

Tlingit place names mapped

by Lyn Kidder
for the *Tundra Times*

Ethel Makinen and Vida Davis are on a canoe trip, a trip that started in 1979 and has taken them to every point, cove and river in the area surrounding Sitka. They are involved with a project whose goal is to provide the Tlingit name for all of these geographical features, and to identify areas of historical tribal use and sites of possible future archaeological study.

Some of the Tlingit names are descriptive. One spot is named Neelinthe x'aak, meaning rocks for aqua color."

"The Indians made their colors," said Makinen, "so the rocks from that place made the bright aqua color." Other names seem to have made the same impression on both Tlingit and English speakers, "Mosquito Cove," for instance. Some of the names uncover more mysteries. Crow Island was called Kala Samni, but the meaning of that name is unknown. "The Tlingit language doesn't have the letter 'M,'" said Davis, "But here's this word with an 'M' in it. Maybe it was a made-up word, or maybe from a Russian word that they couldn't say and it came out that way."

The project began in 1979, with tapes made by Charlie Joseph, Mrs. Makinen's father, who was 90 years old at the time. Isabella Brady, then director of the Sitka Native Education Program, sug-

gested the project, originally to locate the sites of clan homes. They spent several weeks recording Mr. Joseph's memories, painstakingly numbering each feature, while two Tlingit writers, Nellie Lord and Vida Davis, recorded the names.

The tapes remained with Mrs. Makinen, but the written transcripts, left in storage became lost. The loss was discovered this summer when Makinen and Davis sat down to complete the project.

"I never thought back to the written material," said Makinen. "I thought we had it 'made in the shade.'" They arbitrarily began numbering the eight nautical charts, but these numbers did not correspond with the original numbers. When a number was mentioned on the tape, they noted it, and then began the task of renumbering, trying to come back to the original. "It was a lot of investiga-

tion. We had to do it and redo it," said Davis, working on what was then the third hand-written draft. "We're hoping that once we show (other tribal members) what we have, that they'll fill in spots that aren't there."

The impetus for completing the project came from the upcoming Ushk Bay timber sale, on Chichagof Island near Peril Strait. The environmental impact statement for the project will be completed this fall. The sale will be offered next summer to Alaska Pulp Corporation.

"Under the National Historic Preservation Act, federal agencies are required to consult with tribes if activities that they are funding are going to occur in areas that belong to the tribe or are of historic interest to the tribe," said Terry Pegues, tribal planner for the Sitka Tribe of Alaska.