



AkKutiliuk – Making a Path

Torngat Mountains National Park Reserve of Canada

The Torngat Mountains National Park Reserve is Canada's 42nd and newest national park. During the summer of 2006, the first official operating season for this park, Parks Canada organized a base camp on Shuldham Island in Saglek Bay at the southern entrance to the Park Reserve. One of the objectives of the base camp, which was managed by Inuit from Nain, was to explore ways to maximize the presence of Inuit in the park and to ensure the participation of Inuit in park management by merging agendas and objectives of Parks Canada and Inuit as the first step to a productive and long term cooperative management relationship.

Background

The Torngat Mountains National Park Reserve is situated within Nunatsiavut (northern Labrador), the homeland and settlement area of the Labrador Inuit. The history of the efforts to establish the National Park Reserve is one that has taken place within the context of an evolving vision of what a national park should be and of changing attitudes as to how we should go about the process of national park establishment. It is a story that includes the hard-learned lessons of the importance of working with Inuit as equal partners, of the need to achieve mutual respect and trust, of lengthy setbacks, and of tough negotiations and compromise among diverse parties that were nevertheless dedicated to the vision of protecting this magnificent area in perpetuity.

Whereas a true partnership was entered into among Parks Canada, the Labrador Inuit Association and the Government of Newfoundland



Introducing Inuit Youth to the Torngat Mountains National Park, photo copyright Nunatsiavut Government

“I would like to take this opportunity to express my support for the approach taken by the Parks Canada Agency to create an all-Inuit board. It is a forward-looking step and signals great progress in the relationship between your Agency and the Inuit of the Region.”

Letter to Parks Canada from Pita Aatami, President, Makivik Corporation September 5, 2006

and Labrador to undertake the national park feasibility study, a very different and strained relationship with Nunavik Inuit, represented by Makivik Corporation, led to a challenge to the park establishment process in the federal court of Canada in 1997.

However, we have arrived at a point today where both Nunavik Inuit and Labrador Inuit support the creation of the Torngat Mountains National Park Reserve, and where both have achieved full equality between themselves in the park, through such measures as participation in the park’s Co-operative Management Board, and in sharing potential economic benefits associated with the park reserve.

One of the most important details outlined in the Park Impacts and Benefits Agreements that Parks Canada negotiated with the Labrador Inuit Association and the Makivik Corporation is the commitment that the national park will be established, operated and managed through a co-operative management regime that recognizes Inuit as partners and recognizes and honours Inuit knowledge and the special historical and cultural relationship between Inuit and the land.

The Park Impacts and Benefits Agreements provide for a seven-member co-operative management board to advise the federal Minister of Environment on all matters related to park management. Parks Canada, Makivik Corporation and the Nunatsiavut Government each appoint two members and there will be an independent chair jointly appointed by all three parties. This is the context for the evolution of this park and for the continued relationship between Parks Canada and Inuit as partners, guides, guardians, and storytellers. The Co-operative Management Board

members are to act in the public interest rather than as a representative of the appointing party. In that spirit Parks Canada appointed two Inuit as its representatives on the co-operative management board – an Inuk from Nunavik and an Inuk from Labrador. The Nunatsiavut Government and Makivik Corporation each appointed two Inuit and the three parties jointly appointed a Labrador Inuk as independent chair. This makes the co-operative management board for the Torngat Mountains National Park Reserve the first all Inuit co-operative management board in the history of Parks Canada.

It is in this spirit and context that Parks Canada planned its base camp in the park as an opportunity to bring together Inuit from Nunatsiavut and Nunavik, and Parks Canada managers to connect with each other and to reinforce the shared objectives and commitments that make us partners in creating and managing the park reserve.

Initiative

The Torngat Mountains National Park Reserve is a remote park and not easily accessible to Parks Canada staff, Inuit or visitors. This area has always been an Inuit homeland but over the past few decades Inuit have shifted from a nomadic life to community based life, which has meant that they had to move further south away from the park. Today a trip by boat or skidoo into the Torngat Mountains for an Inuk to hunt or fish is costly and sometimes very challenging. Parks Canada believes that establishing a national park in the Torngat Mountains provides an opportunity to facilitate ways for Inuit to get to this area—for elders to reconnect with their homeland and for youth to experience it for the first time. Establishing a base camp in the park as a pilot project





allowed Parks Canada to scope out the feasibility of this initiative as a way to bring Inuit into the park and make vital connections.

The base camp ran from July 24 – August 10, 2006. Parks Canada contracted local Inuit from Nain to organize and manage the base camp and used the services of local Inuit owned and operated long liner boats for logistical support. The first week of the base camp was dedicated to supporting the Nunatsiavut Government's Youth Division's summer youth camp. It was an opportunity for Inuit youth to learn traditional skills and spend time with Inuit elders who are from this area.

The second week was dedicated to bringing Inuit elders from Nunavik and Nunatsiavut back to their traditional homeland. It was a time for re-discovery and sharing stories. For park managers and

Inuit it was an opportunity to get to know each other, to travel on the land, and more importantly, for park managers it was an opportunity to see the park through Inuit eyes. So began the first discussions about a shared vision for the future management of the Torngat Mountains National Park Reserve.

Lessons Learned

The participants in the base camp, and the Inuit who managed the camp clearly endorsed the initiative as one that Parks Canada should continue each year. The enduring memory of the base camp is one of seeing Inuit with perpetual smiles on their faces and listening to the predominance of Inuktitut as the spoken language. It allowed all participants and particularly Parks Canada staff to see the Torngat Mountains National Park Reserve

Torngat Mountains National Park Reserve



“The Torngat Mountains National Park Reserve is a fitting symbol of the overlapping values that bind us together as Canadians. We have created a lasting legacy for all Canadians, made possible through trust, mutual respect and a deep understanding of Labrador Inuit values and traditions. It is truly a gift to us all.”

*William Andersen III
President, Labrador Inuit Association
January 22, 2005*

as not just a spectacular wilderness but as an Inuit homeland and a cultural landscape.

The base camp experience allowed us to “blur” the border between Nunavik and Labrador. Nunavik Inuit shared their stories of their travel routes through the Torngat Mountains and of special places and memories of their land use in this area. The experience that they had in the park, through the base camp, paved the way for later meetings in Kangiqsualuujuaq in Nunavik to talk about the park and the role that Nunavik Inuit will play in co-operative management. Including Nunavik Inuit in the first base camp provided them with an understanding of how we intend to implement co-operative management and celebrate and honour Inuit knowledge and it established important connections with Parks Canada.

The Nunatsiavut Government and Makivik have both endorsed the base camp initiative as a way to facilitate opportunities for Inuit to get back to the Torngat Mountains, and are interested in becoming partners in the operation of future base camps.

Conclusion

Establishing a new park through constitutionally protected land claims agreements provides a vital foundation for the partnerships that are necessary to proceed with co-operative management and a shared vision. It is important that Parks Canada’s role in park establishment and management respects and reflects the commitments made to Inuit in their agreements and ensures that the relationships we have built with Inuit are reinforced as partners. The base camp initiative and the appointment of Inuit to the Co-operative Management Board provides a clear signal to Inuit that Parks Canada believes in the co-operative management relationship that it negotiated with Inuit and intends to honour the spirit in which this arrangement was negotiated.

Labrador Inuit, Nunavik Inuit and Parks Canada are now ready to tell the fascinating story of this park and its people to the world.

“The park will help us protect our land and our memories and our stories.”

*John Jararuse
Inuk from Saglek, Labrador*



Jacko Merkuratsuk – Inuit patrol person, photo copyright H. Wittenborn

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