

THE CANADIAN ARCTIC : A VAST INHOSPITABLE LAND



VEGETATION

There are no trees in the Arctic, because it is too cold. In the coldest regions, there is no vegetation at all, but in other parts, small plants grow and form tundra, which arctic animals can eat.

TEMPERATURES

Average winter temperatures in the Arctic can be as low as -37° Celcius, and the coldest recorded temperature is approximately -68°C !

WILDLIFE IN THE ARCTIC

Herbivores that feed on the tundra include the Arctic hare, muskox and caribou. Carnivores that feed on them are the Arctic fox, wolves and wolverine. The polar bear is also a predator, but it prefers to hunt for marine life from the ice. There are also many birds and marine species like seals.



A herd of muskoxen. Their wool is highly-priced.



POPULATION

The extreme climate explains why this vast land has only about 100,000 inhabitants, with 60,000 Inuits. However, recently the population has boomed in some areas. The city of Yellowknife, for example, has become the "diamond capital" of North America, and as diamond, gas and oil activities continue to grow, so does the city.

THE INUITS

The Inuit people do not like to be called "Eskimos", which means "eaters of raw meat". Inuits have lived in the Canadian North for over 4000 years. They are one the three Aboriginal peoples or "Native peoples" in Canada, as defined by the Canadian Constitution. The other two Aboriginal peoples are First Nations and Métis people. Traditionally hunters and fishermen, they were nomads and they hunted whales, walrus, caribou, seals, polar bears, birds and any other Arctic animals. Sea animals were hunted from single-passenger boats called "qajaq", the origin of "kayak". And of course, they lived in igloos.

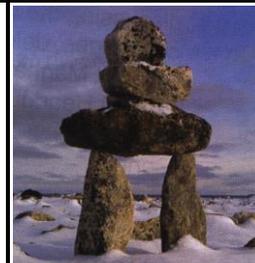


A hunter coming out of his igloo.

Today, the Inuits live in permanent stone or wooden houses, but they have preserved some of their culture. "Inuktitut" is still spoken in all Inuit communities and schools. It is also the principal language used in radio and television productions originating in the North. Many Inuit communities continue to practise traditional Inuit dance, song and oral storytelling. Inuit art is also admired all around the world.



A modern Inuit house.



This Inuit statue was one of the emblems for 2010 Olympic Games in Vancouver.



Kenojuak Ashevak, Enchanted Owl (green tail), 1960.

Photograph: The Museum of Inuit Art.