

## The North

*The North invests Canadian life with an extra dimension. As people who live near great mountains or the sea feel them over their shoulders when they are turned away, present when they are asleep, Canadians feel the North. Robin MacNeil, writing in **Travel & Leisure**.*

The Yukon, the Northwest Territories and some 45,000 square miles of Newfoundland and Quebec are called "The North." Most Canadians never see it even on a visit but, as Mr. MacNeil suggests, it is always up there, on the edge of their consciousness.

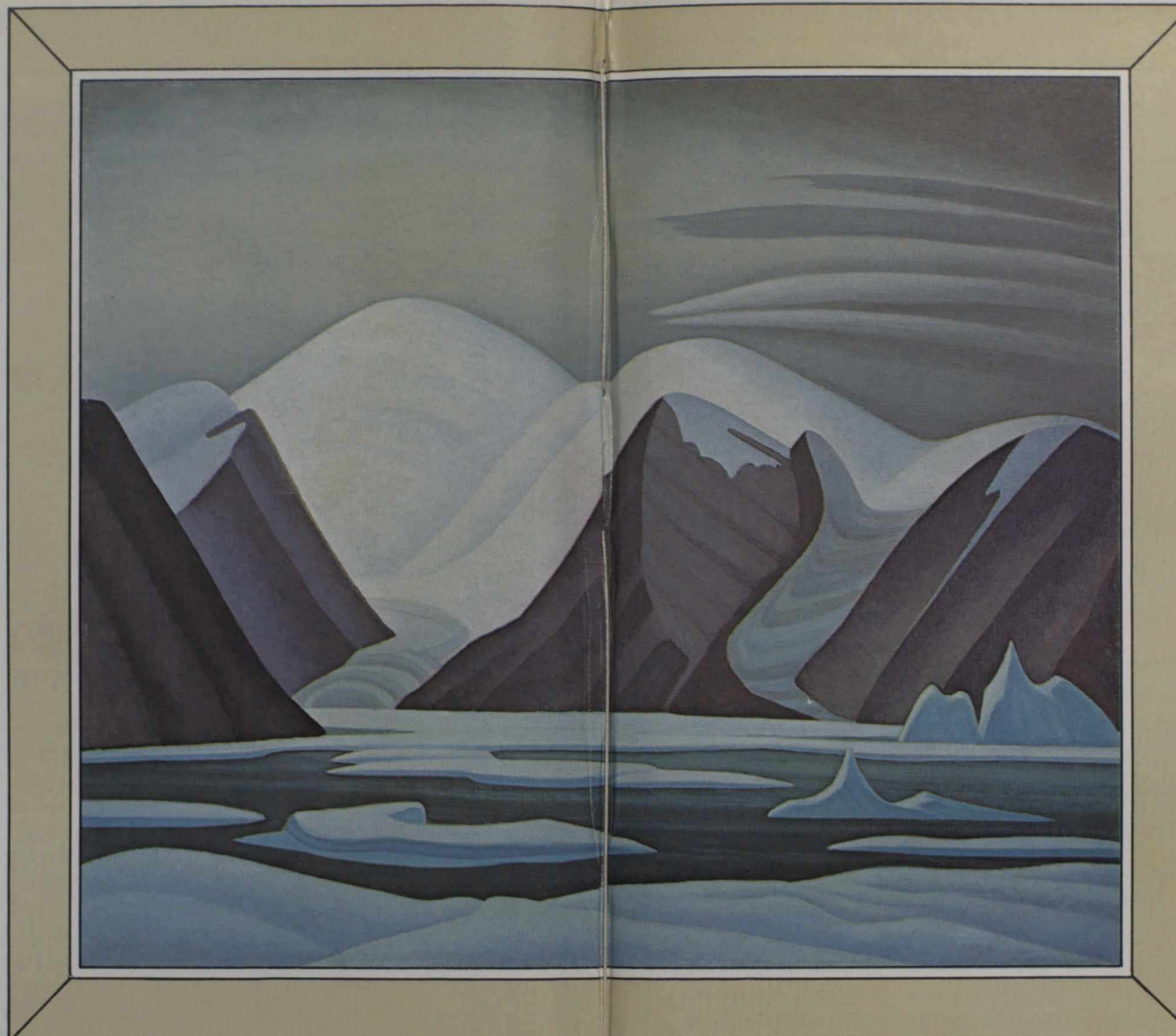
### The Northwest Territories

The Northwest Territories is most of the upper half of Canada, land, water, islands, trees, ice, rock, minerals and oil; 1,304,903 square miles and 46,000 people, most of them in Yellowknife, Inuvik and Hay River and a string of small settlements along the Mackenzie River. The Mackenzie River system is the only major waterway in the Territories other than Hudson Bay, and it flows north—the Pole is downriver.

The climate varies wildly, but in the west, along the Mackenzie Valley, it is relatively mild. The southern half of the valley has three and a half frost-free months a year. Way down south at Fort Smith on the Alberta border, a summer all-time



Fireweed blooms in Kluane, the Yukon, with Mt. Maxwell in the background.



Bylot Island, by Lawren Harris.

high of 103°F. has been recorded.

Most of the N.W.T. is a frozen desert, although it has enormous supplies of fresh water. The scant rain and snow that fall are cradled on the surface above the impenetrable permafrost and in the great granite basins of the Precambrian Shield. If the permafrost were to melt, the water would drain down through the porous earth, but this is not likely. The permafrost (which lies under the surface wherever the mean annual temperature is less than 24°F.) extends a long way down—to 1,600 feet at Resolute Bay. It is sometimes ice, sometimes a combination of ice and sand or loam, sometimes dry gravel, and it may be mixed with solid rock. It has been in place since the Pleistocene epoch. It is now apparently receding at the rate of twenty-five miles a century, but it will remain the foundation of the North for a long time to come.

Small-scale farming has been carried on in the Mackenzie District of the Territories since the earliest days, and at experimental stations at Fort Simpson and Yellowknife the Department of Agri-

culture has introduced many varieties of hardy vegetables.

Trapping is the oldest industry and still a major one, though oil and natural gas prospecting, drilling and production have revolutionized the economy in recent decades. Oil was discovered at Norman Wells in the central Mackenzie Valley in 1921. Geologists believe there is a great north-south belt of oil-bearing rock extending from southern Alberta through the Mackenzie Basin, up to and including the Arctic Archipelago. The richest strikes have been made in the upper Mackenzie Valley, the Beaufort Sea and the Arctic Archipelago.

### The Yukon

Mrs. Martha Louis Black, F.R.G.S., who arrived in Dawson City in the gold rush of 1898, wrote a book called *Yukon Wild Flowers*. In the foreword she wrote: "Within twenty minutes of the heart of

Dawson even a fairly careless observer of Nature's handiwork may gather at least a hundred varieties of flowers, ferns and mosses." She was telling the simple truth.

In June when it begins to thaw, Frances Lake goes from snow-white to brilliant blue. The valleys and basins are green with moss, and the ferns and the Dog Tooth mountains are dark with white and black spruce and lodgepole pine. Among the vegetation are bears—black, brown and grizzly—caribou, deer, moose, and timber wolves. There are mountain goats and mountain sheep, grouse, ptarmigan, geese, swans, ducks, muskrats, mink, marten, lynx, weasels, foxes, squirrels, and fish.

The Yukon has 207,076 square miles and some 30,000 people, most of them transplanted southerners or their descendants, with 3,200 Indians and 1,500 Métis.

It enjoys a fine, short summer. Whitehorse has an average of seventy-eight frost-free days each year and Mayo has sixty-four. The average July temperature at Mayo is 58°F.

There are at most a few thousand acres under cultivation in scattered ranches and backyard gardens. The Yukon has never been surveyed properly, but it is estimated to have hundreds of thousands of arable acres. Federal scientists have raised barley, oats, spring wheat, alfalfa, potatoes, beets, cauliflower, cabbage, lettuce and tomatoes.

Since the gold rush the Yukon has yielded minerals in productive abundance—silver, lead, zinc, cadmium, copper, coal, tungsten, platinum, antimony and gold—and furs—marten, beaver, muskrat, mink and squirrel.

### The Arctic Islands

The islands north of Canada's mainland make up the largest island group in the world, having an area greater than 800,000 square miles and a variety of terrains ranging through marine plains, polar desert and rugged uplands, with peaks among the highest in Canada.



Cone Island (foreground), Smith Island (centre) and Ellesmere Island (behind) are 700 miles inside the Arctic Circle.