Mary Jane Johnson was working in the Kluane First Nation Office back in 1995 when I first approached the Kluane First Nation (KFN) for permission to conduct research in Burwash Landing. She was interested in my project and helped me get the permission I needed to proceed. She then helped me to establish myself in Burwash when I was a stranger whom nobody knew. Subsequently, she left the village to return to school, first in Prince George, British Columbia, and then in Edmonton, Alberta. In the spring of 1998, a month or so before I left the Yukon to begin writing this book, she sent me a letter that began like this:

It is time for you to leave, but you are now a part of who we are. It is not so much the people that will hold you close, but the land has tied your heart. Later you will remember driving to Onion Creek over the hard packed snow with the biting wind on your nose, forehead, and cheeks. You’ll remember looking out over Kluane Lake and seeing a land that is like nowhere else on this Earth. There are an endless amount of things that will bring memories, but one thing you’ll know – you are a part of the land.

She was right. I can still feel the wind on my face, see the lake, and vividly recall hundreds of other sights and sensations from the time I spent in Kluane country. Just as Mary Jane predicted, I do feel a powerful connection to the land; but, as she herself and many others took pains to impress upon me, the land is inseparable from the people. I cannot recall my experiences on the land without at the same time reliving the friendships that made those experiences possible. The people of Burwash Landing gave me something far more precious than “data”; they accepted me into their lives and offered me friendship. As a result of their incredible patience and generosity, I not only learned something about life in Kluane country but also about myself and what is important in life. This book could not have been written without the help of many people, and it is a pleasure to have the opportunity to thank them here.
Everyone in the village treated me with respect and kindness, and I am grateful to them all for their time and patience. There are some, however, to whom I owe a special debt of gratitude. To begin with, I would like to thank Joe and Sandy Johnson, who gave me a place to live and made me feel like family. Agnes Johnson and Joe Bruneau, too, welcomed me into their family and, through their kindness and hospitality, helped me to think of Burwash as home. Thanks also to Gerald Dickson, who is a true friend, whether at the pool hall, in the office discussing land claims, or out in the bush. His dedication to his language and culture is an inspiration. Sharon and Elodie Kabanak also befriended me early during my stay, always treated me as a friend, and continue to ask me when I am next coming home to Burwash. I would also like to thank all of the Dickson brothers then living in Burwash: Douglas, Dennis, Dickie, and Cecil, who treated me as a member of the community and shared literally hundreds of stories with me as they attempted to win all my money at poker. I owe a special thanks to Douglas and Dennis, who put up with my less-than-expert bush skills and took me along on numerous hunting trips and out onto the trapline. From them I learned much of what little I know about hunting, trapping, and living in the bush. Others, too, took me out regularly onto the land and shared with me their knowledge and experience: Joe Johnson, Bob Johnson, Joe Bruneau, Agnes Johnson, and Gerald Dickson. To all of them, I say thank you.

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Sheldon, Peter Upton, Sam White, and Helen and Ollie Wirth. Each in her or his own way helped me to understand a little bit about what it means to live in Kluane country.

Sadly, a number of the people named above have since died, but I will never forget them.

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