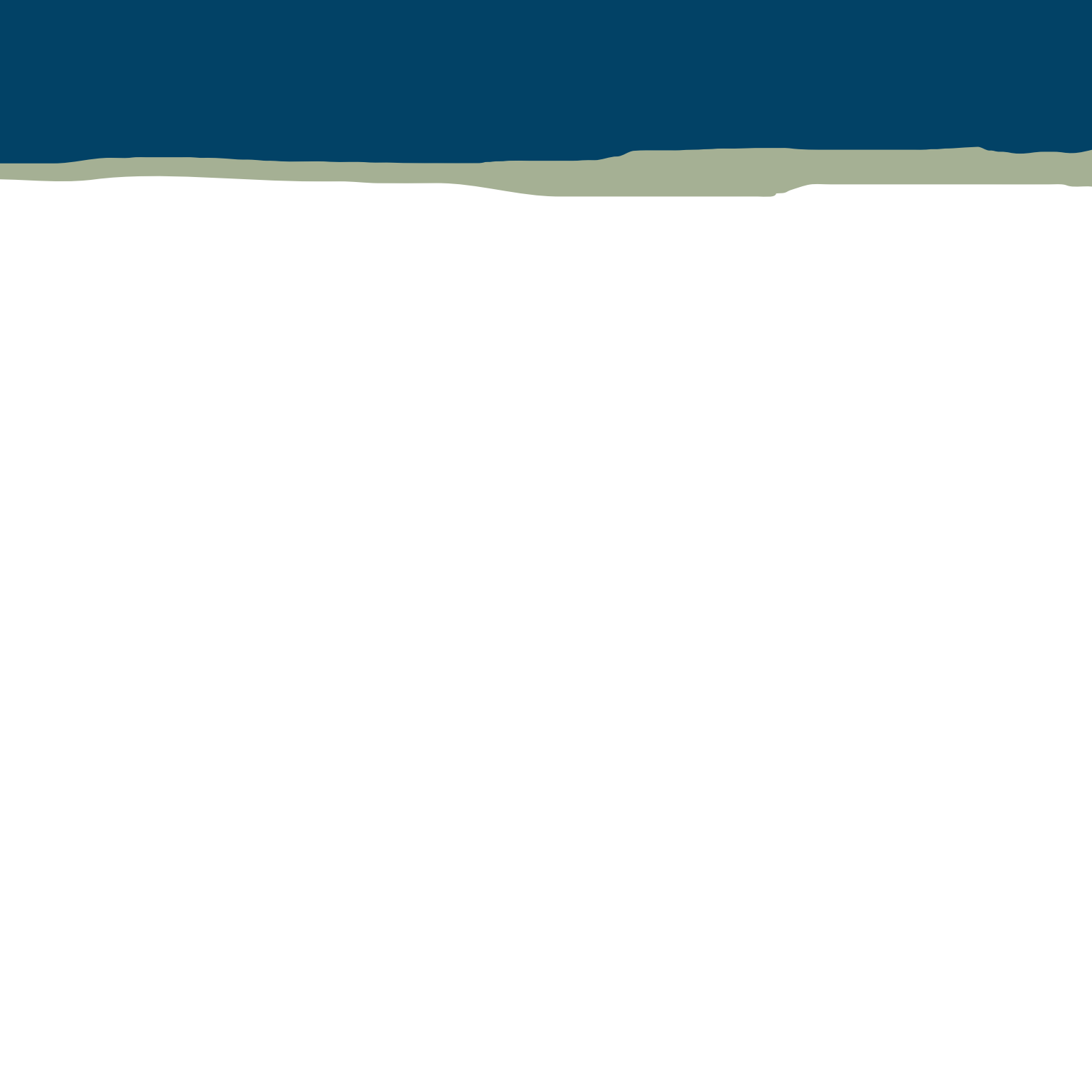


Inuvialuit artifacts from

# Kuukpak

a 500 year old village near the mouth of the Mackenzie River, Northwest Territories, Canada





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*Now in those days I remember every man who  
was the head of a family had a special charm.  
A special charm for hunting different game.*

Felix Nuyaviak



*Itqaumayatka taimani angutit sivuliqtiuyuat  
aanruaraqpangniqtuat. Taamna aanruaq  
atuqpagaat anguniaramik niryutinik.*

Felix Nuyaviak

## Foreword

Museums link the past to the present for visitors by exhibiting artifacts and sharing information about the ways people lived long ago. A recent exhibit at the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre, *Kuukpak: Ingilraan ~ A Time Long Ago*, provides a glimpse into a past culture from 500 years ago. The artifacts, illustrations and Inuvialuktun terminology in this book are highlights from this exhibit. The objects are intriguing, carefully chosen to show aspects of Inuvialuit life at Kuukpak, an ancient whaling camp near the mouth of the Mackenzie River, Northwest Territories, Canada. During decades of fieldwork, Dr. Charles Arnold combined the science of archaeology with the knowledge of Inuvialuit elders and field assistants from the Mackenzie Delta to unearth over 5,600 artifacts from the Kuukpak site.

The Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre has an important responsibility to protect, preserve and exhibit its collections. Working together with northerners and aboriginal organizations is essential to achieving this goal.

We dedicate this book to Inuvialuit of the Beaufort-Delta region, particularly those who contributed years of time and wisdom to the Kuukpak project. I hope this project will inspire cultural pride, especially for the youth.

Barb Cameron,  
Director, Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre, 2011





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# Kuukpak

## The people of Kuukpak

The Kuukpangmiut were the people of Kuukpak, a 500-year-old village at the mouth of the Mackenzie River in the Northwest Territories, Canada. Kuukpak means Big River and Kuukpangmiut means People of the Big River. The Mackenzie River is the longest river in Canada and still an important water route for all communities adjacent to it today.

Kuukpak existed as a village for hundreds of years. It was once a village of more than 20 sod houses and several hundred Kuukpangmiut.

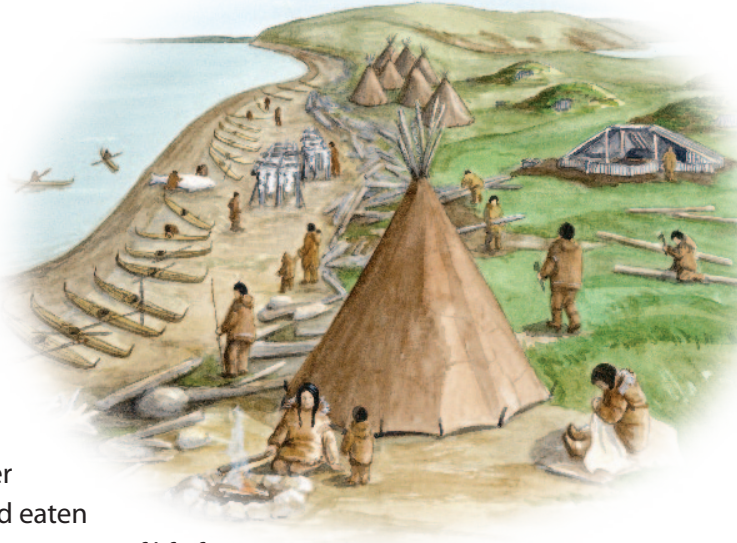
This seal skin boot, found near Kuukpak, is approximately 800 years old. The little boot points to a time when Kuukpak was full of life, also indicated by the many objects uncovered there that were used daily by the Kuukpangmiut.



## Location, location, location

The Kuukpangmiut made their home at the mouth of the Mackenzie River where it empties into Kugmallit Bay on the way to the Beaufort Sea. This area provided them with food, water, and shelter. Access to the mainland provided a vast area to hunt caribou. The rivers and creeks were filled with a variety of fish, and most importantly, the ocean provided access to beluga whales. The mouth of the Mackenzie River is an estuary where beluga whales, or *qilalukkat*, gather in summer. Beluga were harvested, then preserved and eaten throughout the year. Beluga harvesting is still an important part of life for the Inuvialuit, who are descendants of the Kuukpangmiut and other ancestral groups who lived in the western Canadian Arctic.

Kuukpak was also a good place to settle because of the abundance of driftwood that floated down the Mackenzie River. The driftwood provided the village with a source of fuel and material for making tools, equipment, and shelters like the sod house, known as an *igluryuaq*.



A shore covered in driftwood near Kuukpak.





## What happened to the Kuukpangmiut?

Whalers, traders, missionaries and other visitors brought diseases to Kuukpak and many other villages in the area. Kuukpak was eventually abandoned by those who managed to survive. Log covered graves left from this time period dot the hills throughout the surrounding area, showing evidence of a tragic time in the history of the area.

Now, the village of Kuukpak only exists in peoples' memories. The archaeological site is an important record of Kuukpangmiut life that lies buried in the ground and beaches of the Beaufort Sea. The village was located so close to the sea that today the higher banks are eroding into the water, along with some of the remains of village life.



Driftwood covered grave



Monica (left) and Roxy (right) Mimurana, shown in this 1914 photograph, were at the time two of the few surviving Kuukpangmiut. According to Roxy, people stopped living at Kuukpak in the late 1800s. The survivors relocated to other villages. Most of their descendants today live in Tuktoyaktuk.



## Descendents of the Kuukpangmiut

The Inuvialuit of the Western Canadian Arctic are descendants of the Kuukpangmiut and other groups who lived throughout the vast area.

Today, Inuvialuit continue to use the knowledge, skills, and tools that their ancestors passed on. An example of this is the harpoon, still used today to hunt the beluga whale, an important source of nutritional food needed to survive during the cold winter months.

## Artifacts found at Kuukpak

Archaeologists have worked at Kuukpak for eight field seasons. Over 5,600 artifacts have been found. They are now being taken care of by the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre in Yellowknife.

The artifacts can be divided into categories based on what they were used for: building a house, kitchen utensils, making clothing, adornment, fishing, harpooning, bows and arrows, tools, celebrate, trade, play and protect.

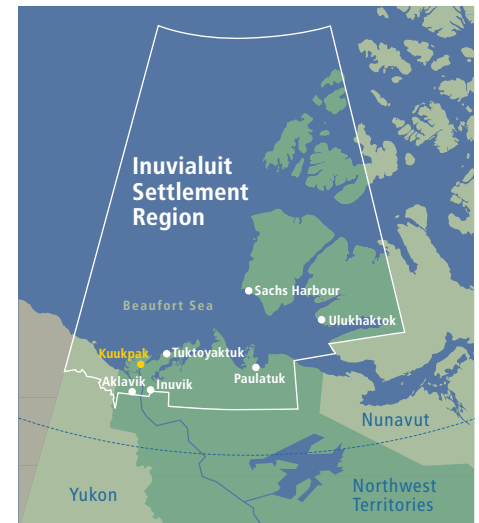
The objects, made of wood, antler, stone and bone, represent a land rich in natural resources. They also showcase the skill, technology and craftsmanship developed by the Kuukpangmiut over many centuries.



Harpoon head  
found at Kuukpak



Modern day Inuvialuit  
harpoon head



Inuvialuit live in a large portion of the Western Canadian Arctic, having settled in six communities: Tuktoyaktuk, Aklavik, Paulatuk, Sachs Harbour, Ulukhaktok, and Inuvik. In 1984, the Inuvialuit settled a land claim with the Canadian government. Kuukpak is one of many traditionally used areas within the land claim area.





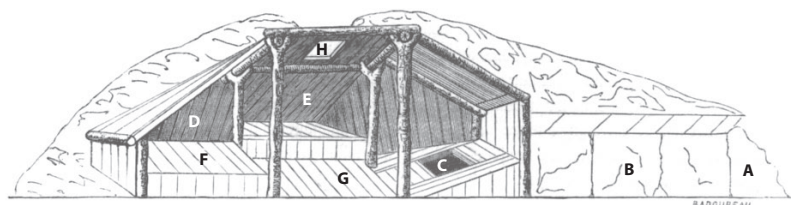
## What is an *igluryuaq*?

In winter the Kuukpangmiut lived in large sod covered houses they called *igluryuit* (singular = *igluryuaq*).

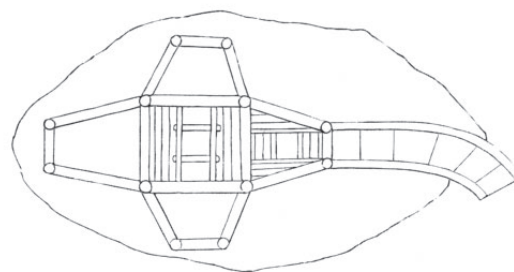
Igluryuit were partially dug into the ground, often on a slope. People entered through a porch made of snow blocks, which led into a long tunnel, and then through a door. The floor of the entrance tunnel was lower than the floor of the main living space, which kept cold air from coming in.

The frame, floor, walls, and roof of igluryuit were made from driftwood logs and planks. The walls and roof were covered with an insulating layer of sod, abundant in this area.

The main living space often had three platforms, one at the back and one on either side. Each opened up into a central area. These platforms were raised above the level of the central floor so that people could sit and sleep in the higher, warmer air. Oil burning lamps, known as *qulliit*, were placed in front of each platform for light, heat and cooking. A window in the roof provided additional light and let out stale air. Up to six families lived in one sod house.



A	<i>silaliq panga</i>	porch made of snow blocks
B	<i>tuqsuuq</i>	tunnel
C	<i>katak</i>	door
D	<i>krinruk</i>	rear alcove
E	<i>kreriuk</i>	side alcove
F	<i>iglik</i>	platform
G	<i>natiq</i>	floor
H	<i>igalik</i>	window



Floor plan of a sod covered house.

# Sanalrutit iglumun

## Tools for building a house



Siklat ~ Picks

Nivaktuaq ~ Digging



Qublut ~ Wedges

Qubluyuaq ~ Splitting logs



## Shaping wood



Ulimautit ~ Adzes

## Saviuyaqtuaq ~ Cutting snow blocks



Savikpait ~ Snow knives

# Niriniutit

## Kitchen utensils



### Puurutit ~ Containers

Containers were made from soapstone, clay and wood.



### Illiviat ~ Platters

#### Blubber pounders

Fat, or 'blubber' from a seal or whale was pounded to draw out oil for the lamp.



#### Qakidjiviit ~ Hooks

Hooks tied to house support posts and walls were used for hanging tools and utensils.





## Qulliit ~ Lamps

Oil-burning lamps made from soapstone provided heat and light.



## Aluuttat ~ Spoons



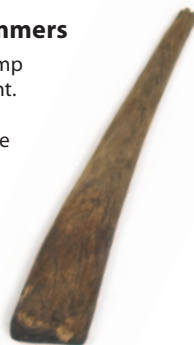
## Nausautiksa ~ Fire starters

One way of starting fires for lighting lamps was by striking iron pyrite nodules with hard stones, producing sparks.



## Tatqiqsuutit ~ Wick trimmers

A line of moss placed in the lamp soaked up oil and was set alight. The amount of heat and light was controlled by adjusting the shape and size of the wick, using a wick trimmer.



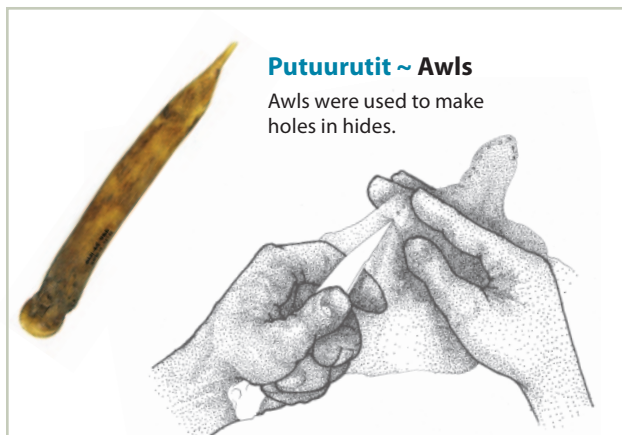
# Annuraaliurniq

## Making clothing



### Ikuutit ~ Scrapers

Scraping tools with sharp edged stone blades were used for removing hair and flesh from hides.



### Putuurutit ~ Awls

Awls were used to make holes in hides.



### Iqtuqsiutit ~ Hide softeners

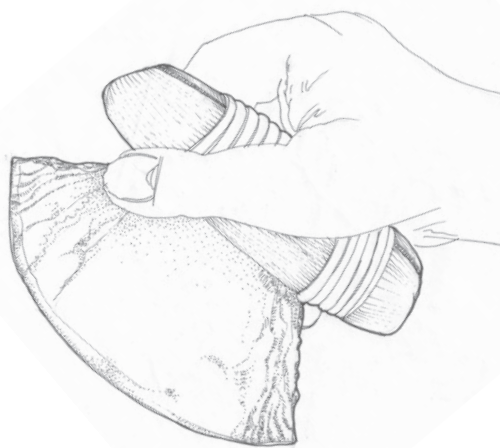
These tools were used to soften hides after the flesh and sometimes the hair was scraped off.





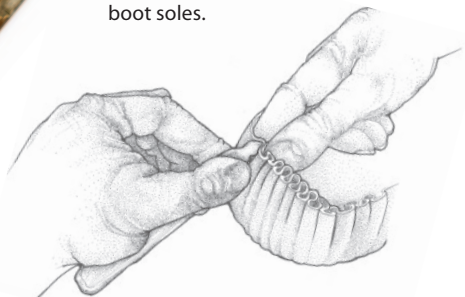
## Ulut ~ Women's knives

Stone knives, characterized by their curved cutting edge, were used for skinning, cutting hides, butchering and preparing food for drying.



### Boot sole creasers

Creaser tools were used to crimp the curved edges of seal skin boot soles.

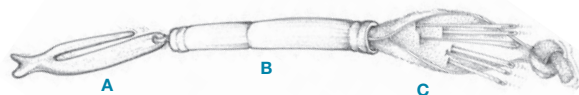


### A Belt hooks

### B Mitqutausiqpiit ~ Needle cases

### C Mitqutit ~ Needles

Needles were wrapped in hide and kept in cases made from hollow bird bone. Thimble holders held thimbles made from hide.



# Savaqutit

## Adornment



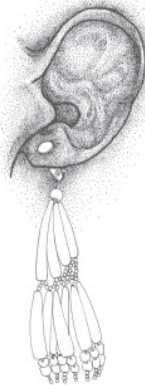
### Illaiyautit ~ Combs

Combs of a variety of styles and sizes were found at Kuukpak. They were used for personal grooming, including getting rid of head lice!



### Siutirutit ~ Ear ornaments

Early drawings of Inuvialuit, such as this illustration dating from the early 1800s, show both men and women wearing ear ornaments through piercings in their ears. This artifact has a hole at one end, and likely had something dangling from it.



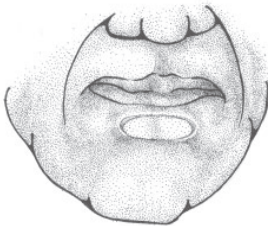
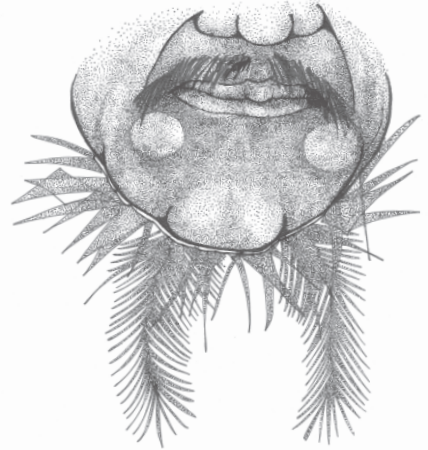
### Sungaumat ~ Beads

Small beads made from bone and amber may have been used for decorating clothing. Glass beads were obtained through trade networks and later through by foreign traders in the mid 1800s.



## Angmaluarutit ~ Labrets

Old photographs show men wearing labrets, or lip plugs, in holes cut through their cheeks on each side of their mouths. It has been remarked that lip plugs, together with tusk-like inserts sewn below the collar of parkas, made men look like fierce walruses!



Women wore one large labret, in a slit cut under their bottom lip, according to Jimmy Memogana, one of the last people to live at Kuukpak.



## Uyarnitqutit, sungauyat, aanruarutit ~ Pendants, miniatures, amulets

Teeth of caribou, fox, bear and other animals with grooves or drilled holes and miniature tools may have been worn around the neck or sewn on clothing for decoration. They may also have been amulets that were intended to protect and bring luck to the person wearing them.



## Kigiunnit ~ Amulet boxes

Small boxes made from wood or stone may have been used to keep amulets and other precious items safe.



# Iqalungniaqtuaq

## Fishing

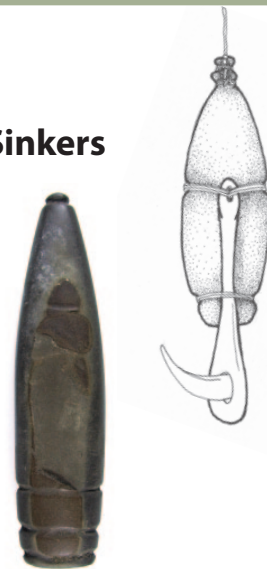


### Niksit ~ Fish hooks

Some fish hooks had serrated edges for tying on bait, such as fish skin. Other hooks had holes carved or drilled into their surfaces for inlaying shell or shiny stones.

### Kiviqun ~ Sinkers

Fish hooks with weights attached were used when jigging in flowing water.



### Aulatdjuti ~ Line holders

Line holders and hooks were used for jigging for fish through holes in lake or river ice.



### Tuuruti ~ Ice chisels

Chisels with antler tips were used to make holes through ice that could be a metre or more thick.



### Ilautit ~ Ice scoops

Scoops made from antler were used to clear ice from holes cut through the ice.





### Kubyat ~ Nets

Nets were used for catching fish in open water. Baleen was the preferred material for making nets at Kuukpak.



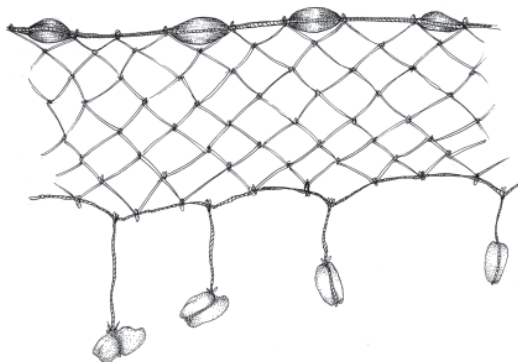
#### Mesh gauges

Mesh gauges were used when making nets to ensure the openings were the correct size.



### Puktarutit ~ Net floats

Floats made from the thick bark of cottonwood trees that float down the Mackenzie River were tied to the tops of nets.



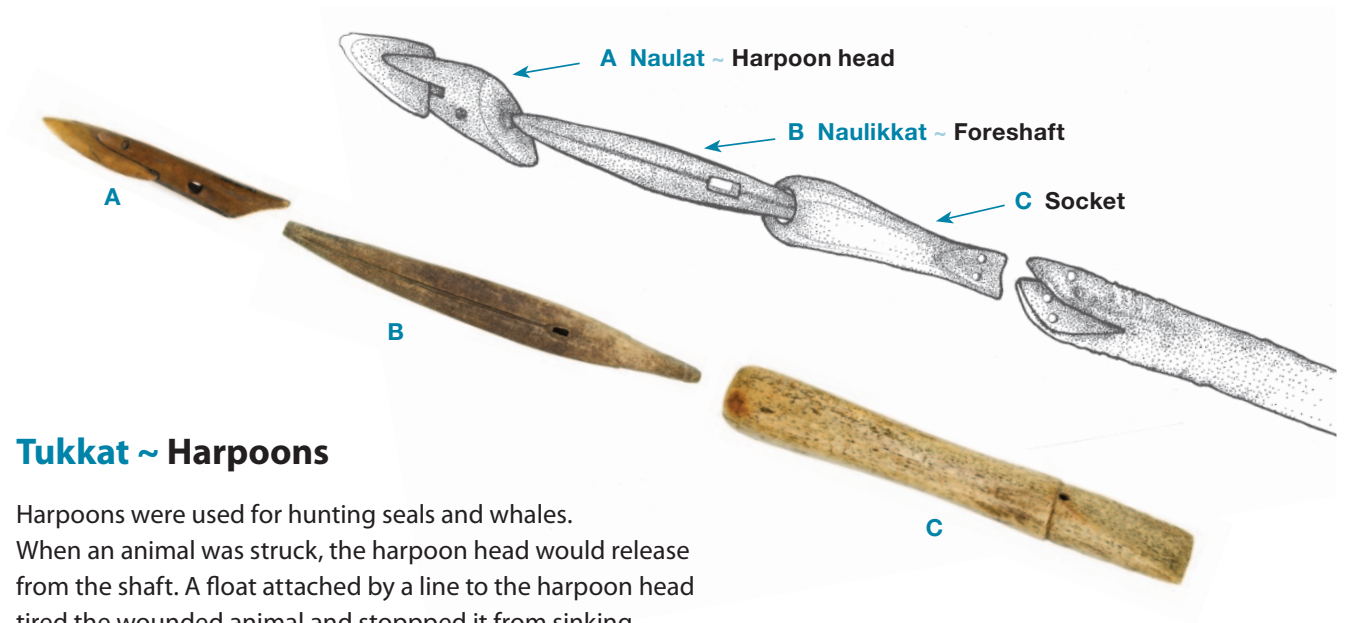
### Kakivait ~ Net sinkers

Sinkers made by notching stones were tied to the bottom of nets to hold them in place.



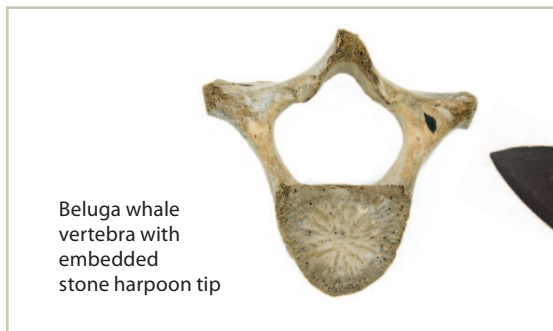
# Nauligaqtuq

## Harpooning



### Tukkat ~ Harpoons

Harpoons were used for hunting seals and whales. When an animal was struck, the harpoon head would release from the shaft. A float attached by a line to the harpoon head tired the wounded animal and stopped it from sinking.



## Pana ~ Lances

Lances tipped with slate blades were used to kill a whale or seal once it had been harpooned.



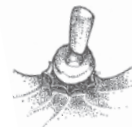
### Float bars

Floats of inflated seal skins were used when hunting sea mammals. A flap of skin wrapped around a float bar made a handle for attaching a harpoon line.



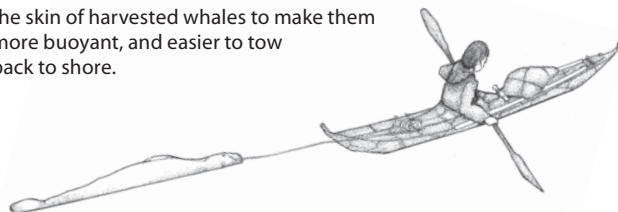
### Inflation nozzles

Tubes made from ivory inserted in an opening in the seal skin float served as mouthpieces for inflating it. These inflation nozzles were sealed with wood plugs.



### Inflation tubes

Bone tubes were used to blow air beneath the skin of harvested whales to make them more buoyant, and easier to tow back to shore.



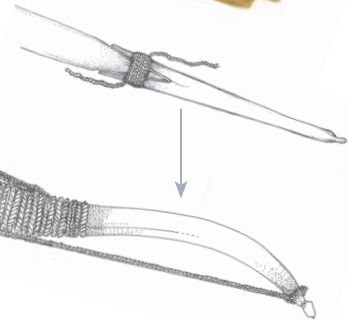
# Pitiksivialuillu qaryullu

## Bows and arrows

### Pitiksivialuit ~ Bows

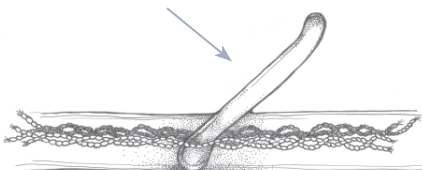
#### Bow 'ear'

In the Arctic, bows were often made by splicing several sections together. The 'ear' is the end piece.



#### Cable twisters

Braided strands of sinew twisted together and tied to the back of the bow provided strength and elasticity.



#### Marlin spikes

These tools were used for lifting sinew strands to insert tension adjusters.



Tension adjusters  
Small plaques of antler placed beneath the sinew kept it tight.



#### Wrist guards

Tied to the wrist to prevent chafing from the bow string.





## Kukit ~ Arrow heads

Barbed arrow heads were used for hunting large animals such as caribou. Some had stone tips, others were self-tipped.



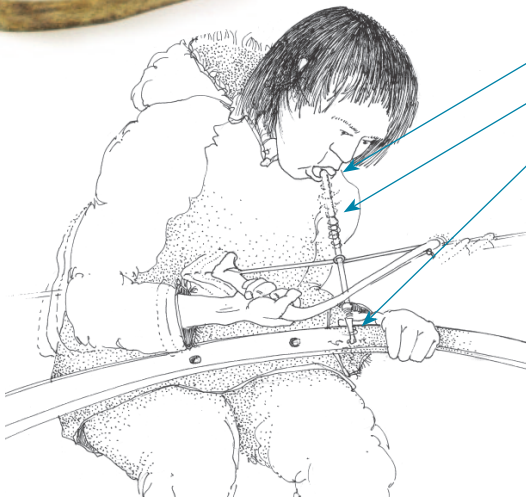
## Qaryut ~ Arrows

Blunt arrow heads were used for hunting birds by stunning them.



# Sanalrutit Tools

## Niuqtuqtuaq ~ Bow Drills

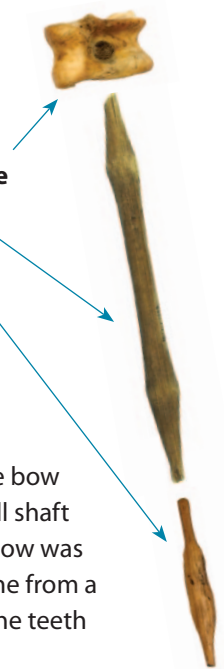


**A Kingmiark ~ Mouthpiece**

**B Pitiksiraq ~ Drill shaft**

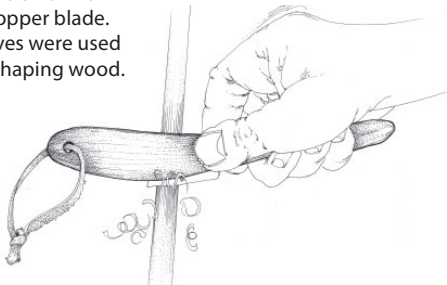
**C Pitiksiraq ~ Drill bit**

Bow drills were used for making holes in wood, bone and antler. Caribou ribs are a convenient shape for bows. A slack string attached to the bow and wrapped around the drill shaft rotated the shaft when the bow was moved back and forth. A bone from a caribou foot held between the teeth kept the drill shaft steady.



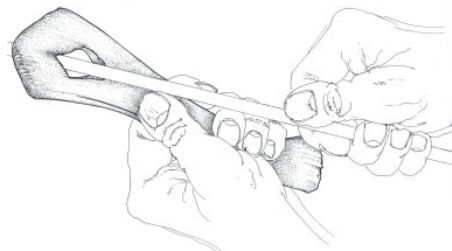
## Shaves

The slot in this tool would have held a small iron or copper blade. Shaves were used for shaping wood.



## Narruqsurviit ~ Shaft straighteners

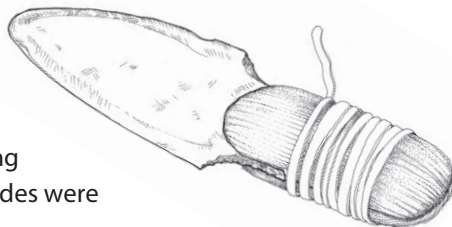
By running shafts through the hole of these tools, irregularities could be found and removed with a shave.





## Saviit ~ Knives

Knives with slate blades hafted in wood handles were used for cutting and whittling. The edges of the blades were sharpened using whetstones.



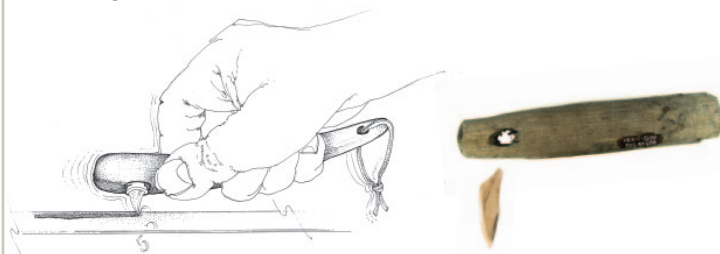
## Ulimautit ~ Adzes

Adzes were used to shape wood by chipping along the grain.



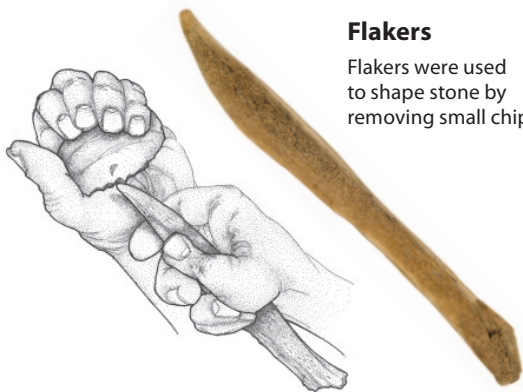
## Qubluutit ~ Draw knives

Draw knives were used for cutting grooves in wood, bone and antler, making it easier to break the material into smaller pieces for making tools.



## Flakers

Flakers were used to shape stone by removing small chips.



# Quviasugvik, piuyaq, Celebrate, play, trade, protect



## Qilautit ~ Drums

Singing and dancing to the beat of drums is a time honoured pastime in the Arctic, and an important way to celebrate significant events.



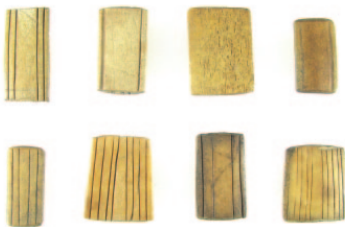
Ipuutit ~ Drum handle

## Drum rim



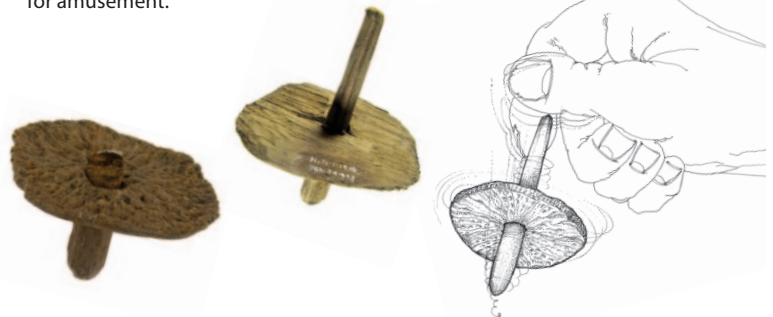
## Gaming pieces?

Small antler plaques, some plain and others with as many as eight incised lines, were found in most of the house remains. Could these have been for a game?



## Kaipat ~ Tops

Spinning tops may have been used in a game, or simply for amusement.



# niuviq, munariniq



## Anaulirauti ~ Clubs

Clubs are known to have been used by Inuvialuit in skirmishes.

## Niuviq ~ Trade

Some of the materials used to make artifacts originated long distances from Kuukpak. Soapstone and copper came from the east, nephrite came from the west and argillite may have come from the south.



Soapstone



Kannayaga ~ Copper



Nephrite



Argillite

## About the project

The information known about the village of Kuukpak was learned through archaeological digs and memories shared by Inuvialuit, some who are descendants of the Kuukpangmiut.

Archaeologists uncovered several sod houses at Kuukpak, trying to understand the people who lived there. They studied the remains of dwellings, lost and discarded tools, bones of animals that were hunted and other evidence of how people lived in the past.

Inuvialuit elders assisted archaeologists by providing them with information that could not be learned by science alone. They are the living textbooks of the traditions, legends and history of their ancestors. Sharing their knowledge, stories, and memories provided archaeologists with another view of the ancient village of Kuukpak.



Inuvialuit Communications Society recording elders Jimmy Komeak and Wallace Lucas talking about Kuukpak



Excavating at Kuukpak



## Project team

Archaeological work at Kuukpak was directed by Charles Arnold, and funded by the Government of the Northwest Territories, the Northern Oil and Gas Action Program, and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

The Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre thanks the many students, youth, elders and others who helped with the archaeological work over the years.



John Kudlak holding parts of a bow



Paula Voudrach with a fish hook



Frank Umoak (standing), Sarah Bannon and Virginia Kotokak



Laura Ettagiak writing notes

## Credits

Based on archaeological research of Charles Arnold

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Graphic design: Dot Van Vliet



**Names for artifacts and other terms used in this booklet are from the Siglit dialect of Inuvialuktun. Here are some examples:**

Kuukpak	big river
Kuukpangmiut	people of the big river
qilalukkaq	beluga whale
qilalukkat	beluga whales
igluryuaq	sod house
igluryuit	sod houses
qulliq	lamp
qulliit	lamps
ulu	woman's knife
ulut	women's knives
pitiksivialuk	bow
pitiksivialuit	bows
ikuun	scraper
ikuutit	scrapers
savik	knife
saviit	knives



Inuvialuit artifacts from  
**Kuukpak**