

The *Ittarnisilirijiit* Conference on Inuit Archaeology

Deborah Kigjugalik Webster

John Bennett

The *Ittarnisilirijiit* Conference on Inuit Archaeology, held at Igloolik, Northwest Territories, from February 7th to 9th, 1994, brought together Inuit archaeology and culture specialists of all ages from across the Canadian Arctic. The objectives of the Conference were to listen to what Inuit, especially the elders, know about their heritage, and to discuss how Inuit can direct the course of archaeology in their homeland.

BACKGROUND

The *Ittarnisilirijiit* Conference, the first of its kind, was the idea of three Inuit: Gary Baikie, who has worked in archaeology and is director of Torngasok Cultural Centre in Nain, Labrador; George Qulaut, who dealt extensively with scientists during his fourteen years working at the Igloolik Research Laboratory; and Deborah Kigjugalik Webster, Northern and New Parks Archaeologist, originally from Baker Lake, Northwest Territories.

In the spring of 1993, the three were invited by the Smithsonian Institution to attend a conference honouring a number of distinguished Arctic archaeologists, all over eighty years old. Over the course of the three-day conference, they were reminded that while a great deal of valuable archaeological work has been conducted in the Arctic, in the past it has often excluded Inuit or involved them only as guides. A few archaeologists do involve Inuit in their work, consulting with Elders, and helping young people learn about their history. Inuit have seen sites disturbed and artifacts taken south where they are inaccessible to most of the people whose history they represent. Southerners, studying artifacts away from the places where they were used and without consulting Inuit experts, have occasionally been inaccurate in their interpretations of Inuit history.

While conferences have been held for years by others on the subject, Inuit archaeology and history specialists have never come together to discuss archaeology in their land. Their experience at the Smithsonian archaeology conference inspired the three Inuit to organize a conference that would give Inuit elders, young people, and others with a special interest in archaeology a chance to meet and discuss archaeology. The main goals of the conference were two-fold: first, to provide an opportunity for Inuit archaeology and history specialists from across the north to meet and exchange information; and second, to produce a list of guidelines for archaeological work in the Inuit homeland.

A volunteer organizing committee (*Ittarnisilirijiit Katimajit*) was formed, including three more people: Luke Suluk, a culture and history specialist from Arviat; Tommy Weetaluktuk, assistant archaeologist with Avataq Cultural Institute; and John Bennett, then-editor of *Inuktitut* magazine. After consultation with elders, the name *Ittarnisilirijiit* was chosen for the conference. It can be translated as "those who deal with the distant past, the time of legends." The term refers to the very essence of Inuit culture, and implies an obligation to protect it. This word has significance for those who truly understand its meaning.

Igloolik was chosen as the location because of its history of community involvement in archaeology, particularly in regard to the Ataguttaaluk Field School, which was started in 1990.

Youth and elder delegates were invited from the western Arctic, the three regions in Nunavut including Kitikmeot (Central), Kivalliq (Keewatin), and Qikiqtaaluk (Baffin), as well as Nunavik (northern Quebec) and Labrador. Several Inuit history and culture specialists were also invited, as well as a small number of southern archaeologists. Jack Anawak, Member of Parliament for Nunatsiaq, also attended.



Participants at the *Ittarnisalirijiit* Conference on Inuit Archaeology, February, 1994.

INFORMATION EXCHANGE

Seven papers focusing on local heritage projects were presented by Inuit cultural specialists and archaeologists:

- Tommy Weetaluktuk presented a paper on his relative the late "Daniel Weetaluktuk," the first Inuk archaeologist, and his contributions to Arctic Archaeology;
- Luke Suluk focused on the "Arviat Historical Society," its objectives, and the projects that it has undertaken;
- Deborah Kigjugalik Webster talked about "The Piqqiq Research Project," an archaeological and oral history research project conducted at a caribou crossing on the Kazan River, near Baker Lake, Northwest Territories;
- "Archaeology and Labrador Inuit," by Gary Baikie, dealt with the unauthorized collection of artifacts and human remains in Labrador;
- Susan Rowley explained "The Ataguttaaluk Field School," an archaeology course for high school students in Igloolik;
- Paul Antone provided information on "The Access to Archaeology Program;" and lastly,
- Bjarne Gronnow discussed "Museums and Archaeology in Greenland" and how the importance and visibility of archaeology and ethnology has increased significantly since the beginning of Home Rule in 1979.

The opinions expressed by conference participants reflected the experiences of people of different ages from different regions. For example, elders from Labrador felt that archaeology is harmful as it disturbs sites best left alone, and that it should be stopped entirely. Others, including elders and young people who had been involved in archaeology, felt that it can be useful to Inuit if it is done properly. A young Inuvialuk said that so much Inuit language and culture has been lost in the Western Arctic that the information gained from archaeology has become essential if young people are to learn about their history (see Riddle, cited in Syms, this volume, Ch. 4). A young person from the Keewatin said his ambition is to become an archaeologist.

As delegates learned more about each other's experiences over the course of the conference, it became clear that Inuit can benefit from archaeology when they participate in it and have control over how it is practised in their land. Young people learn new skills and gain deeper understanding of their own culture; elders have the satisfaction of passing their knowledge on to young people; and when the results of the research are shared with the people of the local community, they have the opportunity to learn more about their own history. When the community works in partnership with archaeologists on a project from beginning to end and Inuit expertise is used, the quality of the archaeological research improves. This benefits everyone.

Discussions were tape-recorded, with the tapes now housed in the Northwest Territories Archives. A report on the proceedings of the conference was prepared by John Bennett (1994) and was made available for participants in *Inuktitut* syllabics, Roman orthography, and English. Financial assistance for the production of the report was provided by Parks Canada. The Igloolik community supported the conference wholeheartedly. Mayor Louis Tapardjuk took charge of organizing accommodation (local boarding) and evening entertainment, including a community dance. The conference was open to the public, and many local people attended. At Ataguttaaluk School, students who had participated in the annual archaeology field school at Igloolik set up a display of artifacts and photographs of the summer course, which teaches young people practical archaeology skills and involves elders in the interpretation of artifacts. The Inullariit Society, the Igloolik elders' group, took particular interest and held a special meeting with the guest elders.

GUIDELINES

Conference delegates produced a list of guidelines and recommendations on how Inuit would like to see archaeological projects being conducted. An unedited version follows:

1. There should be more control by Inuit throughout all stages of archaeological projects in

250 Webster and Bennet—The Ittarnisaliirijit Conference on Inuit Archaeology

- the Inuit homeland;
2. Archaeology permits should be approved by the appropriate regional Inuit organization and the community;
- 3a. Archaeologists should involve local people in the projects. Priority should be given to those people whose ancestors are being studied. Traditional knowledge is crucial to the understanding of Inuit history; archaeologists should thus involve elders by asking them about features and artifacts, and their locations;
- 3b. People from the community should be invited to visit the site, and should be made welcome there;
4. Consultation with the local council, with the community, and with any other appropriate cultural group, is required;
5. In determining where to set up camp, archaeologists should follow the traditional customs of Inuit;
- 6a. Archaeologists should not disturb graves, human skeletal remains, or objects associated with them: these were meant to rest where they were placed. If a grave is found, the archaeologist should record it and report it to the community. It should not be disturbed unless the archaeologist receives direction to do so from the community;
- 6b. Archaeologists should not disturb sacred sites or objects associated with them;
7. The nearest community should be consulted about archaeological sites that are being destroyed by natural or human causes. The community should then decide if nature should take its course, or if the feature should be saved. If it is saved, the objects should be returned to a place close to the original location;
8. Historic or recent artifacts and sites should be treated with the same respect as older sites and artifacts;
9. Archaeologists should obtain permission from the community about collection and removal of artifacts;
10. It is recommended that casts of artifacts obtained by excavation be made and left in the community. Not all artifacts should be removed; some should be left behind;
11. An archaeological site should be returned to its original state as much as possible after excavation;
12. Reports should be translated into *Inuktitut*. Elders should be given credit in reports for information that they have passed on to the archaeologist;
13. Archaeologists should share their information with the community. There should be a follow-through after the project;
14. Both archaeologists and Native communities should refer to the World Archaeological Congress Code of Ethics and Human Remains Section for additional guidelines

RECOMMENDATIONS

Along with the drafting of the specific guidelines relating to archaeology, conference participants also discussed the larger context of archaeological investigations and Aboriginal concerns. The result of these discussions was the following recommendations:

1. Historical societies should be formed in each community. Such societies should have input into the regional museums, the collection of oral histories, and the overseeing archaeological projects in their areas;
2. Regional and community museums are needed;
3. There should be a mechanism, such as site stewards or guides, by which local people can monitor heritage sites and ensure that artifacts are not taken. Rules for the protection of archaeological sites should be enforced;
4. There should be more information (e.g., pamphlets, posters, radio and television programs) about archaeological sites and regulations to improve public awareness. This will help in the protection of artifacts and sites;
5. Archaeological courses should be part of education. It is recommended that Arctic College have an archaeological department;

6. Municipalities should conduct archaeological surveys to make an inventory of sites in the area so that they will not be disturbed by development; and
7. Concerns relating to the repatriation and reburial of skeletal remains should be addressed.

CONCLUSIONS

With the successful settlement of land claims, Inuit are guaranteed that archaeology projects in the Arctic will directly involve and benefit Inuit (see Andrews et al., Ch. 18). The Inuit Heritage Trust, Inc., for instance, is responsible for reviewing archaeological permits for the Nunavut Settlement Area.

The *Ittarnisalirijiit* Conference was an historic event in that the work done by Inuit archaeologists, elders, and the Inuit heritage specialists who have played a significant role in Arctic archaeology were officially acknowledged. The *Ittarnisalirijiit Katimajit* Organizing Committee attained their goal. While a future conference of the same kind is not planned at this time, the Inuit will continue to voice their opinions about archaeology projects in their homeland.

REFERENCES CITED

- Bennett, J.
1994 Report of the Ittarnisalirijiit Conference on Inuit Archaeology, Igloolik, February 7-9th, 1994.