

Innuts mak Atikwuts  
(text by Dr. Trudy Sable, Director, OANR)

## **Innuts mak Atikwuts: The Innu and Caribou in a Shared Landscape 8,000 Years of Innu Culture and History in Northern Nitassinan**

September 21 - October 25, 2006

Beginning on Sept 21, 2006, a group of Innu Environmental Guardians, some family members, six Innu youth, and Tony Jenkinson of the Tshikapisk Foundation, traveled to Kamestastin, an ancient meteoric lake surrounded by archaeological sites attesting to at least 7500 years of continued Innu presence. This was the beginning of a month long accredited educational module entitled, 'Innuts mak Atikwuts: The Innu and Caribou in a Shared Landscape; 8,000 years of Innu Culture and History in Northern Nitassinan, or, on the Saint Mary's University books, Fieldwork in Archaeology: ANTH3373.1LB. Two weeks later, Dr. Stephen Loring, archaeologist from the Smithsonian Institution's Arctic Research Center, and Dr. Trudy Sable from the Gorsebrook Research Institute, Saint Mary's University, joined the group.



Kamestastin (Photo:Paul Piggot Innu Nation archives)



Tshikapisk Foundation camp, Kamestastin  
(Photo: Trudy Sable)

Fieldwork in Archaeology was being offered as part of the ongoing Innu Environmental Guardians Program to support Guardians in the protection and care of their ancestral lands, Nitassinan, in preparation for self governance. Core to the program is that it is based within Innu cultural practices, values, and land use traditions, and that elders (tshishenuat) are integral to the teaching and evaluation of each module. For this reason, we chose Kamestastin as the classroom to explore the development and meaning of Innu archaeology. The module was planned to be concurrent with the migration of the large (up to 800,000) George River Caribou herd through the area, a time that Innu families from time immemorial have traveled to this area to camp and hunt.



George River Caribou, Kamestastin, Labrador  
(Photo: Stephen Loring, Arctic Studies Center, Smithsonian Institution)

Throughout this landscape, Ramah chert and quartz flakes can be found scattered or in concentrations along the maze of caribou trails, along with old camp sites. The field work operated out of traditional Innu camps and cabins, and included Innu families assisting in site interpretation.

The first part of the module focused on Innu knowledge of the caribou, including their movement and behavior, their uses within Innu culture, and legends and oral history relating the inseparability of caribou from Innu culture. During the second part of the module, this same landscape was looked at from the point of view of archaeology, and how archaeology is informed by this real life relationship between the Innu and the movement of caribou through Nitassinin. Participants learned how to “read” their cultural landscape from an archaeological point of view, and were exposed to the full range of activities and experiences surrounding site survey, mapping, and testing, combined with limited site excavation. Evening slide shows were held in one of the cabins where we explored the many issues surrounding the interpretation of the artifacts and the cultural management of Innu heritage resources.



Albert Penunsi and Snowden Piwas (videotaping)  
outside Field tent (Photo: Trudy Sable)

The Innu youth (ages 15-21) who accompanied us, were part of a Social Sciences and Humanities Research (SSHRC) funded project between the Gorsebrook Research Institute and the Innu Nation Environment Office, as was the module itself. Aboriginal Human Resource Development Agency (AHRDA) also supported the youth on this trip to Kamestastin, and the Tshikapisk Foundation hosted the group in its cabins and lodge. Supplemental funding came from Parks Canada toward travel costs. The goal of the three-year SSHRC project (2006-2009) is to assess the

potential development of alternative educational paths for Innu youth who are not currently attending schools. These youth participated fully in all aspects of the module, with one youth, Ponas Rich, taking the module for non-degree credit through the Saint Mary's University Division of Continuing Education. Ponas was also part of a site excavation with Dr. Loring, Sebastian Piwas (an Innu Environmental Guardian), and Tony Jenkinson during which they unearthed a 5,000 year old ulu, a moon shaped knife blade used in the butchering of animals.



Stephen Loring, Sebastian Piwas and Ponas Rich. 5,000 year old site.  
(Photo: Trudy Sable)

Two other youth, Snowden Piwas and Justin Rich, discovered a 2,000 year old bi-face along the Kamestastin River.



Roderick Mistanapeo holding the 2,000 year old bi-face  
(Photo: Snowden Piwas)

Along with participating in the module, the youth were hunting and taking part in all aspects of camp life. They also took a keen interest in the video camera, digital camera and computer being used by Dr. Sable to document the module. Soon, much of the documentation was being done by these young people, leading to a subsequent film making project to train these youth professionally in the use of cameras (see [Innu Youth Program](#) and [Youth videos](#)). The following spring, some of these youth accompanied us on a second module—Caribou Management—and participated in a Photo Voice project through funding from Environment Canada, Atlantic Region.



Fishing along the Kamestastin River  
(Photos: Trudy Sable)



(l-r) Snowden Piwas, Ponas Rich, Justin Rich, Roderick Mistanapeo, Jerry Rich and Albert Penunsi in cabin