



Nunavut Parks & Special Places – Editorial Series

January, 2008

# QAUMMAARVIIT TERRITORIAL PARK

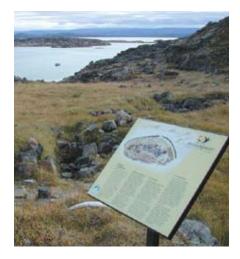


Southwest of Iqaluit, near the head of Peterhead Inlet, lies a small island called **Qaummaarviit**. Grassy swales alternate with rocky bedrock hills and colourful heath tundra on this attractive island, which bears some of the best-preserved examples of structures made by Inuit prior to the coming of outsiders to this land, truly providing a window into the past.

Artifacts and structures on the island attest to 750 years of occupation by the Thule and modern Inuit. People probably spent a large part of the winter here, hunting caribou on the adjacent mainland and seals on the ice of the bay. The bones of a number of species of sea mammals found on the island indicate that the hunting was very good here.

The remains of 11 semi-subterranean winter houses are marked by lush green grasses and mosses due to enrichment of the site. Tightly fitting stones delineate living spaces from sleeping areas. The deep entryways trapped cold air and kept the warmer air within the house from leaking out. Skin roofs supported by whale jawbones and ribs were covered with snow blocks, creating relatively comfortable winter homes that were heated by qulliit (stone lamps). As the climate warmed after the "Little Ice Age" of the mid-1800s, the floe edge was closer to the head of Frobisher Bay, and people seemed to rely less on the island. A bit later, modern equipment like the rifle, snowmobiles and motorboats replaced the spear and bow, dog team, *umiak* and *qayaq* of the past, and people became more mobile, and able to hunt more efficiently. Eventually most people moved away from the small camps on the land to communities like Iqaluit and Kimmirut, and people still travel all over Frobisher Bay and the Meta Incognita Peninsula to hunt.

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Today, a boardwalk and trail link structures and historical sites on the island, permitting visitors to appreciate its place in the Inuit culture without disturbing the ground or the sites. Two of the houses studied by archaeologists have been left open so the structure can be seen. Tiny stone tools found in the sod walls of the Thule houses were traced to the Dorset people who likely occupied this island prior to the Thule. There are also many stone tent rings, storage caches, kayak stands, and even a grave on this island.

Interpretive signs illustrated by detailed watercolours help visitors understand the stories of the island and its inhabitants. A printed guidebook, available at the Unikkaarvik Visitors' Centre in Iqaluit, clarifies the stories with illustrations of the tools, hunting implements, and sculptures of Thule, Tunnit (Dorset), and modern Inuit. Visitors are asked to stay on the trail to protect the delicate vegetation around the ancient structures.

Since **Qaummaarviit Territorial Park** is located on an island about 12 kilometres from Iqaluit, it is accessible as a day trip by boat in summer and by snowmobile and dogteam when the sea ice permits. In spring, a dogteam tour to the island with any of a number of local outfitters is an unforgettable experience, from the exciting "take-off" in Iqaluit with the dogs barking and lunging, anxious to get going, to the thrilling dash through the jumbled ice of the tidal zone. Then, they settle down for the run across the bay to Peterhead Inlet, trotting smoothly along. It's quite an experience to approach this island in the traditional way, reflecting on the old times when the dogteam was the only way of winter travel, times when the people depended entirely upon their own skills and ingenuity for food and shelter. Then, the dogs stop, the *qamutik* is anchored, and visitors hike up onto the land and along the boardwalk, stepping back in time, so to speak, exploring the past as it is written on the land.

In summer, boat tours to Qaummaarviit also provide opportunities to look for birds and sea mammals – visitors may see ringed seals, belugas, or walrus, and, with luck, might glimpse the long black back of *arvik*, the bowhead whale, or even narwhals. Peregrine falcons, gyrfalcons, and ravens nest on the cliffs of the island and adjacent mainland, and long-tailed ducks, eiders, or guillemots are always possible in summer. Caribou migrate along the mainland near the island, and can be spotted from boats. Families or hunters going out on the land often stop at the island, so visitors may encounter people going about their traditional way of life near the island.

## TRAVELLING TO THE PARK

Occasionally, special tours are run to Qaummaarviit, especially to celebrate Canada Day or Nunavut Day in July. You may also get a chance to participate in, or witness special cultural demonstrations including drum dances, throat singing, storytelling, or traditional games. At these special events, many boats make the trip to the island, echoing the gatherings of the people in the past.

To ensure that the ancient structures are not disturbed, camping is not permitted on the island. **Sylvia Grinnell Territorial Park** in Iqaluit offers camping facilities. Operators in Iqaluit run tours to the island, and will provide snacks or meals, and interpretation. Visiting the island with a local guide ensures better understanding of the sites, and is an enjoyable way to get to know the local people.

Stop by the Unikkaarvik Visitors' Centre in Iqaluit and view colourful displays and artifacts representing the rich culture and history of the area. Staff can help you with further information on **Qaummaarviit Territorial Park** and other local attractions.

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For further information or to locate operators who run trips to **Qaummaarviit Territorial Park**, check out the Nunavut Parks website at www.nunavutparks.com, or call Nunavut Tourism at 1-866-NUNAVUT to request the Nunavut Travel Planner, which lists all licensed tourism operators, accommodations, and services.

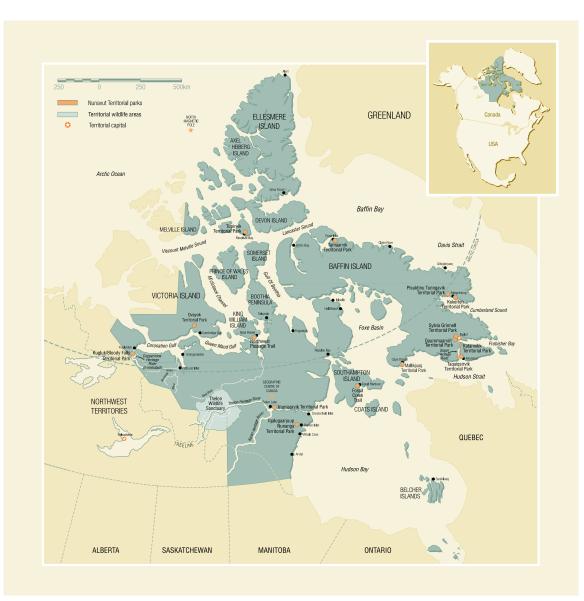


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### NUNAVUT TOURISM

UNIKKAARVIK VISITORS' CENTRE (IQALUIT) ( 867.979.4636





#### SAFE AND SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL IN NUNAVUT

Nunavut's Territorial Parks offer some of the most breathtaking scenery and magnificent wildlife imaginable, but there are risks when traveling in a remote area. You must be self-reliant and responsible for your own safety. The extreme environment can change quickly, challenge your survival skills and face you with an emergency. Also remember, when you travel in Nunavut you are in polar bear country. Polar bears are strong, fast and agile on ice, land, and in water.

For more information on Safe and Sustainable Travel and Polar Bear Safety in Nunavut please visit our website at www.nunavutparks.com.



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