

# Arctic Basics

## Terms and Definitions

*This brief outline of Arctic terminology is intended to pique your interest and act as a point of reference as you prepare for your expedition. Knowledge of these terms will be an asset in the lectures, presentations, and conversation aboard the ship.*

### **Aurora Borealis**

Also known as the northern lights, aurora borealis is a natural electrical phenomenon characterized by the appearance of streamers of reddish or greenish light in the sky, usually near the northern or southern magnetic poles. Auroras are produced when the magnetosphere is sufficiently disturbed by the solar wind that the trajectories of charged particles—mainly electrons and protons—precipitate into the Earth’s upper atmosphere. The resulting ionization of atmosphere constituents emits light of varying colour and complexity.

### **Bering Land Bridge**

During the Pleistocene Era, the Chukchi Sea, the Bering Strait and the northeastern third of the Bering Sea formed a vast, cold and dry rolling tundra meadow connecting Asia and North America. So much of the earth’s water was frozen into the great Ice Age glaciers at that time that the sea level had fallen one hundred metres. It is now believed that the continents were still joined as recently as ten thousand years ago, close to the time when the ancestors of the Inuit and the Aleuts wandered along the northern coast of Asia and into the New World. Their migration took place many thousands of years after the American Indian population had travelled the same route across the land bridge between the continents.

The disappearance of the land bridge was to take on a highly symbolic role in more recent years. The Bering Strait became, in fact, the chasm that separated the USSR from America. Prisoners who tried to escape from Stalin’s camps across the Strait were either turned in by the Inuit or the Chukchi (who were paid in gunpowder and bullets) or froze to death among the floes. The czar sold Alaska to the Americans in 1867 for \$7.2 million.

### **Breathing Hole**

As winter sets in and the sea ice begins to form along the vast Arctic coastlines, seals create breathing holes in their respective feeding areas to help them survive the long harsh winter ahead. To a seal, a breathing hole brings life. Seals

therefore take great care and effort to not only create the breathing holes but also to maintain them throughout the winter as the ice thickens. As spring nears and seals begin to exit their breathing holes to warm themselves in the returning sun, mother seals form dens along the walls of the breathing holes so that they can have their pups in a well-concealed and safe environment, away from the reach of predators. They foster and feed their pups in the breathing hole and prepare them for life in Arctic waters. Breathing holes are hunting sites for human and animal predators alike.

### **The Dene**

The Dene Nation live in the Mackenzie River Delta and in the Yukon to its west. They are members of the Athabaskan language group that extends south to New Mexico and Arizona. The word 'Dene' means 'the people' in their language.

### **The DEW (Distant Early Warning)**

The DEW line consisted of a close picket of American radar bases stretching from Greenland to the western tip of Alaska. It was built hurriedly in the mid-1950s in response to the threat of Soviet bombers coming over the North Pole. A massive construction project, it nevertheless took only three years to build, and for a time, secured the northern approaches to North America.

### **Dorset Culture**

The Dorset were an ancestral group of today's Inuit who inhabited the Arctic from 1,000 BC to 1,100 BCE. They were remarkable for their fine ivory, antler, and bone carvings, and are central to Inuit legends.

### **Fast Ice**

Fast ice is defined as sea ice growing close to land, and most Arctic animals treat it more or less as an extension of the land. The seaward edge of fast ice is known as the floe edge.

### **Floe Edge**

The floe edge is where the ice that is still attached to the land, having frozen over in the winter months, meets the sea. 'Sinaaq' is the Inuktitut word for the floe edge, which is a very special place to be in the spring. As drift ice, it will rise and fall with the tides and travel with the ocean currents and Arctic winds unless it is blocked by fast ice, coastal sea ice fastened to the land or shallow sea floor. In the springtime, the floe edge becomes one of the most dramatic and dynamic ecosystems on Earth. When the floe edge fractures, the ice floats out to sea.

### **Freshwater Ice**

Lake and river ice are some of the most extensive cryospheric (portions of the Earth's surface where water is in solid form) components of northern terrestrial landscapes, woven into the broad network of freshwater flow and storage

systems, some of which have headwaters that originate at southerly latitudes well outside the Arctic. Arctic freshwater ice both influences, and is influenced by various climatic conditions. Its effects are mostly local to regional in nature, but can be significant due to the large fraction of the northern high-latitude, sub-Arctic and tundra landscape occupied by freshwater, and by the abundance of large lakes and river deltas.

### **Glaciers**

Glaciers occur when a spreading ice cap reaches, for example, a mountainous area. The sheet is split into flowing rivers of ice, which descend the mountain valleys at a rate depending on both the angle of the slope and the temperature of the air. One of the world's fastest advancing glaciers is in Disko Bay, Greenland, which during the summer months can 'flow' up to 19.5metres (64 ft.) each day. These frozen rivers are transected by crevasses, deep cuts which can reach all the way to the bedrock below. When the ice reaches the sea, it pushes out over the water as a floating tongue. Icebergs are 'calved' from the tongue where the ice is weakened by a particularly deep crevasse.

### **Hoar Frost**

The precipitation from fog, hoar frost can gather in heavy accumulations. Its crystalline clusters can be heavy enough to bring down radio antennae. Cliffs and buildings can be covered with it in a layer which thickens as long as the fog lasts. On aircraft wings, rotor and propeller blades, it forms a dangerous glaze that keeps wise pilots grounded—and the manufacturers of de-icing equipment in business. On thin sea ice, it produces clusters of elegant flowers with crystalline petals—and at home, on your windows, 'Jack Frost' leaves lovely, feathery pictures. Accumulated on land, hoar frost forms into coarse sugary crystals, then by slow stages, compresses under its own weight to become clear and rock solid.

### **Icebergs**

Icebergs are land ice at sea. Often large, even massive, they have broken free from glaciers or ice shelves and floated off on their own. Small, cottage-sized icebergs are known as 'growlers', and lesser fragments as "bergy bits". Some of the largest northern icebergs, breaking away from the ice sheets of the Ellesmere coast of Canada, form ice islands a few kilometres long and wide—strong and large enough for a heavy aircraft to land on, and for semi-permanent scientific camps to be established safely.

Greenland produces most of the Arctic bergs, mainly from glaciers along its eastern and western flanks. It releases some 15,000 sizeable bergs each year, of which two thirds fragment and melt away fairly quickly. The rest make their way south, melting as they go. Some travel far enough south to menace shipping lanes—where the Titanic met its fate.

Some bergs are marked by progressively higher waterlines. These are caused when the iceberg loses some of the bulk that weighs it down in the water, either by fragmentation or melting. As more and more bulk is lost, the berg rises higher and higher in the water. Icebergs can also roll over, usually because of underwater melting which makes them top-heavy.

Ocean currents and winds drive icebergs, but as more than 80% of their bulk lies below the surface, currents are often the main moving force. In the north, long-term ice patrols by air, sea and satellite have established where most bergs are to be found, and where they are likely to go. Along the east coast of Greenland, convoys of them drift south every year. Along the west coast, they head north, cross Baffin Bay, then start a long southward drift that carries their remnants past Labrador and Newfoundland into the North Atlantic. The huge keels of the larger bergs keep them out of shallow water but can strand them on shoals. Oil companies take them seriously, towing them away if they approach drilling ships in shallow waters.

## Ice Caps

The sheets of ice that cover Greenland and Antarctica are mosaics of ice that has fallen as snow and hoar frost over many centuries. They seem solid and timeless, as permanent as the rocks they cover. In fact, ice caps are far more dynamic than they appear: their substance is constantly changing, and different parts change at different rates. The edges advance and retreat, sometimes slowly, sometimes in great surges. Inland, they flow majestically, oozing downhill, filling valleys. The pressures from their own vast bulk drive them onward. Tensions tear them apart, opening wedge-shaped cracks or crevasses that penetrate deep, sometimes down to the bedrock below.

Every day, ice caps lose some of their bulk to evaporation—but in the summer months, far more is lost due to melting. Ice sheets that terminate on land melt into streams and rivers made milky by fine sediment. Those that meet the sea tumble away in chunks, forming icebergs and ice islands that float off on voyages of their own. But these losses are generally compensated by new snow and hoar frost, with the gains varying over different parts of the ice sheet. Seaward edges usually gain most, for that is where the snow falls most heavily.

## Ice Sheets

The sheets of ice resulting from the spreading of icecaps.

## Independence I

The Independence I was a Paleo-Eskimo culture; they were the first Inuit to leave Siberia for the Canadian High Arctic and Greenland, where they remained until 1600 BCE. They hunted muskoxen and were part of the Arctic Small Tool Tradition.

## Innu

The Innu are indigenous inhabitants of most of the northeastern portion of Quebec, and some eastern portions of Labrador. They are frequently classified into two groups: the Neenoilno, who live along the north shore of the Gulf of St.

Lawrence in Quebec, and the less numerous Naskapi, who live further north. The Innu recognize several distinctions based on different regional affiliations and speakers of various dialects of the Innu language. The Naskapi are traditionally nomadic, in contrast with the more sedentary Neenoilno.

## **Inuit**

The Inuit are a group of culturally similar indigenous peoples inhabiting the Arctic regions of Greenland, Canada, and Alaska. Inuit is a plural noun; the singular is Inuk. The Inuit live throughout most of northern Canada (“the North”) in the territory of Nunavut, in Nunavik in the northern third of Quebec, in Nunatsiavut and NunatuKavut in Labrador, and in various parts of the Northwest Territories. These areas are known collectively as the Inuit Nunangat in Inuktitut, which is their spoken language. Inuit are the descendents of the Thule culture, which emerged from western Alaska around 1000 CE. They had split from the related Aleut group about four thousand years ago. They displaced the related Dorset culture, which was the last major Paleo-Eskimo culture.

The Inuit have traditionally been hunters and fishers. The typical Inuit diet is high in protein and very high in fat obtained from whales, seals, and other marine mammals; traditionally, up to 75% of an Inuk’s daily energy was obtained from fat. The Inuit hunt sea animals from covered, single-passenger sealskin boats called qajaqs. On land, they used dog sleds, or komatiks, for transportation. Inuit industry relied almost exclusively on animal hides, driftwood, and bones—although some tools were also made out of worked stone. Art has always played a big part in Inuit society; historically, sculpture of animal and human figures were carved from ivory and bone. While this practice continues today, modern Inuit art also consists of printmaking, and working in soft stone.

## **Inuit Nunangat**

There are four Inuit regions in Canada, collectively known as Inuit Nunangat. The term “Inuit Nunangat” is a Canadian Inuit term that includes land, water, and ice. Inuit consider the land, water, and ice, of their homeland to be integral to their culture and their way of life.

## **Inuvialuit Settlement Region**

The Inuvialuit region comprises the northwestern part of the Northwest Territories. In 1984, the Inuvialuit, along with the federal and territorial governments, settled a comprehensive land claims agreement, giving Inuvialuit surface and subsurface (mining) rights to most of the region. The agreement ensures environmental protection, harvesting rights and Inuvialuit participation and support in many economic development initiatives. With a population of approximately 1,600, Inuvik is the largest community in the region and is also the regional administrative center. Economic conditions in the Inuvialuit region focus on oil and gas development, diamond mining and transportation, but the region is also on the verge of significant economic development in the construction of a major natural gas pipeline. The Inuit of this region are known as Inuvialuit and their mother tongue is Inuvialuktun, one of several dialects of the Inuit language.

## **Inuksuk**

Inuksuit are human-like stone ‘sculptures’ made of piled rocks. These appear on prominent points in the landscape wherever Inuit live, travel or hunt. Many have been standing for centuries, and they have many uses. They might be directional indicators (the arms may be pointing out something specific), guardians, or a sign that shelter, safety or good hunting is nearby. Rows of strategically placed inuksuit were used to lead caribou to ambush (with young men acting as flushers behind a running herd). The silhouette of an inuksuk is an important motif in Inuit art.

## **Inuvialuit**

The Inuvialuit are the Inuit of the western Arctic who occupy the area known as Inuvialuit Nunangat. The title to the land was accorded them in a 1977 treaty with the Federal Government.

## **Kamik**

Kamiks are Inuit footwear made of sealskin with soles of walrus hide or sealskin. Bird skin slippers were sometimes worn underneath, or the boot would be lined with dried moss or grass.

## **Komatik**

Komatiks are flexible Inuit dog-sledges 4.5–9-metres long made of whalebone, ivory, horn, baleen or wood. Pulled by six to twelve dogs with traces and harnesses made of caribou or sealskin thongs. Caribou antlers with the points removed were sometimes attached at the back for the driver to hold on to.

## **Midnight Sun**

The long, dark winters and the sunlit summers of the polar regions occur because the whole area within each polar circle is tilted away from the sun in the winter and toward it in the summer. Thus any point north of the Arctic Circle is out of sight of the sun (i.e. the sun does not rise above the horizon) in winter, and in full view of the sun (i.e. the sun does not set) in the summer. So the Arctic Circle (and the AntArctic Circle) indicates where we can see that exclusively polar phenomenon, the midnight sun.

Travelling poleward in summer from lower latitudes, the days lengthen; the sun sets lower each evening and rises earlier each morning. At the polar circles in midsummer, the sun remains above the horizon throughout the twenty-four hours. After its noontime high, the sun rides steadily down the sky as usual during afternoon and evening, although at a shallow angle. By late evening it is near the horizon. By midnight it is running along the horizon. Then it starts to rise again. To see this happening, one has to be at or beyond the polar circles. Similarly, at midwinter beyond the circles the sun never

rises above the horizon. There is a brightening of the sky around mid-morning, but the sun never does appear. The nearer one is to the pole, the less one sees of this day-glow. In 70°North and South, midday at mid-winter brings only a twilight glow—the moonlight is often brighter.

Poleward too, the number of days of summer daylight increases, and for each long summer day, roughly speaking, there is a long winter night to come. At 70°N, the midnight sun starts on approximately May 16 each year and continues for seventy-two days. At 80°N it starts on February 14, or thereabouts, and continues for 137 days.

### **Multi-Year Ice**

As the name implies, multi-year ice is ice that has managed to survive through one or more seasons of the melting and freezing cycle. By its second year, multi-year ice has lost virtually all of its salt content, and is as fresh as rainwater. Formed into floes, these great clumps of ice are driven against each other by the powerful winter winds, creating massive pressure ridges that, through the succeeding summers, are melted down into gently rounded hummocks. It is this worn and rounded silhouette that distinguishes multi-year ice from the flatter and greyer floes of first- and second-year ice.

### **Nunavik**

The area in northern Quebec inhabited by Inuit is known as Nunavik. In 1971, the Quebec government announced its intention to develop a massive hydroelectric project flowing into James Bay. The James Bay Project was developed without consultation or consent of Inuit and Cree who had lived and used the area for thousands of years. The James Bay Project had the potential to irrevocably damage the land and wildlife, resources upon which the people depended.

In response to the announcement, the newly formed Northern Quebec Inuit Association and the Grand Council of the Cree of Quebec took the provincial government to court to stop development. In 1973, the Inuit and Cree won an interlocutory injunction, effectively halting construction. Quebec responded by announcing it would negotiate land claims with the Aboriginal groups. A week later, the court ruling was overturned.

The result for the Inuit of Nunavik was the first modern comprehensive land claims agreement in Canada, called the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement, signed in Quebec City on November 11, 1975. Some 11,000 Inuit live in fourteen communities along the eastern coast of Hudson's Bay and the Hudson Strait. The largest community in the region is Kuujuaq, with a population of approximately 1,800. The Kativik Regional Government is responsible for the delivery of municipal services and infrastructure in the communities. The Kativik School Board is responsible for the administration and delivery of education. Health services to Nunavik residents are managed by the Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services.

Traditional hunting and fishing is a crucial food source for the Inuit of Nunavik. The transportation and service industries, along with tourism and mining are important components of the local economy.

### **Nunatsiavut**

On December 6, 2001, Governor General Adrienne Clarkson proclaimed an amendment to the Canadian Constitution, officially changing Newfoundland's name to Newfoundland and Labrador. The name change acknowledges the distinction of the Labrador region of the province. The Inuit region of Labrador is called Nunatsiavut. Approximately 2,300 Inuit live along the Labrador coast, primarily in five communities. Nain is the biggest Inuit community in Labrador, and is also the administrative center, with a population of 1,100.

Wildlife harvesting continues to dominate the Inuit diet and regional economy. Government and service industries are Nunatsiavut's biggest employer, but the Voisey's Bay nickel mine is expected to boost the local economy in years to come by employing Inuit from nearby areas.

The Nunatsiavut Government officially came into being on December 1, 2005. It has responsibility for economic development planning, preserving Inuit culture and implementing social programs.

### **Nunavut**

In total, there are about 134,000 Inuit living in four countries: Canada, Greenland, Denmark, and the United States. In Canada, Inuit received a comprehensive land claims settlement with the signing of the Inuvialuit Final Agreement in 1984. This paved the way for the next ten years, until 1992, when a final agreement was reached with the Government of Canada. The largest land claims agreement in Canadian history, the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement was finally signed in 1993. The Canadian parliament passed the supporting legislation in June of the same year, enabling the 1999 establishment of Nunavut as a territorial entity. It is the fifth-largest country subdivision in the world, as well as North America's second largest (after Greenland). The capital, Iqaluit, was chosen by the 1995 capital plebiscite. It has a population of 35,944—mostly Inuit—spread over 1,750,000 square kilometres and twenty-six communities. Nunavut is divided into three regions, Qikiqtaaluk in the east, Kivalliq in the central Arctic along the western coast of Hudson's Bay, and Kitikmeot in the west. Nunavut is home to the world's northernmost permanently inhabited place, Alert.

The territorial government of Nunavut incorporates traditional values and beliefs into a contemporary governing system. Inuktitut is an official language of government, along with French, English, and Inuinnaqtun. Nunavut's economy, like that of the other regions, is based on renewable resources, arts and crafts, both on and offshore fisheries and tourism. Government is the largest employer in the territory, followed closely by the private sector and service industries. Upon its creation, Nunavut inherited legislation from the Northwest Territories government and is now in the

process of drafting a slate of new bills. Made-in-Nunavut laws include an Education Act, Official Languages Act, and Inuit Language Protection Act.

### **Pack Ice**

Pack ice is old ice, formed by successive layers of snow that are compacted into a hard, solid mass. The Arctic has a core area of pack ice several years old, with outer zones of annual ice that forms each autumn and disperses in the spring. As the presence or absence of pack ice has a considerable effect on air temperatures, summer and winter limits of pack ice are ecologically relevant. They are also crucial to mariners, as they determine navigable waters. They usually appear on maps as mean southern limits of pack ice.

Although contaminated with brine, pack ice is frozen pure water, since the ice crystals contained therein have separated themselves from any dissolved materials—such as salt.

Pack ice can be land or sea bound. On the sea, it can shift and break into fragments, which drift with the winds and currents. The North Pole, in fact, lies in the middle of a deep ocean covered with drifting pack ice. No permanent research station can be established there: built today, it would shift tomorrow in the direction of Scandinavia.

### **Pancake Ice**

Pancake ice is an early stage in the formation of sea ice. When the sea starts to freeze, ice crystals float to the surface to form a thick mush, which then congeals to a solid layer a few centimetres thick. If slightly disturbed by winds or swells, this solid surface breaks into fragments that rub together, forming rounded plaques of ice with raised edges. If the air is cold enough, these plaques freeze together again to form the basis of annual sea ice.

### **Permafrost**

Permafrost is soil, rock, or sediment that is frozen for more than two consecutive years. In areas not overlain by ice, it exists beneath a layer of soil, rock, or sediment, which freezes and thaws annually and is called the "active layer". Active layer thickness varies with the season, but is generally 0.3 to 4 metres thick.

### **Pingos**

These are giant blister-like formations with cores of solid ice and an outer covering of soil. Pingos are found in areas of permafrost, where the ground is permanently frozen. They are the result of pressure on layers of unfrozen material caught between a substratum of permafrost and a frozen surface.

### **Polynyas**

Patches of open water, which occur in anomalous areas—for example, off cold polar coasts where ice is constantly forming, or in the middle of a wide expanse of sea ice. Coastal polynyas are usually due to strong offshore winds, which break up the ice as fast as it forms and push it away from the land; some may also be due to strong currents between islands. Those occurring in mid-ocean ice sheets are thought to form because of upwelling of warm water. Satellites often pick them out because the open sea is much warmer than the surrounding ice.

Ecologically, polynyas may be extremely rich. The absence of sea ice allows early spring penetration of sunshine, agitation of water (to bring nutrients to the surface), and high productivity early in the season. In the Arctic, they open up channels and bays, attracting fish and other prey species, and becoming the haunt of whales, seals and sea birds.

## **Qajaq**

A qajaq (or kayak) is a small, narrow watercraft propelled by a double-bladed paddle. The traditional qajaq has a covered deck and a cockpit, often covered by a spray deck to prevent the entry of waves and water; this spray deck makes it possible for skilled pilots to roll the craft. Traditional Inuit qajaqs were made of animal skins stretched over a wood or whalebone frame. The design of the craft is believed to be at least four thousand years old. They have been variously used for hunting and transport, and were typically built with very personal specifications to the pilot. Generally, they are about five metres in length and about fifty centimetres wide at the cockpit.

## **Sea Ice**

Sea ice starts to form in autumn when the air is still and the water surface chills below freezing point. First comes a porridge of fine crystals, then a layer of soft fudge that thickens within hours to a brittle toffee. Wind at this stage breaks the layer into pancakes - tiny floes that rub themselves into circular shapes with the movement of the water. Continuous hard frost causes further thickening and freezing. After twenty-four hours at low temperatures the ice may be twenty centimetres thick, and strong enough to walk on. After a week it may be twice as thick, and strong enough to bear the weight of a sledge.

## **Thule Culture**

Direct ancestors of today's Inuit, occupying the Canadian Arctic and northern Greenland from 900–1700 AD, displacing the Dorset as they arrived from Siberia and Alaska. They were primarily hunters of the bowhead whale.

## **Tundra**

The tundra is a type of biome where tree growth is hindered by low temperatures and short growing seasons. The vegetation in these regions is composed of dwarf shrubs, sedges, grasses, mosses, and lichens. Arctic tundra consists of stark landscapes and is frozen for much of the year. Tundra tends to be windy, with gusts often blowing upwards of 100

kilometres per hour. However, the tundra is also desert-like due to its low precipitation; evaporation is also minimal. The tundra is characterized by low biodiversity—only forty-eight species of land mammal can be found here.

### **Ulu**

The graceful, curved, multi-purpose knife traditionally used by Inuit women.

### **Umiak**

A large, open boat made of caribou or walrus hide, or sealskin, stretched over a frame of whalebone or driftwood. Sometimes a sail, made from seal intestines, was added. Umiaks were between nine and twelve metres long and were used for whaling as well as transporting people and their possessions.

### **Weirs**

Weirs were stone barriers placed across rivers to catch fish (mainly char) as they swam to their spawning grounds. The weirs are composed of two walls, one spaced slightly upstream from the other. A gap in the downstream wall allowed the fish to swim through. The fisherman would then quickly drop a stone into the gap, trapping the fish for easy spearing.

# Arctic Basics

## Inuit Culture and History

The Circumpolar Region is home to nearly 200,000 Inuit who share a similar culture in the four separate countries they inhabit; Yupigeet in Siberia Russia, Inupiat in Alaska and the Western Canadian Arctic, Inuit of Canada, and Kalallit of Greenland Denmark.

These people—indigenous to the coastal regions of Nunatsiavut (Labrador), Nunavik (Northern Quebec), Nunavut, the Northwest Territories (including the Arctic Archipelago) Canada; Greenland; Alaska and northeastern Siberia, Russia—share ancestors as well as many cultural traits. They form an entirely separate group from the Amerindian tribes. Each of these regions, however, has its own language: Yupik is spoken in northern Siberia and along the central Alaskan coast, Inupik from northern Alaska across Western Arctic Canada, Inuktitut in Eastern Canada, and Kalallissut in Greenland. These all stem from the same linguistic roots.

Inuit are thought to be of Mongolian origin, arriving into the North American continent from the Bering Sea more than three thousand years ago. Centuries of contact with non-Inuit have resulted in a small number of Inuit with mixed heritage. Inuit adapted remarkably to the cold climate of the Arctic through their intelligence and resolve and their physical traits that are adapted to the Arctic.

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## HISTORY

### Paleoeskimos

Somewhere around four thousand years ago the earliest inhabitants of the Arctic arrived on the coast of Alaska—approximately ten thousand years after the first indigenous ancestors from Siberia arrived in America.

These were the people of the Arctic Small Tool tradition, thought to have originated from among the seal hunters dwelling on the shores of Lake Baikal in Siberia. Their name stems from the minuscule size of their tools: stone harpoon tips, arrowheads and knives were sometimes barely an inch long. There are traces of this group along the Canadian littoral and into Greenland, indicating an eastward migration, although it is unclear over what time span. Carbon 14 dates indicate that they may have been in Greenland by 2000 BCE.

The reason behind this 5,600-kilometre migration is also anyone's best guess. It may have been in pursuit of game, for the withdrawal two thousand years before of the ice sheet covering Hudson's Bay and the islands must have brought on an explosion of wildlife.

## **Independence I**

The Independence I culture were the first people to reach the High Arctic islands and northeastern Greenland. They are named for the fjord along which their remains were first found. These people seem to have lived in small bands, travelling almost constantly along the so-called 'muskox way' which describes their migration route. In spring the bands grouped together for seal hunting along the shores. Their houses seem too skimpy for the polar climate—although the climate in the north was warmer than it is now. They were little more than skin tents, with vertical stone slabs (called 'mid-passages') in the middle of the dirt floor. Families appear to have virtually hibernated through the winters, sleeping under muskox skins as a fire made of muskox bones warmed the stones of the mid-passage.

By about 1600 BCE, Independence I had more or less disappeared from the High Arctic, probably as a result of a cooling climate.

## **Pre-Dorset**

Pre-Dorset is the name given to an almost simultaneous culture that lived mainly along the shores of the Foxe Basin and the Hudson Strait from 3000 BCE to 500 BCE. The Pre-Dorset seem to have been a more sedentary lot than Independence I, deriving most of their food from seal, walrus and caribou. Their tools included toggling harpoons, spears and bows and arrows (the latter made of driftwood and caribou sinew).

The Pre-Dorset were not affected by the extremely cold winters until much later, around 500 BCE. By then, the climate had become so cold that the ground was permanently frozen, as it is today. The people adapted themselves by learning to hunt through sea ice, focusing on the breathing holes which walrus and seal keep open all winter.

## **Dorset**

Next came the Dorset period, dating from 1000 BCE to 1100 AD and later in some areas. They occupied a triangular area of land, bounded by Victoria Island in the west, Ellesmere Island and northern Greenland in the north, and Newfoundland in the southeast.

These small bands of seasonally nomadic people used only hand-thrown harpoons and lances to hunt, eschewing bows and arrows. Their winter houses were rectangular and partly submerged, usually clustered in groups of three to fifteen houses. Seals, walrus, and caribou were their primary quarries.

Most remarkable about the Dorset people was their art: delicate carvings, realistic or abstract were made in ivory, antler or bone. Most are thought to have given magical powers to their makers or owners. Inuit legends are full of descriptions of the Dorset people, whom they call the Tuniit or Tunirjuat.

## **Thule**

Around 900 AD a warming occurred in the north, causing the ice of the Beaufort Sea (north of the Bering Strait) to retreat. The settlements of the Denbigh and Ipiutak cultures of Alaska had grown, and these hunters of seals and whales were finding it more and more difficult to take enough for their needs. Consequently, a second migration to the east began. Within two hundred years these people, called the Thule by archaeologists, had spread over all the coasts formerly inhabited by the Dorset culture.

The Thule were superbly adapted to the Arctic. They hunted whales that could feed an entire small settlement for a year. The hunters used open skin boats (umiaks) to take bowhead whales, which were then stripped of their blubber, meat, and baleen. Their houses, clustered in groups of six to thirty, were deep pits with rock slab floors, walls of piled boulders, and rafters of whalebone. The roofs were probably covered with animal skins and insulated with sod. A tunnel entrance kept the cold out. The houses were heated with soapstone lamp bowls filled with flaming seal and whale oil. Gadget-oriented, the Thule created clever tools and devices of bone, antler, ivory, and stone to accomplish their every task.

The Dorset were, it seems, no match for the resourceful Thule. There are no signs of massacre, but the Dorset may have starved in unsuccessful competition with the newcomers, or perhaps they were simply absorbed by intermarriage.

The end of the eighteenth century brought the 'Little Ice Age', in which cold winters in the eastern Arctic increased the extent of the sea ice and made whaling more difficult from land. This marked the end of the Thule culture, forcing the people in the region to leave their winter pit houses for temporary snow house villages on the sea ice.

## **Contact and Conflict**

The early European visitors to the Arctic had little to do with Inuit, believing themselves superior in every way. Later, men like John Davis, William Scoresby and Dr. John Rae came to understand they had much to learn from Inuit, who, after all, knew a great deal more about the Arctic than they did. With few exceptions, the explorers tended to spend as

little time as they could in the north, and consequently had only a minimal impact on the lives of their Inuit acquaintances. The late nineteenth century, however, brought a longer-term and much rougher group of Europeans to the Arctic: the whalers.

The whalers often spent a winter in the north to take advantage of two summer seasons, and in doing so, came into close contact with Inuit. These latter learned of and adopted many of the labour-saving devices used by the whalers: canned food, cloth, wooden boats, and metal utensils, among others. They learned to hunt with guns, to knit, to dance Scottish reels and square dances. They also learned to drink alcohol. And they caught many of the European diseases to which they lacked immunity, dying in some areas by the hundreds.

When the whaling industry disappeared from the Arctic at the turn of the century, as much from the near extinction of the bowhead whale as from the invention of electricity and plastics, Inuit lost their sources of supply for many of the commodities upon which they had come to depend. But other commodities soon brought new generations of southerners to the Arctic: white fox fur led the way in the 1920s, then the growing popularity of many other species of northern fur brought about the establishment of permanent trading posts in the north, with the largest trader being the Hudson's Bay Company. Small towns sprouted, RCMP detachments were put in place, and missionaries of the Roman Catholic and Anglican faiths arrived, replacing many of Inuit traditional rituals and beliefs with those of dictated by the church. It's worth noting the church also gave Inuit their first form of written language, still in use today. The construction of the DEW (Distant Early Warning) Line brought still more southerners into the north in the 1950s, also the time when the Canadian government chose to enact a ruling which brought Inuit under federal jurisdiction and established a network of schools, hospitals and administrative centres in the Arctic. The oil industry provided the most recent rush to the north, which lasted only a few years until the cancellation of government subsidies made much of the drilling unviable. Oil exploration and extraction continue to some extent, primarily in the western Arctic.

## **Canadian Eastern Arctic Today**

There are about 40,000 people living in the Canadian eastern Arctic today. 30,000: of these live in Nunavut Territory, with the balance split between Nunavik Northern Quebec (where 12,000 people inhabit a region one third of the entire province of Quebec, about the size of France) and Labrador (where 5,300 Inuit live along the northern coast).

The resulting population density is a scarce one person per sixty square kilometres: 85% or so of these people are Inuit, and 56% are under the age of twenty-five. Traditionally, Inuit lived in small groups of extended family members. Nowadays, Inuit communities range in size from just over 100 to over 7,000. Aujuittuq (Grise Fjord) and Ivujivik have populations over 140, while Iqaluit has over 7,000 and climbing. Most of these communities were formed over fifty years ago, when government officials persuaded Inuit to move into settlements so that their children could be near a school.

Inuit society has experienced rapid change. A people who once lived semi-nomadic lives now reside in settlements, always along coastal regions. Most of these changes were set in motion merely a generation ago. Inuit embrace the modern while retaining valued traditions such as hunting for subsistence and the manufacture of traditional clothing.

In the old days, hunting, fishing, and trapping were virtually the only Inuit pursuits, although in the last few centuries the fur trade impacted hugely on their subsistence economy. For better or worse, Inuit became an unwitting part of the world economy—initially through trade with whalers in the eighteenth century, and later through the trading posts that sprouted in the Arctic in search of furs. However, their new reliance on the fur trade was subject to the whims of the market. When the price of fox fur plummeted during the depression they lost one of their mainstays, and with the steep decline in the demand for seal fur in the 1960s due to pressure from animal rights activists, Inuit lost nearly all means of purchasing the manufactured goods they had become accustomed to having. By the 1950s the federal government had taken administrative control of their regions, building schools and sending teachers north to educate the Inuit.

At around the same time there was a government program under which Inuit of Inukjuak and Pond Inlet were relocated to Grise Fiord and Resolute Bay. The social and cultural impacts of this forced move were huge, with some families losing contact for many years. Their demand for compensation from the federal government was eventually answered, and many moved back to their old communities. Others chose to remain in the new settlements that they had helped forge, and so Aujittuq (Grise Fiord) and Qausuittuq (Resolute Bay) remain two Inuit communities that have allowed Canada to claim its sovereignty in the high Arctic.

Another major impact on Inuit way of life was the loss of great numbers of sled dogs in many Inuit communities. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police and other government authorities killed entire dog teams in the 1950s and the 1960s, and many once-proud owners of sled dogs lost their autonomy—and their means of transport. An annual Inuit dogsled race called Ivakkak was created in Nunavik to promote the return of the tradition of tundra sledding. Inuit, young and old, are again proud owners of their own sled dogs.

By the end of the 1960s, Inuit had come under the control of the remote Ottawa government—and had become the objects of what has been called ‘welfare state colonialism’. Nunavut, and the other regions of the northern Canada, rely on transfer payments from the federal government: Ottawa spends more than \$28,000 for every man, woman and child in Nunavut and in the Northwest Territories, compared to \$2,700 per capita in Newfoundland & Labrador.

## **Northern Politics Today**

A wave of Inuit nationalism arose throughout the circumpolar world in the early 1970s. In Alaska, the Inupiat and other Inuit groups joined the Alaska Federation of Natives and participated in treaty talks with the US government. In 1979,

the Kalallit in Greenland obtained home rule Government within Denmark—but it was among Canadian Inuit that the most political change took place.

In 1971 Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (Inuit United in Canada) formed to represent Inuit at the national level. Priorities were fair Inuit representation in regional government, and active Inuit involvement in the political progress of land claims for ancestral territories. Inuit then created their own associations within their respective regions, such as the Northern Quebec Inuit Association (whose mandate was later replaced by Makivik Corporation). In 1975 the association, alongside the Cree of James Bay, concluded a monumental task: the first modern day land claims treaty called the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement. This treaty opened doors for the Inuit of Nunavik for collective land ownership, rights to hunting, fishing, and trapping—and for the creation of Inuit directed administrative organizations such as the Kativik Regional Government.

The 1970s were also when negotiations on the creation of Nunavut—Inuit-governed territory covering Baffin Island and what used to be central Northwest Territories—began. But it took twenty years of discussion for the Nunavut dream to become a reality. In 1999, the landmark Nunavut legislation was created, including the massive land claim and a system of public government representing all residents of Nunavut—both Inuit and non-Inuit. Inuit citizens also became taxpayers choosing to administer services through municipalities or hamlets.

In 2005, the Inuit of Northern Labrador concluded three decades of negotiations for self-governance by establishing the Labrador Inuit Land Claims Agreement. Through this agreement came the Nunatsiavut government, a regional Inuit government within the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Currently, Inuit projects aim at relieving and preventing poverty, resolving social problems prevailing in the communities, creating sustainable development and jobs, and promoting education.

Concern for the environment has taken on a greater importance in Inuit government organizations in the last few years. Inuit have been observing later ice formation and earlier ice break-up both at sea and in fresh water systems in recent years. One unexpected affect of climate change in the north has been increased interest in what used to lie beneath the ice: namely oil, minerals, and natural gas. As much as a quarter of the world's remaining oil and gas resources are believed to exist in the Arctic. So naturally, the Arctic's bordering nations—Canada, Russia, Norway, Denmark, and the United States—are jockeying for access and control of the reserves. To help curb discussions among these groups, The Arctic Council, an eight-nation and six “Permanent Participant” (various Arctic indigenous groups) was established in 2002 to create guidelines for sustainable development and environmental protection of the Arctic.

Finally, the likely opening of the Northwest Passage presents huge changes and challenges. Among them are: significant increases in shipping traffic which present political challenges related to sovereignty, socio-economic impacts due to a greater presence of southerners (at least seasonally), new possible narcotics trafficking and diamond trade routes, and environmental concerns over potential oil spills which would have catastrophic impacts on wildlife—there simply is no comprehensive oil spill response system in the Arctic. It is therefore absolutely critical that sound management and policy is established to ensure the fragile ecosystem is protected and that Inuit are directly involved in decision making. Inuit are also actively involved in creating businesses and stimulating the economy within their regions. Nunasi Corporation, an arm of Nunavut Tunngavik Inc (NTI), the birthright organization representing Inuit of Nunavut, and Makivik Corporation, the birthright organization representing Inuit of Nunavik, are partial mandates to create businesses in their regions to help stimulate the economy and create as many jobs as possible for Inuit. Both deal in investments and subsidiary companies including airlines (Nunasi Helicopters, First Air and Air Inuit), construction services, shipping, fishing, mining, and now with the creation of Cruise North Expeditions in 2005, tourism.

## INUIT TRADITIONS

The customs, equipment and beliefs of Inuit of the 1850s are only now disappearing. Canadian Arctic Inuit are geographically divided into seven close-knit groups: Baffinland, Igloodik, Netsilik, Caribou, Copper, and Mackenzie Delta Inuit. Each of these offered variations in every aspect of life, from the hunting equipment they used to the style and decoration of their clothing. Many of the variations were due to the materials available and the climate. The following section focuses on Inuit of the Baffin Region.

### The Igloo

Because of their seasonal movements, Inuit had no permanent homes. Instead, various types of shelter were used that were quick and easy to build, but solid enough, nonetheless, to withstand severe weather.

The igloo was the winter home, consisting of a dome built out of blocks of wind-packed snow. The same skins used for the summer tent were hung as a lining to catch the melting water, and held to the outside of the igloo with leather thongs which passed through the blocks. A low tunnel entrance was an important feature, as was a raised sleeping platform made of snow within. Some igloos had smaller side domes for use as storerooms or dog shelters.

Summer homes involved a snow base with an overhead tent made of skins. In the Baffin Region, the skins were hung from a central ridgepole, whereas Inuit of the western regions used a single standing pole to make a cone-shaped tent. There was no wood available, so heating was supplied by burning seal oil in soapstone lamps (qulliqs or kudliks). These were in the shape of half-moons, with a wick made of hair, Arctic cotton, or dried moss floating in the oil. The fire was lit by striking pieces of pyrite together, or by rotating a fire drill with a leather thong until the embers produced by friction caught in a little bunch of dried grass or catkins.

## **Diet**

Inuit diet revolved around meat and blubber, with the latter providing the fat essential for survival in a cold climate. By preference, the meat from a freshly killed walrus or seal was eaten raw and still warm. In fact, many of the nutrients in meat disappear with cooking. Raw narwhal and beluga skin contain as much vitamin C as oranges, and raw seal liver is an excellent source of vitamins A and D. If the meat had been frozen and required cooking, this was done inside the igloo in a pot made from a hollowed out stone or from the waterproof hide of a walrus. The family ate in a circle around the pot. The father would spear a larger piece of meat with his knife, cut off a small chunk for himself and pass the knife along.

Meat could be stored in the winter because it naturally stayed frozen, and fish could be dried. But there was never enough, and hunting was a continual process.

Fish provided some variety to the diet, as did the partially digested contents of ptarmigans and certain sea animals. In summer, food was much more easily obtained, and the whole family gathered berries, roots, and leaves. The eggs of eider ducks, murres, and gulls were also collected (and often buried for consumption in December).

## **The Hunt**

Winter was the hunting season for sea mammals. The best place to hunt walrus, beluga and the young seals was at the edge of the floe, and the equipment of choice included a harpoon and a lance. In February, when the sea ice is frozen to a 1.5m/6ft thickness, seals have to scratch a conical breathing hole, or an aglu. The hunter would locate the aglu with the help of a dog, then replace a small plug of snow at the top with a wisp of down. When the down fluttered, the hunter would know that a seal had come to breathe—but this might take hours of motionless waiting in sub-zero temperatures. The hunter would have to make a quick and accurate thrust with his harpoon to kill the animal through the hole, and then enlarge it to haul out the seal. The catch would then be loaded onto a sledge and pulled by dog team back to the camp.

Spring sealing, utoq, required stealth as well as patience: as cracks opened in the ice, the seals came out to bask in the sun. The hunter would approach them by slithering slowly across the ice—sometimes taking as long as two hours to get within harpooning distance.

Seal and walrus hunting required the specialized equipment of the skin kayak and the toggling harpoon. This latter was constructed in such a way that when the toggling head entered the animal's body, the shaft and the foreshaft fell off, leaving only the embedded harpoon and line. Small animals could be retrieved by pulling on the line, but larger animals (bearded seals and walrus) had to be floated home behind the kayak using an inflated sealskin.

In the late spring and during the summer, Inuit families would move away from their winter camps and 'go out on the land' where they fished and hunted birds, seal and walrus. August is the month for Arctic char fishing, when Inuit used (and still use) stone weirs (saputit) to hold the fish as they swim upstream to spawn. Once caught in the weir, the fish could be speared relatively easily. All sorts of creative devices were used for capturing birds: Gulls were hooked by burying a gull-hook in a bait of whale blubber; The hook was attached to a line which was anchored by a rock. Bolas made of stone or bone were swung at flying birds, and dovebies were netted on cliffs.

In late August the caribou hunt started, since at this time of the year the animals' coat had just the right length of hair for winter clothing. The hunt took place with much of the same social activity as the southern fall harvest: it was a time for bands to get together and for young people to meet. The area of the hunt was demarcated by inukshuk, simple sculptures of stones piled in the shape of a man, which were laid out to form a long V. The younger men were sent out beyond the opening of the V to drive the caribou towards the closed end. The hunters would be waiting behind the inukshuk with their lances and bows and bows ready to kill the frightened animals as they passed. Too heavy to carry intact, the caribou were butchered on the spot. The skins were dried at the summer camp, and the meat cached until the snow came and it could be picked up by dog team.

Inuit never hunted for sport: in their mind, all animals had souls and, if abused, they would make the hunting bad.

## Transport

The main craft for hunting was the one-person kayak, a light, slender boat that cut silently through the water and was easily carried. It was generally 3.5–6.5 metres long. Its framework was of rib bones or pieces of driftwood lashed together with sinew. This was covered with walrus or sealskin hides, stretched over the frame and sewn in. The hunter sat in a central cockpit covered in a waterproof cape of tanned stomach linings. Gear was lashed to the deck of the kayak with thongs tied onto ivory or bone knobs.

If a larger boat was needed, Inuit used an umiak. An open boat 9–12 metres long, the umiak carried entire families with all their possessions and was essential in whale hunting. It was made of the same materials as the kayak, but in larger, thicker pieces. Instead of being sewn, the cover was attached to the inside of the boat with thongs. A sail made from seal intestines was sometimes added. If the whole family were using the umiak, the women would row while a man steered in the stern with a paddle. The other men in the family would travel alongside in the kayaks. This system of travel was common when moving en masse between summer and winter camps.

Winter meant travel by dog sled, or komatik. These were usually 4.5–9 metres long. Crossbars joined two long runners—narrow at the back, wider at the front. These were lashed on in such a way that the sledge could articulate slightly as it went over rough ground. The runners and the crossbars were made of wood, ivory, horn, baleen—or even frozen hides. Six to twelve dogs pulled the sledges, harnessed with sealskin or caribou hide thongs. The dogs in the far north were usually harnessed individually in a fan-shaped arrangement. The strongest were attached in front, and the lead dog had the longest harness of all. If the snow was particularly rough—in the spring, for example—the women would sew boots for the dogs to protect their feet from jagged bits of ice. A hunter with dogs had to catch enough food for them as well as his family—quite a commitment, since each working dog needed about a kilogram of meat and a healthy helping of fat daily.

## Clothing

Clothing style and decoration varied from one group of Inuit to the next, and you could tell where someone was from by the clothes they wore. The regional differences lay not only in the shape of the garments but also in the type of skins, the use of dyes, and the sewing techniques practiced to piece the skins together.

The type of fur or skin used depended on availability, but also on the activity of the wearer. For example, seal intestine was the most waterproof material available and widely used for kayakers' gear. Greenland Inuit from the Melville Bay area treasured their pants made from polar bear furs, both as hunting camouflage and because they felt a close connection to their prey while wearing them.

In the Baffin Region, caribou and sealskin clothing is still considered the best gear for hunters. Adult ringed seal skins are preferred when light, wind- and water-resistant clothing is needed. Baby sealskin parkas, once widely worn, have now become rare since few hunters have dogs and the seals' breathing holes are difficult to approach undisturbed on a snowmobile.

Caribou hide, with its superior insulating qualities, was the most common material for clothing across the Canadian Arctic. When caribou were scarce, squirrels, birds, and dogs provided less desirable alternatives.

The style of the all-important parka (jacket/coat) seems to have been influenced by the early European visitors, particularly in Baffinland, where the cut of men's traditional parkas resemble the caftans worn by the Vikings (mid-thigh length, with a slit up the front).

The amauti or amautik is a woman's parka, but like most Inuit clothing and equipment, it has a spiritual as well as a utilitarian side. It was highly symbolic in this child-centric society. Traditional amauti had an enormous hood/pouch, the amaut, in which babies were carried stark naked except for a fox or bird skin cap. The pouch was lined with a re-usable diaper of caribou skin or moss. A woman's refusal to wear the amauti was sometimes perceived as her rejection of the traditional role of the woman as child-bearer.

The traditional footgear is the kamik, typically made of sealskin and sometimes lined with duffle cloth. In the old days the seams on the boots were stitched with narwhal sinew, which expanded when wet to plug the holes made with the needles. Nowadays, oddly enough, dental floss is the thread of choice for better quality kamiks, although synthetic thread is also common.

In some areas, Inuit mitts are designed according to social and work roles. The women's mitts are made from the skin of a caribou's front legs because of the elegant white stripe. Men's mitts make use of the caribou's hind legs, which yield a thicker, warmer hide with the fur cut short on top to ease igloo building and hunting. Mitts made for children are fashioned from the fluffy, white legs of fawn caribou.

## LANGUAGE

Inuit language reflects their culture and value system: strong emphasis is placed on nature and its elements. There are, for example, dozens of words to describe snow, because snow in the north comes in many different forms, and the quality of the snow is of great importance to the people who live there. Only a certain type of snow makes good igloos; other types make travel easy or difficult. It is on these bases that they merit their own words. Inuktitut has had to keep pace with the changes in the people's lives. A number of the 'new' words are highly descriptive, illustrating Inuit perception of the object.

ENGLISH	INUKTITUT	LITERAL MEANING
clock	<i>siqingujaq</i>	sun follower
steel	<i>savirajak</i>	knife material
ship	<i>umiajuaq</i>	giant umiaq (boat)
store	<i>niuvivik</i>	a place to buy things
flag	<i>saimati</i>	an item to make people happy
clerk	<i>adlati</i>	a person who writes
radio	<i>naalaut</i>	to hear things from
airplane	<i>qangatajuq</i>	an item that is able to fly
RCMP	<i>pukitalik</i>	the striped one
law	<i>maliigat</i>	items to follow
computer	<i>qaritaujaq</i>	like a brain
satellite	<i>qaritaujaq</i>	an item raised to the heavens
fax	<i>sukatunik titiraut</i>	fast letters
ozone layer	<i>silajuap igalavja</i>	protective window-like covering for earth
HIV	<i>anamaijautiqarunituq</i>	no longer having any good warriors in the body to fight bad infection
Snowmobile	<i>qamutaujaq</i>	like a sled

There was no written form of Inuktitut until the missionaries arrived in the north in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Prior to this, Inuit history had been preserved through a tradition of storytelling. Day-to-day information, particularly hunting information, was recorded in drawings and symbols on hide or bone.

# Inuit Art Today

by the Inuit Art Foundation

**“Artists must see and respond to [a] new Arctic reality, perhaps by choosing to become social and cultural activists. [By] providing young artists with a range of tools, [they] will find new forms of expressions in an ever-changing Arctic world. In many ways it feels like a new beginning.” —Abraham Anghik Ruben**

Inuit art is one of the most vibrant, varied, thriving, and relevant art forms in Canada today. Covering the entire range of fine art disciplines and beyond, Inuit artists are continuously innovating to create vital commentary on contemporary life in the North and beyond. These artists stand confidently on the world stage at international exhibitions such as documenta and the Venice Biennale, while representing the unique and critically important perspective of Inuit.

Inuit have been producing arts and crafts with incredible attention to detail, form, and functionality for centuries. Their art has taken many forms, including traditional Inuit tattooing, meticulously constructed skin clothing, tools for hunting and fishing, and ivory miniatures created for entertainment and trade. The birth of the modern Inuit art movement finds its roots in the 1940s, beginning with the production of soapstone carvings in Nunavik (northern Quebec). Since then, the production of art has flourished in nearly every community in Inuit Nunangat (the Inuit homeland in Canada), which includes Nunavut, Nunavik, Nunatsiavut (Arctic Labrador), and the Inuvialuit Settlement Region (Northwest Territories and the Yukon). Inuit artists have explored nearly all media, including drawing, printmaking, weaving, sewing, ceramics, photography, filmmaking, basket-weaving, and clothing production—as well as sculpture in bone, stone, ivory, wood, and metal.

Today, Inuit artists—who have always been early adopters and adapters of new technologies—are availing themselves of an ever-broadening range of materials and techniques to produce critical, engaging, and forward-thinking work. Artists are expressing what they see and experience in their everyday lives, and subjects such as climate change and environmental stewardship, cultural and political sovereignty, and celebrations of community and cultural heritage are

just some areas of their artistic inquiry. And, like earlier generations, Inuit artists are making work that incorporates traditional knowledge and storytelling while foregrounding narrative and community.

Founded in 1987, the **Inuit Art Foundation** is the only national Inuit organization dedicated to the support of

# Inuit Art

## FOUNDATION

Inuit art and artists. For over thirty years the IAF has provided professional development and support services to Inuit artists and arts administrators. Its initiatives include the *Inuit Art Quarterly*, the only magazine devoted to Inuit and Arctic arts; the Igloo Tag Trademark, which protects artists from cultural appropriation and theft; the Inuit Artist Database, a first-of-its-kind biographical resource for artists to receive support in creating online CVs—and more.

The IAF provides ways for those outside of Inuit Nunangat to access the varied and vibrant art made by Inuit and is your resource for remaining connected with Inuit artists. How can we connect you?

**[inuitartfoundation.org](http://inuitartfoundation.org)**

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# Thoughts on Inuit Art

by Carol Heppenstall

**“Art can never be understood, but can only be seen as a kind of magic, the most profound and mysterious of all human activities.” —Bill Reid**

Inuit Art has enjoyed a global presence for over fifty years. While curators, dealers, and government funding agencies struggle with the definitions and parameters of these exciting visual forms, those of us who encounter works by Inuit artists are immediately touched by their honesty, intimacy, and communicative power. The art of any cultural group is a window of opportunity for insight and understanding. What better way to experience Canada’s last frontier, and its most exotic landscape, than through the artistic outpourings of its people?

The art of Inuit, Canada’s Arctic people, has a history of some 4,000 years. Its means of expression took the form of highly decorated material culture. Whether these objects were used for hunting or personal adornment, their significance is unquestionable. The aesthetic appeal beyond western understanding underlies the amazing collections to be found in the world’s great museums and galleries. For Inuit, this rich artistic outpouring created a spiritual bond, a means of communicating with the world around them and the spiritual forces that controlled that world. For a non-literate people, art was a means by which they translated *isumasi* (“our thoughts”). That they have a rich oral history which complements this tradition has only come to light within the last century.

Today’s Inuit artists continue the role of communicator. This voice honours the land and its people, initiating a dialogue with those who encounter the works of art. To confront a stone carving of a polar bear dancing to its own music or a mother nursing her newborn is to experience a glimpse of the Arctic rich with both the familiar and the exotic. Realizing the distance the artist must travel just to quarry the stone—and the dangers inherent in this exercise—raises the level of motivation beyond the challenges of artists elsewhere. The raw materials of stone, bone and antler emerge from the Arctic landscape. When we hold a handmade carving we are in touch with this landscape.

Paper for limited edition prints and drawings and textiles used for weaving and wall hangings are newer materials for these artists. Both these mediums afford a narrative means of sharing information. Prints that illustrate life in the communities, often contrasting then and now, bring us closer to their way of life. Sprinkled with humour and imagination, prints have become highly sought by collectors. The excellence with which they are produced is a tribute both to the many artistic advisors who come north to share their expertise and the talent of the artist to capture the idea on paper, translate it in the print medium and produce the print. Weavings and wall hangings expand the traditional sewing skills of women and are a richly decorative and highly personalized art form.

As Inuit artist gains recognition, a more personal vision may inform his or her work. We often see signature pieces that characterize the work of a particular artist.

Personal thoughts and ideas are translated into stone or on paper, or an artist may choose to work in a new medium such as film, video or precious metals. At times we are challenged by notions of what is traditional, what is art? These questions are not limited to art made by Inuit or anyone else. Suffice to say that as we encounter the art of Inuit we experience what Reid calls a kind of magic, a gift of seeing and knowing another.