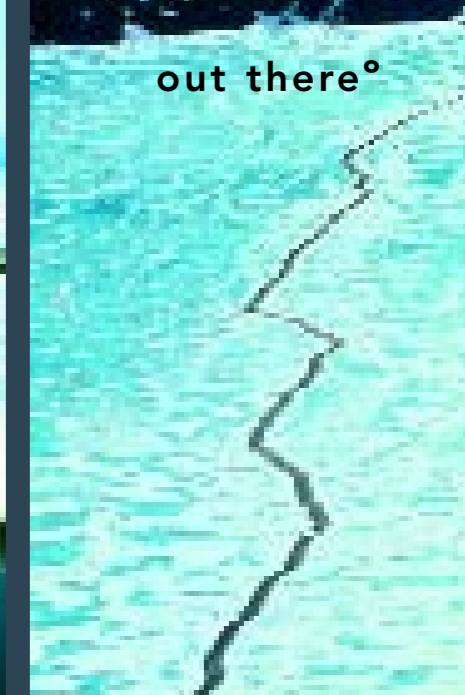


+ MY EXPERIENCES IN THIS AMAZING REGION HAVE BEEN IN THE CANADIAN ARCTIC, FURTHER NORTH THAN THE NORTHERN-MOST TIP OF ALASKA. I TRAVELLED TO VARIOUS SPOTS OVER SIX SUMMERS AND WORKED OUT OF A NUMBER OF SMALL COMMUNITIES – ARCTIC BAY, POND INLET, IGLOOLIK, CUNNINGHAM INLET, AND RESOLUTE. MY GOAL WAS IMAGES OF MARINE MAMMALS, POLAR BEARS, WHALES, WALRUS, AND SEALS FROM 75 DEGREES NORTH LATITUDE, 900 MILES FROM THE NORTH POLE. THE BEST TIME OF THE YEAR IS THE SUMMER WHEN THE WHALES ARE WAITING FOR THE BREAKUP OF THE ICE TO ENTER VARIOUS FEEDING GROUNDS.

LEADS IN THE ICE



: DOC WHITE

• Male narwhal sport the 'tusk' by which they're readily identified, which is a tooth protruding from the upper jaw, generally the left side • In the Arctic, dogs are each tied individually to the sled, so if one falls the others can drag him out. • The polar bear is the largest land carnivore in North America, and can smell food several kilometres away, even baby seals hiding in snow caves.

It was necessary to travel from various small villages over ice by snowmobile and sledge some 60 nautical miles to the ice edge. Of course since the whales are waiting at the floe edge for the ice to break up, we also had to be careful of that same break up of ice, particularly behind us. On one occasion the solid ice around us broke up in to 15 leads around our camp – we threw everything onto the sledges and high-tailed it to solid ice. This isn't always the case, a friend of mine's camp broke off completely; by sheer luck he'd hired a helicopter for the day's shoot so they were able to save all their gear. I used aircraft for aerial images and once the ice broke up, I used small craft to travel to some of the more remote areas where the beluga and narwhal feed.

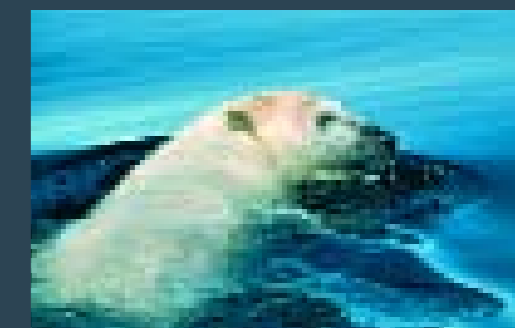
Travel on the ice requires the expertise of the Inuit, as the people prefer to be called, Eskimo being a name given them by other Indians. We'd 'jump' three and four metre wide leads (breaks) in the ice, without a worry, but then there'd be a five inch lead our guides wouldn't cross, insisting we camp on the shore side and only venture to the floe edge on snowmobiles. Their knowledge and sense of humour was wonderful and made the trips possible and safe as is possible in one of the most dangerous environments in which I've ever travelled.

Provisions – fuel, food, tents, everything – were carried on incredibly strong and flexible sledges which are held together

by seal gut. Travel over the ice ranged from ice rink smooth to teeth-jarring rough. In summer the sun is bright all day long, never falling below the horizon, though even in July we had three-day blizzards. We camped on the ice, sometimes five feet from the floe edge, ever ready to strike camp and run from a break up. Always we had a rifle, as polar bears will actively hunt humans. In this day and time, it's amazing to board an airplane with a gun.

POLAR BEAR - *Ursus maritimus*

Truly a marine mammal, the polar bear can be seen 60 miles out at sea. Their long slim heads belie their size – 3.5 metres from nose to tail and 600 kilograms. They can smell food several kilometres away, even baby seals hiding in snow caves. Their fur covered skin is black, even their tongue is black. They are so well insulated that they can easily overheat in the summer. Too many commercials and their white look makes one forget that the polar bear is the largest land carnivore in North America. On many occasions we had bears circle





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the camp trying to sneak up on us. Generally the roar of the snowmobile engine would send them on their way.

One occasion I spotted a mother and two cubs feeding on a seal. I was able to photograph for almost an hour before it was apparent she was upset, requiring me to leave her alone.

NARWHAL - *Monodon monoceros*

The name narwhal is old Norse meaning 'corpse', referring to the spotted white grey colour. The male narwhal sport the 'tusk' by which they're readily identified. This is really a tooth that protrudes from the upper jaw, generally the left side, though I have seen two narwhals with double 'tusks'. They're a small whale, no more than 5 metres in length, very shy underwater. The females would approach, but the males rarely. Why they have a tusk isn't known, whether male displaying, protection, is speculation.

The tusk certainly looks like the legendary unicorn and was sold as such for many times its weight in gold. England's Queen Elizabeth I received a tusk valued at £10,000, the cost of a castle. Karl V of Austria is said to have paid a large national debt with two tusks.

Why would a small whale that lives in the confines of ice have an appendage that's often one half the body length? Recent

research points toward the tusk as a form of receptor for the animal. The tusk has 10 million nerve endings that tunnel from the core the outer surface which are thought to detect subtle changes of temperature, pressure, particle gradients, and probably much more. These nerve endings appear to be unique in nature – a mystery that's just beginning to be unravelled.

The narwhal is only found in the eastern arctic, seldom seen south of the arctic circle. Like other whales indigenous to the arctic, the narwhal doesn't have a dorsal fin and its tail has a reverse curve. I'd sit on the floe edge waiting for their blows, as they travelled by the edge, sometimes within a foot of the floe edge.

BELUGA - *Delphinapterus leucas*

Deriving its name from the Russian word for white, the beluga is the only whale with a neck and can actually move its head in different directions. Similar in size to the narwhal, it's called the 'sea canary' because of its vocalizations. The beluga actually travels as far south as the St Lawrence as well as the Chukchi and Okhotsk Seas.

Many belugas travel to Cunningham Inlet on the north coast of Somerset Island. There by the hundreds, they rub against the rocky bottom in the warmer waters from the river and clean off skin, leaving the inlet much whiter. The tidal difference and shallow water result in an occasional stranding. Here I sat on my four wheeler at low tide for hours watching the whales swim within feet of me. You could hear their calls, pursing their lips, they would blow raspberries that could be heard a kilometre away on a still day.

Underwater, they were always aware of my presence and often would swim upside down looking up at my feeble swimming,

encumbered in drysuit and equipment. Sometimes they'd swim up to me and stop, curious perhaps, more likely amused.

BOWHEAD WHALE - *Balaena mysticetus*

This is the only large whale to live exclusively in the arctic, its name deriving from the large bow-shaped skull. Also called a right whale as it was the right whale to hunt – once killed, it floated. However, it's a different animal from the northern right whale. The bowhead is rare and endangered, they have never been weighed, but believed to be the heaviest whale for its body size. It lives in four different groups throughout the Arctic. On one occasion I was in a lead when seven bowhead whales entered and swam



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- The only large whale living exclusively in the Arctic, the bowhead is rare and endangered.
- The beluga is the only whale with a neck and can actually move its head in different directions.
- After long swims walrus haul out on sea ice, eyes and skin bright red, its blood flow directed to the skin to warm itself.



around me. They'd dive and feed miles under the ice, putting their blowholes in small holes in the ice to breathe, some of these holes in the ice were only a metre across.

Inuit elders and now new scientific studies suggest that the bowhead whale may be the longest living mammal on earth. One male is estimated to be 211 years of age. Stone harpoon heads found in a bowhead whale may have been put there by Inuit in the 18th century.

WALRUS - *Odobenus rosmarus*

Though a pinniped like seals and sealions, the walrus is easily recognized by its teeth which are used as ice picks. In fact the walrus is called the 'tooth walker'. It doesn't use the teeth for feeding, but uses suction to remove the siphons and meat of the clams that compose its principle food. The walrus swims along the bottom using its whiskers to find the bivalves. After long swims, the walrus will haul out on sea ice, eyes and skin blood red, the animal directs its blood flow to the surface to warm itself by the sun.

My first time in the water with walrus was a bit uncomfortable. Their 900kg and 3 metres are intimidating enough, but then add a

couple of feet of enamel on the front end and it is indeed a formidable looking animal. My approach was slow, always allowing the animal an escape route. I was allowed close enough for several images; on another time the animal became upset with the boat. I can only imagine, had I been in the water.

INUIT

Time and time again, I found that the stories relayed to me by elder Inuit were rejected out of hand by scientists, only to be proven correct later. The bowhead is one, the walrus another. Inuit told me to watch out for a certain type of walrus, that it was dangerous. They told me of such animals attacking kayaks. Later a kayak was attacked, and finally a photograph was taken of a walrus eating a seal. Just as my friend had told me. He told me of the bowhead being ageless, they had never seen a bowhead whale that had died of old age. I was told of a particular bowhead whale that had been hunted by three generations.

Also the elder Inuit, while not being experienced in photography, understood what I doing much before the young Inuit. Essentially I was hunting the animals with a camera, they understood what was needed and were most helpful. They explained habits, when and where to look, dangerous situations. They explained how they had hunted, showed

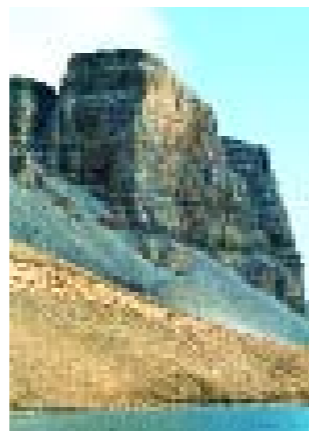


- Time out on the ice, waiting for action.
- Inuit get all their clothing, food and vitamins from the animals, birds, and fish. Vitamin C comes from eating raw fish.
- 900kg, 3 metres length, a couple of feet of enamel on the front end make walrus intimidating and formidable.
- Marvellous machines and mobility!



me old kayaks, harpoons, how their clothes were made, which fur to use for which article of clothing. Even as good as modern cold weather clothes are, it is arguable that fur parkas, pants, and gloves perform better in the arctic environment. They make waterproof boots out of seal skin, parkas out of caribou, polar bear skin pants. All remarkable.

In a land that has no trees, only a few plants in the summer, the Inuit must get all their food and vitamin needs from the animals, birds and fish hunted. Many of the vitamins, including vitamin C, comes from eating the meat raw.



The dog team used in arctic is different from those used in the Yukon. The Yukon, teams are tied in tandem two abreast, much like a team of horses which works in the woods and tundra of the Yukon. On the ice, this is not effective – should the lead dog fall into a lead in the ice the entire team could be lost. In the Arctic the dogs are each tied individually to the sled, so that should one fall the others can drag him out.

MAGNETIC NORTH POLE

The Magnetic North Pole is located in this area of the Canadian Arctic. In 2001 it was located 81.3N, 110.8W. It has been moving north since that time. Close proximity to the Magnetic North Pole causes a magnetic compass needle to be pulled down to the earth, regardless of its direction, which of course makes the compass worthless. GPS is the only practical means of determining direction and position this far north.