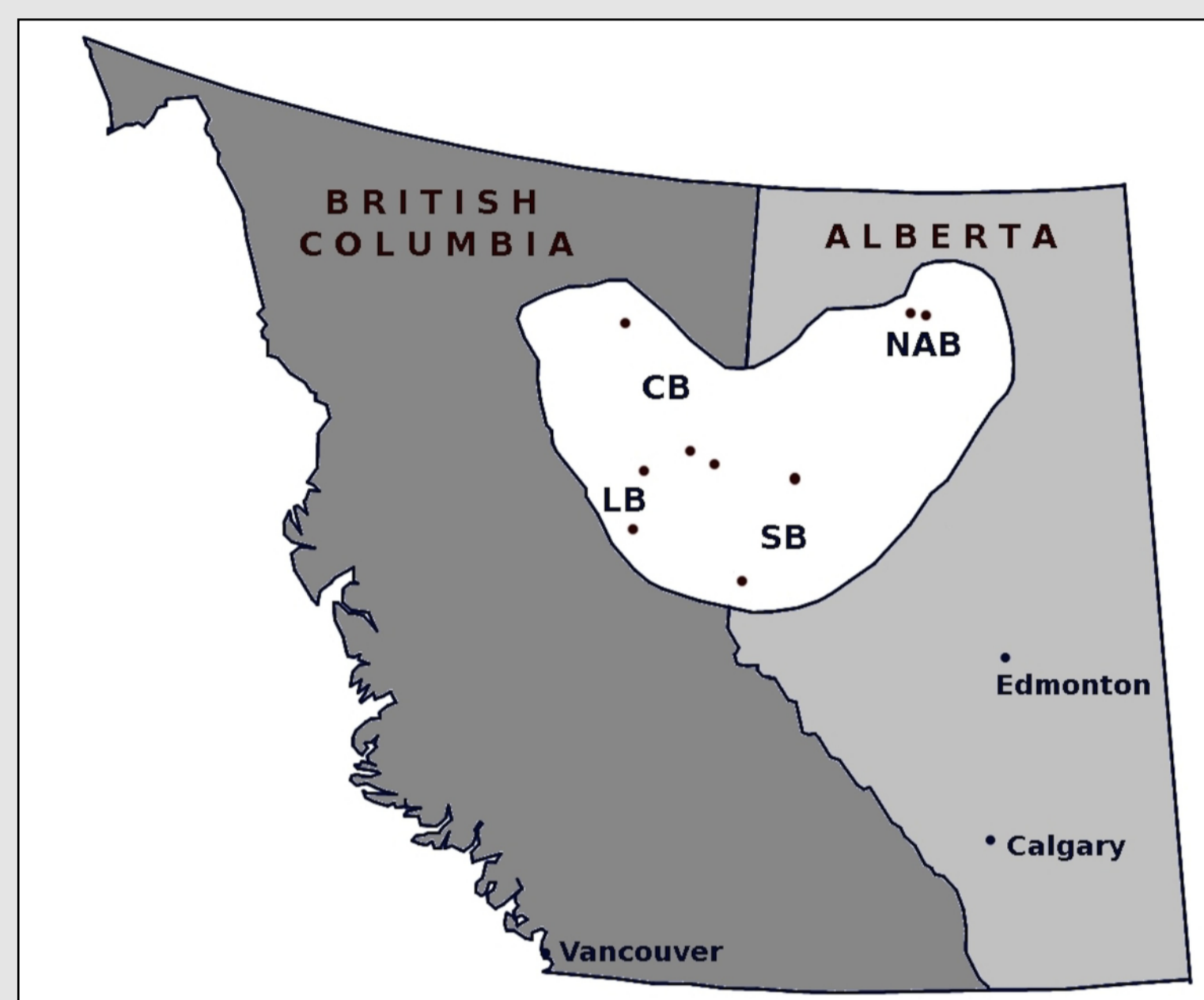# Beaver (Dane-zaa)

Real places and virtual representation

The Dane-zaa or Beaver language

The Beaver language, also called Dane-zaa za-gé', is spoken by the elders of several First Nations in Eastern British Columbia and Western Alberta: Beaver First Nation, Doig River First Nation, Blueberry River First Nation, Halfway River First Nation, Moberley Lake First Nation and Prophet River First Nation. It is part of the vast Athapaskan language family that stretches from Alaska through Western Canada down to New Mexico. The dialects are very distinct and some not mutually intelligible.

There are several dialect groups: Northern Alberta Beaver (NAB) as spoken in Child Lake and Boyer River, Central Beaver (CB) encompassing Doig River, Blueberry River and Prophet River, Lower Beaver (LB) with the Halfway River and Moberley Lake dialects, as well as the now extinct Southern Beaver group formerly spoken around the Dunvegan area.

The language has always been orally transmitted — the early written texts stem from 1860-1890 and used mainly Canadian syllabics. In the 20th century several alphabetical writing systems were developed but were only rarely taught in schools. The Anglican missionary Alfred C. Garrioch wrote the following version of the beginning of a morning prayer using syllabics in 1886 (our transliteration added):

⊲⊂▷·ᑕ	⊲ᑫ	Ս·/ᐱ ᢺᐊ·Ս·,	ᑕᴾᗌ	ᢤᒋᐃᒥᐱ	ᐃᑲᗌ ▷ᢗ/·.
ataosti	ato	tyesoe kohastye,	kahcho	sametselihi	inkaa oghasi.
I.know	not	right I.have.done,	and	my.sin	always I.see.it

'I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.' *Psalm* li.3.

Ernest Kipling takes a bear apart that he shot close to the hunting camp at Two Lakes after it attacked horses.

The project: language and the land

Our project traces narrations of traditional as well as modern land use in a broad sense: what are the names of specific places, and how do these relate to specific landscape features, but also to the history of the First Nations' groups or history of individual people. A name of one of the reserve is Child Lake, which relates to a legend in which orphaned children broke through the ice and drowned:

place name	ts'idoaa chuughjghǫde	
	'Child lake', 'the place where water drowned the children'	
linguistic analysis	ts'idoaa	chuu-ghj-ghǫ-de
	children.small	water-PFV-kill.several-where

Playing Handgames has seen a growing interest from the Native communities in the area. Originally the games were held to determine who had the greatest spiritual power, while nowadays the competitions are entertaining social gatherings and a celebration of Native culture. Accompanied by drummers two teams of seven players compete in guessing in which hand a little object is held.
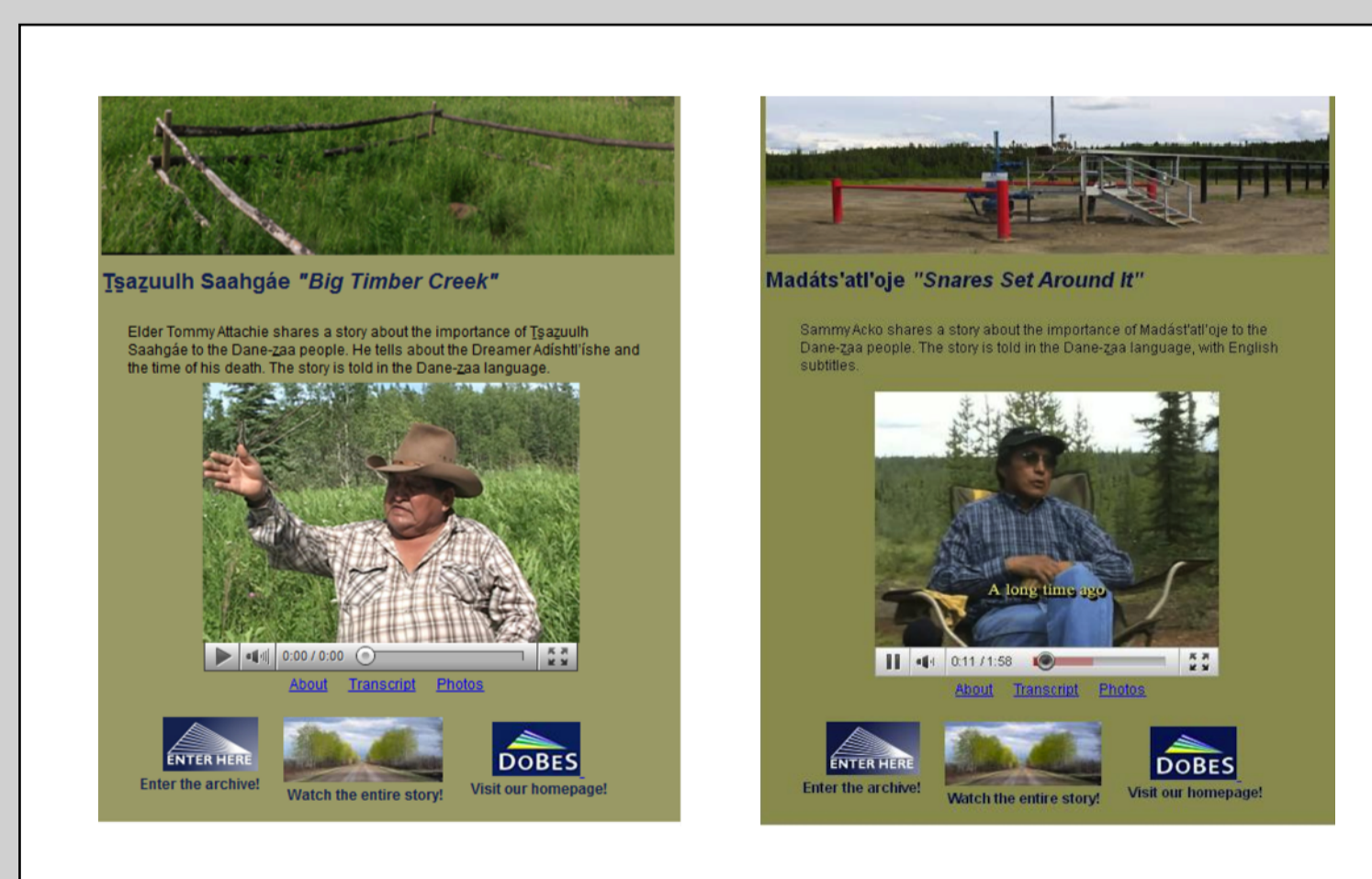
The documentation of stories that happened together with the community revealed also a contemporary framing of narratives that ties the present and the past together.

Sammy Acko and Tommy Attachie (Doig River) check video set-up.

Use of Google Earth

Some stories and information about the place names can be accessed through a Google Earth layer that connects to the Dobes-Archive.

Tommy Attachie and Sammy Acko tell stories about important places in the history of the Dane-zaa and their prophets, at Big Camp and Snare Hill. These stories can be accessed through a Google Earth layer that connects to the Dobes-Archive.

Workshop on the Dane-zaa language at Fort St. John in 2008. Language teachers, elders, and linguists came together to compare dialects and share stories.

Topical dictionary: a book for community use

For use in schools and at home a dictionary was compiled that is sorted by topic: Beaver words are listed in chapters that contain household items, tree names, family relations, hunting gear, etc. This kind of dictionary facilitates finding words and concepts that can be combined to teaching units.

PlantsTrees

al *n.* spruce. *picea mariana.* See: gat 'spruce'.
ayídléʔ *n.* woodchips. See: aghazéʔ 'woodchips'; dachín t'aadzéʔ 'sawdust, woodchips (lit. wood inside)'; dachín ts'iléʔ 'woodchips'.
ch'ák'ale *n.* poplar.
dachín *n.* stick, tree, wood. dachín tyéél lumber, planks (lit. flat wood). dachín danéʔ carpenter (lit. wood person). ah chinéʔ frame of snowshoes (lit. snowshoe stick). See: tsats 'wood, timber, firewood'.

dachį ghaayéʔ *n.* tree roots. chak'ale ghayéʔ xáách'uli. I will pull out poplar roots. See: dachín 'stick, tree, wood'; xai 'roots'.
dáats'ęʔ *Variant:* gat dáats'ęʔ. *n.* cone, bud. *Ques:* check again
dáást'ue *n.* bark. See: maty'uudzéʔ 'bark, peel, skin (lit. its bark)'.
dááts'ii *n.* branch.
dyúúze *n.* tamarack, larch. *larix laricina.*
gat *n.* spruce. See: al 'spruce'; gat dák'ale 'white spruce'.

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