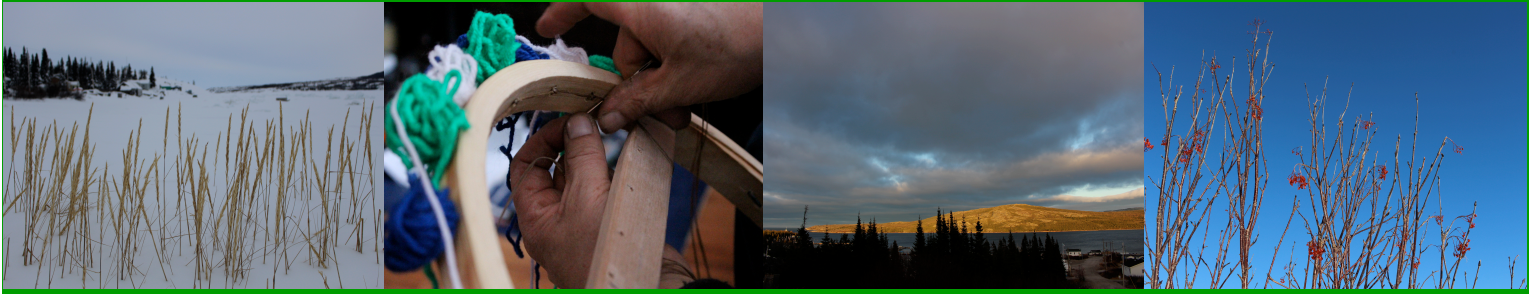


# The shared stories of people and plants

Fall 2014 - Winter 2015 Update



**Visits to Makkovik: Oct 27–Nov 6 (2014); Jan 29–Feb 6, Mar 21–31 (2015)**

Erica Oberndorfer, PhD student (Carleton University)

## Purpose of the visits:

On these past three visits to Makkovik, I have been visiting with people to confirm all the details of our previous conversations about plants. When I am at home in Goose Bay in between visits, I type up our discussions about



plants — either from audio tape or from written notes —and I bring these written transcripts back to Makkovik to be checked

and corrected. The process of checking through these transcripts together ensures that I have understood everything correctly, and gives people an opportunity to change or add to their transcripts if they wish.

I would like to thank everyone for their time, effort and patience in making sure these transcripts are accurate. It means a lot to me to share this time together and to work with everyone on this project. I hope our combined efforts to document the cultural importance of plants in Makkovik will be helpful and useful to all Makkovimiut.

## Activities:

### *Transcript review and discussions*

During each of these past three visits to Makkovik, I have been focusing on reviewing existing transcripts, and asking follow-up questions about plants. Over the winter, I have also been asking new questions about the importance of wooding and wood.

### *Snowshoes*

One way to learn about plants is by doing, or at least by watching people who know what they are doing! Thanks to Mr. Henry Jacque, I was able to watch a pair of snowshoes being made from start to finish. I even got to try doing a bit of the garnishing and filling, when I was



not stitching my thumbs together. Learning by doing really makes me appreciate how many hours go into making a pair of snowshoes, and how many more years go into mastering the skills that allow you to make those snowshoes well. Thank you to Henry for my beautiful pair



of snowshoes, which are seeing many miles of walking at home.

### *Plant Night*

On November 4th, I hosted a Plant Night at the hall, where we got together to discuss the many different plants that are important to life in Makkovik. It was an



opportunity to learn new things about plants from each other, and to hear stories about plants from both "Them Days" and "These Days." One thing we all know now: don't eat the Deadly Nightshade! Instead, we ate Lori's blackberry pork cake and Aunt Nellie's wiener rolls – much better tasting.

### *Hall update presentation*

On March 26 at the hall, I presented a summary-to-date of what I have learned about the importance of plants in Makkovik, based on speaking with Makkovimiut Elders and plant experts. One of the priorities of this project on plants is to put together a community book on plants of Makkovik, and I am looking for your opinions on what a Makkovik plant book should look like. Some of the topics we discussed were the importance of plants in eating, healing, celebrating, fishing, traveling, gardening, hunting, wooding, and the plants of family places. If you have ideas for what a book like this should include, I would be happy to hear from you.



Don't eat it!  
Deadly Nightshade

### *Elders dinners*

Thank you to the Elders and to DHSD for inviting me to the Thursday Elders' dinners. I presented three slideshows: Berry Superfoods of Makkovik, Family Places, and a summary of what we've learned about the importance of plants in all parts of life in Makkovik. We also had some homemade redberry & blackberry & blueberry ice cream.



My husband Paul trying to win at bingo - no chance against Aunt Ellen

### *Dog races and badminton*

I love being in Makkovik because it seems like there are activities every day of the week! I got to celebrate my first Bonfire Night in Makkovik, which was wonderful. I unexpectedly got to judge the Annual Heritage Dog Team Race with Mr. John Winters in March, which was an honour. Thank you to organisers for clarifying that I was supposed to pick the best looking dogs, not the best looking drivers.



I'm also honoured to have been thoroughly thrashed by the provincial badminton champions at the tourney that same weekend – thank you to Katie Hays for inviting me to play. Thank you to Constable Barry Andersen and Travis Dyson and all the Junior Rangers for inviting me to watch their target shooting training at the gym, and thanks especially to Mandy Smith for teaching me how to shoot.



### *Jamboree*

It was another great year for Jamboree, and a chance to rub shoulders with Makkovik's talented musicians. Maybe one day some of the talent will rub off. This year I penned some lyrics called "Music in those Snowshoes" to the tune of "Comb Your Hair Flat Down" by the Flummies. Thank you for being such a lovely and forgiving audience, and thank you to the organizers at DHSD for all the work that goes into this beautiful evening of music-making.



And as always, it's a pleasure to attend the Sewing Circle evenings and the DHSD Craft Nights. Thank you everyone for your warm welcome.

### **Other projects this past fall/winter:**

#### *School presentation*

In November, Jessica Winters gave a presentation at JC Erhardt on her experience as an undergraduate student at Memorial University. Last summer, Jessica was a research assistant with this project. This presentation was a chance for students to hear first-hand from a JCE graduate on what life is like at university. Thank you to Jessica and Dion Rideout for making this presentation possible.

#### *Rhubarb update*

In Sept 2013, many of you were very kind to let me collect a leaf of your rhubarb patch, to see if we could learn about rhubarb diversity in

Makkovik by looking at rhubarb genetics. There is finally some news to share on this! The laboratory methods have been successful, and we are able to see that there are very noticeable genetic differences among rhubarb patches in Makkovik. How different are the rhubarbs? Where did they come from? Have our rhubarbs in Labrador adapted over time to conditions here? We don't know these answers yet, but we hope to continue this work over the summer. Stay tuned, and please let me know if you have a rhubarb patch



and would like to know more about it. Did you know that rhubarb roots were used as a powerful medicinal plant? Rhubarb was brought to Europe from Asia over the silk road, and was once more expensive than opium!

#### *Conference presentation*

In May 2015, I traveled to Santa Barbara, California, for a conference presentation, which was co-authored by Carol Gear. The conference was called The Many Faces of Ethnobiology, and its purpose was to learn from communities all over the world who successfully live in balance with their environment. We are greatly indebted to Aunt Ellen, Aunt Nellie, Aunt Annie, and Mary B for advising us on what was important to share about people-plant relationships in Makkovik. After the presentation, many conference attendees thanked me for reading the words of Elders in Makkovik directly in the presentation. Overall, people were surprised and interested to hear about how important plants are in the north, and always commented

Questions? Comments? Suggestions? Please contact Erica Oberndorfer:

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*Nakummek! ~ Thank you!*



on how beautiful the land was. People also cheered when they saw the picture of Uncle Harold with his blueberries.

### Next steps:

#### *Gardening workshops*

Marilyn Faulkner will be hosting two gardening workshops in Makkovik this spring/summer. The first workshop is on container gardening on June 22 in the evening, and the second workshop is on composting at a later date. Both



workshops will be at the Craft Centre. If you would like to take part, please contact Marilyn to sign up. Thank you to Marilyn for very kindly sharing her gardening experience and developing this workshop.

#### *Rhubarb and trout*

This summer I will be in Makkovik in late July to continue verifying transcripts. I will also be giving a presentation at the community hall to provide an update on the project, and to ask for your input on content for a Makkovik plant book. With your permission, I'll be collecting a few more rhubarb leaves and asking you about your rhubarb patches to help put together the genealogy of rhubarb in Labrador. And if you need anyone to taste-test your smoked trout before Trout Fest, I will be happy to volunteer :)

#### **Some plants to look for at this time of year:**

The tulligunnak are nice and small and good for eating right now. The uKaujak (willow buds) can also be eaten with molasses.

Many different willows are flowering. One of the world's smallest shrubs is the Snowbed Willow, with only two leaves. This one was at Wild Bight up on a rocky ledge.



On Indian Head, you can see some very early flowers of Diapensia and Alpine Azalea.



Alpine Azalea on Makkovik Hill



Diapensia on Makkovik Hill



Indian Plum or Chuckley Pear is also in bloom with its white flower.



Indian plum / Chuckley Pear at Tom's Cove

If you're out egging, keep an eye out for Scurvy Grass on the islands. It's not really a grass – it's in the mustard family. It's high in Vitamin C and people used to eat it to prevent scurvy.



Scurvey grass

You can also eat the Beach Greens that grow on the seashore, and they are quite tasty.



Beach greens by Indian Head

## Thank you

Thank you to the many people whose knowledge is the foundation of all this work, and who are so generous with their time. I would also like to thank Marilyn Faulkner for preparing the gardening workshops, DHSD, Makkovik Inuit Community Government, Junior Rangers, DHSD, and Carol Gear for all her guidance.

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*Nakummek! ~ Thank you!*



## Music In Those Snowshoes

*To tune of "Comb Your Hair Flat Down," by the Flummies*

It's winter in Makkovik and the snow is soft and deep  
Walking round is hard – the drifts are high and wide  
and steep  
So I went up to Henry Jacque's, I found him in his  
shed

He said we'll turn some snowshoes to give you  
better tread

He cut a stick of juniper and fired the steambox high  
Then he curved the bows into their shape and set  
them there to dry  
He fixed the beams, the garnishing, the filling,  
straps, the slings  
I'd never seen such snowshoes, they were such  
pretty things

When he was done then Henry said, let's go outside  
and try  
And once I had those snowshoes on, I felt like I  
could fly  
I waved my thanks to Henry and to his family  
And I snowshoed round Makkovik to see what I  
could see

*Chorus:*

*When you're wearing snowshoes, you can't help but  
sing*

*Walking through the woods and you're as rich as  
any king*

*The rhythm in your step and the heartbeat in your  
ear*

*The music in those snowshoes is what I love to hear*

I snowshoed past the post office and the RCMP  
Barry had to ticket me for excessive speed  
I ran down past Aunt Annie's where the dogberries  
grow red  
I snowshoed past the fish plant all the way to  
Hebron end

I climbed up over the boardwalk til I could climb no  
higher  
I ran down past the fire hall - they thought I was on  
fire

I snowshoed past the radio so listeners understood  
That Goose Bay girl is nuts but her snowshoes are  
ugly good

*Chorus*

I snowshoed to the school and all the kids came out  
to look

Sophie Tuglavina said, who made your fine Tallot?  
I ran to Ranger Bight and back and down to Laura's  
Lane

Where I was passed by Charlene Ford - well, she  
could run to Nain

I snowshoed by Aunt Nellie's house and I could  
plainly see  
Her sewing needle and thread were moving twice as  
fast as me  
Aunt Ellen waved and Uncle Harold was out with  
gun and cartridge  
He said, you snowshoed half Makkovik and you  
never got one partridge!

*Chorus*

I thought of running out to the McNeills at Island  
Harbour  
But I confess that I'd grown cold and I could run no  
farther  
So I followed in my tracks and ran back home to  
Randy and Lori  
And here's the funny part of my Makkovik snowshoe  
story

Those snowshoes that I loved were frozen solid to  
my feet  
I had to keep them on to eat and drink and shower  
and sleep  
I'm waiting for a good spring thaw and then with any  
luck  
I'll once again be able to work the pedals in my truck

Visit report completed June 8, 2015

*I gratefully acknowledge my research support:*

