



Collaborative Place Name Research in the Community of Kinngait (Nunavut, Canada)

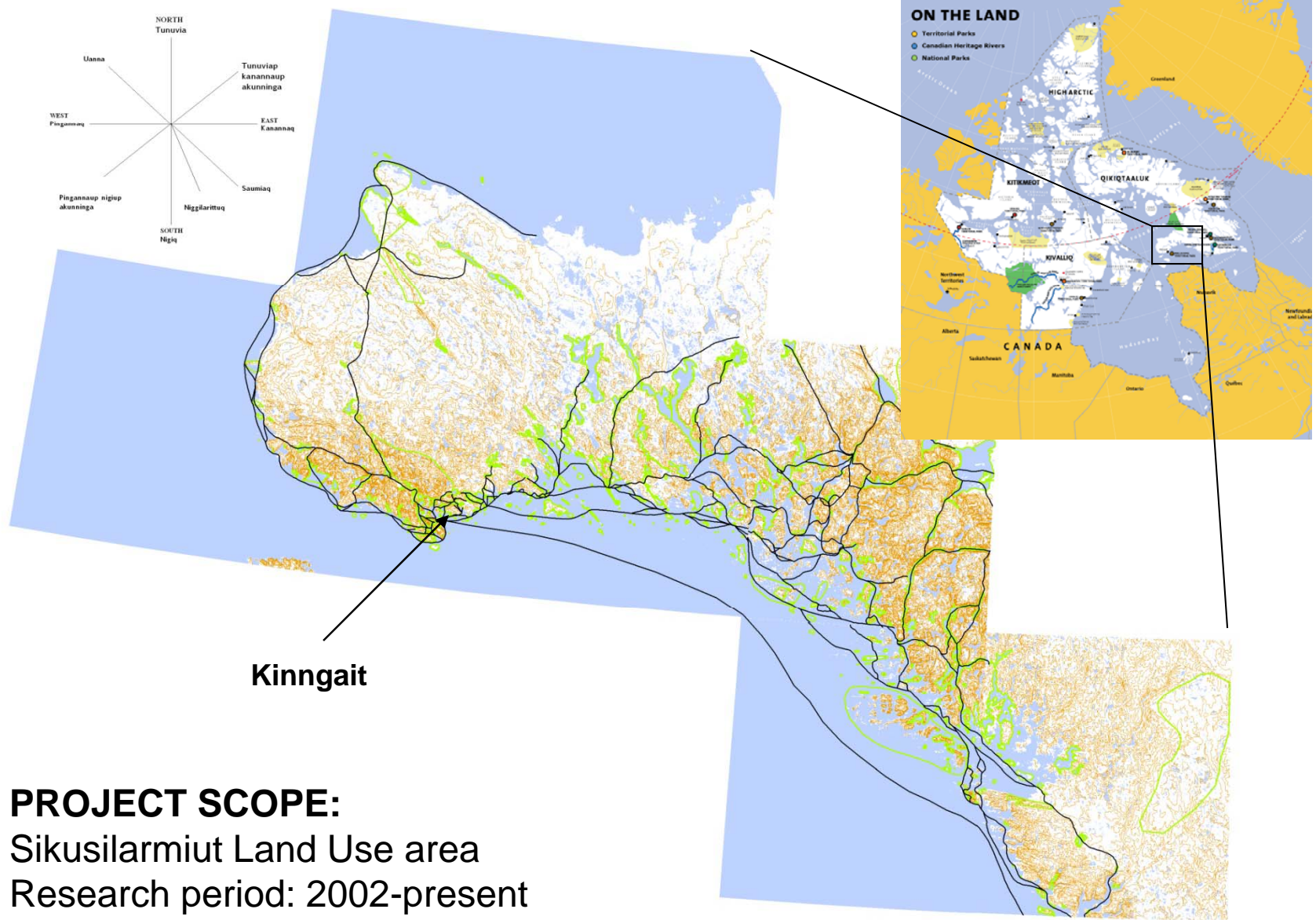
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Abstract

This paper describes the preliminary results of an ongoing place-name project currently taking place in the community of Kinngait, Nunavut.

The presentation focuses on the process of conducting collaborative place-name research from both the vantage point of an Inuk and an anthropologist. We explore three key themes that interweave our perspectives. These include: 1) the process of being guided, 2) the relationship between place names and traveling, and 3) how the process of naming embodies multisensory notions of place.

The construction of this paper, like our work together, represents a joint effort based on a running dialogue that has inspired us both to understand each other and the meanings attached to the land through language.



Kinngait

PROJECT SCOPE:

Sikusilarmiut Land Use area

Research period: 2002-present

600 names gathered

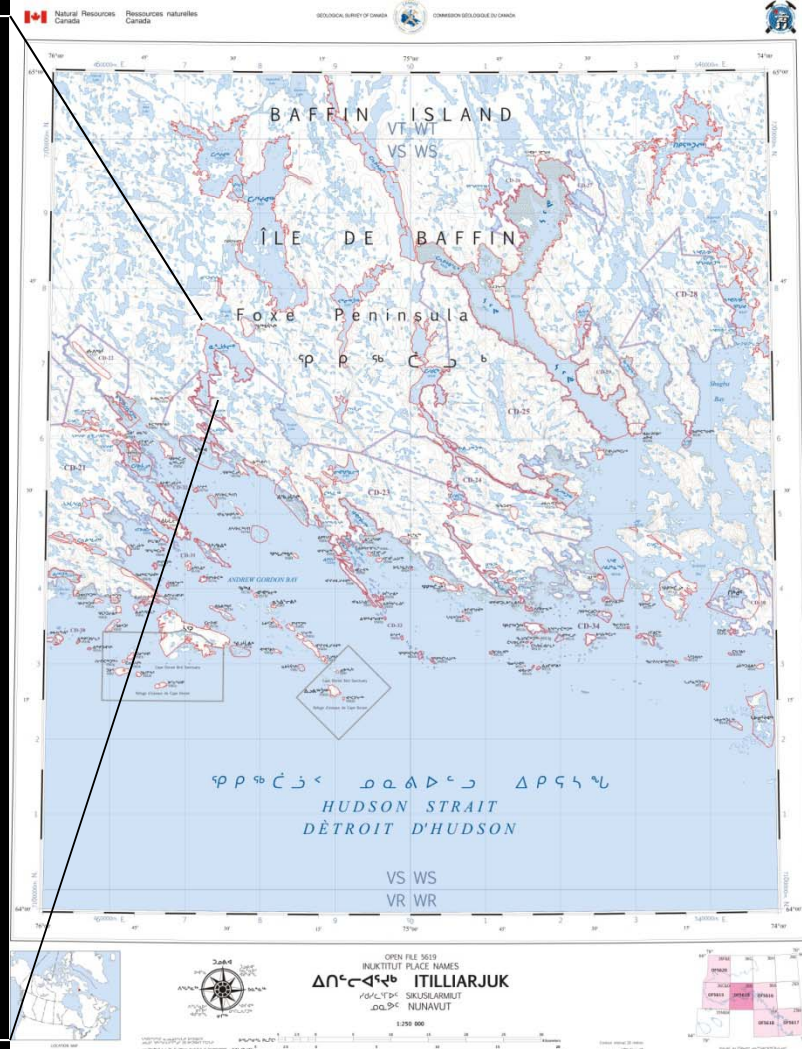
100 routes documented



The methods employed in this project involve a combination of 1) community-wide workshops, 2) one-on-one interviews with Inuit elders, 3) participant observation and 4) computer database development.

GIS DATABASE PLACE NAME ATTRIBUTES

Geographic coordinates
Site Number
Inuktitut name
-Roman orthography
-syllabics
Explanation
Inuit Experts
Interpreter
Environmental Classification



CODE	NAME	FEATURE	EXPLANATION
0001	0001	Point	A point on the coast.
0002	0002	Point	A point on the coast.
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Place name themes

Being guided

Tukimuaqtitauniq

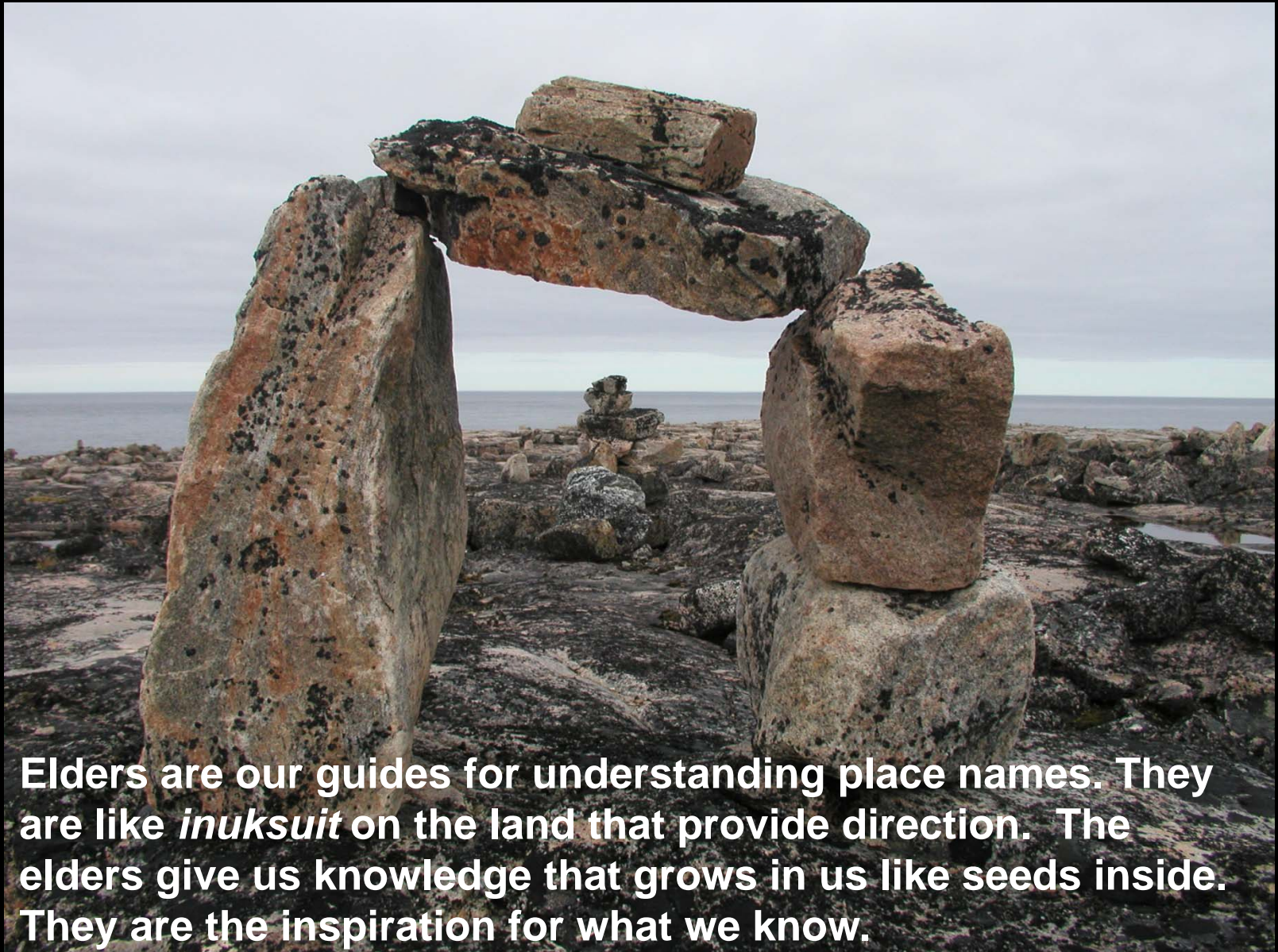
Traveling

Aulaqtut

Multisensory understandings
of place

*Atuqsugit tallimat
qaujimajjutiit*

Aksatungua: “*Tukimuatitauniq...*”



Elders are our guides for understanding place names. They are like *inuksuit* on the land that provide direction. The elders give us knowledge that grows in us like seeds inside. They are the inspiration for what we know.

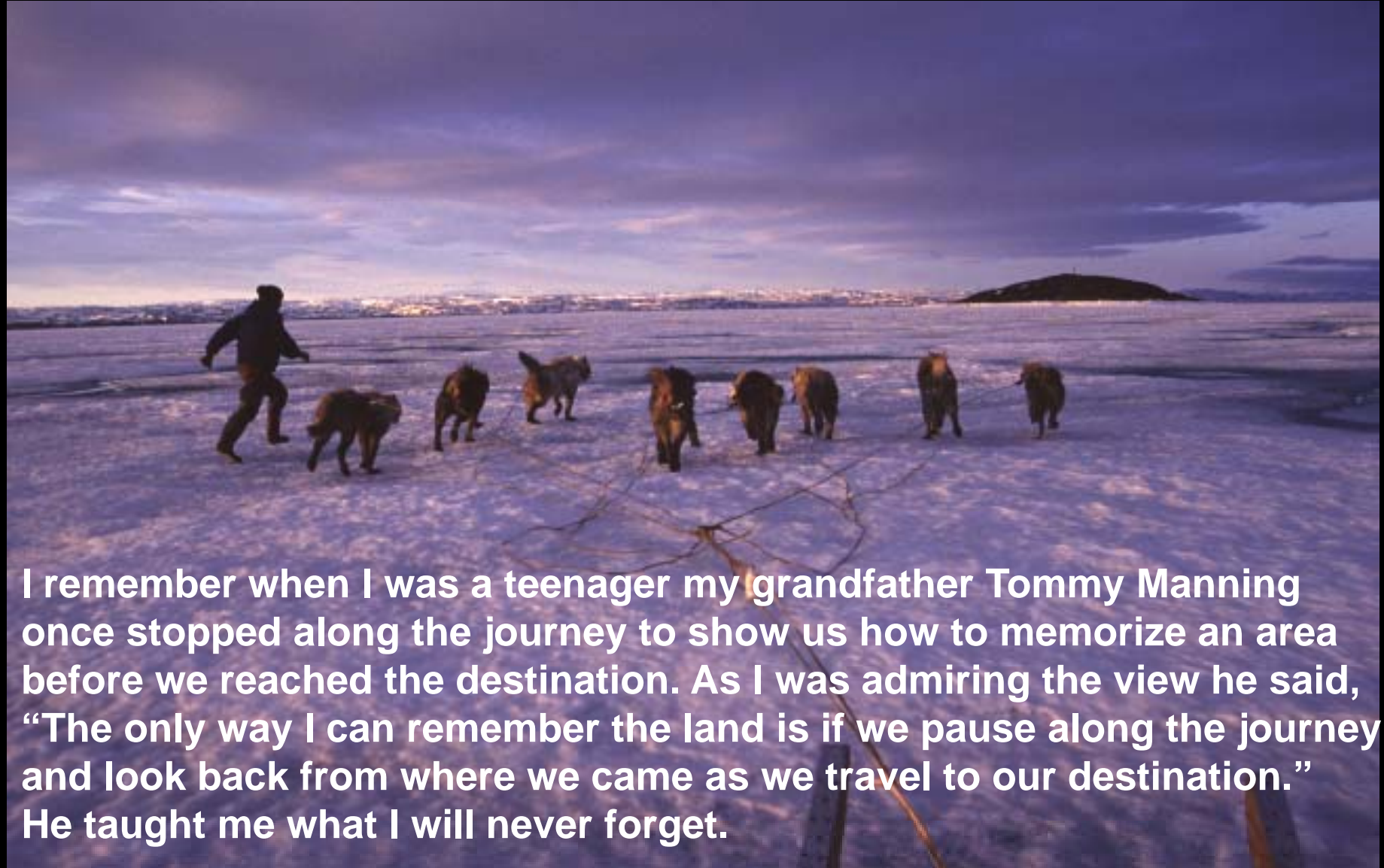
Anne: “Being guided...”

Aksatungua as a skilled interpreter was my guide into a language and a culture layered with meaning. Place name knowledge traveled from elder to interpreter to researcher, and back again. Listening became a skill that I learned through observation and experience of watching the process of oral communication unfold, like words and language traveling through time.

I learned in the process that making place names maps, the product (in the form of paper maps) is less important than the care and attention given to the process of how the names were gathered and the meanings that they hold for the elders who shared them.

It is worth noting that working with Inuinnait people (Canadian Western Arctic) Beatrice Collignon (2004) came to the same conclusion.

Aksatungua: “Aulaqtut...”



I remember when I was a teenager my grandfather Tommy Manning once stopped along the journey to show us how to memorize an area before we reached the destination. As I was admiring the view he said, “The only way I can remember the land is if we pause along the journey and look back from where we came as we travel to our destination.” He taught me what I will never forget.

Anne: “Place names and travel...”

Aksatungua’s story reminded me of the way anthropologist Tim Ingold (2005) recently described the notion of travel. Wayfarers are those who travel along paths and routes that are irregular. A type of travel that helps you integrate knowledge of the landscape as you go.

This is quite different than the way more metropolitan societies may conceive of travel which emphasizes transport over wayfaring. Transport involves simply getting from point a to point b. In this context Ingold describes how people are destination-oriented, often emphasizing direct point to point connections. The movement in between the points is less important than getting to the next location.

That is a fundamentally different from the way Inuit conceive of travel. The journey itself is what is important. Place names in this sense do not represent destinations *per se* as much as they are simply a part of the narrative associated with movement.

Place names referenced in the oral biography and life story of Peter Pitseolak



The strong relationship between place names, mobility and life histories come to life through Aksatungua's grandfather Peter Pitseolak. Over the course of his biography (PITSEOLAK AND EBER 1993), Pitseolak makes reference to over 60 place names. Many of the names are used to document the course of his life and his movements between different camps and places on a seasonal basis. In many ways, the significance of place names for Pitseolak were not the names themselves but how they served as a temporal and spatial mnemonic markers for telling his lifestory, exactly as discussed by Mark Nuttall (1992) based on his work in Western Greenland.

Through this connection between toponyms, routes and travel, Inuit mobility is more than just part of a “seasonal round” related to subsistence. Movement itself constitutes an important part of Inuit culture and memory, especially for how Inuit “learn the landscape” (HENSHAW 2006).

Aksatungua: “*Atuqsugit tallimat qaujimajjutiit...*”

Inuit use all five senses to name a place when it is discovered.

Such multisensory perceptions are intimately connected to the way Inuit experience place and are conveyed through the toponymy associated with particular visual, auditory, olfactory, and tactile experiences affixed to locations.

Anne: Multisensory naming and experience of place

Multisensory perceptions of place are also conveyed through Inuit toponymy. Sikusilarmiut place names are rich with visual imagery and metaphorical references that illuminate Inuit understandings of the world that surrounds them.

For example toponyms such as: Aiviqqat, “islands that resemble walruses swimming in a group”; Qiniit, “a place that resembles layers of seal fat when you cut it open”; and Nalluujalik, “a place that resembles the hind leg of a caribou”. In addition to this visual element, many of the place names describe features of place that make references to other senses including smell, touch and sound. For example, names including: Aluqqaluk, “a place where you can hear the sound of footsteps because there are many eider ducks taking flight off the water”; Miaggujuqtalik, “an island where you can hear something howling”; Tatsiumajuq, “a place where you feel your surroundings through touch”; or Kauktuut, “a place where you eat the skin of walrus”. The name sikusilaq itself (“without permanent ice”) also refers to the fontanelle body part (THERRIEN 2005: 42)

In many ways, multisensory examples such as these communicate an animistic worldview found in so many different cultural contexts across the Arctic in which the environment is perceived as alive (HENSHAW 2006).

Conclusions

Aksatungua: Place names help me visualize the past through the stories that are told by the elders. Experiencing the places first hand by traveling on the land, the past becomes alive. It is in fact a healing journey because I know my ancestors have traveled here for thousands of years and I am now part of the process of learning and passing the information along to my children.

Anne: Place names are part of a running narrative in the North, they represent much more than locations on a map or a tool for orientating oneself on the land. They communicate concepts relative to space and time through stories shared from the past and the present that will continue in the future. As Nunavut has engaged in the official recognition of Inuit place names for its territory, recognizing the process of gathering Inuit knowledge will be as important as the final maps themselves.

Nakurmiirumajakka



**Inutuqavut
Atsiaq Alasuaq, Sagiatsu Sagiatsu, and Iqalluq Nungusuituq
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