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Relics to reveal past to modern Inuvialuit

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The Western Arctic's Inuvialuit people will soon be able to access 150-year-old Inuvialuit cultural items housed in a museum thousands of kilometers away.

The reunion is part of a sweeping international project based at Simon Fraser University's Department of Archaeology concerning control over, and responsibility for, the intangible aspects or products of cultural heritage, including traditions and knowledge.

It's one of four initial community-based initiatives funded through the seven-year Intellectual Property Issues in Cultural Heritage (IPinCH) project, supported by a \$2.5-million Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) grant.

Approximately 550 Inuvialuit items, including pipes, tools and clothing, formed one of the founding collections of Washington D.C.'s Smithsonian Institution.

Elders plan to visit the museum in November, when young research assistants will record their knowledge of how these traditional items were made and used.

The elder visits will lead to the creation of virtual exhibits and a school curriculum to enable youth and the greater community to connect with the objects.

"Accessing these items, which are central to the continuity of Inuvialuit cultural knowledge, has been a priority for the community for a long time," says Natasha Lyons, an SFU post-doctoral fellow who is partnering with the Inuvialuit of the NWT and others on the project.

Catherine Cockney, manager of the Inuvialuit Cultural Resource Centre, says the project will contribute to the community's ability to continue traditional teachings.

IPinCH will fund up to 20 projects spanning several countries. They'll address how to best protect and manage sensitive intellectual properties and archaeological sites and unite archaeological information with elders' knowledge and practices.

For details on the first four projects see: <http://www.sfu.ca/IPinCulturalHeritage>

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