

Routes, trails and tracks: Trail breaking among the Inuit of Igloolik

Les routes, sentiers et traces chez les Inuit d'Igloolik

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Résumé de l'article

Malgré d'importants changements qui sont survenus dans leur vie aux niveaux social, économique et technologique, voyager à travers leur territoire demeure une activité très importante pour les Inuit qui vivent à Igloolik, au territoire du Nunavut. Lorsque la neige couvre le paysage, incluant la banquise, les voyageurs doivent tracer des sentiers, dont certains recréent des routes déjà utilisées par plusieurs générations d'Inuit. Ces routes sont ancrées dans la mémoire individuelle et collective de la communauté. Cette connaissance permet aux gens de voyager de façon efficace et sécuritaire vers leurs endroits de chasse et de pêche, ainsi qu'entre les différentes communautés des environs. Cet article analyse les différentes caractéristiques des routes traditionnellement utilisées par les gens d'Igloolik. Il explore également les variations qui existent entre les routes qui traversent la terre ferme et celles que l'on retrouve sur la banquise, et examine comment les chasseurs tracent les sentiers sur la neige et décrivent ensuite ces routes à travers la tradition orale. Enfin, l'article considère comment les différences générationnelles et l'introduction de nouvelles technologies reliées à la transportation, ont affecté la façon dont les gens considèrent et utilisent les sentiers à Igloolik. L'étude de leurs sentiers révèle plusieurs aspects de la compréhension qu'ont les Inuit de l'environnement si particulier qu'est l'Arctique. Elle contribue également à la connaissance historique de l'utilisation du territoire, et démontre comment les descriptions orales du territoire et le savoir oral en général, peuvent traverser le temps sans changer de façon significative.

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Claudio Aporta*

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Malgré d'importants changements qui sont survenus dans leur vie aux niveaux social, économique et technologique, voyager à travers leur territoire demeure une activité très importante pour les Inuit qui vivent à Igloolik, au territoire du Nunavut. Lorsque la neige couvre le paysage, incluant la banquise, les voyageurs doivent tracer des sentiers, dont certains recréent des routes déjà utilisées par plusieurs générations d'Inuit. Ces routes sont ancrées dans la mémoire individuelle et collective de la communauté. Cette connaissance permet aux gens de voyager de façon efficace et sécuritaire vers leurs endroits de chasse et de pêche, ainsi qu'entre les différentes communautés des environs. Cet article analyse les différentes caractéristiques des routes traditionnellement utilisées par les gens d'Igloolik. Il explore également les variations qui existent entre les routes qui traversent la terre ferme et celles que l'on retrouve sur la banquise, et examine comment les chasseurs tracent les sentiers sur la neige et décrivent ensuite ces routes à travers la tradition orale. Enfin, l'article considère comment les différences générationnelles et l'introduction de nouvelles technologies reliées à la transportation, ont affecté la façon dont les gens considèrent et utilisent les sentiers à Igloolik. L'étude de leurs sentiers révèle plusieurs aspects de la compréhension qu'ont les Inuit de l'environnement si particulier qu'est l'Arctique. Elle contribue également à la connaissance historique de l'utilisation du territoire, et démontre comment les descriptions orales du territoire et le savoir oral en général, peuvent traverser le temps sans changer de façon significative.

Abstract: Routes, trails and tracks: Trail breaking among the Inuit of Igloolik

Despite significant social, economic, and technological changes, travelling remains a significant part of people's lives in the community of Igloolik, in the territory of Nunavut, Canada. When the snow covers the land and the sea ice, travellers start breaking trails, some of which recreate routes that have been used by generations of Inuit. These routes belong to the individual and social memory of the community, and this knowledge affords people safe and reliable travel to hunting and fishing grounds and between communities. This paper analyzes the characteristics of routes traditionally used by the people of Igloolik and explores the differences between land routes and sea-ice routes, the role of the *trail breaker*, and the characteristics of oral descriptions of routes. Finally, it addresses the issue of how the perception of trails is changing due to generational differences and the use of new transportation technologies. The study of trails and routes reveals some significant features of the Inuit understanding of the Arctic environment, provides an indication of the history of land and sea use in the area, and shows how verbal descriptions of the territory in particular and oral knowledge in general may remain unchanged or with little variation through time.

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Introduction

Travelling was and still is a very important aspect of people's lives in the Inuit community of Igloolik, in the territory of Nunavut, Arctic Canada. In their movements, the Inuit of Igloolik do not randomly travel extensions of a monotonous landscape, as the Arctic tundra and sea ice are frequently perceived by outsiders. On the contrary, Inuit travel along well-known routes that belong to the individual and social memory of the people, and that are traced every year in the same general locations. Most of the routes used by the Inuit of Igloolik today follow very old courses, which have been known, transmitted and laid out on the snow year after year for generations. The knowledge of routes is learned either while travelling or through oral means. Some of these routes can be identified in the notes and charts of the explorers who visited Igloolik as early as the 1820s.

Except for the period of snow-free ground and open water provided by brief Arctic summers, travel is mostly performed over snow-carpeted land and sea ice, in the past by dog sled and in contemporary times mostly by snowmobile. Despite occasional markers placed along the routes, most trails are broken every year in a process through which the knowledge of courses materializes as snowmobile drivers move over trackless snow. Trails are constantly discussed in the community, and new trails are broken if people consider existing trails unsatisfactory. Today's trails are mostly related to caribou hunting and fishing on Melville Peninsula and Baffin Island, hunting seals and walrus at the floe-edge, hunting seals through breathing holes, and visiting relatives and friends in other communities (especially in Hall Beach [Sanirajaq], Arctic Bay [Ikpiarjuk], Pond Inlet [Mittimatalik], Repulse Bay [Naujaat], and Clyde River [Kangiqtugaapik]). Since some of the trails are partially related to the patterns of the freeze up and the availability of animals, most people use the same routes to the same locations at the same periods of time.

This paper analyzes the characteristics of routes traditionally used by Inuit of Igloolik, and explores the differences between land routes and sea-ice routes, the role of the *trail breaker*, and the characteristics of oral descriptions of routes. Finally, it addresses the issue of how the perception of trails is changing due to generational differences and the use of new transportation technologies.

Study area

The current settlement of Igloolik is situated on the island of the same name located in northern Foxe Basin. Archaeological evidence shows that Northern Foxe Basin in general and Igloolik island in particular have been preferred places of human residence for more than 4,000 years (Maxwell 1984). The present-day inhabitants of Igloolik are descendents of those who brought the Thule culture into the area around the 12th century A.D. (Mary-Rousselière 1984: 431). Both oral and written sources describe Igloolik and its surroundings as one of the most important settlement areas in the semi-nomadic life of the inhabitants of the region (*e.g.*, Lyon 1970 [1823]: 217, 284). Mobility and residence patterns of the Inuit of Igloolik have changed over time,

but it is agreed that the Aivilingmiut of southern Foxe Basin and Melville Peninsula, the Tununirmiut of Northern Baffin Island and the Iglulingmiut of Northern Foxe Basin are closely related (Mathiassen 1976 [1928]: 1). Mathiassen (*ibid.*: 21) pointed out that “a movement between these areas is constantly going on, with the result that their population is constantly changing in number and composition. That a man is an Iglulingmio as a rule means nothing more than that for the present he is living in the Iglulik area.” The establishment of permanent settlements was a turning point in the lives of most Inuit, as by 1960 “the entire Iglulingmiut population was quickly pulled into the settlements of Igloolik and Hall Beach” (Rasing 1994: 273).

Igloolik has experienced rapid population growth and it is undergoing continuous changes, notably since it became one of the regional administrative centers of the new territory of Nunavut in 1999. Despite all the changes, however, subsistence hunting and fishing continue to be among the most important activities of the community, both in social and economic ways.

The island of Igloolik is relatively small (approximately 18 km by 9 km) and the highest topographic feature is a hill that stands 57 metres above sea level. While there is some hunting of sea mammals at the southeast polynya¹ and on the sea ice, most hunting and fishing are carried out at different locations situated between 30 and 200 km from the community. Low topographic features make navigation quite challenging in some parts of the territory, and travelling frequently involves long crossings of frozen sea and tundra, as well as courses through more prominent topographic features, such as valleys, river bends and canyons.

Methodology and objectives

This work focuses on the spatial characteristics of routes, and analyzes how and why people recreate these routes year after year². It also explores how the specific routes in particular and travelling in general are so central to the lives of the people of Igloolik. These topics have only been marginally addressed in the literature about Inuit peoples. Since travelling has been, and in many ways still is, one of the most important activities of Inuit daily life, the study of Inuit knowledge and use of routes, trails and tracks seems relevant in order to have a better understanding of how Inuit relate to their environment, and of the Arctic environment itself. Describing the Arctic landscape, Carpenter (1973) wrote that “[it] conveys an impression of absolute permanence. It is not hostile. It is simply there—untouched, silent and complete. It is very lonely, yet the absence of all human traces gives you the feeling you understand this land and can take your place in it” (cited in Lopez 1986: ix). One of the objectives of this paper is to show how the Arctic landscape in which Inuit live is actually covered by human traces.

¹ The term polynya refers to sea that remains open throughout the year. Polynyas are of utmost importance for Inuit hunters because they constitute a reliable source of marine mammals during the sea-ice season.

² In the context of this work the term *routes* is used when discussing knowledge of courses that remain and evolve in the memoryscapes (Nuttall 1992) of the people, while *trails* refers to the physical manifestation of routes, through the carving of sled tracks on the snow year after year and some times more than once a year.

Routes do not go from place to place through “no-man’s land” (Crowe 1969: 29). On the contrary, routes go through named features, across patterned snow, and along familiar horizons, all of which constitute the territory in which a good traveller always knows where he/she is.

The research upon which this paper is based involved extensive travel with Inuit hunters. During fall, winter and spring of 2000 and 2001, I participated in 30 hunting and fishing trips where we travelled by snowmobile (travelling a total of approximately 2,000 km), interviewed hunters of different generations, created a database containing 400 Inuktitut place names³, and mapped 37 trails, of which 15 are traditional routes that several generations of Inuit hunters have used. I used Global Positioning System (GPS) receivers and Geographic Information Systems (GPS mapping programs and *ArcGis* software) to record and interpret travells, place names, ice features and routes.

Most of the routes were recorded with a GPS receiver while travelling; others were drawn on paper maps or at a computer by knowledgeable hunters. Most of the interviews cited in this study were conducted in Inuktitut and translated into English. The interviews conducted by the author were in English or through an interpreter. This paper also relies on routes described or charted in ethnographic material (especially Mathiassen 1976 [1928] and Boas 1888), explorers accounts (mainly Parry 1969 [1824] and Lyon 1970 [1823]), and autobiographies (Rowley 1996). It also draws from interviews of the Igloolik Oral History Database, a collaborative, on-going project run by the Inullariit Society of Igloolik and the Igloolik Research Centre. All the interviews cited in this work (including the ones I conducted) are part of the Oral History Project. The most valuable sources were self-taped interviews, in which elders were given a tape-recorder and freely discussed topics of their choice. Not surprisingly, most of these narratives contain copious geographic information, and some of them detailed descriptions of routes.

There are no studies specifically concerned with Inuit use of routes, but the significance of movement in different cultures, including Inuit, has been analyzed by several scholars. Nelson (1969: 66) reflects on the Wainwright Eskimo’s use of trails on the ice, pointing out that they “usually chop and smooth a trail through the rough ice from the village to the edge of land fast ice. The trail is leveled with axes and picks,” a practice that is not usually performed by the Inuit of Igloolik. Collignon (1996: 98, my translation) points out that the Inuinnait perceive their territory as an ensemble of itineraries, and “as organized by a network of lines through which people and game move.” In his study of Inuit navigation in Igloolik, MacDonald (1998: 188) states that routes and landmarks are “the very arteries and nodes, the topographical anatomy, through which Inuit comprehend the totality of their land and access its life-giving resources.” The importance of trails and routes in different cultures has been stated, among others, by Brody (1981), Lewis (1976, 1994), Lewis and George (1991), and Myers (1986). The Inuit Land Use and Occupancy Project (Freeman 1976) and the Nunavut Atlas (Riewe 1992) produced valuable maps showing traditional routes.

³ This place names database was partially created with data collected through a toponymy project in the mid-1980s. This excellent work was compiled principally by Emile Imaruittuq and André Uttak, and was part of the Government of the Northwest Territories’ Geographic Names Program.

The spatial characteristics of Inuit routes, however, have hardly been a topic of interest for anthropological and geographic research. Such study reveals some significant features of the Inuit understanding of the Arctic environment, provides an indication of the history of land use in the area, and shows how verbal descriptions of the territory in particular and oral knowledge in general may remain unchanged or with little variation through time.

Characteristics of Inuit travel

Travelling for the Inuit is not a transitional activity of going from point A to point B. Life happens while travelling. Other travellers are met, children are born, and hunting, fishing and other subsistence activities are performed. Mathiassen (1976 [1928]: 99) suggested that the courses of traditional routes were not only related to the geographical characteristics of the terrain but also to the possibilities of hunting. Ijjangiaq (1990) described how when he was younger several families often undertook the long trading journeys together, explaining that hunting and interacting with other Inuit were parts of the journey.

Failure to notice this particular approach to travel puzzled the explorer Parry, who could not understand how people whom he praised as having such a great geographic memory could not agree about distance between two places (measured in periods of sleeps or days' journeys). Parry (1969 [1824]: 251) pointed out that "they not only differ from each other in this respect, but the same individual differs from himself at different times." A detailed analysis of the cross-cultural problems in the transmission of geographical knowledge has been published by Bravo (1996). Here, it suffices to say that Parry's informants may have had in mind different seasons of travel (a point noted by Parry). Most importantly, however, was the fact that while travelling was an activity in its own right for the explorer, the Inuit may have seen travelling as part of their daily lives. In fact, distance was sometimes referred to in a very loose way. Ilupaalik (2001) remembers that "they would not know by numbers as to how far it would be [...]. If [a knowledgeable person] sent someone to a specific location, a location that is far [...] he would tell him to take along dog food with him. He knows that he would have to spend days out on this particular trip, because he [was told] to bring along dog food."

Travelling, therefore, was not a transitional activity between one place and another, but a way of being. This approach to travelling can be seen in the terminology that the Inuit of Igloodik use when referring to travel and travellers. As shown below, statements made by some Inuit elders reveal that the act of travelling from or to a particular location plays a part in defining who the traveller is. A person was not only identified by the place where he/she had been born, or was currently living (as the suffix *-miut* defines), but also as regards the location to or from which he or she was moving.

The relationship between the origin of the trip, the destination, the traveller and the journey is quite complex, as the following statements of Igloodik elders show. Michel Kupaaq (1993) points out that the region around Naujaat (Repulse Bay) is known as

Kivalliq, and that people travelling in that direction “had always been referred to as *Kivavattut*.” However, people returning from there were called *Pijuat*. Those terms are also mentioned by Hubert Amarualik (1994). According to Mark Ijjangiaq (1990) the route to Naujaat was known as *kivavaq*, and the journey itself as *kivavaan* (“southbound”). Kupaaq (1993) also says that people living at the northern communities of Arctic Bay or Pond Inlet are known as *Tauvakkua* (“those over there”), but those who travel up there are called *Itivimiut* (“overland people”; overland refers to Baffin Island), and those who are already on the journey are called *Itijjaat* (“gone overland”). Those returning from overland are known as *Itivittut*.

The fundamental importance that movement plays in Inuit culture can also be appreciated in Rasmussen’s description of the ritual performed before a newborn child undertook his/her first journey. After describing the ritual and the prayer used for the occasion, Rasmussen (1930: 47) says that “this was the child’s first journey, and the little girl [...] had to be introduced to life by means of the magic formula here given.” Therefore, according to Rasmussen, being introduced to the first journey was, in a way, being introduced to life.

Why do Inuit travel?

The reasons for Inuit mobility have been frequently associated with the seasonal availability of food (*e.g.*, Boas 1888; Mauss 1979 [1906]; Kemp 1971). The Thule migrations, for instance, have been explained as related to scarcity or availability of food in relation to climate change (McGhee 1969). A complete description of the different motivations by which scholars have explained the migrations can be found in Morrison (1999). Subsistence plays indeed an important role in residence and mobility patterns. Both ethnographic literature and interviews with contemporary elders, however, suggest a much larger set of reasons for travelling.

Parry (1969 [1824]: 415) was perhaps the first to notice that subsistence was not the only motivation for Inuit movements when he wrote that “in these movements necessity may during the winter have considerable share; but in the summer it is perhaps only the love of change [...] that can induce them to leave Igloodik, the shores of which there need be no hesitation in asserting would easily supply a population, even of Esquimaux, ten times greater than theirs with food in profuse abundance.” Other motivations cited in different sources are trading (Boas 1888; Mathiassen 1928), marriage (Lyon 1970 [1823]; Parry 1969 [1824]; Rowley 1996), visiting relatives (Kappianaq 1995), geographic curiosity (Lyon 1970 [1823]), exploration (Ikummaq 2000a; Qulaut 2000), and social pressure (Mary-Rousselière 1980). Nostalgia for a significant place is also an important reason for travelling, as “it is peculiar to the migratory habits of the Eskimo that almost without exception the old man returns to the country of his youth and consequently by far the greater part of the old people live in their native districts” (Boas 1888: 466). Returning to the birth place, at least for a visit, continues to be a compelling reason for travel today (Qulaut 2000).

Another reason for moving is given by Julia Amarualik (2001), who explains that a former camp, Avvajja, was abandoned because “our elder Ittusarjjuat, just before he passed on, had made it known that this place had heated up from all the use; he wanted this place abandoned to give it a chance to cool down; it might be only for a year. That means no one was to stay there during that period; if they so wish they could come back and live there again.” Qunnun (2001) also remembers that “in those days they used to get sicknesses when the land was occupied too long.”

Routes as parts of memoryscape

The term memoryscape has been coined by Nuttall (1992: 39) to refer not only to the mere physical territory remembered by a particular individual, but also to the community’s interaction with a place through time. Memoryscapes are constructed “with people’s mental images of the environment, with particular emphasis on places as remembered places” (*ibid.*). This concept is rooted in earlier works of other anthropologists, such as Ingold (1986: 137), who states that “it is only by virtue of his belonging to the community that a person acquires a relation to a determinate portion of natural space,” and Basso (1988), who points out that through knowledge and memory hunters negotiate images and understandings of the land. I would add that memoryscapes are not static entities; on the contrary, the concept expresses both the permanence of memory through time and the dynamics of people’s relationship with their environments. Memoryscapes are not transmitted from generation to generation as a mere corpus of geographical knowledge. As Ingold (2000: 189) puts it “remembering is not so much a matter of calling up an internal image, stored in the mind, as of engaging perceptually with an environment that is itself pregnant with the past.”

This relationship with the environment through the act of remembering can be clearly seen in the activity of breaking trails. One of the main differences between routes used by Inuit in the Arctic and those used by most cultures in other geographies is that in the Arctic, routes remain and evolve in the social and individual memory of the people, become visible only in certain periods as tracks on the snow, and disappear from the landscape as the seasons progress. Routes are, therefore, an important part of people’s memoryscapes in Igloolik.

Inuit in Igloolik say that the routes they use today have been used for generations. This is supported by Mathiassen (1976 [1928]: 99) and Boas (1888: 462), the latter who wrote that routes “are established by tradition and the Eskimo never stray from them.” The dramatic seasonal changes of the Arctic environment erase the trails year after year, and blizzards may do the same within a single year. The only permanent or semi-permanent features of routes are occasional markers, such as *inuksugait* (rock cairns; plural of *inuksugaq*), rocks or other objects placed or left along parts of the trails (Figure 1), as well as natural features.

Regardless of the use of occasional markers, most of the routes still followed in Igloolik are recreated from memory. A good indication of the historical continuity of routes is the description of the trail between Igloolik and northern Baffin Island, as

provided by Parry (1969 [1824]: 449-450), Hall (1864: 356), Boas (1888: 443), Mathiassen (1976 [1928]) and Rowley (1996: 109). The descriptions indicate that the route went through the same locations from the 1820s through the 1930s. This route is still followed by contemporary travellers (Inuksuk 1995). Similarly, the route between the regions of Repulse Bay and Igloolik is described as going through the same locations by Rowley (1996: 67), Ijjangiaq (1990) and Qulaut (in Aporta 2000).

Among the routes that people consulted in this study considered as old, well-established routes, are the routes to Repulse Bay (Ikummaq 2000b; Iyerak 2000, Paniaq 2000), the routes to Arctic Bay and Pond Inlet, the routes to Steensby Inlet (Ikummaq 2000b), the routes to Majuqtulik (Paniaq 2000), and the routes to the interior of Melville Peninsula (Alianakuluk 2001).

Routes as networks

Routes frequently present the most efficient ways (if not the shortest) of travelling between two places (MacDonald 1998: 189). Since most people use the same routes, they become true networks of communication and exchange. People frequently meet along the trails and exchange news about travel conditions and about the places where they come from and the people they have seen. This communication network was of great significance in times before shortwave radios and telephones, since they provided an efficient way of receiving news about distant relatives and about the welfare of travellers encountered along the way. When meeting other travellers, people would also exchange essentials such as dog food, harnesses and seal oil (Rowley 1996: 217). In his detailed description of a trip from Lyon Inlet to Igloolik, Rowley (1996: 186) says that one of his Inuit travel companions, Kutjek, predicted that they would “meet Inuit before dark because his ears were ringing. An hour or so later, we saw four komatiks in the distance.” Rowley (1996: 187) points out that “for both ourselves and our dogs, meeting [this] party meant a change to feast from famine for they had plenty of meat.”

This network was also reinforced through communal travel and through placing along the way caches with dog food for the return trip. An excerpt from a description of a route by Ijjangiaq (1990) suggests that in the times of dog sled travelling, the journeys would be actually divided into segments determined by caches of dog food. He says that in the trip to Repulse Bay, these locations were precisely determined, as the caches were set at a distance “of a full day’s travel.” The caches were buried along the trail in lake shores or at the bank of the river Ajagutalik.

This network is still important today, and people who meet *en route* invariably stop for a chat, a cigarette and sometimes a cup of tea. In the event of a break-down, it is also easier to meet with other people or to ask for help on the shortwave radio if the traveller is along a known route. In the verbal description of his geographic location, the traveller would mention the route he has taken, refer to a nearby place name, and identify landmarks that can be seen from the trail.

An eventful trip I undertook with a hunter and his son during December 2000 provides a good illustration of the importance of travelling along known routes. During the trip, one snowmobile broke down and the other ran out of gas while returning to the community during the crossing of Ikiq (Northern Foxe Basin). My Inuit companion used the shortwave radio to ask for help: he mentioned that we were in our way back from Saglarjuk and that we could see Imilik (an island located 18 km northwest of the community of Igloolik) in the direction of *Uangnaq* (WNW wind). The call for help reached people in a camp on Baffin Island who in turn communicated with someone in the community of Igloolik, who finally phoned the relatives of my companion. Three hours after the radio transmission, they found us while walking to Igloolik along the trail. The description of the location was given verbally: throughout the process, no maps were used. Antonen Qunnun (2001) also says that to identify a specific location along a trail, “a place name is called out and your target location is [described as being] at its *Uangnaq* (WNW), or it might be at its *Kanangnaq* (NNE), *Akinnangani* (SSW), or to the direction of *Nigiq* (ESE); then you go and look for an object based on those directions.”

Tracks, trails, routes and the trail breaker

As pointed out above, trails have to be broken every year on the trackless snow of the sea and the land. After a trail has been broken, the wind will blow the snow that has not been compacted by the impact of the transportation device (most frequently sled runners), and the tracks become semi-permanent features. The landscape's surface becomes a historical record of the community's yearly trips, skills, mistakes, misfortune, and hunts. Sled tracks are frequently used as wayfinding aids since people remember and talk about them⁴. During a fishing trip in November 2000, for instance, I lost sight of the hunter I was travelling with during a crossing of Ikiq. I became momentarily disoriented and took the wrong bearing until I could find the tracks of the hunter who was leading the way. I was surprised (and embarrassed) when weeks later someone commented on having seen my erratic tracks. In another trip, during March 2001, my travel partner recognized tracks we had left in a trip made during the previous December.

Given the importance of any sign of activity recorded on the snow surface, it is not surprising that the Inuit of Igloolik use different terms to name tracks and trails. The general term for trail is *igliniq*, which refers to a trail that has been adopted by the community, is made of several tracks and is routinely used for travel. Usually *igliniit* (plural) correspond with traditional routes (*aqqutiit*). Louis Alianakuluk (2001) explains that “as soon as you hear this term [*igliniit*], you immediately identify what it means; it means that it is a trail that is used; indeed, it is well trodden.” *Iglinikuluk*, on the other hand, means “small trail,” and refers to a trail made of a few tracks. *Inisiaqpunga* is used to describe the act of following a lone track left by an occasional

⁴ Following tracks can be deceiving when travellers have poor navigational skills, as it is easy to follow the wrong tracks.

traveller⁵. *Iniiit*, in turn, is the generic term for sled tracks (different from *tulliniit*, which refers to tracks or paths made by humans or animals walking).

Every year, in order for routes to become visible, someone has to be the first in breaking the trail. Louis Alianakuluk explains how travellers break the trail across the sea ice of Ikiq:

When the strait becomes land-fast, someone will make the first trip across. And this first person that goes across leaves tracks in his wake, as he is the first to cross. Then after him, someone will follow these tracks, then again and again. Sometimes, if this track is going through unfavorable conditions, especially through ridges, a trail is going to be broken to make an *igliniq* on a different route (Alianakuluk 2001).

The trail breaker, therefore, leaves a lone track, which will then be followed by other travellers, causing the track to become *iglinikuluk* (a small trail). Depending on the characteristics of this trail, the *iglinikuluk* will become *igliniq* (a permanent, well travelled trail); otherwise a new, better trail will be broken. Alianakuluk (2001) points out that “I myself tend to cut through the trail in order to go straighter, especially when I see that the trail is curved when you feel that it should go straight.” When the *igliniit* are too curvy “I would just break trail and go for that direction” (*ibid.*). Ilupaalik (2001) points out that “sometimes you will see tracks all over the place [...] they are heading in the same direction, but the tracks are all over; they cannot be referred to as *igliniq*. Only the trail that is constantly used can be referred to as *igliniq*.”

Sometimes, “bad” *igliniit* will continue to be used throughout the year because “the raw ground is usually pretty rough in comparison to a well trodden trail which is nice and smooth” (Alianakuluk 2001). This was the case with the 2000-2001 trail between Hall Beach and Igloodik, which was considered by experienced travellers to be too curvy, but continued to be used as frequent travel had made it smooth and fast.

Trail breakers are usually experienced hunters, and unnecessary detours of early trails are frequently related to poor visibility, snow accumulation or, in the case of sea-ice trails, ice thickness and ice roughness. Alianakuluk comments on the 2000-2001 trail between the town of Igloodik and the floe-edge:

There is usually more than one trail. For example, if we go down to the floe-edge this winter, I am not certain how many trails we have. The first trail that was broken happened when the daylight was still too dark, and it takes a [course] that goes well away from the [right] direction. Then I went out and took a route away from that *igliniq* through a trackless ground, this is from Qikiqtaarjuk and on to the direction [of the floe edge] in a straight route, as it was my desire to take a short cut to the floe-edge. Later on, these tracks that I made had now become *igliniq* (Alianakuluk 2001).

⁵ The suffix *-punga* refers to the first person of singular. The literal translation of *inisiaqpunga* is “I have found a trail and I have followed it” (Michèle Therrien, pers. comm.).

Land routes

As stated above the term *routes* (*aqqutiit* in Inuktitut) is used when discussing knowledge of courses that remain and evolve in the memoryscapes of the people, while *trails* (*igliniit*) refers to the physical manifestation of routes, through the carving of sled tracks on the snow year after year and some times more than once a year. Figure 2 identifies the location of maps and photographs used in the following sections.

Trail breakers recreate the routes while remembering a previous trip or following directions given by another person. Land routes avoid rocky ground and favor isthmuses, fiords, and frozen lakes and rivers, which present the best conditions for easy, fast travel (fiords and isthmuses have been included here as parts of land routes because they frequently go several kilometres inland, and the surrounding scenery is similar to that of the land and quite different from the conditions of open sea-ice travel). In the past, smooth travel was even more important in order to preserve the shoeing of the *qamutiit* (“sleds”) and to avoid as much as possible the tiring and time-consuming task of re-icing the runners (MacDonald 1998: 188). Ijjangiaq (1990) emphasizes that, on the way to Chesterfield Inlet, “they would have to follow the route as past Nagvaan the terrain is rough, so one must follow the exact route.”

Breaking a land trail presupposes a deep knowledge of the terrain topography and, most frequently, of place names (see below) associated with topographic features. Travellers must be able to identify landmarks, either along the trail or at the horizon. They must know what certain landmarks look like when approached from a particular direction. They must also notice changes in elevation and in the characteristics of the ground underneath the snow. Travellers must always know the wind directions, and in cases of bad visibility or while traversing long extensions of tundra, they must read snowdrifts correctly.

All the characteristics of land trails explained above are illustrated in the following paragraphs, which contain excerpts from an oral description of the route between Igloolik and the Naujat (Repulse Bay) region. The route was described by Mark Ijjangiaq, an experienced traveller, to a younger hunter, George Qulaut, in 1990. According to Ijjangiaq (1990), the trail was generally broken by a hunter named Aakuannuk, who “knew the area very well, so all of the others got to know the routes to take from him; indeed, he used to lead the rest of the travellers through the route: ”

Once you get to a lake it will appear to you as this is the route to take, as it looks like a good route to take as the lake is large; on the side there is a small stream that runs into the lake; that is the only route you can take, there is no other way. You will go through this small stream until you get to another long lake, as a matter of fact this lake is known as Tasiraujaq [...]. After Sanningajuruluk the lake is called Tasiraujaq, just before the lake Qukiutitalik. This Tasiraujaq is a long lake so that you can go through it for a long time. It has been many years now that I did not use the route but I still remember the route. This stream is very short but there is a bend, despite the fact that the lake Tasiraujaq is only some short distance away. So as you go through the stream you will come across a sharp bend that will lead you

to the lake [...] this lake is not visible at all from the other lake that you are leaving behind, this is despite the fact that they are very close together [...].

[...] When you go through the river [...] Ajagutalik you will go through Sanguraq, of course this being the sharp bend, so you continue going through the river until you notice that the terrain and the land is getting bigger but it starts to get smoother; that is the Avalagiavvik or where you get off the river as you start for Nagvaaq.

Q. How should I be able to recognize Avalagiavvik towards Nagvaaq?

A. [...] from Avalagiavvik, you will not come across any deep valleys, as you go along you will be going uphill and downhill very slowly, when you get closer to Nagvaaq you will see two big mountains which [are] located south of Nagvaaq which is higher than the rest [...] Before you reach the end of the lake you cut across the north wind snow banks (Uangniutin) where the lake Tasiruluk is close [...] the only problem is that there are quite a few rocks along the way to the lake, but that is not a threat in the early spring travel (Ijjangiaq 1990).

Additional aids for the trail breaker (and the trail follower, for that matter) are rock cairns (*inuksugait*) and other objects (such as oil drums) placed on the sides of the trail. The role of different objects placed along known routes has also been noted in other regions of the Arctic by Nelson (1969: 104) and in Igloolik by Mathiassen (1976 [1928]: 97) and Lyon (1970 [1823]: 219). Description of this method has been explained by Ikummaq (2000b), Qulaut (2000) and Hubert Amarualik (1994), among many other hunters in the community of Igloolik.

In sum, land trails go through the same general locations year after year. There may be exceptions related to travel in flat tundra, and trails broken during blizzards, or in dark periods. Across large extensions of flat tundra, for instance, there may be more than one trail, and bearings are usually kept through sighting of visible landmarks and the correct reading of snowdrifts. In general, however, the Inuit environment is not homogenous space, in contrast to how it has been described by some authors (Carpenter 1973: 8).

Land routes typically take long detours with the purpose of following smooth travel surfaces. Preference for smooth travel was noted by Boas (1888: 450), who pointed out that sled routes would follow “a chain of long, narrow lakes” as well as rivers and isthmuses (*ibid.*: 459). Ijjangiaq (1990) says that the route to take to Kivavaq “is not on a straight line; one would have to make a zigzag route.” These features of land trails can be clearly observed in the routes recorded for this study.

The angle of view has been modified on the map in Figure 3 to have a better impression of the use of lakes, fiords and rivers in these two land routes. The observer is situated above Saglarjuk, looking southward towards Igloolik. The trail on the left shows a detour between Igloolik Island and the mainland due to ice conditions at that time of the year.

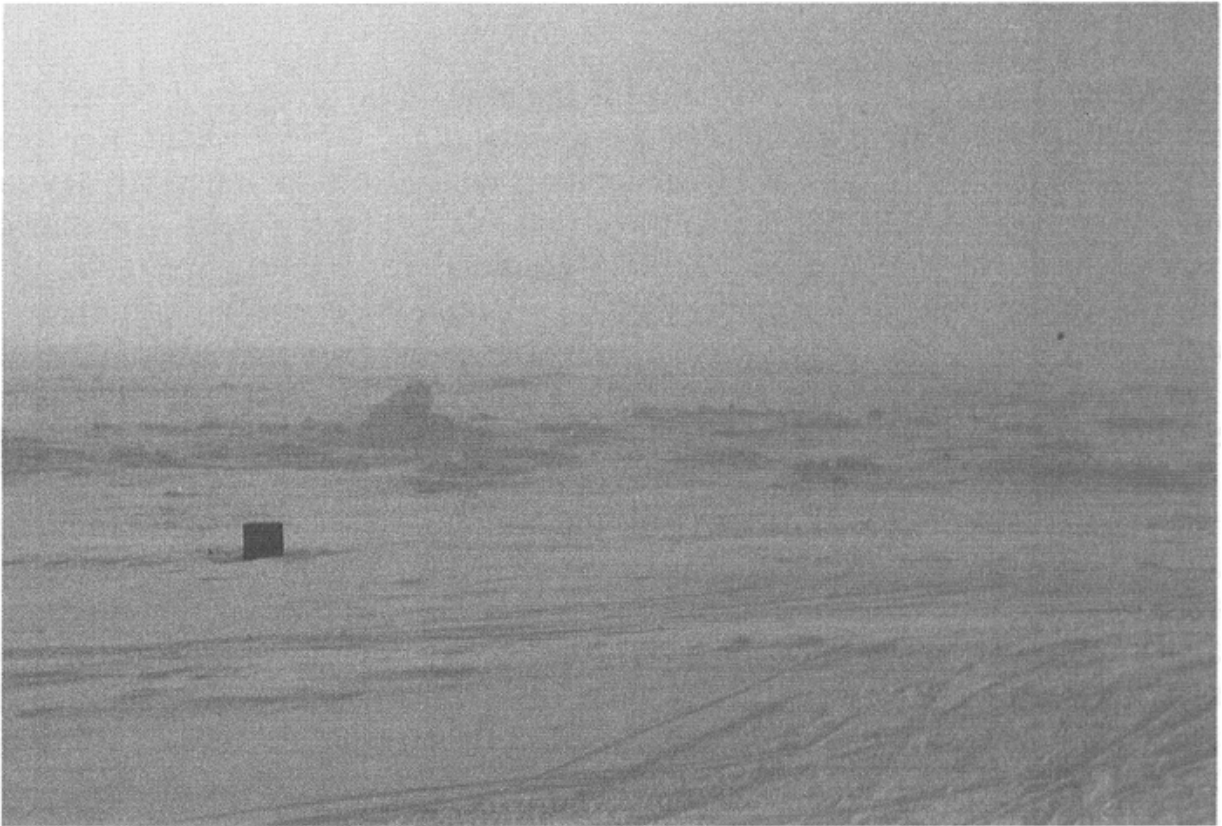


Figure 1. An oil drum helps identify a land trail on Igloolik Island. Photo: Claudio Aporta.

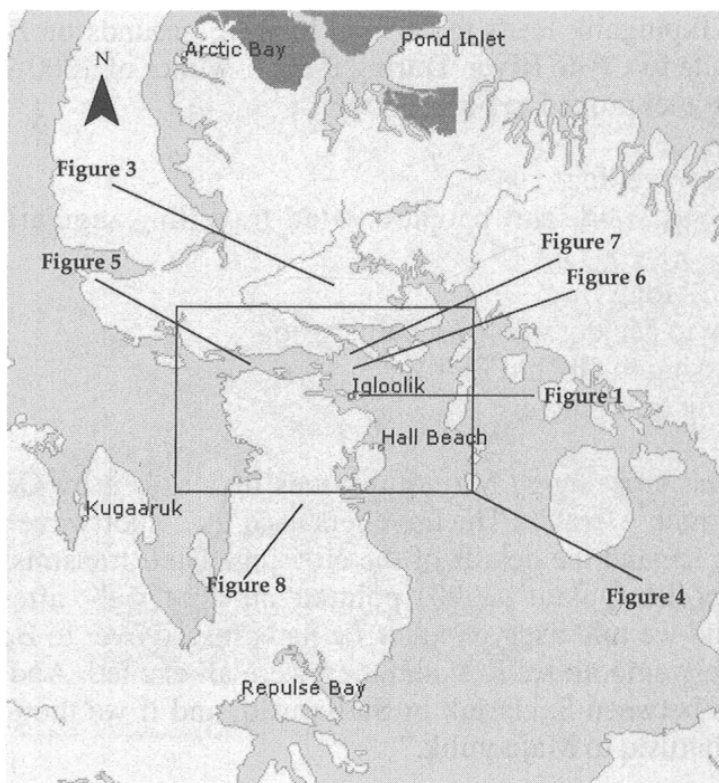


Figure 2. Location of subsequent maps and pictures.

Ice routes

In winter, the crossing of the sea-ice is undertaken on a regular basis in order to access hunting and fishing grounds in the mainland and Baffin Island. Between the middle and the end of October, the community is confined for seven to ten days as the ice on Turton Bay is too thick for boat travel and too thin for the sleds. The state of the ice is evaluated every day, and is constantly discussed on shortwave radio. A local hunter mentioned that, in December 2000, he would stand on the eastern coast of Igloolik every day to look at the steam coming out of the Fury and Hecla Strait (Ikiq), and he would also receive radio reports from a family living in an outpost camp at the other side of the strait.

There are several crossings that link the community of Igloolik to hunting and fishing grounds on Melville Peninsula and on Baffin Island (Figure 4). The first crossing goes to Naluqqajarviup Kangiqᑦua (Mogg Bay) in Melville Peninsula, and is used mostly for caribou hunting, fishing, and to connect with westward inland routes. Later in the year, a crossing from Igloolik to Utusivik connects with southward routes that lead to the neighbouring community of Hall Beach, and also to Repulse Bay. As the ice stabilizes, other trails to the mainland are broken north of Mogg Bay. Another important crossing, linking the mainland with Baffin Island, is located on the northwest part of Ikiq, towards Majuqtulik, and is used mostly for caribou and polar bear hunting. Later in the year, a crossing located just north of the community towards Iqaluit Nuvua (the mouth of Gifford Fiord), allows travel to fishing and caribou hunting grounds on Baffin Island, and also connects with the routes to Arctic Bay and Pond Inlet. Finally, a crossing between Igloolik and Ikpiugalik leads to caribou hunting grounds on Baffin Island and connects with the route to Clyde River. During the fall-winter of 2000-2001, several dates related to sea-ice travel proved to be important:

- October 19: last day of boat travelling;
- October 27: Turton Bay was solid, and people started travelling regularly by snowmobile;
- October 29: first crossing to Mogg Bay;
- November 24: first crossing to Majuqtulik from Salliarusiq;
- around Christmas: first crossing to Gifford Fiord;
- after Christmas: first crossing to Ikpiugalik.

In November 2000, the first crossing to Majuqtulik was undertaken by George Qulaut, Louis Illupaalik and Joannie Alaralak. The travellers used their shortwave radio to communicate the state of the ice and the details of the crossing. Their transmissions were eagerly followed in Igloolik. Qulaut (2000) pointed out that right after the crossing they built an igloo, “and we told everyone that we had crossed over to Baffin. We reported that it was extremely smooth ice [...] and they were all excited. And they started asking me about the ice between Saglarjuk or Salliarusiq, and if we thought it could be crossed over from Salliarusiq to Majuqtulik.”

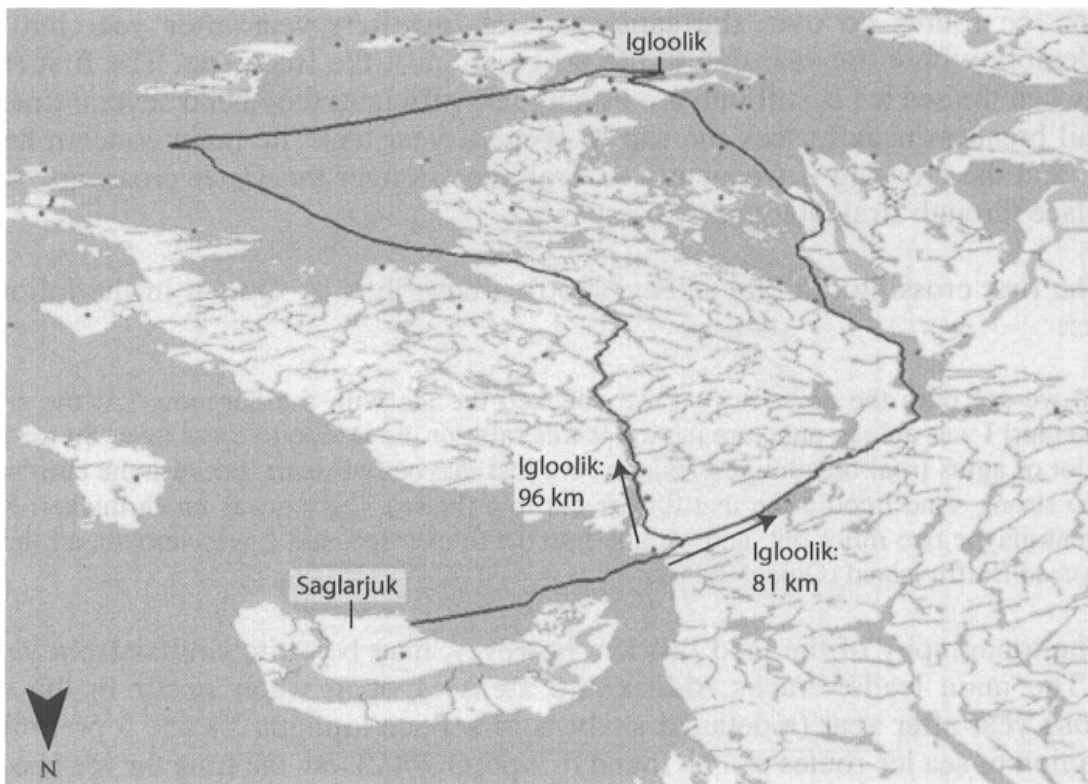


Figure 3. Two routes between Igloolik and Saglarjuk mapped by the author with a GPS in 2001. Dots represent places for which Inuktitut names were recorded.

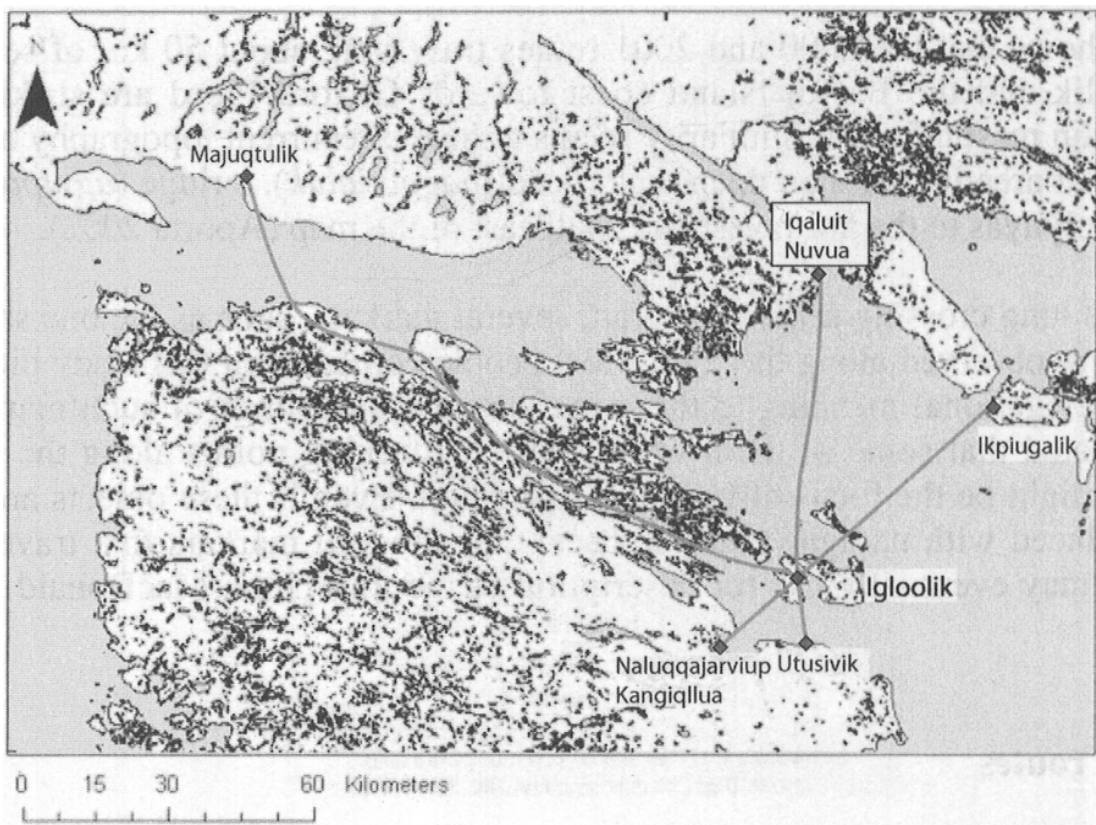


Figure 4. Map of the main sea-ice crossings.

Sea-ice routes go over the same general locations year after year but vary considerably within the year due to the progression of the freeze up. The first routes taken when the sea ice is still thin are usually less efficient; they bend several times, as the trail breakers usually seek the safety of multi-year ice. The main concern here is safety, and the crossing is frequently several hours longer than later crossings, which take place through straighter courses.

The first crossing (15 November, 2000) is described by Qulaut in the following manner:

So we got onto the new ice [...] we checked the ice with the harpoon. [At the second attempt] I was able to puncture it. And it was safe for the skidoo to cross over. So we found a lot of aglus [seal breathing holes], and we lost maybe two seals, because the current was too strong. And I could see that further out into the sea, the ice was much thicker. So we went maybe two miles out, and we got onto the thicker ice, and it was smooth, all the way over to Baffin Island (Qulaut 2000).

The topography of the land fast ice, however, may be quite similar from year to year. The main leads, cracks, ridges and areas of open water occur in the same locations year after year (a detailed analysis of sea ice topography and a preliminary description of sea ice routes can be found in Aporta 2002). By the time the ice becomes solid, routes across the strait become fairly similar from year to year. In Figure 5, the last crossing of that year (7 December, 2000) reveals a very efficient course, and constitutes the route that was finally adopted by most travellers. It is likely that this route maintains a fairly similar course from year to year.

Figure 6 shows that the 2000 and 2001 routes traversing about 50 km of sea ice between Igloolik and the Baffin Island coast towards Gifford Fiord are strikingly similar. The main reason for this similarity seems to be the recurrent topography of the ice, which in that area includes an open-water lead (*naggutialuk*), a ridge (*agiuppiniq*) and recurrent polynyas to the northwest and southeast of the map (Aporta 2002).

During this long crossing across the strait, several markers, such as the one shown in Figure 7, were observed along the trail. Most people consulted in this study did not attribute any navigational meaning to these markers. GPS readings of such markers, however, indicated that some of them were located at turning points along the trail; these features might be the focus of future investigation. Even if these objects are not intentionally placed with navigational purposes, they are still markers that travellers memorize and may eventually use for description of the trail (John MacDonald pers. comm.).

Description of routes

As important as breaking or following a trail is the ability to describe the routes to other people and to understand descriptions made by others. In the past, maps were scarcely used in Igloolik, other than eventually by drawing ephemeral maps on snow or sand. Rowley (1996) cites several situations during the 1930s in which his Inuit travel

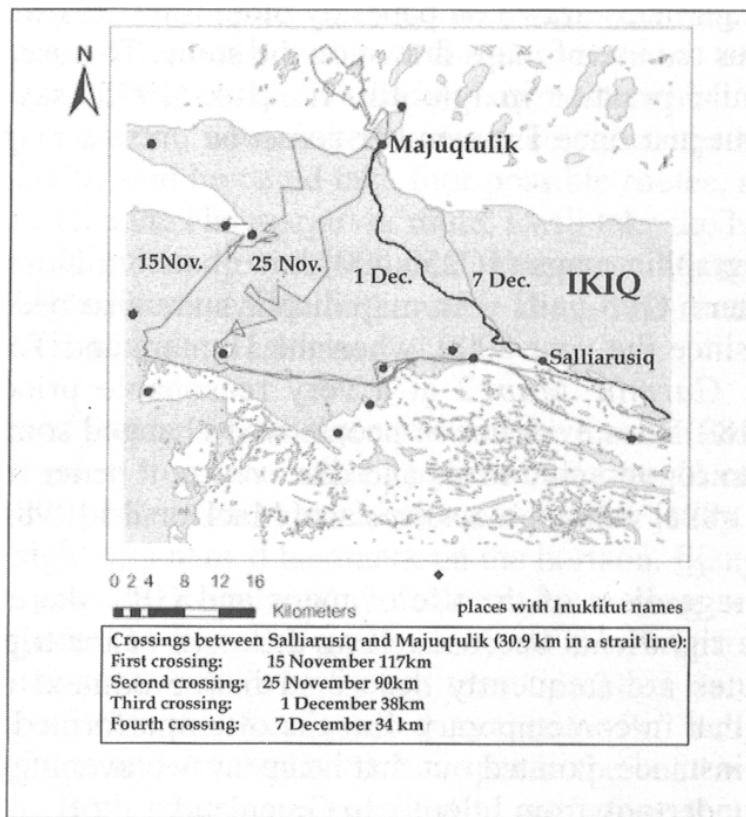


Figure 5. Four crossings across Ikiq during November and December of 2000. Dots refer to Inuktitut place names known to Igloolik hunters.

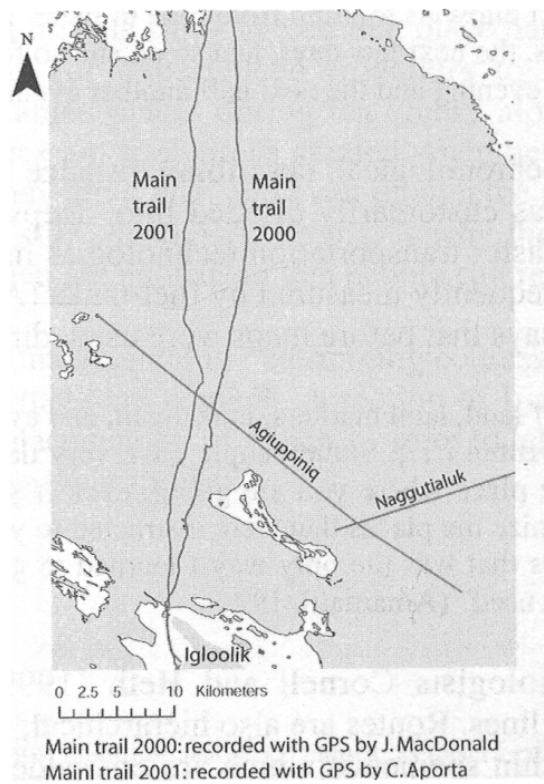


Figure 6. Sea-ice trails from 2000 and 2001.

companions used rough maps drawn on paper by other travellers who knew the routes. Boas (1888: 643) cites the use of maps drawn on the snow. The use of ephemeral maps has not been a regular practice in Igloolik. Inuksuk (1995) says that routes were explained orally, “but just once I remember someone drew a map [on the snow] of Piling area.”

Nowadays topographic maps (1: 250,000) have become more common, notably among younger hunters. GPS units with map displays are also becoming increasingly popular, especially since the year 2000, when the Hunters and Trappers Association made available the *Garmin Map12* at a very reasonable price to Inuit hunters. MacDonald (1998: 189) cites evidence of people who changed some traditional routes after having access to topographic maps and discovering a better route. Older people, however, frequently travel without maps (see also MacDonald 1998: 199).

In most cases, regardless of the use of maps and GPS, the emphasis on verbal descriptions remains significant because telling the story of the trip is as important as the trip itself⁶. Routes are frequently described in the context of the narrative of voyages, a practice that in contemporary times is often performed on the local radio. Theo Ikummaq, for instance, pointed out that he spent two evenings on the local radio describing a trip he undertook from Igloolik to Greenland:

Actually we had a radio show, a local radio, where we spent a couple of evenings, just talking about the trip. One of the elders doing the interview about the trip. And we didn't cover bits or pieces of the trip. We covered from day one, and we progressed. The way he asked the questions didn't allow us to jump from here to there. It made us talk from the day we left, the first few days, the next few days, and so on and so forth, to the point that half of the trip was covered one evening and the next half another evening (Ikummaq 2000a).

Narratives are always chronological, describing distance in periods of time instead of space units. A route was customarily divided into sleeps or places where people would camp. Nowadays, faster transportation technologies have changed the rhythms of travel, and distance is frequently measured by fuel-tanks (Aporta and MacDonald in press). Hubert Amarualik says that before maps were used, directions would be given

[...] about lakes, shape of land, land markers, inuksugait, and everything that could describe the way. Nothing was written [...]. Some people gave very detailed information that you could almost picture the place where you are going, even if you had not taken the route before, you would recognize the places that were instructed to you. When I was growing up and learning to go places that was the only way I learned to go places. Nothing was ever written or maps were not used” (Amarualik 1994).

Environmental psychologists Cornell and Heth (1999: 16) define routes as “represented by more than lines. Routes are also hierarchical, with landmarks, bearings and actions embedded within segments, which are embedded within a larger spatio-temporal framework, defined by the beginning and the end of the trip.” They also say that changes in surroundings help to define a sequence and that “nodes provide

⁶ The narrative of the journey involves the sharing of knowledge, information and events, without which the trips lack significance.

memorable endpoints for segments.” Finally, they state that segmentation facilitates memorization, a point frequently seen in Inuit narratives of trips. In Igloolik, descriptions of routes are frequently divided into segments which usually start and end in named places. For instance, when asked to describe the routes between Igloolik and Saglarjuk, Qulaut (2000) said he could take four possible routes, and described one of them as follows: “If I take the Naluqarjarvik route, I will take the Naluqarjarvik, and on to Uigursiq, and from Uigursiq up to Avvajjaup Qinngua, and from Avvajjaup Qinngua to Itilliq, and then Saglarjuk, and then Salliarusiq. That’s one route.” Qulaut described the other three routes in a similar fashion.

In the narratives of journeys from interviews of the Oral History Project, routes are always described as going from one named place to another. Turning points of routes are frequently named places (see also MacDonald 1998: 188). They may also be associated with the sight of a named landmark on the horizon. Ijjangiaq (1990) explains that the route that goes to Repulse Bay follows for a long while a river named Ajagutalik. At one point the traveller must get out of the river to take a small creek. Ijjangiaq says that the place where one must turn “is called Sanguraq [...] then the place where you cut off from the river is called Avalagiavvik.” Sanguraq is the name of a sharp bend in the river, and Avalagiavvik is a spot in the bend where the terrain gets wider and smoother. Both places are essential to recognize the continuation of the route, and both are named. The creek eventually leads to a lake named Nagvaq. Alianakuluk (2001) also says that “if I was to make reference to the trail, and mention a place where it bends, then they know immediately what I am making reference to.”

All hunters consulted for this study agreed that place names are important in order to travel⁷. It is common for experienced travellers to ask their younger travel companions to point at named places during tea breaks along routes. Kupaaq (1987) pointed out that new names are sometimes created when new routes are used because “Inuit like to say where they are going, and even though the name of the place may not seem significant they are still a landmark; so that is why they are named [...]. That is why places like Qalirusiujaq are named, so that people can refer to them.”

Lakes and rivers are fundamental in determining courses of land routes (see Figure 3), and many of these features are named⁸. A section of Ijjangiaq’s route description, for instance, contains 24 place names, of which 11 refer to lakes, and 16 to inland water in general, as the following table shows:

⁷ This seems to differ from how Inuinnait use place names, as described by Collignon (1996). She points out that for a good hunter/traveler “there is no need to name space to travel without getting lost” (Collignon 1996: 115, my translation).

⁸ Collignon (1996) states that most of the land names collected in her project refer to lakes and that fewer refer to more prominent topographic features such as hills. The author concludes that this supports the hypothesis that, among the Inuinnait, place names are not related to travelling but to residence (Collignon 1996: 122-123). In Igloolik, however, lakes and rivers are not only important for camping, hunting or fishing, but are also very significant components of land routes.

Table 1. Place names mentioned by Ijjangiaq.

Tasiujaq	(lake)
Ajagutalik	(river)
Nagvaan	(lake)
Tasiraujaq	(lake)
Qukiutitalik	(lake)
Sanguraq	(sharp river bend)
Tasiruluk	(lake)
Tasirjuaruluk	(lake)
Kimaktuutin	(lake)
Ulualuk	(lake)
Kuujjuaq	(river)
Qariaq	(inlet)
Angmaluttuq	(river)
Angmaluttuq	(lake)
Piringajuq	(lake)
Amittuarjuk	(lake)
Sanningajuruluk	(rough land at sides of the lake)
Avalagiavvik	(elevated, smooth terrain)
Akunniq	(point)
Usuarjuk	(point)
Iglulik	(town)
Nuvujjuaq	(land before Naujan)
Nagjuttuuq	(point)
Qupirrutuuq	(reference point to compare distance)

All the sea-ice routes recorded in this study reach land at named places along the coast. The single landing place of four trails recorded in the winter of 2000 between the island Saglarjuk and the northern tip of Melville Peninsula, is named Qakkiaq, which means “landing place.” In the Igloodik area, shore profiles and hills can be spotted from far away, and they play a significant role in defining the location of routes and the areas where the routes bend. Collignon (1996: 123) also noticed the use of named places along the coast as navigational aids among Inuinnait.

The importance of place names in travelling has been noted by several authors. Lyon (1970 [1823]: 218-219), for instance, points out that during long journeys weighty goods are “frequently left in store on the banks; and as every streamlet, lake, bay, point, or island has a name, and even certain piles of stones have also appellations, it is easy, in some ensuing year, to find the things which are buried, or even to describe their situation to others. It is remarkable, that in enumerating the various sleeps, or days’ journeys along the shore, every one has a particular name.” Arima (1976: 218) adds that among the Caribou Eskimos “place names were most often featured in songs



Figure 7. A marker on a sea-ice trail across Ikiq (the Fury and Hecla Strait). Photo: Claudio Aporta.

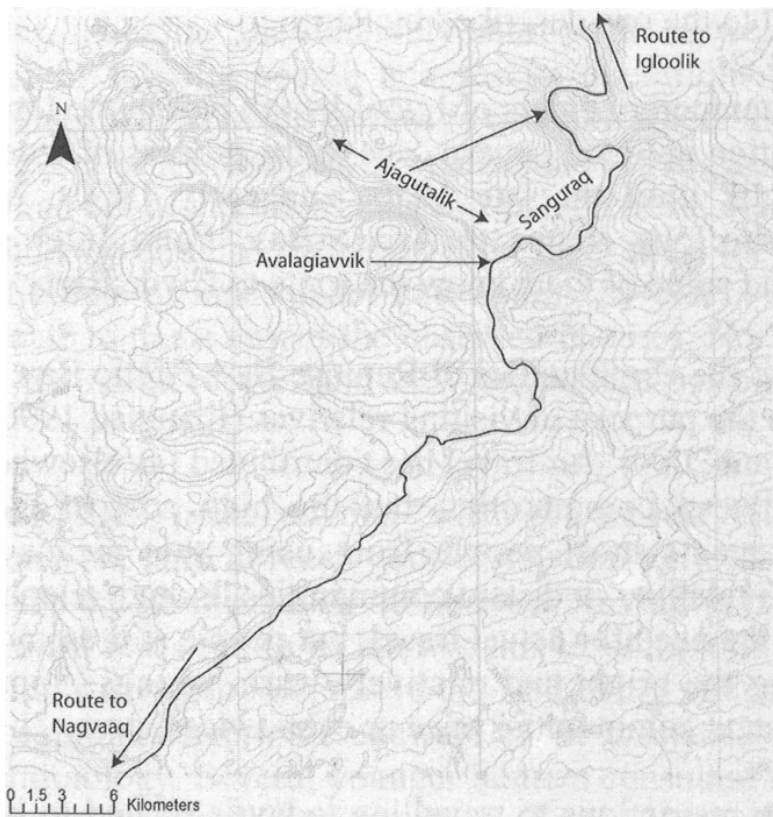


Figure 8. A segment of the route between Igloolik and Repulse Bay, as described by Mark Ijjangiaq. Photo: Claudio Aporta.

about travelling, with necessarily capable men undertaking long, arduous journeys and later singing about them.” Andrews *et al.* (1998: 312) point out that in Dogrib cosmology, significant places “represent the physical embodiment of cultural processes, which is realized though the combination of travel and story-telling. By traveling traditional trails, which link places like beads on a string, Dogrib youth are told stories as each place is visited.”

Travelling today

The patterns and extent of travel have changed over time. Parry (1969 [1824]: 513) pointed out that the most knowledgeable people of the Igloolik area were familiar with a territory of “a distance of more than five hundred miles reckoned in a direct line [south-north], besides the numerous turnings and windings of the coast along which they are accustomed to travel.” By the time Mathiassen visited Igloolik in 1920s, trading had become an important yearly activity and long journeys were undertaken every year to the trading posts at Repulse Bay, Pond Inlet and Arctic Bay. Trapping had also become an important economic activity. Long journeys were certainly made in the pre-trading period, but with the establishment of the trading stations, these long trips became part of the yearly cycle of life. Mathiassen (1976 [1928]: 97-98) says that “at Pond Inlet I met a man who knew the whole of the country between Chesterfield Inlet and Pond Inlet and had also travelled to Piling, North Devon, Cornwallis Island, North Somerset and Prince of Wales Island,” a territory of significantly larger proportion compared to the one described by Parry.

Most of the contemporary elders of Igloolik took part in the long trading journeys, since the transformation in travel patterns due to the process of sedentarization did not take place in Igloolik until the late 1950s and early 1960s. Most elders in the community know the long routes to Arctic Bay, Pond Inlet, Repulse Bay and Chesterfield Inlet, and some of them know the route to Clyde River.

Long journeys to the communities of Repulse Bay, Arctic Bay and Pond Inlet, are still undertaken with the purpose of visiting relatives (Ijjangiaq 1990; Kappianaq 1997; Piugattuk 1989; Qulaut 2000). Air travel has contributed (as elsewhere in the world) to reduce distance between communities, but the high cost of plane tickets in the Canadian North prevents most people from using this means of transportation. Communication with relatives in distant communities through telephone and shortwave radio has decreased the need for actual travel, but people still enjoy the undertaking of long journeys during the bright and relatively warm springs. Some Inuit in Igloolik make journeys to distant communities once or even twice a year.

One of the main restrictions to travelling today is related to life in town and the need to have part-time or full-time jobs and to attend school. Travelling is still an important part of people's lives, but the rhythms of travel are very different; people usually undertake their hunting and fishing trips during weekends, even in cases in which weather conditions are far from ideal.

Snowmobiles have almost completely replaced dog teams. The known disadvantages of snowmobiles related to expensive maintenance and mechanical failures, are compensated for by the speed and comfort they provide. On the downside, snowmobile travel results in a much narrower perception of the landscape since the traveller focuses mostly on the trail. The lower pace of a dog-sled allowed better memorization of landmarks and a view of the surroundings that was 360 degrees wide. Furthermore, the gentle pace and relative silence provided by the dog-sled allowed communication of geographic knowledge while travelling. MacDonald (1998: 7) observes a similar situation regarding the transmission of astronomical knowledge.

The route between Igloolik and Majuqtulik was travelled by snowmobile in an average of seven hours in December 2000. In the past, travellers used to take between three and five days to reach Majuqtulik by dog team. Iyerak (2000) says that “if you are travelling fast you are only looking right in front of you. You are not looking sideways or anything. But with dog teams you are always looking sideways, always, always. Not only at the front [...]. You can memorize all what you have seen and if you go in one direction you will have memorized what you have seen already and then when you come back you will know how it was.” Dogs were also good at following well trodden trails and, in some situations, at orienteering in bad weather (Ikummaq 2000a).

My own observations and the opinion of experienced hunters in the community suggest that a large number of young people have become track-followers. They follow trails that have been made by more experienced hunters, and make frequent mistakes in well-travelled routes, including the relatively short route between Igloolik and Hall Beach, where most of Igloolik search and rescue operations take place. Young, inexperienced travellers also have difficulties to describe where they are on their radio transmitters in the event of a break-down. MacDonald (1998) describes a case where young hunters who ran out of gas after being lost in a blizzard, could not describe their location on their shortwave radio: “Whereas from their camp they could see familiar distant islands and points of land, under questioning by elders over the short-wave radio they were unable to name any of the observed features. Nor could they tell their would-be rescuers the name of the land last seen before the blizzard struck” (MacDonald 1998: 163).

Nathan Qamaniq (2002) points out that “when you are just following a trail you do not need to worry or work hard to reach your destination [...]. [Younger people] only travel by following the trail to reach their destination. This slows the learning or getting knowledge about things that need to be known; this is taking things too easily; this is just following the trails or when you are on the sled being pulled by someone else.” Younger people in Igloolik seem to be unaware of the existence of different types of tracks, and their terminology. Several younger hunters consulted in this study did not recognize the different terms described above. Louis Ilupaalik (2001) says that “whenever [younger people] see a track, even a single track [...] this person would refer to that as *igliniq*; these are not what we would term as a trail, they are only tracks.”

Trail-following, however, is not necessarily a passive activity. Good travellers would still pay attention at the landmarks and other navigational aids along the trail. As pointed out above, tracks can be suddenly covered by fresh or blowing snow, and sometimes sled tracks splitting from the main trail can be deceiving. A confident traveller may also leave a trail if he considers it unsatisfactory.

Skills at travelling and wayfinding, therefore, are still very important, socially valued, and a source of personal pride, in the same way that becoming lost is a source of embarrassment. During the course of my research in Igloolik, I met several young people with deep knowledge of routes, place names, and who were confident at wayfinding. All of them spent most of their childhood and early youth hunting and fishing with relatives, and some of them used to live in outpost camps.

Conclusion

Despite important social, economic, and technological changes, travelling remains a significant part of people's lives in the community of Igloolik. When the snow covers up the land and the sea ice, travellers start breaking trails, some of which recreate routes that have been used by generations of Inuit. These routes belong to the memoryscape of the community of Igloolik, and their knowledge allows people safe and reliable travel to hunting and fishing grounds and between communities.

In a contemporary Inuit community, younger people are faced with skills, contexts, expectations, technologies, and geographies of a different nature. In this context, learning the local routes, place names and wayfinding techniques means much more than acquiring a body of knowledge. Remembering community routes is a process through which oral knowledge becomes inscribed on the snow surface through the act of travelling, or by sharing the experience of earlier trips. Breaking or following trails is a process of engagement with the surroundings, which implies recognition of snow patterns, landmarks, icemarks, and other navigational aids.

In the past, the knowledge of routes was exclusively transmitted by oral means or gained through the experience of the journey. Although maps and GPS units are being used today, the account of trips, often recounted on the local radio, is still as important as it was before. The knowledge of sea-ice and land routes and the significance of travelling give an indication of the nature of the way Inuit in Igloolik understand and relate to their environment.

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