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UNGAVA BAY - UNGAVA PENINSULA

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UNGAVA BAY—UNGAVA PENINSULA

by

ROBERT BERGERON

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A NOTABLE EVENT in the history of Canadian mining was the discovery and development of iron ore in the Schefferville area*. This led to exploration and prospecting campaigns in numerous other parts of the Labrador Peninsula, and particularly in the area south and west of Ungava Bay. This area — its history, human and animal life, and mineral resources — is reviewed briefly in this article.

Before describing the country, we must try to dissipate some of the existing confusion regarding the names Labrador, Ungava, and New Quebec. Study of ancient geographical maps, particularly those of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, shows that to travellers and sailors of those times the word Labrador meant a peninsula in the northeastern part of the North American continent roughly based on a line connecting James Bay and the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

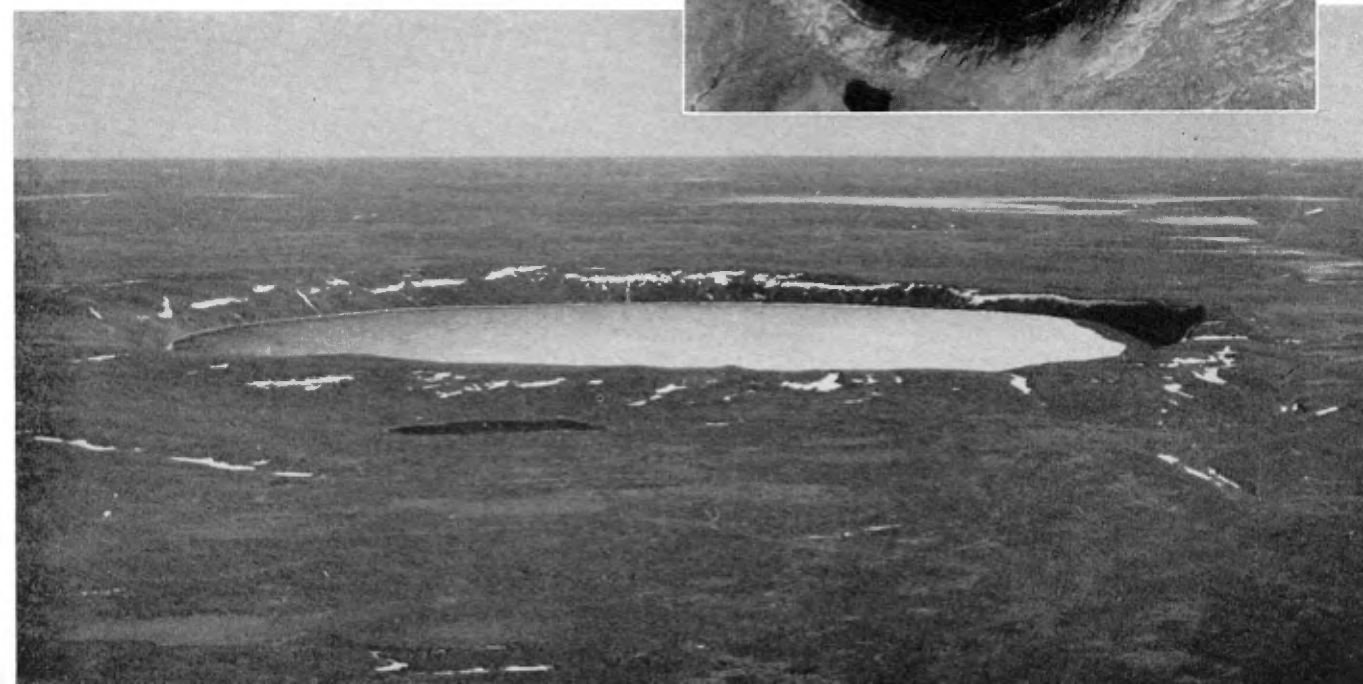
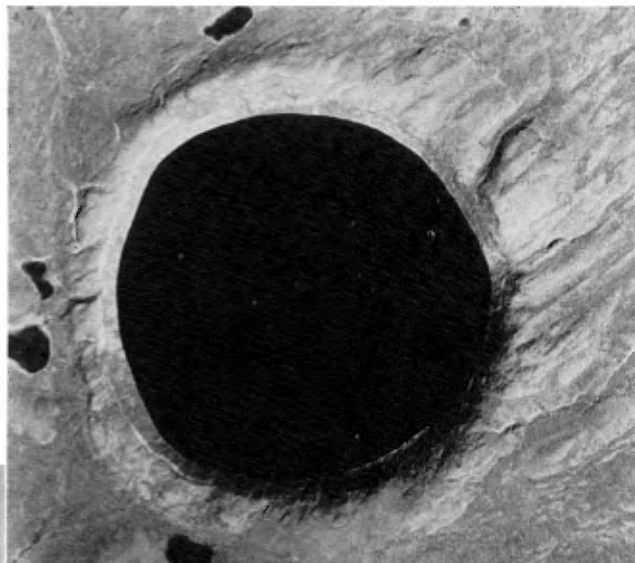
Ungava is an Eskimo word meaning "far away". The origin of the word is not definitely known as yet. But it is logical to suppose that

*See *Iron Ore Galore*, by J. A. Retty, *Can. Geog. Journal*, Vol. XLII, No. 1 pp. 2-21, January 1951; and *Knob Lake on Canada's New Frontier*, by W. G. Ross, *Can. Geog. Journal*, Vol. LIV, No. 6, pp. 238-245, June 1957.

the Eskimos living along the Atlantic coast referred to their brothers living along the shore of Ungava Bay as the "far away" ones. The name Ungava was later given to the bay and to a poorly defined but large part of Labrador.

Prior to 1912, Ungava was a district of the Northwest Territories, established by the Canadian Government in 1895. It comprised the land within the Province of Quebec north of latitude fifty-two degrees. When annexed to Quebec, its name was changed to New Quebec.

The spur west of Ungava Bay was named "Ungava Peninsula" by R. J. Flaherty, "the



father of the documentary film" and the maker of the film *Nanook of the North*, who made two traverses across the peninsula in 1912. The expression has been used by many explorers since and deserves to be retained. That part of the Labrador Peninsula which falls under Newfoundland's jurisdiction is properly called the Coast of Labrador.

General Features of the Area

Physiographically, the Labrador Peninsula is a peneplain; that is, a land-form worn down by erosion to a nearly flat or broadly undulating plain. Since its formation, the peneplain has been tilted so that a high escarpment borders the Atlantic Ocean and Hudson Strait, and from this escarpment the plateau surface slopes gently toward the west and southwest. A major exception to this generality is a U-shaped area around Ungava Bay, wherein the surface slopes northward toward the sea.

Many islands are found along the northern coast of Ungava Peninsula. This coast is irregular and relatively steep at many points between Cape Wolstenholme and Cape Hopes Advance. The coast is followed inland by an

undulating plateau rising 1,000 to 2,000 feet above sea level; many of the highest points are between Wakeham Bay and Douglas Harbour.

Within the peninsula, two ranges of hills rise some 1,000 feet above the level of the surrounding ground. They are the Cape Smith Range, northwest of the Chukotat River which flows into Hudson Bay, and the Povungnituk Range immediately south of the Little Povungnituk River in the north-central part of the peninsula. The most interesting topographical feature within this area is the New Quebec crater, which has been considered to be of meteoric origin; its exterior diameter is 11,500 feet. The diameter of the lake filling the depression is 9,100 feet and the average height of the rim above the lake is 400 feet. The altitude of the rim is about 300 feet above the surrounding ground. The inside slope approaches forty-five degrees.

The coastline of Ungava Bay is generally low. It rises here and there into hills with a maximum elevation of 500 feet. The littoral is jagged in many places and has many small rocky islands, but it usually consists of stretches



An Eskimo cairn made of quartzite-hematite flagstones.
Aubert de la Rue



Above:—The air base built at Fort Chimo by the United States was closed in 1948, but some of the buildings and an air strip are still in use. In the background is the Koksoak River.

Aubert de la Rue



Left:—The typical aspect of the tundra in the interior of the Ungava Peninsula.

Aubert de la Rue

UNGAVA BAY—UNGAVA PENINSULA

of clay strewn with large erratic boulders. Tidal variations are considerable, being up to fifty-four feet, the highest in the world, at Leaf Bay. The major indentations of the coastline are the estuaries of the largest rivers, which are fiords. These are not as majestic as the fiords of Norway, as the plateau in which they are incised does not rise above 600 feet.

Climate, Flora and Fauna

This territory has but two seasons — winter and summer — and summer lasts little more than the months of July and August. Around Fort Chimo, the lakes are generally free of ice about 25 June; in the northern part of Ungava Peninsula, about 10 July.

Most of the snow melts during the first two weeks in June, but many patches remain until the middle of August and some remain throughout the year. Regular, nightly frosts start about the first week in September in the vicinity of Fort Chimo. Here, also, this is about the time of the first snow-fall. The climatic conditions are slightly different south of Hudson Strait, where at Esker Lake in 1957 the first snow-fall was recorded on 13 August. The main charac-

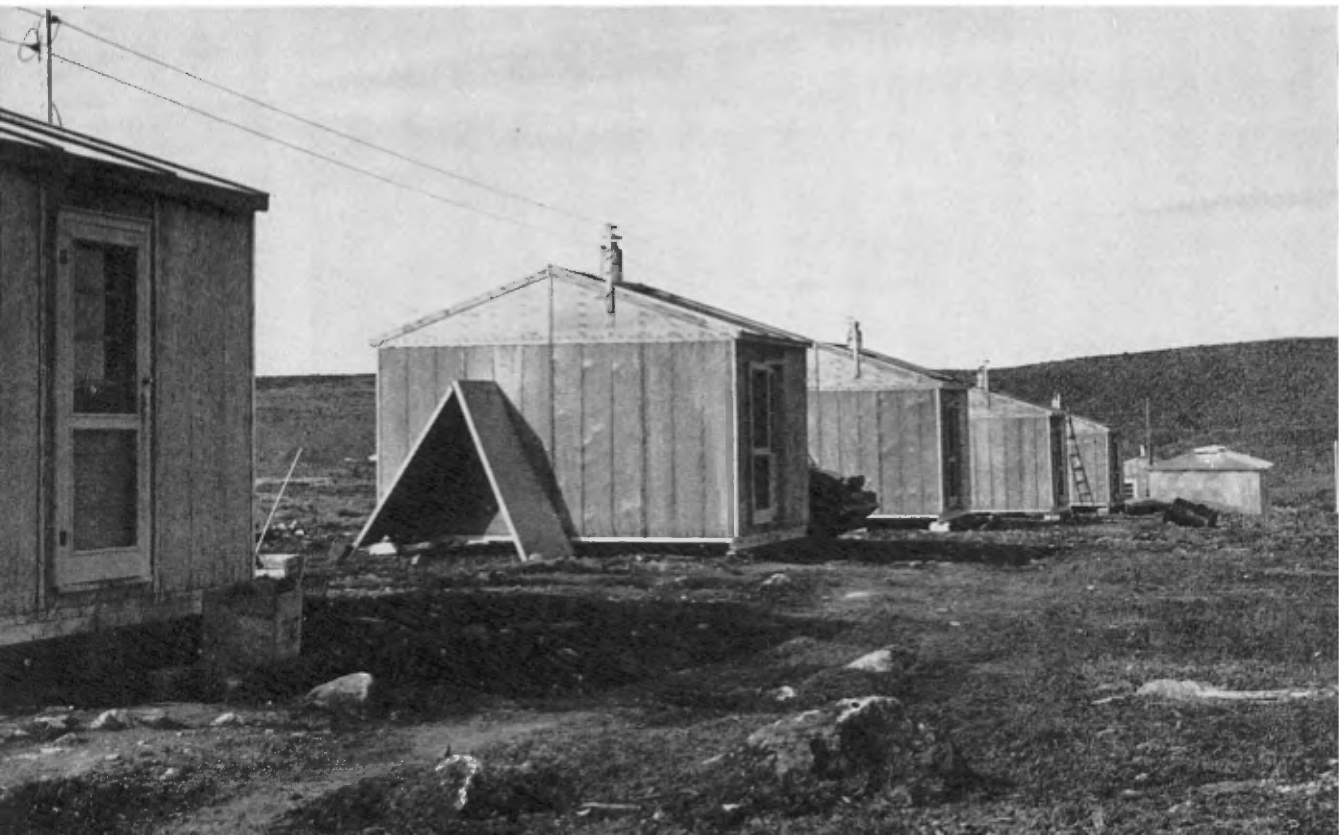
teristic of the climate of the northern part of Quebec is its great instability. Weather changes are frequent, and although the annual precipitation is only about twenty inches, very few summer days are without a drizzle of rain. The thermal variations are also great in summer, with temperatures above 90° Fahrenheit being recorded almost every year in the Fort Chimo area.

The vegetation of this northern part of Quebec is characterized by the tundra, commonly called the Barren Lands. The southern limit of the tundra proper is a sinuous line between latitudes 58° and 59°. This line passes a few miles north of Fort Chimo. The tundra is characterized by large areas carpeted mainly with moss and lichen. In addition, there are sedges, flowering and bushy plants and, as in the river valleys opening on Hudson Strait, a few stunted willows and alders.

Game is not plentiful. Caribou, so precious to the Indian and Eskimo populations, once thrived in very large numbers in this territory, but have almost completely disappeared in the last few decades. Several reasons have been brought forward to explain this disappearance,

A group of prefabricated huts at Esker Lake, central base of operation for the companies working in the Cape Smith-Wakeham Bay area.

Henry Koro





An Eskimo family from Sugluk. The man was working for a mining company at Esker Lake in the summer of 1957.

Henry Koro

but the main reasons seem to be forest fires and inconsiderate slaughter by Indians and Eskimos. During the winter, the Eskimos capture white or polar foxes and arctic hares. They also hunt seals and kill a few polar bears along the coast of Hudson Strait. Flocks of white partridge, ducks and Canada geese inhabit the territory, and various sea birds dwell along the coasts.

If game is scarce, fish are plentiful. Salmon ascend some of the large rivers flowing into the southern part of Ungava Bay. Large trout are caught in many places in the coastal waters, and grey trout, speckled trout, arctic char, carp, whitefish, and several other species are plentiful almost everywhere in the interior.

Insects, particularly mosquitoes, are in

extreme abundance during the summer months all over the territory.

Population

There are about one hundred permanent white residents in the area. They include Hudson's Bay Company personnel, missionaries, employees of aviation companies and government officials.

The Eskimos living along the shores of the Labrador Peninsula are known as Labrador or Eastern Eskimos, and number about 2,000. They are divided into three groups: the Itivimiut (people living on the "far side"), disposed along the coast of Hudson Bay; the Tahagmiut (people living towards the sunset), dwelling along the south shore of Hudson

Strait and the west side of Ungava Bay as far as Fort Chimo; and the Sahinimiut (people of the sunrise), living along the coast from George River to Hamilton Inlet.

The Labrador Eskimos are essentially fishermen and hunters. Although their life and customs will not be described here, I would like to discuss the impact of mining on the Eskimos living along the shores of Hudson Strait and Ungava Bay. These natives are poor, caribou having disappeared and the fur trade being slack, which has resulted in a deterioration in their state of health. The advent of a mining industry probably would save them. Anthropologists and missionaries agree that the Eskimos are quite adaptable and that many of them could be trained in mining operations. A mining industry would also give rise to a market for their fish. What would be the impact of civilization on these natives? It would be to their advantage and to ours that they be integrated but not assimilated. It might be best to follow the example of the Danes in Greenland, "to attempt to put the native economy back on a footing as near as is reasonable to the original . . . and to graft in, gradually, the pattern of civilization in the process."*

Indians of the Naskapi tribe used to dwell in the northern part of the forest-covered country south of Ungava Bay, in the Fort McKenzie

area. The Hudson's Bay Company had a trading post in that locality, but this was closed in 1948. Then, the Indians living in the area numbered about 250. After the closing of the post they moved to Fort Chimo. But, being away from their natural environment, and the fur trade being poor, these Indians were dying out, when the Federal Government in 1956 moved them south near Schefferville, where it will be easier to take care of them.

Brief History of Exploration and Mineral Search in the Area

The first relatively accurate map of Ungava Bay was published in 1814 in a book called *Journal of a Voyage from Okkak on the Coast of Labrador to Ungava Bay*. The book was written by two Moravian Brothers, Kohlmeister and Kmoch. They made this trip in 1811, and on 25 August of that year they entered the mouth of the Koksoak River.

On this river, about thirty miles from the bay, is Fort Chimo. This is the most important and the best known Hudson's Bay Company post in northern Quebec. The history of this post dates back to 1828 when, in order to study the possibility of establishing a trading post in Ungava Bay, William Hendry journeyed from Richmond Gulf to Clearwater Lake, thence to the head of the Larch River and down this river and the Koksoak. Hendry's

*Dunbar M. J., *The Ungava Bay Problem*; Arctic, Vol. 5, No. 1, pp. 4-16, March 1952.

The estuary of the Payne River and the Payne Bay post.

Aubert de la Rue





A group of igloos at Wakeham Bay, where a Roman Catholic mission has been established.

trip resulted in the opening of Fort Chimo in 1830 by Nicol Finlayson and Erland Erlandson. The word *chimo* has several meanings. A likely origin for the word is given by Andrew Graham, who published a book in 1768, *Observations on Hudson Bay*. According to him, the Eskimos "rub their breast with their open hand, calling in a pitiful tone, *Chimo! Chimo!* which is a sign

of peace and friendship." Fort Chimo has remained open since 1830, except for a period of twenty-four years between 1842 and 1866. Besides the Hudson's Bay post are found in Fort Chimo a detachment of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Anglican and Roman Catholic missions, a meteorological station, and an air base. The air base was built during the

Sugluk in winter. The Hudson's Bay post is on the right, the Roman Catholic mission on the left.





Murray Watts, whose investigations led to nickel-copper discoveries in the Cape Smith-Wakeham Bay belt.

Henry Koro

first to point out the favourable nature of the geology of certain regions for the occurrence of iron ore and base metals.

The first permanent establishment on Hudson Strait was established by the Hudson's Bay Company in 1909 at Cape Wolstenholme. This was the first step towards the expansion of the company in the Barren Lands. The cape was named by Henry Hudson to honour Sir John Wolstenholme, one of the merchants who financed his expedition in 1610. This post is now closed.

Apart from Fort Chimo, the permanent establishments now existing along the south shore of Hudson Strait and the coasts of Ungava Bay are the following: Ivugivik (Catholic mission), Sugluk (Hudson's Bay Company post, Catholic and Anglican missions), Wakeham Bay (Roman Catholic mission), Cape Hopes Advance (Department of Transport radio meteorological station), Payne Bay (Hudson's Bay Company post).

Low's reports aroused much interest at the time they were published, but it was not until 1929 that the New Quebec Mining Company undertook an expedition into the interior of the Labrador Peninsula. The expedition was headed by Dr. W. F. James and Dr. J. E. Gill, who discovered iron ore at Ruth Lake, a few miles northwest of where Schefferville now stands. Their explorations took them northward to the area at the junction of the Kaniapiskau and Swampy Bay Rivers, about eighty miles south of Fort Chimo.

About the same time a company, called Labrador-Ungava Prospectors Limited, was formed to explore the area west and southwest of Fort Chimo. The party travelled by canoe, following the route used by William Hendry in 1828. Copper showings were discovered in the Gerido Lake area about fifty-five miles west of Fort Chimo. The same showings were rediscovered in 1953 and studied in detail by a number of mining companies.

In 1931 and 1932, a prospecting party for the Cyril Knight Prospecting Company explored a belt of rock extending across the tip of Ungava Peninsula from Cape Smith to Wakeham Bay. This journey was made on foot, using dog sleds while the snow lasted and back-packing during

Second World War by the United States Government. It is located on the west shore of Koksoak River about six miles up-stream from the village of Fort Chimo. The base was closed in 1948, but some of the buildings and one air strip are still in use.

The first to explore the inhospitable wilds of the northern part of Quebec were Hudson's Bay Company men bent on establishing posts in the interior and on opening a route to Hamilton Inlet. The most famous was John McLean, who made a trip from Fort Chimo to Hamilton Inlet in 1838 and who discovered Grand Falls on Hamilton River in 1839. His notes were published in 1932 by the Champlain Society.

It is not possible in this article to mention the names of all the explorers and missionaries who contributed to the exploration of these lands, but these included one of the most important names in Canadian exploration, A. P. Low. We owe to him the first detailed descriptions of the character of the coastal regions and of the interior of the northern part of Labrador Peninsula. These are based on explorations undertaken for the Geological Survey of Canada between 1885 and 1904. Low was the

the summer months. The party had travelled by canoe from Moose Factory on James Bay to Cape Smith. Deposits of massive sulfides containing nickel and copper were discovered. A young man, Murray Watts, was a member of that expedition. He went back to the area in 1955 and again in 1956. His work resulted in the discovery of nickel-copper showings which sparked the interest of many mining companies and which led to a large amount of exploration work being done in 1957 on what is now known as the Cape Smith-Wakeham Bay belt.

Following the discovery of high-grade iron ore in the Schefferville area, many mining companies searched for similar material north of the holdings of Iron Ore Company of Canada. Although no similar high-grade, direct-shipping ore was found, a huge tonnage of concentrating-grade iron-bearing material has been disclosed. These ores contain roughly thirty per cent iron but cannot be treated directly. Impurities must be removed and the material concentrated to a product with a content of over sixty-five per cent iron.

Many obstacles have been and still must be overcome to bring these large, low-grade iron deposits into production. Two companies in particular, Ungava Iron Ore Company and Ocean Iron Ore Limited, with properties located respectively west of Hopes Advance Bay and south of Payne River, have given this problem much consideration.

Conclusion

The future of Quebec's Arctic, and even of the country north of latitude 52° (New Quebec), rests in the development of its mineral and water power resources. So far as mineral resources are concerned, only about five per cent of this vast area has been adequately explored. To date the only areas examined in some detail are the Cape Smith-Wakeham Bay belt in northern Ungava, the Fort McKenzie-Fort Chimo-Leaf Bay-Payne Bay area, the Schefferville (Knob Lake) region, and a few scattered areas southeast of Hudson Bay. Government and company geologists will continue their explorations in this region, and it is certain that other important finds will be made.

Modern means of transportation are a great help in exploration work in the north.

Henry Koro





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