

Information

AKLAVIK AREA

Aklavik is situated in latitude 68°12'N., longitude 135°00'W., and is the most northerly settlement on the Mackenzie River. It is located on the west side of the Mackenzie Delta midway between McPherson and the Arctic Ocean. Aklavik is approximately 110 miles north of the Arctic Circle and 50 miles south of Mackenzie Bay on the Beaufort Sea. Ten miles west of Aklavik the Richardson Mountains rise sharply out of the Delta plain to an altitude of about 2,500 feet.

In 1912 the Hudson's Bay Company set up a trader at an Eskimo camp midway between Herschel Island and Fort McPherson on the Pokiak Channel of the river opposite the present settlement of Aklavik. This camp came to be called "POKIAK". The Mackenzie Delta is a rich fur country. With the arrival of other trading companies the settlement expanded in Area and importance and spread across the river onto its present site, known as "AKLAVIK". The name "AKLAVIK" is an Eskimo word meaning "Place of the Barren Land Grizzly Bear".

Major developments after 1918, the true begging of Aklavik at its present site, included the establishment of an Anglican Mission in 1919, a Royal Canadian Mounted Police Detachment in 1922, a Royal Canadian Corps of Signals Station in 1925, and a Roman Catholic Mission and the relocation of the Hudson's Bay Company from "POKIAK" in 1926. In this way Aklavik became the chief centre of the Delta and by 1931 the population of the settlement and the surrounding area had reached 411; 180 Indians, 140 Eskimos, and 91 Whites. The Indians belong to the Loucheux tribe, a branch of the Athapaskan race. As at Tuktoyaktuk, most of the Eskimos have come from Alaska comparatively recently and they are the most sophisticated of the Canadian Eskimos. With the expansion of the Anglican and Roman Catholic hospitals and residential schools and the intensive trapping of the whole delta area, the population increased steadily. The concentration of activities led the Federal Government to open administrative offices in order to provide more efficient administration for the region.

The estimated delta population at the present time numbers approximately 1,500 persons. Whites 384, Indians 242, and Eskimos 883. The settlement itself has a permanent population of approximately 700, approximately 350 whites, 200 Indians and 150 Eskimos. The growth of Aklavik from a single trading post to by far the largest community in Canada, north of the Arctic Circle, has taken place in just over forty years.

The settlement of Aklavik now includes an Anglican Cathedral, Anglican and Roman Catholic Residential Schools and hospitals, Northern Affairs sub-District Office, Federal Day School, and R.C.M. Police Sub-District Headquarters, a Royal Canadian Corps of Signals Station, two National Health and Welfare Doctors, a Department of Transport Radiosonde Station, a Naval Detachment, a Post Office, one hotel, several stores, an oil depot, a charter flying service and an electric power supply company. Canadian Pacific Airways operate a tri-weekly mail and freight scheduled service from Edmonton during the summer season and a bi-weekly schedule during the winter months. Most freight is of course shipped to Aklavik by barge down the Mackenzie during the summer months.

The major economic activity in the Mackenzie delta is trapping with muskrat being the chief fur bearer taken. A large proportion of the annual fur harvest is sold or traded to various traders in the Aklavik area by both native and white trappers. The annual muskrat harvest varies. During the period of 13 years 1942-43 to 1954-55 the harvest varied from a high in 1945-46 to 286,000 muskrats to a low in 1953-54 of 140,000 muskrats. Average annual take during the thirteen year period was 190,628 rats.

Within the Aklavik area, which comprises approximately 35,000 square miles, trappers and their dependents number about 940 persons. Due to the low fur prices during the past few years, the average trapper's income has been on the decline. The trapping season will again show a considerable overall decline in the trappers income from trapping due to three factors: the first, the low prices paid for muskrat pelts, secondly, the late breakup which will result in a decline in the number of muskrats taken, thirdly, many of the muskrat trappers have taken advantage of employment opportunities leaving their areas to be harvested by their families.

Owing to site limitations at Aklavik, the Canadian Government decided in late 1953 to relocate the growing settlement. Space requirements for a modern hospital and school, which represent a larger investment in themselves than the value of the entire property of the present settlement, could not be met at Aklavik. An airport was required but it was not feasible to build one in the Delta. The low ground, only 50 feet above mean sea level at the highest point in Aklavik, is flooded at years of unusually high water at breakup. Public health requirements also called for a considerable investment in sewage and water supply plants. After study, a new location was selected where the facilities required could be established in a planned community. Inuvik, the new town, is located 33 air miles east of Aklavik on the east channel of the Mackenzie River.

The plan of the new community was designed for both present and future growth. It will accommodate 2,500 people in its initial stage, with plans for about 5,000. Every effort was made to design the community in such a way that it would comply with the unusual requirements set by the climate, the location, and the terrain. The town is divided into areas, each carefully planned for the buildings or services it will contain.

A fully modern hospital, adjacent to a residential area, will provide accommodation for nurses, doctors and other hospital staff. It is expected that the hospital will be ready for operation in the summer of 1960.

The new 25 room school, and school residences each having 250 beds, are nearing completion and will be ready for the 1959 school term. The residences, built by the Government, will be operated by the Anglican and Roman Catholic churches, where Eskimo and Indian children can live and attend school while their parents are hunting or trapping in their distant homes.

There are two types of housing in Inuvik. In the serviced area running water, plumbing, electricity and central heating will be available. In the unserved area, for people who may not be able to

afford these services, only electricity will be provided within the houses themselves. "Service Centres" have been constructed, to which residents can go to get their water and dispose of their sewage.

In the centre of the community there is a Town Square, with retail stores, Federal Administration offices, R.C.M.P. headquarters and provisions for recreational facilities such as a theatre and rink. This commercial area starts at the main square and its development will eventually spread down toward the wharf. A modern hotel is being put up by a private builder.

The new town will be an important centre for the Canadian North and the people who live there. Situated, on the one hand at the edge of the Arctic Ocean, and on the other at the end of the Mackenzie River chain, it links the Western Arctic and the Provinces and will be important as a transportation centre. Materials and supplies are delivered by boat when the Mackenzie River is open. The airport will not only give Inuvik contact with the rest of the world for 12 months each year, but it will become an important link in Northern air routes. Inuvik will house Federal Government employees who carry on the administration of the area and who look after the welfare of the Indians and Eskimos. Through its schools, it will offer the advantages of education to Eskimo, Indian and white children living in the area or as far away as Spence Bay--more than 1,000 miles to the east. The hospital and rehabilitation centre will provide the best of treatment for all who require it.

Aklavik, N.W.T.
June 3rd, 1959.