The shared stories of people and plants  
Summer 2013 review of activities

Makkovik visit: July, August, September 2013 – Trip Report  
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Purpose of the trip:
When I asked Makkovimiut about their priorities for research on the topic of people and plants in 2012/13, many people described a need to start documenting local knowledge about plants. This summer, I began speaking with people about their relationships with plants, and learning about the many ways that plants are important in daily life, as well as in years past. Some of the topics people have shared include:

- Plants as food (springtime wild plants, garden plants, berries), medicine, materials (blackberry sod, plant dyes, grass sewing)
- The importance of families spending time together on the land
- Stories about plants from childhood
- Places that are important to people for plants

I have been asking for permission to record some of these discussions on a mini audio-recording device. When people prefer not to be recorded, I take handwritten notes to remember the stories they share. The idea is to create a record of people talking about plants in their own voice, and to make these stories and this knowledge available for future generations. Audio files and transcripts will be stored in the White Elephant Museum, and may be used for future teaching and community projects. As this project is part of my graduate studies, I will also be writing and talking about this project to people outside Makkovik.

My goal over the next several years is to speak with people about plants, in discussions in town and on-the-land. I am also looking at the plants of family places in the bights and islands around Makkovik, to see if plant
communities can tell their own stories about people and about past practices on the land. Everything learned during this project will help in the development of a guide book on plants in Makkovik, and in the development of other community projects that tell the shared stories of people and plants.

**Trip activities:**
This past summer, I was in Makkovik in July (15–21), August (12–26) and September (10–20). During this time I was very fortunate to be welcomed into people’s homes to talk about plants. I'm grateful for everyone who took the time to speak with me in their homes, outdoors, and at their family cabins. I also appreciate the effort people made to teach me about plants hands-on, including how to:

- Make a smoke pot
- Make spruce beer
- Pick berries
- Collect plants for natural dyes
- Pick saltwater grass for grass work
- Use berries for paints
- Garden, compost and make fertiliser

Along with Guide Sheldon Andersen and Conservation Officer Errol Andersen, I also had the chance to visit many of the amazing family sites around Makkovik, to look at the plants of family cabins, former gardens, fishery outposts, and older archaeological sites. Some of the places we visited include Ikey’s Point, Strawberry Harbour, Makkovik Bay, Dunn’s Island, Turnaviks, Seal Cove, Big Bight, October Harbour, and Noon Walk Island. In September, people in town were very kind to share parts of their rhubarb plants with me as part of a pilot project looking at whether different rhubarb patches can be genetically traced to areas along the coast, and whether the distribution of rhubarb mirrors the movement of families on the land. I hope to have preliminary results back in a couple of months.
Other activities:
I was very glad to participate in community activities and get to know people throughout the summer. During the Trout Festival, I helped organise a painting with berries activity for kids, and gave a presentation on plants at the Craft Centre. I’m proud to have participated in the swim race, and just glad to have finished (even though it was in last place 😃).

I was on the radio to talk about this ongoing project on people–plant relationships, and I helped prepare a workshop at the Craft Centre on making natural fabric dyes from plants. I was happy to once again join the Elders’ dinner and give a slideshow on plants.

Next steps:
I will be in Makkovik in late fall and winter to continue speaking with people about plants. As the seasons change from berry-picking to snowshoeing, I hope to learn more about trees and how people work with wood. I look forward to presenting an update to the Makkovik Inuit Community Government, and to continue discussions on how this project can contribute to tourism projects underway in Makkovik.

There is a lot of interest in continuing the plant workshops at the Craft Centre, so we will be planning future workshops, including one on grass sewing.

If you would like to discuss the importance of plants in your life and share your experiences with this ongoing project, I would be happy to speak with you when I am next in Makkovik. Please let Carol Gear know you would like to speak with me, or please contact me by email or phone.

Questions? Comments? Suggestions? Please contact Erica Oberndorfer:
personal info removed
On Facebook: “Makkovik - People and Plants” ~ University page: http://straightupnorth.ca/Sikuliriji/Oberndorfer.html
Nakkmnek! ~ Thank you!
Thank you

I am grateful to the many people who have shared so many of their stories and experiences with me. I am grateful for all the hours we spend together. For their hospitality and kindness (and rhubarb leaves!), I would like to thank Annie Evans, Nellie Winters, Ellen and Harold Andersen, Enid and Charlie McNeill, Jim McNeill, Joan Andersen, Lori Dyson and Randy Edmunds, Andrea Hoyt and Frank Andersen, Mary B and Tony Andersen, Albert Andersen, Margie Broomfield, Mary Ann Andersen and Eldred Pottle, Marilyn Faulkner, Megan Andersen, Holly Andersen, Gladys and Henry Jacque, Chantelle Andersen, Hank Andersen, and Denise Lane and Alden Jacque.

Thank you to the Elders and the team at DHSD for their welcome and for inviting me to once again join the Elders’ dinner. Thank you to Sheldon Andersen and Errol Andersen for their guiding expertise and for putting up with my lack of sea-legs. I thank AngajukKâk Jacque, Terry Rice and everyone at the Makkovik Inuit Community Government for their enthusiasm and support for this project. My thanks to the wonderful group of people who participated in the Craft Centre berry painting and plant dye workshop. I would especially like to acknowledge the ongoing efforts of Carol Gear, who continues to provide invaluable guidance and support for this project.

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Trip report completed October 9, 2013