

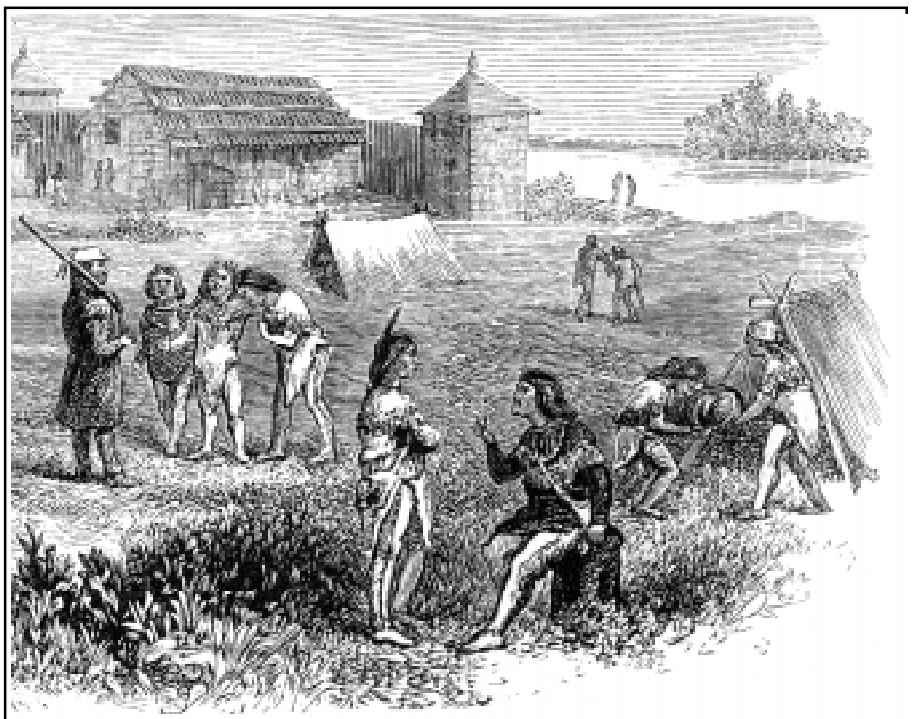
Gwitchin Visits to Fort Youcon 1847 - 1856

To understand the past many sources are used – personal memories, stories, photographs and drawings, letters and other written accounts. One of the greatest difficulties facing a researcher studying these different messages from the past is understanding the meaning or values the creators were trying to present. The way research is done often shapes this understanding. Therefore it is important for a researcher to respect the source. The researcher must try to make sure that every voice from the past is heard and that their understanding of the world they lived in makes it to the present.

One of early written sources describing some aspects of Gwitchin life is the post journals written by Hudson's Bay Company traders that settled amongst them. In the late spring of 1847, Alexander Murray, his wife, and 11 men arrived at the confluence of the Porcupine and Yukon Rivers. After a few days of travelling the district, noting how low and wet the country was, they met and talked with locals. These Gwitchin pointed them to one of the few large pieces of high ground, noting it was a place they often camped. For Murray it seemed the ideal spot for his trading post - Fort Youcon. Within days Murray found out how well used the site was. His journal entry for June 28 described the Gwitchin reception when they met Murray at their camp:

About 4 o'clock this morning we were aroused by reports of firearms below, and everyone was on his feet in an inst. and 3 guns were fired by us. 20 canoes hove in sight around the point, and soon paddled up along the shore to our encampment, all joining in songs and most unearthly yells, as soon as they were on the bank the leader commenced his harangues. There were 15 men with their wives + families. I gave each man 3 ins. of tobacco after which the dancing began and lasted for half an hour. They then brought up a quantity of dried whitefish + the fresh meat of a moose, which they readily traded for Ammunition + Tobacco + all seemed exceedingly pleased. Our P[ee]l River Indians talked with them most of the day... late in the evening another salute of 5 guns were heard from the point below. I ordered none to fire, but the Indians here said it was always the custom with them when they came in peace to discharge their pieces, and if we did not return the salute they would consider us to be enemies. We then fired 5 guns in answer to theirs, which was responded to from the fleet of canoes, now close at hand, by a shout that might be heard for miles, in the party there were 18 men, also accompanied by their families, they hauled up their canoes some distance below, and formed on the bank in single file, with their Chief in front, women + Children in the rear, and danced forward by degrees until in front of my tent when they continued at it for upwards of half an hour without intercession. I then gave each a piece of Tobacco same as the other. They then presented some fresh meat + skins which were traded also for ammunition + a little tobacco. The speechifying then commenced + having now so many of them together I explained to them at length the object of our coming here and encouraged them as much as possible to collect provisions etc. if they wished us to remain amongst them. Referred also to the Russians visiting this River + said all that I could think of for the good of the Establishment, and pleasing and encouraging to themselves, the Chief then stepped forward and expressed his happiness of himself and all his party that we had at last come to live with them and promised to do great things, which I would rather see than hear of. I gave the Chief 6 ins. of Tobacco + then the dancing commenced in earnest all joining (37 men with the Women + Children only two of whom had before seen the whites) they danced a variety of figures + sung songs for more 2 hours.

[In late June] the Indians mustered very strongly; canoe after canoe arrived, and there was a constant blazing of musketry, as though the fort was in a state of siege. Over 500 natives were at one time congregated outside the station. They erected tents, open booths, and "lodges;" the latter being constructed of poles and moose-hides, and usually placed two together, the doorways facing each other, with a small fire burning between them.
(Frederick Whymper notes of 1867)



**First Nation Trading
Accounts at Fort Youcon,
1850 & 1856**

Although the Journals tell us only a little about the Gwitchin, they do hint at what life was like on the land 150 years ago - what animals were hunted, who came by Fort Youcon to trade and what they wanted. In the 1855-56 trading season, Murray traded with 111 heads of families. This list of names and his journal notes help to bring some of these people into the present.

There was a decided difference between the Upper and Lower Yukon forms of clothing. At [Fort Yukon] we saw quantities of buck-skin dresses; and mocassins were commonly worn. The leading men of the tribes assembled [for the spring trading] wore mock uniforms, presented to them by the Company; old "Red Leggings" in particular, one of the Kotch-á-kutchin chiefs, was gorgeous in one with immense gilt epaulets, brass buttons, and trimmings, and had many coloured ribbons hanging from his cap.... In winter these people wear mooseskin shirts or robes, with the hair turned inwards. (Frederick Whympfer notes of late June, 1867)

Name	Other Information	1850	1856
An Old Man		X	
Anateah			X
Bakinetsate			X
Bechareche			X
Bechechrunte			X
Bee taw ingee		X	
Beeckquatril			X
Beet ingie	aka Beet i ingie	X	X
Beeha			X
Bee-heeit-hye-sik	aka Beitahisik	X	X
Beetse-kye-tla	aka Betsekyeta	X	X
Beetsha		X	
Beetsug-ethee		X	
Beketh-sa-tee	died Outfit 1855	X	X
Benekato			X
Berega			X
Betailtic			X
Betasoo-itcha	aka Betta soo etcha	X	
Betesarathun			X
Betsacek			X
Betsa-tee-tee-che	aka Betsa-tee-tee-cha	X	
Betsooteel			X
Bookee-irrey	aka Bookée-errey	X	
Buckinechate			X
Cha onsil the	aka Chan oolte	X	X
Chatelo			X
Chavilte			X
Checheenjo			X
Cheet-sel	aka Chitsil	X	X
Chickochats	died Outfit 1855		X
Chitsa			X
Chotetho			X
Chran-eeta-tee-e	aka Chran tee la teea	X	
Chree-ah		X	
Chryn-gee-tetsil		X	
Chutsugethe			X
Corbeaux		X	
Dogee sach		X	
Dzeetret			X
Ebey-tee-it		X	
Eche oonta			X
Enach-teeah	A Chief	X	
Enjoog-atcho		X	
Etho		X	
Etchee-outah		X	
Ethta			X
Etseel		X	

Etzee		X	
Eyanthls			X
G B Brother		X	
G'hunte			X
Hachit			X
Haoonjikte			X
Howitse	died Outfit 1855	X	X
Hunee-tye-tee		X	
Hytutho			X
Intlacko		X	X
Kagah			X
Kanachuckte			X
Kasavue	died Outfit 1855		X
Kataroonde			X
Katho			X
Katleene	died Outfit 1855		X
Kay-sah	aka Kasangh	X	X
Kay-zuck	aka Kazook	X	X
Kee o thay		X	
Kendo-ezey		X	
Kendowean			X
Kethoch-thee		X	
Kethsey		X	
Kihah			X
Koch-cho-teene		X	
Koch-cho-teene's Br.		X	
Konn-eka	aka Kaki	X	X
Koo day thee		X	
Koodatele	died Outfit 1855		X
Koo-eeatee	A Leader, aka Koeeawtee	X	
Koo-eetekat	aka Koreet chat, Korechat	X	X
Koongahte			X
Lame Man		X	
Letter Carrier	Chief Rat Indians	X	
Manjetha-aiy		X	
Mendanitse			X
Menday-aqua	aka Mendatha	X	X
Men-day-shay		X	
Nakuth'sinte	died Outfit 1855		X
Naleel			X
Naleelte			X
Natla		X	
Naysong		X	
Neereech-te	aka Nee vee te	X	
Neeset-thiek	Leader aka Neselthuck	X	X
Neet soo yee		X	
Ne-eyleel		X	
Neka			X

Neltilicho			X
Netay-cheech-te	aka Netachete	X	X
Nitsahze			X
onla			X
onlate	"Gens du Fou"		X
Owntley	aka Owntla, Ontla	X	X
On-tawt-she		X	
Orzah	aka Oozah	X	X
Qeeawte	Chief		X
Quatlun			X
Quils angh			X
Quot lul	aka Qutlul	X	X
Qutri			X
Rathote			X
Red Leggings	leader	X	
Russian Post Man		X	
Saveeah	Chief, aka Savuah, hunter	X	
Seegon-athat		X	
Seenazit		X	
Senate	Chief		X
Setowel-theek	aka Setowelthuck	X	X
Sindaazine			X
Sinlate			X
Sooe			X
Split Lip		X	
Strong			X
Ta-ee-inte	aka Ta-ee-ente	X	
Tahset'sa			X
Talleau	aka Talleah died Outfit 1855	X	X
Tarshee-itshee	aka Tarshee itche	X	X
Tasande			X
Ta-seese	aka Taseeseh	X	
Tawit			X
Tchong-quaw	died Outfit 1855	X	X
Teetse-beah	aka Titsebeah	X	X
Tekee Kach lay	aka Tekekathla	X	X
Tekeetla			X
Teligkahtsa			X
Te-see-se-tee	aka Te-see-seh-tee	X	
Tet-seeth-etret		X	
Tetsekectlet	died Outfit 1855		X
Tetsha-anna		X	
Tetsoo antee		X	
Tetsoo-ite-sel		X	
Thache			X
The Grouse		X	
Thyortsen			X
Thyotsin	died Outfit 1855		X

Thrachley			X
Tingee-eezey		X	
Titsecel			X
Titsee ashe			X
Titseooze			X
Tla-ah	aka Tloah	X	X
Tlacha-veethe		X	
Tlo-ach-ley		X	
Tlo-hanley	aka Tlo han hley	X	
Tog-arsee		X	
Totsee-ach-tsoh	aka Titseatso	X	X
Touresets			X
Towarshi			X
Traha		X	X
T'sa ah tut			X
Tsatutah			X
Tseoo	aka T'seoo	X	X
Tsey-tawtick	aka Tsaquatrit	X	X
Tsooquak			X
Tyee tret		X	
Untseetsil		X	
Vee eshah		X	
Veneulindi			X
Vezeesah	aka Vezeessah, Vozesah	X	X
Wewesha			X
Wintan-cha		X	
Yanglee		X	
Yew	died Outfit 1855		X
Yewthine			X
Zeetath-injug		X	
Zettuethe			X
Zuneekahchul			X

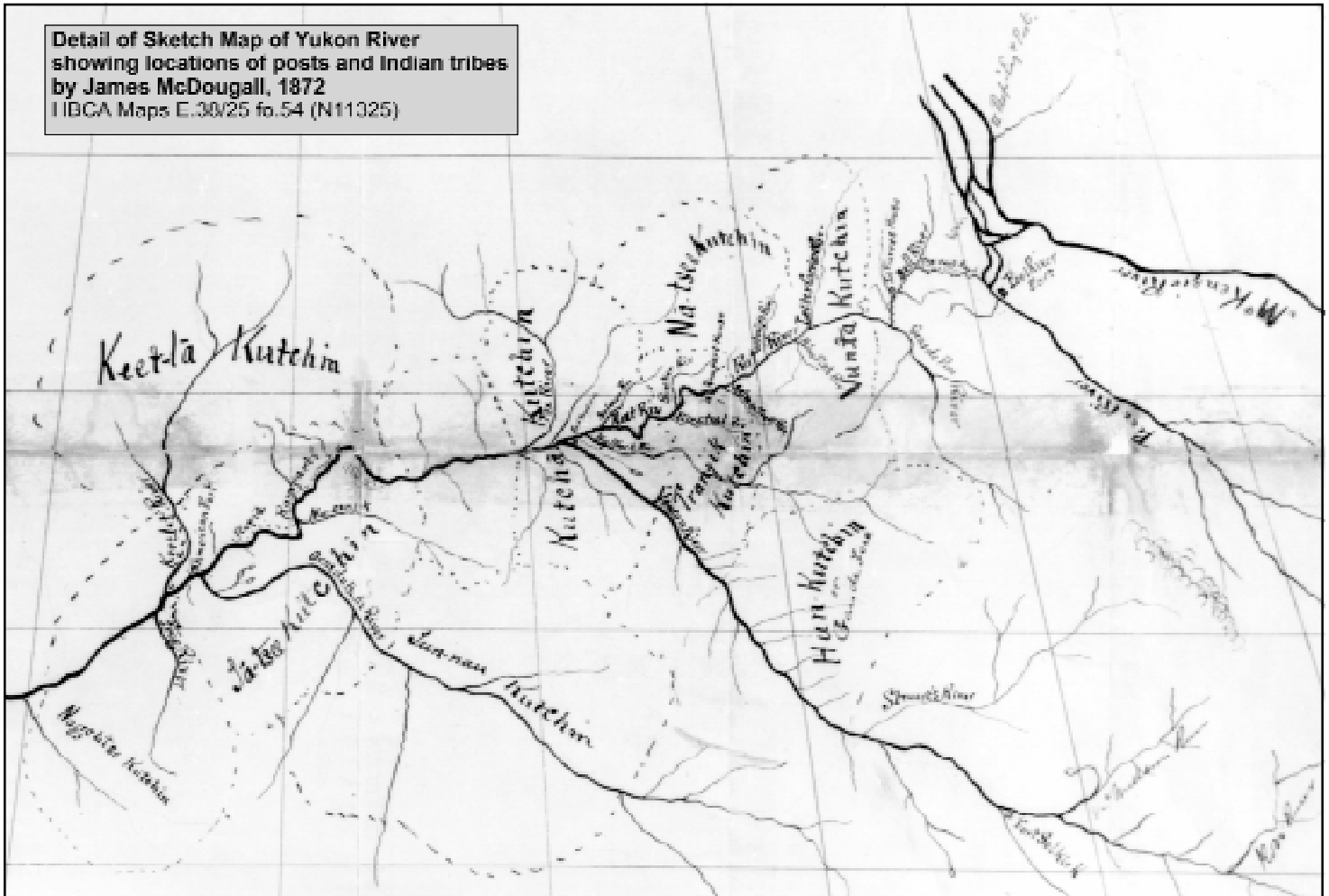


An unidentified Tanana man portrayed by Frederick Whymper in 1867.

An old Indian who has been by himself all winter came in today, — a good sled full of meat + furs + this man has done so well this winter that I gave him a cap and 12 ins of tobacco gratis.
(April 19, 1850)

Young Chief 'Savuah' arrives at the post with five men and four women, [He] brought good burdens of meat + some grease... This young man is exerting himself wonderfully for us + has each time kept his promises, if they would all do like him we would be well off for provisions here.
(October 10, 1847)

Detail of Sketch Map of Yukon River showing locations of posts and Indian tribes by James McDougall, 1872
 IBCA Maps E.30/25 fo.54 (N11325)



In the fur business, Murray found the Gwitchin shrewd and demanding traders. Broad cloth and wool coats were of little interest to people comfortable in their caribou skin clothing. In the first trading, *all ask for ammunition whether they have guns or not, beads + axes are the articles most in demand for furs.* (July 11, 1847) Trading was hard work for Murray. *Settled with the Indians after breakfast + had some trouble to satisfy them. Beads, Beads is all they cry and we have none to give. These "Gens du Fou" [Han] are the most unreasonable fellows to trade with that I ever came across They say as we have not what they want it is unlikely that the band will come here this fall as they can get what they want from the Russians. Beads, axes, knives + guns we must here after have in plenty, or there is no use trying to compete with the Russians.* (Sept. 21, 1847)

From the aboriginal perspective, Murray's actions were often curious. For the Hudson's Bay Company, trade was strictly a business exchange, a way to make a profit. Fur trade historian Richard White notes that First Nations saw trade as an integral part of social relations - you traded with friends. Murray had an early introduction to this idea when he learned about firing off his rifles as a sign of being friendly. However, he took some time to learn the lesson. While Murray often provided small gifts of tobacco or ammunition as a preliminary to trade, he separated the actual trading from the social relationship. In August, 1849, two Gwitchin arrived to trade fresh meat to the post. Afterwards they asked Murray for something to eat and he promptly traded some of their meat back to them, noting in his Journal; "these lower Indians are the greatest beggars I ever saw." While the response of the two visitors is unknown, Murray shouldn't have been surprised about the very lean meat often brought to trade.

Over the years Fort Yukon became a profitable post for the Company and an important source of new goods for the Gwitchin. However, this happened only after the post managers and the Gwitchin trading at the post constructed a middle ground, an understanding of how they could successfully bridge the cultural differences between them, recognize each other's interests and work alongside each other to pursue their different objectives.