The End of the Road: An Ethnographic Account of Tourism Along the Inuvik-Tuktoyaktuk Highway

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ABSTRACT

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Mathieu Lamontagne-Cumiford

Based on fieldwork conducted over three months in the Mackenzie Delta communities of Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk, this thesis explores tourism in the Western Arctic as a product of a newly completed all season highway. The new Inuvik-Tuktoyaktuk Highway (ITH) connects the Hamlet of Tuktoyaktuk, a community of 900 people on the Beaufort Sea, to the North American public highway system and has led to a steady rush of road trippers, overlanders, motorcyclists, cycle-trekkers, and RVers into the region. Ostensibly an extension of the already famous Dempster Highway, the ITH has captured the imaginations of travellers and set online forums and blogs abuzz with accounts of a new Arctic destination. Narratives of adventure, of unspoilt wilderness and rugged frontier towns abound in the accounts of travellers, paired with an acute awareness of the explosive potential for change in communities seeing several times their residential numbers in visitors during the short summer months. Taking an approach centered on the stories told and the interactive intersections of infrastructure, material goods, and people, this project hopes to use a specific moment of touristic activity to speak to larger notions of leisure travel, engagement with nature, and the fetishization of particular places.

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And finally, I need to thank all the wonderful people I met during my time in Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk, whether as interlocutors, friends, or simply more kindhearted people I met somewhere along the road.

PS; Thanks for lending us the truck, sorry about the tires. They needed to be changed soon anyways.

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Chapter 1: The Dust Gets Everywhere

I've grown claustrophobic in the sun.

My heart sits itchy in my chest

Now rushing forward, a comet with a tail,

A trail of dust billowing,

Further on down the road.

It is not everyday you reach the end of the road. Not some off-ramp or cul-de-sac but the actual end of the road, where to drive any further is not only impossible but unimaginable. Roads seem endless in contemporary North America. It is possible to drive for weeks at a time across the continent without ever truly reaching the end of a road. More likely, you will reach your destination and simply stop driving. Yet, here on the edge of the Arctic Ocean, in the community of Tuktoyaktuk, there is a new end to the road, and it is starting to be a busy place.

Let us talk about the road for a moment. This particular road, the one which hooked me into coming back, is named (at the time of writing at least) the Inuvik-Tuktoyaktuk Highway, or ITH colloquially. A recent object with a long history, the ITH was completed in November of 2017 to great fanfare, after nearly 70 years of planning. As can be determined by its rather creative name, the ITH links the communities of Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk in the Western Canadian Arctic. While it may appear at first glance little more than a crowned gravel backroad, the Highway none-the-less means quite a bit to quite a few different interested parties. For the communities linked by the road, particularly Tuktoyaktuk which previously relied on barge traffic and a winter ice-road, the Inuvik-Tuktoyaktuk Highway represents access: access to healthcare and government services in Inuvik; access to the rest of North America without relying on costly airfare; access to harvesting grounds in the tundra south of the community. For the Canadian Government and its agents, the road represents sovereignty. The highway is one of the most northernly extensions of the North American highway network, the only publicly accessible road to the Arctic Ocean, and is symbolic of Canada's arctic sovereignty aspirations. For the Inuvialuit, the Highway means sovereignty as well, as the relationship between the two governments, federal and indigenous was one of (relative)

equals in the building of the road. Finally, for those who like to wander, tourists, travellers or otherwise, the Highway means adventure, somewhere far, far away.

My own first encounter with this road occurred because of the possibilities it offered travellers. In the summer of 2018, before beginning my MA studies, I set out with friends on a seven-week canoe expedition down the Mackenzie River. One of the reasons this trip was possible was that since the new highway had been opened, we could ship a car to Tuktoyaktuk by barge, and drive home with all our gear and equipment, a significantly less expensive alternative to air-freight transport. It was on the ragged edges of a vicious Arctic storm then that I first arrived in Tuktoyaktuk. Exhausted, soaked, and wrestling our canoes through massive swells we came around the sea-break that marks the receding shoreline of "The Point" to see a lineup of white fiberglass recreational vehicles and campers along the shore. Parked there, next to a big blue sign marked "Arctic Ocean" was a small fleet of vacationers. I can vividly remember spotting one older couple sitting in lawn chairs waving as we approached, a sight which stunned me enough to almost be capsized by the next wave to crash into our battered stern. Two days later we had packed our kit into a dusty and rather ancient jeep, and joined the flow of travellers southbound, down the road.

The new highway captured the imaginations of many travellers that summer. In one of several articles published on the subject that season, the CBC reported on the unexpected surge of tourists travelling to the hamlet of Tuktoyaktuk. Initial estimates for traffic to the community for the season ranged from 5000 to 10,000 visitors, a massive volume for a community of 900 (Scott 2018). Now, after the close of another busy summer season (officials from the Hamlet Office and the Western Arctic Visitor Center that I spoke with estimated similar levels of traffic in 2019 as 2018) the Inuvik-Tuktoyaktuk Highway is becoming a veritable destination for road-trippers, vandwellers, long-distance cyclists, and a whole host of different tourist groups. Travel blogs and websites dedicated to a variety of touristic passions have begun to turn their attention to the new road. Canadian Geographic's Travel section published under their Escapes & Adventures label an article about the highway titled "Road-tripping to the Arctic Ocean" (Patterson 2018). "Road Less Travelled: Driving the Inuvik-Tuktoyaktuk Highway" reads the headline of a similar article published by the Telegram, complete with a photo of a dusty camper-back pick-up truck stopped on the rutted road (Sowerby 2018). The interest in the road is not purely from large media

publications either. On online forums dedicated to a variety of travel modes, the highway has sparked curiosity and discussion. Reddit, the popular online discussion platform has several sub-reddits (thematically organised, independently moderated communities) dedicated to different types of travel which have displayed a featured interest in the Inuvik-Tuktoyaktuk Highway. Searching the website's myriad sub-reddits brings up hundreds of discussion threads from eager travellers sharing their experiences or asking for advice as they plan to make the trip themselves.

This road is not unique in its capacity to draw attention and inspire the imaginations of travellers. Journeying on down the road is a popular trope in tourism across North America. Both the roads themselves and the act of driving over extended distances, often into the 'unknown' or to experience novel sights carry significant weight in the 'culture' surrounding leisure mobility. The contemporary North American road trip may be best defined by the narratives surrounding travel along some of the continents most famous roads. Route 66, cutting east-west across the South-Western United States is an archetypical example, both a road and an interwoven fabric of symbols and stories. Pre-dating the interstate system in the United States, Route 66 is a now dis-used highway stretching from Chicago to Los Angeles. The highway became popularised as a road-trip west-bound in the post-war economic era of American prosperity, becoming the emblematic North American road vacation (National Parks Service n.d.). Now relegated to a tourist attraction, Route 66 lives less as a useful physical object as it does a cultural touchstone. A vast web of symbols and stories of road travel stretch out from this point of origin. Dreams of freedom on the open road, of little roadside motels and gas stations drenched in neon and chrome, and of the great adventure westward owe a great deal to this road (Wood 2010). The cultural significance of this road is further visible through the process of simulation and simulacra which occurs for the popular symbols associated with it. As symbols such as neon-lit motels, 50s style diners, and long desert stretches of road are (re)produced, the impact of Route 66 on the popular imagination of roads grows. Beyond the physical symbols, the narrative weight of tropes such as the westward journey of discovery, new beginnings, and long-awaited vacations permeate our automobile culture (Wood 2010; Banić-Grubišić 2011). Without being unreasonable, it is possible to argue that this disused highway acts as the point of origin for a whole host of road-based narratives of adventure, freedom, and leisure travel (Payne and Hurt 2015).

Considering the importance that roads can have culturally, I have attempted to construct a theoretical framework that addresses the intersection of people and highway in a satisfying manner. The fundamental assumption behind this framework is that the Inuvik-Tuktoyaktuk Highway is a space rich in meaning, which is constantly being (re)produced by the stories told about it. I hope to champion a view of leisure travel along this road which takes narratives to be representative of symbols held individually and as elements of larger cultural categories. A framework of narrativity therefore underpins the entirety of this thesis.

In each of the chapters of this thesis then, I shall be referring to different bodies of literature with the goal of building towards a satisfying answer to the question of why the new Inuvik-Tuktoyaktuk Highway has attracted such touristic attention and how that experience is mediated through narratives. The four major chapters will explore first how roads are conceptual objects. Turning to ethnographic accounts of roads situated largely in infrastructure studies as well as philosophical discussions of space and place, I present my own fieldwork encounters to build the case that the Inuvik-Tuktoyaktuk Highway is as important symbolically as it is materially. Next, I bring forward a similar discussion of how the communities along the road become destinations. This chapter engages with interlocutor accounts, as well as the history of tourism in the region to explore the processes involved in making places worth staying in. Afterwards, I argue that travel is a liminal experience marked by moments of communitas. Through mobilities literature and the experiences of my interlocutors I demonstrate that a fundamental part of the tourist experience is making connections driven by a sense of togetherness. Finally, I work towards tying together these arguments in a final discussion regarding the role of narrative in travel. In this final chapter, I address how story telling is the means through which travellers make sense of their experiences and creatively engage with the expectations they held before setting out.

The initial question which led to this project was why the Inuvik-Tuktoyaktuk Highway had sparked such tourist traffic, and through this thesis I now venture a tentative answer. Through the course of my fieldwork, I came to realise that Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk do not hold an intrinsic draw, but instead represent an excellent example of the power of narratives in shaping people's desires and dreams of leisure travel.

To Set the Stage

Inuvik sits on a glacial esker, overlooking the spruce treed expanse of the Mackenzie Delta and the not-so-far off Richardson Mountains. Several degrees of latitude above the Arctic Circle, on a clear day the 24-hour summer sun sparkles over seemingly endless lakes and river channels to the west. The community of nearly 3500 is by far the largest within thousands of kilometers. An amalgamation of creative architectures, the town is one ceaseless engineering attempt to contend with constantly shifting permafrost. From the pastel toned row-houses which formerly played host to public servants, to the glimmering scaled dome of the Igloo Church, to the raised metal tubing of the utilidors snaking through backyards, Inuvik's buildings are an odd blend. The collection of buildings is made odder by the vacant lots common in older parts of town, overgrown with weeds and the cut stumps of support pillars jutting out of the ground. Due to the nature of the permafrost the community rests on, it is often simpler (and safer) to tear down buildings after the ground begins to shift. Large empty lots sit where the residential schools once stood, now only the school's former hockey arena remains, rebuilt as a community greenhouse. There have been calls to name the new Inuvik-Tuktoyaktuk Highway in honour of three young boys who escaped their residential school in Inuvik during the 1970s. Of the three boys, only one survived the arduous trek through the tundra to Tuktoyaktuk (Brockman 2017).

Inuvik can be reached through one of three ways; in descending order of likelihood: by road from the Dempster Highway, by air from Mike Zubko Airport (large enough to support jet traffic and military aircraft), or by the East Channel of the Mackenzie River[1]. Acting as a service hub for the region, the town hosts a hospital (one of only two major hospitals in the Northwest Territories), government offices, the Aurora College and Research Institute, as well as a host of other major private and public institutions such as a large elementary school and several grocery stores. There is a certain quality of a larger town, only shrunken, to Inuvik. Many of the travellers I spoke to were surprised at the host of services on offer in the community, expecting the community to resemble more the smaller towns along the way.

[1] Hence the community's original designation of East 3, as it was the third surveyed site for a town on the east channel. The local high school honours this designation in its name.

Figure 1: Downtown Inuvik, including the Northmart, and shuttered Eskimo Hotel.

Further north, on the eastern shore of Kugmallit Bay and nestled between the gentle rise of pingos lies the Hamlet of Tuktoyaktuk. The first sign of Tuk, as its locally known, that can be seen regardless of how you approach is the large RADAR tower, part of the NORAD early warning system. The white, roughly spherical geometric shape sits at the top of a tall trestle tower and is by far the tallest structure in the surrounding area. Tucked into the narrow spits of land that lie above the myriad lakes and inlets are the homes and buildings that make up the community. There is a strange sprawling quality to the whole affair. Due to the necessities of local geography, the community stretches out from its oldest parts near the mouth of Tuktoyaktuk Harbour in the northwest, southwards towards where the new highway connects to the outskirts of town. Recently, the Hamlet Office has been engaged in beautification projects. Over the course of the summer, new picnic tables were installed at The Point where the road ends and there is a recreation area. Additionally, many residents were offered paint for their homes, which has led the community to

have a bright collection of houses scattered across its peninsulas. There is a vague feeling of a small east-coast Maritimes, or a Nordic Fjord community to Tuktoyaktuk because of this.

Figure 2: Tuktoyaktuk, with views of the colourful houses and my tiny grey tent.

Between these two communities lies a wide expanse of tundra. After the tree line ends at the outskirts of Inuvik, the landscape is dotted with innumerable small lakes and streams. It is through this rolling landscape that the Inuvik-Tuktoyaktuk Highway carves its path. Looking at a map, it is impressive that the surveyors managed to find enough solid ground on which to construct the road. A tall crown of gravel, several meters deep in places, packed down and regraded throughout the busy summer season, this highway is an impressive engineering accomplishment. In the early summer months, the road was smooth, with only the occasional deep patch of gravel. By the end of the season however, after thousands of RVs, trucks, and other vehicles had passed, the highway was pock-marked and washboard-ed. Driving to and from Tuktoyaktuk in late august

of 2019 was a feat of patience and teeth grinding, what could be done in roughly 90 minutes on a clear day eventually became a several-hour engagement.

On a dry day, you see the cloud of dust long before the car comes barrelling down the road. Seeing that cloud approaching, you tug gently on the steering wheel and slow down to avoid another rock flying up to chip the windshield. Its for good reason that in the Northwest Territories, you are allowed to drive with a cracked windshield, provided the crack is not too major. In places the gravel is deep enough to cause your car to buck and tug wildly, in others the hardpacked earth is carved with washboard and you hope the rattling you hear after passing was always there. This highway requires a little more attention than those that lead to it.

Chapter 2: Methods, Maps, Bears, and a Camera

A poem goes here

It should be about methods

Or at least doing things

Before getting into the analysis, there are some thing that may bear mentioning regarding the methodology of this project. The conception, planning, execution, and eventual analysis of this research all involved choices whose explanation may be enlightening when paired with the arguments that will follow. Further, this document has been written in a certain way on purpose, a purpose that also bears explaining. Methods, being the nitty-gritty of ethnography never exist in a vacuum. By speaking of our methods and the choices behind them, I believe that we as researchers render our work more accessible and reflexive.

Maybe before anything else, I should explain the poems that open each chapter. There are a great deal of things that happen during fieldwork that are hard to explain, encounters we could never anticipate, experiences that don't fit our expectations, things too unexpected to explain. In retrospect, these were valuable experiences but bereft of previous research experience, I struggled to make sense of these encounters. In the early weeks of my summer in Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk, I felt that no amount of description could capture what I was experiencing. Speaking one night with a friend back in Montreal, they recommended writing poetry in my fieldnotes. The next day, as I sat in the sun and fed the mosquitos, I scribbled a tentative handful of lines. They were not very good as far as poetry goes, but as the summer progressed and I kept at it, writing the occasional poem allowed me to capture moments that exceeded what I could describe in my fieldnotes.

I claim no great leap forward in adding poetry to my ethnographic toolkit. At least since the 1990s poetry has become increasingly common as an alternative anthropological method (Maynard and Cahnmann-Taylor 2010). Works are increasingly being published by anthropologists that include poems, and some forays into entire ethnographies written as verse have emerged[2] Poetry allows the anthropologist further space to explore their own relation to their

[2] Nomi Stone's *Kill Class* (2019) is an excellent example of this kind of visionary work. Written as a collection of poems, this ethnography richly relays the author's experience in a US military cultural training camp.

experiences, as well as a creative vessel less bound by the rigidity of academic writing forms (Maynard and Cahnmann-Taylor 2010). The vast majority of the poems I wrote during my time in Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk will not be read by anyone else, but writing them allowed me to process my experiences in a way that could defy my own expectations of academic rigour and empirical observation. Through writing poems, I aimed to convey something more than the sum of what I experienced. So, while most will remain tucked away in my notebooks, I have selected one with which to start each chapter. More than decorations, I have selected each of these poems carefully for how they convey my experience of the topic that will be discussed within the accompanying chapter. The only exception to this rule is the haiku that begins this chapter. This little poem I wrote initially as a placeholder, but it has grown on me as a reminder that some realisations only come to us when we return from the field.

Talking to People (thanks to cameras and dogs)

From the outset, preforming ethnographic research with highly mobile interlocutors required careful methodological considerations. When we discuss anthropological fieldwork, the character of the Malinowski-esque cast-away still holds considerable sway. Marooning ourselves in communities, our very situatedness begins to speak of the people around us. Ethnography still holds a mystique of "deep hanging out" (Geertz 1998). Spend enough time with the same people and eventually you should have some sort of breakthrough, reach some deep conclusion about 'culture' or the like. At least, these were some of the unconscious biases and expectations I now realise I held as I set out to plan my project. There has of course been considerable work done in the discipline of anthropology to reflect on what exactly constitutes 'the field', as well as the methods employed while there. This is not a space for that discussion however, it is simply an attempt to illuminate why certain choices were made by reflecting on the expectations I held. There was an initial hurdle to consider: how to do fieldwork with a group of people who rarely stayed two nights in the same place?

A straight forward answer appeared apparent, why not adopt that mobility myself? While other ethnographers have accomplished this with great success, this was not to be the case for my project. Two factors led to my eventual decision to stay in Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk, working with travellers as they passed through the communities. The first was rather uncomplicated. Logistically, it made more sense to have a fixed location out of which I could operate and buying

an RV in which to live for the summer was out of the question financially. Secondly, ethnographic research is about more than just the people we work with. This project, I decided, was as much about the new Inuvik-Tuktoyaktuk Highway as it was about those who travelled it. This decision led in turn to the selection of a series of research methodologies which privileged an anthropological interaction with both travellers and the spaces they occupied as they journeyed to these communities. The arguments presented in Chapters 3 and 4 are largely the result of this decision, as they engage with the processes behind the conceptualisation of particular spaces by those who interact with them.

What research techniques then could I employ to complement the usual practices of participant observation? I was interested in what lay beyond semi-structured interviews and descriptive fieldnotes. Having already discussed poetry's impromptu intrusion into my practice, I want to focus on two methods that I planned to use in my work, as well as how they survived contact with the field. One of the questions I was most interested in discussing with my interlocutors was how they conceived of the practice of driving the new and existing highways. To answer this, I hoped not only to ask questions about their travel experiences, but also to get glimpses of the way they interacted with the space physically and conceptually. As I was to be based in town and did not intend to install myself on the side of a lonesome dirt road[3] (getting mauled by bears is not productive, unless your work is an auto-ethnographic account of post-humanism) I had to find another way to observe interactions with the road.

With this in mind, I developed a series of questions to be used alongside two roadmaps that I intended to invite participants to comment on, in an attempt to relive some aspect of their driving experience. The two maps I printed were of Dawson City to Tuktoyaktuk, and Inuvik to Tuktoyaktuk. Maps are more than "mere representations of place" argues Kimberly Powell, they are material objects that help us engage with spaces in multi-sensory fashions (2016, 403). Like Powell, who used mapmaking as part of an urban studies program with students in Panama, I was interested in the capacity for maps to allow interlocutors to re-experience their interactions with a specific place. When I used the exercise in the field however, I often realised that interaction with the road is most often governed by the specificity of automobile travel. This surprise led me to

[3] The one time I tried this, I was promptly turned around by some roadworkers and informed that several large grizzly bears were known to frequent the roadsides around town. It is not for nothing that for a Research License to be approved by the Aurora Research Institute it must include a bear-safety plan.

stop using this exercise for some time. As the summer progressed however, I began to reintegrate the maps into my interviews, often using them as prompts for discussing the kinds of relationships my interlocutors felt they had with highways and the landscapes they passed through. These discussions helped shaped the arguments found in Chapter 3, being the first steps to my realisation that different people may actually be travelling experientially different versions of the same road.

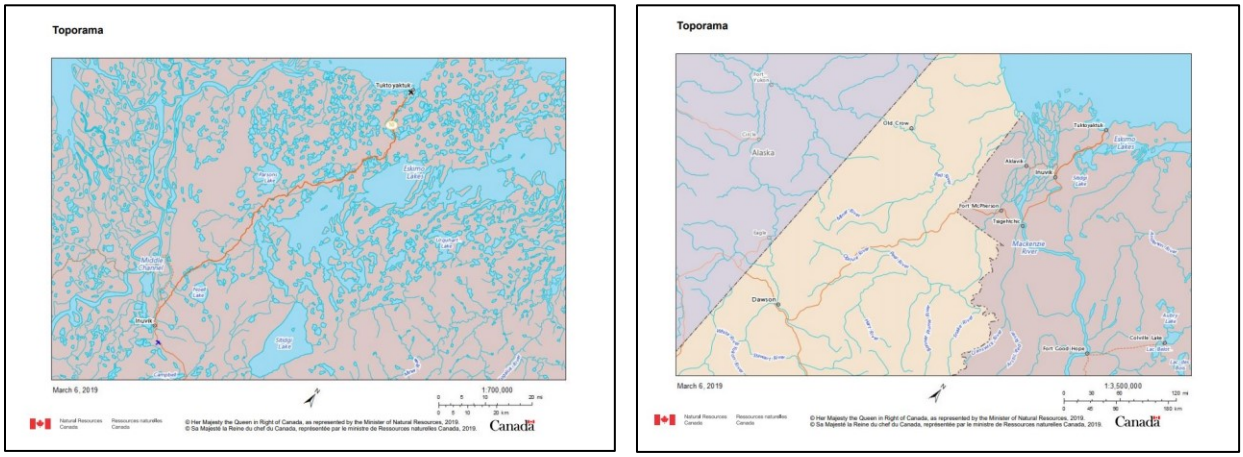

Figure 3: The two maps used for the space-interaction exercise.

Over the course of my fieldwork, I took nearly 1300 photos. Considering I spent roughly 3 months in the communities, this averages out to nearly 15 images a day. From the outset of this project I always had the intention to use photography as a visual ethnographic tool in my research rather than as a documentary companion to my fieldnotes. The difference between these two notions lies in a certain level of intentionality and awareness of the poetics of the still image. While the taking of photos has been part of the anthropological practice since the founding members of the discipline, it is only relatively recently that the act has moved from documentary to a poly-semiotic form (Harper 2003). The composition of images is a powerful act, which regarding photos as simply documenting reality ignores. Ethnographers acting as photographers must be aware of photo-poetics such as framing and composition, as these choices produce specific accounts of the captured subject (Crowe 2003; Harper 2003). My commitment to photography as an ethnographic method therefore involved the careful framing of my images as a conscious act of meaning formation. This process is doubly beneficial, providing the simple documentary evidence to complement fieldnotes as well as photos which act as discursive objects interacting with their surrounding text. Choosing to take certain photos framed in meaningful ways, I aimed to convey a message to the reader with each shot. There was also an unexpected practical benefit to being a

researcher wielding a camera. As Crowe mentions in his musings on time spent performing photo-ethnography in the Kalahari, the camera is a mediating object for interactions (2003, 473). The camera carries with it certain expectations of behaviour, both for the subject and photographer. In my research I found that the camera often acted as a conversation starter, and a marker of an assumed identity. Often when I first met travellers or locals, I would be asked if I were a journalist or tourist because of the camera.

My camera was far from my only means of meeting people. As I worked with transient interlocutors who often stayed no more than a day or two in the communities in which I based myself, I constantly had to develop new relationships with travellers. This process was made easier however by my own previous shared experiences of being a tourist in the region. Being able to quickly establish some common experiences was important to my ability to develop relationships with visitors even in the brief amounts of time they spent in town. The importance of my own previous experience as a traveller, and the sense of community that often emerged from this formed the basis for my arguments in Chapter 5. On a humorous note, many of the friendships I made started with me asking a simple question: can I pet your dog? Much like my camera made it easier for some people to interact with me, travellers' dogs were an easy way for me to initiate conversation with new people every day.

Other Hoops to Jump Through

A wrapping of bureaucracy surrounds research projects in the Canadian Arctic, including Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk. As communities that have seen their fair share of researchers come and go, it is understandable that local governments (indigenous and settler) are interested in limiting and making order of research in the region. While at the library during fieldwork, I stumbled across *Inuvik a History, 1958-2008*, by Dick Hill, a long-time resident. Filled with interesting tidbits about the planning and construction of the town, the book also contained a short collection of local humour. Several of the jokes recounted had to do with the presence of researchers in the community. One that stood out to me as poignant to my situation went roughly: How can you tell it's spring in Inuvik? The birds and anthropologists return! (Hill 2008).

The joke felt a little ironic to me, as one of only two social scientists I met that summer amongst the untold masses of geographers, biologists, climate scientists, and other 'ologists. Perhaps the mood of the discipline has changed. Perhaps also the policies governing research have

helped prevent opportunists who do not intend to engage meaningfully with communities from arriving with projects. These policies clearly exist to act as a safeguard to ensure communities have opportunities to voice concerns and maintain authority over research projects. To be allowed to preform research in Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk, I was required to acquire a Scientific Research License from the Aurora Research Institute (ARI). This process involves submitting a detailed proposal of the intended project as well as a completed ethics review to the ARI, who then distribute it to the relevant community organisations and governments. In the case of my project, this meant that almost a dozen organisations in Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk reviewed the research I intended to complete, and ultimately decided to allow it to proceed. Additionally, my project needed to be reviewed under sustainable development guidelines, as well as reviewed for the necessity of a Research Agreement with both local indigenous governments (the Inuvialuit and Gwich'in). The waiting period while my project was being reviewed was a time of considerable anxiety due to my inexperience with these sorts of bureaucracies. Despite my concerns, I received approval for my project. As my project concerned itself largely with visitors to the communities and did not consist of an expedition into the surrounding landscape, it was of little concern to many of the organisations that received the proposal.

This process bears mentioning because it had a great deal of importance for the planning of my project. The documentation for acquiring a Research License recommends following the guidelines set out in the *National Inuit Strategy on Research*, developed by the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami. This document, accompanied by a guide for researchers developed by the same organisation, lays out recommendations for researchers on conducting ethical and respectful research in Inuit communities. As Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk are both communities in the Inuvialuit Settlement Region, I was particularly concerned with making an effort to follow these guidelines. I was concerned with accountability, respect, and potential representation of indigenous peoples in my work. This is one of the reasons that I decided that my project should focus more on the people who come as tourists to the area than those who live in the communities. What came to pass in the field, however, was the realisation that these things are all more importantly determined by actual interactions with people than bureaucratic guidelines. As my project explicitly dealt with travellers, many of the indigenous people I met were comfortable speaking with me and I developed a series of friendships with locals that I cherish. In the end, no amount of planning can adequately prepare us for the realities of field research, and this is a situation we should appreciate.

Having the opportunity to be surprised by what we encounter is a blessing of the discipline, and one we should never take for granted.

Chapter 3: On Roads, Signposts, Dust, and Flat Tires

Wheezing, heaving, rattling my bones.

Teeth shaken out by the beating from the road.

My thirsty heart beats petrol through my limbs,

Weary steel groans as we move again.

Down this winding, grinding torture chamber.

Fresh mountain air, wide open space

- Ptuh -

Another mosquito in my face.

There was not always a road here. In the grand scheme of things, people have spent far longer getting to Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk without a road than with one. The Inuvik-Tuktoyaktuk Highway has only existed as an official, drivable road since November of 2017 and the Dempster Highway is not much older. Even in the relatively short memories of settlers, traffic of people and things have a much longer history of floating and flying than driving. Transport in the region has long been dominated by the waterways of the Mackenzie River. Up until the completion of the new highway, the only road that led to Tuktoyaktuk was the winter ice-road built upon the river every year as the freeze began. And yet, while recent, the presence of an all-season highway should be seen as exerting monumental impacts on the communities this new road now reaches. A road is a technology, built through design and memory to serve a purpose. To have a road somewhere imparts to that place a particularly 'modern' form of accessibility and inspires the imaginations of those who interact with it.

The roads which lead here are pieces of infrastructure and carry with them the impacts, consequences, and realities linked to their existence and materialisation. While a vast array of actions and reactions (social and otherwise) are involved in their planning and construction, it is after their completion that we encounter our roads. These roads have been built, lead to and from places, and are travelled by people and things. Looking at the Dempster and the Inuvik-

Tuktoyaktuk Highway as pieces of infrastructure is asking how, through their material and imaginary existences, they make themselves known in the lives of state actors, travellers, and the locals who live in the communities they access. Here I am separating the material and conceptual existences of roads, the tangible, material forms which act on people by occupying physical space, and imaginary forms which act more as symbols. These intangible forms come to exist when thinking about roads through the host of symbols, stories, and expectations that surround them. Roads are powerful objects which engage people's imaginations (Dalakoglou 2017). Both of these forms are equally important and it is useful to differentiate them, as they are the result of distinct processes of experience.

The arguments put forward in this chapter are the result of a line of questioning that arose during my fieldwork. When asking various people who travelled the road to describe it, I realised that while the object of discussion was the same, the descriptions seemed very different. If these various descriptions were taken out of context, it would seem as if they might be describing wholly different roads. Herein then, I will argue that roads are definitive of contemporary mobility and that because of this, we come to travel different versions of the same road. The ideas that people take on are determined by something. In this instance, the ethnographic encounters I am drawing from interviews, conversations, and the documents produced following the completion of the road illuminate these expectations. Taking these ethnographic encounters and framing them through literature on infrastructure and political economics, it will become clear how the road has implications far beyond the limits of the physical space it occupies and how it acts to create and limit the experiences of those who think/live alongside it.

Roads (on the getting there of it all)

Somewhere between here and there, a stack of documents met a fleet of heavy machinery, crushed some rock, and their love child now rests as a three-meter-deep path of compressed particulate winding through the tundra. Roads are funny things. They exist as recognisable material objects, but without layers of bureaucratic sedimentation and the sticky stuff of public imaginaries they are really just piles of dirt and rock, capped and sealed. To be able to say then, that roads render a place accessible we must begin by explaining what the assemblage labelled as a road actually is. Roads, after all, are not culturally universal. The people of the Western Arctic historically navigated (and continue to navigate) the environment by water as well as overland during the

winter, when impassible geographies freeze over, without roads. The anglophone etymology of the term road in fact relates to vehicles, pack animals, and the infrastructural technology which acts as a fixed path for them (Merriam-Webster n.d.). Contemporary roads are complex assemblages, materially and socially, and defining them is a question at the center of a body of thought which attempts to explain the experience of place and our movements through it.

Roads have only recently emerged as the objects of serious ethnographic inquiry. Most often, the roads anthropologists travelled ended up as characters in opening vignettes. It is the study of infrastructure through an anthropological lens that has finally brought roads into the mainstream literature of our discipline. As an anchoring point then, few works provide as useful of an analysis as Penny Harvey and Hannah Knox's *Roads: An Anthropology of Infrastructure and Expertise* (2015) and Dimitris Dalakoglou's *The Road: An Ethnography of (Im)mobility, Space, and Cross-Border Infrastructure in the Balkans* (2017). Through an ethnographic account of the construction of the Interoceanic Highway and smaller Iquitos-Nauta road in Peru, Harvey and Knox render their roads into things more complex than piles of dirt snaking over topography. The approach taken, where the authors' research remains always centered on the road, effectively explores the interaction between a host of people and organisations deeply invested in this highway. As Harvey and Knox weave through a variety of perspectives, it becomes evident that the roads they have studied are enmeshed deeply in people's lives. Different groups, including engineers, bureaucrats, and locals in the path of construction, as well as many others each hold a particular understanding of the new road and the impact its presence will bring. Similarly, Dalakoglou delves into the history of a short segment of highway near the Albanian and Greek border, bringing to our attention flows of history, people, and materiality. Dalakoglou's ethnographic work helps to demonstrate that roads are often more important as symbolic objects than material ones. As the road he examines was built largely during Albania's socialist period, when cars were largely unobtainable, the road itself acted more as a symbol for modernity than as a tangible object in people's lives. Further complexity arises when the author details how the post-socialist era and proximity to the European Union have made roads into pathways for foreign influence in communities near the border. Roads become something very particular in these works. They are objects which through their construction and existences generate an experience of space, calcified in everyday interactions with the people and things that travel along them. Harvey and Knox describe the decision to center their work on the study of the road as proving "vitally useful

to […] demonstrating how a mundane material structure registered histories and expectations of state presence and state neglect" (2015, 3).

The theoretical framework that I employ in this chapter is most closely related to that presented by these two works. Considering roads to be both materially and conceptually real objects allows for the honest consideration of all the different accounts I encountered. This framework cannot solely be attributed to these two works, however. The study of roads has emerged as a topic of growing interest, and so it may prove productive to draw a genealogy of the position I am taking.

As I have mentioned before, roads are a technology. More specifically however, roads are a technology which are produced as a means of interacting in a controlled fashion with space and distance. Across the world, when roads have been built, their construction has often been part of projects to dominate space by reducing logistical distance. In Europe, the Roman empire expanded outwards upon the roads built by its legions. Colonial governments built roads to reach resources and signal their modernity. The United States' Interstate Highway System, emblematic perhaps of the contemporary highway, was a military endeavour, built to reduce logistical distance for defense mobilization. With this in mind, I choose to designate the philosophy of mobility and space as the primogenitor of the framework I am using. Specifically, I point to the works of thinkers such as Lefebvre and Virilio whose works philosophise space and mobility as those concepts relate to modernity. In *The Production of Space* (1991), Lefebvre works through notions of how specific spaces are created and managed. This work is important due to its discussion of various forces of sociality, consumption, and power and how they come to render the natural environment into spaces. Virilio discusses mobility more specifically in *Speed and Politics* (1986), particularly the vision held by modernist states of roads being a pathway to ever greater progress. As these thinkers address space and mobility as consequences of modern development, they provide the foundation to discuss roads as contemporary objects which manifest the desires of various groups who engage with them.

From this body of thought, the study of roads as infrastructure objects emerged. As an avenue of anthropological inquiry, the study of infrastructure has largely been concerned with understanding how these material goods are intertwined with various social realities. Tentative early examples of such analysis can be found throughout the discipline's history. One exemplary

early piece concerned with infrastructure is Max Gluckman's *The Bridge*, where the author uses the opening of a new 'modern' bridge as an avenue to explore the social relationships between colonial authorities and local Zulu power structures (1958). Regarding roads specifically, particular attention has been drawn to the relationship between infrastructure as a networked object and the fundamental experience of contemporary mobility. In fact, many authors working on roads follow James Scott's assertion that roads are an essential modern technology (1998). By asserting roads to be an "archetypical modern technology", the position being taken is that all other technologies are predicated on or modelled after roads. With the modern experience of mobility being centered around the automobile (Urry 2006), the paved road is a required precursor to movement. Similarly, in contemporary models of development, all other infrastructure is built around or modelled after the networked structure of road systems. This is usually because to build these structures requires a means of access, of which roads and highways are the main form. While several pathways open themselves for inquiry with such a statement, the one most usually followed by the anthropology of roads is that of the development that tends to follow the construction of roads.

Considering how the study of roads has largely emerged from bodies of thought most deeply interested in political economies and technologies, the focus on roads as objects of development should be seen as an expected concern for anthropology. Indeed, significant attention has been given to 'new' or under-construction roads in places which could be described as the periphery.[4] For example, studying the impacts of a new highway along the Baja coast of Mexico, Anderson explores surging real-estate development as a consequence of improved access to the region (2017). This new highway, built to encourage tourism in the region, has had the difficult impacts of rendering the region prohibitively expensive to many of its residents. The road, built to improve access to a region popular with tourists who appreciated it for its inaccessibility, proves to be an agent of significant change. A host of similar publications, dealing with the social consequences of the construction of roads for economic development can be found in anthropological literature (see Beer and Church 2019; Batista 2018; Melly 2013; Klaeger 2013; Jobson 2018 as other pertinent examples). While the specific consequences and locals may change,

[4] I am choosing to use the term 'periphery' as many of these works center on the power dynamics between central authorities who plan and execute new roads, and those who live where roads are built.

fundamentally this body of literature is interested in roads more as objects of disruption to the social order than as material agents in themselves.

Recently, work has emerged that turns its focus on infrastructures themselves, attempting to conceive of ways to explore more complex understandings of materials. In an effort to seriously consider roads as influential beyond their connections to other apparatuses (such as states or economies) this body of work has turned to various theoretical frames. The most interesting of these are works that imbue some form of agency to the road itself. Adeline Masquelier's *Road Mythographies* describes such a phenomena regarding roads in southern Niger, specifically the major Route Nationale 1 (2002). These roads, largely built through the traumatic processes of forced labour and as projects of colonial ambitions, are sites of danger for those who must travel them. Haunted by spirits, the roads that Masquelier examines are alive with the malice and violence of their colonial pasts. Dalakoglou speaks similarly of the road he examines, with the highway being a mythologised site of violence and supernatural danger following its increased use post-socialism, particularly as an alleged avenue for organised crime (2017). Considering roads as spaces haunted by the violence which has affected communities reached by them is doubly important in the context of indigenous localities in Northern Canada. The legacy of violence, particularly in northern British Columbia that has been left by the 'Highway of Tears'[5], should not be ignored. While these authors demonstrate the agency of roads as a force of some haunting possession, others venture further.

Rest and Rippa, in a bold and exciting article, work towards applying Ingold's notion of animism to roads (2019). By working through Ingold's notion of animism instead of other theories of material agency - such as the popular 'new materialism' proposed by Bennet in *Vibrant Matter* (2010) – the authors attempt to drawn attention to the relationality of roads. Essentially, Rest and Rippa argue that roads are animate, agent forces because they exist as sums of relationships. This argument is also made, although quite differently, by Larkin in *The Politics and Poetics of Infrastructure* (2013). Instead of animism, Larkin points to how objects of infrastructure such as roads operate on several levels of interrelatedness simultaneously. Due to this, roads (as pieces of infrastructure) have the capacity to affect subjects that interact with them, as they bring in forces

[5] A lonesome stretch of highway in northern B.C, the Highway of Tear has seen the disappearance and murder of numerous indigenous women and has come to represent the larger issue of violence against this group in Canada.

through a vast array of technological and cultural networks. Importantly for this thesis, the notion that roads have some sort of independent agency is interesting because it begins to suggest ways that they may be responsible for manifesting their histories and contexts onto travellers.

The registering of histories and expectations is what makes the Inuvik-Tuktoyaktuk Highway so ethnographically interesting. Through research focused on roads, we can make manifest the experiences of people as they interact with the state through infrastructure. Roads, under the model that Harvey, Knox, Dalakoglou, and others exemplify in their work, are materialisations of the desires of political and state-based organisations. This presence (or the failure of this presence to make itself evident) is something that appeared frequently in my ethnographic encounters. Travellers and locals alike would speak of the road as an object associated with what they perceived to be the state. The condition of the roads, for example, was a frequent topic of conversation. In interviews my interlocutors would almost always bring up the rough segments of the highways. This was then followed up usually by a discussion of the maintenance of the road, in particular how the state needed to increase maintenance, or for those who were aware of the construction costs of the road, how the road should clearly be in better condition given the financial investment it represented. It was through the experience of driving, with flat tires and chipped windshields, that the road manifested itself in peoples' journeys.

Driving the road can be understood as an experience of interaction between road travellers and the state associated bodies who bring it into being. Underpinning this interaction is the intentionality of those road-building bodies. The road exists at some level as a manifestation of the desire of the state to collapse physical, logistical, and imaginary distances. Roads are spoken of by states through their connective potential (Harvey and Knox 2015, 22). Through the construction of a road, the state can reach out to a logistically distant region and (while geographical distances are unchanged) render it near. Motivating this project is the understanding of the state to be a force of progress and modernisation. Roads are one of the ways through which states render their geographies modern (Dalakoglou 2017). The enactment of this will is the motive force through which a place becomes accessible in a desirable way. Building a highway is the state making a place accessible to the full range of independently mobile public and private agents. As this line of argumentation risks reifying 'the state', I find it useful to pause here and explain that by referring to 'the state', I am referring to the host of interested parties that exert influence over government

bodies. These interests are multitudinous, as are the government bodies, so there is some value to be found in considering that certain goals remain central because they coincide with dominant ideology. Increased automobile accessibility would be one such ideological goal, in that there is sufficient accord between disparate actors that the notion yields increased economic activity and state-services that it is often automatically considered beneficial.

When I state that Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk are made accessible because of the highways that lead there, I do not mean to say that these places were impossible to reach otherwise. These communities have been and are still travelled to by many other means, including by river, sea, and air. Accessibility in this context is therefore not simply the capacity to reach a place. What these roads do is render a place reachable in a way that is recognisable through a key mode of personal mobility, they render a place accessible by car. Making a place drivable is a facet of the larger projects of the compression of space and time argued to be characteristic of the contemporary state project, as it coincides with notions of development and connectivity.

> *Driving the highway, I am at attention. The road winds, narrows. Rutted hardpack gives way to deep gravel. Turns are narrow and often the road simply gives way over one side to a steep embankment. It feels like driving through thick snow at times, the automatic transmission and four-wheel drive and I disagreeing. I let the car win and drive carefully. (Excerpt from my fieldnotes)*

Figure 4: The Inuvik-Tuktoyaktuk Highway as it winds through the tundra.

In late June of 2019, a tired friend asked me to take the wheel during our return from Tuktoyaktuk to Inuvik. We had spent the day in the hamlet as visitors and in the early evening with the eternal Arctic sun still shining bright, I drove the Inuvik-Tuktoyaktuk Highway for the first time. I had been a passenger on this road many times already, but the experience of driving is markedly different. Driving can be understood as the ideal form of personal, independent mobility in the contemporary moment, around which all other forms of mobility are organised and modeled (Urry 2006). The dominance of the automobile and the experience of driving organise more than simply the geographies of mobility. Our understanding of what it means to get somewhere, and which places are accessible is coloured by the automobile's position as the dominant mode of transport. There is a mystique and a uniqueness of experience in driving somewhere. Urry speaks of the dually flexible and coercive nature of automobile travel, wherein the driver is liberated to travel as they may, but only along the rigid confines of the road network, where the material needs of their vehicle can be satisfied (2006, 19-22). Further, automobility speaks to the central place that motor vehicles hold in the development of space. No other form of travel has such an extensive built environment to support it. Highways, gas-stations, bridges, and a host of other services exist purely to create spaces in which the automobile can exist. Automobility is total not only as a mode of mobility but also as a developmental reality.

Drivers are free within the capsules of their cars. Automobile travel is understood to be liberating, allowing drivers total choice of where to journey, so long as they remain on road networks. Fundamentally, as the automobile is so total in its dominance of mobility, the limitations of this freedom are usually not considered. Instead, travellers speak reverently of the journey as a moment of total freedom and self-direction. Susan[6], travelling from the United States with her husband Pierre in a pick-up truck with a large camper-back expressed concisely the freedom offered to them by driving to their destination:

> […] and especially with the camper to be wherever we want. You know, we can be in a campground or a provincial campground or just by the side of the road. So, we have the freedom too.

[6] Susan is a pseudonym. All names of interlocutors have been replaced with pseudonyms in this text, even for the dogs.

While cherishing the freedom offered to them by their rugged and self-sufficient camper set-up, Susan and Pierre none-the-less experience their mobility through the confines of automobility. Going unsaid by Susan is that their freedom is limited to the infrastructure that exists to support motor vehicles. They can go anywhere, as long as there is a road.

For some, the road is as, if not more, important than the destination itself. For example, Jessica, who was travelling with her husband and three teenage children from British Columbia by pick-up truck spoke to the importance of the drive for their trip.

> You do appreciate driving it. I mean obviously there are places I will fly to, right? But when we went to Disneyland we drove, we made the whole driving a part of the trip, the same as we've done here. It's not [that] our destination is Tuk, everything along the way has been part of the trip.

For many of the travellers I met, it was the driving, not the destination itself which was the crux of their travel experience. The act of driving to the end of the road was far more important for most than what was to be found there. For Jannet this was certainly the case. Travelling alone with her rescue dog in a small but well-prepared pick-up truck, she had come to Inuvik following a moment of intuition. Planning to venture deep into Alaska next, for Jannet, a woman in her early 70s, the experience of driving was an important expression of her continued freedom and mobility. The destination gave her a reason to go somewhere, but it was the journey itself which mattered. [7]

Figure 5: Xena, Jannet, and her trusty Toyota pick-up truck with hand-written thank you notes.

[7] I actually met several women of similar ages travelling alone who spoke to me of their journeys in similar ways. It bears a passing mention that roads clearly allow for an important expression of continued independence for some.

Having a road connected to continental highway networks renders the communities of Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk accessible to car travel. Being able to drive to these communities, travellers experience their journey through the lens of automobility. In this drive they interact with the desires of state actors by engaging with the material object of the road, reifying these desires by travelling in the expected manner. Further, roads are places where contemporary dreams of freedom and mobility are played out. Often in the short bursts of vacations, travelling somewhere by road is still an affirmation of the potential for freedom many desire, even if it is unconsciously limited to the infrastructure which supports the automobile.

Signposts and Dust (and what does a road taste like)

Versions of the Inuvik-Tuktoyaktuk Highway have been planned or seriously considered since the 1960s, when the town of Inuvik had just been completed. This highway has existed for far longer as a conceptual thing than a physical one, and although now built, imaginary versions of the highway continue to emerge as people interact with, hear tell of, and experience the consequences of the road. This is not a condition specific to this road. Roads in all their forms are some of the most imaginatively and poetically productive objects built across the world. Taking the time to explore some of these versions of the Inuvik-Tuktoyaktuk Highway is taking time to understand the relationships people have with the road, as well as the related narratives that are produced and shared. I want to note here that I am differentiating between the 'real' observable road and the versions that people experience without the aim of valorising one over the other. These experienced versions are dependent on the understandings that individuals have of the road, understandings that are made up of prior expectations, empirical encounters, and cultural touchstones regarding travel and roads as a whole. The road as a physical object is no more important than the road that people can imagine.

When referring to an imagined or conceptual road, what I am referring to is not something less real. Instead, I chose these terms because what I am referring to is the version of a road that is held in the mind of someone asked to describe it. The imagined roads I make reference to throughout this section are the products of a variety of factors specific to the encounters an individual might have had with the road up until the moment they describe it. A tired cyclist, covered from head to toe in dust from passing cars is likely to describe a very different road than a government bureaucrat collecting usage statistics, sitting in an air-conditioned office. Yet both

these roads are very real, and both are accurate representations, based as they are in the experiences of these individuals.

In early June 2019 Inuvik played host to the Arctic Development Expo, a three-day trade show and conference rebranded from its previous title as the Petroleum Expo. Serving as a venue for discussing the future of development in communities across the Arctic, one of the attractions at this year's Expo was a guided tour of the newly completed Inuvik-Tuktoyaktuk Highway. Interested attendees had the opportunity to be shown the magnificent 150 kilometer stretch of hardpacked gravel and stare wide eyed at the feat of engineering now sitting atop the permafrost. It should come as no surprise that during a development exposition the board of Industry, Tourism, and Investment of the Northwest Territories would be eager to show off the new road, after all roads exist as an important manifestation of the desires of the various interests that compose the state.

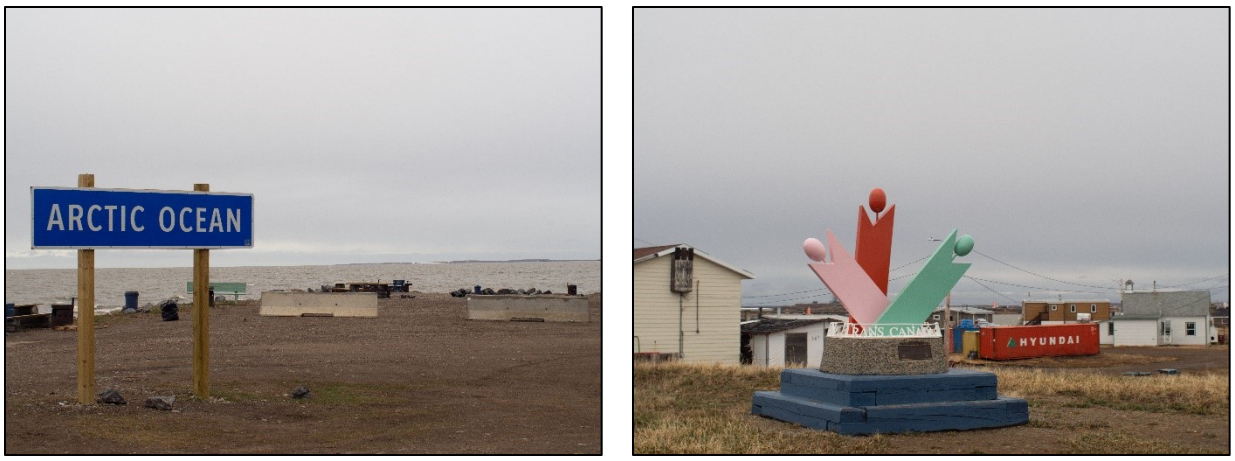

Figure 6: The Trans-Canadian Trail Marker sits near the Arctic Ocean sign at The Point in Tuktoyaktuk. These symbols demonstrate the Canadian state's assertions of access granted by the road.

Roads are imagined and then enacted by states in part for their capacity to dominate landscapes (Lefebvre 1991), further the modernist vision (Virilio 1986), and continue the late-capitalist project of time-space compression (Harvey 1989). We can observe these desires through the different ways in which the new road is conceptualised and presented by different government bodies. Before construction even began, state bodies were engaged in extensive projects of measurement and conceptualisation in the form of environmental impact assessments, the surveying of geography, and negotiations with the Inuvialuit, on whose land much of the highway is built. A vast collection of reports and documents are stored in the collective archives of a host

of agencies describing a road that only recently came to exist. Now completed, the new highway's prominence at the Arctic Development Expo displays a desired future of the road for enabling renewed economic activity in the Beaufort region. By showing off the road to potential developers in various major industries, state agents are attempting to impart their version of the road to these figures. This representation of the highway's promise is manifested as well through the official materials that publicise and advertise the new road. A recurring motif in publications aimed at tourists, for example, is that this new highway is the most northerly, publicly accessible road in North America. This theme is important because it demonstrates the conquest of nature and geographical space, an emblematic ideal of highways promoted by state agencies. Where state communications consistently refer to the road as a highway, many travellers I spoke to would joke about the purported irony of labelling what they saw as little more than a back-country dirt road in this way. By insisting on the terminology of the highway, the vision of the road held by state actors is made clear. Even though the road may not resemble the asphalt, arrow-straight motorways of the mid-west - which are arguably archetypical of the contemporary North American highway - labelling the Inuvik-Tuktoyaktuk Highway as such transplants their semiotic weight onto our little road.

When travelling down the Dempster and Inuvik-Tuktoyaktuk Highways, tourists often experience a very different kind of road than that extolled by state promotional materials. When asked during an interview how he would convince someone to take a similar trip, Pierre took a moment to think and said:

> I think I would tell them that if there wasn't some internal passion to see this country, you're, huh, it takes something to overcome that road. That's 500 miles of grief.

Pierre's opinion was far from unique. The majority of my interlocutors spoke of the dangers and difficulties they faced on the road in the course of their travels. Different groups of travellers would often highlight specific dangers, usually in regard to how they were travelling. Cyclists, for example, would often describe the road as covered in deep patches of gravel where it was easy to lose one's balance and fall. These same patches of gravel were often left out of descriptions by travellers driving cars, who tended to be more concerned about potholes and washboard segments. The imagined version of the road is dependent on one's means of experiencing it.

Clearly, these roads are very different for travellers than those represented by state agencies. Contrary to the modern highway promoted by the state, the Dempster and Inuvik-Tuktoyaktuk highways are construed as dangerous backroads and rugged frontier trails by the tourists who travel them. This difference is indicative of the different desires and expectations that these groups may generally hold in relation to the highways. Travellers reaching Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk by road have usually driven thousands of kilometers before arriving at a destination, where the only way left to go is back the way they came. The segment of their journey which takes tourists and travellers down the Dempster and Inuvik-Tuktoyaktuk Highways is rich with narrative forces. These narratives need places to call home, and for this, the highways become the rough pathway through the wilderness, to the frontier. Road narratives and imaginaries are inseparable and exist in mutual dependence. While the narratives that underpin travel in the region will be the subject of considerable discussion later in this thesis, at this point, we need only keep in consideration key themes of the wilderness and personal freedom. These themes help form the imaginary of the road as a pathway towards a temporally displaced frontier.

Deeply rutted gravel, washboard and hardpack, the Dempster and Inuvik-Tuktoyaktuk Highways wear their frontier imaginary well. In my encounters with travellers, the roads were frequently characterised through the qualities that resembled the frontier narratives they held. My interlocutors spoke of the newness of the Inuvik-Tuktoyaktuk Highway, of its remote quality, and of the novelty of reaching the literal end of the road. While both state actors and travellers therefore imagine these roads as pathways through the wilderness, these imaginaries differ in the romantic temporality of these perceptions. For the state, the highway brings its destinations towards modernity. Travellers drive the road in the opposite temporal direction, towards a romanticised era of personal freedom, rugged individualism, and the march towards the frontier. It is on this frontier that nature is conquered. People triumph over the wild, and on these roads every traveller can imagine a little bit of that triumph for themselves.

In the same conversations where many of my interlocutors would praise the wilderness of their road travels, they would express their surprise at the level of infrastructure present. During an interview with Franz and Heidi, two Austrian overlanders travelling the world in a modified Toyota Landcruiser, this was clearly expressed when they were asked about the highlights of travelling the road. Franz exclaimed:

> Well the countryside was fantastic, this remoteness, the loneliness…

Soon after, when asked about the unexpected parts of the journey so far, Franz thought for a moment and said:

> I'm surprised about the excellent tourist infrastructure you have. The information centers, visitor centers, the tremendous amount of information you get everywhere. With the Milepost booklet and some other books about flowers, plants, hiking, the Dempster Highway, there's lots of information. And also the flyers, maps. There's really an excellent infrastructure for tourists here.

Franz's surprise was not unique. The ready availability of information and prolific tourist infrastructure surprised many travellers I spoke with due to their conception of the highway. These roads, for a great many travellers, are pathways to a more remote, wild place than where they are coming from. They are the rugged frontier roads cutting through the wilderness. This perception is the product of both the experiences travellers have on the road, and the expectations they had in setting forth. Expectations of what to expect are born from the stories they read or hear from other tourists, cultural conceptions of the region and road travel, and advertising material made for tourism in the region.

Figure 7: Dusty campers in Inuvik displaying. "Tuk or Bust" is a sort of sloganised expression of the concerns many travellers had about the rugged roads.

"Almost every ethnologist who has studied highways reports that roads trigger people's imaginations" (Dalakoglou 2017, 93). This is certainly the case for the people who live in the communities along the Dempster and Inuvik-Tuktoyaktuk Highways. The highways experienced

by locals are physically the same as those experienced by travellers and built by the state but are often understood differently. For locals, the new highway is a vessel of influx, a potential causeway of wealth, a worrisome object of drainage, and a space of considerable anxiety. Speaking with locals in both Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk, I heard a wide variety of expectations regarding the impact of the new highway; the opportunities and dangers of having road access to the rest of the North American highway network. Locals often understood the benefits of the highway as pertaining to the influx of travellers and potential economic opportunities of tourism. The dangers of the road often related to a concern that youth and businesses may be drawn away to less remote parts of the country. At the same time, another danger of the highway frequently mentioned by locals was the very real danger of an influx of alcohol (a restricted substance in Tuktoyaktuk)[8] and illicit substances into their communities. In September of 2019 shortly after I had left the region, the RCMP stopped a vehicle attempting to enter the community with 190 containers of alcohol, far above the quantity permitted by community's restrictions (CBC 2019).

Where the state sees a highway and the traveller sees a frontier pathway, locals see a causeway, a vessel with inflows and outflows simultaneously draining and charging their communities. Anxieties concerning new road projects are commonly observed amongst residents of communities who must live with the new conditions of accessibility brought on by the completion of said projects (Harvey and Knox 2015, 68; Dalakoglou 2017, 99; Anderson 2017). Locals worry about the impact these in- and out-flows will come to have on their communities. These anxieties then manifest themselves in the stories told of the road. The form the road takes in these stories coalesces around the potential for wealth that may be accorded by the new highway. The road becomes a clandestine pathway for bootleggers when anxieties emerge towards the potential influx of alcohol. The road becomes an impressive source of wealth when locals consider the economic opportunities to be had from the influx of tourists since the completion of the highway.

This was evident in the discussions I had with locals, and in the management of tourism development in the community. Throughout the summer, the policies for camping in the recreation area known as The Point changed several times, reflecting different understandings of how to

[8] Tuktoyaktuk Liquor Restriction Regulations R-009-2010 Amended by R-003-2018. In 2018, with the new highway completed, the community relaxed its complete prohibition into a quantity restriction.

accommodate tourism. At the start of the season, the area was listed as permitting overnight camping for 20 to 30 dollars, depending on the vehicle. Shortly after, camping was banned, then reopened with a higher price, until finally it settled into a premium but middle ground price of 60 dollars (for reference, a tent-pad at Happy Valley in Inuvik was around 10 dollars a night). In a discussion at the coffee table with a long-time resident on a particularly cold and windy day, I heard that this wild fluctuation was due to conflicts between individuals concerned with access to The Point as a traditional fishing ground, individuals managing new lodging businesses, and the Hamlet government finding an appropriate price to compensate their expenses. Anxious about properly exploiting this economic opportunity while maintaining local autonomy, it is understandable that such fluctuations occurred in the management of the central tourist destination of the community.

This anxiety of living along the road became more acute for the people of Tuktoyaktuk as the end of summer came to the Mackenzie Delta. In early August 2019, after the road had been open for several months and thousands of tourists had visited the community, I learned of a rumor circulating on the local Facebook gossip page. This rumor alleged that some tourists had come up in a blacked-out van to attempt to lure children away with them. I never found any substantiation of this, and never encountered any warnings through official channels that such a thing had occurred. Regardless, the fact that this rumor circulated at all, especially in the late season after a great number of visitors had passed through, exemplifies some of the anxieties that people in Tuktoyaktuk had about the dangers of having so many visitors come by road. For a community that has been affected by residential schools, where children were literally taken south away from their families, it is reasonable to couch anxieties in familiar terms. The road for locals is a connection to the South, flowing with all the wealth, opportunity, and dangers that had not been possible before.

Looking at the Dempster and Inuvik-Tuktoyaktuk Highways, it would seem the only thing that everyone views in the same way is the dust. On a dry summer's day, the clouds of dust from automobiles are visible from miles away. Driving for an extended period of time, you could taste it, chalky and dry. Yet when all the dust settles and we can see the road again, we all seem to see different objects. We imagine this road into different realities based on what exactly a road means to us. Pieces of infrastructure, especially roads, are cornerstone objects for the generation of reality.

Roads, with all their metaphorical and poetic weight, offer an object that can manifest the desires of various groups experiencing it.

Flat Tires (and somewhere to patch them)

Roads are powerful objects. They change places in unstoppable and unexpected ways. Now that the Inuvik-Tuktoyaktuk Highway has been built, it will continue to impact the region. This impact is sometimes hard to measure, and near impossible to draw boundaries around. Do the impacts end at the edges of the communities of Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk? Certainly not, since after all you have to drive all the way down other roads to get to this one. The communities that exist along the highway corridor that is now seeing increased traffic are obviously impacted as well. Although not the focus of my fieldwork, in short visits to Fort McPherson, Tsiigehtchic, Midway, and Dawson City there was clear evidence of changes brought about by the new highway. In the year since my last visit, Tsiigehtchic had moved their designated camping area away from the beach, where fishing was common for locals, and up to a controlled lot near their small visitor center. Fort McPherson had also seen changes, the most evident and popular of these being a food truck operated by a local woman and her family, with signs inviting weary travellers to stop for a snack near the entrance to town. Even beyond the highway corridor, the increased interest in the region is translated through travel blogs, news reports, and the increased attention of a global audience.

As tourists continue to travel along the Inuvik-Tuktoyaktuk Highway, their presence will continue to impact the communities impacted by the new road. These impacts are of course in part the result of the road itself, as without it being there, it would be impossible for this particular group of travellers to reach these communities. As the subject of our next discussion then, let us consider how access encourages the creation of a destination. Having established that roads are technologies of mobility as well as meaning generation, we must next apply these realities to the way in which different actors are involved in encouraging travel to their communities. Thinking about the road in particular ways, we think as well about those who travel it, and the things they may want to see and buy.

Chapter 4: A 'Somewhere' Worth the Drive

Beep! Beep! Beep!

Ringmasters are never so careful with their tigers

As you are with this beast you've bought.

Beep! Beep! Beep!

Carefully now back out into the street.

Carefully now lumber on slow and plodding.

Beep! Beep! Beep!

White aluminum and fiberglass has never looked so threatening

As it does with you behind the wheel.

Everyone in town has something to say about the tourists. In Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk, the new road and those who travel down it are ready topics of conversation. Everyone has something to say, and an idea of what tourists should get up to while they are here. Enterprising locals, various businesses, and different levels of government have all seen the influx of tourists and scrambled to present a host of activities, goods, and services for consumption. The communities of Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk are actively engaged in making themselves into destinations by offering avenues for economic participation that appeal to what they imagine tourists are interested in. There is an interesting interaction at play here. On the one hand, one would be hard pressed to find someone in these communities who would argue that the massive influx of tourism seen since the new highway does not come with potential for business and economic growth. On the other hand, however, a great many of the tourists I spoke with over the summer were more interested in the experience of travelling than any sort of economic participation. Some key differences clearly exist between the version of tourism that is being catered for and the tourists who make the journey.

Herein then, I want to discuss how the communities of Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk are making themselves into destinations, into places worth stopping. This discussion builds on the previous chapter, as we have to keep in mind the importance of roads in dominating experiences of mobility,

and the individualised encounters with the roads that travellers have. These factors play into both how travellers conceive of the communities they arrive in, and how locals in said communities perceive the people who travel the road to reach them. With this in mind, I will work through the dualistic notions of access and consumption by examining them through the lens of the creation of a consumable place. This discussion will relate to key arguments that have been present in the scholarly literature on tourism since near its inception. Next, we will delve deeper into the perceived and 'real' motivations that travellers hold in their travels. Asking what particular reasons tourists have for journeying to specific destinations will lead us to a discussion of nature and indigeneity, as well as one of the most difficult concepts in tourism literature, authenticity.

What Makes a Destination? (or; who?)

One review left by a traveller on the popular social media platform iOverlander for Tuktoyaktuk simply reads "It's done, you can go home now". This is a literal as well as figurative comment. Once you have reached The Point, there is literally nowhere further to go. Figuratively however, the idea that travellers would arrive, take a photo with the Arctic Ocean sign, and leave was a discussion I heard from both tourists and locals. Why bother staying, what else is there to do? A narrative circulated during my time in these communities that travellers rarely took the time to savour the places they had driven for so long to get to. Many tourists would even differentiate themselves from the ostensible 'usual' others by telling me how much more in depth their own encounters with the communities had been. Of course, most travellers did stay some amount of time, exploring the communities of Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk and stretching out their time there to take advantage of the various opportunities available to them. This seemingly paradoxical situation brings us to an important point: at what point do places become destinations, and what exactly is a destination?

Just because one can reach a community, does not mean that this place is necessarily a destination. The same highway that reaches Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk also allows access to the communities of Tsiigehtchic and Fort McPherson, and yet according to official visitor statistics and my own interlocutors accounts, only a tiny fraction of the tourist traffic reaches these other communities. What sets Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk apart then, is that these communities have become destinations. As destinations, they offer a reason to travel there, as well as incentives to participate in the community to some extent. How though, do communities become destinations?

Clearly, a great deal of importance lies in the narratives told about these places, and how those narratives are propagated. Both of these topics will be at the center of discussion in later chapters. For now, let us focus on a way that Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk become destinations which relates more directly to our recent discussion of roads. Considering how roads may make places destinations we can examine the role of access in encouraging the conscious implementation of avenues of touristic consumption.

Access and consumption are paired notions when considering the impact roads have on communities. When a place is made accessible by road, a series of possibilities emerge. Namely, being connected to the road network integrates a community into the larger system of automobility. Becoming spaces accessible to the automobile means that the infrastructure of consumption related to that mode of transportation are now sought after in the communities. Similarly, as Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk become spaces accessible to the larger flows of tourism in North America, active interest emerges in developing spaces for consumption for visitors. Because of the Inuvik-Tuktoyaktuk Highway, the communities are engaged in making themselves into consumable places. In referring to the making of a consumable place, I am drawing on John Urry's work in *Consuming Places* (1995), where he explores the factors and actions involved in rendering a place attractive, enticing, and likely to encourage economic activity for tourists and travellers. A place being rendered accessible is not an automatic assertion of it also being consumable, but during my research, the two appeared to be deeply linked. The road, by increasing access to the region, sparked the imaginations of developers, government bodies, and enterprising locals who began to work towards making these communities into more consumable places for the kinds of travellers they now expected to arrive.

Following the manifold conceptualisation of a "consumable place" outlined by Urry (1995), we need to understand these initiatives to accommodate tourists by the communities along the road as products of the intersection of multiple interpretations of what travellers to the region are searching for. Beyond the direct connotation of the implementation of spaces for consumption, Urry's conceptualisation refers as well to the visual consumption of places, the depletion of the significance of a place through consumption, and the homogenization of places through consumption (1995, 1-2). Basing his work on the development of modern tourism, Urry proposed that places become interesting to tourism through the actions undertaken to render them more

accommodating to consumption in keeping with the expectations that tourists already hold of the place. The creation of a consumable place is therefore not simply the opening of businesses accommodating tourists, it involves the reshaping of a place at several levels. Places are 'consumed' by the presence of tourism under this model, digested and made into versions of themselves that better resemble the aspects that are understood to be desirable. Importantly for Urry, the production of consumable places, as it relates to tourism, is a matter of successfully catering to the sociality of the particular tourists likely to visit the place (1995). This is often a difficult balance to strike. As Anderson demonstrates in his analysis of tourism development post-highway in the Baja Sur, efforts to accommodate tourism often alienate both locals and early adopters of the destination (2017). The tourists who now travel to the region because of the highway are socially very different than those whose actual presence first drew the attention of developers. The communities Anderson researched therefore were consumed in the process of rendering them more attractive to tourists, becoming places markedly different than what they had been before the highway's completion.

Understanding and predicting who is travelling along the new highway is important, as it determines what will be put on offer to the tourists who do come. The active interest in rendering a place consumable therefore entails conscious choices on the part of interested parties to remake their surroundings to accommodate tourism. Notably, this is not a top down, rigidly planned affair. In these communities, various groups have reached independent conclusions as to what exactly it is tourists want, and what they are willing to spend money on. Often, this has been done without asking travellers. Instead, due in part to the recent nature of the completion of the new highway and arrival of travellers, developments towards a consumable place have been guided by assumptions about the kinds of tourists that are expected to arrive. In part, the pre-conception of the stereotypical tourist in Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk has been based on the tourists that previously visited these communities during the busy days of oil and gas exploration.

Permanent tourist infrastructures are key zones where the consumption aspect of tourism occurs. The Western Arctic Visitor Center in Inuvik and the Hamlet of Tuktoyaktuk Visitor Center are exemplary spaces that anchored tourism in each respective community. More established and larger, the Western Arctic Visitor Center sits at the top of the hill immediately as you enter Inuvik from the Dempster Highway. Set back into a small boreal forest with a large gravel parking area

for RVs, the Visitor Center sees almost every traveller stop in for information, activities, or simply to explore the exhibits. Affiliated with the Industry, Tourism, and Investment branch of the Northwest Territories government, the Visitor Center should be seen as prototypical of the official effort to create a destination for tourists entering the community. This visitor center contains the templates which all other local official efforts replicate. Two key functions occur here. First, the Visitor Center acts as an advertising point for other tourist experiences in Western Arctic. A large wall of pamphlets sits near bulletin boards displaying weather and ferry updates near the entrance, and outside a poster board and whiteboard also advertise local businesses and activities for tourists. The Visitor Center, through these materials as well as friendly attendants acts as a space through which travellers are directed towards other activities they can engage in while staying in the region. In the materials offered, and the experiences recommended, the official discourse of development is reproduced.

Figure 8: The welcome sign at the entrance to Inuvik and some bulletin boards updated daily.

Part of what makes Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk into destinations rather than simply stops along the road then is the success of some of the actions taken to render them into consumable places. Not all attempts will be successful, but the ones that are, shape the steps that are eventually undertaken by others attempting to replicate this success. As tourists continue to make their way to and along the Inuvik-Tuktoyaktuk Highway, further actions will be undertaken to accommodate their presence and develop avenues for economic growth. During my fieldwork, I heard rumours from various sources about planned developments in the coming years and witnessed the implementation of some of these plans during the summer as well. A new campground, placed somewhere along the highway, for example was rumoured to be under review by the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation, giving travellers a place to stay in the rolling tundra. Whether or not this will come to pass remains to be seen, but the fact that it is circulating as an idea speaks to an evolving perception of tourism in the region as being increasingly characterised by RVs and campers.

Caribou, Belugas, Boat Tours (and other things to do)

The completion of the new Inuvik-Tuktoyaktuk Highway marks an important shift in tourism in the Western Arctic, but it is not the first time these localities have captured the attention of travellers. Since the completion of the Dempster Highway in the late 1970s, tourism by road has been a factor in the economic planning and development of Inuvik and its surrounding communities. In a report submitted to the Superintendent of Economic Development and Tourism by Akay Tourism Consulting in 1981 (only 2 years after the public opening of the Dempster Highway) a series of recommendations on the development of tourism infrastructure and attractions for the region was outlined. This region, which includes communities along the Dempster Highway and within reach of short-haul air travel, centers around Inuvik as the (at the time) end of the road. While many of the recommendations in the report failed to materialise, it is valuable to explore as a historical document which outlines the guiding notions behind the development of the region's communities into tourist destinations. In identifying indigenous culture and self-guided nature tourism as key to the region, the report is vindicated by a later analysis of tourism in the region by Notzke (1999). Both the report by Akay Tourism Consulting and Notzke's research show that the official discourse for tourism development in the region has, for some time, been centered on the integration of indigenous material culture and practices into consumable forms, as well as the implementation of infrastructure promoting self-guided nature

tourism. During my fieldwork, I frequently encountered examples of this, both in permanent tourist infrastructure (such as Visitor Centers and information panels) and in activities aimed specifically at tourists and other visitors (such as guided tours and public workshops).

Nature and indigenous culture are the key lenses through which the communities of Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk are rendered consumable for tourists. In visitor surveys, these are listed as the top reasons for travelling to the region, with over 95% of visitors citing the natural environment and indigenous culture as a "main interest" (Notzke 1999, 56-57). Following Dressler et al, we can argue that these are not actually separate categories of interest, but that indigenous culture is understood through its integration with the natural environment in the Western Arctic (2001). This dualistic category is certainly in evidence in the offerings for tourists. Guided tours of the natural environment, indigenous practices, and similar activities form the bulk of experiences available for tourists in Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk. These offerings have been developed and put in place based on an interpretation of the history of tourism in the region and the depictions of the region available in popular culture.

To better understand the current development of tourism in Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk, a brief foray into the previous surge of visitors to the community will provide some useful context. From 1969 into the early 1990s, the communities of the Mackenzie Delta and Beaufort Sea were host to extensive oil and gas exploration (Northern Oil and Gas 1995). This exploration was at the core of the local economy until prohibitive costs and the freeze on issuance of exploration rights led to the rapid exit of the companies involved. While the impact of this cannot be understated in either community, it is in Tuktoyaktuk where the evidence of such exploration is the most visible. Driving into the community on the new highway, one can see one of the remaining exploration platforms rusting away at the end of a bay near Reindeer Point, and across the bay from the harbour lies the massive effort to clean-up the former Imperial Oil base. On the outskirts of the community, the former work camps sit mostly empty on pillars driven into the permafrost. This was a period of intense economic activity, where workers employed in oil exploration became an important avenue for the development of tourism in the region.

During the oil and gas exploration, tourism activities and infrastructure were put in place in both Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk following the nature/indigenous lens described earlier. While much of this had fallen into disrepair during the quieter period between the end of oil exploration

and the current post-highway surge, it forms the initial basis for the communities' status as destinations. Wandering Tuktoyaktuk for example, one can find such remnants in the disused walking tour signs (now just rusting posts) and the recently renovated sod-house. In Inuvik, the empty husk of the Northern Images, a chain of art stores which cater to tourists in northern communities next to the boarded up Eskimo Hotel is one such example. Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk became consumable destinations during this period by catering to tourists with extensive disposable income and an interest in the indigenous culture that surrounded them.

Herein lies a disconnect between the interests of many travellers I spoke to and the forms of consumption available to them. Tourists who travelled because of the new highway often valued their independence and thriftiness, after all driving to these communities while camping is considerably cheaper than flying and staying in hotels. This contradiction complicates the notion that tourists simply consume what is offered to them. Importantly, the more expensive guided expeditions and tours are still popular attractions for travellers who reach Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk by other means (usually air travel) and as members of tour groups. Of all the tourists I spoke to that had travelled to the region by road, only a small handful had even considered one of the guided tours offered by local outfitters. Instead, this category of tourists preferred to 'find' their own experiences. Frequently, I spoke with tourists who expressed their interests in learning about the natural surroundings and indigenous cultural practice but preferred to do so through speaking to locals or attending the free workshops on offer. While the desire for nature tourism and indigenous culture remains, the kind of travellers now making the journey has changed.

As tourism sparked by the new highway comes to form the bulk of travellers to the region, it is their interests and consumption which are increasingly being accommodated. The distinction between these new travellers' desires and the modes of consumption largely put in place for their predecessors are perhaps best exemplified by attendance at free daily activities. During the summer, there are a host of tours and workshops to attend, most for free or a small fee. The Western Arctic Visitor Center, for example, hosts daily workshops open to the public in the mid-afternoon. These workshops are largely aimed at tourists; however, they tend to be more frequented by semi-permanent residents, such as workers spending the season in the community or researchers on their days off from the field. These temporary locals resemble much more the oil-workers who acted as the models for the development of tourism activities in the community than the current generation

of tourists. When I spoke with highway travellers who did not attend these free workshops, they reasoned that while interested, they were more eager to continue travelling than plan a whole day in the community. In contrast, the Greenhouse and Igloo Church both offered short daily tours in the early evening which were almost entirely attended by road-tripping tourists. The difference in popularity can perhaps then be explained in two ways. First, travellers journeying by highway often only arrive in the community in the late-afternoon and evening, and often move on by the end of the next morning. This eagerness to continue moving does not mesh well with activities requiring longer or mid-day commitments. Secondly, it may also be that the Greenhouse and Igloo Church tours more closely resemble stereotypical tourist activities. Both are guided tours based in buildings that are recognisable and marketed as landmarks.

Figure 9: The Igloo Church and Inuvik Community Greenhouse, two popular tours in town.

Even if new tourists do not interact with all of the same modes as those for whom the original developments were made, they still often claim nature and indigenous culture as key interests. One of the clearest demonstrations of this is the kinds of souvenirs that travellers are interested in purchasing. Busy giftshops catering to tourists offer carvings, prints, and sewn crafts from local Gwich'in and Inuvialuit artists. Local indigenous culture is at the forefront then of the material culture that tourists engage with economically. Interestingly enough, it was rare that I encountered discussions of authenticity by tourists. Instead, the authenticity of experiences or product was more often mentioned by those who offered the services. This may have to do with how many of the travellers presupposed that Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk were indigenous communities, therefore assuming the authenticity of works purchased there.

While the authenticity of the indigenous centered experiences was rarely questioned, this has less to do with an unwillingness to question and more to do with the continuous corroboration between local and tourist conceptions. As long as both locals and tourists have the same notions of what is authentic, there is no conceptual conflict between what is offered and desired. To explore this further, let us explore briefly some of the extensive literature which surrounds the notion of authenticity in tourism studies.

Authenticity in encounters and material goods is a field of considerable discussion in tourism literature. Cases where indigenous culture is an element of touristic attraction further complicate this discussion, as do the shifting patterns of modern travel. Modern tourism is in part defined by the interest in interactions with other ways of life (Cohen 1972, 165). Erik Cohen described this interest as a desire for "strangeness", where the routines of daily life are supplanted by the extra-ordinary. Strangeness is a helpful concept for our specific context, as it is comprised of both authenticity and novelty. Authenticity, in the case of strangeness, lies in the attribution of a novel experience to its expected point of origin. Novelty in turn lies in the unfamiliarity of the experience. To clarify with an example from my fieldwork, consuming Muktuk is a popular tourist attraction. A local delicacy, the cured beluga blubber is recommended to tourists by locals and other travellers as a uniquely Tuktoyaktuk experience. Most tourists have a chance to try Muktuk at Grandma's Kitchen, a local restaurant run by a woman from the community. Tasting Muktuk has become a popular tourist activity due to its relative strangeness for visitors. Muktuk is novel, eating cured whale is not a common occurrence for most North Americans after all. Trying Muktuk at Grandma's Kitchen is viewed by tourists is also 'authentic' as it is where most locals will recommend finding it. Our Muktuk example therefore also helps to illuminate a further point regarding authenticity, it is a negotiation.

Instead of considering authenticity as something produced for the consumption of tourists, we need to consider the roles that both hosts and tourists have in the negotiation of experience. Under this framework, both tourist and host have understandings as to the authenticity of an experience. Tourism providers and community members valorise certain practices, which tourists can then experience (Cohen 1988). Tourists themselves engage in the negotiation through the frame of their preconceptions. Before encountering localities, travellers have heard something about what to expect. Whether it be from travel brochures, information available online or through

contacts, or simply stereotypes about the place and people they are visiting, tourists have a prior notion of what they will encounter. While some of these expectations are malleable (after all, strangeness requires novelty), they act as preconceptions against which experiences are measured. When experiencing cultural practices as part of touristic encounters, these may be weighed against stereotypes and other expectations to measure their authenticity (Wang 1999). Understanding authenticity in this way situates my discussion within a constructivist model of authenticity. By taking a constructivist position, I am resisting a qualification of authenticity as an inherent property of objects/experiences (as one would in a Modernist perspective), or decrying authenticity as ultimately irrelevant (as one would under a post-modernist perspective) (Reisinger and Steiner 2006). Maintaining a constructivist understanding of authenticity allows for an honest treatment of the relational nature of the condition. By considering authenticity in this way, as a product of a negotiation, we also take time to realise that this relationship is heavy with power dynamics. This power is evident in that the value of traditional indigenous practices is (in part) measured by how authentic tourists perceive them to be, which in turn can be partly measured by which practices and material culture are purchased more frequently by tourists.

There is a great deal of pride amongst indigenous Gwich'in and Inuvialuit locals when it comes to their cultural practices and material traditions. This pride is reflected in the integration of these practices into the tourist economy. As with Stroma Cole's (2007) case study in Eastern Indonesia, tourist interest in indigenous culture presents locals a means of valorising their culture economically and politically. I want to specify here that tourism is far from the sole reason that traditional arts or practices are carried out in Inuvik in Tuktoyaktuk. What is accomplished instead is a further valorisation of these practices through the appreciation of visitors and their patronage. Further, only certain practices are offered to tourists, usually art. Art has the advantage of being recognisable and symbolic. Symbols such as caribou hide slippers, Inukshuks carved from soapstone, and prints are familiar to many tourists. As research into forms of tourism dependent heavily on local culture – such as heritage and indigenous led tourism – have shown, the authenticity of experience is more reliant on the sincerity of what is offered than any sort of essentialized understanding of culture (Taylor 2001, 16). My experiences with tourist interlocutors support this, wherein tourists gauged the authenticity of their experiences largely on the apparent sincerity of their hosts. Most of my interlocutors in this regard admitted their ignorance of local culture and were eager to learn through participation.

Figure 10: Some pieces from a giftshop in Inuvik made by local artisans.

In many ways then, the negotiation of authenticity for those travelling to Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk because of the new highway was couched less in terms of the particular objects or experiences that they engaged with, and more in terms of the surroundings through which these were being offered. My interlocutors were hoping to be surprised, to learn new things, and have meaningful interactions with the kinds of people they expected to live in the communities. This may be best exemplified by one of the most frequent complaints I heard from travellers.

While getting Muktuk at Grandma's was certainly popular, many of the travellers I spoke with were eager to try local foods, either at a restaurant or to buy something to cook themselves. For those I spoke with, food was an interesting and familiar way of experiencing the usual aspects of other cultures, a sort of 'safe' novelty. Inuvik does have several restaurants, including the popular Alestine's, however there is no obvious place where tourists can easily experience a 'local cuisine'. Even Alestine's which is known in the community for its excellent fare and fresh caught fish, did not present the localness that many travellers were searching for. Simply put, all the local food was too familiar, lacking the strangeness that is attributed to authenticity, and therefore it did not register for many travellers as 'local' enough for the experiences they desired. Interestingly, it was largely from tourists who had not reached Tuktoyaktuk yet that I heard this complaint. In Tuktoyaktuk, tourists can satisfy their curiosity at Grandma's or at one of the shacks near the point that offer smoked dry-fish.

Figure 11: The school-bus kitchen at Alestine's. The restaurant is perhaps known as much for the sense of humour of its proprietor as the food it offers.

More Than a Gas-Station and Grocery Store

What makes a place a destination? What drives travellers to decide on here rather than there? These are important questions to ask as we consider the nature of places inundated with visitors in numbers that are several times their residential populations. Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk are busy making and remaking themselves into destinations, into places that this new wave of travellers will find appealing. This (re)making is a process that is dependent on the notion of consumption, wherein locals attempt to develop places that accommodate the tourists they expect to arrive.

Further, this process is based on the negotiation that occurs when tourists encounter experiences. Determining the authenticity of experiences is a process that involves both those who offer these experiences and those who consume them. In Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk, where the experience of tourism has largely been developed around the dual lens of nature and indigenous

culture, authenticity is associated with experiencing an expected strangeness. The interest that many tourists have in authentic experiences is one of finding ways to be surprised by the things they expect to surprise them. This process is also presenting an opportunity for local indigenous artists and knowledge holders to further valorise their culture by offering avenues for economic interaction with the new travellers.

Now, having discussed both roads and what lies at their end, we turn our discussion to the experience of travel itself. In the next chapter we will turn our gaze away from infrastructure and development and begin to explore the moments of community and interactions that happen between travellers.

Chapter 5: And the Friends We Made Along the Way

I have never sat and spoken

With someone that I did not like.

I have however

Walked away

Before the start of many conversations.

In the first week of August, a powerful gale blew through the Beaufort Delta, and chased my little tent and I out of Tuktoyaktuk, back to the more sheltered campground in Inuvik. It was a short time after this that I installed myself to scribble field notes in the warm laundry room at Happy Valley. It is difficult to write when the cold weather begins to freeze the ink in your pen and blood in your fingers, so I sat there alone by the heater. Alone that is, until a small crowd of travellers slowly began to filter in to join me. A group of three young car campers joined me, the countertop serving as a make-shift kitchen. Someone set up a small speaker and music began to play as a middle-aged woman who had been camping at one of the tent pads joined us. Not long after, two cyclists who had met and decided to travel together further down the highway also took refuge. The tiny room rang with music and laughter, crude jokes and tales of adventure. We left muddy boot-prints and fogged the windows with our breath. We ate together and traded stories of our travels, warm from the heaters, stoves, and companionship. One of the younger travellers, a woman from Australia, stopped the conversation to implore me to write in my notes how this was only possible because of word-of-mouth from other travellers, that someone they met on the highway told them to use the laundromat as a kitchen. She asked me to write that this word-of-mouth is essential to her and is part of the reason she has travelled so far. I took the note, and satisfied, she moved the conversation back to trading stories with the others. The next day, everyone had moved on.

This was far from the only spontaneous moment of togetherness that I was a part of during my time in Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk. I frequently experienced and witnessed similar encounters throughout the duration of my stay. The presence of other travellers similar to oneself is an

important aspect of any self-guided form of tourism. Urry, in *Consuming Places*, goes so far as to argue that the satisfaction travellers feel (or lack) in their travel experiences is tied intrinsically to the social composition of other travellers (2006, 131). Such an assertion speaks to the importance of some sort of community, which has been recognised in tourism literature, particularly that which focuses on travel modes that can be defined as "self-guided". Counts and Counts (1996) for example speak to how the senior RVers they worked with had means of designating themselves as recognisable members of clubs and groups. Using membership stickers on their rigs or staying at club-managed campgrounds, these RVers built a community for themselves through their shared passion for road travel. Herein then, we will take the time to explore how it is that communities and comradery can exist amongst a form of travel where it is rare to spend more than two nights in the same place. What forces encourage interaction, and across what mediums? How is it that so many travellers come to experience the same events seemingly independently?

Answers to these questions lie in the moments of togetherness that occur along the road, in the communitas that forms between travellers. After all, tourism can be a liminal experience, especially when undertaken independently, where the people you meet are similarly separated from their usual positions and structures. Further, we will explore the mechanisms that help to define people's places within these disparate and ephemeral communities, as well as generate hierarchies of belonging. The notion of intra-tourist gazing will be important here, particularly as a means to explain the policing of behaviour and formation of clique-like groups of travellers.

Returning always to our initial question: "who travels down the new Inuvik-Tuktoyaktuk Highway and why?", we can perhaps answer the second half of this rather simply in this chapter. For the why of it all, is it so unreasonable to say: because they made a friend, and that friend said they should?

How to Make Friends (and say goodbye)

When I would speak to travellers during my time in Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk and explain my research, one of the most common questions they would ask me was: what does the average tourist coming here look like? My response was tongue-in-cheek, but not inaccurate. The average traveller, I would say, has recently retired. They are driving a modern pick-up truck with a comfortable modern camper on the back. Often these trucks are rentals, borrowed as a package alongside a camper-back, but not always. Finally, I would say, the average travellers are a couple

(married or otherwise) travelling together. This response usually elicited a laugh, either because I had just described my fellow conversationalists, or because they had met such travellers along the way.

Of course, a wide swath of people travelled to Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk that summer, with a seemingly endless variety of methods of getting there. One of the few constants between all these various forms of travel and the 'average' I described above, is that tourists rarely started their journeys in groups other than family units or couples/pairs. The travellers I met were certainly not opposed to making friends and acting as a community, preferring simply not to have their vacations organised as part of larger groups. During the time I was in Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk I only encountered 3 guided tours, of which only one had come by highway. This solitariness, born out of a desire for independence, is a marker of what both development and cultural scholars consider contemporary (or 'New', or Post-modern) tourism. Development literature that engages with tourism enthusiastically defines this form of tourism in part through the interest in novel experiences that are assumed to motivate self-guided travellers (Poon 1994). Novel in this context refers to travels which fall outside the touristic norm, not only an individual's own experiences. Anthropological and sociological studies of the same trends have often been more cautious in asserting this, but usually agree that there is definitively a form of tourism that centers itself around these themes. Ian Munt (1994) for example, explores the development of a tourism industry increasingly catering to self-guided and unique travel experiences. As "Other" post-modern tourists contrasted against the more recognisable mass market offerings, these middle-class travellers are interested in experiences which are novel and independent. Further, Munt suggests the accumulation of prestige through collecting these unique and adventurous experiences as a motivation for choosing this form of travel. The prestige of such experiences comes into play when travellers return, now equipped to share tales of their adventures with their peers. Importantly and for a variety of proposed reasons, these are tourists who elect to organise their travels independently, and the vast majority of those travelling by highway to Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk hold this preference.

Moments of togetherness for these travellers are therefore spontaneous and brief. When such travellers do come together, it tends to be for several often-repeated reasons. Returning to our previous discussion of automobility, travellers often come together because of the proximity of

where they stay. When travelling by car, or even by off-road camper, there are limitations to where one can camp. Through the proximity in sharing the same places, travellers often come together. Another logistical concern that often brings people together is when things go wrong. Automobiles and campers are complex machines and these roads are hard on the mechanics of most vehicles. In situations where drivers experience mechanical failures, they may experience togetherness when assisting (or being assisted by) other travellers. In Tuktoyaktuk, I met a man travelling in a pick-up who told me about one such case. Stopping to help a fellow traveller in distress change a flat tire, he was surprised when this traveller followed him doggedly all the way to Inuvik! Finally, many travellers simply enjoy each other's company, and decide to journey together after meeting on the road. Several of the long-distance cyclists I met reached these sorts of conclusions. Early in my trip, I met a young French couple in their 30s, who upon meeting a British cyclist of the same age at the airport ended up riding the Inuvik-Tuktoyaktuk Highway together because they got along so well.

These experiences of comradery, short and dependent on the mutuality of the liminal experience of travel can certainly be described as communitas. Relatively unchanged from Victor Turner's (1977) original definitions, communitas is used in tourism studies to define the experience of communion between individuals what are placed in a situation that is temporarily separated from the usual conventions of social structure. Importantly, communitas does not imply an erasure of structures or hierarchies but a dialogue, where the mutuality of experience produces a sort of anti-structure, around which the sense of comradery is built. When referring to communitas then, what I am referring to is the act of togetherness, i.e. voluntary social interactions with others that share some form of mutuality, for no reason other than the pleasure of each other's familiar presence during the liminal period of travel. In other words, I am privileging those actions and moments that travellers choose to engage in, however brief. Further, in describing these actions as communitas, I am also implying that they go beyond the usual casual sociality of interactions between strangers. Thus, waving to passing campers from the comfort of your picnic table is not a moment of communitas. Pulling off into a gravel pit on the side of the road to camp for the night because you noticed a group already forming, and joining them around a campfire, however, might offer the possibility for a moment of communitas. Ephemeral as this togetherness may be, potentially occupying the same social and physical space for only a short time, the capacity to

experience such relationships is important to the overall satisfaction some travellers feel towards their journeys.

Returning to Urry's arguments in *Consuming Spaces* for a moment, the importance of communitas for touristic experience is the social role which the presence of other travellers plays in the construction of a consumable place. The social composition of other tourists is key in contextualising the place that you have reached (Urry 1995). Following the argument that consumption is related to the geniality of the place being visited, the presence of other like-minded travellers inflects this space, affecting the satisfaction of tourists. Simply put, a destination must have the right kind of visitors, people with whom you can feel some affinity. We could further argue that this is even more critical for the contemporary self-guided traveller. For travellers who purposefully avoid the 'beaten path' of popular destinations, and value the novelty of their experience, the presence of the right kind of company is critical. Encountering fellow travellers who live up to your expectations of adventure and independence encourages communitas. Often, the identification of the social composition of other travellers is based on visible markers distinguishing them as particular kinds of travellers. Most often in the cases I experienced, this categorisation occurred through the mutuality of modes of travel. The first instances of contact between travellers would often be dictated by the vehicle you rode in on. The role of the vehicle in determining interaction goes beyond its visibility, however. Firstly, and rather simply, the vehicle you arrive in determines the potential space you can access and occupy. If one travels by motorhome for example, it is rather difficult to take it off road to the gravel-pit campgrounds frequented by more rugged contraptions. As such, travelling in a certain way limits the kinds of people one can interact with because it limits where you can encounter other travellers. Secondly, different vehicles have assumed a semiotic significance which have established them as anchoring points for 'neo-tribes'.

Acting as material anchoring points, different travel vehicles have come to signify what Hardy et al refer to as "travelling neo-tribes" (2013, 48). Neo-tribes, a sociological category used to help describe increasingly fluid and consumption organised groupings of individuals instead of sub-cultures, is introduced to describe the social organisation of RV travellers (Hardy et al 2013). RVers often experience togetherness on the road, deciding to travel together for a time, or share moments of sociality because of the familiarity of other travellers that share their mode of

transportation. The vehicle acts as the grain of sand around which the pearl of the neo-tribe forms, complete with the trappings of 'culture': norms of behaviour, linguistic particularities, and semiotic baggage. We can extend Hardy et al's argument to other vehicle centered neo-tribes encountered along the long stretches of northern highways. Overlanders, vandwellers, motorcycle-trekkers, and cycle-trekkers are all groups of travellers who center their identities around their mode of transportation. Further, we can expand the concept of travelling neo-tribes by suggesting that it represents an experience of tangible communitas. Suggested as expansion on Turner's (1982) three forms of communitas (spontaneous, normative, ideological) by Nikki Cox (2018), tangible communitas is an experience of comradery expressed through mutual experience of a material object. Cox suggests this form to describe the relationship of community that has developed around the Wishing Tree in Los Angeles, but others like Higgins and Hamilton have suggested expanding it to portable material culture through their work on Catholic Pilgrims in France (2020). I therefore suggest that travelling neo-tribes and tangible communitas may be paired notions, the former explaining the sense of identity associated with travel modes, the later explaining how such identities presented the initial impetus for experiences of comradery.

Pairing these conceptualisations of the bonds travellers form during their journeys may also help to explain how the groups I encountered often included members from a wide array of demographic groups. If we recall the example I began the chapter with, our spontaneous laundromat gathering that evening had travellers in their 20s, 30s, and 50s, travellers from Canada, America, Europe, and Australia, and travellers that were decidedly middle-class alongside some who were working class. Regardless of our demographics, we were brought together by both membership into neo-tribes (three travellers were cyclists who had met on the road, three more were road-tripping), as well as around the laundromat as a sheltered space away from the cold. Sharing affinity for rugged, independent travel, our positions in larger demographic structures were temporarily put aside, and we experienced an evening of communitas. I want to note also that this evening only occurred because of the way we all decided to travel. No one in that gathering travelled in a way that provided a warm place to commune, such as a trailer or RV kitchen. Additionally, the laundromat was where we gathered because we each had seen others who travelled as we did using it for similar purposes (or had heard of this by word-of-mouth like the Australian woman who implored me to take notes on the matter).

Over the course of my fieldwork, I encountered all sort of bands of travellers, most often grouped together by neo-tribe. Motorcycle-trekkers, for example, would often arrive in town in small groups that had formed on the road. These groups were most often temporary, disbanding at the intersection of major highways (such as where the Dempster meets the Alaskan near Dawson City) but for the extent of their time together would make camp and travel together, sometimes even exchanging contact information or blogs to keep in touch later. Identifying each other as fellow members of travelling neo-tribes led to tangible experiences of communitas centered around the vehicles that in turn helped travellers build touristic identities for themselves and others. Notably, these different neo-tribes often also were of mixed demographics. I encountered young and old, men and woman, and people of various backgrounds, nationalities, and ethnicities travelling in groups that were organised around the vehicles they used to travel down the highway.

Figure 12: Impromptu gatherings at Happy Valley and a gravel pit on the Dempster Highway.

The two large off-road campers in the second photo are an excellent example of the capacity of neo-tribal identity to make moments of community. These two Unimog-style campers (named for the German utility vehicle whose chassis many of these custom vehicles are built on), have been travelling together since Baja in Mexico. Finding affinity in their campers, they travel separately during the day and locate each other by searching out their conspicuous campers in the evening.

Organising around a feeling of community also has the role of solidifying the narratives of experience held by travellers. As will be discussed in the next chapter, one of the driving forces behind the sort of travel entailed in coming up to Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk is the narrative of adventure, wilderness, and freedom. Moments of communitas help to confirm this experience, as

long as one encounters travellers who appear similarly adventurous. Becoming comrades for a time, and trading experiences of adventure is a moment for reinforcing those narratives by sharing them with others.

On Gazing (or, you drove *that* here?)

The travellers I met in Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk often organised themselves around membership in a perceived mutual community. As we have discussed, this mutuality was often centered on membership in a neo-tribe, anchored upon the vehicle that travellers used to arrive at their destination. Sophie and David, self-proclaimed Vandwellers, emphasized the importance of being members of this community when discussing their online presence:

> S: And we've actually, we connect with other travellers and a lot of people and get inspiration for places to go and about our van, which is really, really awesome. We've been able to, people message us or we message them, and we meet up. Kind of like blind dates with other van-lifers along the way.
>
> Nice, it's a whole culture now?
>
> D: Oh yeah.

A certain material culture arises around these vehicles and their drivers, which leave visible cues for others to recognise. Like the tail feathers on a peacock, motorcycle saddle bags are plastered with destination stickers, overlanding rigs are emblazoned with social media handles, and Sprinter vans proudly display their makes. The importance of visual symbols cannot be overstated when it comes to mutual recognition between travellers. Visual cues are also important as they coincide with a driving force of intra-tourist community formation: the act of gazing.

Gazing is a form of interaction that has occupied a good deal of attention within the cultural study of tourism. Beginning with an influential introduction by Urry in *The Tourist Gaze* (1990), the concept refers to a Foucauldian visual interaction between tourists and their subjects of interest. Through gazing upon their destinations and hosts, tourists manifest power, making and policing the world around them. For Urry, the visual was a voracious aspect of tourism. Places were made for visual consumption by tourists, often entailing the development of spaces to further encourage this. Alongside the shift towards post-modernity in other economic sectors, tourism for Urry was increasingly dominated by the production of the visual. The symbols associated with an attraction

or destination, the aesthetic quality of buildings or monuments, or even the dress of attendants and staff, all became avenues through which tourists' desires could be accommodated. At its most fundamental, the tourist gaze is a force that remakes destinations into places that are more visually recognisable for consumption. When considering Tuktoyaktuk, the beautification project enacted immediately before the opening of the highway is the clearest example of the force of the tourist gaze. In anticipation of the new highway and the visitors it might bring, the hamlet organised an initiative to repaint the town in bright, inviting colours (Scott 2017). Remaking itself in the image of a destination, this initiative by the hamlet is an excellent example of the effect of the tourist gaze as it is internalised by potential hosts.

As the concept has become more influential, it has in turn been expanded. Urry himself continued to address the notion, often through collaborations with other scholars. A series of articles have been published to render the tourist gaze applicable to various theoretical turns in the field. *Gazing and Performing*, for example, addresses the challenge from performativity theory that tourism is an embodied, performed experience rather than a visual one (Larsen and Urry 2011). Not only is the tourist gaze compatible with performance theories of tourism, where the touristic form is a product of touristic behaviours, gazing is the performed behaviour. Revisiting the tourist gaze, Urry argued that visual consumption forms the basis for why tourists engage in performative behaviour, as acting like a tourist means gazing upon destinations in a particular way. As the theory was applied to more cases, the possibility that it extended beyond tourists emerged. A major contribution to the notion comes from Darya Maoz, in her work on host-tourist interaction. Working with backpackers and their hosts, Maoz came to understand the relationship of gazing to be two-way, both parties gazed upon each other (2006).

Understanding the relationship between hosts and travellers as moments of mutual gazing acknowledges the presuppositions each bring to this encounter, and the constant appraisal and policing each group levies upon the other. Building in part on this "mutual gaze", we reach the work of Holloway et al and their "intra-tourist gaze" (2011). Working with seniors travelling by RV in Australia, Holloway et al searched for a way to describe how different groups they encountered related to each other. Taking the tourist gaze and using it to explain interactions between tourists, the authors introduce us to a useful theoretical explanation to a phenomenon I encountered frequently in my fieldwork. Intra-tourist gazing is an action of policing behaviour as

well as establishing membership in traveller communities. In their time with "grey nomads" (the Australian term for seniors travelling long-term by RV) Holloway et al found that experienced travellers often gazed upon others with the express intent of gauging their behaviours. Frequently, this gazing revolved around policing un-acceptable behaviour such as littering, or excess partying. The act of intra-tourist gazing becomes a way to distinguish tourists into groups by observing their behaviours and placing them into categories, such as "schoolies" who are university age tourists on break and are viewed as disruptive by the grey nomads (Holloway et al 2011, 240-241). Through gazing upon other tourists, communities come to be formed based on their adherence to (often unspoken) norms of behaviour and stereotypes.

Through this process of gazing, tourists arriving in Inuvik or Tuktoyaktuk can find others with whom they might wish to socialize. Holloway et al stress the compartmentalising potential of intra-tourist gazing amongst travellers (2011). Working primarily with grey nomads they found that the gaze between tourists often functioned to reify expectations of behaviour. These expectations demarcate cohorts of travellers as being more or less desirable to interact with. Seeing is believing, and the intra-tourist gaze helps to make groups evident through the observation of common or respected practices. These practices often differ between groups of travellers. For example, overlanders that I met often took pride in the independence from utilities that their rigs offered. Staying in gravel pits and free-camping in turn-offs was a behaviour that could be observed as a way to single out other overlanders. Even when staying in campgrounds, the modifications made on their vehicles by overlanders act as a sort of identifier, and topic of conversation. One massive custom rig that stayed in Inuvik for several days in a campground was always busy with other overlanders coming over to chat with the owners about the extensive systems on the vehicle, and how they might duplicate such things. The intra-tourist gaze therefore can be seen as a mechanism through which members of our previously mentioned neo-tribes can identify each other. Further, this gazing is also a mechanism through which particular practices become normalized within these neo-tribes, through policing and differentiation.

Over the course of my fieldwork, the most frequently encountered examples of the intra-tourist gaze related to the stereotyping of rental vehicle drivers. Rental vehicles are easy to spot amidst the crowd of RVs in Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk. These vehicles will usually be emblazoned with a large "RENT ME!" or similar decal, denoting their status. Often, my interlocutors would

comment on the bad behaviours of rental vehicle drivers specifically, indirectly identifying what they would consider to be acceptable behaviour. Frequent comments included the poor, dangerous, or inattentive driving habits of these travellers. “They don’t slow down as they pass” I would hear, or “they don’t pay attention to the road, they’re busy watching the scenery”. Once, while sitting with a large group of travellers at the Happy Valley campground, the topic came up. This group, composed of several cyclists and road-trippers in their own vehicles, gave their own stories regarding run-ins with rental vehicles when a German cyclist spoke up. “They’re dangerous,” she said, “not slowing down and spraying me with rocks”. Continuing, she told the story of how on one occasion during a particularly steep uphill climb in the rain, a rental RV slowed down, drove up right beside her only to roll down the window and take a photo before driving off. All in attendance expressed their shock, what rude behaviour! In moments such as these, travellers affirm their membership in groups by distancing themselves from those who act in ways that are unacceptable. Part of what is being affirmed here is the independence and commitment of experienced travellers. Comparing oneself to renters by highlighting their bad behaviour is a means of cementing one’s own level of experience. Like ‘other’ post-modern tourists, cyclists and road-trippers see these rental vehicles as being driven by stereotypical tourists, and through the policing of gazing (in this case second-hand, as the experience was shared as a story) seek to distinguish their own position as independent and resourceful travellers. It is important to note that I almost never encountered rental vehicle drivers mingling with the more ‘adventurous’ travellers. Their highly visible form of difference (rental RVs) led them to be easily targeted for intra-tourist gazing and excluded from these communities.

Similarly, membership within specific neo-tribes was often negotiated through moments of intra-tourist gazing regarding travel mode. I encountered this often with motorcyclists and overlanders, where travellers would often inspect each other’s vehicles, complimenting or giving suggestions for improvements. One hazy evening, the sun still high in the sky, I sat for the second night with a group of almost a dozen motorcyclists at the tent pads in Happy Valley. I had just sat to speak with Hector about his extensive travels, and we had rejoined the crowd of bikers. This group, a motley crew banded together for just this leg of the trip had returned from Tuktoyaktuk in the late afternoon. Hector explained to me how even though he preferred to travel alone, he had joined this group because he had been told that the road was very difficult. Although the road failed to live up the expected dangers, he wanted to continue with the group, at least until the paved

road began near Dawson City. Also included in this group was a young couple, in their 30s, travelling from Alberta. They had joined the core of more experienced middle-aged American bikers some time after Whitehorse. For the benefit of the inexperienced couple, several members of the group began to discuss their respective bikes, and the sometimes-extensive modifications each had made to the shocks, chains, and other components. The group got up and walked around the area, moving from bike to bike continuing this conversation. Through this ritualistic act, which I would see repeated several times with different groups throughout the summer, membership (and level of commitment) to the neo-tribe of 'motorcycle trekker' was performed and reified within groups. Further, such acts help in establishing tangible communitas between members of a neo-tribe, particularly as in this example where less knowledgeable members are taught by more experienced ones.

As a final, humorous example, I will relate a short story told to me by David and Sophie, two young professionals travelling as vandwellers across North America. After a long day of driving through the open highways that weave their way across the continent, David and Sophie parked their van at a campground and went to take advantage of the hot water showers on offer. I believe it important to note at this point that their van is a large, well equipped Sprinter (an expensive and popular Mercedes chassis favoured by vandwellers). Upon their return to their van, imagine their surprise to encounter a pair of legs sticking out from underneath! As it turns out, they told me laughing, the woman underneath the van was camped nearby, and had a similar van she was in the process of converting into a camper. Seeing their set-up, she was curious about some details regarding the water system, and so decided to get a closer look. David, the more technically inclined of the couple, ended up chatting for some time with the woman, becoming friends for the evening. The young couple and visiting woman, a lifetime traveller, bonded over their shared experience of vandwelling, and exchanged contact information, pledging to use online forums and communities to keep in touch wherever they may find themselves. While this is clearly a very particular case of gazing, the spirit of comradery that occurred for David, Sophie, and their curious visitor was a direct result of intra-tourist gazing between members of their disparate travelling neo-tribe, and the growth of online avenues for communication.

Word Gets Around (and around, and around)

Comradery is found in companionship, and companionship is found in conversation. While the intra-tourist gaze provides a useful theoretical frame for understanding the 'how' of tourists' experiences of communitas, conversation provides both the 'what' and 'why'. As I have already identified travellers journeying to Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk by road as independent in their mobility, there remains room for a discussion of how information circulates between tourists. Conversation occupies an important place in the literature surrounding independent travel modes. A number of tourism scholars have written extensively on the importance of word-of-mouth communication as a vector for authoritative information, both in person and more recently through digital medias. My interlocutors spoke to me frequently about the importance they felt the word of other travellers held for them. Both as an authoritative source of useful travel tips and as a means of discovering new destinations, discussion underpinned by a sense of communitas informs tourists in a way that traditional advertising does not.

As a form of inter-consumer communication, word-of-mouth is considered valuable by independent travellers when it is offered freely by peers (Confente 2014). With regards to tourism, word-of-mouth has become a particularly useful concept for understanding how independent travellers (such as backpackers) share information and build community. In her work exploring the normalisation of backpacker travel, O'Reilly suggests word-of-mouth is one of the deciding factors for choosing to travel this way. Online, through internet forums and social media presence as well as in the brief moments of community experienced while travelling, backpackers share information (2006, 1011-1012). Additionally, O'Reilly mentions that the social capital of some backpackers grants them further authority through word-of-mouth, normalising the community's practices (2006). Backpackers with strong online presences (through blogs or ready participation in online forums for example) can gain prestige within the community by demonstrating their extensive experience. As new travellers seek to plan their own trips, the advice shared by more prestigious, experienced voices is more likely to be influential, normalising the travel mode. The normalising potential of online word-of-mouth spaces is further discussed in the backpacking community by Paris. More than simply sources for information on trip details, Paris (2010) demonstrates that participating in online word-of-mouth spaces helps travellers integrate themselves into these ephemeral travel communities. RV travellers are also deeply engaged in online word-of-mouth communities. In their ethnography of senior RVers Counts & Counts (1996)

described how their interlocutors would use online communities to coordinate meetings, keep in touch, and share advice. Additionally, Holloway et al. (2011) identified online word-of-mouth communities as spaces where grey nomads engaged in the establishment of norms, which then became the subject of the policing force of the intra-tourist gaze.

Online word-of-mouth spaces came up frequently in discussions with my interlocutors. When discussing either how they had heard about Tuktoyaktuk and the new highway as potential destinations, or how their trip had been planned, the travellers I spoke to often referred to their reliance on online spaces where they could find other first-hand accounts. iOverlander, an application for mobile devices and webpage, was mentioned time and time again. Overlaid on a map, iOverlander allows users to create markers designating a certain place, such as a campground, restaurant, garage, or other and then leave a description of said place. What makes this app a popular and important word-of-mouth hub, however, is its functionality which allows other users to leave comments and reviews on each other's place markers. Franz, the Austrian man travelling the world in his overlanding set-up was the first to introduce the app to me. During our interview, he went on to mention that it was one of the ways that he planned out the trip, with the app having helped him to choose Tuktoyaktuk as one of his destinations. Travellers such as Franz appreciate iOverlander because the information found there is uploaded by other travellers. As opposed to a simple guidebook, the application is also a community space, where the opinions and accounts of like-minded travellers can be found.

iOverlander was the online community that was mentioned the most frequently as a source of word-of-mouth information but was far from the only one. Often, the online source that my interlocutors would mention would be related to their mode of travel and the neo-tribe community that surrounded it. For example, cyclists I met often referred to online chatter on forums and blogs about the new highway as an alternative to the established Pan-American Deadhorse to Ushuaia route. A dedicated online community exists where long-distance cyclists of all sorts share their experiences and their passion for this travel mode.

While online word-of-mouth came up frequently, there were many travellers I met whose voyage had been inspired or influenced by what they heard in person. Travellers on more flexible itineraries sometimes mentioned to me that the decision to come to Tuktoyaktuk and Inuvik had been reached on a whim based on word-of-mouth information they received while on the road.

One such example was Matthew, an undergraduate studying computer science, who had spent the early summer tree planting and was road-tripping and hitchhiking when I met him. It was in the camps while tree planting that he originally heard about coming out west on a road trip, something he told me was a popular end of summer activity amongst tree planters. Originally planning on only driving to Tombstone Territorial Park, which is situated near the start of the Dempster, Matthew decided to hitchhike onwards to Tuktoyaktuk after speaking to another traveller. Discussing how his plans had changed over the course of his trip, Matthew said:

> […] But I met some folks along the way, and it sort of worked out, people telling me that I should try and find a ride up to Tombstone Park instead. […] Found a lift, and then that lady sort of convinced, well convinced me. I had it in my mind, but she was sort of egging me on to do the full highway, and that's what I ended up doing.

For Matthew, who had planned his summer to be spur-of-the-moment, the suggestions offered by other travellers were valuable. Relying on the kindness of strangers for some of his travels, he relished in the experience of meeting people while hitch-hiking. Bonding with unexpected people, Matthew embraced the community found on the road.

In a similar spur-of-the-moment decision based on word-of-mouth information, Rob recounted the moment he decided to travel to Tuktoyaktuk. Travelling from the Florida Pan Handle on a prolonged fishing trip, Rob heard about the new highway between Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk only when he had already reached Dawson City. In his own words, Rob told me:

> Yeah, I left in the Pan handle of Florida and just headed to meet an old, another fishing boat captain in Grand Junction Colorado. So, I came up through Texas, New Mexico, Colorado. Found a camper to buy over by Colorado Springs, so I went that way. Went to the National Parks, you know, like Rocky Mountain National Park and then I worked my way up to Yellowstone and Wyoming and stopped at the parks. Did a lot of camping in the National Forests, in the BLM, you know, free camping. So, then I went to Montana and I bought a fishing license. So, then if I buy a fishing license some place then I stay longer because I can fish legally now. So, I spent probably a week on the Madison River, the salmon flies were hatching so I had to stay there and check out all those streams. I said well I got the license I

> might as well go up! Instead of going to Glacier Park I went further west, the Yak River, check that out. Then of course, bump across the border to Canada, the usual Banff and Jasper but I kind of like the out of the way places so I headed up the, to Whitehorse and then to Dawson City. That's where I first knew about Tuk. So, once I saw that I went "gosh! I've got to go!". That was just, there's no doubt, I'm going! If I have to hike or take a canoe. If I knew I could have taken a canoe I wouldn't have driven!

Rob trusted in the experiences recommended by strangers to fulfill his sense of adventure, travelling further and further from home on a whim. When I met Rob in Tuktoyaktuk, he was travelling with Jill, a woman he had met only recently, and he was still relishing the companionship found from trusting in the friendship of strangers.

Figure 13: Rob and Jill at a campground in Tuktoyaktuk.

See You Again (somewhere down the road)

Community is clearly a deeply important aspect underpinning why some people travel. The formation of community groups and the sharing of information amongst them are underpinnings of independent travel. Being surrounded by likeminded people is a recognised factor in the achievement of satisfaction for tourists. Travelling then, is to some degree a chance to make friends. When travelling independently, we have to find ways to identify those who are like minded, who might also be interested in our company. Through the social processes of gazing, word-of-mouth information sharing, and the formation of neo-tribes, travellers form bonds and experience moments of communitas.

When I would ask what the most enjoyable, or valuable part of travelling to Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk had been for the tourists I spoke to, I heard a variety of answers: the natural beauty, the contact with indigenous culture, the overcoming of challenges. These were all reasons that came up frequently in conversation. As conversations would progress, another factor would come up. People would talk about the friends they made along the way. Whether it was another traveller with whom they shared a gravel pull-off on the side of the road, a friendly attendant at a Territorial park, or any other of a myriad connections my interlocutors mentioned, the interpersonal bonds we build are fundamental to the experience of travel. Matthew, the young hitchhiker, perhaps best expressed this when we spoke of how his trip had been up until our meeting. Expressing his surprise at how his trip had taken an unexpected turn, he told me:

> It's been really nice, not at all what I expected. Like I thought I'd come here and go into town then go back sort of thing. Sort of do hikes and only really come to town for food and laundry or whatever, but I've met some really great people. Hitchhiking too, you meet some [people], you just get to know people that you literally never would have met in your whole life. Yeah, so now in Inuvik I'm going to stay the day and it's been nice to see people and connect with them.

Maybe it is the liminal nature of the experience that helps make these bonds seem so meaningful. Maybe it is the loneliness of travelling solo by vehicle, confined to a small space and rapidly passing landscapes that make the human interactions feel so rich. Or maybe, I think, it is simply a very human drive to share a little bit of something we find special with someone else. Regardless,

the friends we make along the way may not be around for terribly long, but they sure seem to make a difference.

Chapter 6: The End of the Road

Here now, where every direction leads home

Are fields of wildflowers

Growing amidst the dust thrown up from the road.

By the time you arrive at the unassuming turn off to venture up the Dempster Highway, you have been driving the scenic Alaska Highway for days. Passing through stunning mountain vistas and following at times the famous Yukon River, you have stopped at the little lodges that still line the highway. Further on lie the popular tourist destinations of the Klondike and Alaska. Why take what looks to be little more than an over-grown access road when you could continue to Dawson City and beyond? This was a question I frequently asked my interlocutors, and more often than not, I was met by surprise, a moment of thought, and then a pithy comment. "Because it's the end of the road!". For many travellers, the journey itself was the reason for their travel, and choosing a destination a secondary concern. Still, I would press, why Tuktoyaktuk? What leads travellers to this particular corner of the world? Usually it was only in longer conversations that more complex reflections and reasonings would emerge. When speaking of the motivation behind their travels, my interlocutors rarely spoke argumentatively. They spoke narratively.

Instead of direct answers, speaking with travellers about their reasons for choosing Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk as destinations often grew into stories. Stories like David and Sophie's, whose vandwelling escape from the maddening bustle of Silicon Valley led them to keep asking "what's further down that road?". Stories like Darren and Jessica's, who were determined to make the last family vacation before the kids got too old a memorable one. In keeping with other works within leisure studies, such as Laina Hall's exploration of the narratives underpinning overlanding in the Australian Outback (2006), I am interested in what stories can tell us about tourists' relationships with the places they visit. Therefore, I am putting forward the argument that the narratives travellers tell are creative spaces where their experiences come together with the expectations they have come to hold. When referring to expectations, what I am commenting on is the presuppositions that travellers have regarding the experiences and encounters they will have, as well as the places they will visit. These expectations are often built through the representations of

a destination available to travellers before they arrive, which may be consumed through popular media, cultural touchstones, or even stories told by other travellers. Furthermore, through storytelling, travellers contribute to the larger cultural narratives of the places they visit, their own experiences shaping the expectations of others. Each person's surprises on the road contain the possibility of altering the understanding of others.

This chapter therefore represents the culmination of the arguments I have put forward so far. In each previous chapter, groundwork has been laid for this discussion of narrativity at the end of the road. By beginning with a discussion of roads and destinations, the necessary framework was laid out for understanding touristic experience as materially grounded in the places to and through which people travel. Furthermore, those two chapters began to suggest that individual experiences are subjective and dependent on expectations that are constructed far from the places where they are realised. Dealing with roads as imaginative objects and destinations as spaces constructed through consumption, I have in a way worked backwards. As we will come to see through the examples I provide herein, many of the concepts I introduced earlier can be related to the role that narratives have in shaping expectations.

Just as the chapters discussing the more material aspects of tourism in Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk began my exploration of the role of narratives in shaping experience, my discussion of community and communication in tourism suggested the importance of other travellers as sources of knowledge. In that chapter, I characterised the inter-tourism relationships as one mediated by communitas and neo-tribalism and then suggested the way in which these relationships acted as conduits for the word-of-mouth sharing of information. This ties into a conversation on narrativity in tourism by helping to explain how stories come to be shared between travellers. Through the moments of togetherness on the road and in online community spaces, individual experiences are compared to others, and narrative trends emerge, helping to form the expectations of others who participate in these spaces.

If I am to argue that travellers are using narratives to make sense of their experiences and reconcile them with their expectations, then it bears specifying what theoretical framing underpins such a statement. Narrativity, where stories are manifestations of culture organised into meaningful, transmittable entities, is the framework I would like to employ here. In such a model, a narrative about a thing is meaningful in that it represents that thing, all while shaping the reality

of the story's subject through the capacity to mediate how it is experienced. This may seem convoluted, but what it essentially means is that stories both represent their subjects, as well as indirectly shape the perceptions of their subjects by creating expectations about them. Further, stories can be grouped into categories defined by tropes, or repetitious forms which follow the expected norms of the category. These categories allow for a generalisation of the myriad narratives being told about a specific thing or place. In the case of travel along the Inuvik-Tuktoyaktuk Highway, the stories told very often fall into a narrative category that has had major cultural significance in North American perceptions of travel, that of the Wilderness. Through this category I will explore specific stories and how they represent the interactive engagement between experience and expectation for tourists in the region.

Before diving into examples drawn from ethnographic fieldwork however, I would like to explore certain bodies of literature to better define and historicize the concepts necessary for this argument. To begin, I will further define narrativity by drawing on work from several academic fields to demonstrate the importance of such a theoretical frame. Having established this, I will turn next to contextualising stories as they relate to leisure travel and tourism. Travel writings are a longstanding body of literature and continue to shape the understandings that many hold of far-off places and 'exotic' destinations. A clear genealogical link can be made between this kind of writing and anthropology, something I intend to take advantage of in this chapter. By joining the literature on tourism/travel writing with anthropological work on storytelling and its capacity to make meaning, I hope to contribute to both bodies of work with my own ethnographic examples.

Stories Told Around Campfires (and beside coin-op dryers)

There is a gentle crackling of campfire that haunts the background of many of the audio recordings I made during my time in these localities. In other recordings, you can hear the more assertive 'thunk-thunk' and rumble of a coin-op dryer tumbling a heavy motorcycle jacket. These background noises shape the ambience behind a collection of stories I heard that summer: stories of adventure and freedom, stories of liberation from the mundane, and stories of the little moments people will carry fondly with them in their memories. I did not set out with the intention of gathering these stories. Instead, it seemed that anytime I would sit quietly somewhere with a fellow traveller, the conversation would invariably turn to a narrative form. Through these stories my

interlocutors shared a little bit of themselves with me and, as I came to realise, found ways to make sense of their experiences and expectations.

Rickly-Boyd, in *The Tourist Narrative* (2010) presents a theoretical framework for engaging with stories of travel that helped inspire the analysis that I present herein. The author presents her work with first-person tourist narratives as a methodological solution to understanding the processes of place-making for tourist destinations. Citing the longstanding interdisciplinary approach characterizing tourism studies, Rickly-Boyd works to integrate phenomenological and narrative approaches to meaning formation into her case study of tourists visiting the Spring Mill Pioneer Village (2010). This approach is important for my work because it suggests that there is an interaction between what Rickly-Boyd refers to as the "meta-narratives" of tourism, and personal narratives of experience. In fact, in a similar vein to what I argue in this chapter, Rickly-Boyd takes the personal narratives of individual tourists to be moments of place-making for her field site, where the larger "meta-narratives" are (re)made on an individual basis as tourists talk about their experiences there (2010). Before delving into my own ethnographic examples then, I want to address these "meta-narratives" by integrating them into anthropological and tourism literature, as well as discuss what precisely 'stories' are.

What then is a story? To tell a story, argues Le Guin (1980), is to make ourselves distinct actors within our experiences. Approaching the question from the perspective of literature, Le Guin demonstrates in *A Dark and Stormy Night* how stories are objects that render the teller real and meaningful for themselves and others. In this short essay, the author constantly makes and remakes her own self as the storyteller by weaving her narration through meaningful cultural touch-stones, an act which causes the reader to continuously reform an understanding of the author through the associations she marks out with recognisable forms (Le Guin 1980). An important take away from Le Guin's text is the self-referential, semiotic nature of stories. Making a similar claim, albeit from a philosophical approach Jerome Bruner has written extensively on the cognitive function of narratives and storytelling. Searching for a convincing explanation to the question of how human cognition organises experience, Bruner turns to narratives. "We organise our experience and our memory of human happenings mainly in the form of narratives" he states (Bruner 1991, 4). Bruner argues that we process our empirical world by rendering it into a series of stories and narratives which construct meaningful, comprehensible versions of events (Bruner

1991; 2004). Stories then offer constructions of events that we make meaningful through their telling and sharing.

Stories are not benign, inherently truthful entities, however. Obviously, stories can be fictions, not every story is an act of bearing witness (Le Guin 1980). Narratives, in the form of myths or fictions can exist beyond the limits of the measurably empirical or experiential. Regardless, narratives carry with them the interpretive act of experiencing the world. The relationship is like an ouroboros, a "continuing interpretation and re-interpretation of our experience" (Bruner 2004, 692). Through being told stories we form conceptions and expectations of things we have never (and possibly will never) experience firsthand. There is a selectiveness to the creation of narratives that must be acknowledged as well. As Cronon (1992) demonstrates in his analysis of narratives told of the Dust Bowl, it is possible to create completely different understandings of events by telling stories that include different details. By deciding which aspects to include in a story, or which symbols to invoke, the narrator has the capacity to shape the understanding of those who hear that story. This is a fundamental point to acknowledge, as it explains how individuals can have radically different understandings of the same subjects due to the stories they hear, as well as suggesting that conceptions of subjects can shift as the narratives told of them are reframed.

Stories seem to operate at an essential level of human experience, colouring and potentially serving as our understanding of the world. I want to suggest then, following the theorisation laid out by Kathleen Stewart in *A Space on the Side of the Road* (1996) that narratives might actually be one and the same as what we anthropologists refer to as 'culture'. In her ethnographic account of Appalachia, Stewart finds that it is through the stories her interlocutors tell of people, places, things, and events that these subjects become operational at a shared level of understanding. By telling stories, Stewart's interlocutors create transmittable, meaningful entities. It is for this reason that in her introduction, we are invited to conceive of culture "not as a finished text to be read or as a transparent 'object' that can be abstracted into a fixed representation but as a texted interpretive space in itself" (Stewart 1996, 26). 'Culture' then, in such a model, is the collection of stories that are shared and told by recognisable groups, where the understanding of subjects within the group is the product of the stories told of them. Such a theorisation of culture allows us

to make sense of the claim that my interlocutors are actively contributing to the cultural narrative of road travel through the stories they tell of the intersection of their experiences and expectations.

The literature on tourism has a strong relationship with narratives. Namely, leisure studies have often turned to a narrative driven framework to conceptualise why tourists engage with certain places in particular ways. Even if we limit ourselves to literature on contemporary tourism, as early as Cohen's seminal *Towards a Sociology of International Tourism*, where the author classifies modern tourists in part through their conformity with certain narratives of experience (1972), works in this field have clearly often relied on narrative. To give some examples more closely related to my own work, I turn to Laina Hall and Peter Bishop's separate accounts of the importance of narrative in shaping experience for Australian overlanders. While the Australian Outback may seem far removed from the Canadian Arctic, the two have been similarly conceptualised due to coinciding colonial histories (Crane 2016). Both Hall and Bishop separately argue that overlanders engage with the Australian Outback as a space allowing rugged, individual adventure and freedom because of the narratives told of this activity in popular Australian culture (Hall 2006; Bishop 1995). In her work, Hall explores narratives of adventure historically, demonstrating a thematic continuity that continues to encourage new generations of travellers to experience the Outback in this way. Bishop, working on the same subject, explores instead how narratives frame overlanding vehicles as belonging in the Outback. Stories of the dangers of the Outback and the scientific and military expeditions into it influence overlanders to (re)produce certain experiences by acquiring vehicles that resemble those featured in those stories. Clearly, the literature on tourism understands narratives to be one of the major influences in the creation of expectations that travellers hold of where they are going and what they will do once they arrive.

My interlocutors felt the importance of stories as they related to their own travels. Stories, I was frequently told, were important for remembering, being remembered, and sharing their travels with others. I met travelers during my time in Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk who were avid bloggers and journal writers, who maintained detailed websites and sent out lovely email blasts (which I still receive occasionally) telling of their adventures, and even a handful who wrote books about their adventures. Through the sharing of their stories directly and publicly with other travellers, these storytellers actively participated in shaping the 'culture' of travel to Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk.

During one of my evenings with Roger, Joyce, and their two golden retrievers, as we sat around their campfire and burned wormwood to chase away the hungry mosquitos, Joyce ducked into their camper and returned with a large DSLR camera. Asking me to stand, she snapped my photo and explained it was for her book, promising that I would feature in the one she wrote about this trip. In an interview, Joyce would explain to me that she writes a book about each trip she and Roger take together. Explaining, Joyce told me:

> No, we don't do a blog, we don't do a newsletter, but I write books. So, when we're all done with a trip, I take notes every day, and I do some research, then I put together a book. For my friends and my family and people who are interested. […] It comes in both a print version and an online version. For people who are interested I am more than happy to email it to them. Particularly in Canada, it is so expensive to have it mailed. The price of the postage to get it mailed is almost as much as the printed book.

To which sometime later in our conversation, Roger and Joyce added:

> R: She is just a wonderful writer and I'm so proud that she's done that for not only my pleasure but our family's pleasure. To remember us by if they care to.
>
> Its a pleasant way to remember your travels too.
>
> J: Yeah! Because you forget. Really, if you do not keep a daily journal, record, you completely forget. You look at photographs and say, Oh! Well that was… I don't know where?
>
> R: Oh, that was in so-and-so in I-don't-know-where, but when it's down in black and white and pictures, it's permanent.

These books are ways for the couple to make their experiences permanent and to share them with the people they care about, including the friends they make along the way. As Joyce writes of travels with Roger, she engages with her memories of those times, making them into stories that can be shared with others. This sharing is one way which personal stories contribute to the larger narratives that make up cultural conceptions of places and experience. Stories are deeply important for how travellers make sense of their experiences and remember their time on the road. As an example, on their way to Inuvik and later Tuktoyaktuk, Roger and Joyce passed through Keno

City, Yukon, a community they had visited some years earlier. Roger explained to me how they went looking for people they had met previously:

> After we talked to him for some time, he remembered us and brought us through the place. That's one of the benefits about travel, it's one of the exciting things about travel. I actually told Joyce: "now just think about this, we're going into this town that we went to 7 years ago, didn't know anybody. Now, we're going in there and know at least 2 people by name and they're in our book". Joyce's book and we brought the book and gave them a copy. And they were amazed, absolutely amazed that we would think of them and write about them in her book and then think enough about them to come and share that book with their community.

Parks and Paddlers (and what to wear when confronted by a bear)

"This isn't any ordinary road trip. Driving up to the edge of the continent is a wilderness adventure second to none" promises the Spectacular Northwest Territories webpage, referring to the drive down the Dempster and Inuvik-Tuktoyaktuk Highways (Northwest Territories Tourism, 2019). This promise is far from an exaggeration. The Dempster Highway weaves through three distinct and rugged mountain ranges only to then treat travellers to a stunning view of the seemingly endless Mackenzie River Delta, and the tundra beyond. Before even embarking on their travels, most tourists have probably already had some sort of encounter with this majesty of nature. Maybe they saw photos, after all the pamphlets and websites for tourism in the region are resplendent with natural vistas and evocative descriptions of rugged landscapes. Maybe they read someone's travel blog, where they were encouraged to come experience the pristine wilderness for themselves. Whatever the method, tourists travelling to Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk have likely already been in contact with narratives that fit into the category of The Wilderness, and have expectations built upon these stories and representations.

In the accounts my interlocutors shared with me, it was clear that their stories often incorporated tropes built on a culturally constructed Wilderness. Their narratives of travel were centered around the rugged beauty of the landscape, being awestruck by this beauty, and the rarity of such environments. These narratives contained within them a reification of the Wilderness as a distinct, localised place. Localisation is important for Wilderness narratives because of the importance of recognisable settings, which in turn encourage travellers to engage with spaces in

familiar ways. A babbling river passing under a small bridge on the Dempster for example, is a recognisable natural feature, where travellers can enact their own Wilderness narratives of fishing in a mountain brook. This was a localised engagement shared with me by many interlocutors who made evident their appreciation of the wilds, such as Ron, who sat with me after our interview and marked rivers and streams for fishing on a map. Descriptions of the wild beauty travellers encountered were centered on commonly recurring geographies: the rolling tundra, the rugged mountain chains, or the expansive river delta. Each of these spaces contained features through which travellers could recognise the Wilderness. What my interlocutors were expecting to encounter – and found in definable places – was a space that resembled the settings of familiar stories of wild adventure.

Figure 14: Tourism brochures on display at the Wester Arctic Visitor Center

Nature is represented in numerous ways across media, art, and literature. One of the most common narrative categories, particularly for descriptions found relating to tourism, is that of the Wilderness. The notion carries significant cultural force, pressing travellers, through the power of narrative framing, to value certain natural spaces and not others. The natural spaces that are valued are those that conform to the particularities of the Wilderness, which William Cronon (1996) describes in *The Trouble with Wilderness*. The Wilderness, according to Cronon, is a view of nature relatively recent in its cultural conception, marked by the (conceived) absence of any human presence and forms of landscape that leave the protagonist awestruck by their rugged beauty (1996, 7-8). This place-based conception of 'empty' nature being desirable as an experience can be traced to the conceptual change embodied by romanticist writings by the likes of John Muir. An incredibly influential figure for the contemporary conception of nature, John Muir was an

outspoken naturalist whose vivid writings about his experiences trekking the Sierra Nevada helped popularise the outdoors as a valuable, transcendental place (National Parks Service, 2018). Muir's travel writings proved popular for an American public faced with rapid industrialisation, and his descriptions of nature centered on particular places he found powerful in their beauty and impact. Towering sequoia trees, steep granite-walled valleys, and cascading waterfalls; these natural features became objects of importance in the American conscious.

Cronon argues that the portrayal of nature that emerged in the late 19th century marked a dramatic shift in the perception of wilderness, where rather than a wasteland meant only for human consumption, a beauty bordering the divine came to be viewed as existing in the 'un-tamed' corners of the world. This shift would lead to important place-based changes in public and private engagements with the natural world. The conservationism popularised by Muir and his contemporaries led to the foundation of the American National Parks System, a model which became the international standard for the preservation of natural spaces (Tsing 2011, 97). Historicizing the globalised conception of natural space she encountered in Indonesia, Tsing traces naturalist and preservationist initiatives back to their roots in the American National Parks system, and the wealthy and influential supporters who helped make it a near universal. Often, conservationists turn to this model because of the powerful imagery of Wilderness narratives. There is a sort of looping (re)creation of meaning at play here, where stories are told of wild places, which in turn generate new stories of Wilderness. This is a position argued by Reich (2001) in his discussion of Shenandoah National Park in the United States. Detailing the history of this park, where indigenous people and settlers who lived on the land were evicted in order to create a 'return' to a natural space, Reich argues that the park is in fact the product of Wilderness narratives, a simulacrum of nature made in the image of an imagined ideal that never was. Wilderness narratives have the power then to reshape landscape, as well as encourage certain models of interaction. In fact, as both Cronon and Tsing note, one of the only recognisable ways left to interact with nature under this new conceptualisation is through leisure practices.

This history helps to explain how the narrative category of the Wilderness came to have its recognisable tropes, settings, and characters. The tropes common in Wilderness narratives are familiar ones: self-realisation, transcendental encounters, and personal liberation (in particular, freedom from the purposelessness of civilization). John Muir's own work is of course emblematic

of these tropes, his writings on trekking across North America embodying all three of these major tropes. Describing Yosemite Valley, the archetypical park, Muir writes: “No pain here, no dull empty hours, no fear of the past, no fear of the future. These blessed mountains are so compactly filled with God's beauty, no petty personal hope or experience has room to be.” (Cronon 1996, 12). Helping set the tone for those to come, the Wilderness for Muir is a place of holiness and self actualisation. These tropes have continued into the contemporary. In the words of one of my interlocutors:

> I mean the beauty of it is incredible. You get cultural experiences in Paris or somewhere else, but you can certainly get spiritual, its almost like going to church seeing some of these mountains and valleys up here. It’s really quite impressive.

The Wilderness is a central concept in Canadian art and media, underpinning conceptions of natural spaces across the continent as well as being a major thematic category for symbols of national identity[9]. Turning to major media and artistic examples, it is evident that Canada sees itself as a space for wilderness stories. In Canadian visual art, the Group of Seven is likely the clearest example of the re-creation of Wilderness narratives as a project of national identity. These influential artists worked within a project aiming to “develop an independent aesthetic – homegrown, northern, and free of foreign influence” (O’Brian and White 2017, 3). In privileging depictions of specific forms of nature, namely those of spectacular beauty and emptiness, these artists helped centralise the Wilderness as perhaps the most familiar Canadian national narrative category. Canadian literature is also at times dominated by this narrative category. While Canadian writing seems to revolve around the “imminence of the natural world”, it is distinct from the American conception due to a more antagonistic relationship with nature (Frye 1970). As summarised by Margarette Atwood, classic Canadian literature is centered around a wild nature that obliges a constant vigilance, where survival is always a serious concern (Henderson 1992). Further, for Canadians, the North occupies a similar conceptual space as the West does in much of American media and literature, being recognised as a sort of bastion of the Wilderness. This conceptualisation came up with Canadian interlocutors such as Mark and Steve, two recently retired men travelling by rented RV. Sitting in the backroom of the Roost, sipping beers and

[9] The concept of a universal Canadian national identity is of course a question of considerable contention, for the usual regional variations, but also due to the capacity of such a discourse to erase violent colonial histories. This is in fact a key part of the power of Wilderness narratives, they erase indigenous history by re-imagining land as empty.

nibbling fries, the two men frequently mentioned the importance they felt in travelling to the North in relationship to their self-identification as Canadian men.[10] Asked about their experience so far the two men thought briefly and described their trip up the Dempster:

> M: We've been amazed at the vastness and just the beauty of the area. You know as Canadians, this Canadian anyways, you don't appreciate the size of the country until you get up in the North where you can see the expanse. Living in Vancouver you know you don't, it's an urban setting, like any other city. Once you start getting up into this area you realise just how big this country is.
>
> S: Yeah it's exceeded my expectations. Kind of the physical impression it makes on you, you know, its just the size and expanse of it.
>
> Are there any highlights that really stand out so far?
>
> S: Lots of them. With just the Yukon, we were saying earlier, past Tombstone Park is it Wright Pass? We came through there, it was kind of white-knuckle, it was foggy with lightning flashing and hail falling. That was pretty neat, makes for quite a story. The mountain ranges themselves all around you, it's something that as a Canadian I'm really happy I've done it.
>
> M: Yeah, just you know, mountain ranges coming through the Canadian Rockies was a highlight for me. I've seen the Canadian Rockies south near Jasper and Banff etc., but I'd never seen the northern ones. That was impressive. Coming over a ridge and seeing just vast valley as far as you can see with wildflowers, white, its spellbinding. It really is. You just don't appreciate that until you come up and see it.

Near the end of our interview, I asked the two brothers-in-law how they would sell this trip to others when they got back home. Mark chimed in right away, returning the discussion to themes of wilderness and national identity:

[10] There is an important conversation to be had on the erasure of women from Wilderness narratives. I hope to address this in future works, as I have had the fortune to speak with solo travellers (men and women) of similar demographics about their experiences and encountered different engagements that appear to follow gendering.

> I think that one argument is that so many of my contemporaries spend a lot of money and time travelling around the world seeing places and they don't spend enough time and money seeing their own country. And to be a Canadian you should investigate your own country and learn it and experience it and forget some of the other countries that people all are going to because its somewhat cliché of a thing to do, I think people as Canadians should see their own country. They should see Canada. The North is Canada and they should see some of it.

Figure 15: The dramatic landscape of Tombstone Territorial Park

Not all my interlocutors were Canadians or Americans of course. The Wilderness holds an appeal for many, regardless of nationality. Often, the media and art that brought Wilderness narratives to people were related to a particular travel activity. Cyclists Jason, Jean, and Naomi explained that their trip had been in part inspired by a documentary film produced by an extreme adventure cyclist Ben Page, who had travelled to Tuktoyaktuk by the winter ice-road. This

documentary was also mentioned as a source of inspiration by Will and Leah, two experienced long-distance cyclists from Ontario. Both groups of cyclists stressed to me how the case documented in the film was extreme, and that their own travels were markedly less so, but they still felt inspired to find their own version of such an adventure along the Inuvik-Tuktoyaktuk Highway. Similarly, Hector and other motorcyclists mentioned the influence that the TV series *The Long Way Around* (which aired from 2004 to 2005) held for them. The series, depicting adventures by motorcycle across the world inspired them to seek out their own wild places by motorbike. One of the clearest legacies of this series was the uniformity of the motorbike models I encountered, almost all being the same BMW adventure bike that was driven in the show. My interlocutors often mentioned their bikes as enabling their own travels, allowing them to recreate the spirit of rugged freedom and adventure they had seen in the TV series.

Setting is key for Wilderness narratives, after all the adventurous protagonist needs an appropriate stage. Here is where we return briefly to discussing the National Parks system and its influence on creating a recognisable, place-based conceptualisation of nature. We should also keep in mind my earlier discussion of destinations, and the efforts involved in making places into desirable locations. Canada, as the second country to put into place a National Parks system (almost immediately after the United States) has its own history of localised Wilderness. As was the case in the American context, parks in Canada have, since their inception, been entangled with tourism and leisure. Banff, perhaps Canada's most iconic tourist destination was also its first national park. Taking advantage of an emerging passion for leisure in natural space amongst the moneyed bourgeois (Cronon 1996), the park was developed with the express intention of serving as a prestigious tourist destination (Henderson 1992). Tourism in Canada has therefore long had national parks, and in turn the Wilderness category of narrative, to thank for bringing in eager travellers. This is a motivation that manifested itself amongst many of my interlocutors. Either mentioning parks as destinations or as spaces to practice Wilderness leisure activities, my interlocutors often ventured to the region because of their understanding of it as a Wilderness paradise. During our interview for example, David and Sophie mentioned how the next leg of their journey would take them to Alaska and how one of the only stops they had planned was to return to Kluane National Park. Matthew, as I have mentioned before, explained to me that what brought him to the region was the hiking trails of Tombstone and other parks.

Wilderness narratives take place in distinct, recognisable settings capable of generating further plays on these narratives through actual experiences within these places. These settings are promoted heavily by tourism material for the region, forming some of the first expectations that travellers will hold. Interlocutors such as Mattias, a young Norwegian man deeply valued the wild spaces they encountered, describing them as highlights of their travels so far. In Mattias' own words:

> Great! I don't think we were really prepared for how beautiful the nature is. 'Cause there are some spots where you have no words. It's just breath taking. Like Haines* and that kind of stuff, and up the Dempster too. It's incredible just the view. I don't think we were really emotionally prepared for how beautiful it is.
>
> **Referring to Haines Junction, a village in the Yukon acting as the intersection between the Alaska and Haines Highways.*

Note that Mattias expresses his admiration in emotional tones reminiscent of the reverence common in Wilderness narratives. This language was present for other interlocutors as well, such as Rob:

> I think the Dempster Highway is a highlight of my trip, just the different, when you hit the tundra, landscapes that I didn't have. You see a lot of, from Colorado to Jasper you know you see a lot of Rocky Mountain and snow-capped peaks and stuff. But to come up, and I was lucky enough to see the caribou. They went for miles; you just couldn't count them. To me that's the highlight of my whole thing, I just stopped and couldn't believe it.

These descriptions highlight an engagement with nature that exemplifies the Wilderness category, stories of encountering beauty beyond compare and being awestruck by its magnificence. As Rob's example highlights perhaps best, the specific local is fundamental. While appreciative of the mountains, they were not novel, in fact, Rob associates the mountains with towns (Jasper, Alberta) and states (Colorado), not with the wilds. It is the tundra that is wild for Rob, and the tundra where he was awestruck with appreciation.

Clearly, Wilderness narratives permeate both the experiences and expectations travellers have when travelling to Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk by road. To help demonstrate how narratives are

also means for travellers to reflect on and engage with their experiences and prior expectations, I want to relay a particular moment from my fieldwork where this occurred in a group that formed organically one evening. Recalling that travellers may find comradery in a sense of shared community, which in turn is often developed through perceived identification with a certain neo-tribe, I bring forward this particular example as the group that formed was based around mutual passion for canoe-trekking.

August 7th, 2019 was an eventful day during my field stay for two totally unrelated reasons. Firstly, and in no way related to the events to follow, it was the day that I read in the news that the bodies of the young men suspected of murdering travellers in Northern B.C. had been found, and the manhunt that had frazzled the nerves of many tourists I met had ended. Secondly, it was the first day of that summer that I met paddlers who had arrived in Inuvik by the Mackenzie River. I had been looking forward to this meeting since the day I returned to Inuvik that summer, since after all it was through such an expedition that I had my first introduction to this locality the year before. I was eager to hear of similar experiences.

In a twist of luck, the same Arctic gale that chased me from the shores of Tuktoyaktuk had grounded Sue, Bea, Chuck, and Shadow the dog, forcing them to take refuge as I had in the sheltered camping of Happy Valley. I had met Chuck and Shadow (who was to become something of a local celebrity in the coming weeks due to his friendly countenance and wolf-like appearance) in the mid-afternoon, after my geographer friends had dropped me and their beluga whale samples (a favour for the Department of Oceans and Fisheries) off in town. I met Sue and Bea, as well as Matthew the hitchhiker, later in the day when I saw the two retirement aged women unloading their barrels from the back of a friendly local's pick-up truck. After I introduced myself as a researcher and former canoe trekker, the two women eagerly invited me, as well as Chuck and Matthew, to join them for after dinner drinks, to trade stories of adventure. So, it was then that a couple of hours later, under a dull grey sky a round of introductions was made, and the sun-bleached picnic table burbled with chatter and the crack-hiss of beer cans being passed around.

In good company, we began trading anecdotes and stories. While stories were told by all the participants in that evening's conversation that evoked the Wilderness genre, I'd like to focus on those told by Chuck, simply because he had organised his travels that summer around the possibilities opened up by the new highway. A carpenter by trade, Chuck is a soft-spoken man

with a woodsman-y appearance who had just entered his fifties when we met. He told us how he decided on paddling the Mackenzie as a sort of gift to himself, a fifty-day trip for his fiftieth birthday. Weeks later, when we sat down for an interview, Chuck would tell me the reasoning for his trip in simple terms:

> […] that was kind of the gist of it, put together a long trip where you get to experience some wilderness and some solitude and it seems on this continent this is about the last trip that can be had like that.

As an experienced outdoorsman, Chuck valued Tuktoyaktuk as a destination for his canoe trip because of the natural setting he would travel through on the way, as well as the logistical benefit of being able to drive back with all his own gear. His expectations of the trip were built around his conceptualisation of the areas he would pass through as Wilderness spaces. The stories he told that night and other times we spoke were in part moments of weaving together his expectation of wilderness with the experiences he came to have, experiences like his bear story, which I heard several times in different contexts.

Somewhere along the riverbanks, Chuck told us, he was woken in the middle of the night by the sounds of scuffling outside his tent. Normally not one to be troubled by racoons or other scavengers, he was ready to go back to sleep when the scuffling turned to huffing and low growls. Having gotten the attention of Shadow, Chuck figured the night's visitor ought to be chased off, and so grabbing a can of bear-mace and a rifle, he came out of the tent. It was at this moment, Chuck told the table with a wry grin, that he realised he had armed himself with everything except a pair of pants, and so he stood face-to-face with an equally naked but somewhat harrier grizzly bear. The two faced off, and through the application of a stern poker face by Chuck, the bear ambled off back into the bush. Later, during our interview, Chuck brought up this encounter as one of the highlights of his trip:

> C: And I suppose that's another really spectacular highlight. I saw every kind of creature, and you know from paddling in the river, I paddled within 20ft of a lynx because they just don't understand what you are in the river. I paddled exceptionally close to a caribou because it has no fear of something that's in the water floating and it was, you know, the bear encounters were exceptional. But without risk there is no reward, so I thought that even the bear experiences were very nice.

Yeah you go to have them, right?

C: I got to have them, get charged.

Get your blood pumping.

C: Charged by a black bear, had a grizzly stand up on both feet and get grumpy with me. It was not ideal, but it was a great experience all the same.

Telling stories like this is a way for travellers to situate their experiences in relationship to their expectations. This particular story fits into the larger genre of wilderness narratives that held value for Chuck. Being faced with a bear, a sort of avatar of the wilds, Chuck experienced for himself a version of rugged individual freedom, coupled with fierce natural danger that is emblematic of this genre. By telling this story Chuck is engaging with two levels of narrative. On a personal level, by telling his story he becomes a protagonist in the kind of chronicle he expected would occur during his travels, reifying his expectations. By sharing this story with us, Chuck is also contributing to the larger cultural compendium of Wilderness narratives, shaping it with an account of his personal experiences.

Of course, not every story is an example of the successful matching of expectation and experience. Often, stories are spaces where travellers can creatively and reflexively return to what happened. Another of the stories Chuck shared with us that evening is more indicative of this use of narrative. Like many others, Chuck understood where he was going to be wild, pristine. What he actually encountered was more complicated, however. When he arrived in Inuvik, just ahead of the storm, Chuck told us how he was fortunate enough to have befriended a local indigenous man who took him out to his fish-camp. There, Chuck was treated to traditional fishing and cooking techniques, something he was incredibly grateful to have experienced, but that also left him having to find a means to find balance between the way he watched locals interact with nature and his own values.[11] As he brought it up again in our later interview, this was clearly an important concern for Chuck. Recalling the same fish-camp event during a conversation about experiences he had hoped to have, Chuck mentioned:

[11] The cultural narratives told of indigenous peoples in North America came up often with my interlocutors, and have been critically discussed by indigenous voices. Excellent pieces of writing on the subject include Vine Deloria's *Custer Died for Your Sins* (1988) and Thomas King's *The Inconvenient Indian* (2012).

> I think that to have caribou and muskox, and the traditional foods that they would have eaten here prior to the intrusion of all of the, you know all that, would have been a nice experience. But I also understand that if the locals just, they're hunting and fishing and living off the land is their way of life, and if they do that to the extent that it would take to feed all the tourists it would have an extremely negative impact on the wildlife. And although it is their way of life, I'm not into just killing animals just to you know, do it. At the fish camp that I stayed at for a day, all the gut pile and everything, they just toss aside. They're not being bear aware at all because, when I asked him about that, he goes "yeah, then I shoot the bear". And then he uses that bear for his purposes but that, I guess it's not for me to judge one way or another, but I guess it's hard for someone who lives in the States that you have to kill things to live. Hope for a different path but it is what it is.

Telling his story to others was a way for Chuck to think through the experience he had in relationship to his own prior expectations, which drew on wilderness narratives that emphasize a reverential attitude towards nature in its supposed pristine state. Encountering someone living in a space he understood to be wild who interacted with nature differently, Chuck uses the telling of this event as a means to think through his experience as it intersected with his expectations. Clearly, Chuck's expectations did not adequately prepare him for this situation, and he was surprised. The story he ends up telling about the occasion is redolent with the surprise he feels, but also with a certain reflexivity. Instead of condemning the man, Chuck produces an account that brings into question his own assumptions, stating: "I guess it's not fair for me to judge one way or another". In telling us these stories, Chuck was also shaping our own expectations as well, altering the content of the larger cultural narrative.

That evening, the narrative category of the Wilderness was reproduced but also altered. While some important tropes were reified, others were questioned. Stories are full of imperfections; they are not exact reproductions of the empirical worlds they describe. Whether it is through the failings of human cognition (memory is often far from accurate and stories often change with each retelling), through moments of reflexivity, creativity, or even simple falsehoods, narratives are places for dynamic and constant shifting of meaning. When I argue that the telling of stories is a time when experiences and expectations come together, I have no intention of

implying that act to be a determinist eclipsing of one by the other. Instead, that moment is one that can produce a wide spectrum of possibilities. As the examples I have given demonstrate, there is a great deal of flexibility in how travellers integrate their experiences through narratives. Often the stories told matched with some of the expectations previously held by the narrator, but that does not occlude space for genuine surprise or an alteration in the telling of events. A narrative framework allows us as researchers to take seriously the influence travellers have on each other by considering each individual to be an active voice in the stories told of places, peoples, and things.

Chapter 7: Every End is a Beginning, or; The Way Back

All your bait is gone, fly-paper town

They've left with it, the drillers, the millers.

Gone are the surveyors and scribblers,

And all the other hard eyed men

Who always knew better.

It is not every day that you reach the end of the road. You stand there on the grey rocky coastline looking out over the choppy water. Behind you is a sign that reads "Arctic Ocean" and the motor of your campervan chugging along in idle. The wind is biting, it is colder than you thought. You have gotten your photo, dipped your toes in the sea and tried the Muktuk. It is time to go home, time to turn around and go back the way you came.

In the last few cold days of my time in Inuvik I was surprised by how many travellers still arrived each evening. I had to some extent expected to be one of the last 'tourists' of the season to leave. Checking in with friends who remained in the community after I left, it seemed that travellers continued to come and go right up until the ferry crossings on the Dempster Highway closed sometime in late October. I tried to imagine still being out in a campervan in the deep snow brought by the start of winter, in the arctic cold that was settling in. While deeply curious as to the conversations I might have had with such rugged travellers, I was glad to be back in Montreal. We all have to come home eventually.

I suppose this brings us to something resembling a conclusion. Throughout this thesis I have attempted to provide an ethnographic account of tourism on the new Inuvik-Tuktoyaktuk Highway. Through my own experiences and those of my interlocutors, I hope to have provided some semblance of what it is to travel to new and (these terms I use with the deepest of ironies) seemingly remote parts of the world. There are a wide array of stories that have been woven into the North American cultural imaginary about the power of roads and the journeys we take down them. Built upon legacies of a romanticised 'frontier' at the edge of the 'wilderness', our stories of travel are those of adventure. As we live in a world where mobility is, for a great many, still

defined by the automobile, our experiences of travel are often entangled with the car. Those who made the journey to Tuktoyaktuk along the new highway did so enacting their own stories of freedom, of adventure, of the conquest of nature. In Chapter 3, I discussed how roads are productive objects to think around. In Chapter 4, I engaged similarly with the concept of a destination. Next, in Chapter 5, I considered the importance of moments of communitas for travellers and how these moments may be avenues for the sharing of knowledge and meaning. Finally, in Chapter 6, I reached something resembling a final statement, that narratives are key drivers of leisure travel, and that stories are a cultural force which travellers engage with by creatively exploring the intersection between experiences and expectations.

I hope to have contributed to both anthropology and the field of tourism studies with this thesis. Beyond the addition of a pertinent ethnographic example, I believe the contribution made by this thesis is in the effort made to explore the boundary between personal and cultural narratives of tourism experience. This intersection is deeply important because it represents one of the spaces where 'culture' is mediated by people as they tell stories, and in which 'culture' is integrated into a person's conception of self. I believe that there is great value in work that takes on narrative as a central theoretical framework. Narratives provide a satisfying explanation for the dualistic relationship between individuals and 'culture', as through stories persons are both influenced by and influencers of the larger systems of meaning that surround them. Further, a narrative framework is not daunted by the moments of incongruity or outright falsehood. The creative and reflexive capacity we have in telling stories helps to integrate the moments when individuals act outside of the cultural norm.

Travelling the Inuvik-Tuktoyaktuk Highway as a tourist is an experience of inserting yourself into the fabric of cultural narratives, and (re)making yourself as someone who belongs on that road. Even if this shifting personal story is only as brief as your vacation, it is significant in that so many engage in it. By conservative estimates, in the two summers (at the time of writing) since the highway opened, at least 10,000 tourists have made the journey to Tuktoyaktuk, and the actual numbers are likely much higher. As Rickly-Boyd mentions in the introduction to her article, one of the most fascinating aspects of tourism studies is that so many of us have been tourists at some point or another (2010, 261). Tourism, while perhaps benign in the eyes of some academics, is a potential angle for exploring a whole host of social and cultural phenomena. The ethnographic

case with which I have been concerned is particularly evocative due to the wide array of people I observed making this journey. During my time in these localities, as well as a brief excursion down the Dempster to Dawson City I met travellers from North and South America, from Europe, India, and East Asia. I met travellers of considerable means and those travelling on shoestring budgets. I met travellers of all ages and life-stages, as well as a whole host of other demographic markers. Simply put, something about this destination has inspired a breadth of people to visit the Western Arctic, something that I think can be understood through the narratives travellers told of it. Even if my research is focused on this particular highway and communities affected by it, I firmly believe that the contributions of my work extend intellectually and geographically further.

Finally, the arguments in this thesis should prove relevant to those who live in the communities about which I have written, as well as other localities that might be soon be connected to the highway network. During my time in Inuvik, several conversations with individuals working in infrastructure and tourism included mentions of major road expansion projects slated for the future of the Northwest Territories. These communities may come to face the circumstances already experienced by Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk. Small towns like Wrigley and Fort-Goodhope may find themselves to be destinations for eager adventurers, heading out into the wild yonder for their own experiences down a new yet dusty road. A great deal of the literature in tourism studies has been devoted either to encouraging development or decrying its impacts. I hope that my work instead straddles the boundary, presenting a research effort that takes tourism seriously as a complex series of relationships. Understanding tourism in this way, particularly through the influence of culturally significant narratives, hopefully can give communities about to experience an influx of travellers intelligible means of planning their modes of engagement. Rather than relying on some simplistic development or supply/demand schema, efforts can be devoted to developing hosting arrangements for tourists while maintaining the sovereignty of local communities. With an understanding of the role of cultural narratives in shaping the desires and motivations of travellers, community members involved in tourism can chose to affirm or challenge these stories as they see fit. Simply reproducing the expectations of tourists is not the only avenue of success, after all, a great many people travel because they want to be surprised, to experience something they could never have expected.

Why then, have thousands of travellers come to Tuktoyaktuk by road in the two short years in which the highway has been open? Why drive thousands of kilometers on rough roads, risking flat tires, chipped windshields, and inclement conditions? If you were to ask my interlocutors, they would probably tell you that if you have to ask, you wouldn't understand.

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