

Canada's Arctic Journal

above & beyond

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2009 • \$ 5.95

MAGICAL MYSTERY TOUR

Canada's
Nunatsiavut
Coast

Soul Searching by Qajaq

A Journey Along the Arctic Coast

**APTN Sets Sights
on the Olympics**

Growing a Network

Featured on

FIRST AIR
The Airline of the North

PNM65098372



www.arcticjournal.ca



Michelle Valberg's
MAGICAL MYSTERY TOUR
Canada's Nunatsiavut Coast

A relatively unknown region of Labrador, the Nunatsiavut coast abounds in a wondrous natural energy. Deep fjords slice through steep, rugged mountains affording those who do come here, impressive views.

Waterfalls, Arctic wildlife, lush tundra, rugged coastlines rising out of the sea and ancient burial grounds grace the landscape. From Nain to Rigolet, the Nunatsiavut coast, a part of Canada still rarely seen by tourists, is dotted by welcoming Inuit communities.

In the chill of an Iqaluit [Nunavut] night, zodiacs usher us to the Lyubov Orlova, a Russian vessel. She is our home for the next 10 days as we tour the northern Labrador coast. Our excitement grew in anticipation of the untold wonders that might lie ahead.



The Moravian Mission complex was built in 1831. Many of the buildings still stand today.

Our first landfall is Killiniq Island — where the Inuit lands of Nunavut, Nunavik (Arctic Quebec) and Nunatsiavut uniquely converge. At this, the most northerly point of Newfoundland & Labrador, the mountains and coastline are nothing short of breathtaking. Snow is scattered artistically across the tundra. Cool fresh waters stream in cascades down the hillside; the vegetation under foot models the eclectic earth tones of fall. This place is already a photographer's dream come true.

Appropriately named — "the place where spirits live" the Torngat Mountains that stand guard over the region are majestically steep and rugged; it is hard to imagine that any life here survives, let alone thrives. But immediately after landing at Killiniq we're met by the thrilling sight of fresh polar bear tracks. There is comfort in knowing that our Inuit guides are ever watchful on the hilltops above, prepared for any danger or threat to our group. Would, could, tomorrow surprise even more?

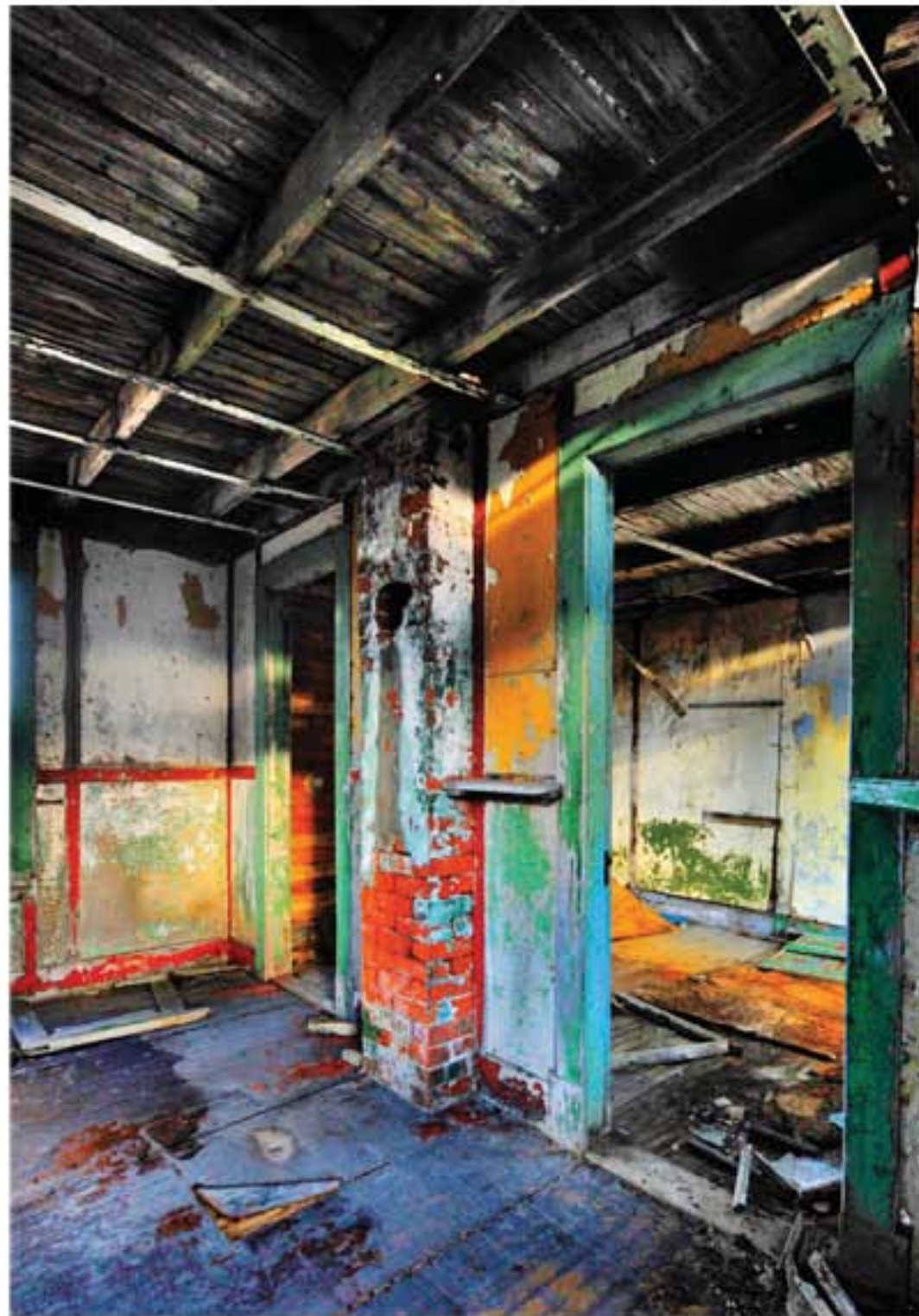
The *Lyubov* makes her way carefully, heading southward along the coast in the dark of night while her happy passengers sleep. Daybreak springs a surprise to those on deck — the faint glow of a glorious sunrise. We head deeper into the clear blue waters of Nachvak Fjord. The clouds magically peel away as if beckoned, and the majestic Torngat mountain tops appear once more, contrasted subtly by the merest hint of blue in the sky.

VISUAL EXPRESSIONS



Aaju poses in an old building in Hebron. She was one of the Inuit guides on our trip.

A beautiful panoramic landscape in the heart of the Nachvak Fjord.



A caribou in the Nachvak fjord along the northern Labrador coast.

The interior of an old Moravian Mission building was electrifying.

Our inescapable urge to go ashore is fulfilled again, as we make a wet, but oddly exhilarating zodiac landing on the fjord's shores. Here traces of caribou tracks weave between the antlers and seal bones that lie askew along the shoreline. The towering formations that reflect in the fjord's steely shallows become all the more fascinating in nature's lens. The need to seek higher ground via the soft lush tundra heavy with wild blueberries is not to be resisted.

On the mountain's summit the reward is to be able to take in the sheer enormity and grand splendor of all that is Nunatsiavut. The spiritual depth of the experience gives pause to ponder who may have gone here before. It is fairly certain through archaeological evidence, that the Dorset and Thule cultures had lived here, surviving through the millennia by relying purely on their ingenuity and the fickle bounty of this natural paradise.



Below: Joyce Allen, of Rigolet, masterfully makes a fishing net.



Boat builder, Max Allen, explains his craft on a rainy day in Rigolet.


After spending a day cruising the Saglek fjord, we land in what was once the northernmost settlement in Labrador. Historic Hebron, is situated 200 kilometres north of Nain. Investigating the abandoned Moravian mission complex and the surrounding area here was not only interesting, but also a deeply moving experience.

It was heartbreaking to hear our Inuit guide Eli explain that in 1959, during an Easter Monday church service, 58 families living here were surprised and devastated to learn that the mission was closing and they would have to relocate to larger settlements. The Hebron mission, built in 1831, and many of the original structures, still stand today.

At the entrance of Hamilton Inlet is Rigolet, the most southerly Inuit community in the world. Here we visit a boat maker in his workshop and watch as a woman makes fishing nets with an ease and skill that could only have been inherited over generations.

At the community's town hall, Inuit women demonstrate grass weaving and serve delicious bannock and homemade apple jam. We are made to feel welcome as they play music and dance for our delighted group.

PERSONAL IMPRESSIONS

Canada's Nunatsiavut "our beautiful land" remains one of the last untamed wilderness regions in North America. A place that is forever magical and mysterious for its diverse environs and the Inuit who call this part of our country, home. Like me, you will surely want to hold these sights and special moments in your heart to remember them forever. This trip, my camera joined my mind and heart. I had fallen in love with Canada's North yet again. 

The swirling waters seemed to dance in the mystical play of light.



The cold blue water set against the towering Torngat Mountains was an exhilarating sight.

Ottawa-based photographer Michelle Valberg, travelled the Nunatsiavut coast with Adventure Canada. She generously chose to share her northern cruise experience with above&beyond readers, to publicly express her love of the North, its people, and to promote her belief in the necessity that we all work together to encourage and support a healthy, sustainable environment.

For more information on the region go online and visit: nunatsiavut.com. Readers can also visit: valbergimagine.com

