



Time for Nature



Cleaning up Cold War relics Ivvavik National Park of Canada

Like many aging military facilities, the radar station at Komakuk Beach had environmental problems: deteriorating buildings, abandoned landfills and soil contaminated by fuel spills. Now the site is part of Ivvavik National Park of Canada. And the site's ecological integrity is a priority for Parks Canada.



Ivvavik is the first national park in Canada to be created as a result of an aboriginal land claim agreement. © Parks Canada, Lynch, W., 1991.

The radar station is a relic of the 1950s, when the Distant Early Warning (DEW) Line system was installed along Canada's northern coast. Such radar sites, which once protected North America from foreign attacks, are now obsolete. Today, the former DEW Line site at Komakuk Beach has been replaced by a smaller North Warning System Short Range Radar facility, which is a fully automated station.

Sharing the responsibility

When Ivvavik was established, Parks Canada and the Department of National Defence (DND) knew that Komakuk Beach needed an environmental clean-up. And because Ivvavik is a part of the Inuvialuit Settlement Region, it was also important to the Inuvialuit that the remains of the old DEW Line site not pollute the land. Parks Canada, DND, and the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation signed an agreement to co-operate in the clean-up and maintenance of the military site.

Cleaning up the site

Restoration of the site began in 1999. DND workers demolished buildings, excavated contaminated soil and removed it. They also excavated three landfills and stabilized the remaining one.



When Ivvavik was established, Komakuk Beach needed an environmental clean-up. © Ron Larsen, 1998.

After considering several excavation measures to remove all of the hydrocarbons left by an old fuel spill, scientists concluded that further site disturbance might do more environmental harm than good. The site appeared stable, and will be monitored to safeguard the ecological integrity of the park.



Monitoring the site

When the clean-up work was completed, DND, Parks Canada and the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation established a monitoring program with regular assessments of the landfill and hydrocarbon content at the old spill site.

DND commissioned a consulting firm, to conduct the inspections and report on their findings. These experts take soil and water samples for laboratory analysis and check test wells to track the movement of any contaminants in the groundwater. They also use probes to see if permafrost at the site is being affected by the remaining landfill. Any change in the stability of the ground, or in the presence of the hydrocarbons, is carefully tracked.

Continued monitoring will help to protect the environment of Ivvavik National Park for all Canadians.

For more information visit www.pc.gc.ca/ivvavik



The former DEW Line station at Komakuk Beach has been replaced by a smaller North Warning System Short Range Radar facility. © Ian McDonald, 2003.