

FOR RELEASE #06-032  
February 16, 2006

**OLDEST MOCCASIN IN CANADA FOUND IN YUKON ICE PATCH**

WHITEHORSE – The discovery and reconstruction of what is believed to be Canada’s oldest moccasin has been announced by Tourism and Culture Minister Elaine Taylor.

“This is truly an amazing discovery,” Taylor said. “It is a significant addition to the wealth of archaeological artifacts that have been found at Yukon ice patches. We are pleased that work being done in partnership with our department and six First Nations has produced an artifact of such importance.”

The 1,400-year old moccasin was first recovered from a melting alpine ice patch in 2003 by Cody Joe of the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations, working as part of a multi-disciplinary research team. Originally thought to be a hunter’s bag, the artifact was kept frozen until Yukon Conservator Valery Monahan could finish cleaning and assembling the pieces. Monahan painstakingly put over 240 hours into gently unfurling and cleaning the article, and re-piecing it to form the moccasin. It has now been thoroughly dried and reassembled and can safely be viewed and examined.

“We are delighted that it was one of our young people who found their ancestor’s belonging,” Champagne and Aishihik First Nations Chief James Allen said. “This project gives our young people a sense of belonging and a clear connection to their ancestors.”

Ancient ice patches in the Southwest Yukon have been the focus of research into human history and environmental change since their discovery in 1997. Annual fieldwork at the ice patches is carried out under a cooperative partnership between the department of Tourism and Culture Archaeology Program and six Yukon First Nations with support from the Department of Environment. The participating First Nations are Champagne and Aishihik, Kluane, Kwanlin Dün, Ta’an Kwäch’än Council, Carcross Tagish, and Teslin Tlingit Council.

Researchers have recovered more than 180 hunting related artifacts to date. They range in age from several hundred to over 8,000 years old. The moccasin is the first sewn hide object to be found in an ice patch.

“This moccasin is of great interest to First Nation artisans, researchers and citizens,” Kluane First Nation Heritage Manager Pauly Sias said. “This discovery is believed to be the oldest example of a Canadian First Nation moccasin and is of great historical significance; to find such a rarity that is so well-preserved is a real treasure.”

-30-

Attached: Moccasin Backgrounder, photos

Contact:

Peter Carr  
Cabinet Communications  
Yukon Government  
(867) 667-8688  
[peter.carr@gov.yk.ca](mailto:peter.carr@gov.yk.ca)

Pauly Sias  
Heritage Officer  
Kluane First Nation  
(867) 841-5501  
[pauly.sias@kfn.ca](mailto:pauly.sias@kfn.ca)

Vaughan Johnstone  
Communications  
Tourism and Culture  
(867) 667-3660  
[vaughan.johnstone@gov.yk.ca](mailto:vaughan.johnstone@gov.yk.ca)

## Ice Patch Moccasin – Backgrounder

- The moccasin is  $1440 \pm 40$  years old, making it the oldest known moccasin found in Canada. It is approximately 1,200 years older than published examples of early Yukon footwear.
- The moccasin is one of a very small number of pre-European worked hide objects found in Canada. Almost all of the other examples are from tundra regions and relate directly to ancestral Inuit culture. The moccasin is even rarer as it comes from the boreal forest and was likely to have been made and worn by early Athapaskan people.
- The moccasin is a “new” discovery only now available for study. It had been kept frozen after its discovery in 2003 when it was initially thought to be a hunter’s bag. Since then, it has undergone many hours of cleaning and re-shaping, and has been positively identified as a moccasin. It has now been put on a three-dimensional mount and allowed to come out of the freezer permanently.
- The moccasin is an excellent example of the collaborative nature of Ice Patch Research: Found by a member of the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations during Archaeology Program/First Nations joint fieldwork, now restored for study through the expertise of museums staff.
- The moccasin is of great interest to researchers of First Nation traditional clothing and footwear. Since there are so few Canadian examples of these from before the eighteenth century (nineteenth century for Yukon) any new example greatly increases our knowledge about them. It should be noted that all the other “early” examples from the Yukon date from after European trade/contact, so may have European influence even if they are made from traditional materials. The moccasin clearly pre-dates any European trade or contact.



Cody Joe of Champagne and Aishihik First Nations discovered the moccasin (blue square bottom right) at an ice patch during archaeological field work in August, 2003.



Tourism and Culture Conservator Valery Monahan cleaned and re-shaped the moccasin.