

INNU MESHKENU

THE GREAT ADVENTURE
OF
DR. STANLEY VOLLANT



THE MESHKENU INNU WALK



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Puamun Meshkenu would like to thank all those who made Dr. Vollant's Innu Meshkenu walk possible in 2010. So that the memorable adventure can be told for many generations, we created this document recounting the various routes Dr. Vollant took and sharing excerpts from his journal. Puamun Meshkenu wishes to celebrate the tenth anniversary of Innu Meshkenu, a feat that truly marked First Nations' history in Quebec.

A heartfelt thank you to the many walkers, guides, logisticians and school staff who welcomed Dr. Vollant and all those who fed and lodged the walkers. In short, thank you to everyone who made this wonderful Innu Meshkenu adventure possible.

Mikwetc! Tshinashkumitin! Chiniskomiitin! wliwni! Mihwetch! Tiawenhk!
woliwon komac! welalin! Nakurmiik! Nia'wen! Migwech!



The following excerpts were taken from the logbook of Dr. Vollant's adventure, written by both Innu Meshkenu team and Dr. Vollant.

Happy reading!

JOURNEY 1: NUTASHQUAN TO BAIE-COMEAU, 620 KM

(October 12 to November 2, 2010)

Dr. Stanley Vollant began his Meshkenu Innu journey from Nutashquan on October 12, 2010. It took him 22 days to cover the 620 km of this first step of the journey.



JOURNEY 2: VIEUX-FORT TO NUTASHKUAN, 440 KM

(March 4 - 24, 2011)

Day 14 - March 21, 2011

Today, was a walking day, but not just for Stanley. Of course, he started his day by walking the Innu path. He reached the school in La Romaine around 11:15, and the students walked the 1 km to the health centre with him. This was a source of pride for the young people and their families, because even the little ones took part! Stanley wanted to encourage young people to be active and support the walking club that is gaining in popularity in the village. In the afternoon, he visited the preschool, because there was no way he was going to leave anyone out! He ended his day by walking, encouraged by the hope he had glimpsed in all the wonder-filled eyes. Is there any greater form of recognition than that flame? He is now 31 km from La Romaine and heading toward Kegaska.



JOURNEY 3: STE-ANNE DE BEAUPRÉ TO WENDAKE, 68 KM

(July 23 and 24, 2011)

Day 2 - July 24, 2011

Today, we walked along the linear park of the Saint-Charles River, or the *Kabir Kouba*, which means "the river of the snake." I now grasp its full meaning. It really meanders through the valley. I can't help thinking that my Innu and Wendat ancestors must have travelled this route by canoe and on foot. I feel the energy of the Ancestors.



JOURNEY 4: BAIE-COMEAU TO OPITICIWAN, 680 KM

(September 6-26, 2011)

Day 10 - 14 September 2011

We finished our day at Kilometre 79 and I walked another three kilometres to get to Ste-Rose-du-Nord, on the bank of the Saguenay River. This is territory my grandparents once inhabited. There are Innu buried in the nearby forest. It was important for me to follow in the footsteps of my Ancestors on their land.





JOURNEY 5: OPITICIWAN TO MANAWAN, 290 KM

(February 20 to March 5, 2012)

Day 13 - March 4, 2012

over the course of this journey, I play different roles: supporter, companion, and of course, doctor! I encourage everyone I meet. I treat pain and I have helped many people with their sleds. I tell myself that the energy I give to others today will be returned to me tomorrow. We can count the end of our adventure in hours now. Tomorrow, we will meet you and be all together! As I advance, I think about things. I'm happy to see the others happy and achieving their goal. My biggest victory is, in fact, all the little victories! In the end, everyone's greatest victory is to have vanquished oneself. When you think about it, isn't a person their own greatest obstacle?





JOURNEY 6: ODANAK TO WOLINAK, 55 KM

(September 8 and 9, 2012)

Day 1 - 8 September 2012

We were entitled to a very special welcome; a group of young wabanaki were there and gave us a performance. This show was not just entertainment, it was also a warm-up for our many walkers! We were all invited to participate in the choreography with the youth. The young dancers were all wearing make-up in Innu Meshkenu's colours.

So, when we were all warmed up and ready to begin our walk to Odanak, suddenly, we heard a sound. With their *tewehikan*, our young wabanaki dancers led the walkers to the starting line. We all followed the sound of the drums for about 300 metres. A "guard of honour" lined the trail, directing walkers toward the start. Today, September 8, there were about 80 of us.





JOURNEY 7: VIEUX-FORT TO SHESHATSHIV, 735 KM

km (September 12 to October 5, 2012)

Jour 2 - 15 septembre 2012

The weather conditions have been so harsh and extreme. The mountains are bare. Vegetation does not even grow on some parts of the coast. Jacques Cartier and the vikings called Labrador "the land of Cain," a hostile and arduous place. My Ancestors lived in this territory that is austere but so great and full of energy, they drank deeply from it and survived in these conditions. Resilience springs from this land, and it shaped my people and allowed them to adapt and make the most of the land in difficult times.

I see stone gardens in the landscape that bear witness to the glaciers of times past. My ancestors must have thought that these large stones were brought here by giants. It's such a different world!





JOURNEY 8: MANAWAN, KITIGAN ZIBI TO RAPID LAKE, 360 KM

(February 20 to March 8, 2013)

Day 6 - February 26, 2013

I realized all of a sudden that this path is a very special one. It is the route the Algonquin, Attikamek and Innu alliance took some 300 years ago to meet the French to go fight the English! And to think that now, ALL these beautiful people are walking the same path with a very specific goal: peace and mutual aid! We are modern Indigenous "blue helmets" who are sowing peace and hope among our young people, to promote the future of our youth.



Scenes from Richard Desjardins' film, "The Invisible People," come to mind where we see Algonquins walking with their sleds. I realize that we are living out these very scenes and the Ancestors must be very proud to see their grandchildren walking the path again.





JOURNEY 9: GESGAPEGIAG, LISTUGUJ TO EEL RIVER BAR, 110 KM

(August 15-18, 2013)

Day 3 - August 17, 2013

The weather is gorgeous and the landscape is fabulously beautiful. We have been walking in small groups and stopped at the St-Omer rest stop for a healthy break. The next stop is the arrival point, but it is still far ahead. People are encouraging each other... This helps us to continue on without even realizing it. Some have dedicated their walk to people, others to problems that severely affect Indigenous people, like diabetes, suicide and addiction. This has a liberating effect and provides us the energy to keep on. For me, my walk today is dedicated to the people of Listiguj.





JOURNEY 10: RAPID LAKE TO NORTH BAY, ONTARIO, 635 KM

(September 20 to October 11, 2013)

Day 5 - September 24, 2013

As soon as I arrived, the young people were there. A big sign wishes me *mino pijan*—welcoming me in Anishnabe—people playing drums line the way and sing a song composed in my honour! They chant my name: Stanley vollant! Stanley vollant! Stanley vollant! I'm deeply touched. I see the flame in their eyes! They listen so attentively. I visited all the classrooms. I told the children about my walking stick, given to me by Moshimis Hervieux. I tell them that it has walked a lot and has powers. I told them also that all they have to do is to put their hands on it, close their eyes and conjure up their dreams. This will make their dreams come true. I said that in a moment of doubt, they can then think about the stick. My walking stick is now filled with hundreds of children's dreams. I promised to come back in two years to ask them where their dreams were at. Seeing these children fills me with energy! I thanked the teachers who prepared these children so well; I think them with all my heart!







JOURNEY II: VISITING COMMUNITIES, 60 KM

(February 17 to March 1, 2014)

Day 3 - February 20, 2014

We also met the teachers of the Matimekush School. We talked about perseverance and how I see education. Even if I am a doctor, I believe it is more important to invest in education than in health. When you improve education, health follows.

When it comes to perseverance, young people are inspired for sure. But teachers too need to be inspiring. And parents need to encourage their children so as to nurture young people's perseverance so they finish school. Diseases lurk in low socio-economic populations.

It is so important for Indigenous youth be educated in a way that values Indigenous identity, history and culture. This way, they can walk into the future on solid ground.





JOURNEY 12: EAGLE VILLAGE TO AKWESASNE, 490 KM

(September 19 to October 11, 2014)

Day 20 - October 8, 2014

I'm walking through Mohawk territory. Approaching now... I am approaching Akwesasne. I can't wait to meet you. I can't wait to learn more about your culture and your language, which is so different from ours! While Innu, Atikamek and Algonquin are very similar, Mohawk is totally different. This language comes from Central and South America. The Mohawks were a sedentary nation. They knew how to keep the land fertile! They lived in longhouses and grew corn, squash and beans. Growing these companions together was beneficial to all three plants and kept the land from becoming depleted. This method comes from Mesoamerica. So I will be enriched by this Mohawk culture, which will also bring me closer to my Wendat roots... Two Iroquoian nations.



JOURNEY 13: SHEFFERVILLE TO KUUTJUAQ 470 KM

(February 27 to March 29, 2015)

Day 9 - March 8, 2015

I'm going back on the road. Job has to stop here. One of his snowshoes broke. Bob is going to join me. He noticed I have frostbite on my face. With this biting wind, there's no doubt! I have to wear ski goggles to protect my eyes, but they fog up! I can only see the snowmobile trail with my peripheral vision. I'm starting to not enjoy this. What time can it be? I find that snowmobiles don't pass by often. I'm running out of energy... BUT I HAVE TO KEEP WALKING OR I'LL FREEZE TO DEATH RIGHT HERE!!! I'm walking arduously with each agonizing step, pushed on by despair!! If I stop, I'll freeze but I'm not walking fast enough to keep warm. A layer of ice lined the inside of my parka. It's my body heat that's freezing as I walk!!! Even my food, which I keep under my parka, is frozen! I'm starting to get scared. I am praying to the Ancestors to help me, to provide me with the energy to get me through this. I am thinking of a similar experience, with my cousin Eric that happened between St-Augustin and Tabatière. I'm listening. Please, the sound of a snowmobile, please!! Some time goes by before I heard Willie's snowmobile approaching. A mirage? No, it really was him!! Oh!! How happy I was to see him!!





JOURNEY 14: CACOUNA TO WENDAKE, 241 KM

(April 18-28, 2016)

Day 7: April 24, 2016

The sharing circle was very helpful yesterday. At this point in the walk, we all felt the need to verbalize. We used the walking stick, as a symbol that gives priority to those who want to speak. As long as the walker was holding the walking stick, they had the right to speak. When they finished, they passed it to the next person.





JOURNEY 15: PIKOGAN TO WASWANIPI, 257 KM

(February 8-19, 2017)

Day 12, February 19, 2017

[...] the ties of our language bring out our similarities and they bring us together! All of this brings me closer to my ancestors, to my grandparents, to the language of the forest, to the hunters and how important it was for them to help each other... to the strength and safety of the group. And also it brings me closer to the importance of walking together in one step, speaking with one voice to be heard loud and clear by those at many levels. Mamu is stronger!



