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Canada marks centenary of Arctic islands transfer

The Canadian Government has set aside the period from July 31 to October 9 to commemorate the centennial of the transfer of the islands of the Arctic Archipelago from Britain to Canada. Minister of Indian and Northern Development John Munro participated in a ceremony in Ottawa July 31 to mark Canadian Arctic Islands Centennial Day. Privy Council President Yvon Pinard was present in Frobisher Bay, Northwest Territories to make a speech commemorating the centennial. Excerpts from the speech follow:

On this day in 1880, Queen Victoria declared that the islands of the Arctic Archipelago were to become part of the new Dominion. The formal transfer of jurisdiction took place on September 1 of that same year.

Thereafter, "all British Territories and Possessions in North America, not already included within the Dominion of Canada, and all islands adjacent ... (with the exception of the Colony of Newfoundland and its dependencies)" became Canadian and subject to Canadian laws.

The history of man among the Arctic islands predated the transfer by many centuries. Inuit hunters were the first true explorers of this vast and formidable region. They traversed it in their sealskin kayaks, raising stone cairns in the likeness

of a person, which they called *inuksuk* (in-NOOK-shook) to mark their way. So it is fitting that the *inuksuk* symbol has been chosen to represent this centennial commemoration.

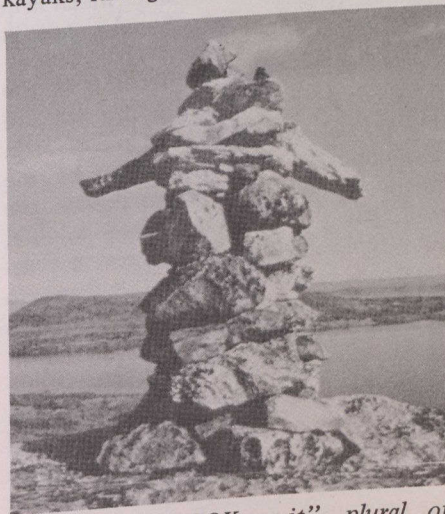
Search for Northwest Passage

British explorers followed in search of the fabled Northwest Passage. One of the expeditions sent out, under the command of Sir John Franklin of the British Admiralty, disappeared somewhere among the islands in 1847. Curiously, a series of search parties, some dispatched by Franklin's frantic wife, awakened international interest in what was until then a global backwater to Europeans and Americans.

Despite the many expeditions which gave Britain a claim to the islands, huge tracts were virtually unknown when it came time for the transfer. Its magnitude would not be clarified for decades to come. Its import was sublimated at the time by the enthusiasm of a young nation preoccupied with prospects in the West.

The Government of Canada did not turn its attention to the Archipelago in a concerted way until the twilight of the nineteenth century. A quarter of a century after the transfer, Captain Joseph-Elzéar Bernier, a son of seafaring heritage born in L'Islet, Quebec in 1852 was commissioned to make the first of three Arctic voyages to take "formal possession of all lands and islands" in his way on behalf of Canada.

Bernier has been likened to Jacques Cartier. Like Cartier he wanted to find the Northwest Passage, but was thwarted by the merciless climate. As Cartier did for France, Bernier took possession of a great many Arctic islands in the name of



Inuksuit ("in-NOOK-soo-it", plural of inuksuk) dot the coastline and caribou grounds of the islands. These piles of stone, up to 2 metres (6 feet) high, guide travellers, mark good fishing or help channel caribou towards hunters.

Thirty-seven years ago this week...

Franklin D. Roosevelt became the first United States President to make an official visit to Ottawa.