

Fishing Branch Ni'inlii Njik Park - Culture



The Vuntut Gwitchin are strongly connected to Fishing Branch. Ni'inlii Njik is a sacred area with a long history of traditional use. Vuntut elders have related that the watershed of the Fishing Branch and its tributaries is extremely important for the community and for the protection of fish and caribou.

"The headwaters of those rivers come from the mountains. We use that water and there are a lot of fish in every tributary." "This area we look after, as Vuntut

Gwitchin, is very special to us for the migration of caribou and the other animals there. We know them like ourselves - we live with them - we take a few, watch them go through, and give them thanks." "The history of our elders has taught us how to use the resources for the future. We have been told by elders to protect the caribou, the moose and everything in that area. And speak for it."

An important part of the history of the Vuntut Gwitchin is the legend of K'aiiheenjik, the great warrior. "K'aiiheenjik spent his last days at Bear Cave Mountain, which is at the centre of the protected area. He must have done this because of the abundance of food there."

Windows into the Ice Age - Human Heritage

The Fishing Branch area is located in Beringia, a dry, cold northern region that was not covered by the last ice age. The limestone mountains and hills overlooking the Fishing Branch area include ancient karst caves.

Unlike other ancient sites in the north, which have been exposed and disturbed by erosion and weathering, these Beringian caves contain bones and remains which are well preserved. An impressive array of remains of plants and animals and traces of human occupation have been discovered in nearby caves dating to the last ice age.

This area promises to increase our understanding of Eastern Beringia and the role it has played in the changes and movement of plants and animals in North America. These caves may make a major contribution to the story of early human occupation of North America.