

NEW OWNERS IN THEIR OWN LAND: MINERALS AND INUIT LAND CLAIMS. By ROBERT McPHERSON. Calgary: University of Calgary Press and the Arctic Institute of North America, 2003. Northern Lights Series No. 3. ISBN 1-55238-097-1. xxiv + 305 p., maps, notes, index. Hardbound. Cdn\$49.95.

The book opens in 1949, when the white fox market had collapsed, family allowances to Inuit began only after a “means test,” and 20% of the Inuit population had tuberculosis. The decline of natural game had led to local cases of starvation, but the government still resisted social benefits, believing they would lead to a lack of self-reliance.

There was growing resistance by the Inuit to white domination and regulation. The Canadian government considered decentralization of the Inuit population to prevent over-hunting in certain regions.

The second part of the book reviews recent history in the eastern Arctic. Mineral development led the way in opening up the Inuit lands. The Rankin Inlet nickel mine during the 1950s and 1960s, the Ungava nickel and asbestos deposits starting in 1955, Pan Ocean Oil in the Keewatin in the 1970s, the Nanisivik zinc-lead mine for three decades, and the Polaris mine starting in 1980 are all reviewed as great changes in Canada’s Northwest Territories that influenced the Inuit attitude in negotiating for self-government.

The federal government’s 1969 White Paper on Native Policy triggered a renewed Inuit political initiative, based on a policy of integration without assimilation; and in 1971, the Inuit Tapirisat of Canada was preparing to negotiate the terms of Inuit self-rule with the Government of Canada. The Berger Inquiry reported in 1977 that the Natives of the Arctic did not want small land parcels around their villages: they wanted large areas that included subsurface as well as surface rights. Berger recommended delay of the Mackenzie Valley pipeline until negotiation of Native land claims was settled.

The Inuit and the Inuvialuit both advocated their own separate territories, amounting to about one-half of the lands that they occupied. Selection of these lands would be the challenge.

In order to avoid conflict, the Inuvialuit targeted lands that were not under development. This led to an Agreement-in-Principle in 1978, which contemplated allotment to the Inuvialuit of about 22% of the land they occupied, about 32 000 square miles of surface rights including 5000 square miles of subsurface rights.

In 1985 the Inuvialuit land settlement approved by government was described as “the first in Canada to include land ownership, both surface and subsurface, in fee simple absolute title, including the beds of water bodies. The land, however, can only be conveyed within the Inuvialuit community or to the government of Canada” (p. 139). This settlement led to increased effort by the Inuit. The Tungavik Federation of Nunavut was formed in 1982 to negotiate on a platform of co-management of lands, with royalty rights and private ownership only by Inuit.

The Inuit felt that they had missed out on the benefits of natural resource development on their lands. They wanted a

separate territory of Nunavut with the democratic right to govern themselves. To build a broadly based negotiating position, they set about canvassing all Inuit communities to obtain an understanding of the feelings of their people.

This consensus led to the identification of the lands around their communities that the people wished to control and the natural resources in certain other areas that would allow them to develop economically. They identified a quantum of land larger than they expected to receive because they knew some of it would be lost in later stages of negotiating. The land selected by the Inuit in the first round of negotiations included 136 000 square miles, of which 14 000 included subsurface rights, that is to say, mineral rights.

The final part of the book is dedicated to the hard negotiations required to pare down Native land claims to the dimensions contemplated in the Agreement-in-Principle of 1990. This part of the book provides considerable insight into the strategies, principles, and negotiating skills of the Inuit.

It is interesting to see the idealistic attitude of Inuit at the beginning of negotiations give way to a more practical outlook on economic development. At first, they were completely against uranium development: the Kiggavik mine near Baker Lake was overwhelmingly voted down in a 1990 plebiscite. In the end, they found themselves owners of a uranium deposit on their lands.

McPherson predicts that the Inuit will operate their mineral lands by license, much like any other private freehold owner, but not by the free-entry system prevalent in the rest of Canada. Time will tell whether he is correct.

In places the book is not very complimentary toward government and industry actions in the past, both of which led to the determined posture of the Inuit during negotiations. However, any person who intends to explore and develop on Inuit lands should read this book. It provides an interesting view of Inuit history and the maturing of Inuit thought towards development.

The narrative in this book is well written and easily understood. A timetable of events would have been useful to keep the sequence of events straight in the reader’s mind. The map inside the front cover could have been very useful, but is too small for easy reference. Even with a magnifying glass I found it difficult to read. This is a shame because it beautifully summarizes the final result of the negotiations.

Clear individual photographs of the principal participants would have been better than those of unrecognizable groups that were included.

Explorationists like case histories that allow them to benefit from the experiences of others. This book is just such a case history, of value to all negotiators and intended negotiators for Native land development. It is a “must read” for explorationists and history buffs like me.

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