

# **Report on the 2012 Art and Archaeology Initiative**

**A Collaboration between Yukon College Field School in Archaeology**

**The Northern Cultural Expression Society**

**And Members of the White River First Nation of Beaver Creek Yukon**



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## Report on the 2012 Art and Archaeology Initiative

In February of this year I met with Naomi Crey and discussed my vision of integrating an art component to my longstanding Cultural History project on the Yukon – Alaska borderlands which is currently focussed on the archaeological excavation of the Little John site (see attached article for more details). She was receptive to the idea and we subsequently made plans for her to join us in the field in July, accompanied by participants in the Northern Cultural Expressions Society.



**Yukon College Archaeology Crew at the Little John Camp**

Ms. Crey arrived at the Little John field camp Monday afternoon on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of July accompanied by seven other participants, along with Laurianne Bourgeon, a graduate student from the University of Montreal they had agreed to transport to the site for a two week stint working with us. The weekend's weather had been lousy with rain and the forecast was for more through the coming week, so apparently six other participants, not liking the weather, cancelled their participation. We gave the new arrivals, along with three other tourist visitors, a tour of the site and showed them a variety of artifacts we had recovered over the years. David and Ruth Johnny, former Chief of the White River First Nation and his wife who is a Native language instructor, arrived with their two grandchildren and visited with the camp until about 11 pm, during which they discussed various aspects of local native history, culture, and language.



**Extensive Rainfall through the Week Hampered Program Efforts**

On Tuesday the 3<sup>rd</sup> of July we shared breakfast and then we collected spruce boughs for the floor under the large tarp we had set up for general activities. After this we assigned the NCES people to assist with the established excavation crews. They worked at this through the day. After dinner that evening Ms. Crey provided canvasses and paint to the archaeology crew and NCES participants and gave advice on mixing of paints, perspective, and tone while each student produced a small painting. Landscapes of Mirror Creek were most popular, with a moose and some artifacts rounding out the efforts. Mrs. Johnny visited the camp again that evening and provided further instruction in the Upper Tanana language to the participants and discussed various aspects of Upper Tanana culture and history.



**Two Examples of Excavation Units Worked on By NCES Participants**

On Wednesday the 4<sup>th</sup> of July participants again undertook excavation and related archaeological duties through the morning. At noon the entire camp went into Beaver Creek to the 4<sup>th</sup> of July BBQ hosted by the Visitor Reception Center, where we socialized with the villagers and American tourists passing through. We returned to camp about 2:00 pm. The archaeology crew continued excavations until dinner, while the NCES and village youth participants were taught the Hand Game / Stick Gambling by Ms. Crey in late afternoon, who also provided the drum accompaniment. David and Ruth Johnny, Patrick and Jackie Johnny, and a slew of kids and grandkids arrived to share dinner and company – at this point there were 32 people in the camp. After dinner the archaeology crew were taught the hand game by the NCES participants under Ms. Crey's guidance, with the youth displaying considerable skill at both the game and sharing rules and techniques with the archaeology crew. This was followed by David Johnny showing and speaking about his carving tools, process, raw material selection (with an emphasis on selecting quality pieces that meet your need and avoiding waste, and the importance and means of how to respect the wood you are cutting), appropriate treatment and storage of the material, and finally Upper Tanana design elements. Additional conversations, one-on-one instruction, and sharing of knowledge continued through the evening around the central campfire until 12:30 am. That evening we were also informed of the death of Elder Ida Wilson in Northway Alaska that required me to attend the funeral on the following day.



### **White River First Nation, NCES, and Yukon College Students Play the Hand Game at Little John**

On Thursday the 5<sup>th</sup> of July our plans for further activities were cut short due to the necessity of my attendance at the funeral of Ida Wilson in Northway later that day. NCES participants assisted in archaeological work until lunch time, after which we each went our separate ways.

My assessment of this initial Art and Archaeology enterprise is that it was a good start to a program of considerable potential. NCES, Yukon College, and local village participants gained from each other's company and related experiences and I would hope to see NCES return again next year. Despite the bad weather people enjoyed themselves, partly due to the infrastructure we have established at the camp to ameliorate such conditions. The participation of White River First Nation adults and youth was high and enthusiastic. Everyone learned new skills and understanding of the history and culture of the Borderlands. Native Youth participants were exposed to a deeper appreciation for the depth and complexity of Athapaskan history as revealed by archaeology. They also were given the opportunity to display their own impressive cultural skills to the College students during the hand game. I personally was impressed at the organizational efforts of Ms. Crey to bring this program to fruition. I look forward to working on a similar, perhaps expanded program next year.