



Trading was an interesting and somewhat formal affair. HBC posts were not heated; the HBC did not want people to linger in the post, and they wanted to reduce any damage to furs. People were “grubstaked” (lent traps and supplies) in the fall and traveled out on the land to their traplines. They camped near the traplines and began trapping in November, after the foxes’ fur was “prime” (at its most luxurious). By Christmas, a trapper generally had a load of furs, so returned to the post by dogteam. At the post, the furs would be stacked on the counter, and the post factor would go through them, establishing a “grade” (quality measurement) for each, and tallying the value with HBC tokens or tally sticks, which were laid on the counter as the furs were taken away. When all the furs were gone, the pile of tokens remained, representing a value against which the trade would be totaled.

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The trader would lay a rifle and several boxes of ammunition on the counter, and would remove the tokens to the value of the rifle.

Then the trapper might say, “*Oh, a kettle for my wife....*” Or, “*I’d like a Primus stove.*” More tokens would be taken away.

Eventually, the counter might be covered with goods purchased in trade for the furs – bright calico cloth, needles, sewing thread, flour, tea, milk powder (Klim), tobacco in a can, the rifle and ammo, the Primus stove, a copper kettle, several blankets, and more, to the exact value of the tokens. At the end of the trading, the trader might say, “*Oh, here’s some candy for your children,*” giving a little gift. And the trade would be concluded. Hands encased in fingerless woolen gloves, the trader would then write up the trade on a small pad. He’d later transfer the information to a ledger in the heated comfort of his home.

In the Baker Lake post, the furs were stored upstairs. A post assistant would take the furs, bundle them, and then climb the steep stairs to the loft. Here he could use a pulley system to raise the bundle to the upper level where they could be stored in the dark and cold. In the springtime, they would be taken out and hung on a line outside to air and be fluffed, before being rebundled and readied for the annual ship, which would take them to a central fur warehouse for further processing and sale.

LIFTING THE VEIL OF THE PAST

Today, in the Vera Akumalik Centre, the fur loft remains, with bundles stacked in the dim interior. A figure representing the assistant or trader stands at the top of the stairs, pulling the rope to raise a bundle of furs. On the shelves are many of the trade items stocked in the little trading posts across the North. In the other end of the building, there are displays featuring the wildlife of the area, the Thelon River, and much more.

The centre was named for Vera Akumalik, a highly-respected Baker Lake elder who lived much of her life on the land. When asked whether she thought life in the past was easier or harder than life today, Mrs. Akumalik responded, “Oh, much easier today, we are warm and we don’t starve!” She has vivid memories of hard times on the land when each family lost members to starvation or accidents.

VISITING THE CENTRE

The centre leaves the visitor with a much greater understanding of the trading era in the Arctic so long ago and of the land and wildlife of the central barrenlands. It is staffed and open during the summer only, but is a “must see” if you are in Baker Lake.

Visitors should also include a stop at the Inuit Heritage Centre, or *Itsarnittakarvik* (Inuktitut word meaning “place of anything old”), which was established at the request of the elders to preserve and promote the unique inland culture of the inland

Inuit from several groups who have come together to live in Baker Lake. The elders wanted a place where they could share their knowledge with youth and visitors through exhibits, displays and programs. The heritage centre plays a distinct educational role within and outside the community.

Baker Lake is also the artistic centre for the Kivalliq region, and several galleries in the community display and sell carvings, fabric wallhangings, jewellery, and traditional tools.

Camping is available at **Inuujaarvik Territorial Park**, located between the airport and town, on the shore of the lake. This campground is ideal for canoeists coming off the Thelon or Kazan Rivers who want to spend some time in the community.

It offers a beach well-suited for unloading canoes, tent pads to accommodate eight tents, a cookhouse/shelter, picnic tables, a barbeque, and outhouses, and provides a great place to camp while in Baker Lake or a place for families to go for a picnic near town.

For assistance in planning a trip to Baker Lake or for more information on the Vera Akumalik Centre, **Inuujaarvik Territorial Park**, the Thelon Wildlife Sanctuary, and the Thelon and Kazan Canadian Heritage Rivers, check the Nunavut Parks website at www.nunavutparks.com, or call Nunavut Tourism at 1-866-NUNAVUT to request the Nunavut Travel Planner, which lists all licensed tourism operators, accommodations and services. ■



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