



## *Katannilik Park Knowledge Camp*

*Nunavut's population is younger than anywhere else in Canada; and there are both challenges and opportunities associated with developing programs and activities for youth, particularly in smaller, non-decentralized communities in Nunavut. Nunavut Parks has developed a "Knowledge Camp" for Katannilik Territorial Park, and is currently exploring opportunities to develop similar camps in other territorial parks in Nunavut.*

### **Background**

With an average age of 20 (half the national average) and 60% of its population under the age of 25, Nunavut is by far the youngest province or territory in Canada. As such, it is essential that programs are developed with and for Nunavut's youth, especially in small and 'non-decentralized' communities where there are fewer opportunities for organized activity.

In addressing this issue for Kimmirut, a town of 400 on the south shore of Baffin Island that is adjacent to both Katannilik Territorial Park and the Soper Heritage River, there was both a need to create activities for youth; and an opportunity to establish connections between youth and Elders, and extend traditional knowledge and skills through generations. Traditional land skills are essential in Nunavut, but as with other Aboriginal communities in Canada, opportunities to gain



Kimmirut Elder,  
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Participating in children's games at camp,  
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traditional knowledge and understanding of Nunavut's landscape are decreasing as a result of Elders passing away and declining interest by youth in land-based activities.

Katannilik Territorial Park is a surprisingly fertile arctic oasis tucked in the middle of the ancient Meta Incognita Peninsula on southern Baffin Island. The Park stretches north from the top of Pleasant Inlet near the village of Kimmirut toward the south shore of Frobisher Bay, across from the City of Iqaluit. The Park follows the Soper Valley and the Itijjagial Trail—a 120 kilometre traditional overland trail from Iqaluit to Kimmirut. The park's boundaries follow a series of rivers, lakes and hills on the plateau above the river valley. The Soper River and its 1,200 square-kilometres meandering wilderness is central to the park. Known locally as Kuujjuaq ("big river") the Soper River was designated a Canadian Heritage River in 1992 for its cultural significance in the lives of Inuit, its natural beauty and its countless opportunities for recreation. Along the river itself, on its many tributaries, in the streams and rivulets flowing down the sides of the valley, countless cascades echo the recurring theme of the park, and the reason it is named Katannilik—"the place of waterfalls".

### Initiative

The Katannilik Park Knowledge Camp was first set up in 1999, following the creation of Nunavut. The program is broader than simply a 'science camp' in that it was envisioned to not only introduce youth from Kimmirut to Katannilik Park and the Soper River Valley, an area not often visited by residents from Kimmirut in the summer; but it was

also set up to provide 'on-the-land' knowledge of the sciences (botany, biology, biodiversity, ecology, etc.). More importantly, it was established as a means of integrating science and Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit (Inuit traditional knowledge), and to unite Kimmirut's youth with local Elders as a means of sharing knowledge of the land, its wildlife, and its resources from a traditional perspective.

Its goals, from the beginning have been to provide:

- An opportunity for youth (Grades 5 and 6) to travel into the Kuujjuaq Valley safely
- A chance to learn first hand from Elders how Inuit have made use of resources of the valley over many generations and still today
- An opportunity to observe relationships between biotic and abiotic resources, and how they interrelate to form a diverse backdrop for Kimmirut residents
- Confidence and leadership skills; and
- An emphasis on science and nature that may lead to careers in science, wildlife management, and parks.

The camp's curriculum was set up with the local Tourism and Parks Advisory Committee, the local Hunters and Trappers Organization, and Inuit Elders in the community to respond to those goals. Students are taught traditional uses of rocks and other materials for qulliq (stone lamp), using traditional material (moss) and seal fat, where and how to cache meat, making dry meat, fish weir, fox traps, cook using rocks, tent rings, burial sites, Inuksuit and other navigational aids, Inuit games and other purposes. Uses of rocks was very important for the Inuit because there were no trees and for other reasons. Similarly, Elders teach





students about different edible plants and also plants used for medicinal purposes (e.g. remedial plants for arthritis, cuts, heartburn (uqsigujuq); and learn about the different wildlife in the area, where they den & what they eat, do a bird study to identify birds found in the area & to learn about identifying birds by listening to their calls/sound.

Students are also taught on the land skills—fire-arm safety, safe boating practices on river, lake and coastal areas; setting up traditional tents, and proper method(s) of dissection of a caribou and identification of body parts. Because Inuit communicated primarily by verbal means traditionally, students also learn Inuit terminologies as well as more contemporary scientific tools. Students will benefit from the old and the new ways.

The program sees all Grades 5 and 6 students in Kimmirut attend week-long sessions camping on the land in Katannilik Park. The camp is split into two sections: the first week for up to 15 female students and 15 male students the following week. The camp takes place in early August and is timed to ensure full participation from the community cruise ship and other local activities that dominate August.

The program was developed by Katannilik Park staff in Kimmirut, with additional funding from the Kakivak Association, the economic development arm of the Qikiqtani Inuit Association, which helps develop and funds training programs, and supports youth programs in the Baffin Region.

## Lessons Learned

The success of a Knowledge Camp relies heavily on the capacity of local communities to help in its development and operation. In small communities, there tends to be higher turnovers of people that can deliver camp programs. The importance in including local agencies and extending support networks throughout the community has shown to help extend the sustainability of the camp. However, this may also lead to a 'stagnant' camp that does not necessarily change to reflect different needs and community knowledge. As such, it is important to maintain a degree of involvement throughout.

Nunavut Parks has an interest in developing similar knowledge camps throughout Nunavut, but recognizes there is a need for capacity and expertise in setting up and delivering these camps. The division has started to explore opportunities with national and other territorial agencies with similar mandates and interests as a means of developing appropriate frameworks that can be delivered throughout the territory as interest and capacity allows.

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## Conclusions

Continued support for territorial parks and conservation initiatives requires knowledgeable communities and early exposure to these concepts. In a territory whose primary focus is on development and need for related economic growth, employment, and other social challenges; there is a need to communicate the need to recognize the important roles that parks and conservation can play in a balance with development needs. As Nunavut's largest and most developed

territorial park, Katannilik Park was a logical starting point for development of a Knowledge Camp in response to this challenge.

Katannilik Territorial Park is increasingly used as an important site for Cultural Inclusion programs—as an area for community and individual healing, school programs, community cultural activities, and knowledge camps.



Disembarking in Kimmirut, photo copyright Nunavut Parks & Special Places

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