

**Building Cross-Cultural Understanding of the
Pikangikum Cultural Landscape**

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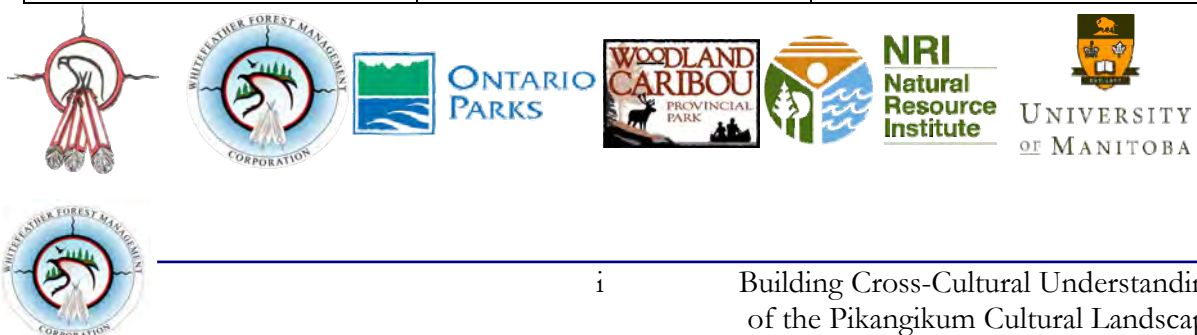
Building Cross-Cultural Understanding of the Pikangikum Cultural Landscape: *An Exhibit of Art and Research*

The Whitefeather Forest Research Cooperative was established with the purpose of working with Pikangikum Elders to carry out community-based research and documentation in support of the Whitefeather Forest Initiative. Pikangikum First Nation entered into a letter of agreement with University of Manitoba, Lakehead University and the University of Winnipeg in the summer of 2004. Since that time, Pikangikum First Nation, the Natural Resources Institute, University of Manitoba and Ontario Parks, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources having been working on building cross-cultural understanding of the Pikangikum Cultural Landscape.

This document provides you with the exhibit that was developed by the three partners to bring together art and research in communicating elements of the Pikangikum cultural landscape. The exhibit will be hosted at the Red Lake Heritage Centre and the Ontario Parks office in Red Lake during the summer of 2009. In the fall, it will be taken to Pikangikum where it will be hosted by the school and made available to Pikangikum students. An opening will be held at the Red Lake Heritage Centre at which participants in the process, including Pikangikum Elders, will be present.

The following people are available if you would like further information or would like to arrange interviews to develop articles regarding the exhibit, the artist or the research. Materials are also available that can provide examples of how to include Elders teaching in school curriculum and in documenting cultural landscapes.

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Introduction

The Whitefeather Forest Management Corporation, the Natural Resources Institute, University of Manitoba and Ontario Parks, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources are working together to build cross cultural understanding of the Pikangikum Cultural Landscape in the Whitefeather Forest and Woodland Caribou Provincial Park.

In *Cheekahnahwaydahmungke Keetahkeemeenaan* (Keeping the Land), a Land Use Strategy for the Whitefeather Forest, Pikangikum First Nation and the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources agreed to work together for the stewardship of the Whitefeather Forest. Ontario Parks has also committed to work in partnership with Pikangikum First Nation to engage in mutually enriching dialogue and learning between cultures for the stewardship of Woodland Caribou Provincial Park. A key term of these partnerships is the recognition that the Whitefeather Forest and a portion of Woodland Caribou Provincial Park are a cultural landscape of Pikangikum people. The following is taken from the Whitefeather Forest Land Use Strategy and provides an overview of Pikangikum First Nation's understanding of the cultural landscape concept.



***Beekahncheekahmeeng Ahneesheenabbay Ohtahkeem* - The Pikangikum Cultural Landscape**

The Whitefeather Forest Planning Area is a holistic network of both natural and cultural features that results from the relationship between Pikangikum people and our ancestral lands (*Ahneesheenabbay ohtahkeem*). This relationship (*kahsheemeenoweecheetahnahnk*) expresses a closeness that comes from our knowledge of the land, but also from a spiritual and emotional connection to the land.

We refer to our ancestral lands as *Ahneesheenabbay ohtahkeem* with the understanding that the landscape has been physically modified and given cultural meaning by *Beekahncheekahmeeng paymahteeseeewahch*. Pikangikum people have cleared and maintained waterway channels and portages, planted *mahnobmin* (“wild rice”) throughout our traditional lands, and have used indigenous pyrotechnology to enhance the abundance of waterway and wetland vegetation which supports ducks and muskrats.

Pikangikum people have also been formed by this land. Elder Whitehead Moose has put it this way: “Everything that you see in me, it is the land that has moulded me. The fish have moulded me. The animals and everything that I have eaten from the land has moulded me, it has shaped me. I believe every Aboriginal person has been moulded in this way.”

For us, land and people are inseparable. Our *Ahneesheenabbay ohtahkeem* is not merely a landscape modified by human activity but a way of relating to the land, a way of being (on the land).

“Keeping the Land” Land Use Strategy 2006, Page 24



This exhibit presents one aspect of how we have been working to build cross cultural understanding of the Pikangikum cultural landscape. We asked Mario Peters, a young Anishinaabe artist from Pikangikum, to represent teachings that the elders had provided for fire, woodland caribou and sturgeon. Fire is a key process that shapes the boreal forest and the Pikangikum cultural landscape. Fire shapes the land and, in turn, how Pikangikum people live on and make use of the land. Both the woodland caribou (*abtik*) and lake sturgeon (*nubmay*) are clans (*doobdahm*) of Pikangikum people. How Pikangikum people understand their relationships to these animals and forces that help shape the land provides important insights into the Pikangikum cultural landscape. Research projects on these topics are examples of what has been undertaken to build dialogue and understanding of key ecological processes and species of the Pikangikum cultural landscape.

The choice of subject matter was determined through existing research project funding but the details of what was to be depicted in the paintings was largely determined by Mario, in discussion with his elders. In the seven paintings that follow you will find one artists' attempt to convey aspects of the knowledge communicated to him by the elders. You will also find a selection of elders' teachings, in the (Anishinaabe) language that guided Mario as he considered how to represent his elders' knowledge through painting. English translations were produced by WFMC staff primarily during interviews although in some cases they were produced using transcripts. As such, the translations represent a first-order attempt to convey the ancient Anishinaabe (Ojibway) spoken by Pikangikum elders and may not capture the full subtlety of what was being conveyed, let alone the cultural worldview in which their intended meaning is brought to light.

We find that the paintings provide a window into the Pikangikum Cultural Landscape and an appreciation for the depth of the elders' knowledge of the land. This knowledge, as stated in the land use strategy, will guide the Pikangikum Anishinaabe as they undertake their ancestral stewardship responsibilities for Keeping the Land in the Whitefeather Forest. It is through building cross-cultural understanding that we can begin to understand how to work together in a way that is mutually enriching.



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Whitefeather Forest & Woodland Caribou Signature Site



Living with Fire

Fire is a supremely powerful force within the boreal forest. It is responsible for maintaining the health of the land and for making life possible for the people. Because fire can also threaten life and well being of the people, humans must always treat it with knowledge and respect.

These paintings arose from statements made by the Elders of Pikangikum during investigations between 2006 and 2008 into the importance of fire to the life of the people and the health of the land. They represent lessons which the Elders have gained through traditional stories and teachings of their people, and directly through their lives on the land. The Elders expressed their desire to pass these messages on to the youth of Pikangikum and more broadly so that their traditional knowledge of the processes at work within their territory will be respected and accepted in Canadian society. The images which Mr. Peters portrays were selected from themes judged to be important for understanding Anishinaabe teachings about fire by the research team and community Elders. In western scientific terms these four themes might be expressed as: the importance of lightning fire, how burned forests recover following fires, Anishinaabe use of fire for land management, and the need to respect fire and practice fire safety. Their true message is best communicated in the words of the Elders' descriptions in the Anishinaabe language (see captions).





Peeneysee Eshkotay – Thunderbird Fire

The Creator has a match and that match is the Thunderbird. He brings that match to the land when the forest gets too old and can't grow anymore. So the Thunderbird comes to earth. After the forest is burnt new growth starts. Animals get tired of eating old food. Just like you and me. The Creator knows that animals need new food. After the fire there is fresh food to eat.

Whitehead Moose (July 21, 2006)

This is how the Thunderbird fire works. Thunderbird carries fire. Thunderbird can use lightning and strike a tree and into the ground. When there is lightning and there is no rain at all it can cause a forest fire. And after the fire is gone there are these jack pines that grow in the fire area. That's what the Creator did, he created the Thunderbird and he created the jack pines for the animals.

Whitehead Moose (December 18, 2007)

The lightning comes from the blinking of the thunderbird's eye. What he is looking at gets hit.

George B. Strang (February 04, 2007)

One of the things that I was taught about Thunderbirds from my grandparents, is in the fall there is sometimes a storm, a lightning storm... And I was told by my grandparents that these are the young thunderbirds and they are out practicing. They are out with the big Thunderbird and he is telling them where to shoot their lightning. Here is an example of why I said that when you give a rifle to a young person he is not careful where he points the gun. That is the role of an adult, he shows what not to shoot. It is the same with the Thunderbird.

Tom Quill (December 18, 2007)





Geeyahwaysaag – The land returning to the way it was

Everything was burnt over there even those trees that were lying on the forest floor were burnt. Where the fire had gone through there was nothing but bare rock on the land. A fire goes through and leaves ashes. I truly believe that the ashes play an important role. Where the fire has gone through, these ashes regenerate the same forest that was there. Today the place where the forest burned is coming back.

Oliver Hill (August 24, 2006)

If you open up the earth you will see what the Creator made in the earth. The roots are there preserved. You will see many roots. Fat roots, long thin ones. ... The fire comes and opens the ground for the roots to grow. ... The blueberries, the jack pines all the plants are there waiting for the conditions to be right to grow.

Norman Quill (October 30, 2006)

Where fire comes to rock area blue berries come after the fire. Feeds a lot of animals. We eat blueberries too. Fire makes good food areas.

Whitehead Moose (July 21, 2006)

My grandfather told me about Ayasay, this man who started a fire one time. He started a fire and it burnt the whole world and nothing was left but ashes. And then later on he noticed that something was growing – *weengoop*, a willow, and then later on pine, pine trees started to grow, and then later on and then like we say *ayasayweesuhk*, an Ayasay tree, a burnt tree. When we pass a place in a *mushkeeg* where we see these burnt trees we think about Ayasay and what he did.

Charlie Peters (December 18, 2007)





Peeshaskoosaywahseegay – Burning the dead grass in the early spring

It occurred in the early spring while the ice was still on the lake. I learned the practice from my father. It was intended to bring new growth to small creeks, and marshes.

We must understand this process. It is only to burn grass. Not to burn the soil. Not to burn the ground. It was only to burn the grass.

Those areas that they burnt, from what I saw, when they burnt those grass areas in the early spring, once everything thawed out, when things started to grow on the land in the late spring, these burnt areas tend to grow much faster and more plentiful whereas these ones that we did not touch just grew with the season. In other words those areas that they burnt, they helped those areas grow faster.

Geeminozahgeegink - for the land to grow beautifully. Those other areas just grew with the season.

When ducks first came in [the ground] would be black so they would not stay immediately, but later in the summer they would go there. Other animals wouldn't like it immediately either, but eventually these areas would be very good homes to many little animals. There would be lots of little birds like red winged blackbirds and sandpipers. Muskrats became plentiful in those areas. Also frogs – you could hear them singing in those places.

We got a lot of food from these areas.

Charlie Peters (October 05, 2007)



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የባለሙያ (October 05, 2007)





Elders Teach about Fire

The Creator created fire to help us survive. We must always respect fire. It is the Creator's. If you are careless (*kuhnuhnuhkuhcheetooseek*), it means that you fail to understand fire or how fire works. Because of your limited understanding of fire...you will lose out. You will fail. You will lose all your possessions or your cabin because you don't understand fire. Fire is used for means of survival. If you respect fire, the fire will be good to you. It will keep you warm cold days. But you also have to have respect and be careful with the fire. You have to use it wisely. If you use it wisely it will keep you. If not it will burn all of your possessions.

Solomon Turtle (April 17, 2007)

When fire is involved in a house it gives heat. It gives life to your family. And you have to really aware of it all the time – that fire in your house. Especially the hydro – the Whiteman fire. Everybody has to respect this kind of fire. Sometimes you see the old houses that have been wired and you see old light fixtures coming loose. You have to get them fixed all the time. And when children start crawling around the house they see these little plugs with three holes and the put sticks in them and that can make a spark. We have to be aware and careful with these things at all times.

Norman Quill (January 29, 2008)

I will tell a little about the different fires. Anishinaabe *eshkotay* is a soft fire (*kaamookaak*). If we have water and pour it on, it will go out. The Whiteman fire and the Thunderbird can also make fires. There is something that is included in these. When you touch something that the Whiteman creates such as power lines that their fire travels in, something happens to your body and you die because you get electrocuted. Thunderbird fire is the same. There was a man in Red Lake while I was fire fighting and during a thunder storm he was holding a water hose line and that's when he got electrocuted and died. Both Thunderbird fire and Whiteman's fire are hard fires.

Norman Quill (December 12, 2007)



One of the things we have to tell our young people when they are out in the bush is to make their fires on rock, not on soil. Deep soils (*noosowakahmeegeeteg*) can catch fire. If you do put your fire in that area you really need to put that out, really soak it with water. Eventually it will spread if you miss a burning coal by a whisker. You really have to soak the moss.

(Oliver Hill January 29, 2008)

The place where I would light my fire was close to the shore, close to the water. That way I was able to control my fire and contain it in that area. It was a limited fire too. Enough to boil my tea. If I was careless with the fire, then the fire would be out of my control. I never built my fire in a wooded area.

Tom Quill (January 29, 2008)



Introduction to Woodland Caribou and Sturgeon Knowledge

The Whitefeather Forest Management Corporation has been conducting research on woodland caribou since 2003 and research on lake sturgeon since 2007. This research has focussed on understanding Pikangikum elders' teachings about the physiology, behaviour, and habitat of these two species. Mario Peters was asked to depict, through painting, an aspect of his elders' teachings about woodland caribou and lake sturgeon. The first painting shows a woodland caribou with its summer coat, the fur around its neck being very white. The second and third paintings show two different kinds of lake sturgeon that inhabit the Berens River. The second painting depicts the type of sturgeon that lives in the open lake and is light-coloured on the top of its body. The third painting depicts the darker-coloured type of sturgeon that is found in river environments.

The quotations from Pikangikum elders express the relationship between Pikangikum people and their ancestral lands, the Pikangikum cultural landscape - "a way of being (on the land)". Central to this relationship is living off the land, being dependent for survival on what the Creator has provided; this includes eating other animals provided by the Creator for Pikangikum people. Eating off the land is an act of reciprocity with the Creator; failure to harvest the foods provided by the Creator is cited by Pikangikum elders as an immediate cause in the decline of wildlife populations - "We used to work the traplines, harvest its abundance, and it would return again. This was the Creator's way of looking favourably upon us" (elder Solomon Turtle, December 11, 2003). So, the abundance provided for Pikangikum people by the Creator can be threatened through inappropriate behaviour, including failure to eat from the land, destructive land use practices, and the imposition of laws and regulations that interfere with the practice of reciprocity between Pikangikum people and the Creator. Thus, for example, regulations that alter how or where Pikangikum people hunt and fish may have a negative impact on the abundance of animals.







Elders' Quotes about Woodland Caribou

The caribou was given life to live on the land by the Creator. The Creator's plan has been initiated. We cannot give the caribou what they want to eat, we cannot tell the caribou where to live; only the Creator can do this. Even though we create all kinds of maps with boundaries, saying where the caribou are and where the caribou will eat, we don't know what the Creator's plan is. It is the Creator who knows that, who looks after them. It is up to the Creator to look after creation. It is the same with us; nobody tells us what to eat or where to get food. It is our belief that the Creator will look after the caribou.

Charlie Peters (March 01, 2006)

I don't understand why they want to confine the animal to one particular area, or designate an area for caribou. That's never going to happen. The caribou will never stay in that particular designated area. That will never happen because the caribou must follow a cycle. The only thing that is going to happen once they designate those areas [for caribou], is they are going to close in on the caribou; they are going to isolate them. Once the caribou has been isolated in a certain area, they will no longer follow that cycle that is in them. That cycle is in the caribou and they have to follow that cycle because the caribou is a moving animal. The caribou is on a journey.

George B. Strang (December 15, 2006)

The caribou are coming closer because they are being chased out of the south. They are being treated like people. People are playing around with the caribou, putting tags on them. That's inhumane. They are fleeing all those things. They know they won't be treated like that when they come up north.

Oliver Hill (December 15, 2006)

We are told that certain animals, like the caribou and sturgeon, are going to disappear. We were told the wolverine was becoming extinct and would need to be protected; now we see many wolverine. We are told this is because they are protected but we have a different view. The [MNR-funded] posters say these



animals [caribou and sturgeon] are becoming extinct and we are told to abide by these rules, by what we are told to do. That is the reason these animals are becoming extinct -- we don't hunt them any more. Rabbits were abundant in the past but today there are scarcely any rabbits in our area because we don't hunt them anymore; we don't hunt rabbits and they become extinct. In those days, the Creator looked after us, provided food for us. It is the same today; if you do not hunt, there will not be any animals.

Oliver Hill (April 29, 2008)





FRANCO PETERS ©

Elders' Quotes about Lake Sturgeon

There are two different types of sturgeon, marked by the different colour on top of their body. There is a light-coloured type that lives in the open lake, and a dark type that lives in the river. The difference in colour is related to their environment: the light one lives in the bright shallows of the lake, while the other is dark because of the shade of trees along the river. Both are equally slimy and taste the same.

George B. Strang (December 05, 2007)

Our people hunted the sturgeon traditionally, using a traditional method of hunting: they would use a traditional spear. With that spear there was a long string attached to those spears ... Sturgeon were very abundant on Berens Lake. Sturgeon would come ashore in the shallow areas. Every time you would go along the shore, if you see muddy water along the shore area, these were the sturgeon ... They would go along the shore where they would see muddy waters, they would approach that area and they would spear those sturgeon.

Matthew Strang (July 18, 2006)

It is important to handle your nets properly so as not to spook sturgeon and other fish. It is important to put your net into the water nice and easy, with a clear reason or conscious purpose, if you expect to be successful. You cannot have something in your net that you are not aware of, such as the scent of your home where the net was kept, otherwise the fish will not come near your net. They will right away be aware of that foreignness and be spooked. This is true for all fish.

Charlie Peters (October 01, 2007)

It was the whiteman that came and killed off all the sturgeon. One summer long ago, when I was 10 winters old, they came and fished all summer. They were only fishing for sturgeon, and they took a lot. The planes were coming [to pick up the fish] all summer.

Charlie Peters (October 01, 2007)



I was 16 years old at that time the sturgeon began to disappear ... White people came to my trapline in the spring to catch sturgeon and take them away by plane. Those people lived close to the Mikiaimi Rapids for two weeks in the spring when the sturgeon were spawning. They never set a net on the lake, only at the rapids.

George B. Strang (December 5, 2007)



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ግብርና (December 5, 2007)

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ግብርና (December 05, 2007)

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ግብርና (October 01, 2007)





Understanding Animals as part of the Cultural Landscape

So the animals are smart, they have a way of life. The same as we have a way of life. The animals out there have their own life too. And it is surprising that it's similar to our way of life. The way that the animals survive, nothing is broken. Everything is as if it is the way it has been organised.

Oliver Hill (December 11, 2006)

We don't laugh at or tease any animals, we hold them with much respect, because it is not proper in our culture to tease animals, whether they are large or small. They will hear you when you don't respect them and they will come after you, get even with you.

Matthew Strang (March 3, 2006)

I just want to stress that some of your legislation is very hard to work with; it makes things difficult for us, the way we are trying to live. When your legislation begins, it changes our way of life, so we have to do things differently.

Oliver Hill (February 28, 2006)



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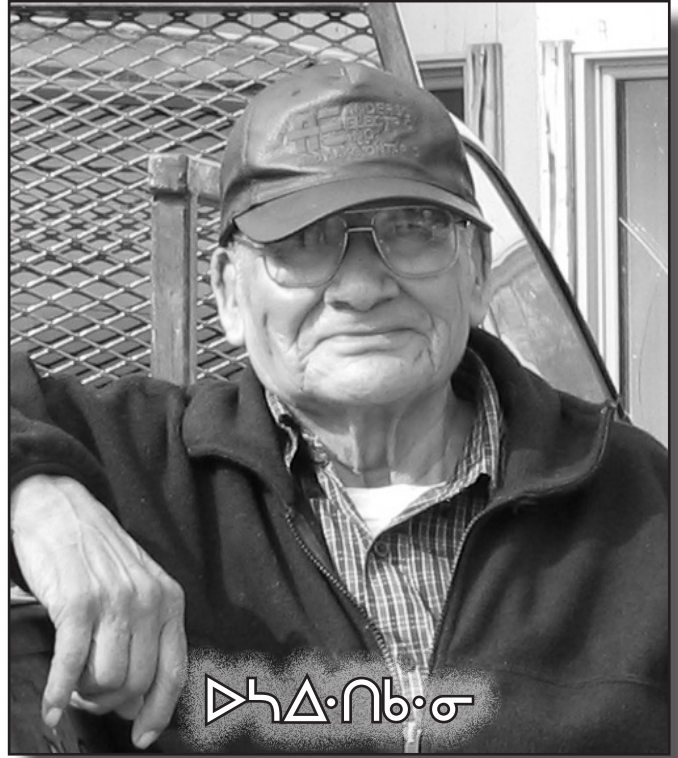
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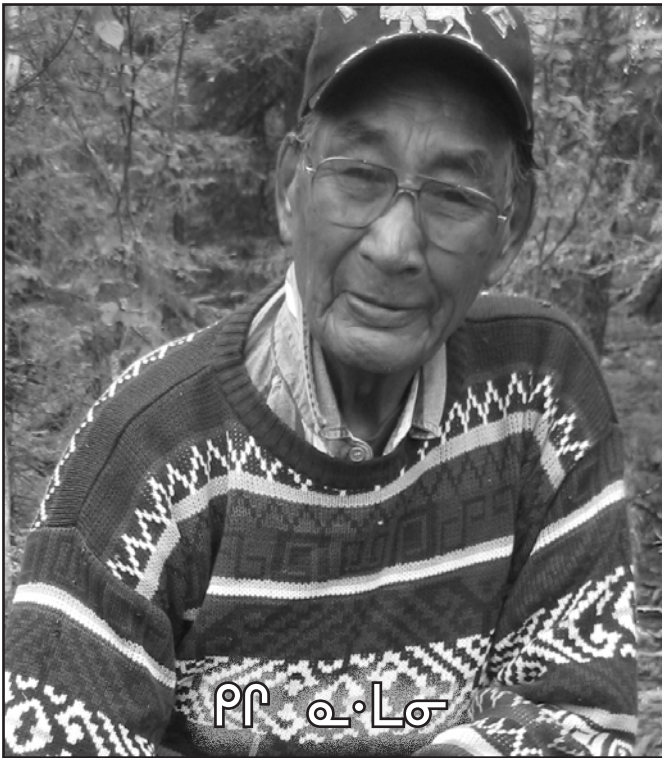
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**The Late
Elder Whitehead Moose**



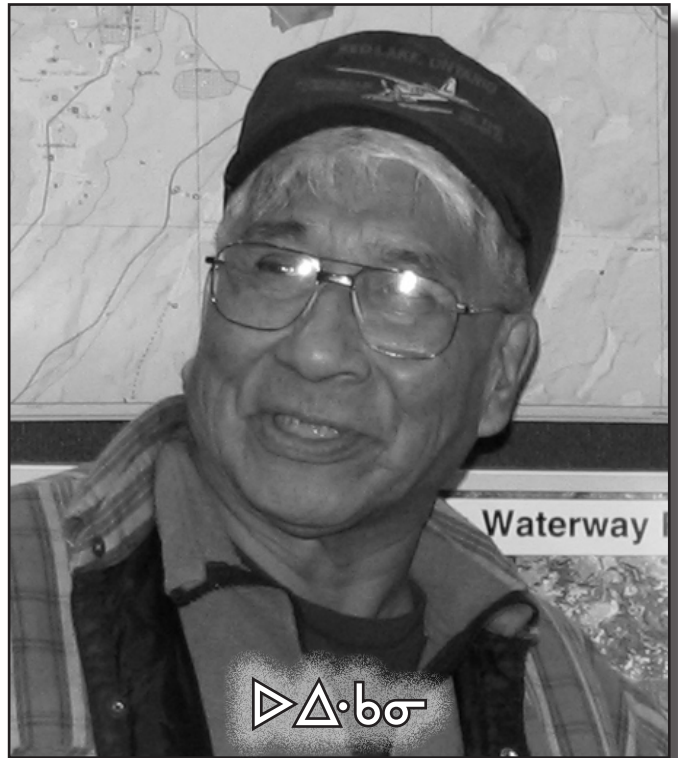
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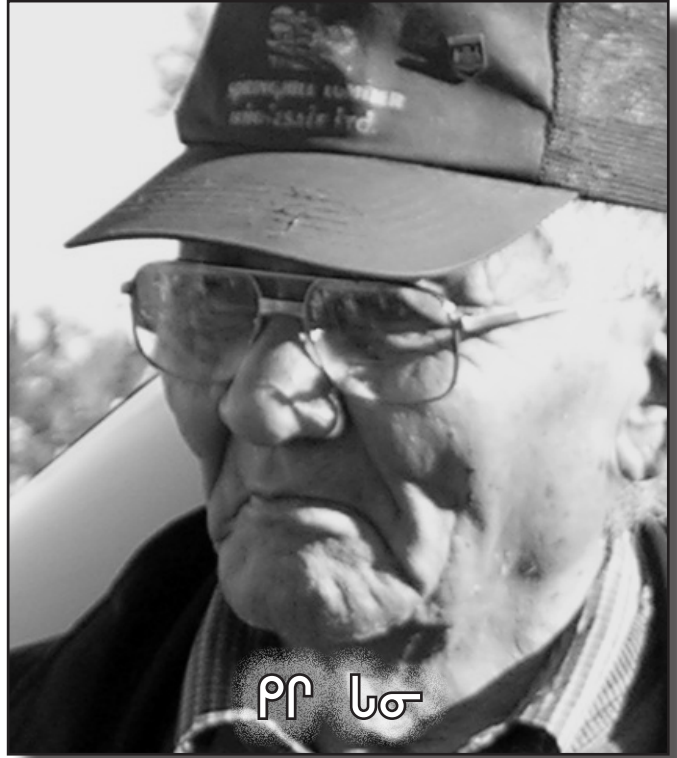


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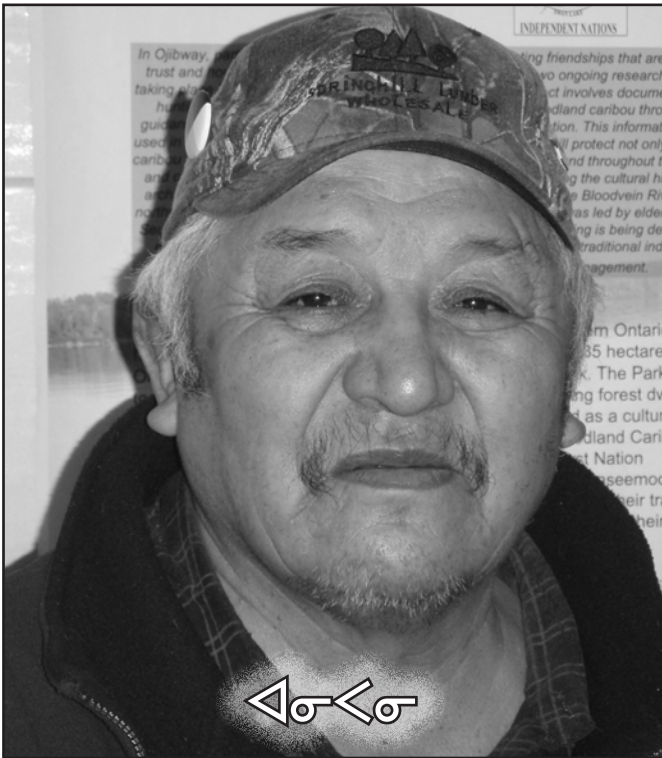
Elder Matthew Strang



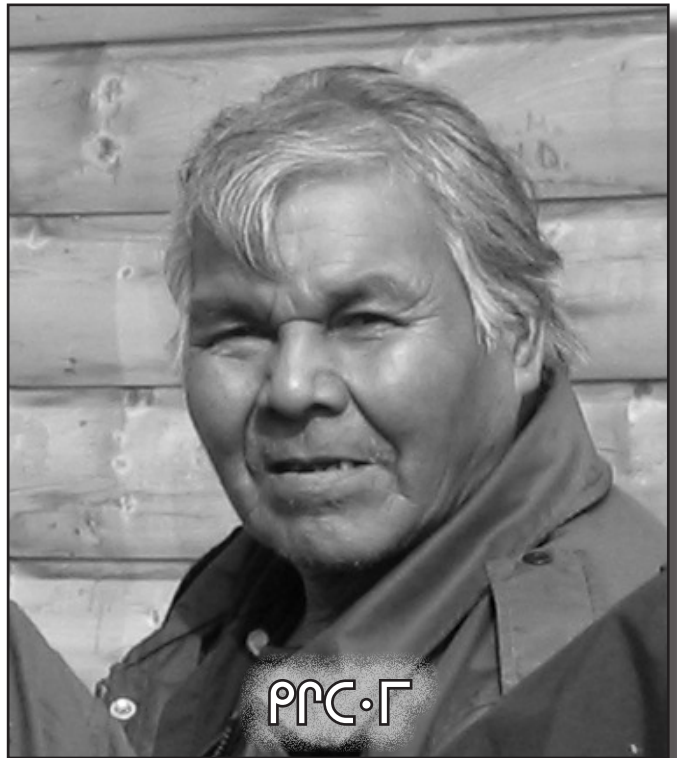
Elder Solomon Turtle



Elder Charlie Peters



Elder Oliver Hill



Elder Tom Quill