

Herschel Island: Qikiqtaruk

A Guide to the Historic Resources



Paleontology/Geology

The approximately 116-square-kilometre island was formed from sediments that were pushed up by a lobe of the Laurentide glacier approximately 20,000 years ago. The glacial moraine ridge that eventually became Herschel Island was connected to the mainland until post-glacial sea levels rose to flood the Beaufort Sea shelf. Herschel Island-Qikiqtaruk was probably severed from the mainland within the last 1,600 years and Workboat Passage, between the island and the mainland, is only two metres deep in places.

Ice Age fossil bones, teeth and antlers have been found, mainly in beach debris at Pauline Cove. They span a range of dates from greater than 50,000 years to 16,000 years old. These fossils indicate the

presence of ancient caribou and muskox and the now-extinct woolly mammoth, American mastodon, Ice Age horse, and steppe-bison.

Euro-American Contact

The earliest archaeological evidence of human occupation of the island is from Thule people living there approximately 1000 years ago. The Thule (pronounced “too-lee”) were the ancestors of present day Inuvialuit.

Their arrival coincided with a period of climatic warming, an increase in the bowhead whale population and conditions that allowed whaling by kayak and umiak, a large open boat.

This island was given its English name by Sir John Franklin who had set out from England in 1825 to map part of the arctic coastline. He sighted the island in mid-July 1826 and named it in honour of his friend Sir John Herschel and his family of well-known English scientists

and astronomers. There were three Inuvialuit settlements on Herschel Island at that time with the largest located at Pauline Cove. Population estimates for the island and the nearby coast range from as few as 200 to as many as 2000 people.

The Inuvialuit that



R.C.M.P. – G.R.C. / "HERSCHEL ISLAND - 1909" (5)

Inuvialuit hunter in a sealskin kayak - circa 1909.

Franklin met had Russian trade goods they would have received from the Inupiat of Alaska or the Northern Athapaskan Gwich'in from the Porcupine River region.

The Commercial Whaling Period

Whaling in the 19th century was driven by the market for oil and baleen. A bowhead whale has 500 flat flexible plates of protein keratin known as baleen that the whales use like a sieve to filter small fish and plankton from a mouthful of sea water. The baleen had flexibility and strength and was used to make buggy whips, parasol ribs and corset stays.

A relentless pursuit of

depleted whale stocks brought the whalers into the Beaufort Sea in the late 1800s. Starting in 1890, the whalers over-wintered at Herschel Island where there was a good harbour for the large whaling ships and a Euro-American “settlement” was established at Pauline Cove.

The whalers brought Siberians and Inupiaq from

the Alaskan North Slope to hunt for them and make them warm clothing. The Inuvialuit and Gwich'in from the Peel River and Mackenzie delta regions supplied them with fresh caribou meat in exchange for manufactured goods. Unfortunately, the whalers also brought alcohol and disease into the region and many Inuvialuit were severely affected by both.

Most of the whalers lived on their ships, insulating them from the winter cold with blocks of snow and heating them by burning imported coal and driftwood found along the shore. The Inuvialuit lived in traditionally constructed sod houses on the land. When the community was established, the first frame buildings began to appear at Pauline Cove. At the height of the Beaufort Sea



American whalers crowded around the Community House celebrating the 4th of July, 1896.

whaling period in 1893-1894, the Herschel Island seasonal residents numbered around 1500, making it the largest Yukon community at that time.

Missionaries arrived on Herschel Island in the mid-1890s and the North-West Mounted Police established a post in 1903. The whalebone market collapsed in 1908 and the whaling era came to an end but fur trading remained active until the 1930s. The police detachment went from a sub-district headquarters, to a minor post and then permanently closed in 1964.

The Kowana family continues to live and practice a subsistence lifestyle within the settlement area during the summer months. Inuvialuit still use the island seasonally for traditional pursuits such as fishing, hunting and as a place to camp when travelling.

The Creation of Herschel Island Territorial Park

The Inuvialuit land claims process began in 1978 and the Inuvialuit Final Agreement (IFA) was signed in 1984. Herschel Island was designated a Territorial Park by the Government of Yukon in 1987, in accordance with the IFA.

The Government of Yukon and Inuvialuit share responsibility for planning, managing and protecting

the natural and heritage resources of the park. Park management and preservation plans were developed by a balanced committee of Inuvialuit and Yukon Government representatives. The Yukon's Cultural Services Branch has undertaken stabilization of the buildings according to the mandate of the IFA. The principal objective is to preserve the built cultural resources in their present form.

Research projects have included archaeological and other scientific investigations and the historic period of Herschel Island-Qikiqtaruk is well documented in historical records and photos. A 1990-1992 oral history project with Inuvialuit elders greatly enhanced our knowledge of the island and the life of its peoples and has provided a broad perspective of Herschel Island history.



UNIVERSITY OF ALASKA ARCHIVES, CHARLES BUNNELL COLLECTION

Settlement area with S.S. Patterson (N.W.&T. Co.) anchored in Pauline Cove - circa 1930.

Archaeological Sites

The remains of prehistoric and historic sod houses are among the most visible traces of past occupations. Large scale archaeological excavations have been carried out on Avadlek Spit, around the settlement at Pauline Cove and at the Washout site just to the east of the settlement. Avadlek Spit is a narrow five-kilometre spike of land that stretches south almost to the mainland. The Thule who lived here were no doubt attracted by the caribou and muskox that travel along the spit, the numbers of fish and beluga whales and large flocks of ducks that congregate on the sheltered water. The Thule who inhabited the Washout site and the Inuvialuit living at Pauline Cove were close to the open Beaufort Sea and the seals and whales they hunted.

Pauline Cove has long been a centre of occupation although the past century's activities have somewhat obscured the older archaeological record. The arctic environment has preserved the remains of 1000-year-old semi-subterranean sod house pits complete with split driftwood floors, cooking hearths, support posts, wall remnants, air trap entrances, sleeping benches and

small artifacts.

Most of the Pauline Cove sod houses are visible as horseshoe-shaped mounds of earth, often covered with wildflowers. The evidence of caches, sod mines and kitchen middens of domestic waste might be only a slight depression in the ground. Please be careful when exploring the settlement to avoid damaging the scientific and cultural value of these resources.

Many original artifacts and reproductions and some remains from the sailing ship *Triton*, still underwater at the east end of Pauline Cove, are on display in the Bonehouse. Visitors may also encounter artifacts left on the landscape or washed up on the beaches. Please leave them where they are and notify the Park Rangers of their location.



Archaeological excavations on Avadlek Spit in July 1991.

Northern Whaling & Trading Company Buildings

Three buildings were constructed in 1926 by Captain Christian Pedersen of the Northern Whaling & Trading Company.

The **Store** is a 6.2m x 16.8m one-storey frame building with a trussed gable roof. It was the first on the island to be wired for electricity and was connected to a generator on Pedersen's vessel, the 580-ton former United States Coast Survey ship *Patterson*. Three of the store's walls and the roof are clad in galvanized sheet metal and the third wall is covered with tongue and groove beadboard. A shed-roofed addition was built along the full length of the west wall shortly after the building was completed but was demolished in 2001 after being damaged by sea ice and driftwood. Due to the building's location directly adjacent to Pauline Cove it has been affected by the

retreat or erosion of the shoreline and it, the shed and the Canada Customs Warehouse have had to be moved further inland. This occurred between 2003 and 2008. All three buildings were originally built on top of mud sills with minimal blocking below them but now sit on cribbing to provide access for future maintenance. The store is currently used to store park equipment and gear for on-going research projects. The graffiti on the back of the door dates from the 1940s and was written by a crew member of the police ship *St. Roch*.



Northern Whaling and Trading Company Store.

The **Shed** is a 4.7m x 5.4m frame building with a slightly arched roof that was originally part of a cabin from a whaling ship. There is a 4.7m x 2.4m shed-roofed addition on the south end of the building. The walls and roof are covered in galvanized sheet metal on the exterior while the framing is exposed on the interior.

The **Canada Customs Warehouse** is a 7.6m x 12.2m one-storey frame building with a gable roof. Two lines of posts in the interior help support the roof framing and have created an aisled floor plan. The exterior walls are clad in galvanized sheet metal. The wood framing and sheathing of the walls and roof were extensively charred by a 1973 fire which destroyed the Newport House, formerly adjacent to the warehouse. The building was constructed as a bonded warehouse to avoid paying duty on goods not traded in Canada. The warehouse is currently used to store park equipment.

Pacific Steam Whaling Company/Royal Canadian Mounted Police Buildings

The first Pacific Steam Whaling Company warehouse, the Pioneer House, was built on Avadlek Spit in August, 1890. After construction, the whalers went out to hunt whales and, on September 18th, were unexpectedly frozen in at Pauline Cove, twenty miles away. They were forced to relocate their supplies to Pauline Cove and reconstruct their warehouse. This southern style frame building, the first constructed on the island, is no longer standing.

In 1893, the Pacific Steam Whaling Company constructed a building called the **Community House** at Pauline Cove. This 9.3m x 17.7 one-storey frame building with a gable roof was prefabricated in San Francisco and shipped in labeled pieces to Herschel Island with the whaling fleet. The interior and exterior

wall surfaces were clad with redwood. Doors throughout the building were also constructed out of redwood. Outfitted with a recreation room, storage facilities and an office and living accommodations for the manager and storekeeper, the Community House became important for the social activities it housed.

After 1896, the Company offered the Community House to Reverend Stringer as a residence and a place to teach school and hold church services. The Anglican Church used it until 1906. In 1911, the police purchased all of the Pacific Steam Whaling Company assets for \$1500.00.

From 1910 to 1931, Herschel Island was sub-district headquarters for the Mounted Police in the western Arctic. Command was transferred to Aklavik in 1931 and Herschel Island was patrolled intermittently until 1948 when the detachment was reopened on a seasonal basis. The Community House was used as detachment headquarters with housing for the lower ranks, office

and jail until the post closed in 1964. Since then it has been used by various scientific research teams as well as government staff working on the island.

The building has undergone numerous alterations. Porches have been added, the exterior walls were over clad and the roof reshingled. The interior was renovated for use as a park office and visitor centre; larger spaces were partitioned, electrical lights installed and walls were repaired and repainted.

The **Bonehouse**, built in the mid-1890s, is a 12.4m x 10.4m heavily framed building with a gable roof. There are two separately framed additions, approximately 2m wide, along the length of the east and west sides. The exterior walls were originally clad with cedar shingles over canvas over board sheathing and there were cedar shingles over board sheathing on the roof. Since that time, the roof has been covered with corrugated sheet metal and a large Canadian flag painted on the west slope. The RCMP obtained their summer's supply of fresh water by

bringing ice from an interior lake and storing it in the tanks that still exist beside this building.

The original part of the building is presently being used as a display area while the additions are used for storage. The original part of the building is framed with 100mm x 100mm timbers while the additions are framed with a mixture of driftwood logs and sawn lumber with much of the lumber showing evidence of previous usage. The interior is unfinished, leaving the framing exposed.

The Bonehouse was used as a storehouse for baleen, also called “whalebone”. After 1906, this structure was used by the police for storage and at one point the west addition was used as dog kennels and the east addition housed an electrical plant.

The first court case held in the Arctic took place in this building in

1924. Court officials came from Edmonton for the trial and jury members were chosen in Fort McPherson, Arctic Red River and at Herschel Island. Two Inuvialuit men were found guilty of murder and were hung from a tie beam in the Bonehouse. This beam was removed by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in 1963.

The **Blubberhouse** was built in the mid to late-1890s. It is a small, 8.5m x 4.9m, frame structure with a gable roof. The exterior walls are clad with shingles over vertical boards and the roof is sheathed with horizontal boards and shingled. All framing is exposed on the interior. An addition covering the same area but with

a greater height once existed on the west end of the Blubberhouse. The Blubberhouse was likely used for industrial purposes as historic photographs show it with few windows and a number of louvered vents in the walls. The building is presently being used as a maintenance workshop and tool room by the Park Rangers.

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police constructed **Dog Kennels and a fenced dog run** using two shacks along the south edge of the settlement area. Records indicate that a Police dog breeding program was run here in the 1940s and 1950s. The supply of fresh seal meat for dog food and a number of vacant

buildings made Herschel Island a practical location for such a program. The large number of holes in this area were dug by the dogs. Visitors should watch their step.



R.C.M.P. Buildings, circa 1930. Left to right: Officers Quarters, Detachment Headquarters, Bonehouse.

St. Patrick's Anglican Mission

The first missionary, Isaac Stringer, arrived on Herschel Island in 1893. He stayed for three weeks and returned in 1894 to establish a mission. Over the years there were numerous attempts to construct a church on Herschel Island. Lumber was first ordered in 1896 but the wood never reached the island. For a time the Stringers and later the Whittakers used the Pacific Stream Whaling Company Community House to live in, teach school and hold services. After Reverend C. E. Whittaker left the island in 1906, there was no permanent Anglican presence on Herschel until 1916 when Bishop Stringer was finally successful in sending lumber and plans for a church. Work started first on a mission house but was stalled when the Hudson's Bay Company sold the mission house lumber to another buyer. When Reverend W. H. Fry

arrived that year, he suggested using the wood intended for the church to complete the mission house so he and his wife would have a place to spend the winter. The Mission House was hastily completed by Whittaker and a crew of workers from Fort McPherson.

The Mission House is a 6.1m x 9.1m, storey-and-a-half building with a gable roof. The structure was poorly insulated and hard to keep warm although entrances were enclosed with porches, storm windows

were installed and the building was banked with sod.

After 1919, the Anglican mission was relocated to Shingle Point on the Yukon North Slope. The Mission House was used to house itinerant missionaries such as Thomas Umaok. Reverend Umaok was the first Inuvialuit Anglican deacon, ordained by Bishop Stringer in a ceremony on Herschel Island in July 1927.

The building is in poor condition as it remained empty and received no maintenance for many years. The

interior was partially stripped of materials for use in other structures leaving it fairly unstable. Bracing has since been installed to ensure that it remains part of the landscape and capable of continuing its new use as home to a nesting colony of Black Guillemots.

The public is asked to keep away from the building in deference to the birds and any hazards the structure may present.



Anglican Mission House.

YG PHOTO.

The Royal Canadian Corps of Signals

In 1924, the Royal Canadian Corps of Signals sent a wireless radio set to Herschel Island as part of a plan to link the south with stations along the Arctic coast. The wireless set was on board the *Lady Kindersley* when the ship sank in August off Point Barrow, Alaska. In 1925, Aklavik was chosen as the new site for the main station and a small satellite station was finally installed at Herschel Island in 1930.

The Royal Canadian Corps of Signals Building is a prefabricated 6.5m x 7.1m structure with a hipped roof. Two Selkirk chimneys were prominently located

on the south slope of the roof. The exterior walls are clad with beveled cedar siding, and the roof with roll asphalt roofing. All remnants of the original antennae and radio equipment are gone. The interior was partitioned into five rooms, one of which was a narrow closet-like space

that provided warm storage for the batteries required to operate the radios.

The Royal Canadian Corps of Signals Building housed the transmitter and its operators from 1930 until 1938, and then it was a residence for special constables

with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police until the detachment closed. In 1954, the Mounted Police gained title to the building from its then owner Reverend Umaok.

Several alterations have been made to the building over the years. The porch has been enlarged and enclosed and the wall that divided the present northeast room was removed. The building has been rehabilitated for use by Park Rangers as living quarters.



Royal Canadian Corps of Signals transmitter station - 1990.

Other Buildings

Building 10 is a rectangular, 3.7m x 5.6m, frame structure with a gable roof. It was built circa 1894, probably by Captain James McKenna, with excess materials from the Community House including the windows, redwood siding and cedar shingle roofing. The building was clad on the exterior with redwood siding and the interior was sheathed and finished with paper to make the building more comfortable. The interior was divided into two small rooms with a loft area over the rear room.

The earliest known graffiti on Herschel Island, “R.E. Byrne May 7/94 Str Grampus”, was carved into the redwood siding and later covered by cedar shingles. Byrne was likely a whaler on the steamer *Grampus* owned by the Pacific Steam Whaling Company. This building is in good condition structurally

although most of the interior finishes have been removed or damaged. It is now used for storage.

Both Building 11 and Building 12 appear in an 1893 historic photograph but their construction dates are not known nor do we know their uses or who occupied these dwellings.



Building 12 as it appeared before stabilization.

Building 11 was originally 3.8m x 4.7m and consisted of a single room with a medium-pitched gable roof. The ceiling follows the slopes of the roof due to the low height of the walls. A frame addition, covered with canvas, was built on the south side of the building and then removed at an early date. The only above-ground evidence for this addition is a faint ghost image on the building’s south wall. A second addition was built along the east wall and later extended to its present size of 2.8m x 4.7m. This building has several structural problems due to the removal of wall framing during the construction of the additions and the low slope of the addition roofs. New framing has been added on the interior to stabilize the building. Seal skins were stretched against the north wall as evidenced by cuts in the exterior cladding.

Building 12 was initially 3.7m x 4.6m

but has been expanded by three additions. The exterior of this building is relatively decorative with board and batten siding, ornamental bargeboards and finials at the peaks of the gable walls. The battens are stop-chamfered, as are the frieze and skirt boards between the battens. The first addition was a 3.1m extension to the south end of the building and an attempt was made to continue the look of the board and batten siding on the original structure. The second addition was a 2.4m x 3.1m lean-to shed built along the east wall. The latest addition was also a lean-to shed, 1.1m x 3.6m, built south of the second addition along the east wall.

Graveyards

There are four historic graveyards located on Herschel Island plus some isolated graves scattered around the island.

The **Royal Northwest Mounted Police Graveyard** contains the graves of Sergeant Selig, who died in 1911, and Constable Lamont who died in 1918 during a severe typhoid epidemic which swept the island. Over the course of their involvement with Herschel Island the Mounted Police have been named North-West Mounted Police (1903-1904), renamed the Royal Northwest Mounted Police (1904-1919) and today are known as the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (since 1920). The Royal Canadian Mounted Police maintain

and care for these two graves. The original wooden grave markers and fences have been replaced by new fences and granite headstones.

There are two **Inuvialuit Graveyards**. Frost action and natural erosion have caused deterioration of the sites and some displacement of the graves. The larger graveyard contains approximately 100 graves dating from the mid-1890s to the 1920s. Two graves south of this graveyard were originally located on top of the bluff but slid downhill when the ground slumped. The smaller graveyard, containing about 10 graves, was used as recently as the 1950s.

Wooden grave markers and fences have been reduced in thickness through wind erosion. A seasonal stream running through the larger graveyard, has led to increasing natural



U. OF ALASKA ARCHIVES, CHARLES BUNNELL COLLECTION

The larger Inuvialuit Graveyard, circa 1930.

wood decomposition and erosion. The hillside above it is slumping and threatens to eventually cover the site. Efforts to restore the larger graveyard are thwarted by the relentless freeze-thaw action of the arctic ground. Any decisions or actions concerning the graves will be made by the Inuvialuit.

The **Whalers' Graveyard** contains twenty-four graves dating from 1890 to 1916 as well as a symbolic marker for the barque *Triton* which sank in Pauline Cove. Original markers from the whaler's graveyard were removed in 1985 and are now stored in the Yukon Government Archaeological Collections Facility in Whitehorse. Replica markers were installed in 1986.

Icehouses

The whalers followed the example of the Inuvialuit and constructed five icehouses in the frozen ground to store fresh meat and other food through the year. The whalers used dynamite to blow holes in the permafrost between two and two-and-a-half metres in depth. They used a short log wall at the entrance to support the ends of logs laid closely together to form a shed roof. A small vestibule was built to enclose the entrance and the entire structure was covered with sod to provide insulation for

the permanently frozen walls.

Four icehouses have collapsed into depressions in the ground although some structural components such as roof logs and entrance walls remain visible. Only one icehouse is in good condition and still in use. It is of slightly different construction from the others, with posts and beams supporting the roof. Public access is discouraged although visitors may look inside. Please ensure that the door is securely closed behind you when you leave.



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The Icehouses, circa 1930.

Former Buildings

There were three different eras of sod houses on Herschel Island-Qikiqtaruk; the prehistoric Mackenzie Inuvialuit house, a post contact version and finally a larger more Euro-American structure.

The original Mackenzie Inuvialuit sod houses were semi-subterranean and constructed of locally available driftwood logs and sod. The houses were cruciform in plan with a main room, averaging 3m x 3m, and smaller 2m x 2.5m alcoves along two sides and the rear. A fourth alcove, along the front formed part of a sunken air trap entry. The main room had four corner post logs with additional shorter posts used at the rear corners of the alcoves. The posts supported log beams that in turn supported logs used vertically to build up the walls and horizontally to create a roof for the main room. The logs

in the alcove roofs sloped down from the main roof. All of the exterior surfaces were covered with sod. These sod houses had sunken air-trap entrances, split-log floors, sleeping benches in three of the alcoves and cooking hearths in the central room.

The second era Inuvialuit sod houses appear to have been larger and may have lost the cruciform shape.

Driftwood was used to form the walls and ceiling and imported materials such as lumber from packing crates, canvas, window sashes and doors were incorporated into their construction.

Some of the whalers lived in sod houses as did Reverend and Mrs. Stringer in 1896 and the North-West Mounted Police in 1903. This third generation of sod house had distinctively modern influences. Driftwood was becoming increasingly scarce due to its use for heating fuel and more manufactured material was incorporated into the buildings although the use of sod remained the same. Wall framing using sawn lumber replaced most of the driftwood log construction. Logs were placed in a way similar to log cabin construction rather than the techniques used in traditional sod houses. Doors were at grade level and manufactured window



NEW BEDFORD WHALING MUSEUM, KEITH SMITH COLLECTION

Bird's eye view of Herschel Island, 1936.

sashes and doors were widely used.

All of the sod houses are gone, but the wind shelters constructed by the rangers for use as campsites, while not historic, are similar in construction to traditional sod houses.

Many buildings that no longer exist appear in historic photographs of Herschel Island. We have limited information about them but some, as described below, are indicated with capital letters on the map.

Christy Harding arrived at Herschel Island in 1915 to establish and manage a Hudson's Bay Company post. He constructed a number of wood-framed buildings including a warehouse (D), store (E), house (F), shop, dog house, storehouse, coal house, outhouse and wharf (unknown locations). By October 1915, the "Bay" was open for business.

The fur trade was especially bad in 1915 and business was never very lucrative for the Hudson's Bay Company on Herschel Island although a warehouse (C)

was built in 1922. After the loss of the company ship, *Bay Chimo*, in 1931 it was deemed safer and more cost-effective to ship goods via the Mackenzie River. As it was no longer the trans-shipment point for the western Arctic posts, the Hudson's Bay Company closed the Herschel Island post in 1937 and the buildings were abandoned. A report by the company in 1943 noted the condition of each building and stated that they were all to be demolished and the material moved to Tuktoyaktuk, Northwest Territories. Bermed outlines remain to mark the locations of some of their buildings.

The Newport House, built by the Pacific Steam Whaling Company between 1890 and 1893, no longer exists. It was 6.5m x 13m and constructed of Oregon Pine with a porch at the south end. Records indicate that the walls and roof were built with two layers of sheathing separated by an insulating air space and clad with shingles. It was adjacent to the Canada Customs Warehouse. Used by the Mounted Police in 1907, it was

purchased by them with the rest of the company's assets in 1911. The building was used for storage by the police until 1964 and burned to the ground in 1973. A new building was constructed near the site for use by hunters and visitors to the island.

The Mounted Police also bought a building they called the Woodshed from the Pacific Steam Whaling Company in 1911. This building was likely the Pioneer House (A), the first building to be built on the island, initially located at Avadlek Spit and moved to Pauline Cove. The Woodshed was dismantled by the police for the lumber to build patrol cabins along the coast. The RCMP CO's Quarters (B) was built in 1925.

Workshops were an important element of the early whaling community. Records document the building of a blacksmith shop at Pauline Cove but examination of historic photographs has not revealed a positive identification of this building. Visitors will see hand-forged hardware on many of the buildings.

Further Information

Collections of artifacts, photographs and other reference material are located in the Pacific Steam Whaling Company Community House and the Bonehouse. Visitor services and the park office are located in the Community House.

For additional information regarding historic resources on Herschel Island Territorial Park contact:

*Cultural Services Branch – Historic Sites Unit
Department of Tourism and Culture
Government of Yukon*

P.O. Box 2703, Whitehorse, Yukon Y1A 2C6
(867)667-5386

web site: www.tc.gov.yk.ca/historicsites.html

For more information regarding park operations and visitor facilities on Herschel Island Territorial Park contact:

Yukon Parks, Department of Environment

P.O. Box 2703, Whitehorse, Yukon Y1A 2C6

(867)667-5648

Inuvik office: (867) 777-5058

email: Yukon.parks@gov.yk.ca

web site: www.yukonparks.ca



Some archaeological specimens: (top) arrowhead and (bottom) harpoon head.



PRINCE OF WALES NORTHERN HERITAGE CENTRE, NT. (TERRANCE PAMPLIN)

Sod house in sectional perspective.

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MYSTIC SEAPORT MUSEUM, MYSTIC, CT (É-U.)

Arctic Whaling fleet at Herschel Island, May 1895.



YUKON ARCHIVES/FINNE COLLECTION

A typical Inuvialuit house - circa late 1920s

Our Island in the Polar Sea

This booklet provides an overview of the historic resources on Herschel Island. Visitors can use it as a walking guide to the island by referring to the map at the back. A short list of reference material lists some related books, articles and websites.

Herschel Island Territorial Park is approximately five kilometres off Yukon's north coast. This treeless land, composed of permanently frozen sea bottom sediments, is extremely susceptible to surface and coastal erosion. Rising sea levels and late formation of sea ice has allowed fierce fall storms to impact the shoreline and consequently the buildings and archaeological features. The park was established in 1987 to conserve the wildlife and

habitat and to protect and manage its valuable heritage resources.

A short growing season is characterized by twenty-four-hour daylight which allows a profusion of tundra plants to flourish. More than one hundred species of birds have been recorded, forty of which breed on the island. Caribou and muskoxen graze the low slopes. The water near shore hosts a seasonal migration of Arctic Char and Arctic Cisco and is the habitat for Bearded and Ringed Seals as well as Bowhead and Beluga Whales.

The "big island" (*qikiqtaruk*) is a shelter and refuge

from storms on the Beaufort Sea. Currents in the Beaufort Sea bring driftwood logs, useful for firewood and building materials, to its shores. Herschel Island will continue to be a stopping place for the Inuvialuit who have hunted, fished and whaled here for centuries. Southern whalers, missionaries and the Mounted Police found the island to be a convenient headquarters for their activities in the western Arctic. The buildings, artifacts and archaeological sites on Herschel Island are the products of two distinct cultures and are a reflection of the influences they had on each other.

Visitors are asked to help us protect these resources and respect the special combination of natural and cultural heritage found here. Enjoy your stay and take nothing but pictures - leave nothing but footprints.



An abandoned boat and the Mission House viewed from the west.

