

New Owners in their Own Land: Minerals and Inuit Land Claims

by Robert McPherson The University of Calgary Press 2500 University Drive N.W. Calgary AB T2N 1N4 ISBN 1-55238-097-1; 2003 CDN\$49.50, hardcover, \$34.95 soft cover

Our northernmost people are frequently mentioned on the business pages of Canada's newspapers. We read that the partners in the \$5 billion Mackenzie Valley pipeline, who already include the Inuvik-based Aboriginal Pipeline Group, are being asked multimillion dollar land-access fees by native bands along the pipeline route. At the other end of the country, benefit agreements between Inco and the Innu Nation for development of the Voiseys Bay, Labrador, nickel deposit are said to hold good prospects of steady jobs and a productive future for the indigenous people. Things seem to be looking up for our long neglected northerners. So how did this come about?

This aptly titled book provides answers that apply to the inhabitants of that vast part of Arctic Canada, 20 percent of our landmass, now known as Nunavut. It describes the events of three or more decades that led to the Land Agreement between the Inuit people and the Government of Canada in 1993. It tells of the motivations that drove a scant, widely scattered population to organize, demand and eventually win control and ownership rights. This account of history in the making is by one who knows whereof he writes. Robert McPherson spent his career in mineral exploration and the last 20 years of it in the north. He was an adviser to the Inuit on the land selection process as it pertained to subsurface mineral rights. He wrote his book in retirement while an Associate with the Arctic Institute of North America.

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This is essential reading for mineral or energy explorationists. McPherson states that prospecting, exploration and mining activities were the catalysts that brought about the 1993 Agreement. Many examples are given of the abuses that led to Inuit concerns about disruption of their culture, desecration of the environment and impact on wildlife and traditional livelihoods. It tells also of how they came to view government and industry as close partners who had little interest in Inuit concerns and whose consultation processes were a sham. This is what led them to strive for management boards to regulate, impose standards and engage in joint planning procedures. They were not against development but they wanted to be part of it, to have some control over its impact and to enjoy some of its benefits.

The resulting Agreement is a beacon to aboriginal people everywhere and of interest to all thinking Canadians. McPherson's details of how the Inuit organized to bring it about makes this publication a guidebook. With roots in an Ottawa-based volunteer native rights group, the Indian Eskimo Association (IEA) was founded in 1960 by a wide variety of scholars, educators and church people from across the country to provide research, fund-raising and advocacy for aboriginal people. Generously supported by over 2000 members and by the private sector, its ultimate aim was to produce self-sustaining aboriginal associations. A talented IEA field worker, Coral Harbour native Tagak Curley, brought together Inuit leaders from Keewatin to the eastern Arctic to form the Inuit Tapirisat (Brotherhood) of Canada in 1971. From its beginnings, the Tapirisat (ITC) was interested not only in Inuit culture and independence but also in successful development of the Arctic regions. Much of the book is devoted to the ITC's interventions and challenges to government and industry. The penultimate chapter "New Owners" is gripping as it describes the long process of consensus building after agreement in principle was reached in 1990. The author and his colleagues played a major role here as they attended meetings in isolated communities and delineated pockets of subsurface rights that they felt should be part of any agreement. The upshot was that the Inuit were awarded ownership of 356,000 square km.,

17.7 percent of Nunavut, and they own subsurface rights to a carefully selected 10.8 percent of this. The Agreement makes the Inuit the largest freehold owners in Canada, larger even than the C.P.R.

In a final, short summary chapter, the author agrees with Government negotiator, Tom Malloy, that the agreement is essentially about people working together--not only for the benefit of Inuit but for all of Canada. McPherson goes further and feels that the Inuit may form their own community-based exploration groups and may one day aspire to take on responsibility for all Crown lands in Nunavut. "They will then become the true custodians of the North for the benefit of all Canadians."

The book is pitched at the intelligent lay reader but offers special appeal to those with interest in mining and geology. Tribute is paid to the early G.S.C. mapping by giants of the past such as J.B. Tyrrell and Lud Weeks. Comprehensive accounts are offered of exploration highlights and the development of producing mines, e.g. Rankin Inlet Nickel, on the west coast of Hudson Bay, which produced from 1955 to 1962 and the Nanisivik base metal mine in north Baffin Island, active from 1976 to 2002. Serious Inuit concerns stem from the Rankin Mine and its aftermath. Serious Inuit involvement (through the ITC) stems from the early years and led to satisfactions in the late years of Nanisivik. Throughout, readers with geological or mining backgrounds will be delighted to see the names of former colleagues and acquaintances (and even onetime classmates!) in Arctic roles that we may not even have guessed. Also, we'll meet Isaac Attagutsiak "one of the true founders of Nanisivik", Allie Salluviniq--a survivor of the Government resettlement program at Resolute, and many more colourful bit players in this Arctic pageant. A serious criticism is the lack of a legible location map. A drastically reduced, coloured map of "Inuit Owned Lands in Nunavut" on the inside of the front cover does justice to the surface and mineral rights land locations. However, most of its print is not readable with the naked eye so, if you can't remember where Coral Harbour, Arctic Bay, or Grise Fiord are located, you may have to resort to your hand lens! Apart from that oversight, it's a really great read. Learn while you enjoy.

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