



*Tundra swans*

## SOLO ON THE BEAUFORT SEA

**Deborah Percival**

I'm paddling alone in the waves of the Beaufort Sea. Overhead the bright blue sky is punctuated with a few fluffy cumulus clouds. I'm leaving the protection of the Mackenzie River Delta and heading out into the Arctic Ocean. The only sounds are the water: waves lapping the kayak and the slice and drip of my paddle as I ride the waves of the Beaufort Sea. Distant mirages make offshore islands appear to rise high out of the water. I can't believe the breathtaking beauty of this land: rolling seas and rolling tundra. And I can't believe I'm here.

It had all started the previous January when I was pouring over the maps for a canoe trip I was organizing on the Snake River in the Yukon. I noticed how close I would be to the tundra of the Arctic coast. While I was looking forward to paddling through the mountains on

the Snake River, my true love is the tundra: paddling in the Barrens had hooked me. So I started dreaming about paddling from Inuvik down through the Mackenzie Delta and along the coast of the Arctic Ocean to Tuktoyaktuk.

At first I didn't take the dreaming seriously because I feared that such a trip was too far outside of my experience, but the more I read about the area and talked with people who had paddled there, the more realistic the dreaming became. In the Mackenzie Delta the Arctic coast is at its gentlest: the tides are low, the terrain is low with few cliffs, and the waters are warmed by the river flow. The tree line extends furthest north here and human activity is high: my route would follow a well-charted shipping lane. I'd like some day to go