

Collaborative Archaeology: A Perspective from the Yukon-Alaska Borderlands

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ABSTRACT: Archaeological investigations among the Upper Tanana speaking peoples of the Yukon-Alaska Borderlands began with seemingly conventional approaches to respectful consultation and collaboration in the early 1990s. After having been engaged with this work since 2011, first as a student and now as a researcher at the Little John site, I have accumulated experiences which have shaped my ideas regarding the maintenance of collaboration, how it evolves over time, and how its unique community context promotes a relaxed and mixed methodological strategy that I call an unstandardized approach to collaboration. This includes formal and informal relationships or friendships, diversifying institutionalized concepts of capacity building, and deprioritizing disciplinary goals that impose time constraints in favour of just being present. This approach has been nurtured by the cultural ethos of our host community over twenty-five years of engagement and an ongoing conversation of “how” anthropologists should approach and practice community collaboration. The result is an academic archaeological program which has become integrated into a small northern community of transitional hunter-gatherers that contribute to the shared goals of collaborative archaeologies –particularly the deconstruction of power resulting from colonial legacies and the reconstruction of power rooted in locality.

KEYWORDS: collaborative archaeology, community archaeology, archaeology method, archaeology theory, indigenous archaeology

Introduction

Self-reflectivity has permeated the social sciences at large in recent decades and archaeology has been no exception. In particular, it has led archaeologists to be increasingly concerned with the colonial foundations of the discipline’s practice and our relevance within contemporary societies. This has led to a variety of public engagements, consultations, and collaborations. In this paper, I will draw upon my own long-term engagement with an archaeological and ethnographic field program to document a strategy that favours an *unstandardized* approach that draws upon elements from multiple current “collaborative archaeologies.” My goal is to reflect upon my own student experiences and share some of my stories, placing them within the current discussions of the collaborate discourse. I will begin by reviewing some of the many approaches which lie under the umbrella of “collaborative archaeologies,” and then

discuss how elements of each are present within the Scottie Creek Borderlands Culture History Project.

For more than twenty years, scholars have been developing an array of collaborative archaeologies, including *Indigenous archaeology* (Nicholas and Andrews 1997; Bruchac et al. 2010), *community archaeology* (Marshall 2002; Moser et al. 2002) *community-based archaeology* (Greer et al. 2002), *community-based participatory archaeology* (Atalay 2012) *ethnographic archaeology* (Hamilakis and Anagnostopoulos 2009), *collaborative archaeology* (Chilton and Hart 2009; Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2008), and *public archaeology* (Brighton 2011; Lassiter 2008). All of this theoretical momentum has, in part, been the result of a desire by some to transform a *movement* into a more substantive disciplinary *shift* (Atalay et al. 2014:10) that is grounded in a type of scholarship that is meaningful to con-

temporary non-academic communities, particularly Indigenous communities whose history archaeology is investigating, and to engage with and encourage different means of knowledge production and ways of knowing. While all of these archaeologies share this common purpose, they have also emerged within a generalized disagreement on how collaboration should be conducted (Angelbeck and Grier 2014:519).

In continuing this conversation on how archaeologists should or could practice collaboration, in this paper I will present a number of experiential narratives that I have accumulated through my involvement with the Scottie Creek Borderlands Culture History Project since 2011, which includes the long-term excavations at the Little John site near Beaver Creek, Yukon Territory. These narratives have not only shaped my understandings of collaboration, they interact to demonstrate the nuanced principles that guide our collaborative strategy. Our work in this project does not adhere to any single collaborative archaeology, rather it supports an unstandardization of collaborative archaeology. This idea to ‘unstandardize’ is not meant to discredit ongoing theoretical development working to advance the larger collaborative movement within our discipline, but to document how a mixed methodological strategy and informal approach have resulted in meaningful archaeological and anthropological knowledge in the Yukon-Alaska borderlands. I further hope to demonstrate how this fluidity contributes to the common goals of the collaborative archaeologies collective to deconstruct the ongoing power imbalances in archaeological knowledge production and to produce research that aligns with host community objectives and is meaningful beyond academia.

Collaborative Archaeologies

Many approaches to collaborative archaeology have been developed over recent decades. I review four such approaches here, including their merits, fundamental differences, and shared goals: Public Archaeology; Community Archaeology; Community-based Participatory Archaeology, and Archaeological Ethnography. While not an exhaustive review, it does reflect the diversity of contemporary approaches.

Public archaeology's central purpose is the promotion of a sense of shared human heritage. It achieves this by focusing on the education of the general public and mass audiences through excavation and archaeological exhibits (Brighton 2011:346; Lassiter 2008:71). Public archaeological programs engage with people beyond the community level to advance notions of a collective heritage, often with the goal of instilling a desire to steward, protect and promote archaeology at an individual level. Public archaeologies also support multi-vocality. The integration of the greater population can be used to assess contemporary feelings about the past on the practice of archaeology in general and thus inclusive of different ways of knowing. It has also been promoted as means of informing the pasts of neglected or disenfranchised groups and providing an opportunity to share these untold stories and cultural heritages (Menzies 2015:5).

Community archaeology is an umbrella term that includes a number of sub-approaches with subtly different definitions on what it exactly signifies and entails. In general, it can be understood as the incorporation of strategies that facilitate the involvement of local people in all aspects of archaeological research from investigation to interpretation (Moser et al. 2002:220). Some consider it an approach to cultural resource management as opposed to academic archaeology (Marshall 2002:213), while others would highlight the role of collaboration above consultation within community archaeology practice (Moser et al. 2002:202). It is important to acknowledge community archaeology as a collaborative archaeology currently prominent within academia. It may not be mandated by law in academic research like it is when aligned with development and industry or cultural resource management. It may not be as frequently practiced or as illuminated by formalized procedure in academic research, but it is by and large the prevailing approach applied to current archaeological projects to at least some degree.

Community-based participatory research signifies a branch of community archaeology thoroughly defined and developed for expanded application by Atalay (2012). She demonstrates its utility in both cultural resource management and academically

approached archaeology. Community-based participatory archaeology is reciprocal for all partners, and its central tenant is to value information and ways of knowing from diverse knowledge systems including Indigenous or traditional knowledge (Atalay 2012:4). This is in fact one of its strengths, the ability to combine knowledge generated through different traditions and experiences. It advocates a partnership approach motivated by community rights to be active participants in the creation and production of knowledge (Atalay 2012:45).

Finally, *Archaeological Ethnography* is broadly defined “as a trans-disciplinary and trans-cultural space that enables researchers and diverse publics to engage in various conversations, exchanges, and interventions” about the past (Hamilakis and Anagnostopoulos 2009:65). It is a much more academically applied theoretical approach. It was introduced through ethno-archaeology and typically operates through this tradition but addresses larger ethnographic and ethno-historic issues alongside archaeological ones.

Archaeological ethnography brings different epistemological values to archaeological interpretation through the integration of community knowledge, experience, and relationships to materials and space. Hamilakis and Anagnostopoulos describe archaeological ethnography as occupying a space “centered upon the material traces of various times and involving researchers as well as various other participants” (2009:73). This approach requires the researcher to familiarize themselves with all aspects of the participating community’s relationship with material culture in a practice called “total ethnography” (Hamilakis and Anagnostopoulos 2009:75).

While these approaches are diverse in their emphasis on either method or theory and their relationship with either academia or industry, they share an overarching objective. They all aim to make the archaeological past both accessible and relevant to contemporary society in ways that are inclusive of the non-archaeological community, including their knowledge systems, cultural expertise, and life experience through participation and collaboration.

Collaboration has been used quite generally as a tool of decolonization (Nicholas et al. 2011:20).

Following the internal recognition that anthropological (and archaeological) research was often another exploitative extension contributing to the colonial tradition (Asad 1973; Gough 1968), many academics shifted out of traditional research objectives and began to align themselves with the communities in which they work, including their sociopolitical objectives, resulting in new standards within professional associations.¹

Collaboration thus developed in explicit opposition to conventional practices of archaeology – shifting from hierarchical practices and pursuing open and safe places for sharing deeper understandings of community values, perspectives, and epistemologies (Nicholas et al. 2011:25).

Our endeavours at the Little John site include aspects of each these approaches. We engage with diverse publics from Alaskan Highway tourists to youth groups from the Whitehorse region,² we translate our research through film, television, radio and print,³ we have participation in excavation and analysis from the local community⁴ and we collaborate on a continual basis to assess our work and its impact through regular discussions with our partners. We engage in ethnographic, linguistic, and archaeological research. We have hosted a diverse group of visiting and returning students and scholars ranging from such disciplines as art history, ornithology, geology, geography, botany, political science, linguistics, biology, literature, performance art, and playwrights. Our approach at the Little John site utilizes aspects of many informed theoretical collaborative strategies in a methodologically fluid practice. The experiential

1 See: Statement of Principles for Ethical Conduct Pertaining to Aboriginal Peoples (<http://www.canadianarchaeology.com>); Principles of Archaeological Ethics (<http://www.saa.org>); Principles of Professional Responsibility (<http://www.americananthro.org>)

2 For example: Northern Cultural Expressions Society’s summer cultural program for native youth at risk (2014-2015); Whitehorse Assisted Living Household led by WRFN member Janet Vandermeer (2007)

3 For Example: Nine-year-old yukoner makes archaeological breakthrough 2008. Chris Oke. Yukon News; Little John Country 2009. Max Fraser. Whitehorse, YT. Video Short. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k5qqynzPIHM>); Wild Archaeology (S1E3) 2016. Tracy German and Karen Hanson. Aboriginal Peoples Television Network; Community Gallery Exhibition: Little John 2017 (Archaeological Site Artist-in-Residence 2015) Dr Ukjese van Kampen. Yukon Arts Centre.

4 Of the 320 fieldworkers involved in the Scottie Creek Borderlands Culture History Project between 1994 and 2016 106 have been from Yukon – Alaskan First Nations.



Figure 1. The Midnight Sun at Mile 1216 of the Alaska Highway – Little John’s Camp. (Handley 2012).

narratives that follow intend to situate the unique context of Canada’s north western Subarctic and the Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities that live there. Further, I wish to encourage the consideration of how research fits within and impacts the lives of the local communities where it is practiced as opposed to how it will fulfill the requirements of disciplinary advancement and sustainability.

Two decades ago it was proposed that for archaeology to move forward, those whose lives are affected by our research must be more than subjects but also partners, sources of insight, and contributors to the archaeological enterprise (Wylie 1995:267). One of our main challenges has been to find ways of creating and maintaining these partnerships. I take the position that our research must harmoniously complement the current lifestyles and livelihoods of the communities we work within not as research partners, but as friends.

Site and Program Background

July, 10, 2014. The Burnt Paw in Tok was an interesting outfit. In one respect it catered to tourists – the walls lined with Alaskan novelties and cabins to rent out back that provided it’s guests with the ultimate Alaskan experience not devoid of modern comforts. However, it also served the needs of the local dog musher community, which is a much bigger cliental than the average person

would assume. They sold dog food, tackle, and even Alaskan husky pups. We had originally gone to Tok for provisions, groceries, a new hammock, tent, and bug repellent, I’m sure was on the list. Also on the agenda was a quick survey of the Tok Terminal, a remnant of the WWII era Norman Wells pipeline, which held a cluster of archaeological sites documented a few years back by the U.S. Military. The man ringing through our purchases was pleasant, probably in his early seventies. He asked what we were doing up here, wordlessly acknowledging my Canadian accent, not uncommon for a traveler of the Alaska Highway. More likely it was our less than groomed appearance that gave us away.

– We’re archaeologists. Working at a site just outside Beaver Creek, on the Alaska side.

– I knew a man from over that way once. Ya, he walked a lot. All over this country really. His name was White River Johnny. Boy, did he walk a lot. Always coming and going, been years since I saw him last.

This exchange, though brief, made me reflect on a few things. Since my first summer here as field school student I had heard tales of Little John, most prominently that he was a man of many miles. The Indigenous community throughout the borderlands, and the non-Indigenous all the way over here in Alaska knew him as a man of foot power. He understood this landscape and traveled it in ways foreign to you or I. He was a keeper of a deep traditional knowledge of the land – the muskeg and watersheds, the animals and skies. He kept this knowledge alive throughout his travels and, in a way, the landscape mirrors this in it’s keeping of Little John’s legacy. Such traversing of the subarctic landscape was not and is not just a means of travel but a way of life and understanding.

The Little John site was named after this respected elder. He went by many names, White River Johnny, *Klaa Dii Cheeg* (“His Hand Drops”), but affectionately he was known as Little John. For as long as people remember, the site had always been Little

John's hunting camp, and after recognition of its archaeological significance in 2006 and consultation with the White River First Nation, it was formally named after him at a community tea at the site which included a cheeky ribbon cutting ceremony (Easton et al. 2011:289). The site was used as a camp and game lookout during Little John's time, demonstrably as well as for millennia before him, and it continues to be used in the present day by his kin and descendents for this same purpose.

Situated about 12 km from the village of Beaver Creek, Yukon and 2 km from the international border with Alaska, the Little John site lies within the traditional territory of the White River First Nation, members of Upper Tanana speaking *Dineh* in Canada and their American relatives, members of the Villages of Northway, Tetlin, and Tanacross. The site is located, rather conveniently for archaeologists and locals alike, just meters off the Alaska Highway. This accessibility is rare in the great physical expanse of the subarctic. It is actually quite astonishing, given its proximity, that the highway did not significantly impact the integrity of the site – archaeological speaking – like it had so many up and down its nearly 2,500 km transect. Excavating here I am oftentimes astounded by evidence of the highway builders, as I unearth their discarded shotgun shells or razor blades, lost jewelry and forgotten notes. They had a temporary yet substantive camp here during its construction, and were unaware of the antiquity of human activity below their feet, the significance of this place both past and present, and that they themselves were becoming part of the archaeological record.

As an archaeological site, Little John's camp was first documented by Norman Easton of Yukon College in 2002 during field surveys associated with the Scottie Creek Borderlands Culture History project, which he began in 1992 (Easton and MacKay 2008:333). The survey revealed an abundant collection of lithic artifacts and preserved animal bone that eventually proved to be the oldest in the Yukon and became the focus of Easton's culture history project within the region.

Archaeologically, the site represents 14,000 years of occupation, first occupied by a highly mobile people, the founders of this landscape. It is recog-



Figure 2. David Johnny and Easton at the look out, overlooking the Mirror Creek Valley. (Handley 2014)

nized as the second oldest site in northwestern North America (Easton et al. 2011; Potter et al. 2013). However, there is much more to the Little John site than the unfolding of this ancient human past and its insight into the remains of this ambiguous founding population. There is a lively, generous, and accepting community of humans, descendant and from away, that share this land today.

The Community

June 11, 2011. At half past eleven, Bessie and Chelsea Johnny pulled into camp. Most students were already nestling into their respective tents. The sun was high in the sky, the valley's breeze rustling the fallen spruce needles mixed with the busy caws of nearby ravens, reflecting the liveliness of northern summer-nights. Chief David and Eldred, his youngest son, had shot a moose and they "invited" us to take part in skinning and butchering –Norm knew it was a demand and roused us to participate. Like the land and animals, the people here come alive during the long days of the summer season. When we arrived, the moose was being pulled behind a boat from the far side of the lake, its shores vibrant with children playing, elders laughing and drinking tea, and many hands tending to the moose. We mostly watched and helped when asked.

It wasn't until 2 a.m. that we finished. We removed our soiled clothes and placed them inside

of garbage bags to be stored in the cab of the suburban until we had the opportunity to clean them again. This is a typical night in Beaver Creek – a village of roughly a hundred people. It so happens that our short field season intersects with this wonderfully alive but very busy time for our hosts. During the summer, the Upper Tanana and neighbouring groups are still largely dedicated to hunting and gathering. So while many work at jobs, a large part of their time is spent driving the highway to visit distant friends or relatives, along the way berry picking, fishing, harvesting spruce root, hunting any variety of animal from porcupine to moose, or staying up with the sun and sipping tea.

Regardless of a conventional or collaborative approach, and beyond the theoretical or ethical goals of contemporary archaeology, archaeological research conducted in the Borderlands runs the risk of being intrusive to both the lifestyle and livelihoods of our hosts. The presence of a field crew of two or twenty, for two to twenty-five years, is nothing less than substantial to the members of this remote northern village composed largely of transitional hunter-gatherers (see Easton 2007; Nadasdy 2003) as they adapt to our presence and we adapt to theirs. The basic premise that informs our collaboration is flexible adaptation – a fundamental socio-cultural characteristic of the *Dineh* (see VanStone 1974; Wilson 2003).

This overarching flexibility and adaptability flows into the application of other governing credos leant to us from the cultural repertoire of our *Dineh* hosts and teachers, including; 1) building and maintaining meaningful relationships through *reciprocity*; 2) approaching capacity building *advantageously*; and 3) *being present* despite the confrontation of temporal limitations. The application of the socio-cultural traits of host communities has been discussed by many, most notably, reciprocity (Clauss 2014; Smith and Jackson 2010; Wylie 2000). However, it is the combination of an approach guided by principles (Angelbeck and Grier 2014), learned and derived from relevant cultural groups, and ultimately the consideration of the unique socio-cultural circumstances



Figure 3. David skinning a moose with the 'supervision' of two of his grandchildren (Handley 2011).

leading to the current make up of our community that has manifested into an unstandardized collaborative strategy.

Ultimately, an unstandardized approach (which may be interpreted as *informal*, *atheoretical*, or even *unorganized* by some) is sensitive to the fact that no two communities are alike. While researchers may relate to the circumstances of community life, our story is unique to us in the sense that all collaborative programs denote their own degree of individuality. And as every community is different, all attempts of collaborative research will inevitably require a unique research strategy (Tondue 2014:140). Ongoing collaboration here begins when the trowel is laid down to play with children, when we replace a meeting agenda for a cup of tea and talk of dogs and moose, when we first clean white fish and later conduct debitage analysis.

Building and Maintaining Meaningful Relationships through *Reciprocity*

For over a decade now they've been welcoming us come back here. We haul up all our people – students and visiting scholars, our equipment and convoy of vehicles. We litter the land with 1 by 1 meter square holes, clear the vegetation and alter the landscape both physically but, more importantly, metaphysically. We set up our dozen or so tents, stock the gear sheds and inventory the storage bins and we stay there. For two months maybe four – the entire summer season. There are no words for this kind of generosity. Especially in light of the historical infringements and injustices suffered from the imposition of our own 'nooglee' – not Dineh but apparently human – ancestors.

This imposition began with the geological surveys of America and Canada, staking out political boundaries that severed their traditional territory with an international divide, followed by the self-serving motivations of foreign participants in the fur trade and gold rush. And, finally, the construction of the Alaska Highway which would bring with it a limitless amount of outsiders with their sense of superiority and their project of cultural transformation. All of these historical events would impact the Dineh way of life. In the grand scheme of things, our work adds yet another historical event of non-Native presence, altering the meaning and memory of not just this camp or this knoll but this 'country.' They don't let us do this because they have to. They don't let us do this out of archaeological curiosity or as a means of acquiring a scientific form of insight into the ancient past. They do this because, first and foremost, we are friends. And because we are friends they trust us.

This trust was built by ten years of commitment to an authentic interest in their culture and language, political and social history, their daily lives and relationships, and their traditional knowledge and existential insight, before any intensive archaeological investigation of the White River's traditional territory. Easton's relationship with the community began with one person, *Nelna* – Bessie John, who

recruited him as the historian of the borderlands; it was only after many years of being there the archaeology began (Easton 2001; Fraser 2009).

In the not-so-distant past, the Upper Tanana were forced to choose between being residents of Canada or Alaska, a decision that would greatly impact their lives and the generations to follow (Easton 2007). Currently, the White River First Nation remains one of three "unsettled" First Nations in the Yukon Territory – they rejected the land claim settlement proffered by the Canadian state and remain an Indian Act Band. As their negotiations continue over their unsettled land claims so does their need for the external recognition of continued presence within their traditional territory. This is where the goals of the Scottie Creek Borderlands Culture History project and the political goals of the White River First Nation align – in the motivation, desire, and necessity to establish their past and present affiliation to their land. This has included the production of two major ethno-historic monographs for the Borderland *Dineh* documenting their traditional land use and occupancy in support of their claims (Easton 2005; Easton et al. 2013). This integration of goals and interests is identified as a contributor to collaborative relationships (McGuire 2008:146).

The contemporary relationship between *nooglee* archaeologists and *Dineh* residents is strong because we are friends here in the borderlands. Like all meaningful relationships, these bonds required time, the building of trust, and authenticity. This effort, begun in the early 1990s, was not met without skepticism, and our *Dineh* friends delight in telling stories of Easton's early years in the community which reveal his cultural missteps, but which simultaneously reflect his dogged pursuit of cultural understanding and community integration. By the time of my entry into the community in 2011 I was privileged to benefit from the previous twenty years of effort by Easton and two earlier generations of students. And this is where I reflect from, a place in time where I have benefited from the work and experiences of my mentor and hosts, a place I share with many of my peers in which collaborative-, public-, Indigenous-, engaged-, community- archaeology has become the only practice we know.



Figure 4. Signage for the FHQ – Permafrost is No Excuse! (Arguably neither are constraints of time nor money). (Handley 2011.)

A hallmark of all the collaborative archaeologies has been the deconstruction of power imbalances in the production and dissemination of knowledge and the promotion of archaeological pasts as part of the ongoing construction of Indigenous cultural identity. I consider the dismantling of historical power structures in the Borderlands to begin with pure and simple friendship. Avoiding the existential complexities that curtail attempts to define *friendship*, I simply argue that it is based in trust, authenticity, and reciprocity in practice through time. I believe it is notable that the Upper Tanana’s ability to continually re-engage in relationships with *nooglee* reflects a willingness to rebuild trust where others might not. It is this rather astounding ability to forgive and trust, despite the historical experience of the community, and the project’s insistence that we recognize, appreciate, and reciprocate this trust, that results in friendship.

While friendship is the defining feature of the relationship, secondary to this is their role as our



Figure 5. Home. (Handley 2015.)

hosts and we as guests. The host/guest model has been advocated elsewhere (McNiven and Russel 2005 and Brady 2009). The premise of this model is that archaeologists are guests in Indigenous communities, and our work is based on a partnership with and consent of the host community. This approach does not share power linearly but, instead shifts the power from archaeologist to host. Shifting or sharing power are common approaches to building relationships within collaborative archaeology.

Friendship-like relationships are evident in the literature (Menziess 2001). Continued considerations of friendship can be discerned through discussions of the features of collaborative relationships, emphasizing trust and mutual respect (Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2004, 2006). Also, proposed are *virtue ethics*, pursuing “civility, benevolence, generosity, loyalty, dependability, thoughtfulness, and friendliness” (Thomas 2008: xi-xii). Indeed, “Horizontal relations” has been suggested as an overarching principle to conduct meaningful collaboration (Angelbeck and

Grier 2014). In this view, reciprocity can be understood as a part of collaborative friendship, associated with sharing the benefits of knowledge production. This commitment to reciprocity is a strong shared feature in the collaborative archaeologies but, I believe, should extend beyond processes of production and gain and be an organically derived attribute of meaningful personal relationships.

At Little John, the significance of historical power imbalances when working within the framework of a colonial legacy is explicitly acknowledged. Students are exposed to the colonial experiences of our hosts as a common feature of their stories around the camp fire. Knowledge as a product requires partnership in which all stakeholders share the benefits. However, knowledge as a process occurs from a foundation of friendship. It is through this process that we can shift from a need to share power towards a means of deconstructing it. There is a coolly detached post-modern position that all friendships are built upon a power structure, but I do not share this cynical view.

Approaching Capacity Building *Advantageously*

July 24, 2014. We stood there, Norm, myself and two young women from the village, puffy eyed and coffee in hand contemplating today's game plan. The girls had been coming out for a couple of days now to excavate, and on rainy days catch up on analytics and lab work. Norman relayed the plan of attack to me for our units and then asked the young women,

- 'What do you want to learn today?'

- 'Math.'

The girls were getting a small cash incentive to come out and help. And as they had expressed to me, their work was a way to make a little money over the summer. It was also a way to keep busy, 'just something to do' as one girl had put it. I wouldn't say they weren't interested in the work, and as days went on their proficiency surely advanced as did our discussions of it. They would often ask questions – what happens to the artifacts when



Figure 6. The grandchildren of Little John excavating the Late Pleistocene paleosols of the east lobe – while simultaneously making mud pies (Handley 2014)

they leave the field? What does this tool do? How do you know? What does this change in dirt mean? I am always keen to take advantage of teachable moments. What would resonate with me, for the rest of our time together, and my time spent with other participants, was that answer. 'Math.' When asked what they wanted to learn they didn't say stone tools, they didn't say heritage management. They didn't say I want to take better field notes. In that moment, archaeological field methods and theory was surely an option but was it an opportunity?

As we aspire to redefine the relationship between the archaeologist (and anthropologist) and the community, escaping the legacy of inequality remains one of our most significant challenges (La Salle 2010:405). Within collaborative archaeology, the process of capacity building has been fundamental to decentralizing such power relations. It supports the larger Indigenous movement towards reclamation and self-determination through efforts of returning the control of culture, language, and history to Aboriginal peoples (Conkey 2005; Nicholas et al. 2011). In this way collaborative archaeology confronts our discipline's colonial legacy of managing and interpreting cultures of subject. The mainstream trajectory of community capacity building is to provide people access to the tools and strategies required to manage and control their own cultural representa-



Figure 7. The author preparing signage for Timeka and Eddie Johnny's surprise joint birthday party at the Little John site (Easton 2013)

tion and heritage so as to pass on- or back- the baton of stewardship to their rightful hands. Ideally, so long as we practice this while not forgetting to emphasize the significance of and find a place for traditional knowledge and expertise, capacity building becomes an effective means of combating these old stubborn power dynamics. Although intentions are seemingly 'good' and activist, this approach to capacity building borders a shaky line between empowering communities and masking the existing power imbalance.

La Salle, a fellow self-reflective student, asks the question, "how *is* the power actually shifted when the people, the gatekeepers to and objects of our study, become our partners in it?" (2010:412). The currency of research is measured in the production of knowledge including, publications, dissertations, and reports – products which have been identified as aligned with the "dominant social order" (Menzies 2015:16-17; see also Raymond 1977). Through collaboration we attempt to share this position, by practicing research that is egalitarian in nature by producing knowledge that is aligned with community interests as well as archaeological/anthropological interests (Atalay 2014:55). It draws upon the means of understanding by both parties to produce research that is reciprocally beneficial. However, the question remains, does power truly shift when the gatekeepers of archaeological knowledge adhere to the dominant social order by becoming active participants and gainful partners in the production of academic research?

Similarly, capacity building vis-à-vis training in heritage management and archaeological methods shifts power through the attempt to return cultural control to the members of that culture. It does not presume that this training will change the lives of Indigenous community members in that they will necessarily become professional archaeologists but that they will be better situated to maintain cultural stewardship in the future (Silliman and Dring 2008:74). I question whether this means of 'training,' one that maintains the systems used to manage culture, learned through the formal educational system of our inherent dominant social order, is a prerequisite to the adequate maintenance and control of heritage?

In the same way that some researchers have "mastered the technical form of respectful consultation, but without the necessary depth and the real respect that is required," (Menzies 2001:21) community capacity building may mimic past actions of simply promoting academic opportunity. A conventional model of community capacity runs the risk of becoming another rehearsed component of collaborative archaeology, an easy copy-paste fulfilling our institutionalized requirements for collaboration, proposals, funding applications, and research designs that include rearticulated statements along the lines of 'we will train local community members in empirical scientific methods and archaeological field methods,' or 'we will build community capacity for localized heritage management strategies.'

As community capacity building becomes a standardized part of collaborative archaeology we move away from that girl who, in fact, came to the site that day with a desire to improve her math skills. Reciprocity at Little John occurs when I helped that girl brush up on math over the summer, or when the kids were dropped off at the site for the day because their parents wanted to make a quick trip to Tanacross and knew they would be kept busy and safe, or because the kids were bored in the village and Little John is fun – the closest thing to a daycare facility within 500 kilometers. Capacity building occurs on a spectrum in the Borderland's community because the community's interest in participating occurs on a spectrum. And while the efforts of our



Figure 8. Ready for a feast – culture camp. (Handley 2014.)

grander goals to work alongside White River First Nation in the overdue restoration of self-governance may not have been clear that day, a teenage girl got to have fun, do a little archaeology, and practice fractions. I think it is pretty important that we talk about that too.

Being Present and Confronting Temporal Limitations

End of July 2014. The camp numbers in the last weeks of fieldwork were down to Norman and I. Productivity was low but I thoroughly enjoyed the calmness. We often extended our morning coffee, took turns making meals and extended our working hours well into the evening, a luxury afforded by the never setting sun.

Culture Camp runs every year at Ten Mile camp up the river from the Village of Northway. We were invited along. It is a community program that provides local youth the opportunity to advance their knowledge and skill in a wide range of traditional practices, language, song and dance routines, subsistence skills, bush craft, oral history, and more. It is very much a community event, with 40 to 80 people there at any given time over the week. I spent a lot of the day with David, Ruth, and Ruth's sister Alice. She introduced me to many people and explained who others were from a distance. Northway was Ruth's home village and this is why I was so excited to attend culture



Figure 9. Drying Fish. One of many ongoing activities at culture camp (Handley 2014).

camp, since I had yet to meet many of Ruth's people. This day greatly extended my exposure into cultural practices and customs of the Upper Tanana but also the social landscape. Culture camp is an anthropologist's dream – traditional foods and food sharing practices, the processing of moose and fish, beading and basket-making, kinship interaction, the stuff of our discipline. It is also just a nice way to spend a Saturday.

Every season begins with a detailed itinerary, a list of research goals with northwesterly expansions of the East Lobe, reaching the 14,000 year old loess below the Younger Dryas paleosols, and getting back out to Owl Skull to extend earlier test pits in the ground. And then someone will shoot a moose, someone will stop in on the drive to Northway, or we'll go out and harvest spruce root to give to Elders. It is this interface between the past and present that makes work meaningful to me as an archaeologist but also as a person. And I believe it is this state of 'just being' that has contributed to an establishment of meaningful relationships between the archaeologist and the community.

In academic archaeology it is common to be temporally and financially constrained by educational institutions and our budget. These constraints are often the biggest challenge faced by academic archaeologists engaged in collaborative work (Celeste 2009:6; Nicholas et al. 2011:12). Further, objectives

motivated by archaeological research interests can deter from the current moment and situational opportunities to engage with communities about culture and traditional knowledge and gain insight into alternative value systems. These institutional expectations of the use of our time rarely align with or are sensitive to Indigenous communities' sense of time (Celeste 2009:6). In the north, casual physical presence within the community signifies not just commitment but a sensitivity towards different constructs of time, which has been identified as integral to maintenance of meaningful relations (Tondue 2014:421). One possible tool to move past internal perceptions of this constraint is to confront it through changing and minimizing priorities or even de-prioritizing research goals in favour of being participants in the emergent priorities of the community. Such a shift of research priorities accommodates and brings awareness to contemporary sociopolitical agendas of descendent populations we work with (Arden 2002:380). At Little John this shift has manifested into what I would define as a de-prioritization that values the contextual nuances of the present. The trowel is laid down to make tea and sew while listening to stories from visiting Elders, colour with children, or travel to Tanacross or Northway to assist in a funeral potlatch.

The field of archaeological ethnography presents a theoretical approach to practice archaeology informed by the present. Archaeological ethnography has unintentionally challenged the rigid archaeological distinction between past and present (Hamilakis 2011:405). It furthers its ethno-archaeological origins by viewing descendant communities as more than modern-day proxies of ancient lifeways. Some archaeological ethnographic projects have even explored the auto-ethnographic approach as a means of situating and reflecting on one's own impact in the local context and what it is that we as archaeologists do (Harrison and Schofield 2009:198; Marshall et al. 2009). It is through the merging of ethnographic and archaeological practices that researchers can explore the contemporary relevance and meaning of the material past to communities as well as the political context of archaeology (Hamilakis and Anagnostopoulos 2009:66).

While collaborative research projects often include diverse cultural components, the philosophy of archaeological ethnography is something I view as lacking in many collaborative models. Research need not be a procedural means to an end so much as a trans-disciplinary, transformative process of learning. Archaeological ethnography de-prioritizes archaeological objectives and requires the researcher to be present in the exploration of the space between the material past and contemporary culture.

Discussion: Un-standardization

Many discussions about the theory and method of collaborative archaeology articulate step by step processes on how to integrate First Nations into all aspects of research, how to build archaeological capacity, and how to build and maintain community partnerships. These methodological approaches maintain rightful utility in establishing respectful interactions within historically exploitative relationships amongst other intentions already discussed. Proponents of these related approaches often express that their strategy is not necessarily universally applicable. Similarly, the unstandardized approach I argue for may not always be suitable. But in the case of small bands of transitional hunter-gatherers in the remote reaches of the north, this approach has proven to be appropriate, successful, and respectful. The fluidity and flexibility of this program has allowed for the development of lasting relationships, reciprocal experiences of learning from one another in non-archaeological or academic ways, while still informing archaeological knowledge and transforming a new generation of archaeologists.

I view collaboration within the Yukon-Alaska Borderlands as one that was born amongst many others in and around the 1990s (Easton and Gotthardt 1989; Easton 1994; Hare and Greer 1996; Nicholas 1997; Spector 1993; Trigger 1990; Yellowhorn 1993; Zimmerman and Echo-Hawk 1990) in a collective response to the discipline's colonial legacy and to establish disciplinary foundations that would first be concerned with respectful consultation followed by authentic intentions to collaborate. Collaboration in this way was developed as a tool to redefine relationships, break down colonial concepts of power, and



Figure 10. Dinner and a show – Seth drumming and singing for his grandmother (the late Martha Sam) (Handley 2014).

work with people to promote Indigenous (as well as community and public) driven goals, whilst contributing meaningful knowledge relevant to all people. Like many academic research projects, these initial efforts have evolved over time. I acknowledge that it is this evolution of collaboration at the Little John Site that shapes my overall understanding of how collaboration has been approached here. However, in this period of heightened self-reflectivity, an assessment of the overall experience, from initiation to present, lends itself first to disagreements on how collaborative archaeology should or could be practiced and the ways in which collaborative archaeology has itself evolved.

In our circumstances on the Yukon–Alaska borderlands, the un-standardization of collaborative archaeology has changed the relationship between community and archaeologist. Archaeologists are faced by disciplinary constraints, primarily time and money. By confronting these constraints and emphasizing relaxed and less formal approaches to collaborative research we avoid extending this imposition of procedural constraints on the communities in which we are practicing. More importantly, we are open to the gifts of knowledge and experience offered to us by our hosts.

When archaeological research occurs within a community it often becomes a part of that community. To apply formal guidelines and processes to collaborative work is to standardize life, experience,

and culture. Unstandardizing archaeological collaboration is reactive to this imposition of structure and allows life, archaeology, and research to occur harmoniously, naturally, and transformatively within the communities we work and within ourselves. An unstandardized approach can also help free the archaeologist personally from their own structured concepts and perceptions of research and achievement, opening us to the recognition of new measures of accomplishment valued by the communities in which we work.

Fluid and flexible collaborative practice can be theoretically informed research. Archaeological ethnography and auto-archaeology have been suggested here as a means of increasing reflectivity of the self and our approaches to the past. These processes bring internal awareness to the contemporary present of unique sociocultural contexts, ultimately contributing to the ability to develop collaborative programs based on that community's individual cultural, environmental, and material landscape. Evidently, archaeological ethnography and auto-archaeology can better inform archaeological understandings and they can also inform approaches to collaborative archaeology – at the level of individual context and in the field generally. As we continue to parse out 'how' collaboration 'should' be done, there may not be a right way, or it may be community specific. In the Borderlands we aspire to do it in a way taught to us by our friends and hosts, that is emergent from *Dineh K'èh – The People's Way*.

Conclusion

Theoretical and methodological developments within the field of collaborative archaeology continue to defend Indigenous voices and contributions to archaeological knowledge (Colwell-Chanthaphonh et al. 2010:230–232; Zimmerman 1997; Zimmerman 2008), to expose the growing number of advantageous and deceptive claimants of collaborative practice (Angelbeck and Grier 2014:520; Atalay 2014:47–48), and to transform the current ethical movement into a disciplinary shift (Atalay et al. 2014). From my experiences and place of reflection, as a student of the Scottie Creek Borderlands Culture History Program, I can attest that this shift has occurred amongst the

coming generation of archaeologists, as for many of us there is no current distinction between collaborative archaeology and archaeology as this has become the only practice we know. This is equally attributed to the dedication on behalf of the academic community and also the descendent and otherwise affiliated communities in which we/they work.

The lessons I have learned from the Yukon-Alaska Borderlands community regarding an archaeological practice that is fluid and flexible has deeply informed my archaeological understandings of this landscape and shaped my approach to future collaboration. I acknowledge that the principles guiding our work here may not be appropriately applied elsewhere. However, research that is informed by archaeological ethnography occurs within the plane between the archaeological past and contemporary present and preempts a practice that can integrate cultural ethos into collaborative efforts, bring awareness to institutionalized constraints that most threaten the everyday conduct of community life from the perspective of its individuality, and foster the deconstruction of power inherent in academic research through attempts to build authentic friendships. Collaborative archaeology has overcome many challenges but much work remains to be done. Conversations regarding how we should practice collaboration have resulted in a diverse collective of well-developed, often structured methodological strategies. Amongst the Upper Tanana of the Scottie Creek drainage of the Tanana River watershed, an unstandardized approach has greatly contributed to the success of academic research, the establishment of trusting relationships between archaeologist and members of the community, the growth of many students of archaeology, and the transformation of an academic archaeological program into an integrated part of the community whole.

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