

Setting our nets

Community-based fisheries monitoring in Nunavut

“Ajungi, you got them first try! Right behind the brain, do you see them? The otoliths, the *qarasautiik*?”



Alex Flaherty (instructor), Greg Ningeocheak, Rachel Emiktowt, Jake Netser and Troy Netser sample an Arctic char from Quraluk during the Coral Harbour N-CAMP.



Alex Flaherty (instructor), Linda Orman, Samueli Ammaq and Natalino Piugattuk record weather information at Atikittuk during the Igloodik N-CAMP.

It sounded like conversation around an operating table, and it was. Only, we were doing surgery on fish — 200 beautiful, healthy Arctic char that we had caught at Atikittuk, a lake two-and-a-half hours by snowmobile from Igloodik.

With occasional assistance from our training team, seven community members worked together to carefully measure and record information on each fish. Whenever someone found the two otoliths — bones in the fish’s middle ear that help it to balance and that can

be used by scientists to tell a fish’s age and life history — there would be a cheer from the group. Later, elders Amaq&ainuk and Samueli demonstrated how to use other bones from a cooked fish head to create a graceful loon and other animals or objects; and I had my first chance to taste fish eyes as we savoured the results of our hard work.

Those two weeks in March were the first pilot for the Nunavut Community Aquatic Monitoring Program, or N-CAMP, developed

by the Government of Nunavut’s Fisheries and Sealing division to train Nunavummiut in sampling for fisheries development and aquatic research projects. We work closely with communities to define the research and the few days of preparatory classroom training. The data collection is performed on the land at the lakes where they want to develop commercial fisheries or monitor water quality and fish health.

The five-day land camp is key to successfully sharing knowledge — when you can directly

Concept Construction Completion

info@sanaqatiit.ca
phone: 867-979-1109
867-222-5454

Martha and John Ivarluk prepare to sample an Arctic char from the Coppermine River during the Kugluktuk N-CAMP.



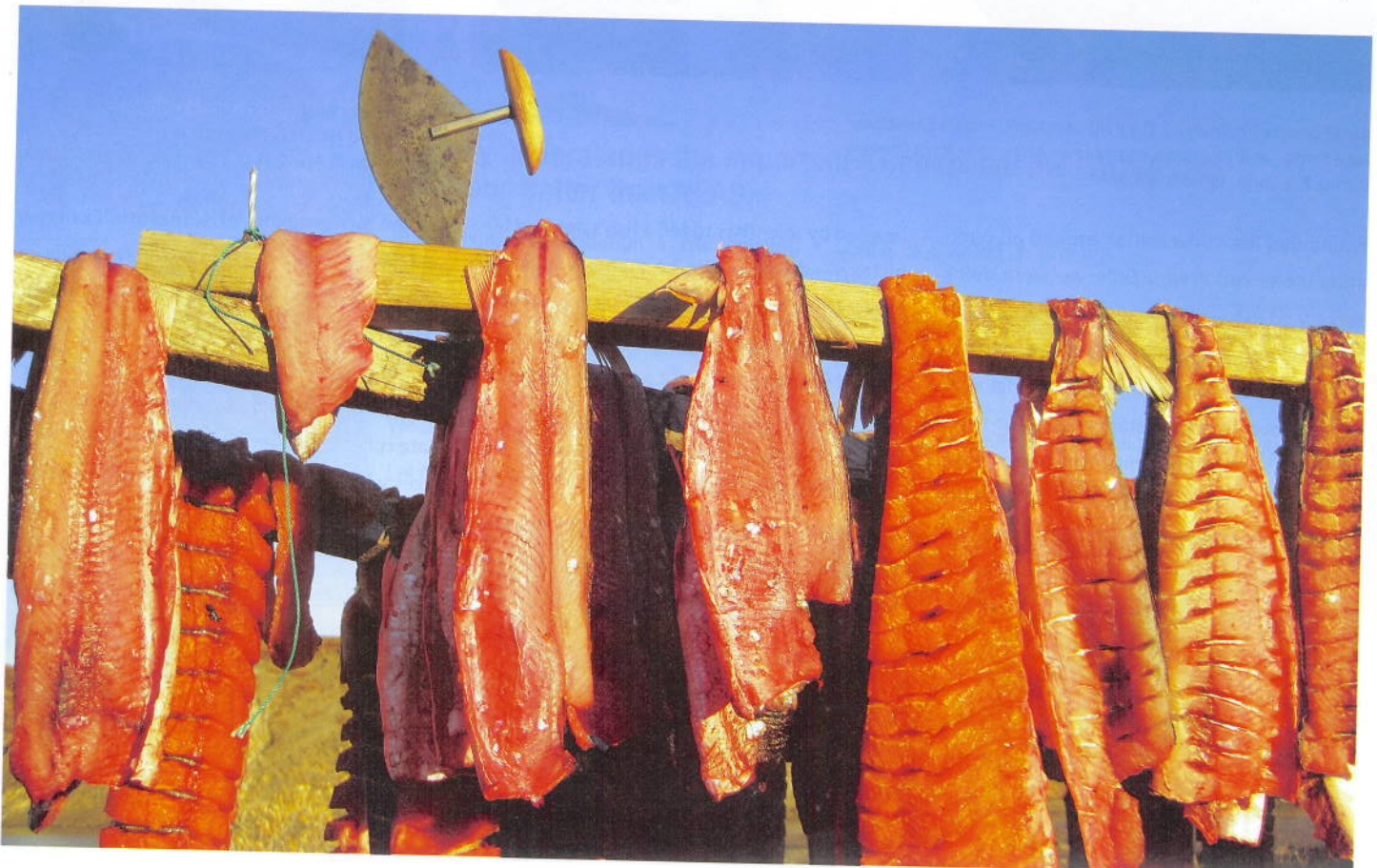
show someone what you're trying to teach them, whether scientific techniques or *Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit*, differences in language and culture melt away. So, although over the past two years we have visited our pilot communities — Igloodik, Coral Harbour and Kugluktuk — multiple times to get input into the training module and plan for the camps, 2014 was the real test as to whether we could make everyone's vision happen "out there" on the land.

Of course, nature was always going to be one of the greatest challenges. We had set out from Coral Harbour for our second camp under bright, sunny April skies — a long train of 15 snowmobiles and heavily-loaded *qamutiit* that round past jogging caribou through the mountains to Quraluk, in the north of Southampton Island. The beautiful canyon, however, proved problematic both for weather and for fishing, funnelling the wind and creating deep lakes that made for slow fishing.

In fact, we were catching fish faster by jigging than with the nets! Despite the low numbers of fish, we were nevertheless interested to see that we caught a greater proportion of females and overall larger fish at Quraluk than we had at Atikittuk, and we discussed some of the environmental changes that Sallirmiut have observed, such as increasing numbers of parasites on fish in some lakes.

By the third day, our "nice igloos" (i.e. large, domed sampling tents) had collapsed under 80 km/hr winds and everyone had resorted to huddling in a hunting cabin, listening to music, playing cards and telling stories to pass the time. The group remained cheerful and participants were making plans to return and finish the sampling at another time — so when the wind died down on our final day, we could still declare the camp a success; and the most important memo in my field notes was to pack more coffee for future camps!

Whitefish piffi drying at the Kugluktuk N-CAMP.



John Pameolik shares his knowledge of fish head bones with Tamara Koltit during the Coral Harbour N-CAMP. This head bone represents a harpooned walrus towing a hunter in a *qajaq*.

Jokes, laughter and working together also turned out to be hallmarks of our Kugluktuk camp in September. The early fall weather stayed clear and calm, and far from having slow fishing, we caught 88 fish in one net! With the pressure on to get them sampled, a production line quickly developed. Austin, wearing his aviators, skilfully wielded the filleting knife crafted by his grandfather, while Helen laughingly recorded whether the fish was “sex or female”. At the next table, Martha carefully prepared the sampled fish with her *ulu*, to make piffi that John hung on an improvised rack outside, until a long row of Arctic char and whitefish gleamed in the sun. Everyone enjoyed the piffi for a snack on our last day as we relaxed by the falls at Kugluk while John told us stories of the day that he trapped, and lost, his first fox. Once again, we shared knowledge, ideas, respect and fun through the N-CAMP.

A few days later, as I thanked and congratulated Martha, and presented her training certificate, she slipped something into my hand — a beautifully sewn zipper pull with miniature sealskin mittens. I will treasure that gift to remind me of all I learned from our N-CAMP participants, as we hope that they will



build on the training to take the lead in caring for and using their fish and water into the future. As Amaq&ainnuk put it, “We are very proud of this”.

More information about N-CAMP can be found at www.ncamp.ca. [ASB](#)

Sarah Arnold

Sarah Arnold is a Fisheries Sector Specialist in Rankin Inlet with the Government of Nunavut.



The Igloolik N-CAMP team celebrates sampling our 200th fish.

Janor Guest House & The Willows Inn

www.janor.ca



Self-serve continental breakfast • 24/7 access to fully equipped kitchen
BBQ • Free high speed WiFi, Satellite TV • Laundry • Ample parking.
The Willows Inn offers great office away-from-the-office work space. Enjoy all the comforts of home in your choice of private or shared living accommodations.

Box 777, Fort Simpson, NT X0E 0N0
☎: 867-695-2077
janorwillows@gmail.com