

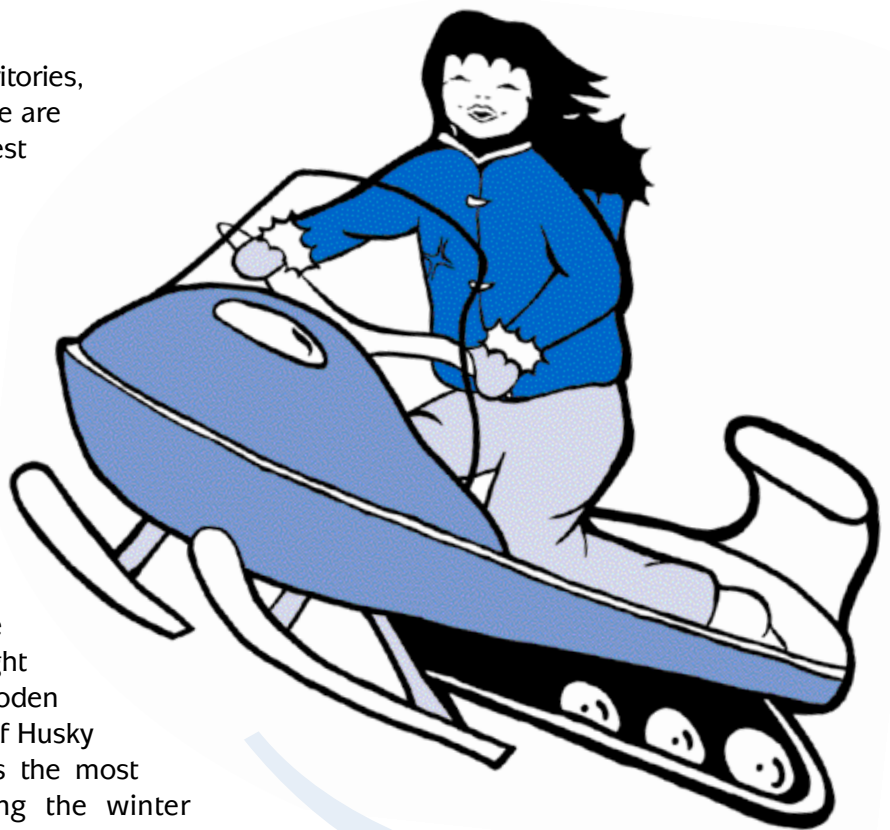
Travel in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut

What would we do if we didn't have roads?

How would we be able to travel from one place to another?
To find the answers to these questions,
we can turn our attention to the North.

Way up north in two of Canada's territories, Nunavut and the Northwest Territories, there are very few roads at all. While the Northwest Territories has some highways that keep it connected to the south, there are no roads connecting Nunavut to the rest of Canada. There are cars in Nunavut, but these can only travel on the roads within communities. In Iqaluit, the capital of Nunavut, there is only one paved road and there are no traffic lights. This paved road is the only one in the whole territory, a territory that makes up one-fifth of Canada's land mass.

In the wintertime these vast territories are covered with ice and snow. While you might think winter travel in the North means wooden sleds being pulled by hard-working teams of Husky dogs, skidoos have replaced dog sleds as the most popular method of transportation during the winter months. Many Inuit hunters still travel along the ancient dog sled routes while out hunting on their skidoos, an interesting combination of old traditions and new technology.



Air

Airplanes are one of the most popular methods of travel in the North. It is the best way to travel the very large distances that separate the communities of Canada's North. With three of its own airlines, the territories are well connected by air travel. But the convenience of air travel does not come without problems. Constant travel in airplanes is very expensive and the unpredictable weather of the North often disrupts flight schedules. But air travel is very important to the North. So important, in fact, that each town has its own airport where mail and supplies are brought in each week. In some areas, the mail is delivered each weekday, just like at your local post office. Did you know that pilots often use their planes as ambulances, taking the very sick to the nearest hospital, often located many hundreds of kilometres away?

Water

Travel by water is also important to the Northwest Territories and Nunavut because there are many islands in the northern regions of these territories. The water surrounding these islands is frozen for almost nine months of the year. During the short summer period, large boats and barges visit northern coastal communities to deliver mail and supplies. These boats come from as far away as Montréal and often carry the staple foods that families will need for a whole year.

The Inuit use their own boats for hunting in the lakes and ocean.

The kayak, a very popular type of recreational boat, was invented by the Inuit. An Inuit kayak is a long, narrow, streamlined vessel with a frame made of wood or whale bones and then covered with animal skins.

For example, sealskin is scraped clean of all hairs and then sewn to other skins in a watertight fashion for a safe and secure covering. The hunter's weapons can either be carried on the inside of the kayak or lashed to the side of the kayak.



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Kayaks are very quick and manoeuvrable, and serve as very effective hunting vehicles. An umiak is much like the kayak in construction, but not in shape. The umiak is a large boat with a wood or bone frame, covered with animal skins and measures about nine to 10 metres in length, two metres in width and one metre in depth. This large boat was the primary mode of transportation and carries up to 30 people or several tonnes of goods. The umiak translates as "women's boat" because it was the women who paddled this boat when carrying family members or moving from one hunting ground to another.

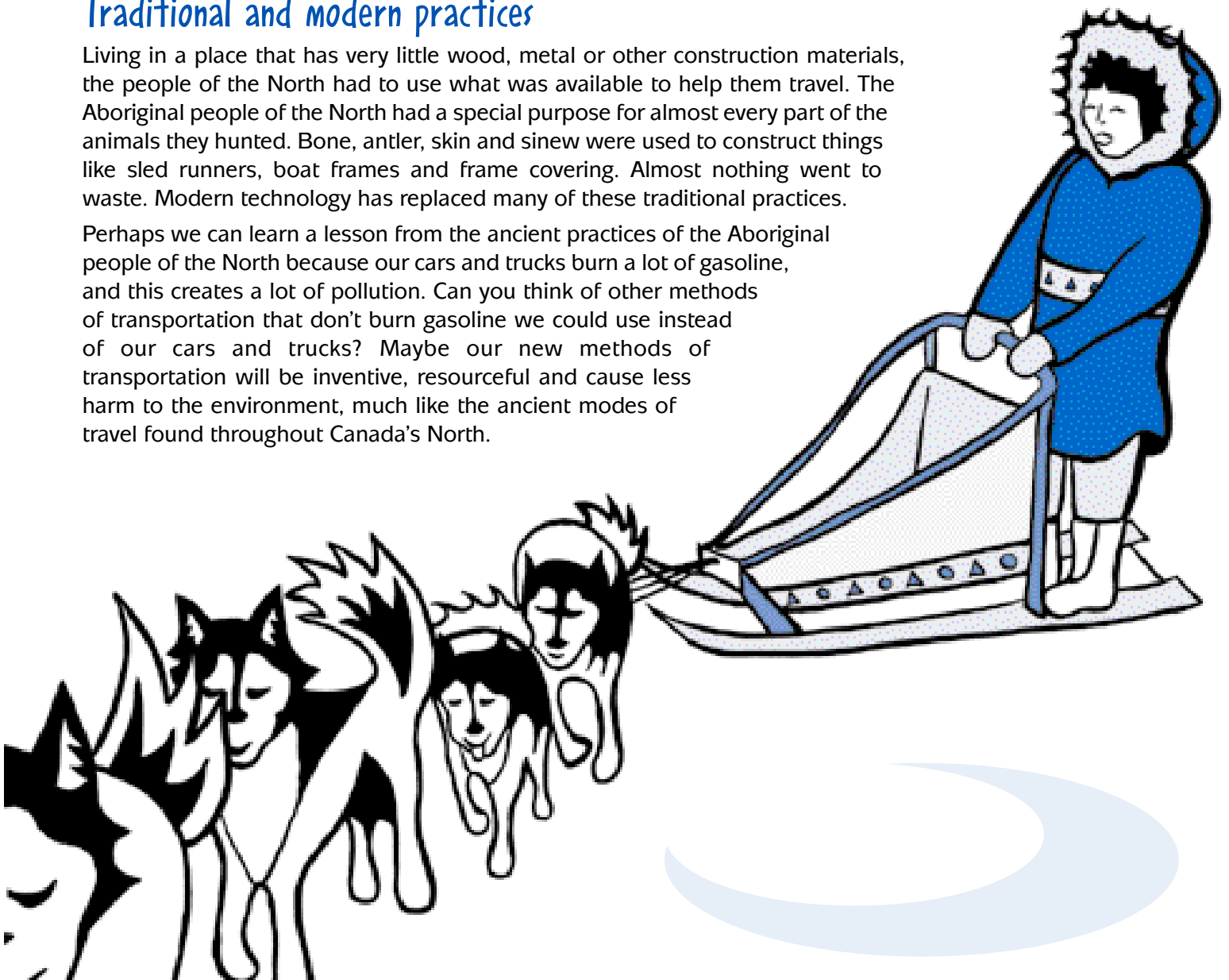
Land

Did you know that in the Northwest Territories cars can drive on lakes and rivers? They drive on an ice road created in the cold temperatures of the northern winter. Ice roads are a feature unique to Canada's northern climates. "Ice roads?" you may ask. "Cars are too heavy to drive on ice. Wouldn't they crash through the ice and sink?" For more than half of the year the ice on northern rivers, lakes and the Arctic ocean is thick enough for cars, trucks and even fully loaded eighteen wheelers to drive on! Car portages are built that connect different bodies of water so residents can drive on a great frozen network. This is something that residents of the Northwest Territories could not do in the summer months. They would have to drive boats to use the same road ways...or waterways...or "ice ways." Did you know that there are 1,300 km of seasonal winter roads in the Northwest Territories?

Traditional and modern practices

Living in a place that has very little wood, metal or other construction materials, the people of the North had to use what was available to help them travel. The Aboriginal people of the North had a special purpose for almost every part of the animals they hunted. Bone, antler, skin and sinew were used to construct things like sled runners, boat frames and frame covering. Almost nothing went to waste. Modern technology has replaced many of these traditional practices.

Perhaps we can learn a lesson from the ancient practices of the Aboriginal people of the North because our cars and trucks burn a lot of gasoline, and this creates a lot of pollution. Can you think of other methods of transportation that don't burn gasoline we could use instead of our cars and trucks? Maybe our new methods of transportation will be inventive, resourceful and cause less harm to the environment, much like the ancient modes of travel found throughout Canada's North.



This information is also available through the Internet at www.inac.gc.ca



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