

# ***KING GEORGE GOT DIARRHEA: THE YUKON-ALASKA BOUNDARY SURVEY, BILL RUPE, AND THE SCOTTIE CREEK DINEH***

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## **ABSTRACT**

The imposition of the international boundary along the 141st meridian of longitude between Yukon and Alaska has separated the aboriginal Dineh of the region into two separate nation-states. This division holds serious implications for the continuity of identity and social relations between Native people across this border. This paper examines the history of the establishment of this border along its southern margin through the Scottie Creek valley, comparing the written record of the state surveyors with the oral history of the Scottie Creek Dineh. I argue that the evidence supports the notion that the Dineh of Scottie Creek, like elsewhere in the Yukon and Alaska, were both aware of and resistant to the implications of the boundary and refused to cede their rights to continued use and occupancy of both sides of the border. Concurrent with this history is that of William Rupe, the unacknowledged first trader in the Upper Tanana River basin, and his role in mediating the negotiations between government surveyors and Dineh leaders. Despite the difficulties imposed by the border, Natives of the region continue to formulate a strong identity as Dineh, holding and practicing distinctive values and social relations that collectively are known as the Dineh Way.

**KEYWORDS:** Upper Tanana, aboriginal-state relations, 141st meridian, Yukon-Alaska history

## **PRELUDE**

It is July 1997. I am atop Mount Dave, Yukon, just east of the international border with Alaska. About fifty residents of the region, mostly Dineh, have gathered here to witness the marriage between Rickie John and his Cree bride from Saskatchewan, whom he met while attending school outside. They stand beneath a willow bower specially constructed under the direction of Rickie's mother, Bessie John. The Beaver Creek justice of the peace goes through his state-dictated role to formalize the marriage and then Bessie and her sisters launch into their own Dineh ritual of approval in their Upper Tanana Athapaskan lan-

guage. Everyone cheers at the end and we break up into smaller conversational groups. I walk aside with Joseph Tommy Johnny, with whom I have been living off and on for the past two years in his borderlands cabin, and Teddy Northway, his close friend, older cousin, hunting partner, and mentor in the Dineh Way. We pause overlooking the Scottie Creek valley laid out below us in the sunshine to the northwest (see Fig. 1). They ask and I share cigarettes with them. We smoke. They point out to me Ts'oogot Cho Niik—their name for Scottie Creek<sup>1</sup>—the mountain beyond known as Tets'eniikayy, the village at its base called

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<sup>1</sup> Place and personal names transcribed in Athapaskan language follow the orthography for Upper Tanana established by the Yukon Native Language Centre, Whitehorse. They include tonal indicators and represent utterances within the Scottie Creek dialect of the Upper Tanana Athapaskan language. Both John Ritter and James Kari have assisted in the collection, transcription, and translation of these words, though any errors (and there may well be) are my responsibility alone.



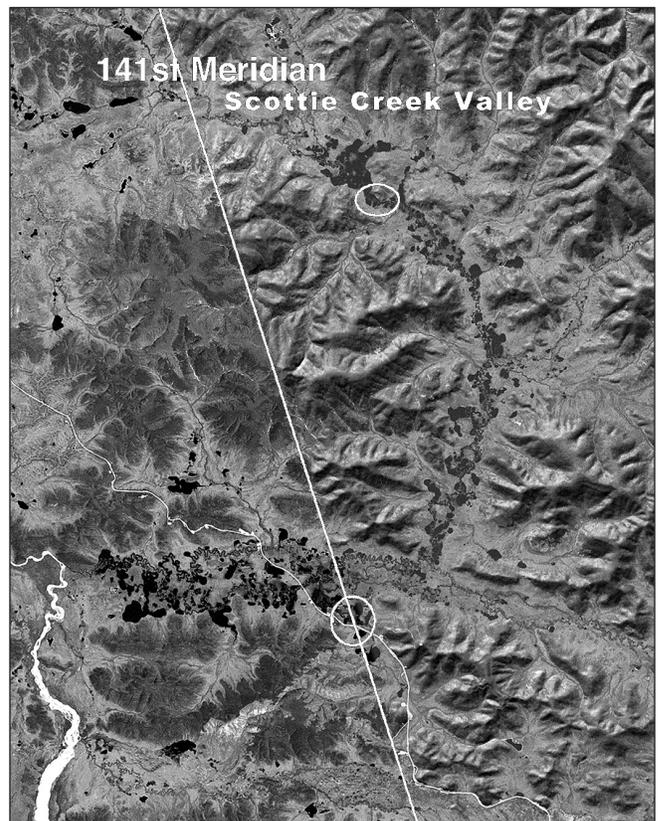
*Figure 1. View from Mount Dave to the west, overlooking the lower Scottie Creek Valley.*

Tayh Chìj, the point to the north called Tthee tsa k'èet, and the borderline vista that bifurcates the valley, crossing the Alaska Highway at the United States Customs station, which itself lies atop the old village of Ts'oogot Gaay. Teddy starts to hum a tune and on the second refrain begins to softly sing some words, which are taken up in unison by Tommy. They repeat it twice and then stop, laughing. "You know that one?" Teddy asks me. I have heard it before: Tommy has sung it quietly on the trail as we walked to Tayh Chìj earlier in the summer and later again as he built a fire at our camp. "What does it mean?" I ask. Looking at each other, they both laugh. "Oh no," says Tommy, "we can't tell you that one. We don't want to start a war. The Queen would get mad at us." I plead further. "It means," says Tommy with hesitation, "it means, 'King George got diarrhea.' We sing that for that border there."

## INTRODUCTION

The survey of the international boundary between Canada and the United States along the 141st meridian between 1907 and 1913 was the first prolonged incursion by the modern state into the lands and lives of the Upper Tanana Dineh, the aboriginal Athapaskan language speakers indigenous to these borderlands that today are traversed by the Alaska Highway (see Fig. 2).

While at first this long straight line across Dineh lands had only a minimal effect on their lives, the existence of the border would come to have profound social, economic, and cultural effects later in the 1900s (Easton 2005a) and remains problematic in their lives today. The Dineh of the borderlands were always aware of the implications of the boundary survey effort, however. In fact, from early



*Figure 2. Satellite photo of the Yukon-Alaska Borderlands. The Alaska Highway can be seen as the white line running northwest from the bottom left to intersect with the border at the lower circle, which marks the Dineh village of Ts'oogot Gaay. The other circle above shows the general location of Nàhtsja ch'ihchuut Mànn'.*

on the Dineh asserted their rights to occupation and use of the borderlands regardless of the claims of the new nation-states of America and Canada. In this paper I present contrasting versions—that of the state and that of the Dineh—of how the international border was established across the territory of the Scottie Creek valley and examine some of the implications of their differences.

The choice of the 141st meridian as the international boundary between Alaska and Yukon was established through the terms of “The Treaty between Great Britain and Russia, signed at St. Petersburg, February 28/16, 1825,” which also set out its demarcation through the coastal panhandle region (Green 1982: Appendix, contains the full text of the original treaty). However, the panhandle boundary identified in the treaty was geographically vague and the 141st meridian boundary was practically unenforceable for lack of any Russian presence within the interior. This led to a number of international disputes between Britain and Russia and, after its purchase of Alaska from Russia in 1867, the United States.

The most significant of these disputes, known variously as the Dryad Affair or Stikine Incident, occurred in 1834 (Green 1982; Shelest 1990). Among other issues, it identified to both parties the practical imprecision of the 1825 treaty’s demarcation of the boundary within the coastal panhandle and the almost utter lack of topographic knowledge along the borderlands. Due to these ambiguities, different interpretations of the treaty text were possible, and the precise position of the border along the coast remained unresolved for many years. This led to a number of additional incidents through the late 1800s and culminated in a treaty agreement between Britain and the United States to survey and establish the boundary in the panhandle in 1892 (Green 1982).

### FIRST ATTEMPTS TO ESTABLISH THE 141ST MERIDIAN

Although the border along the 141st meridian seems more straightforward, the lack of surveys establishing the boundary led to disputes as well. Until 1871, when the region was incorporated into the Northwest Territories of the Dominion of Canada, the lands to the east of the boundary were granted by the British Crown for the exclusive use of the Hudson Bay Company (HBC). However, the HBC

regularly transgressed into the territory claimed by Russia (and subsequently sold to the United States), establishing Fort Yukon at the confluence of the Yukon and Porcupine rivers in 1847 and carrying out trade in the lower reaches of the Tanana River. In 1869 an American military survey determined the HBC’s illegal occupation in Alaska and deported their representatives upriver (Green 1982).

This led to further recognition by the respective states of the need to establish unequivocally and permanently the location of the border in order to avoid future conflicts of this sort. Initial work on determining the precise location of the 141st meridian began in 1887, with William Ogilvie’s astronomic observations along the Yukon River in association with the Geological Survey of Canada’s Yukon Expedition of the same year (Dawson 1888; see also Easton 1987). From 1889 to 1895, several additional surveys were made of the 141st meridian in the Klondike region, and in 1902 the line was extended south from the Yukon River to the headwaters of Scottie Creek (International Boundary Commission 1966); no mention is made in the official reports of these surveys of any Dineh inhabitants of the region.

From the south, in 1898 a United States Geological Survey party led by Alfred Brooks explored the Upper Tanana territories, providing the first known record describing the upper reaches of the Tanana River watershed. Little is recorded on their nongeological observations in their formal report; however, a map provides some detail on their route and dates of passage through the area: 10 July at Snag, on the White River; 11–18 July along Snag Creek to the 141st meridian; 19–21 July south of Mirror Creek; 1 August at the mouth of Mirror Creek and Tanana River [sic] (Brooks 1898; U.S. Geological Survey 1899).<sup>2</sup>

Again, no mention is made of any Dineh, a curious absence, since the Dineh villages of Nìì’ìì, Taatsàan, and Taatsàan T’oh all lie within a mile or two north and south of the surveyor’s passage over the flatlands through which the middle Snag and upper Mirror Creeks run. However, late July–early August is the time of fish camp in the region, and this may account for the Dineh’s absence from these nonfishing villages. Another possible explanation is that these surveys, unlike those undertaken by George Dawson, were singularly uninterested in recording Native settlements or encounters. Or perhaps we might surmise that the official reports neglected mention of Native people

2 The identification of the Tanana River here is a geographical error; Mirror Creek runs into the Chisana River, which in turn meets the Nabesna River, at which point the Tanana River proper begins.

occupying the borderlands in order to avoid raising, at a bureaucratic state level, the presence of Native occupations (and perhaps the rights that might flow from their occupation) along the borderlands.

Be that as it may, Brooks did recall something of the Upper Tanana Dineh in his memoirs:

These [people] were essentially meat-eaters, their only fish diet being the Arctic trout, or grayling, and a small whitefish. These highlanders, as they might be called, were the last to come into contact with the whites and hence preserved many of their original customs up to recent times. In 1898 and 1899 I found such men living on the upper Tanana who, except for their firearms, exhibited but little evidence of intercourse with the whites. Most of the men and some of the women were dressed entirely in buckskin, and their bedding was made of furs. Here I saw an Indian hunting with bow and arrow. His arrows were tipped with copper from the gravels of near-by streams. On this same stream, the Kletsandek, a tributary of the upper White River, I found a party of natives searching for the native copper pebbles in the gravels, their digging implements being caribou horns. (Brooks 1953:117–118)

Two years later, in early June 1900, W. F. King, Canada's chief astronomer, and O. H. Tittmann, superintendent of the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey, arrived in Skagway, Alaska, to mark out the provisional boundary between Canada and the United States along the three main passes (the Chilkat, Chilkoot, and White) from the coast to the interior gold strikes in the Klondike. As they traversed the Chilkat valley, they were approached by a group of Tlingit from the village of Klukwan who "presented a petition to the commissioners asking that they be allowed to continue to hunt, fish, and trade across the new boundary line that sliced cross the Chilkat River valley about a mile north of their village. The commissioners agreed to forward the petition to the president and governor general

respectively" (Green 1982:76; see also United States 1903: case appendix). While no official reply to this petition has been uncovered to date, it reveals that the coastal Tlingit inhabitants were not unaware of the implications of the state's boundary-making across the landscape. So too were the interior Dineh, as demonstrated below.

### DINEH LIFE IN THE BORDERLANDS BEFORE THE BOUNDARY<sup>3</sup>

Until the turn of the 20th century, the Dineh of the borderlands were exclusively foragers. In this regard they shared much with their Athapaskan cognates within the western Subarctic, such as the Southern Tutchone (McClellan 1975), the Han (Mishler and Simeone 2004; Osgood 1971), the Koyukon (Nelson 1983), and the Ahtna (Kari 1986). Their economic adaptation of hunting and gathering natural resources followed a seasonal round within an ecological region generally defined by a geographical watershed. They gathered within semipermanent villages for labor-intensive economic and ritual activity and dispersed as small extended families during times of resource scarcity. They traveled widely for the purposes of trade and to establish and maintain kinship relations (Easton 2005a; McKennan 1959).

Kin-based economic and ritual activity was promoted and regulated by clan membership; through much of the region this was a dual moiety bifurcation of society members, but among the Upper Tanana in the precontact period there seems to have been a three or more clan phratry division (Easton n.d.(a); Guedon 1974). This included prescriptive marriage and ritual relations between moieties or phratries, which were socially recognized through "potlatch" aggregations (Guedon 1974).<sup>4</sup> Political relations were egalitarian, with a strong emphasis on the authority and responsibility of the individual in determining and pursuing an appropriate choice of action (Goulet 1998;

3 While many features of Dineh culture of the western subarctic have been described, prior to my fieldwork (which began intensively in 1993) there had been little direct ethnographic, historical, or archaeological work with the Scottie Creek Dineh. McKennan conducted fieldwork among the Upper Tanana in 1929–30, but due to transportation difficulties he was unable to visit the territory of the borderlands (McKennan 1959:3). In subsequent decades he conducted additional studies among the Alaskan Upper Tanana (McKennan 1964; 1969a; 1969b; 1981). McKennan's field journal of 1929–30 has recently been published (Mishler and Simeone 2006). Other ethnographic work amongst the Upper Tanana has included Case (1984), Guedon (1974), Halpin (1987), Haynes and Simeone (2007), Haynes et al. (1984), Pitts (1972), Simeone (1995), Vitt (1971), and Northway (1987); all of these works contain no or only tangential reference to the borderland Dineh. Linguistic research of the Scottie Creek dialect of Upper Tanana has been undertaken by John Ritter, James Kari, and myself; much of this remains unpublished, but see Easton (2005b, n.d.(b)), John (1994), John and Tlen (1997), Kari (1986), Milanowski (1962, 1979), Tyone (1996), and Yukon Native Language Centre (1997, 2001). Easton (2002a, 2002b, 2007), Easton and MacKay (n.d.), and MacKay (2004) discuss the archaeology of the borderlands prehistory, while contemporary ethnicity and subsistence is discussed in Easton (2001) and Friend et al. (2007), respectively.

Ridington, 1982, 1983). The authority of leadership was a contingent acknowledgement by those led by a category of people known as *ha'skeh* in the Upper Tanana language—men of respect who had demonstrated capacity to make sound decisions affecting the group and who practiced a life of generosity and wisdom. Extensive oral traditions provided the ideological and moral basis for many aspects of social life, as well as support to a naturalistic world view that understood humans and nature to be bound by reciprocal obligations to each other. The interpretation of dreams, visions, and communications from animals—regarded as “nonhuman persons”—informed decision-making, contextualized experience, and explained misfortune (Easton 2002c.; Guedon 1994; Nadasdy 2007; Nelson 1983; Ridington 1988).

The initial effects of the arrival of Europeans in the northwest were diffused along existing aboriginal exchange networks before Native people met Europeans. This included the trade of material goods (e.g., metal and beads), the spread of disease (e.g., small pox and influenza), and the communication of ideas (e.g., shifting from cremation to burial of the dead). These effects increased in volume and intensity as the western fur trade escalated in geographical reach in the 19th century (Helm et al. 1975; Van Stone 1974), culminating in a wave of Euro-American immigration and the establishment of permanent settlements associated with the gold rushes of the Yukon River watershed between 1896 and 1902 (Hosley 1981; McClellan 1981).

The Dineh of interior Yukon and Alaska reacted to this influx of newcomers with both a culturally driven generosity and a concerned desire for the stability of their indigenous society. In a letter dated 13 January 1902, for example, Kashxóot (Jim Boss), the *ha'skeh* of the Ta'an Kwäch'än Dineh who lived in the region of Lake Laberge, Yukon Territory, sought compensation from the superintendent of Indian Affairs for Canada for his people's losses since the Gold Rush of 1898. “Tell the King very hard” he asked, “that we want something for our Indians because they take our land and game.” (cited in Gotthardt 2000).

Closer to the borderlands, the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in *ha'skeh* Isaac anticipated the coming difficulties for his people in the Dawson City area as early as 1896; by the following year he had arranged for a reserve and the movement of Dawson Dineh 5 km downstream to Moosehide. At about the same time he led a contingent of Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in to Dixthadda (Mansfield) and Tetlin Lake, two Upper Tanana Dineh villages in Alaska. Here he taught his maternal relatives the songs and dances of the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in, asking them to “hold on to them” in the years ahead; Chief Isaac correctly foresaw the suppression and loss of these traditions in the Dawson region in the years to come.<sup>5</sup>

A few years later in Alaska, a group of Tanana River Dineh *ha'skeh* met to discuss the effects of Euro-American immigration into the Alaska interior, and they agreed to bring their concerns forward to the newcomers' authorities. The Tanana Chiefs Conference of 1915 was held in Fairbanks to discuss land claims and educational and employment opportunities within the emerging American state order. Foremost on the agenda of the representatives of the United States was the settling of the Tanana Dineh upon individual homesteads or collective reservations, under the terms of the 1906 Native Allotment Act. This proposition was rejected by the chiefs, who maintained “We don't want to go on a reservation. . . . We just want to be left alone. As the whole continent was made for you, God made Alaska for the Indian people, and all we hope is to be able to live here all the time” (Mitchell 1997:177–78; see also Patty 1970). To my knowledge, based on an examination of records held by the U.S. National Archives, no land grants under the Allotment Act were granted within the upper Tanana River region.

I cite these examples of western Dineh attempts to negotiate a mutually agreed-upon relationship with the new state-based governments that had assumed control over their ancestral lands in order to provide a context for the history of the international boundary survey in Upper Tanana Dineh territory. These examples demonstrate that the Dineh throughout the northwestern Subarctic were not passive acceptors of the new regimes; rather, from early on

4 The term “potlatch” is the English gloss of the western Dineh ritual of formal intercommunity gatherings in which gifts are exchanged between clans in recognition of social obligations met by another clan or family, such as handling the dead of another clan, and honoring members of the opposite moiety, such as a spouse or a paternal child. The Dineh potlatch—called *hubte'etiin* in Upper Tanana—differs considerably in structure and meaning from the more widely described potlatch of the Northwest Coast cultures (see also Guedon 1974 and Simeone 1995).

5 I was told of this responsibility by Titus David of Tetlin Village, Alaska, during an interview in 1996 (Easton tape 1996-4). He himself had learned these songs and dances as a youth. It was also about this time that the transfer back to the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in of these songs and dances, along with some ritual paraphernalia, began to take place, a process which is still continuing.

they had thought through and discussed the implications and their response to these historical events within their local and regional society. Such a context lends credibility to the specific accounts held by Upper Tanana Dineh in their oral history, which I will present below.

The Upper Tanana borderland Dineh held an additional advantage in their encounter with the international surveyors, however: a white man by the name of William (Bill) Rupe—a man who in Upper Tanana history has come to embody all the contradictory aspects of Native–newcomer relationships in the twentieth century: unknown creature–human, stranger–kinsman, advocate–traitor, contempt and compassion.

### THE STORY OF BILL RUPE

Throughout the history of contact between indigenous peoples and European explorers and settlers, there are numerous stories of the newcomers finding themselves in a strange land, lacking even the basic knowledge of survival. Many simply disappeared, dying in the “wilderness” they had entered with such ignorance, their remains discovered, or not, by others. But the wilderness for the newcomer is a homeland for its indigenous occupants, people who have come to survive in their environment through the lessons of their ancestors, learned through the mastery of traditional knowledge and their own careful observation of the world in which they live. There are many instances in which the newcomer to a place, faced with death from his own ignorance, is saved by the intercession of locally adapted and informed indigenous peoples. The oral histories of the northern Athapaskans contain many such accounts; the tale of Bill Rupe is one of them.<sup>6</sup>

During the latter part of the 19th century, and increasingly in the period between the Klondike and Chisana

gold rushes (1896–1914), the borderland Dineh helped many men who had become lost or run out of food on the trail.<sup>7</sup> Chajäktà, Andy Frank’s “father,” who was married to the sister of the major Scottie Creek *ha’skeh* T’saiy Süül (known as Joe in English), was very industrious and always had lots of food cached—indeed, he himself carried *ha’skeh* status. As a result, he was able to help many lost and hungry people who passed through the country at the turn of the century.

Sometime after the Klondike gold rush,<sup>8</sup> Chajäktà found such a man lost and hungry in the bush. His name was Bill Rupe (often pronounced “Bell Root” in Native nonstandard English).<sup>9</sup> Chajäktà took him in and fed him. While Rupe was recovering over the winter, he taught both father and son the English language. On Rupe’s recovery, Chajäktà proposed a partnership to Rupe: he would guide Rupe back to Dawson where Rupe would exchange Chajäktà’s winter fur catch and with the proceeds purchase a trading outfit. Chajäktà reasoned that a white man would be able to strike a better deal in these transactions than an Indian. Then Chajäktà would bring Rupe back to the big village site at Nàhtsjà ch’ihchuut Mǎnn’ in the upper Scottie Creek valley (see Fig. 3), and together they would open a store. Rupe agreed to the proposal.

The small trade post at Nàhtsjà ch’ihchuut Mǎnn was the first of its kind in the upper Tanana River watershed and proved a successful venture for both men. In 1908 the itinerant missionary Rev. O’Meara reported Rupe’s presence in the Scottie Creek valley: “W. S. Rupe has a trading post situated 40 miles [64 km] due West from a point 60 miles [96 km] up the White River. This post is situated on a branch of the Tanana River. *He also trades with the Copper Indians as well as other Bands, who come a distance of 250 miles [400 km] up the Tanana River*” (Anon. 1908, emphasis added). The remains of Rupe’s cabin have been identified and will be the subject of future archaeological investigation (see Fig. 4).

6 There is a parallel structure to the stories of Indians’ assistance to “starving prospectors” found in the tales told by prospectors’ themselves, in which the roles are reversed; prospectors’ accounts maintain the pathetic nature of the Indian and how through their actions and patronage Indians gained food, clothing, medical care, education, and, perhaps most importantly, a job or wage—in short, some measure of “civilization.”

7 For another example in the region, see Walter Northway’s account of meeting his first White men in his biography recorded by Yarber and Madison (Northway 1987:36–37).

8 Possibly during the short “rush” to the White River district in 1902, stimulated by Jack Horsfeld’s discovery of gold at the mouth of Beaver Creek, west of the Canadian border.

9 According to the Northwest Mounted Police Records of Entry, a W. S. Rupe entered Canada through Lake Bennet on 19 May 1898. In 1906 the Post Office List of People Dying or Leaving the Klondike lists “Rupe, W. S., age 29” at Stewart City, Yukon. There are several mining claims in the Dawson and Stewart River areas registered in his name as well in the Dawson City Museum Archives. See also footnote 22.



Figure 3. *Nàhtsjà ch'ihchuut Männ'* (wolverine grabbed something lake) from the northwest. The Scottie Creek Dineh village was located along the hillside to the left, while Bill Rupe's trading cabin site was on the first promontory to the right. (Photo by N. A. Easton.)

Andy Frank spoke to me several times about the years of Rupe's residence [comments in square brackets are my own]:

My daddy and Bill Rupe used to haul freight over that way, from head of Ladue [river]. Bill Rupe and my daddy had a boat, old time motorboat, I guess, bring stuff on it, so far as head of Ladue, I guess. Make cache, put it up. Got two horse there. My daddy use one horse there, Bill Rupe use one horse there, then haul the stuff over to the head of Pepper Lake [Nàhtsjà ch'ihchuut Männ]. Lots of work, to do that, lots of work.

They got store there, they make store. They do good. Even lots of Tetlin, Tanacross people go over there. Go there, bring lots of fur. He doing pretty good, Bill Rupe.

[Did he share the money from that with your grandpa?]

Yup. It's my daddy, he work lots that time. He bring horse load, he got lots of stuff, he got traps, more stuff, more stuff, more stuff. They bring more stuff, guns, groceries, lots of blankets, tobacco, all stuff

like that. They still bring lots of stuff, two horses, eh. They buy fur, I remember. They're all full of fur in the cache. Fur high [in price] too that time, eh. A long time ago. Black fox high that time.<sup>10</sup>

Rupe remained in partnership with Andy's father for about ten years. During this time he settled into a "country marriage" with an Upper Tanana woman named Annie John, and they had a baby girl who was called Margaret in English and popularly called Maggie by the Dineh. Andy Frank and others also recall that Rupe had a habit of recording births and other important events in a book with red binding that was very smooth to touch, "like a bible" (i.e., of tanned leather). Sometime after 1910, Rupe took his daughter Margaret to Dawson and placed her in the charge of the Sisters of Saint Anne, who ran a school for Indians and the hospital there.

#### OFFICIAL ACCOUNTS OF THE INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARY COMMISSION SURVEY

In 1903, the Alaska Boundary Tribunal was established by Britain and the United States to adjudicate the disputed

<sup>10</sup> Easton field recording (SCCHP 1994-02). Interview with Andy Frank, Northway, Alaska, 4 July 1994. See also Easton fieldnotes 14 October 1993.



*Figure 4. Close-up view of the remains of Bill Rupe's trading cabin on the shore of Nàhtsja ch'ihchuut Mànn'. (Photo by N. A. Easton.)*

boundary between Canada and Alaska along the coastal Panhandle (the Dominion of Canada had not yet been given control over foreign relations by Britain). While the treaty negotiations were riddled with intrigues against Canadian interests (see Green 1982; Penlington 1972), the final terms of the resulting Convention of 1906 initiated intensive surveying of the border, including determination of position by astronomical observations and triangulation, and the cutting of a 20-foot-wide vista along the entire length of the established border by collaborating crews of the Canadian and American Geological Surveys. Fieldwork began in 1907 and continued until 1913 (International Boundary Commission 1918; see also Fig. 5). The remainder of this narrative of the work of the International Boundary Commission survey will be restricted to that occurring in our principal area of interest, the territory occupied by the Upper Tanana Dineh.

The official accounts of the work of the boundary survey present the following general chronology of work in the region (see also Fig. 6):

- 1907: Several members of the survey projected a line from the Yukon River southwards 200 km (125 miles) to a point near the crossing of Snag Creek.
- 1908: This line was continued southward past the White River crossing of the border, triangulation was completed to about 120 km (75 miles) south of the Sixty-mile River (near the headwaters of Scottie Creek), topographic mapping and vista clearing undertaken to the Sixty-mile, and permanent monuments set through to the Ladue River.
- 1909: Over 50 men arrived at Canyon City on the White River in late spring (May 21) to carry out the work of the survey; the majority proceeded up the White River to work their way towards Mt. Natazhat in the Wrangell Mountains, while two smaller crews continued topographic surveys about the border to the north, meeting at Mirror Creek on August 24; cutting of the 20-foot vista was completed north from Mt. Natazhat to Mirror Creek.

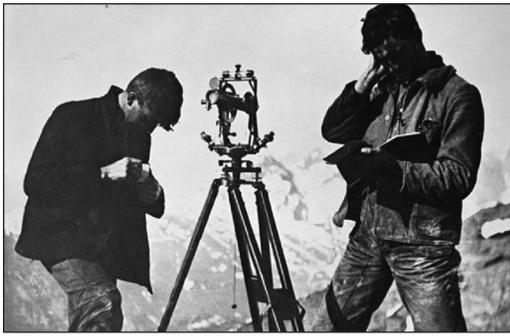


Figure 5. Surveyors of the 141st Meridian in the Nutzotin Mountains, 1912. (*Geological Survey of Canada, National Archives of Canada.*)

1910: The vista was completed between Mirror Creek and the Ladue River and monuments set from the Sixty-mile River to Mirror Creek.

1911: All survey efforts were north of the Yukon River.

1912: Additional triangulation was carried out along the upper reaches of the White River to the Skolai pass and into the Chitina watershed south of the Wrangell Mountains.

1913: A final inspection of the boundary from the Yukon River south to Mount Natazhat was conducted, checking and numbering monuments, thus completing the work of the International Boundary Survey along the 141st meridian (information extracted from International Boundary Commission 1918).

This chronological account of the activities of the survey does not give full justice to the enormous undertaking that was completed between 1907 and 1913. The final report of the commission cited above provides some anecdotal accounts of the challenges met by the surveyors, and Green (1982) expands on this with information gleaned from archival field books and personal logs. Within all of the officially *published* documentation of the International Boundary Commission there are no accounts of observations of or encounters with the aboriginal inhabitants of the region between the Sixty-mile and White rivers. My own research, however, involving the examination of archival documents and the recording of local Dineh oral history, indicates that the surveyors did encounter Upper Tanana Dineh in the course of their work.

Archival research of the survey-related documents was undertaken at the Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa; the Rasmuson Archives, Fairbanks; and the National Archives in Washington, D.C. The research has allowed for a more detailed understanding of the routes and dates of passage

through Upper Tanana territory during the course of the survey, including the winter ranges of packhorses within the White River valley, which were undoubtedly encountered by Upper Tanana Dineh hunting caribou in this area, and lists of men employed in supporting the work of the official survey members. The latter provide us with additional unpublished sources (in the form of journals, memoirs, and letters of the named participants) to attempt to document more fully the interactions between the survey members and the local inhabitants.

The final report of the International Boundary Commission (1918) gives an account of the “Chiefs of Parties and Assistants”; Table 1 summarizes these names for most of the years of our interest (1908–11). The record for 1909, for example, names 14 surveyors and their assistants. In addition, the personal diary of F. H. Lambert, who acted as a chief of party for the Crown that year, lists an additional 31 men by name hired by the Canadian survey to cut vistas, lay monuments, cook, and handle horses (Lambert 1909). Presumably, the United States would have hired roughly the same amount, suggesting a total contingent in the neighbourhood of 60 to 70 men active in the region from late spring to late August of 1909.

The earliest reference in the unpublished documents that speaks directly of the Dineh of Scottie Creek is contained in G. Clyde Baldwin’s account of his work during the field season of 1908. It is clear from the context of his unpublished report that he followed the established

Table 1. *Chiefs and assistants of parties, International Boundary Survey, 141<sup>st</sup> Meridian, 1908–11.*

1908	
USA	Chiefs of parties: G. C. Baldwin, Thos. Riggs, Jr. Assistants: W. B. Reaburn, W. B. Gilmore, A. I. Oliver
1909	
UK	Chiefs of parties: A. J. Brabazon Assistants: Fred. Lambart, D. H. Nelles, Claude Brabazon, Thos. P. Reilly
USA	Chiefs of parties: G.C. Baldwin, Thos. Riggs, Jr. Assistants: W. B. Reaburn, A. C. Baldwin, D. W. Eaton, A. I. Oliver, W. C. Guerin, L. Netland
1910	
UK	Chiefs of parties: A. J. Brabazon, Fred. Lambart, J.D. Craig Assistants: D. H. Nelles, A. G. Stewart, Claude Brabazon, Thos. P. Reilly
USA	Chiefs of parties: Thos. Riggs, Jr. Assistants: A. C. Baldwin, W. B. Reaburn, A. I. Oliver, W. C. Guerin, F. S. Ryus, O. M. Leland
1911	
UK	Chiefs of parties: J. D. Craig Assistants: Fred. Lambart, A. G. Stewart, D. H. Nelles, Thos. P. Reilly

Source: International Boundary Commission (1918).

Dineh trail from the White River, up Katrina Creek, and over the watershed into the Scottie Creek valley. Figure 6 is a Boundary Survey map showing the general routes of the survey 1907–13, while Figure 7 is a less detailed map along the boundary showing the location of the alphabetically named station markers mentioned in the text.

Baldwin (1908:9–10) writes:

Since for the next portion of our trip we must rely entirely upon our horses as the freight carriers when we failed to find part of them on the 6th [of July] (the day we intended starting overland) we necessarily remained until they were rounded up the next morning. Mr. Brabazon had not yet appeared upon the scene so I left one of the packers and three horses to bring him over to our boundary camp. The trail which we followed wound along through the timber in the bottom of the valley of Katrina Creek and was a gradual easy ascent most of the way until we reached the summit of the di-

vide between the waters of Katrina and those of Scottie Creek on the west. Here it took a decided turn to the south but as we knew that it led eventually to Rupe's trading post somewhere in the valley before us we thought it better to continue following it rather than to strike off due west and cut a new trail through the timber. In the Scottie Creek flat we had some very swampy, soft traveling which was only ended after we had crossed the main stream. This creek at this point is composed of a series of small but deep lakes through which there is a very slow current in a southerly direction. Just before we reached the crossing place an Indian came hopping across the 'niggerhead' swamp from the direction of Rupe's cabin but his English proved to be rather limited so when we tried to make him understand that we needed a canoe to ferry our supplies across the stream he would only grunt and bob his head. As this was a rather unsatisfactory answer we did not wait for his canoe but proceeded to build a raft on which we ferried our outfit across in safety.

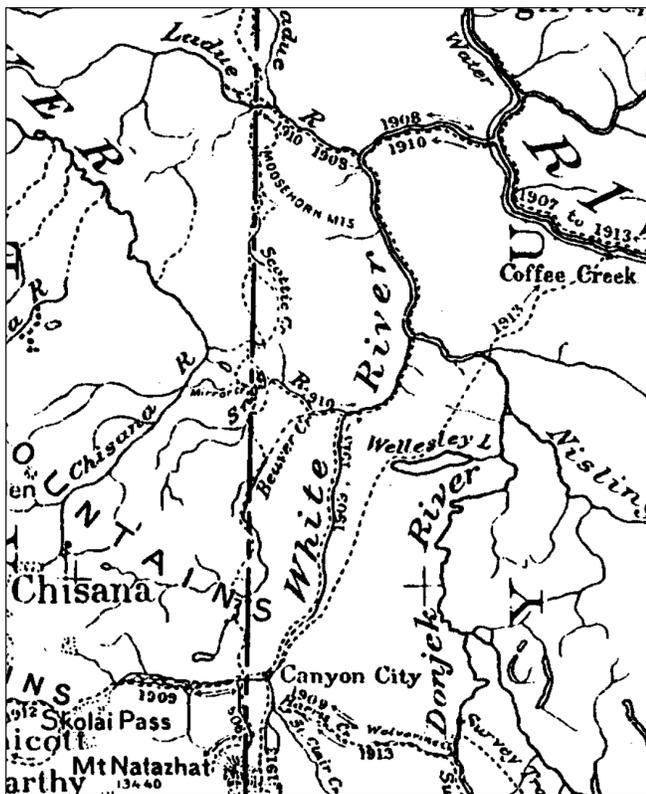


Figure 6. General Routes of the International Boundary Commission Survey, southern portion of the 141<sup>st</sup> Meridian (reproduced from Green 1982).

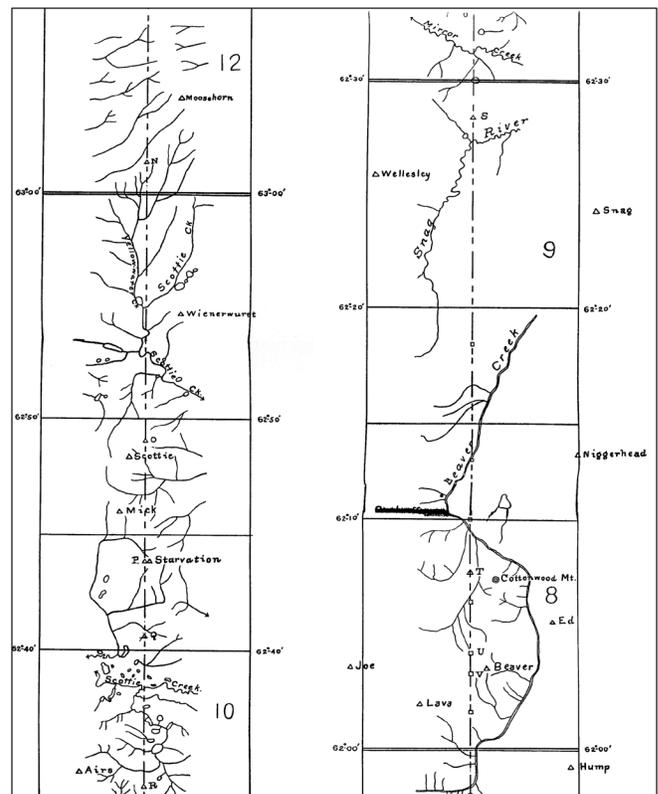


Figure 7. Location of alphabetically named boundary survey station markers and named triangulation points on the 141<sup>st</sup> Meridian, upper Scottie Creek south to upper Beaver Creek. (Source: National Archives of the United States. College Park Facility, Maryland. Record Group 76, Cartographic Series 136, Preliminary Inventory 170, Entry 378, Folder 2.)

About this time, however, several Indians arrived and one old man did actually come in a very small but well made birch-bark canoe. When our horses swam the stream these Indians thought it great sport and the shrill laughter of the women could be heard for some distance. Leaving Scottie Creek we encountered some bad traveling through fallen burned timber and on the 12th a steady rain kept us in camp all day. The 13th was spent in exploring the surrounding country and in locating station "O of the Boundary," none of the men with me at the time having seen it before. Then on the 14th we moved our camp to a small draw very close to the station and at last we were on working ground.

The next day the camp was joined by Mr. Brabazon, while two of the men, with 12 horses, set off back to Katrina Creek to retrieve their cache. The boundary party continued their work in the area for another month, breaking camp on August 26. They then set out to cross the "Big Flat," through which both Snag Creek and Beaver Creek flow, just east of the border. Their progress again shadows the traditional Native trail I have documented across these flats to the low hills south of the contemporary village of Beaver Creek, Yukon:

After crossing Snag Creek we pursued a south south-easterly course until we crossed Beaver Creek when we changed to a south south-westerly direction and kept along the edge of some level bench ground which parallels the latter stream until we finally reached the opening or canyon through which Beaver Creek emerges from the hills. Here we again crossed Beaver Creek and found a fairly well beaten trail along the south bank. This we followed as far as an old Indian camping place near the point of the hill which we knew station "T of the Boundary" to be located. (Baldwin 1908:14)

They set station "T" and quickly pushed on, meeting members of the survey coming north from stations to the south, and were soon thereafter leaving the field for the season. However, Baldwin's 1908 report contains some additional notes on the area and its people in his summary comments:

During the early part of the season those of us who passed through the flat country saw practically no game of any size, which I think was due to the fact that the Indians keep this region pretty well hunted out. In the many small lakes of the vicinity fish

are plentiful and form the chief summer food of the natives. All along the valley of the White River moose, caribou and bear are to be found while in the hills and mountains of the upper river the mountain sheep are very numerous. After reaching the higher hills we had all the fresh meat which we needed for the balance of the season.

The natives of this country have already been mentioned several times but not as yet fully described. In appearance they resemble the Siwashes of the coast, they wear store clothes but continue to use moccasins for foot coverings. Through contact with traders and other white men they have acquired a smattering of English but in many cases their vocabulary is very limited. As in many other non-civilized or half civilized tribes or peoples the squaws do most of the hard work while the bucks do the necessary hunting. In our dealings with them they were perfectly honest but proved to be great beggars and had absolutely no sense of obligation for anything given to them or for any favors accorded them.<sup>11</sup> They are very fond of the white man's food and especially of tea that even the small children will drink without either sugar or milk when as strong as it can be made. Next in value to tea as an article of trade comes tobacco and several times I saw men whose English was entirely limited to the two words "tea" and "chew." In general they know the value of money but prefer silver to any other medium of exchange. This is illustrated by a case in which I paid one of them a silver dollar and a dollar bill for some little service, which he had performed for me, and upon the receipt of the money he immediately bought all the grubs that he could get for the bill although he kept the silver. Some of the squaws had their faces tattooed and I saw one at least with a ring of silver stuck in her nose. In summer they live in tents and in the open but I think most of them have cabins for winter habitations. The women, especially when excited, have very shrill piercing voices, which sound very much like those of small children. (Baldwin 1908:23–24)

Thomas C. Riggs was second-in-command of the American party. His journal for 1909 contains a single reference to encountering Native people:

*Rupe* [emphasis added] was not at his camp but about 30 Indians were camped there. I tried to take some pictures but desisted when a buck grabbed a gun and said "Indian shoot." They seem to have

11 This observation is ethnocentric. The Dineh behaviour described in this observation is what we now recognize as "demand sharing," a common practice among egalitarian foragers (see Peterson 1993).

some sort of idea that a picture takes something out of a person that is not replaced. (Riggs n.d.: July 1909)

Rigg's account places him in the upper Scottie Creek valley at the time, and the "camp" he refers to is almost certainly the village at Nàhtsìà ch'ihchuut Mǎnn where Bill Rupe had his trade store.

## UPPER TANANA DINEH ORAL HISTORY ACCOUNTS OF THE BORDER SURVEY

Living and working in the Upper Tanana borderlands I have often encountered reference to the ill effects of the international boundary on the lives of local Dineh; it is generally regarded with bitterness. Most Upper Tanana Dineh hold that they remain one people: "We're all the same family, both sides of the border, Canadian and Alaskan." In the 1990s a few could even recall first-hand the arrival of the boundary survey and their reaction to it, while many local Dineh held oral history accounts learned directly from their older relatives who were themselves witnesses to the events.

These accounts provide important further elaboration on the encounter between the boundary survey people and the Upper Tanana Dineh. They document the physical division of Ts'oogot Gaay village<sup>12</sup> on Little Scottie Creek (see Fig. 8) by the survey and all emphasize the promise by the chief of survey, William Raeburn, that the Dineh would continue to have the right to occupy and use the region as they had done in the past.

### MRS. BESSIE JOHN'S ACCOUNT OF THE BORDER SURVEY

The oral testimony of Mrs. Bessie John on the border survey through Ts'oogot Gaay village has been recorded

by myself and in John-Penikett and John (1990); the recordings differ only in a few elaborating, stylistic details.<sup>13</sup> Comments in square brackets and footnotes are my own elaborations.

MRS. JOHN: Right now I'm going to tell you people about when the borderline go through there. There were 200 in the village there, the place white people call Little Scottie Creek [Ts'oogot Gaay]. There are lots of people buried there. All our people, things like that. At that time the borderline went through. That's the story I'm going to tell you guys right now.

This great story. My Great [i.e., respected] grandpa (T'saiy Süül),<sup>14</sup> when that borderline go through ahead there. They got some, what they call, moose skin, caribou skin. That's the kind of tent he got right down there at customs with the borderline going through. They don't know at that time, these white people who come around the boundary line, so maybe that one guy who is the government boss, they hit my great grandfather's tent. They say, "Could you move?" He do that you see? [the surveyor waved his arm]. So, that government said, "Your tent gonna be cut. You gonna be Alaskan, you gonna be Yukon?" they tell my Great grandfather, they say.

So, they make lots of moccasins to be used at that time by those boundary line people. I don't know how many wore those moccasins, but all say, "make moccasin."

I don't know, but my mother and my Great grandfather say, "You know how many moose skin they need to keep warm, those Indian people?" Make moccasin, meat, everything.

After that, the government, they give all kinds of flour and rice, I guess. They don't know what's that,

12 Ts'oogot Gaay is sometimes translated as "little spruce knee" or "little spruce," based on the etymological correspondence between *gaay* = "little" or "small," *ts'o* = "spruce tree," and *got* = "knee"; however, when taken as a whole this literal interpretation is not semantically sound within the Upper Tanana language. While there is no doubt of the interpretation of *gaay* = "little" or "small," it seems that *ts'oogot* in this form is an archaic and un-analyzable word, which generally suggests great antiquity (John Ritter, Yukon Native Language Centre, 1997, written communication; see also Sapir 1916 [1949:436]).

13 The occasion for this recollection by Mrs. Bessie John was the Yukon Historical and Museums Association's 1989 conference on Yukon Borderlands, held at Yukon College, 2–4 June. Comments by her daughter, Lu Johns-Penikett, whose questions and prompts facilitated her mother's presentation, are indicated by "LJP" in the transcript. I have reviewed the original tapes for accuracy and corrected several small errors in transcription arising from Mrs. John's pronunciation of English as her third language (her first was Upper Tanana and her second Northern Tutchone)

14 T'saiy Süül was Bessie John's mother's father, which English speakers would refer to as "grand-father." Her use of the term "Great" here is an honorific, meant to indicate his "greatness," not that he was a third ascendent generation ancestor, as English speakers indicate in the term "great-grandfather."



*Figure 8. Aerial View of Ts'oogot Gaay from the northeast. The Alaska Highway runs along the top of the photo, while the international boundary can be seen running diagonally across the top left of the photo. Ts'oogot Gaay Männ' is the lake on the right; to the left can be seen Ch'ihjiit Männ' (ripe or spoiled lake) along the shores of which are found numerous ground caches for storage of fish. (Photo by N. A. Easton.)*

my Great grandfather. That flour, he tried boiling all day, he said, grandma.<sup>15</sup> He tell his wife, he said, "That's sour water. You gonna die if you guys eat it." He boiled it all day, he said, grandma. He boiled it all day and put moose fat—he throw it in there. He finished his fat piece, he said, my Great grandfather, my Great grandma. He stirred all day, and after that he got a stick spoon. They made it out of birch bark sometimes. You used a little bit, that's all. You were his kids, they say.<sup>16</sup>

That's a long time ago they do that, and I'll talk to you about a story, you guys. The boundary line go through at that time. There were lots of people at Scottie Creek at that time, about 200. They buried fish [in ground caches], dry meat, everything. All that stuff was cached. They put fish in there, dry meat, everything. At that boundary line, he showed it to my Great grandfather and that Great grandma she carried that book [note well the reference to the book] around a long time. I'd like to know if that book is in Ottawa. They give my Great grandma and Great grandfather a red book a long time ago.

<sup>15</sup> The Athapaskan language has no gender markers. As a result, it is typical for speakers of English as a second language to ignore or mix-up English gender, as Mrs. John does here. Thus, the sentence "That flour, he tried boiling all day, he said, grandma" is ambiguous as to what sex did what and what sex said what. Informed context generally assists English heads trying to make sense of such utterances.

<sup>16</sup> Typical of Dineh narrative structure, Mrs. John here interjects both practical and ethical Dineh knowledge in her speech: (1) You can make a spoon out of birch bark; (2) if you do you shouldn't use too much bark (3) because that bark is like the child of the tree, its life. (4) Extending the metaphor by thoughtful consideration, since one would not want one's own children treated badly, humans should treat the children of "other-than-human persons" with respect and care.

“This is your book,” they tell my Great grandfather. They carry it around a long time—it must have been about 1911 when the boundary line went through. Lots of people all just dead now. The story just grow up to us. That’s why I tell you guys special story about my Great grandfather.

LJP: So, mom, what happened when the boundary people asked him to move? Did he move or how long did they try and get him to move?

MRS. JOHN: Long time. They stay there. He can’t move his moose skin or caribou skin tent. That’s right. They give him lots of food, they say. The government people. They stay there everyday. That’s all, I think.

LJP: So, did they move or what happened when the boundary survey . . . ?

MRS. JOHN: They don’t move! They belong to their village. The old borderline go through. They back and forth. They move all the way down to Big Scottie Creek, all the way down to the Yukon River.

That’s the right way to Indian. They feed each other, you know. They don’t know boundary between Yukon and Alaska. Right now, just everything happened. It was supposed to be that they feed each other, just one trail in this country. All our country. They help each other, you know, Indian people.

LJP: Well, I thought you told me before that Stsii Stsool [Ts’aiy Süül] didn’t want to move. He didn’t want to move but they kept asking him. So what happened? They got him to sign a piece of paper or something.

MRS. JOHN: Yeah, that government they tell him to sign a piece of paper. So, he sign paper.

LJP: And what did they say he was going to get from that?

MRS. JOHN: “You gonna be Alaskan. You gonna be Alaskan. You gonna be Yukon. Two sides of the country, all you are from,” they tell my Great grandfather. After that they do a book, and my Great grandmother she said, “. . . some kind of bible.” They live to sign that, my Great grandfather. He can’t move his tent, that’s why that government

do that and he sign the paper. “Two sides of the country,” he say. “All your family, they are all going to grow up on two side of the country.” My great Grandfather know all about our country here. That’s why he signed that paper. (John-Penikett and John, 1990:187–90)

## ANDY FRANK’S ACCOUNT OF THE BORDER SURVEY

Andy Frank, who was a young boy of about six or seven at this time,<sup>17</sup> shared his version of the arrival of the border survey crew at the village site of Ts’oogot Gaay:<sup>18</sup>

Borderland chief [the survey chief], his name was Raeburn.

That’s when he say [my grandfather] at the border that time. “Good people,” he say, “what you do this, you cut the bush all the way in a line?”

“That boundary line. New law. There going to be law, nobody can’t go across.” That’s what they [Raeburn] said, he said.

Grandpa, he said, “No,” he said, “I don’t like that,” he said. “Good people. White man good people, but tell ‘em what I say,” he say. “That we can go anywhere, where we got hunting ground, where we got property to get everything, we go there. You got to tell ‘em,” he said. “You’re allright, good people, but me, I like to go anyplace where I got land,” he said, my grandpa.

He [the Dineh] like to hear our grandpa talk too, that people that time. Grandpa talk good. He called Border Chief [his grandfather held *ha’skeh* status]. He got earring bead. “Why you do that?” he say that. Old time chief, borderland chief.

They call the Border People [the English surveyors], that’s what my grandpa told me, a long time ago. He tell that people, the Boundary Line Chief [Raeburn], my grandpa he say “No, no, no us,” he tell him. They put down [the line] all through. My grandpa he go Dawson, he make meeting [with government officials]. Grandpa he say “What they do down there?”

“They make boundary line. You can’t go other side no more.”

17 Like many of his generation, Mr. Frank was not absolutely certain of his birthday but certainly could count the years he had been alive. His birth recorded on his obituary is December 24, 1902 (he died in August 1994). Such a day in the historic record for Indian people is commonly found; it can be taken to mean that he was born in that year, well into the winter. His recollection that he was six, suggests the events occurred in 1908, although the survey itinerary suggests it was more likely 1909, hardly a major inconsistency in Mr. Frank’s account.

18 Taped interview with Andy Frank, 4 July 1994 with N. A. Easton (SCCHP tape #1994-2) and Easton (Fieldnotes, n.d).

“No, not us,” my grandpa say. He tell it true. He put down . . . [unclear utterance], he tell his dad, who he put down. “Us? No way! We got proper way, we got hunt, good place to hunt we use. We go anywhere. Not us,” he say. I tell everybody. I go Fairbanks. I tell you too. That book, somewhere is that book [the “red book” referred to by Mrs. John in which Rupe kept records].

## A SHORT STANDARD ENGLISH SUMMARY OF DINEH ORAL TESTIMONY AND SURVEYOR RECORDS

The evidence of archival and oral history demonstrates that throughout the boundary survey, government representatives of both Canada and the United States did have contact with the Dineh of Scottie Creek. In 1907, projection of the line south to Snag Creek would have taken them through the Scottie Creek valley. In 1908 Baldwin knew of Rupe’s presence in the Scottie Creek valley. Although Baldwin (1908) does not mention meeting Rupe specifically, it seems quite likely he did, since Baldwin anticipated arriving at “Rupe’s trading post somewhere in the valley below us” and subsequently met an Indian “hopping across the ‘niggerhead’ swamp from the direction of Rupe’s cabin.” In 1909 Rupe must have had some contact with the International Border survey, since it was “Rupe’s” camp that Thomas Riggs recorded arriving at in July 1909 to find “about 30 Indians were camped there” (Riggs n.d.), again intimating that the surveyors both knew and were looking for him. The Indians were undoubtedly Rupe’s Scottie Creek Dineh affines. In 1910, the crew clearing the 20-foot wide vista worked from Mirror Creek northwards towards the Ladue River, a trajectory that would take them directly through the Dineh village of Ts’oogot Gaay, which was arranged on the hill overlooking the border lake of the same name. A general map of a field survey of the surface remains at this site is presented in Figure 9.

Not only does the boundary pass through the village, but according to Dineh oral history the vista ran directly

through a large bark-covered domed house structure—indeed if you walk the borderline today you will come to a point at which there clearly was a camp astride the line, evidenced by historic detritus (a kettle, cans, and other metal waste) within a cleared area extending on either side of the borderline.

The survey party insisted that they would have to cut through the house if it would not be moved, and that the Indians would have to decide whether they wished to live on the American or Canadian side of the border. The Dineh at Ts’oogot Gaay refused to do either, seeking assurances that their occupation and use of the region would not be affected by the new borderline.

The Dineh spokesmen, the local *ha’skehs* Chajäktà and Ts’aiy Süül, asked for a meeting with the “Borderline Chief,” the head of the survey crew, and called together the Dineh to discuss the situation. W. B. Reaburn identified himself as the chief of survey and the Scottie Creek *ha’skehs*, assisted by Bill Rupe, negotiated with him the terms of allowing the survey crew passage through Ts’oogot Gaay. After several days of holding their ground, the Dineh finally received the assurance from Reaburn that the people of the village could continue to live there without interference to their historical use and occupation of the region on both sides of the new boundary, and Reaburn signed a paper to that effect.

Rupe kept the paper or recorded a copy of the agreement in the “Red Book,” leaving it with Chajäktà when he later left the valley. Andy Frank was repeatedly told by his father, “Don’t you forget that man’s name, the borderline chief, Raeburn. You don’t forget because one day it will be important.”<sup>19</sup> On his deathbed, Chajäktà entrusted the book to his son Andy Frank, reminding him again to remember Raeburn. Frank kept the book for many years as he lived throughout the region; however, about 1957 someone broke into his cache at the place called High Cache, just below the Alaska Highway on Desper Creek about 10 km into Alaska, and stole his outfit of traps, guns, ammunition—and the Red Book.<sup>20</sup>

19 Easton, fieldnotes. Interview with Andy Frank, 30 September 1993, Northway, Alaska.

20 Such theft has been a common occurrence suffered by many Natives over the years, once easy access to their cached (perceived as “abandoned”) possessions was gained by tourists and government officials through improved transportation. Government employees flying through the area in tax-paid airplanes and helicopters, for example, pillaged caches at Fort Selkirk (Easton and Gotthardt 1990; Gotthardt and Easton 1989). They justified their theft by the notion that the stuff had been abandoned and would only be taken by tourists, while they would keep it in the territory and care for it as a historic object; of course, many of these people would eventually abandon the territory and take it away, as well.

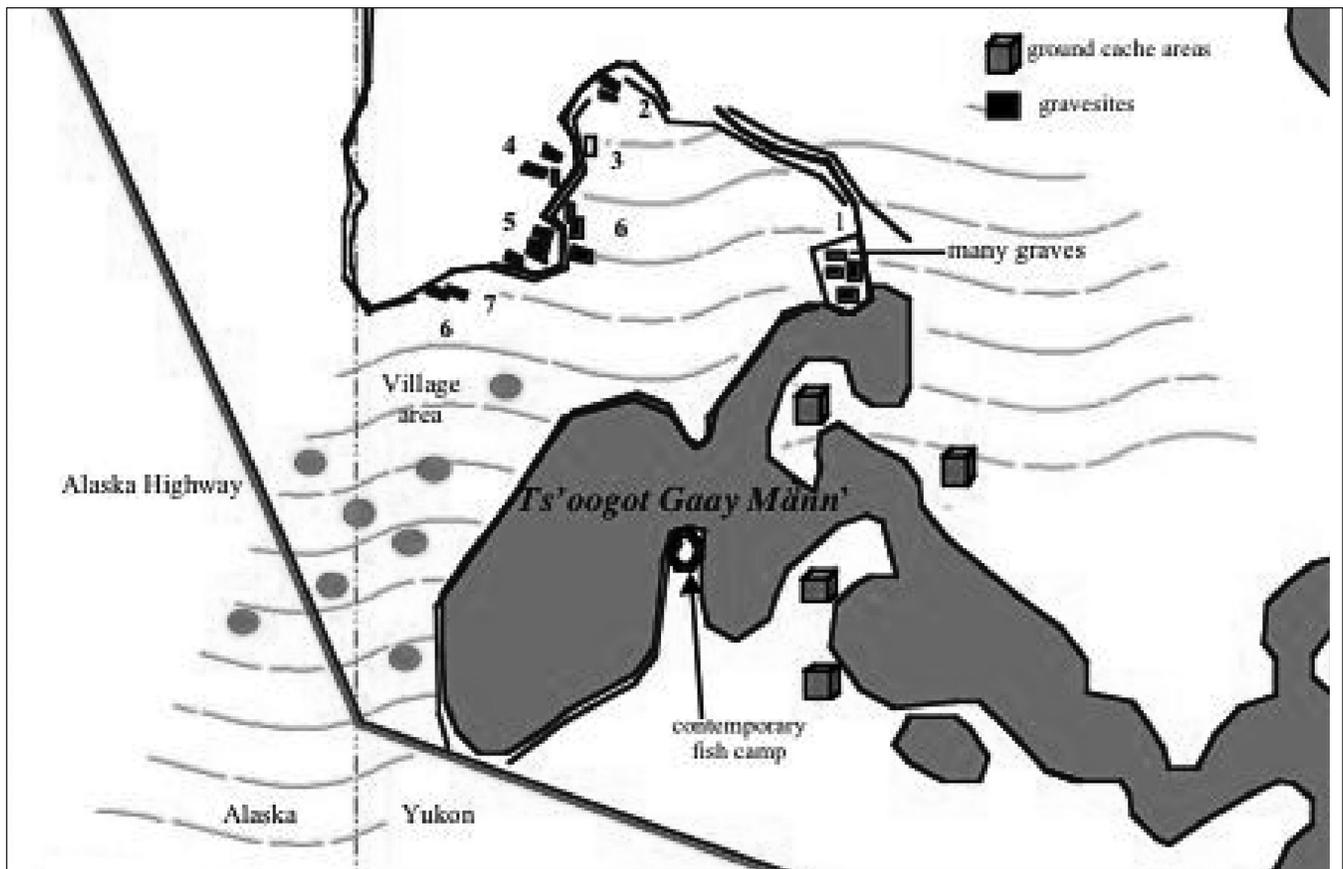


Figure 9. Map of Ts'oogot Gaay based on field documentation by the author. Note the border vista bifurcating the village site and the preponderance of graves; gravesite number 1 is the location of mass burials during the influenza epidemic of 1918–19. Circles indicate approximate locations of large open areas within the contemporary dense willow that are presumed to have been locations of the traditional dome-shaped skin tents of the Upper Tanana Dineh occupants.

### TRUST AND BETRAYAL ON THE BORDERLANDS

After the border had come through, when Rupe's child Maggie was about 10 years old (circa 1912), Rupe left his Dineh wife and took his daughter to Dawson, where he enrolled her in St. Mary's catholic school run by the Sisters of St. Ann.<sup>21</sup> Dineh oral history records that her mother, Annie John (Fig. 10), traveled to Dawson and appealed to the court there to have her daughter returned to her, but her request was refused. Unfortunately, Dawson court records of this period were lost in a fire in the 1920s.

The ultimate fate of Maggie Rupe remains a mystery. Bertha Demit, Annie John's older daughter with another Dineh (and thus Maggie's half-sister), worried all her life over the fate of her sister Maggie. Recalling the story



Figure 10. Annie John, Titus John, and Silas Thomas, Northway, 1943. (Photo courtesy Duesenberg Archive Film.)

<sup>21</sup> According to records held by the Archives of the Sisters of St. Ann in Victoria, B.C., Margaret Rupe officially entered St. Mary's School in Dawson, Yukon, on 26 August 1912. Personal communication from Margaret Cantwell, S.S.A., archivist, 30 Jan 1998.

of Bill Rupe and Maggie to me in the Upper Tanana language in 1996, translated by her son, Mrs. Demit began to cry and she asked me, as a White man who knew the outside world, to do what I could to find her younger sister, a plea I have followed to the best of my abilities.

After he left the Scottie Creek valley, Bill Rupe continued to trap and prospect from the Klondike to the White rivers until his death in Dawson City in 1937.<sup>22</sup> His daughter Margaret had left Dawson in 1927 for Victoria, B.C., where she graduated from St. Joseph's School of Nursing in 1930 (Fig. 11). She worked at the St. Joseph Hospital until 1956, rising to oversee the nursing staff of the maternity ward. Margaret married an affluent man named Arthur and retired to live with him. For reasons that remain unclear, she had asked the sisters of St. Ann to maintain confidentiality of her married name and residence.<sup>23</sup> At this late date, it is presumed she has now passed on and is buried somewhere in southwestern British Columbia (see also Easton 2002d).

Bill Rupe had a profound effect on the eastern Upper Tanana Dineh. He was the first sustained contact they had with a person who was not Dineh. Not knowing who he was or where he came from, they nevertheless recognized his implicit humanness and extended to him all the generosity that any human being deserves when found in need. They gave him shelter, sustenance, and eventually incorporated the stranger as kinsman through marriage. And while it is true that Rupe would eventually disappoint the Dineh, it seems unacceptable to simply characterize Bill Rupe as another White man who came into Indian country to exploit them and then leave with their riches. Although he may have set the standard of betrayal of trust for White-Indian interaction, there are complex motivations discernable in his actions, not the least of which must have been a deep love for his daughter Margaret, which are not visible for much of the subsequent relations between representatives of the new nation-states and the Upper Tanana Dineh.

Nevertheless, when Rupe left with Annie John's daughter he committed a grievous affront to Upper Tanana *matrilineal* culture. By all local measures, Maggie

belonged, literally, to Annie John's lineage and clan. Annie John's failure to convince the government authorities in Dawson of this fact and retrieve her daughter from her father was the first open instance, and certainly not the last, of the capacity of the new encapsulating state order to exercise irresistible force.

Other forces would intrude on the Borderlands Dineh in the years to come. Just before 1920 a devastating influenza epidemic—quite likely the local manifestation of the world-wide Spanish Flu pandemic—struck the village of Ts'oogot Gaay, killing almost everyone there. "Five guys walk out from that—Bell Gaiy, my dad (Little John/White River Johnny), Titus John, and Andy Frank," and one other, recalled Joseph Tommy Johnny. "They bury everyone together, they die so fast. They just quit that village then." A few families would later return after some decades to take up seasonal fishing once again. Today the



Figure 11. Margaret Rupe's graduation photo from St. Joseph Nursing School, Victoria, B.C., 1930. (Photo courtesy Sisters of St. Anne Archives, Victoria, B.C.)

22 "William Rupe, old-time trapper in the White River district, passed away yesterday at St. Mary's hospital after a prolonged illness. The deceased was born in Santa Rosa, California about seventy-one years ago. He is survived by one daughter, Margaret Rupe, now residing on the Pacific Coast." *Dawson News*, 31 July 1937.

23 Archives of the Sisters of St. Ann, Victoria, B.C. Personal communication from Margaret Cantwell, S.S.A., archivist, 30 Jan 1998. This information was in response to a set of well-wishing letters from several of Margaret Rupe's Dineh relatives, which I had forwarded to the Sisters of St. Ann in 1997.

village locality is still used by Ada Galen and the descendants of White River Johnny to net whitefish and collect cranberries in the summer.

However, it was not until the building of the Alaska Highway that any sustained effort was made to enforce the regulations of the international boundary. Along with the highway came numerous other agents of the state who have since attempted to exercise increasing control over the lives of the Borderland Dineh: game regulators, educators, social workers, customs officers, Indian agents, capitalist entrepreneurs, and religious proselytizers. A future essay will address these subsequent impacts; suffice to say that many Dineh see the border as a betrayal of the trust given the newcomers at the time of the International Boundary Survey. In the words of one local Dineh, “When they put in that [border] line everyone got fucked.”

It is important to ask to what degree the agreement that the Upper Tanana Dineh believe to have been made with the United States and Canada through their representative Raeburn was purposely not reported to his superiors, made in bad faith, or ignored and discarded by the governments of the United States and Canada? It is of interest to note that there is no record of contact whatsoever with Dineh in the surveyors’ accounts of 1910, when the vista was completely cleared from Mirror Creek to Ladue River, a trajectory that passes right through the village. Nor, as shown in the copy of the plane table field map of the survey that year (Fig. 12), is there any indication that the border at Ts’oogot Gaay ran through an Indian village, although the topographical detail of the area is considerable. Furthermore, the aboriginal trail is clearly and accurately marked on this map, and an “X” is seen next to the trail at the location of a Dineh camp and fishing site on Tsà’ Kàyy’ Mǎnn’ (beaver house lake), which is still used

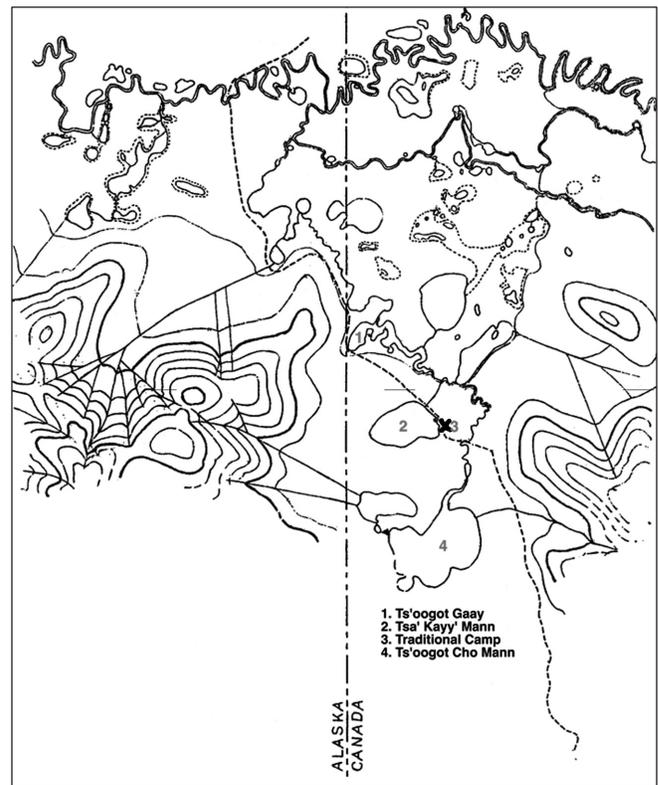


Figure 12. Plane table field map of the International Border around Ts'oogot Gaay. The dashed line represents the Native trail through this area documented by the author. Note that it passes directly through Ts'oogot Gaay, and the “X” at the location of another Native fishing site. (Source: U.S. Archives. RG76. Carto Series 136. Public Inventory 170. Entry 378. 34 Maps. Folder 2.)

by Scottie Creek Dineh today as a base for hunting moose on the lake and is the principal contemporary residence of Joseph Tommy Johnny.

24 It has recently occurred to me that surely there were meetings with and instructions given to the heads of survey for each country, although I have not encountered any in my research. I suspect I have been looking in the wrong place. A determination should be made of who the heads of survey reported to and who was superior to these individuals, and a search of the records related to these bureaucrats should be made in an attempt to discover memorandums or notes related to meetings held before and after each year’s field season. As well, a concerted effort needs to be made to attempt to locate Rupe’s “Red Book,” stolen from Andy Frank’s cache in the late 1950s; it is possible that the traveller who took it, or his heirs, realizing it held some historic merit beyond mere curiosity, may have deposited it in some archives close to their home on their return or death.

25 To be fair, the United States does allow traditional Native commodities of truck and barter freely into the United States from Canada under a provision of the Treaty of Amity and Commerce (the Jay Treaty), which the United States yet recognizes. Canada has always refused to recognize the application of the Jay Treaty provisions since its confederation, maintaining its Parliament has never approved it, a technical point based on the fact the 1794 treaty was between the United States and Great Britain and not explicitly transferred to Canada (Case 1984; Issac 1999).

26 Again, in fairness, many of the Customs officials who work at both nations’ custom stations are now aware of the former village and something of its history as a result of both Upper Tanana Dineh and myself informing them, and many also hold some degree of sympathy towards the Dineh case. But individuals are not the State, and while some officials sometimes turn a blind eye, ultimately they are charged with the enforcement of the law and accompanying regulations.

Finally, referring back to the cited survey documents above, some members of the survey recorded some other camps and villages and their interactions with local Dineh. It is simply inconceivable that the boundary surveyors could have missed the existence of Ts'oogot Gaay village, nor that they did not encounter Dineh at this location during their years of survey and vista cutting, since it was used as both a winter village and a major summer fishing site in July and August, drawing to it additional Dineh from the region. And yet the boundary survey records are silent on the existence of the village.<sup>24</sup>

Correspondingly, so too are both the United States and Canadian governments on the matter of Dineh rights on the borderlands. Indeed, Dineh traditional occupation rights were held in such apparent disregard that the United States built the most recent Alcan Customs station right atop the village site, apparently in complete ignorance of its existence and with no archaeological impact assessment, in contravention of general federal laws and policy.<sup>25</sup> My own efforts to undertake archaeological survey (in addition to the surface survey I have conducted) in the late 1990s were rebuffed on the basis of international border regulations concerning its "security," and a general policy of prohibiting activity within a kilometer of the border; although I have not recently requested, no doubt post-9-11 regulations are even more stringent. Requests by the White River First Nation to have the existing interpretive signs at the tourist pullout on the border vista where it crosses the Alaska Highway revised to reflect their historic occupation have been neglected by the Canadian state over the years. The existence of Ts'oogot Gaay, its Dineh inhabitants, and their original (misplaced) trust, has somehow been officially erased from the memory of the national governments, demonstrating to the Upper Tanana Dineh that the word of the state is at best a convenience.<sup>26</sup>

Perhaps the most bitter recollection of the ability of the state to enforce its administrative authority contrary to the expectations of Upper Tanana Dineh is the failed potlatch for the highly respected Dineh elder Mary Eikland in 1981. It is recalled that blankets and other potlatch

goods were seized from American resident relatives and friends traveling to her funeral potlatch in Beaver Creek, Yukon, by Canadian Customs agents as illegal importations—unless they paid a duty, which few could afford. The potlatch was ruined. The Upper Tanana Dineh have not held a proper potlatch funeral ritual since then on the Canadian side, and a few elderly American Dineh have told me they never crossed the border again. The loss of this sacred religious ritual, one of the defining elements of their cultural identity as Dineh, is heavily felt among Upper Tanana Dineh in the Yukon. Fortunately, ever-resourceful in developing the means to sustain, confirm, and celebrate their unity as a distinctive Dineh society and culture, they have adapted to these state-imposed circumstances by holding this important ceremony for Canadian resident Upper Tanana Dineh in Northway or Tanacross, Alaska, where the ritual continues to flourish. One Dineh composer has summed up their collective bitterness towards the border and the trust to be placed in the state by making a Dineh song which is sung in campsites on both sides of the border. In translation, the singular refrain repeats: "King George—King George got diarrhea."

## CONCLUSION

The existence of the international border of two nation-states dividing the land and people of the Upper Tanana Dineh remains a vexing issue for the descendants of the aboriginal occupants of the region. The resentment of the arbitrary imposition of the boundary between Canada and the United States upon the lands of the Upper Tanana Dineh is deep, separating as it did "Our Great People" from each other with different laws, education, and regulations over their activities. Today, many Dineh work hard to maintain their filial and clan relationships across the border, traveling or telephoning regularly between Beaver Creek, Northway, Tanacross, Tetlin, Mentasta, Gakona, Chitna, Copper Center, Whitehorse, Fairbanks, and other places where relatives and friends have settled, bringing gifts of the land, sharing memories and contemporary

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27 In its recently failed land claims negotiations with Canada and Yukon (negotiations were closed by the federal government in 1995), the White River First Nation had sought designation of the Scottie Creek valley and borderlands as a special management area of natural and historical significance, including the possibility of creating an international park at Ts'oogot Gaay (similar to that at the U.S.–Canada border at Blaine, Washington state), which would provide a location for the presentation of Dineh history and culture to the tens of thousands of travellers that pass through yearly, a suggestion which didn't make it into the proposed final agreement. The White River First Nation people have subsequently rejected the proposed land claims final agreement and remain one of three Yukon First Nations (interestingly, all have trans-border claims) who retain all of their constitutional and Supreme Court of Canada-recognized aboriginal rights and territory, unimpeded or affected by constraining specifics of a negotiated final land claim.

experience, and consolidating a continued ethnic identity as the Dineh of the borderlands.

While their dispersal from the villages of the Scottie Creek valley by a variety of factors (see Easton 2005a; Simeone 1992) has resulted in a serious erosion of contemporary knowledge of the area's history, use, and potential among many younger Dineh, there remains considerable contemporary attachment to this land even today.<sup>27</sup> It is embodied in the practices of some Dineh such as Joseph Tommy Johnny, who still live on and off the land in the area of the borderlands in order to "keep the land open for my people," and in parents who take their children regularly out to the borderlands for evening walks "just to look around," during which they tell of their Dineh history and teach the Dineh Way. Much of this contemporary attachment and practice is invisible to the casual outside observer, non-Natives believing that the integration of television, automobiles, homeboy fashions, and hip-hop music demonstrates the final assimilation of the Dineh into western capitalist consumer culture.

But this image is a chimera, unreflective of the social, cultural, and spiritual beliefs and practices that, though unarguably changed by history, remain unalterably Dineh in nature.

My people help each other. Someone there [in Alaska] wants to bring me fur coat, shirt, that's what I like. Rabbit skin, martin, potlatch food. They [Customs] want tax. It hurts my heart. . . . Where do government people think I came from? A hole in the ground? . . . Who is that Queen Elizabeth anyway? Who made her? We are Queen here, we all are Queens, Native people. (Mrs. Bessie John, speaking to representatives of Canada Customs in Beaver Creek, 24 October 1995)

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