

ARCTIC ATMOSPHERE

Kugaaruk, Nunavut

November 6, 2011, Issue 14



Aine and Mari cross the frozen Kuugarjuk River just north of the Miseks' duplex on Nov. 5 during an unusually clear day.

Iced Over by Aine Misek

NOVEMBER 5 — Morning dawned bright and clear, a rare event during the past eight weeks.

Overcast skies rule the early winter months as temperatures head downward but the ocean's water is not yet encased in ice. Residents say the overcast days eventually vanish when the truly cold months arrive in late December or early January.

John, Aine and Mari relished their first opportunity since Sept. 10 to hike beyond Kugaaruk's boarders. The arrival of polar bears in late September and lack of a weapon confined them to the hamlet.

After checking with locals to see if the river was safe for crossing, the Miseks headed north in hopes of reaching the mountaintop cross before Mari got too cold. She can't walk far in the snow and chills rapidly when carried.

Mild winds blew, but the cloudless sky permitted the sun to transmit a bit of warmth to the frozen landscape. Pristine snow, marred only by an occasional snowmobile track or the footprints of small animals, sparkled on the frozen river's smooth surface.

The Miseks managed to make it one-third of the way up the mountainside before Mari's meltdown. "My feet are cold," she said, and then proceeded to break into tears. The three made a quick about-face and backtrack to the river's south shore where John left Aine and Mari in safety before heading back to the mountain alone. He made the trip to the summit in about 20 minutes.

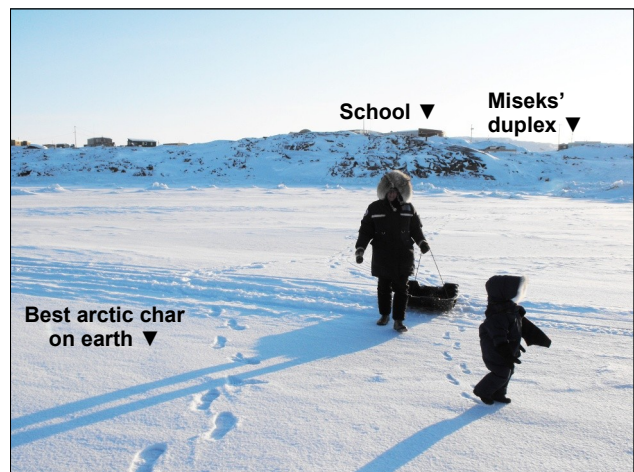
"The wind almost stopped as I reached the top and climbed into the nook where we had lunch after our first climb to the cross [Sept. 3]," John said. "I was quite warm in the sun. The view was stark. I couldn't see any open water in the bay."

John ventured to the northern side of the mountain and took a few practice shots with his gun before returning home around 2 p.m. MDT. The sun was already heading down and dusk came within the hour.

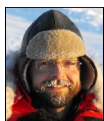
The Miseks' newfound freedom, which arrived with the gun, will soon be lost as daylight gives way to 40 days of darkness.



John climbs to the cross overlooking Kugaaruk from the mountain north of the river. Polar bears now roam the coastline so John was armed with his SKS, a semi-automatic rifle designed in the Soviet Union during 1945. The Soviet Army adopted the gun from 1949 to 1955 until it was replaced by the AK-47.



Aine and Mari cross snowmobile tracks on the river's smooth surface. Kugaaruk's newer subdivision is visible on the left. Temperatures hovered around $-18.0^{\circ}\text{C}/-0.4^{\circ}\text{F}$ at midday.



Grizzly Country

By John Misek

Forget the days of simply chartering a school bus for \$150 for a city-wide sports tournament.

In order to have a tournament in Nunavut, Kugaaruk's high school boys' and girls' indoor soccer teams chartered a plane and took a direct flight 1000 kilometres to Kugluktuk (formerly known as Coppermine), Nunavut's westernmost community.

Teams from the central and western parts of Nunavut and a few from the Northwest Territories arrived Friday, Oct. 28, for the annual regional tournament, which ended Oct. 30.

Kugluktuk High School, home of the Grizzlies, hosted the event; all the teams lodged in classrooms. Sleeping on the floor for what turned out to be three nights instead of two (our return flight was cancelled because of poor weather conditions) made for a *long* weekend. Games were held in the hamlet's regulation-size hockey arena, which was covered in artificial turf.

The trip to the tournament went smoothly. The weekend was uneventful and rather exhausting considering it was spent monitoring teenagers.

Jack (we bought a tusk from a narwhal he killed in July — see Issue 4) had a seat on our chartered plane to Kugluktuk. While grinding metal, a shard flew into his eye and he was flying to Yellowknife to have it

removed. The poor fellow was stuck in Kugaaruk for two days in that painful state because weather prevented scheduled flights from landing. I told him he looked like hell and that got a good chuckle out of him.

While in Kugluktuk I had a chance to visit Herbert Bolt (see Issue 3) for half an hour on Sunday afternoon. His home was very peaceful and cozy. He'd shot two caribou Saturday and was drying some of the meat on clothesline in the kitchen with a fan. He kindly gave me a roast to take home.

Kugluktuk is fairly non-descript. The land is mostly flat and rocky with small, scrubby bushes in low spots. I much prefer Kugaaruk with its little mountains and compact hamlet layout. Kugluktuk has a population of about 1,400 and is at least 800 meters wide and just as long; that's too much walking between greetings. In Kugaaruk, which has 600 fewer people, you can't go 30 meters without saying hello to someone. As far as amenities go, Kugluktuk isn't too different from Kugaaruk. It does have competing grocery stores — a Co-op and a Northern — making food prices slightly less than Kugaaruk's and adding a bit more variety.

During Monday's return trip — the rescheduled flight was during daylight — we could see water vapour rising from the ocean's still unfrozen regions, forming cloudy puffs.

Kugaaruk's school bus dropped me off right on our doorstep and it was sure nice to see Aine and Mari waving hello from the living room window.



TOP LEFT: Kugaaruk School's soccer players show some team spirit during their chartered First Air flight to Kugluktuk Friday Oct. 28. **BOTTOM LEFT:** The Kugaaruk Nanaqs girls' team warms up with coach Kim Walton Saturday in Kugluktuk's hockey arena. **RIGHT:** Kugaaruk's teams pose for a group photograph after the Sunday conclusion of the weekend-long annual regional soccer tournament. Each team consisted of eight players, a coach and one chaperone.

Ups & Downs Oct. 29 – Nov. 4, 2011

Maximum = 0.5°C/32.9°F **Minimum** = -17.0°C/1.4°F

Source: Environment Canada, Station Kugaaruk A, Nunavut [Oct. 29,30,31,Nov. 1,2,3]

Partly cloudy, light snow flurries; less wind than usual

Nov. 6 **Sunrise** = 7:35 a.m. **Sunset** = 1:51 p.m. MST