



*Muktuk and whale meat drying racks*

point at their other camp at Whitefish Station. I opted to carry on to Whitefish Station, but avoided paddling in the wind out around an exposed headland cliff by going up a little protected creek (NM509918).

As I was paddling away from Kittigazuit I had a sudden urge to write to my husband's Uncle Al. I figured that thoughts of Uncle Al had popped into my mind because of his polar travels: as a young scientist he had accompanied Byrd to Antarctica. So when I arrived in Tuktoyaktuk I mailed off a post card to Uncle Al, even though I only knew his name and town. When I returned home three weeks later there was a letter waiting for me from Uncle Al. Turns out that 44 years ago, when he was 44, he'd travelled by canoe from Aklavik to Kittigazuit, covering much of the same route that I was now covering in my 44th year.

As I neared Whitefish Station I saw the floats of a gill net stretched across the creek. Just downstream I encountered an Inuk coming to check the nets. We had a short chat and he too invited me to camp down at Whitefish Station.

Where the creek meets the ocean is the narrow spit of Whitefish Station (NM538969). I could see two separate camps. On the right was an impressive collection of expensive geodesic dome tents and an enormous insulated dining tent complete with a plywood floor. It was the camp of a group of scientists who were tagging the whales. On the left were the canvas wall tents of the Inuvaluit whale camp. I pulled ashore on the left

and enjoyed a hot cup of tea and conversation. The invitation to camp was repeated and I gratefully accepted and put up my tent.

The Inuit come out to their whale camps in July and hunt the white beluga whales. I admired a couple of their home-made harpoons leaning against a drying rack that had strips of the black whale meat

drying on it. But the real taste treat was the muktuk hanging on a neighboring rack. Muktuk is the whale skin and blubber. After it's dried a bit, it's boiled and stored in pails covered with the whale oil. Muktuk is great food: it contains more vitamin C per gram than oranges, and has lots and lots of calories. One guy explained how his face gets so fat in the winter from eating the muktuk.

That night I met the lead scientist on the beach and he started the conversation saying: "Boy, you've got a lot of nerve to just pull in there and set up your tent." He seemed quite surprised when I explained that I had been invited.

I got more insight into his relationship with the Inuit the next day when a guy explained that the scientists had been there three summers trying to tag whales. The first summer the scientists had said they knew what to do since they had read the accounts of the old whale hunts where the Inuit used their kayaks to herd the whales into the shallow Kittigazuit Bay. The scientists tried to do just that to catch the whales they



*My tent in shelter of skimpy willows on Arctic coast*