

Beaufort Delta Region

*Aklavik – Fort McPherson – Inuvik – Paulatuk – Sachs Harbour
Tsiigehtchic – Tuktoyaktuk – Ulukhaktok*

The most northern region in the Northwest Territories, the Beaufort Delta Region lies below the Arctic Ocean, with a western border with Yukon and an eastern border with Nunavut. It includes the Inuvialuit Settlement Region and part of the Gwich'in Settlement Area, and includes a total population of roughly 7,500 residents.

Of the eight communities in the region, Inuvik is the largest and provides most of the commercial and administrative services. The Dempster Highway provides access to communities south of Inuvik, though winter roads connect Aklavik and Tuktoyaktuk to Inuvik. This highway also provides a link with Yukon, and is a draw for tourists travelling the Alaska Highway.

A key economic industry in the Beaufort Delta region is tourism, though resource development is a growing sector as well. Many in the area engage in traditional activities like hunting, trapping, and fishing, and the trade of furs and traditional crafts is very popular.





Inspired by photo submitted by Yannick Gagnon

Aklavik / Akłarvik

barrenground grizzly place

The Hamlet of Aklavik rests on the western flank of the Mackenzie Delta, near the Richardson Mountains. This multicultural community is the traditional meeting place of Inuvialuit and Gwich'in people searching for food and furs. By around 1910, small trading posts had been established, with the Hudson's Bay Company establishing a post at the Inuvialuit camp of Pokiak. This trade eventually caused expansion across the river, becoming the permanent settlement of Aklavik in 1918. Trapping and trading were the main activities of the community, which soon expanded to include an Anglican mission in 1919, a regional RCMP headquarters in 1922, and contract air mail service beginning in 1929.

By 1952, the population of Aklavik had grown steadily to 1,556 with the expansion of a mission hospital and residential schools, as well as the addition of regional government administration offices. However, flooding and erosion problems prompted the federal government to relocate the community 58 kilometres west, to a new town called Inuvik. This move was only partially successful, though, as many residents wanted to stay in Aklavik. This is where the community motto, "Never Say Die", originated.



The Mad Trapper of Rat River

In 1931-32, Aklavik was the staging site for the hunt for the Mad Trapper of Rat River, the most famous manhunt ever in the Canadian North. A man known locally as Albert Johnson had allegedly been interfering with trap lines in the area, prompting RCMP officers to attempt to interview him about his involvement. After repeatedly refusing to talk to the police, RCMP officers blew up his cabin with dynamite and a gunfight ensued. Police were forced to retreat due to a blizzard, and later set off in pursuit of Johnson for over a month before finally catching up with him on February 17, 1932. Another gunfight finished with the death of Albert Johnson, aka the "Mad Trapper". One RCMP officer was killed in the course of the pursuit, and the true identity of the Mad Trapper remains unknown.



Inspired by photo submitted by Charles Furlong

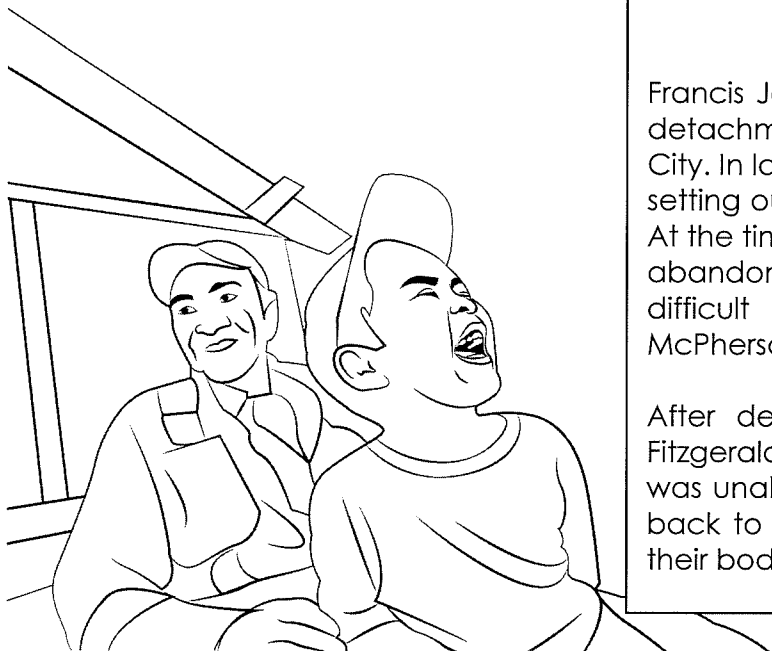
Fort McPherson / Teet'it Zheh *at the head of the waters place*

On a hill above the Peel River sits Fort McPherson, on the eastern edge of Gwitch'in Territory. It was the site of a Hudson's Bay Company trading post established in 1840, and in 1848 it was named for Murdoch McPherson, chief trader for the company. However, many Gwich'in were living in and using the area for hundreds of years; Sir John Franklin wrote of the people and furs in this area during his second expedition between 1825 and 1828.

In 1852, a Dene village was moved to the Fort McPherson site from the bank of the Peel River, both because of frequent flooding and because of the exceptional view from the new site. Having this vantage point meant that people in the community could keep watch for approaching Inuit, as local people were engaged with feuds with nearby Inuit from 1849-1859. A Roman Catholic mission was established in 1860, followed by an Anglican mission, a school, and an RCMP post in 1903.

In 1925, Gwich'in people started building cabins at the Fort McPherson site as temporary shelters for special occasions, and eventually these became permanent settlements. After the construction of the Dempster Highway was completed in 1978, year-round access was afforded to the community. However, twice yearly this access is closed between seasons when neither the Peel River Ferry nor the ice road are viable.

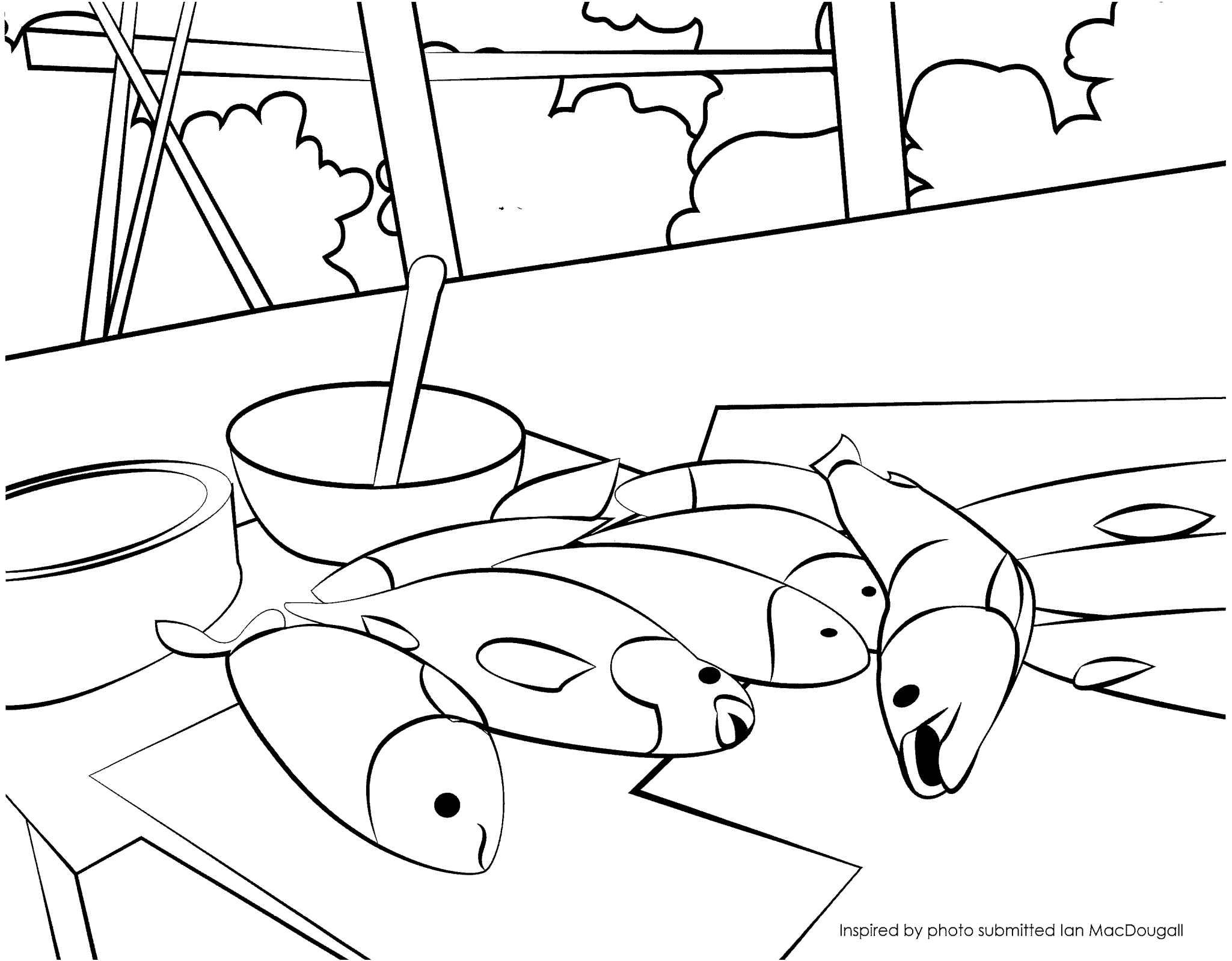
The people of Fort McPherson are well-known to be very hospitable, always welcoming guests and tourists. Fort McPherson residents are also historically very active in politics, and participate in a diverse range of regional economic activities.



The Lost Patrol

Francis Joseph Fitzgerald was the first commander of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police detachment at Herschel Island, regularly leading patrols from Fort McPherson to Dawson City. In late 1910, Fitzgerald led a patrol to Dawson City for the coronation of King George V, setting out to travel the 750 kilometres with a reduced load of supplies to make better time. At the time, Fort McPherson was a link between the Northwest Territories and Yukon after the abandonment of the Upper Liard-Frances Lake-Pelly route. The RCMP patrolled a notoriously difficult route through the Mackenzie Mountains from Dawson City, Yukon, to Fort McPherson.

After departing on December 21 from Fort McPherson with three other constables, Fitzgerald faced poor conditions; heavy snow and temperatures as low as -62° . The patrol was unable to find the route across the Richardson Mountains, and reluctantly had to turn back to Fort McPherson. Unfortunately, the weakened group would never make it back; their bodies were found in March of 1911. All four men were buried in Fort McPherson.



Inspired by photo submitted Ian MacDougall

Inuvik / Inuuvik

place of man

Located on the Mackenzie River, the Town of Inuvik is the administrative centre for the Beaufort Delta region. It is the traditional land of Inuvialuit, Gwich'in, and Métis people, but is now home to a multitude of cultural backgrounds.

While the current Inuvik site was within a traditional hunting and fishing area, the community was only really established in 1954. Erosion and flooding in the community of Aklavik prompted the Federal Government to relocate the community 50 kilometers northeast to its current site. While not everyone residing in Aklavik chose to move, the government administration did and it enlarged the school, hospital, airport, and other facilities at the new location of "New Aklavik". From 1955 to 1961, construction of Inuvik took place, and in 1958 the community was renamed "Inuvik".

Inuvik became one of four towns in the Northwest Territories in 1979; that same year, the Dempster Highway was completed and connected Inuvik with Canada's highway system. It is currently the most northerly town that can be reached by highway during summer months; during winter, an ice road connecting to Tuktoyaktuk makes driving a little further north possible.

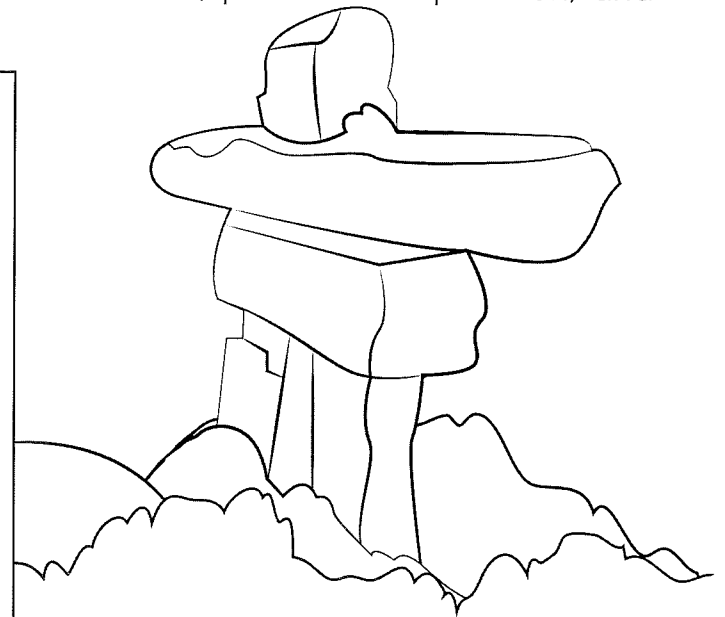
One of the most famous landmarks in Inuvik is the "Igloo Church", Our Lady of Victory. It is the most commonly photographed building in Inuvik, and took two years to build with no official blueprints.

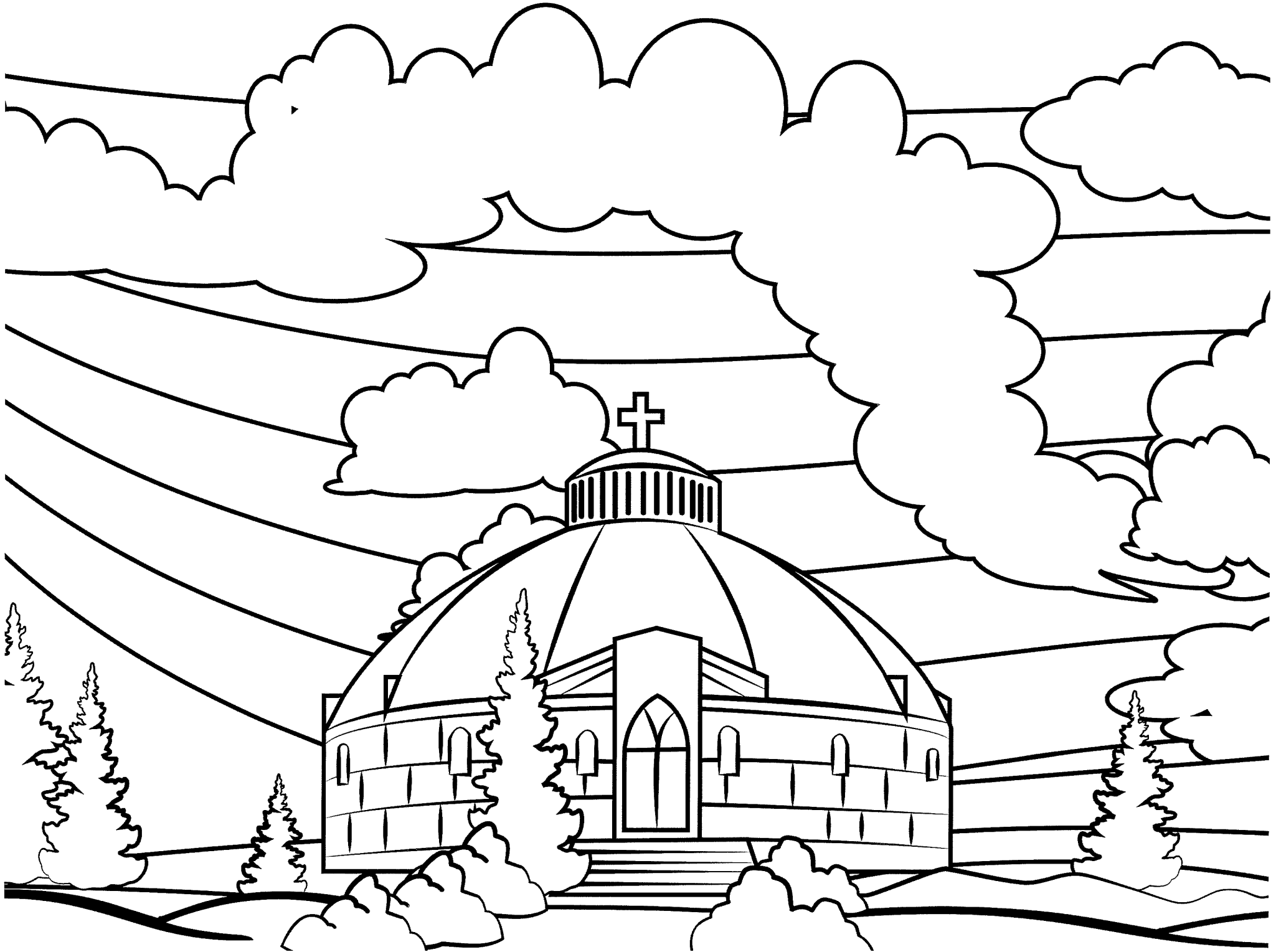
Many residents of Inuvik engage in traditional activities like hunting and trapping, but the majority of residents are employed in the government sector or in the private sector, particularly with construction, petroleum exploration, and tourism companies.

Annual Inuvik Reindeer Crossing

Each year, thousands of reindeer cross the frozen Mackenzie River between Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk. Guided by snowmobiles, this phenomenal crossing frequently attracts crowds of hundreds to bear witness. The reindeer are on their way from their wintering grounds near Jimmy Lake to calving grounds on Richards Island, near Tuktoyaktuk.

The crossing dates back to 1935, when a herd of reindeer were brought to the Mackenzie Delta from Russia. The Government of Canada decided to introduce reindeer to the region because of a shortage of caribou, which was a traditional staple of the area for food and furs.





Paulatuk / Paulatuq

place of coal

Paulatuk is a hamlet on the Arctic coast in the Inuvik region of the Northwest Territories, and has been inhabited by humans since roughly 1,000 AD. "Paulatuk" means "soot of coal" in Inuktitut, as coal is found in the area. In 2015, Paulatuk celebrated its 50 year anniversary of the establishment of a settlement; it became incorporated as a hamlet in 1987.

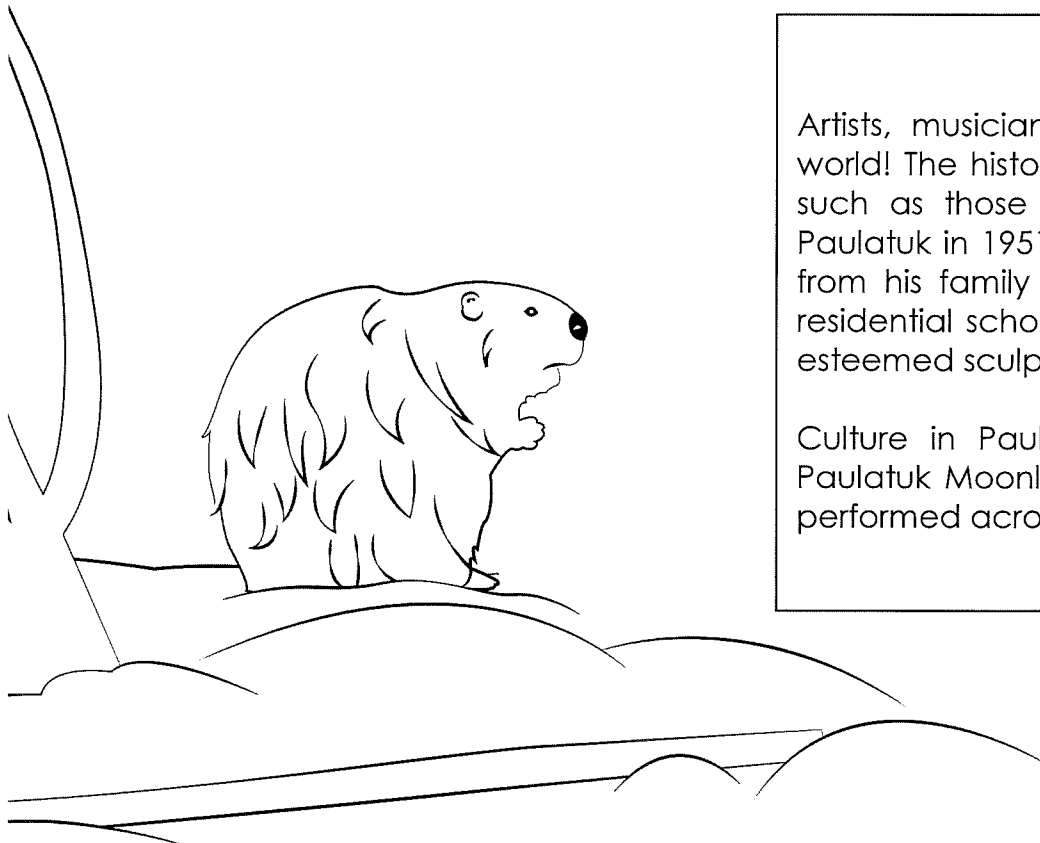
The community, which engages in a wide range of traditional activities like hunting and fishing, also has a number of interesting historic and scientific landmarks. In the 1950s, a Distant Early Warning (DEW) Line site was constructed near the community. These radar stations were built during the Cold War to provide warning of a land or sea invasion, as the shortest distance for an air attack on the United States from Russia is through the Arctic. There were three radar lines in Canada and Alaska, with the northernmost DEW operational from 1957-1985.

Roughly 100 kilometres from Paulatuk are the Smoking Hills, a scientifically interesting landmark as they contain hydrocarbons that have been burning continuously for centuries. Over time, shallow ponds in the tundra at these hills have become acidified, and are noted to have elevated concentrations of metals.

Paulatuk – A Hub for the Arts

Artists, musicians, and dancers from Paulatuk are known around the world! The history and culture of the region comes to life in these works, such as those of Abraham Anghik Ruben. Abraham was born near Paulatuk in 1951, and is known for his sculpture depicting the separation from his family that he and his brothers experienced under Canada's residential school system. His brother, David Ruben Piqtoukun, is another esteemed sculptor and print artist.

Culture in Paulatuk is also strongly represented through dance; the Paulatuk Moonlight Dancers are traditional Inuvialuit dancers who have performed across Canada and around the world.





Inspired by photo submitted by Toutuk Lester

Tsiigehtchic / Tsiigehtshik

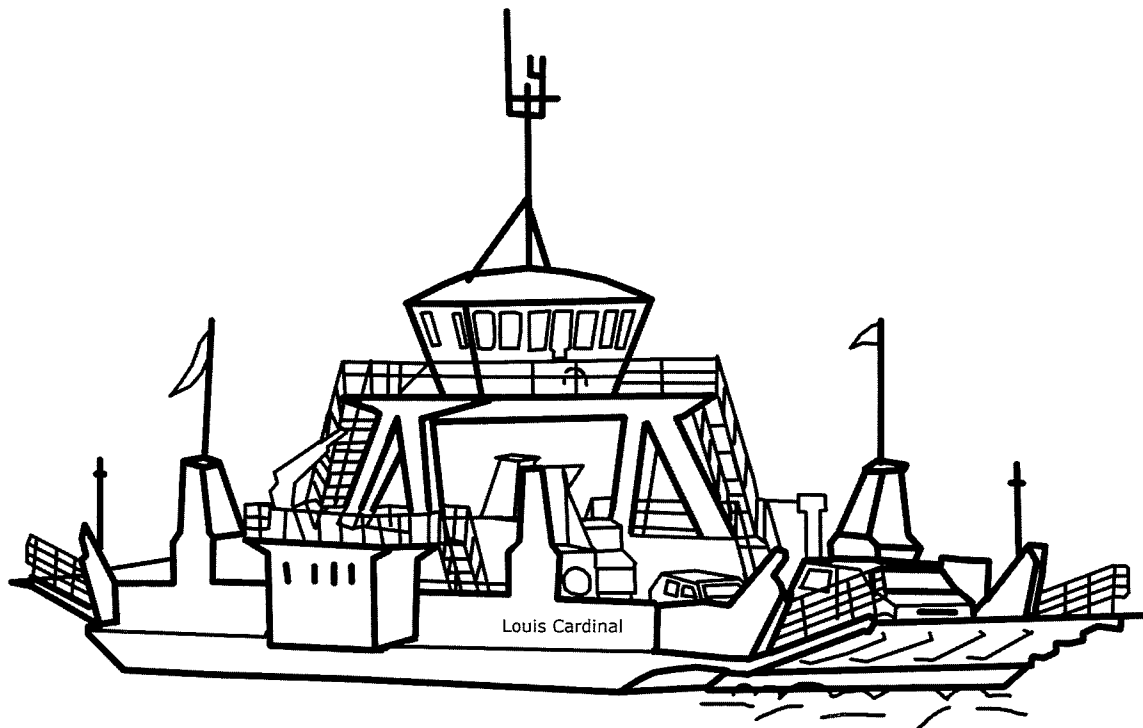
mou~~th~~ of the iron river

The Charter Community of Tsiigehtchic lies where the Mackenzie River meets the Arctic Red River. The Dempster Highway crosses the Mackenzie river at Tsiigehtchic, either by ice bridge in the winter or by the ferry MV Louis Cardinal in the summer.

A Roman Catholic mission was established at the Tsiigehtchic site, formerly known as Arctic Red River, in 1868 and was followed by a Hudson's Bay Company trading post in the early 1870s. Although it was not permanently occupied on a relatively large scale until the 1960s, it is thought that Gwichya Gwich'in, Slavey Dene, and Inuvialuit people used, gathered, and traded on these lands for hundreds of years before.

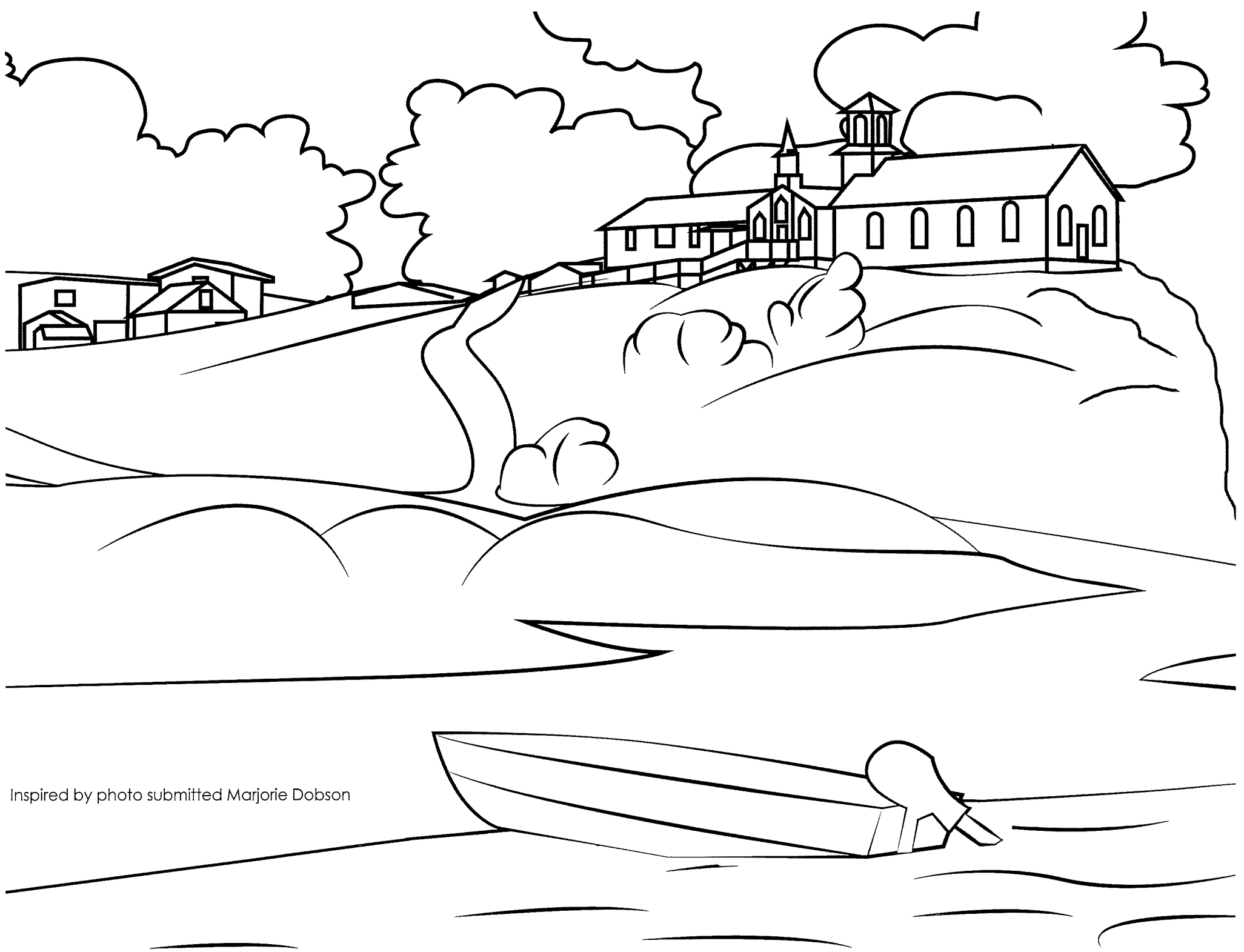
The Tsiigehtchic site was likely the spring fishing grounds for the Gwichya Gwich'in, who returned here after spending the winter living and hunting closer to the Yukon border. Traditional ways of life persisted once the community emerged, though, and the school was noted to have poor attendance as children accompanied their parents on the trapline.

Because of the access provided by the Dempster highway, Tsiigehtchic has become a more popular destination for tourists travelling the route. The community is working to capture this industry in a way that showcases their history, culture, and traditions.



Tsiigehtchic - Steppe Bison Territory

In September of 2007, an important discovery was made in Tsiigehtchic: the remains of a steppe bison. Steppe bison, which were much larger relatives of the bison we know today, became extinct 10,000 years ago. This was the first undisturbed steppe bison discovered in the territory, and is one of the most interesting discoveries because of how well the permafrost preserved parts of the animal.



Inspired by photo submitted Marjorie Dobson

Tuktoyaktuk / Tuktuujaqrtuuq *looks like a caribou*

Once known as Port Brabant, Tuktoyaktuk is a hamlet in the Beaufort Delta region of Canada's Western Arctic. The name comes from the Inuvialuit "resembles a caribou", and in 1950 Tuktoyaktuk was the first place in Canada to revert to the traditional aboriginal name. According to legend, a woman witnessed caribou become petrified as they waded into water, and now reefs resembling these petrified caribou can be seen during low tide! The community also features massive ice-covered hills called "pingos", which dot the landscape and form the Pingo Canadian Landmark five kilometres outside of Tuk.

Traditional activities in Tuk include beluga whale hunting and the centuries-old caribou hunt. The popular whale hunting location was devastated from 1890 and 1910, when a number of local families were killed by influenza outbreaks brought by American whalers. A Hudson's Bay Company store was established in 1937, with Anglican and Roman Catholic missions soon to follow. More families began to move to the community and settle, and by 1950 an RCMP post had been built.

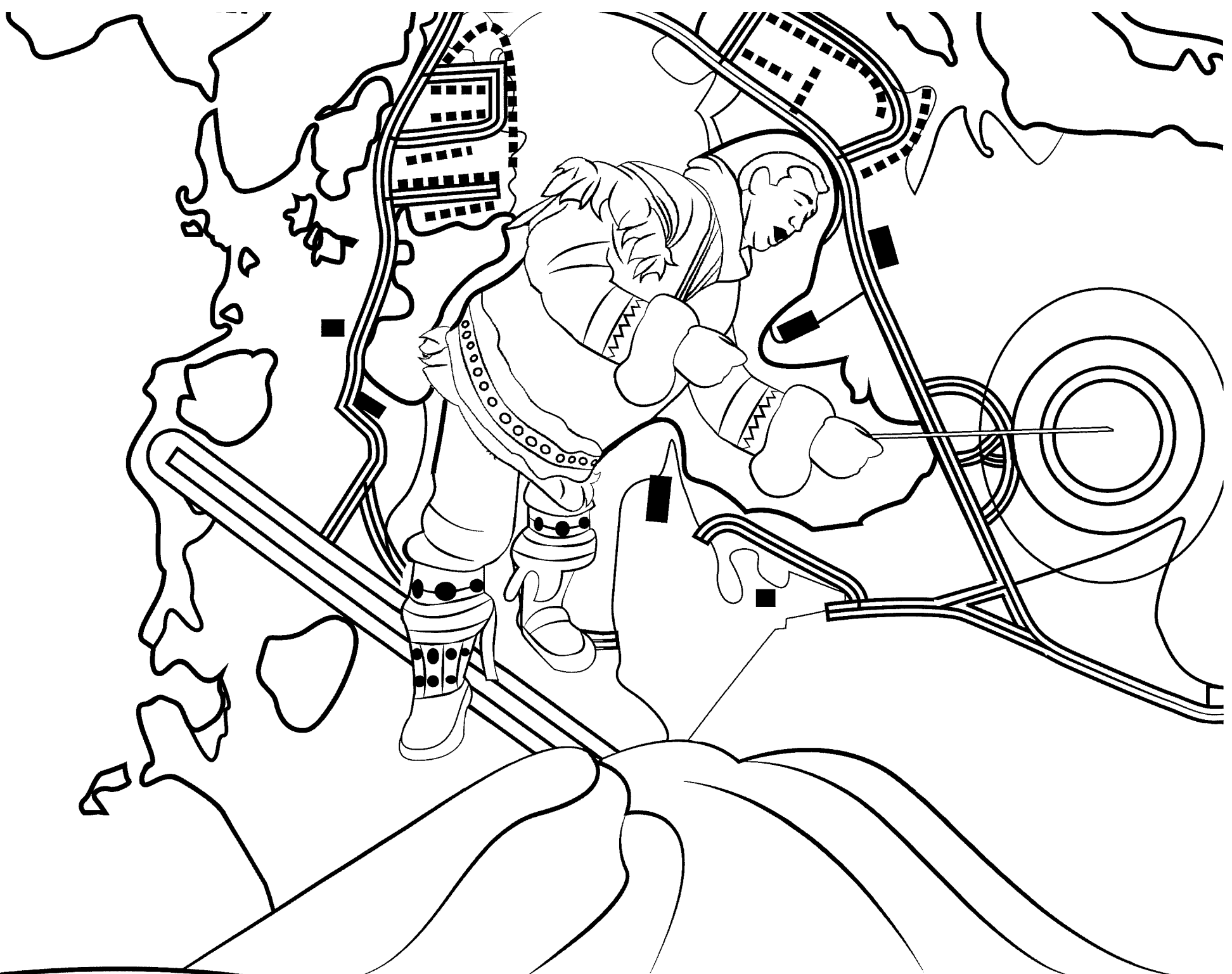
Like Paulatuk, Tuktoyaktuk is home to a Distant Early Warning (DEW) Line radar station, important for national defense measures and American military efforts during the Cold War. Built in 1955, this undertaking created a number of wage-based jobs for local community members, and this was followed by more diverse economic opportunities as transportation and government industries grew. Tuk has since become a base for Beaufort Sea exploration by the oil and natural gas industry, and tourism continues to contribute to the local economy. This will undoubtedly grow as the Tuk-to-Inuvik highway nears completion!

The History of Drum Dancing in Tuktoyaktuk

Submitted by Katrina Elizabeth Cockney

Looking at an aerial map of Tuktoyaktuk, you can see the silhouette of a person dancing holding a drum. From early times, the Inuvialuit have used songs and chants to recount legends, stories, and traditions. Accompanied by the rhythmic beat of drums, dancers reenacted the great feats and accomplishments of kinsmen. In this way, Inuvialuit history was handed down through the generations. At feasts and celebrations, the blend of the drum beat and the rhythmical rise and fall of voices, punctuated with shouts of "auu yah iah!", quickly drew men and women to the dance floor.

Not long ago, drum dancing appeared to be dying out. After decades of contact with foreigners, many Inuvialuit had forgotten how important drum dancing was. However, a few elders did not forget. Together with groups of determined young people, they began to work on its revival. Today, the tradition continues. Drum dancing has experienced a resurgence and is flourishing in the communities of Aklavik, Inuvik, Paulatuk, Tuktoyaktuk and Ulukhaktok (Holman).



Sachs Harbour / Ikaahuk

place to which you cross

The Hamlet of Sachs Harbour was established in 1953 on Banks Island, and while this island was recorded as sighted in 1820, there is evidence that Inuit had lived there centuries prior. The name Sachs Harbour came from the Canadian Arctic Expedition ship *Mary Sachs*, and is the only permanent settlement on the island.

In 1929, three Delta Inuit families sailed to Sachs Harbour, drawn by the fine trapping in the area. An RCMP post was established in 1953, and the Department of Transport followed a year later. Eventually, more came to settle in the area and continue traditional activities like big game hunting, especially of muskox and polar bear. In fact, the largest commercial muskox harvest in the country takes place in Sachs Harbour, and Banks Island is home to the biggest goose colony in North America.

Aside from the goose colony and the bountiful muskoxen, Sachs Harbour has another animal claim to fame; the world's first documented wild-born grizzly-polar bear hybrid! Known by names like the pizzly bear, the prizzly bear, or the grolar bear, the first discovery of such a bear in the wild was in Sachs Harbour in 2006 when an American hunter found and shot the bear.

Discovery of the Northwest Passage on Banks Island

The Northwest Passage connects the Pacific Ocean to the Atlantic Ocean through the Arctic Ocean, following the coastline along North America. It was highly desired as a trade route, and in 1850 Robert McClure discovered what is now known as the "Canadian Northwest Passage". McClure's expedition with a crew on the HMS Investigator was searching for Sir John Franklin and his men, who had become ice-locked in 1846 halfway through the passage.

After approaching by sea from the west, McClure was able to view landmarks he recognized from an earlier voyage approaching from the east from a viewpoint atop a large hill on Banks Island. This was the fabled Northwest Passage, a goal for seafaring explorers for centuries as they sought a faster way from Europe to Asia.





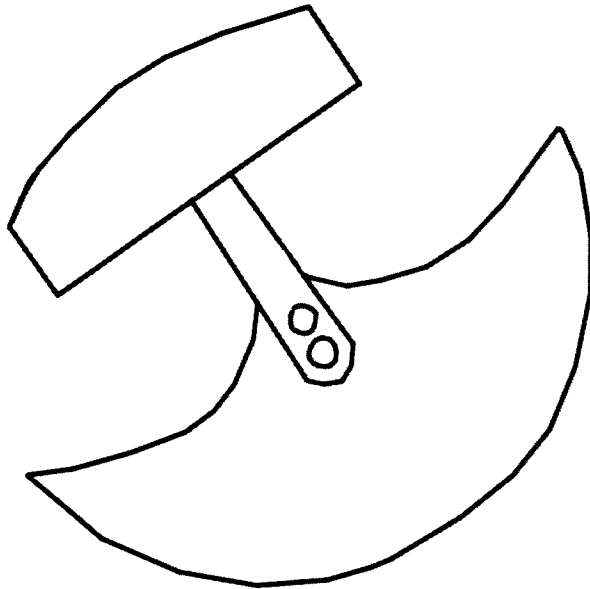
Ulukhaktok / Ulukhaqtuuq

where there is materials for ulus

The Hamlet of Ulukhaktok, formerly Holman, is located on raised gravel beaches on Victoria Island, in the Beaufort Delta Region of the Northwest Territories. For many years, whalers and explorers periodically passed through the area, but it wasn't until 1923 that a Hudson's Bay Company trading post was established 29 kilometres east of present-day Ulukhaktok. This post was moved several times, and in 1939 finally settled at the current site. A Roman Catholic mission was set up in this same year, and families began to settle around the post and the mission.

Hunting, trapping, and fishing are common activities, and are also factors in the regional economy. In recent years, mineral exploration has occurred in the area as companies vie for access. However, companies soon realized that local residents are passionate about their use of the land for traditional purposes and for their way of life, and have to work closely with local peoples if they hope to undertake any resource development.

There are a number of interesting elements of life in Ulukhaktok; it boasts the world's most northern golf course, which hosts the annual Billy Joss Open Celebrity Golf Tournament. This 4-day event allows golfers to play the 9-hole course all hours of the day, as the daylight hours are long and bright. Golfers use specially-woven mats to tee off of the tundra, and can sometimes have their shots interrupted by a muskox or two on the course!



Ulus – A Critical Tool for Arctic Life

The ulu, which translates as “woman’s knife” is a tool with diverse uses; cleaning and skinning animals, general cutting, preparing food, or building igloos. These are traditionally made with antlers, horn, bone, or ivory of local animals for the handle, and slate for the cutting surface. In Ulukhaktok, the blade is traditionally made of copper because of copper resources in the area.

While there are a number of different styles, use of the ulu is common throughout a number of Arctic regions, and date back to as early as 2500 BCE. Traditionally, ulus are inherited as elders pass them to younger family members. They are said to contain the knowledge of generations past.

