



Arctic Athabaskan Council

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Historic Meeting of North American Athabaskan People and the Ket People of Siberian Russia

April 9, 2010 Whitehorse, Yukon

In the coming week, Canadian and Alaskan leaders of the Arctic Athabaskan Council (AAC) will meet for the first time with representatives of the Kets, a Siberian Indigenous people resident in four villages on the Yenisei River in the Krasnoyarsk Krai district of Russia. The Ket language and Athabaskan languages including Gwich'in, Dene, Navaho and Apache of North America now appear to have an ancient common ancestor. There are approximately 1,200 Kets of whom about 200 still speak their indigenous language.

While this linguistic connection has long been suggested, Western Washington University professor Edward Vajda seems to be the first to give it scientific credibility. He has outlined similarities in the verbal systems and in a range of other features which for a growing number of scholars appear to be more than coincidental. But there is more than language to this story. For Vajda the use of similar words for canoe and component parts such as prow and cross-piece also shows ancient cultural connections.

Cindy Dickson, a member of the Gwitchin Nation from Old Crow in northern Yukon and Executive Director of AAC, said "This is an historic and exciting occasion. We are meeting the Kets to find out more about our shared linguistic and cultural heritage. We have so much to discuss. I hope that we may be able to set up some exchanges, particularly of our young people. In the longer term perhaps we can even develop political links and work together in the eight-nation Arctic Council."

Doug Hitch, a linguist from the Yukon Native Language Centre and a member of AAC's delegation, will initiate language discussions with Zoya Maksunova, one of four Ket representatives meeting the Arctic Athabaskan Council delegates in Moscow.

The AAC delegation and Ket representatives will be in Moscow to attend the April 14 and 15 summit of Arctic Indigenous Leaders. Updates on the Arctic Leaders Summit proceedings and the meeting with the Ket People will be made available online. Please visit our website at <http://www.arcticathabaskancouncil.com> for information and photos.

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