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Inuit settlement in the Clyde area during “contact-exploration” times (ca. 1820-1895)

George W. Wenzel *

Résumé: Les établissements inuit de la région de Clyde durant la période de «contact et exploration» (1820-1895)

Dans son classique *The Central Eskimo* (1888), Frank Boas laisse fortement entendre qu’au moment de son périple le plus septentrional, les Inuit utilisaient très peu le littoral de la Terre de Baffin entre la baie Home au nord et le détroit d’Éclipse, qui correspond aujourd’hui à la région de la rivière Clyde. Une étude ethnohistorique concernant les établissements inuit de cette région avant la présence européenne s’est avérée décevante à cause du manque de références temporelles associées à l’information reçue des aînés de Clyde. Néanmoins, l’utilisation avec les informateurs d’indices temporels tirés de la littérature a donné de meilleurs résultats. Le présent article met en lien des souvenirs d’Inuit de Clyde avec trois récits concernant des Inuit du 19^e siècle dans la région. Le plus ancien de ceux-ci (1820) se déroule à l’emplacement presque exact du village moderne de Clyde River, les deux autres, dans la décennie suivant le séjour de Boas. Ces comptes rendus, conjugués à l’information recueillie par Mathiassen (1928) auprès d’Inuit de Pond Inlet au sujet de leur lieu de naissance et de leurs déplacements, semblent indiquer que la région de Clyde était loin d’être inconnue des Inuit, même s’ils ne l’occupaient peut-être pas de façon intensive.

Abstract: Inuit settlement in the Clyde area during “contact-exploration” times (ca. 1820-1895)

Boas, in his classic *The Central Eskimo* (1888), strongly implied that at the time of his most northerly journey the Baffin Island coast between northern Home Bay and Eclipse Sound, what is today the Clyde River area, was at most only lightly utilised by Inuit. Ethnohistorical inquiry about Inuit settlement in the area prior to a European presence was frustrated by a lack of temporal referencing for much of the information received from Clyde elders. However, more success was achieved by using temporally situated literature references as cues for informants. This paper relates Clyde Inuit recollections to three reports about 19th century Inuit in the region. The earliest of these (1820) occurred almost at the site of modern Clyde River, while the other two reports are both within a decade of Boas’s journey. These accounts, coupled with Mathiassen’s (1928) information from Inuit at Pond Inlet about their birthplaces and travels, suggest that the Clyde area, while perhaps not intensively occupied, was far from unknown to Inuit.

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Introduction

When I undertook my first fieldwork at Clyde River and Arviqtiq in 1971-1972, few directly relevant ethnographic and other social science references were available to me. Essentially, I relied on Boas's (1888) *The Central Eskimo* as a very much-needed introduction to the Inuit of eastern Baffin Island. Boas was useful up to a point, but was painfully limited in regard to the history of Inuit settlement in the Clyde area except in the broadest outline. Boas was rich in ethnographic details about the Cumberland Sound region, but had never travelled further north from his base than Isabella Bay (Figure 1), just above Henry Kater Peninsula and Home Bay. As a result, he only penetrated the southern edge of what is today considered the Clyde River region (roughly to mid-Home Bay) and relied for much of his information on the settlement pattern and movement beyond the peninsula on his Cumberland Sound and Akudnirmiut (southern Home Bay) Inuit informants. The other significant work on the region was by D.C. Foote and his students (Foote 1966; later published as Anders et al. 1966), but this covered only recent aspects of Inuit settlement in the Clyde area.

When Boas (1888: 442) travelled northward from Cumberland Sound, he suggested that beyond Cape Henry Kater a considerable portion of the Clyde area, including the present community location and what many Clyde Inuit would consider their core 20th century resource area, was seemingly devoid of permanent Inuit occupation. This suggests that ca. 1883 around Clyde Inlet, important settlements, such as those Foote later noted as being in Inugsuin, Eglinton and Sam Ford Fiords, and Scott Inlet were not occupied on a sustained basis, if at all, but perhaps only occasionally. Indeed, Boas (1888: Plate III) identified just three occupation sites, an autumn settlement and two summering sites, along the whole of the eastern Baffin coast from central Home Bay to Eclipse Sound. Thus, in Boas's time, much of the Clyde region was seemingly used only seasonally and, it may be inferred, was something of a buffer, in the sense suggested by Damas (1984) between the Akudnirmiut of Home Bay and the "Tununirmiut of Pond's Bay" (today, Mittimatalik, formerly Pond Inlet), a view favoured by Stevenson (1972).

This "emptiness" was markedly different from Foote's report of some 80 years later. The difference between Boas and Foote, on the face of it, was explainable by the fact that the Clyde area, unlike Cumberland and Eclipse Sounds, was relatively unaffected by non-Inuit whaling and trading activities. This absence of contact changed in the early 1920s when, first, the Sabellum Trading and Gold Company (1923-1926) and then the Hudson's Bay Company (1923-1988) established themselves in the area, the former on Henry Kater Peninsula and the HBC on the site of what would become the community of Clyde River. The permanent presence of Europeans, and most especially that of the HBC, presumably, as surmised by Stevenson (1972), drew Inuit from north and south into the region.

As my experience with the Clyde River people developed and the literature that was either unknown to me when I first began fieldwork or that only appeared after was found, the "unpopulated and little used" view of the area between roughly Buchan

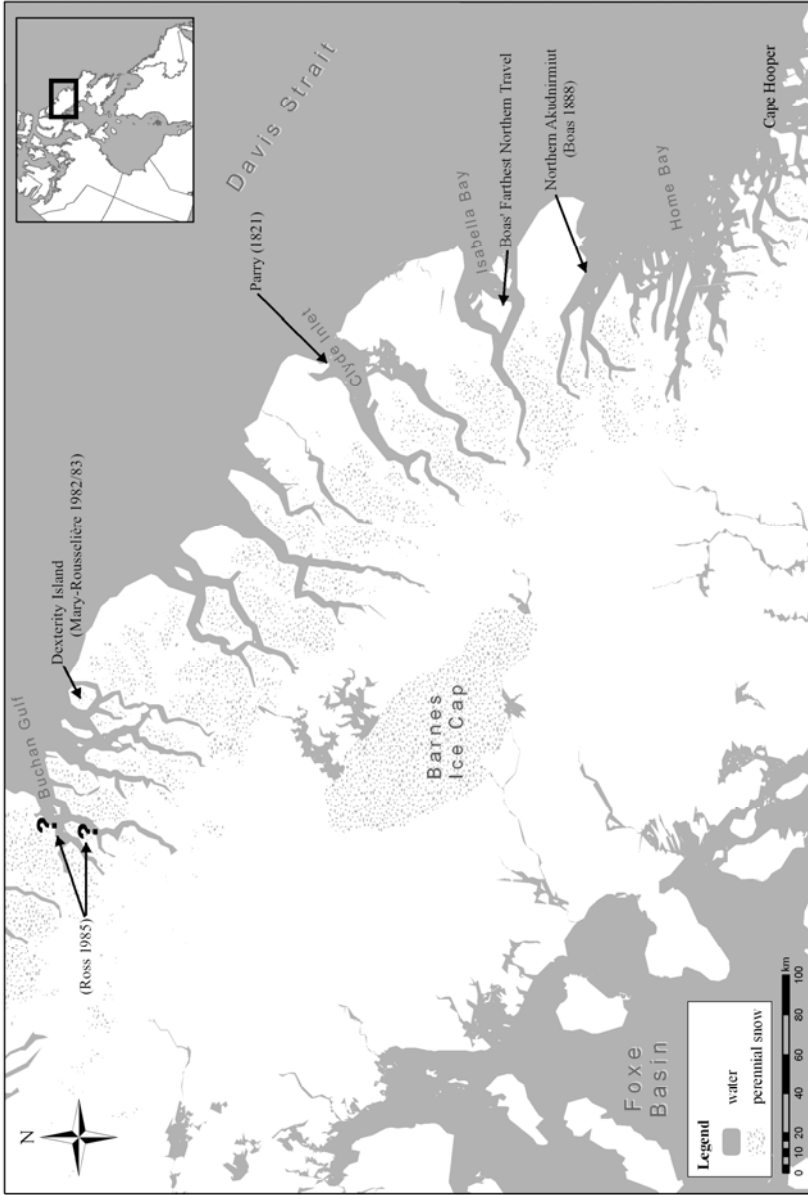


Figure 1. Clyde River Inuit 19th century occupation areas (map: Melanie Poupart).

Gulf and Home Bay seemed not wholly accurate. The purpose here is, therefore, to show in an albeit limited way that the Clyde River region was occupied and utilised to an extent not apparent in *The Central Eskimo*.

The data sources

Three 19th century “contact-exploration” cases, as well as some analysis of Boas and Mathiassen’s remarks about the region, are the focus here (Table 1). While the cases are by no means the only examples of Inuit presence around Clyde known to contemporary residents, they have been chosen because temporal provenience is provided by published sources. Of equal importance is that these events are still a part of Clyde Inuit oral history. While there were certainly other contacts along the Clyde coast, during the period, between Inuit and European whalers, especially in the northern Home Bay-Henry Kater Peninsula area (see Boas 1888: 441; Harper 2005), the events discussed here are limited to ones for which dual “sourcing” (Clyde Inuit recollection and time-referenced European information) was obtained.

Only events or circumstances known in some detail through both Inuit and European sources are discussed here. Undoubtedly, there were more, perhaps many more, Inuit-European encounters than the few mentioned – Parry (1821), for instance, noted that the Scottish whaler *Lee* met Inuit near present-day Clyde River (it was on the basis of information provided by the master of the *Lee* about Inuit at Clyde Inlet that Parry visited the area). Indeed, Clyde Inlet (albeit originally misnamed “River Clyde”) was so named by early 19th century whalers.

Table 1. Clyde region exploration-contact sources and places.

Source	Locations	Information
Parry (1821)	Clyde Inlet	19 Inuit: 3 men, 4 women, 12 children
Boas 1888	Henry Kater Peninsula, Eglinton Fiord, Sam Ford Fiord	Akudnirmiut; occasionally visited by Tununirmiut
Mary-Rousselière (1982-1883); Ashivak	Dexterity Harbour, Dexterity Island	Bowhead whaling, 17(?) Inuit: 6 men, 8 women, 3 children
Ross (1985); Sanguya	Buchan Gulf	Extended family
Mathiassen (1928)	Anaularealing Fiord	Tununirmiut

However, a restricted look at what could be gleaned about Inuit settlement along this coast for this time has been chosen for two reasons. The first is that Inuit information about the event or aspects of an occupation, as opposed to strictly European reportage, was desired. The other relates to concern for temporal referencing, or its lack (most typical were statements such as, “It happened before the HBC came to Clyde”), which further suggested a more cautious approach. Nonetheless, as limited as the following is, it will hopefully lead to further elaboration of early Inuit history in the Clyde region.

Parry's 1821 account

William Parry (1821) provides the first written record about Inuit in the Clyde region. Parry, commander of a British Admiralty expedition to explore Lancaster Sound and the eastern Baffin Island coast, anchored for a day and night at the mouth of Clyde Inlet in September 1820, after having learned from a passing whaling vessel (the *Lee*) that a group of Inuit were encamped near the entrance of Clyde Inlet and just inside the southeast corner of Patricia Bay. The place of this meeting was at or near the present-day summer and autumn camping site known to Clyde Inuit as Supaigajuktuq and is situated less than 20 km from modern Clyde River.

The 17 Inuit whom Parry (1821: 287) met there appear to have been in a temporary camp as they were living in sealskin tents and were apparently preparing to move for the winter into three substantial stone and sod dwellings (*qangmaq*) about 2 km distant from their tent encampment where Patricia Bay opens onto Clyde Inlet. These *qangmait*, while not actually visited by Parry or members of his crew, must have appeared habitable and, while he left no detailed description of them, may have closely resembled Thule semi-subterranean houses. That they had a Thule-like appearance can be surmised from a number of factors. One is that Gardner (1979: 262-263), in the course of archaeological survey around Clyde River, appears to have located these dwellings and recorded their collapsed features as Thule in origin, designating the place OcDn-2. However, Clyde oral accounts (T. Qillaq, pers. comm. 1999) of this first recorded contact with *Qallunaat* indicate that OcDn-2 is the location of the winter village that was inhabited by the people who met Parry. The other is that *qangmait* of this kind of construction continued to be in use in the Clyde region long after early contact times. At least six stone and sod *qangmaq* sites are to be found in Scott Inlet, Eglinton and Sam Ford Fiords, that were all occupied during the later Contact-Traditional Period (1923-1955) (Wenzel in press). In fact, this type of habitation was used even more recently. From 1977-1979, Inuit at an outpost camp in the Walker Arm section of Sam Ford Fiord built and lived in two stone and sod *qangmait*. The only essential difference notable from much older features was that the Walker Arm people substituted canvas for sealskin as roof covering. The camp head, then about 50 years of age, said that these *qangmait* were built exactly like ones he had lived in as a youth in the 1940s (A. Inutiq, pers. comm. 1976).

Memory at Clyde River of the Inuit who met Parry does not include whether anyone today is directly descended from that group of 17 people. However, it is held that the three *qangmait* mentioned by him were in active use for a considerable time afterward and that a stone weir that once existed on a small river near the head of Patricia Bay was built by this group. Neither the Clyde Inuit nor Parry's records provide much information as to the area used by this group or about other Inuit living about the region. Descriptions of the group's tools and clothing suggest nothing exotic, other than some items, such as broken files, obviously obtained at some earlier date from Europeans or from other Inuit in contact with Europeans. Parry did remark on the presence of narwhal and walrus ivory being used for tools, but both species could then have been obtained in the immediate vicinity as narwhal frequent Patricia Bay even

today and walrus were once abundant (Degerbøl and Freuchen 1935: 243) across Clyde Inlet among the islands at the mouth of Inugsuin Fiord, some 30 to 40 km from Supaigaijuktuq.

More intriguingly, he also noted the use of “whalebone” buckets and whale mandibles as sled runners. These materials were certainly from bowhead whales (*Balaena mysticetus*), but it is impossible to determine whether these materials were from animals hunted by his contacts or whether they were scavenged from a commercial “floater” or even from a pre-existing, possibly Thule, occupation. Thus, while both Inuit and European renderings about this group are intriguing, any conclusions about 19th century Inuit settlement pattern, beyond the fact that this group seemed about to winter on the southeastern side of Clyde Inlet in already existing *qangmait*, would be speculative.

Parry also mentions that the people whom he visited readily identified a musk-ox when shown a drawing. As it is most unlikely that Inuit living around Clyde Inlet would have themselves come into contact with musk-ox, it is probable that they were in communication with northern Baffin or Iglulingmiut people who knew of the species from visits to Devon or Somerset Islands.

1880s accounts by Boas

After Parry, published references to Inuit settlement around the Clyde region are few and much less informative. The most interesting come from Boas (1888) and Mary-Rousselière (1982-1983), Boas’s information being received from more southerly dwelling Inuit and Mary-Rousselière’s from ethno-historical accounts obtained from Pond Inlet informants. As mentioned earlier, Boas did not himself visit with Inuit living north of Home Bay. However, in writing about the area immediately around Clyde River and as far to the north as Eglinton Fiord, he (Boas 1888: 442) specified that “River Clyde and Aqbirtijung are not always inhabited, but are visited at irregular intervals by the Akudnirmiut, the same who usually stay at Niagonaujang,” following it by noting that “It is probable that Aqbirtijung and Kangertlualung are sometimes visited by Tununirmiut of Pond Bay.” This passage is highly suggestive that Boas was led to understand that the coast between the Home Bay Akudnirmiut and the North Baffin Tununirmiut had no distinct Inuit population, with Aqbirtijung (Eglinton Fiord) being the most northerly place visited by Akudnirmiut and the southernmost reached by Tununirmiut.

A little more information pertaining to parts of the Clyde region can be gleaned from Boas. One is that the Akudnirmiut made considerable use of Home Bay’s islands during summers to hunt caribou, often moving in August to the southeastern tip of Henry Kater Peninsula (Niaqonaujang [Niaqurnaujaq]) to meet commercial whalers (*ibid.*: 441). He also notes the Akudnirmiut travelled to Ijellirtung (McBeth Fiord), behind Isabella Bay, and Inugsuin [Inuksuit] Fiord, just below the mouth of Clyde Inlet. Ijellirtung [Ijjiliqtuq] was a route that was followed by Clyde Inuit living in

Isabella and Home Bays before centralisation began in the mid-1950s in order to reach a lake-river complex important for Arctic char, while the islands at the mouth of Inugsuin Fiord may have been used, as already mentioned, to hunt walrus. The only other mention about subsistence activities is that few birds seem to have been available.

Boas also sheds some light on Inuit settlement around the southern Clyde area, although his text and maps have some ambiguities. For instance, he mentions (*ibid.*: 442) that, after gathering in late summer near Cape Henry Kater to meet passing whalers, these Inuit often wintered just west on Henry Kater Peninsula at Ipiutelling [Ipiutalik], although he (*ibid.*: Plate II) indicated Ipiutelling as a summer site. The same map shows the island of Avaudjelling (probably Kingittuaq Island) as a spring season site, but on another (*ibid.*: Plate III) it is marked as a spring and summer encampment. Overall, he states (*ibid.*: 440) that “A peculiarity of the Akudnirmiut is their more decided migratory character [...]” as compared to the people of Cumberland Sound.

As for Inuit settlement northward from Clyde Inlet, Boas’s maps (*ibid.*) place a winter village on the southern side of Eglinton Fiord called Aqbirtjung; this is probably the Arviqtiug that was in use by several different extended family units between the late 1920s and about 1976. But this, along with his reference (*ibid.*) to Tununirmiut visitations to Kangertualung [Kangiqtualuk] (likely Sam Ford Fiord), is the extent of his settlement information for the area. However, one more note from Boas about the Clyde area bears mention. He indicates on his map (Plate II) and writes about (*ibid.*: 443) an overland route across Baffin Island from Foxe Basin to Angmaq [Angmaq], which was probably at the head of Cambridge Fiord. This is a place where Clyde Inuit say a large *qangmaq* village existed before the Hudson’s Bay Company came to Pond Inlet and Clyde River. Whether the locations are the same is unknown, but it is unlikely that Inuit would cross Baffin Island to reach an uninhabited area when more direct routes linked the Foxe Basin Iglulingmiut with their North Baffin Tununirmiut and Tununirusirmiut cousins.

Mary-Rousselière about Dexterity Island

Another reference to Inuit settlement above Clyde Inlet is a brief note by Mary-Rousselière’s (1982-1983) about a group contacted by several whaling ships and by Robert Peary at Dexterity Harbour in 1895. This is the same group that Lubbock (1937: 431) reports as having apparently all died sometime afterward, although Mary-Rousselière (1982-1983: 14-15) considers Lubbock’s rendering to probably be wrong. However, he offers no detailed evidence for judging Lubbock’s rendering to be incorrect. Whatever the case, Inuit at Clyde (A. Palituq and L. Iqalujuak, pers. comm. 1981) state that a group did indeed live on Dexterity Island, but that they had disappeared long before the arrival of the Hudson’s Bay Company on northern Baffin Island. This group is said to have possessed a wooden whaleboat, something not mentioned in the account unearthed by Mary-Rousselière and to have hunted bowhead whales for themselves during the summer from a camp on the eastern (Baffin Bay) side of the island, moving to a village on the landward side in the winter.

Shangoya and information from Mathiassen

Two other references to Inuit in the Clyde region during this time are worthy of mentioning. The first is a photograph (Ross 1985: 147) of Shangoya, who headed a Buchan Gulf extended family, apparently taken at his summer camp ca. 1890. His great-grandsons were told that this group was comprised of himself, his three wives and their children, and at least two younger brothers with their families. They are believed to have had a winter village either at Ikpik or Nuilatuq, both on the north side of the Gulf, and to have hunted in other seasons down the fiords that branch westward from it.

The last source pertinent to settlement in the Clyde region is Mathiassen's (1928: 22) census from Pond Inlet taken just before the onset of the contact-traditional period on eastern Baffin Island. In brief, he records that three of the 55 men whom he questioned were born in Home Bay and that nine of a further sample of 33 men had travelled to the Clyde area—five to River Clyde and four to Home Bay (other locations within the region that may have been visited are not mentioned). Finally, he noted that seven adults had close blood kin living in Home Bay. Mathiassen then closed his discussion of Inuit population distribution by stating that the Tununirmiut are loosely connected to the Akudnirmiut of Clyde River and Home Bay, “[...] to whom in fact some of them are related by marriage; a connection here, however, is much weaker than with the Igluliks.”

One last titbit of information from Mathiassen regarding Tununirmiut in the region also comes from his census. Although his inquiry about places visited revealed only nine Inuit who reported travelling to at least Clyde River, another 16 (of the 33 men questioned) had been to Anaularealing Fiord (*ibid.*: 22),. This is likely the same as Cambridge Fiord, an arm of Buchan Gulf. Comparison of Mathiassen's map of northeast Baffin Island with that of Boas, coupled with their respective textual descriptions, raises the possibility that Anaularealing [Anaularialik] is the same as Boas's placement of a winter village near the head of Cambridge Fiord and that Tununirmiut, contrary to what both wrote, were in fact well established in the northern part of the Clyde region.

The picture that emerges from these various oral and published sources is unfortunately vague. The overall suggestion from Boas and Mathiassen is that any Inuit inhabiting the Clyde region were mainly in its southern portion, from about Clyde Inlet into northern Home Bay and would be Akudnirmiut. Tununirmiut penetration of the area would be at best occasional. On the other hand, it would seem from Parry, Mary-Rousselière and several Clyde Inuit sources that Inuit settlement was more widespread and that Tununirmiut would have likely used at least the most northerly parts of the region, likely Buchan Gulf and Cambridge Fiord.

Settlement pattern and community composition

Any determination about community patterning among Inuit of the Clyde region during this time is even more opaque than is settlement. The information from Parry certainly suggests that the Supaigaijuktug group may have been an extended family. Such a conclusion, albeit a tentative one, can be drawn from Parry's estimation of the ages of the adult men and women, forming four couples. Also, Gardner's (1979: 283) OcDn-2 site plan, if in fact the winter houses of the group, shows that two houses shared a joint cold-trap entrance, is suggestive that the occupants of at least these two dwellings may have been related. However, this is only a possibility as early ethnographic sources, like Jenness (1922), are equivocal as to this relationship.

Similarly, it would appear that Shangoya lived in an extended family setting and, in light of his apparent wealth, as evinced by having several wives (Ross 1985; J. Sanguya, pers. comm. 1997), that he may have been head of this group. As for the Dexterity Island people, it is possible, based on information about the organisation of North Alaskan bowhead whale hunting (Burch 1975; Spencer 1959), to surmise that the members may have been related, but this is only surmise.

Conclusion

The preceding material on Clyde Inuit settlement and living groups in the contact-exploration period is admittedly inferential as to the extent of Inuit occupancy and use of the Clyde River region. Contact with non-Inuit, as judged from the paucity of written information about Inuit in that area, seems to have been slight. The cause of this may be, as suggested by Boas, an absence of Inuit from much of that coast, except on a very occasional basis. But the cause of this apparent paucity of mention may also relate to ice conditions that until recently often persisted into August and, thus, made much of the eastern Baffin Island coast from roughly Buchan Gulf to Clyde Inlet unapproachable to whalers and other non-Inuit in some years (see Wenzel 1981).

Indeed, that Boas (1888: 441) also notes that Inuit frequently gathered in late summer on the southeastern tip of Henry Kater Peninsula "[...] to have an opportunity of meeting the whalers on their way south" suggests some greater amount of contact than might otherwise be supposed from his other statements about the region. Likewise, Mary-Rousselière (1982-1983: 4) suggests that by the mid-19th century, the Arviqsuqtiit (hunters of bowhead whales) were often visited by European whalers at Taqtaaluk (Dexterity Harbour). Finally, Harper (2005: 34), using a population estimate by the surgeon of the whaler *Ravenscraig*, suggests that as many as 250 Inuit were in the vicinity of Cape Henry Kater in 1881.

The data from Parry, Mary-Rousselière and about Shangoya, while spread across nearly 80 years, are nonetheless suggestive that when Inuit were present, it was not for the purpose of hit and run seasonal exploitation; it rather reflects possible multi-year occupation by these different groups of a site and/or limited area. The best evidence for

this comes from Parry's 1820 visitation. Here it seems clear that the people whom he met were not about to decamp for distant parts. This also seems to be the case with the Dexterity Island group, although Mary-Rousselière's account strongly suggests that the occupation may have been both very recently initiated and very short-lived.

Likewise, close readings of Boas and Mathiassen suggest that the Clyde region was in some way *terra incognita*. Boas's mention of at least one major settlement at Cambridge Fiord (and also at Eglinton Fiord?) and the existence of a well-used trans-island travel route linking Foxe Basin to the East Baffin coast must be weighed against his other statements about only seasonal usage. As for Mathiassen, while his census comes at a much later time, the fact that he found more than a few Inuit at Pond Inlet to be from, to have travelled to or to be related to Inuit living in the Clyde River-Home Bay area, not least at a time before either the HBC or the Sabellum Company were active trading operations, raises the possibility that the coast between Eclipse Sound and Home Bay was more than a void to be traversed as rapidly as possible.

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