



Elijah Smith Elementary School
Winter Culture Camp





WELCOME

First off, we want to thank you for helping out with this camp. If we didn't have parent and community support, the Winter Culture Camp would simply not exist.

Over the years we have noticed that there is a greater interest in the concept of the Winter Culture Camp, by parents and students. Primary students and the parents of those students have commented that there were only a few more years and then they would get to participate!

With the increase in adult participation, a few more concerns have popped up. To address these concerns, we have decided to produce this booklet so that we can at least all start on the same page and set guidelines.



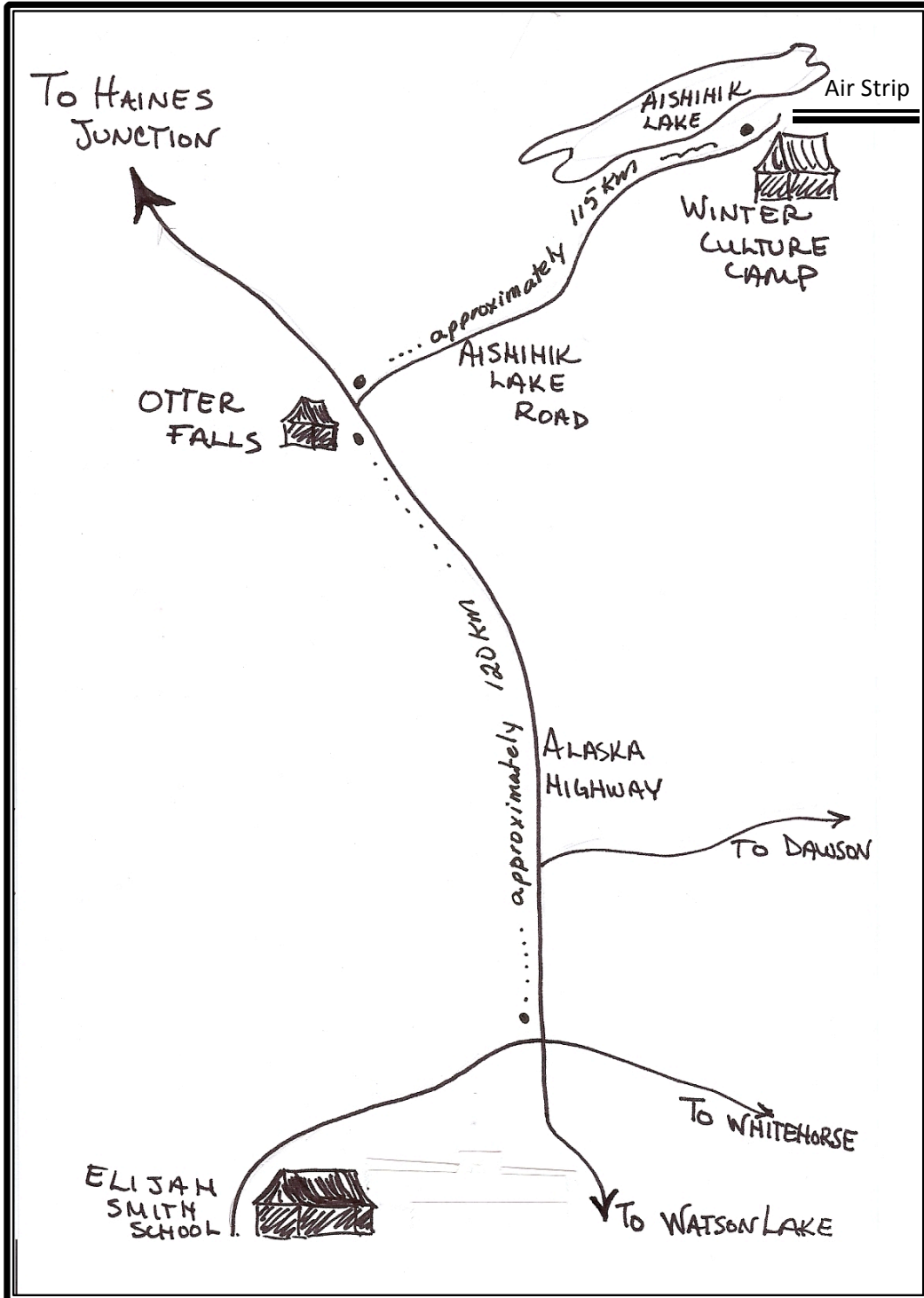
Overview

Each year in late March, most of the grade seven students, together with a large number of staff members, parents and volunteers, travel to the north end of Aishihik Lake to participate in our Winter Culture Camp. We have been holding what we have always called the Elijah Smith School Bison Hunt for 12 years and last year expanded our title to the Winter Culture Camp to better reflect the fact that the hunt is only part of a much larger endeavour. Students also participate in netting fish in Aishihik Lake, snaring, setting up a brush camp, and many other camp-related activities. The centrepiece is still the actual hunt, but it is important to understand that we do so much more.





Getting to the Camp





Camp Structure

We are situated at the old Department of Public Works site, about five kilometres from Aishihik Village. There is an old DPW building there that we make use of, as well as the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations Healing Centre and cabins. The DPW building is used as a shelter and cookhouse, and the cabins are used for emergencies and to house our Elders. The students and adults sleep in wall tents which are erected opposite the DPW building. There are two outhouses – one close to the tents and the other near the cabins.

The arrival day (late afternoon) involves unloading, setting up tents, and generally settling in. The next three days are the hunting days. The students are divided into three hunting groups. Each of the three following days has one group going out on the hunt, with two remaining in the camp area. The camp groups are then split into an activity group and a camp maintenance group. One does camp chores (splitting and piling wood, hauling water, cleaning up), while the other gets involved in an activity. These activities vary from year to year and could include snaring, snowshoeing, one match fires, competitions, gun range, etc). On the following two days, the second hunting group goes out while the remaining two groups stay in camp. The third day follows the same rotation. The final morning is dedicated to camp takedown and loading up before the long drive back to Whitehorse.



Philosophy and Vision

The teachings and experience the students learn are seedlings that we have been nurturing from the beginning of their time with us at Elijah Smith. We hope to teach children how to go about caring and loving the natural world around us. Through participation and listening, students are given the chance to learn the First Nation land-based perspectives that hold the earth and its inhabitants sacred.

We envision students who have solid teachings on the interconnection of life, the impact of their actions on the world, the power of nature and its inhabitants to survive and thrive, and the importance of cooperation and mutual respect that goes into running a 'culture camp.'





CHILD SAFETY

Wood Stoves: Each tent is equipped with a wood stove. There will be a supply of kindling and firewood for each tent as well. It is important to note that students are not allowed to use the stoves – this is a task for adult supervisors only. The stoves are allowed to go out after we all go to the cookhouse in the mornings and stay out all day. We do not want students using the tents during the day, except to fetch something.

Dehydration: Lack of water is a real issue during a winter camp. Many students are reluctant to drink much in the cold and through a hesitation to use the outhouse. It is important that everyone is hydrated on a regular basis. Volunteers can act as reminders to students to avoid becoming dehydrated.

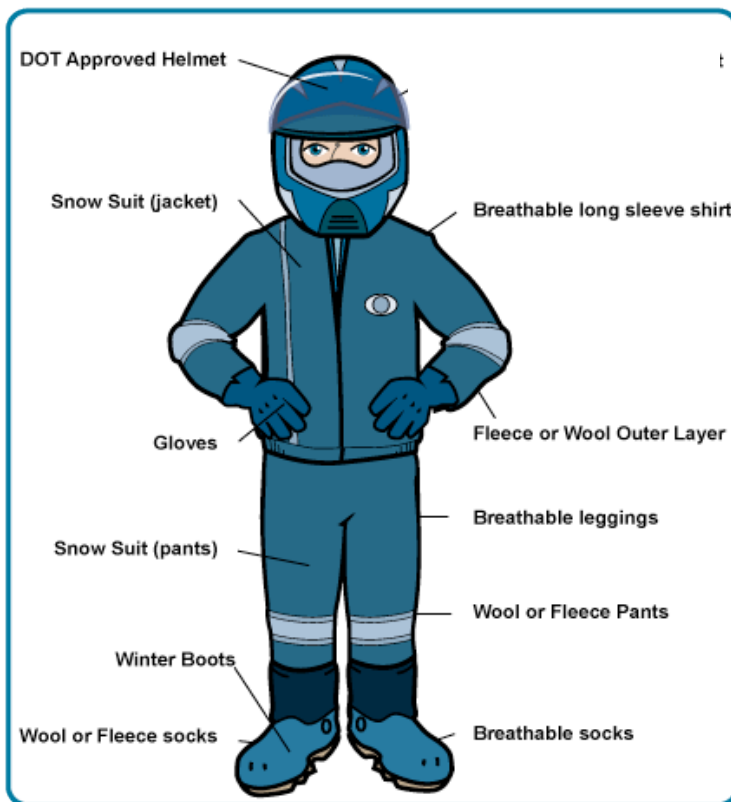
Sleeping Arrangements: All the students and most of the adults will sleep in wall tents. There will be 6-8 students and at least 2 adults in every tent. Tents are assigned by gender groups.

Pulling Skimmers and Skimmer Travel: If you have a hitch set up, you could be asked to pull a skimmer full of meat or kids. Please have a snow flap installed so the snow shrapnel does not shoot off your track right at the passengers. Remember how uncomfortable riding in a skimmer can be, even with cushioned seats! Please drive slowly and carefully and stop often to check on your

passengers. It is important that drivers stay on the trails and make sure that passengers keep their hands and arms inside the skimmer.

All passengers must wear helmets and clothing warm enough for a very cold ride. Each must have a packed lunch and liquids to last for the day.

“My Own Kid”: When you are at the Winter Culture Camp, think of it as one big group. If you have the whole group focus, then your child will not get special treatment from you. Therefore if you are tempted to do something different with your child, save it for when you are out on a family trip. This applies especially to snow machine rides.





EQUIPMENT SAFETY

Axes and Bow Saws: We will use both implements in camp. Students will be shown how to use them but they can only be used for cutting and kindling splitting under direct adult supervision.

Vehicle Insurance: Each driver must have two million dollars in liability insurance. It will cost a few dollars to bump up your existing level of coverage. A photocopy of your driver's license and insurance will be required for the school camp file.

Snow Machines: If you do bring a snow machine, please make sure that it is mechanically sound. Breakdowns really affect group performance. Please ensure that they have lights and brake lights for the long daytrips and riding in single file. Please remember that at the Winter Culture Camp, students do not drive snow machines at any time.



Fire Extinguishers: Please make sure that there is a shovel by the door of your tent, in case of fire. In minus degree weather, snow is the best extinguisher. There will be fire extinguishers in the cook house.

Drying Clothes is Mandatory: Drying wet clothes in a wall tent is challenging. Boot liners and mitts are the most important. Clothes lines need to be put up near the top of the tent where it is warm and dry. Setting liners near the stove is good, but too close is bad. Getting the liners off the ground is essential. Gear needs to be dried each night.

Drying Sleeping Bags: If we have a windy and warm day, have students hang their bags on a line outside. Bags collect moisture and everyone will sleep warmer if their bags are dry.





GUIDELINES FOR VOLUNTEERS

R.C.M.P. Check: We request that all parent supervisors and other volunteers get an RCMP check. This will be free as long as you tell them that you are volunteering for Elijah Smith School. Because of the pressure on the RCMP to process forms for the upcoming Arctic Winter Games, it is important that you get your paperwork into them as soon as possible.

The Drive In: The route to the north end of Aishihik Lake is long and the road is narrow and winding. Four by four (4x4) vehicles are mandatory. We travel convoy style. The lead vehicle must keep a lookout for oncoming traffic and warn them of our approaching convoy. There are numerous stops to ensure that all difficulties (slippery hills, overflow) can be dealt with as a group. Hand held walkie talkies are used to maintain communication within the group. Vehicles need to maintain visual contact without following too closely.

Firewood: Wood for the tent stoves is in short supply on the site and so we generally haul wood in from the Dimok Timber mill on the highway or through a purchase of cord wood.

Food: All food except snacks is provided by Kwanlin Dun First Nation Health Centre, the ESES School Council, and by parents and students. We use a refurbished room in the old DPW facility at Aishihik. It has a cookstove and a barrel stove and seats about twenty people at a time. Therefore, we have to eat in shifts. One of our staff acts as the Chief Cook, helped by a number of volunteers.

Alcohol: The use of alcohol is not permitted in camp.

Attitude: It is critical in this extreme environment that we all present the best attitude possible. The climate in the camp can be bitterly cold, with temperatures falling frequently in the negative zone. Our attitude must be in the positive zone. The adults in camp set the psychological climate, and even if we are having an off day, it is important to remind ourselves that this is the experience that these students have been waiting for and looking forward to for most of their elementary school careers. Winter camp life can be unfamiliar and uncomfortable for them, and a cheerful smile or encouraging words from an adult can change their whole experience. If you feel the need to vent, *please* do so in private, to yourself, or to another trusted adult.

Smoking: If you smoke, do so away from the students and away from buildings and tents. We practice no trace camping, which includes cigarette butts as well.

Discipline: As this is a school event, the staff have ultimate responsibility and liability. However, as adults, you have a role to play with regards student behaviour. Unsafe conduct needs to be dealt with either by talking to students or referring it to a staff member. The same goes for any kind of disrespectful or inappropriate behaviour. Decisions, disagreements and concerns can be discussed at night in our staff and volunteer meetings. When in doubt, the staff member who is designated as the camp leader must be consulted.





Language: School language does not include any foul or suggestive or crude adjectives. School language does not include any hint of sexual connotation. We all need to be respectful of one another, the land, the animals, and the First Nation on whose land we will be guests.

Feedback and Discussions: We will have nightly meetings to discuss how the day went and any issues that have arisen that day. All students and adults are expected to participate.

The Role of the Elders: Our Elders – Fred and Audrey Brown – are a valued part of the Winter Culture Camp. They will take part in activities during the day and will be an important part of our nightly talks.

Participation in activities: It is expected that adult volunteers will participate fully in all camp activities, either having fun with the students or leading/helping to make sure that things run smoothly.

~ Thank you for volunteering for the experience of a life time! ~

