

## The Yukon and the Northwest Territories

This land is vast but thinly populated. Some eleven thousand Athabascan Indians\* live in the Northwest Territories in five tribes — the Kutchin or Loucheux, the Hare, the Slavey, the Dogrib and the Chipewyan — and are known collectively as the Dene nation. There are around twenty-five hundred Inuit or Eskimos — originally members of family groups of less than five hundred. Until recently, they lived in isolated villages, but many now live in the new town of Inuvik. There are one thousand to fifteen hundred Métis, of mixed white and Indian ancestry, who have preserved their Indian cultures to some degree. There are also some fifteen thousand whites. In the Yukon, native people are a minority of the total population of some twenty-two thousand.

The native peoples are linked to the land and the animals. Contrary to romantic notion, the animals of the north are not abundant. Species are few — only nine species of mammals (of the thirty-two hundred known) live in the high Arctic, and about twenty-five species of fish (out of twenty-three \* A language group

hundred) live in Arctic waters. The Arctic also provides nesting grounds for about a hundred species of birds, some quite rare. They depend on a simple ecosystem, based on a few types of natural food. Animals and plants grow slowly; a one-hundred-year-old tree on the edge of the Arctic Circle may be no bigger around than a man's thumb, and the Arctic char in the Sylvia Grinnell River on Baffin Island take twelve years to produce ripe eggs. It takes decades to replace a single mature animal or plant. Justice Berger emphasized the fragility of these life systems:

"Every ecosystem is built on both living and non-living elements. The two are inextricably linked, and the characteristics of the one are reflected in those of the other. . . . [They are distinguished by] the simplicity of the food chains, the wide oscillations in populations, and the slow growth rates."

The land itself — the soil, the tundra and the permafrost — is part of the delicate balance, and the survival of self-sufficient native cultures depends on the stability of the land.

## The Canadian Arctic Gas Pipeline Project

Canadian Arctic Gas Pipeline Limited applied for certification to build a forty-eight-inch, 3,864-mile pipeline from Prudhoe Bay in Alaska, across the

northern Yukon, to the Mackenzie Delta and down the Mackenzie Valley. It would carry gas from *continued on page eight*

