
Introduction

Over the past thousand years, as Europeans penetrated the North American Arctic from the North Atlantic to the Bering Strait, they met only one people, the Eskimos, or Inuit as they are now called in Canada. Today, over 90 per cent of Canada's Inuit live in the Arctic.

The Arctic is commonly defined as the area in which the mean temperature of the warmest month (July) does not exceed 10°C. The boundary is roughly coincident with the tree line. The Arctic landscape in Canada includes the spectacular mountains and fiords of East Baffin and Ellesmere islands and northern Labrador, the rocks, lakes and streams of the Canadian shield in Arctic Quebec and the Northwest Territories (NWT) mainland, and the flat coastal plains of the Western Arctic.

Everywhere it is a landscape without trees. Vegetation ranges from the brushy willows along river valleys on the mainland, to the lichens and mosses of the barren lands, the polar desert of the upland plains and mountains of the Arctic islands.

Winters are long and cold, made more bitter by intense winds in a landscape that offers little shelter. The Arctic seas are frozen over much of the year and, even though the ice begins to break up in June, remnants may persist and be blown back to shore late into the summer.



An *Inukshuk*, or stone marker, on the tundra near Cape Dorset (Jimmy Manning)