

Ungava mystery

The following article by Ralph C. Deans is reprinted from a recent issue of *North*, a publication of the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs:

Near the headwaters of the Povungnituk River in northern Quebec, a small lake appears to have been inscribed in the ragged landscape as if by a compass.

Lac Cratère is almost perfectly circular, in marked contrast to the irregularity of other lakes which cover the northeastern corner of the Ungava Peninsula. The symmetry is startling. It seems to suggest the baleful eye of whatever brooding spirit has laid claim to this wild place, implacably staring up at the air traveller.

The lake nearly fills a depression about two miles in diameter and 1,300 feet deep. The barrens slope away from the crater for miles in all directions, a moonscape of broken, jumbled boulders.

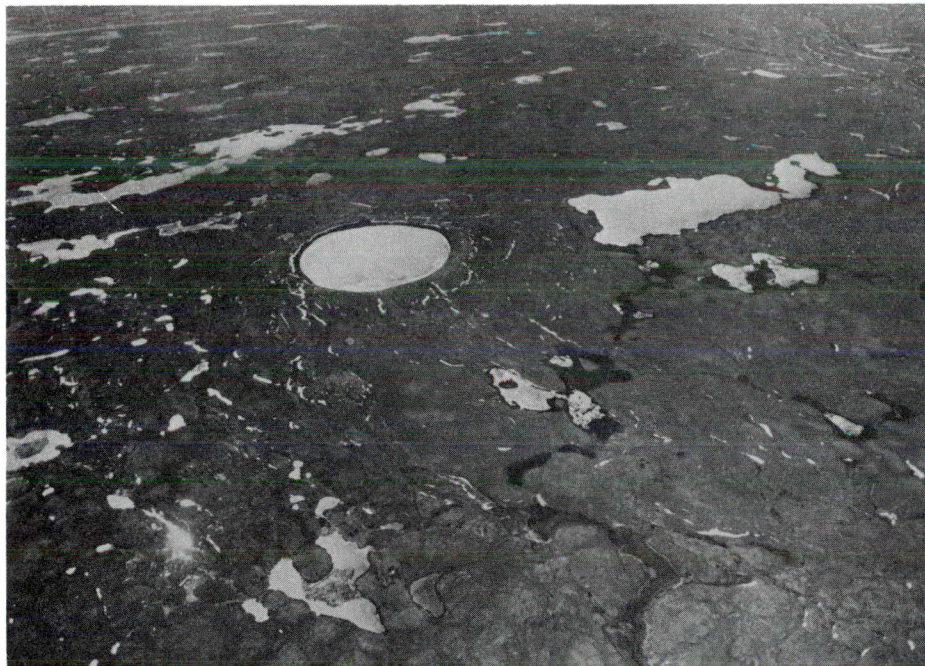
Naturally, there's a story about this place; a story involving wartime pilots, a Whitby, Ontario, prospector by the name of Fred Chubb, a syndicate of Toronto businessmen diamond-hunters and a gentlemanly but persistent scientific controversy. After more than 30 years of study, the New Quebec Crater — as it has been officially named — remains a geological enigma: did a huge meteor fall here eons ago or is there another, less catastrophic, explanation for this most striking topographical feature of the North?

First sighting

The crater was first noticed by U.S. Army Air Force pilots during the summer of 1943 while they were photographing the area in a trimetrogen survey. It was first plotted on an aeronautical chart in February 1945, and marked simply "Crater". Since then, it has appeared on all large-scale maps of this area published in both Canada and the United States.

The Geodetic Survey of Canada sent several parties into the Ungava during the summer of 1946 to establish astronomical control points. Royal Canadian Air Force pilots, who flew these parties in, used the crater frequently as a navigational landmark.

Flight Lieutenant Jake F. Drake mentions sighting the crater on July 20, 1946, and taking pictures of it.



Lac Cratère, almost perfectly circular in shape, is unmistakable from the air.

Eight days later, Flight Lieutenant William K. Carr ran into a line squall and took refuge by landing in the crater. The first white visitors tied up to the northeast shore, had a meal and left — incidentally leaving some tin cans on the beach.

Two years later, the crater was again photographed when the RCAF ran another trimetrogen survey of Ungava. These photographs so bemused an official of Legal Surveys, C.B. Bassett, that he wrote the Geological Survey of Canada on June 2, 1949, asking for an interpretation.

Dr. Y.O. Fortier of the Bureau of Geology and Topography, suggested the crater was probably created by a meteor. In a memo in the files of the Geological Survey, Fortier argued that "...Such a crater to be of volcanic origin would have to be of recent formation, which is not likely in the Canadian Shield."

In 1949, Professor G.V. Douglas and Mary C.V. Douglas prepared a comprehensive report on Ungava for the Arctic Institute of North America. Again, they agreed that the crater was probably meteoritic in origin, although they noted that "this crater has never been examined on the ground and the theory is based on a study of aerial photographs".

Possibility of diamonds?

Despite the weight of scientific opinion, prospector F.W. Chubb hoped

the crater was volcanic. If so, it might contain diamonds, as do some extinct volcanoes in South Africa.

Chubb approached Dr. V.B. Meen, Director of the Royal Ontario Museum of Geology and Mineralogy, with this idea and formed the Chubb Crater Exploration Syndicate on July 13, 1950.

Later that month, Chubb and Meen travelled to the crater financed by the *Toronto Globe and Mail* and a number of interested businessmen. They found no diamonds but a six-day exploration of the site supported the meteoritic theory.

Meen returned to the crater in the summer of 1951, this time under the auspices of the Royal Ontario Museum and the National Geographic Society of Washington. He made detailed studies from July 25 to August 21 that year, including the first measurement of the depth of the lake. He also discovered one of the food tins left behind by Carr and his party five years earlier.

By this time, Meen was firmly convinced that the crater was caused by a meteor which impacted almost vertically. He also suggested that this tremendous event occurred some time after the ice retreated in the last Ice Age.

The meteoritic theory was supported by Dr. J.M. Harrison of the Geological Survey of Canada, who spent some time in the crater in July and August 1953. However, Harrison disagreed