



Photo taken in Wager Bay by Donna Barnett.

#### PAST

When the first Hudson's Bay Company schooner sailed into Wager Bay there was only a handful of Inuit families living in the area. Nevertheless, in an effort to push the fox trade deep into the Barrens in the area of the Back River, the decision was made to establish a new trading post. These extracts from the Manager's Journal illustrate life at the Post.

September 7th, 1925: "Fort Chesterfield successfully made passage through falls (rapids at the west end of Wager Bay) and came to anchor here in harbour, Tessyoooyuk. Messrs. Learmouth and Thom arranged site for buildings. Mr. Thom to be in charge of post. Discharged about half of freight."

September 9th, 1925: "Squally. Schooner left in a.m. All hands on house building."

September 15th, 1925: "Slight snowfall on hills. Boarded up house all but roof, and flooded store."

October 30th, 1925: "Cold and clear with sharp wind from N. Tessyoooyuk covered with ice."

November 2nd, 1925: "Calm and mild. Occupied house for first time last night."

November 5th, 1925: "Blizzard. First real one so far. Great deal of snow gathering around buildings."

November 12th, 1925: "Drifting, N.W. All Natives now occupy igloos - last of them moved today from tents."

February 3rd, 1926: "Cold and clear. Left with two sleds and Natives for Back's River or native camps in that vicinity."

March 7th, 1926: "Arrived home 8 p.m. last night. Found natives after travelling all over the country (it seemed), living on the sea ice close to the mouth of Hayes River where they exist by fishing. Not one of them has ever been in this direction, but now have hopes of seeing them in spring."

December 25th, 1929: "Dull and overcast, calm, snowing a little. Had all the natives in tonight, gave them a feed and presents, after which they enjoyed themselves dancing for the rest of the evening. The music was supplied by native Tommy on a five dollar accordion. Two Back's River natives - 'First time see'em Christmas' - were greatly amused and no doubt it made an effect upon them."

January 13th, 1931: "Keeluk has now had a young wife bestowed upon him. She is Samson's wife's eldest girl and needless to say Keeluk is all tickled up the back - and elsewhere, I suppose."

January 4th, 1933: "Natives Deaf Johnny, Angatingwak, Sutoxi, and Nowya arrived at post this evening and they all were in a sorry plight with frostbite, hunger and tiredness. The majority of their dogs had died on them through lack of food and they had but seven dogs amongst them when they arrived here. None of these natives had any foxes to trade."

March 27th, 1933: "Still no signs of any natives arriving, so I guess they are getting very little fur."

May 10th, 1933: "Natives Arngnawa and Nowya with wives & family arrived at post tonight 12 p.m. They bring in the same story which we have been hearing all winter - absolutely no fur in the country."

August 21st, 1933: "One's glance just now is constantly straying to the mouth of the harbour, no doubt we will see the schooner hove in sight pretty soon now."

Post Script: The Fort Severn arrived on August 28th, and sailed again two days later, with the trader, his journal, and his remaining inventory embarked. The Wager Bay Post was closed. (Quotations from the Wager Inlet Post Journals B492/a/1-10 are reprinted with the permission of the



#### PRESENT

August 9, 1986: "Late yesterday our chartered Twin-Otter put us down on this beach along the south shore of Wager Bay, after a 90-minute flight from Rankin Inlet up the west coast of Hudson Bay. Strong northwest winds have really beat up the inlet, still too rough to permit kayaking. So we may be stuck here for awhile, in an area known for its high concentration of polar bears. I slept last night with the shotgun, loaded with slugs, only inches from my head."

August 10, 1986: "Still wind-bound. Hiked up into the hills behind camp, 500 m ASL, to enjoy a spectacular view up and down the bay, and inland over rolling plains - certainly the most alluring landscape I've seen in the Keewatin. Saw several healthy-looking caribou. Two arctic wolves visited camp briefly, chiefly to satisfy their curiosity, I suspect."

August 12, 1986: "Paddled some distance in our kayaks today, feeling satisfied to be underway at last. Loading and launching were novel experiences for those of us more accustomed to open canoe travel, but we managed without mishap. As we travelled, we saw polar bears along the shore which acted more like mountain goats on the steep rocky slopes, and small bands of caribou grazing on the low-lying grassy plains between the hills."

August 13, 1986: "Today we visited the site of a proposed naturalist lodge and wilderness base, Sila Lodge. The construction is to begin this fall (It did! çed.ž) and the owners, three Inuit, expect to be open for business in the summer of 1987. It's a beautiful site, in the northwest corner of Wager Bay, which will make a perfect jumping-off point for paddling or hiking trips in the area."

August 14, 1986: "So far as we know, our small party is the first group to paddle in these waters, since the Inuit who lived here, of course. The signs of old camps - tent rings, meat caches, fire pits, hunting blinds, kayak stands - are a frequent reminder of that earlier occupation. The last families left here for the coastal settlements in the 1950s. Their parents were the people who centred their lives for a brief time on the H.B.C.'s trading post in Wager Bay, which closed in 1933."

August 15, 1986: "Camped now at the mouth of the Piksimanik River, a feeding ground for arctic char. Literally hundreds swim past our campsite with each turn of the tide."

August 16, 1986: "On days such as this when the winds prevent travel on the water, it is a joy to take to the hills on foot. I've never visited a part of the Keewatin so suited to hiking: the vistas, the wildlife, the rolling terrain. It's late to be out on the Barrens; much of the plant life is gone though arctic heather and moss campion still abound. There's a hint of winter in the air over Wager Bay, just miles below the arctic circle."

August 17, 1986: "Our last day of paddling, 25 km back to our pick-up point. Though we've not travelled far - that wasn't the idea - we have done enough to get a feeling for Wager Bay. It's simply a superb wilderness: isolated but accessible, varied yet predictable, rugged yet hospitable. I, for one, will return. There are hills left to climb."

Post Script: For information on travel possibilities in Wager Bay write to the Keewatin Chamber of Commerce, P.O. Box 190, Rankin Inlet, N.W.T. X0C 0G0.