



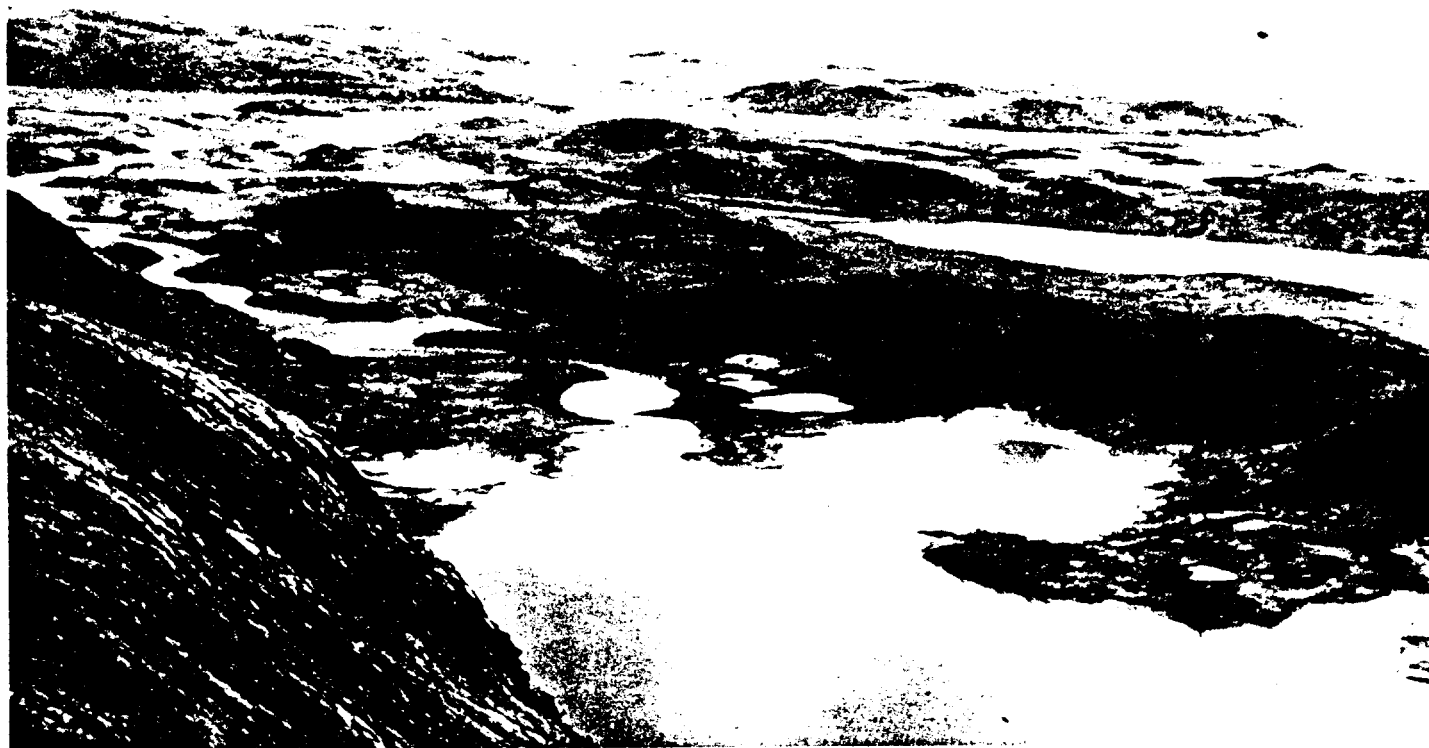
Arctic Development
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***Wager Bay - A Natural Area Of Candian
Significance
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Wager Bay - A Natural Area of Canadian Significance



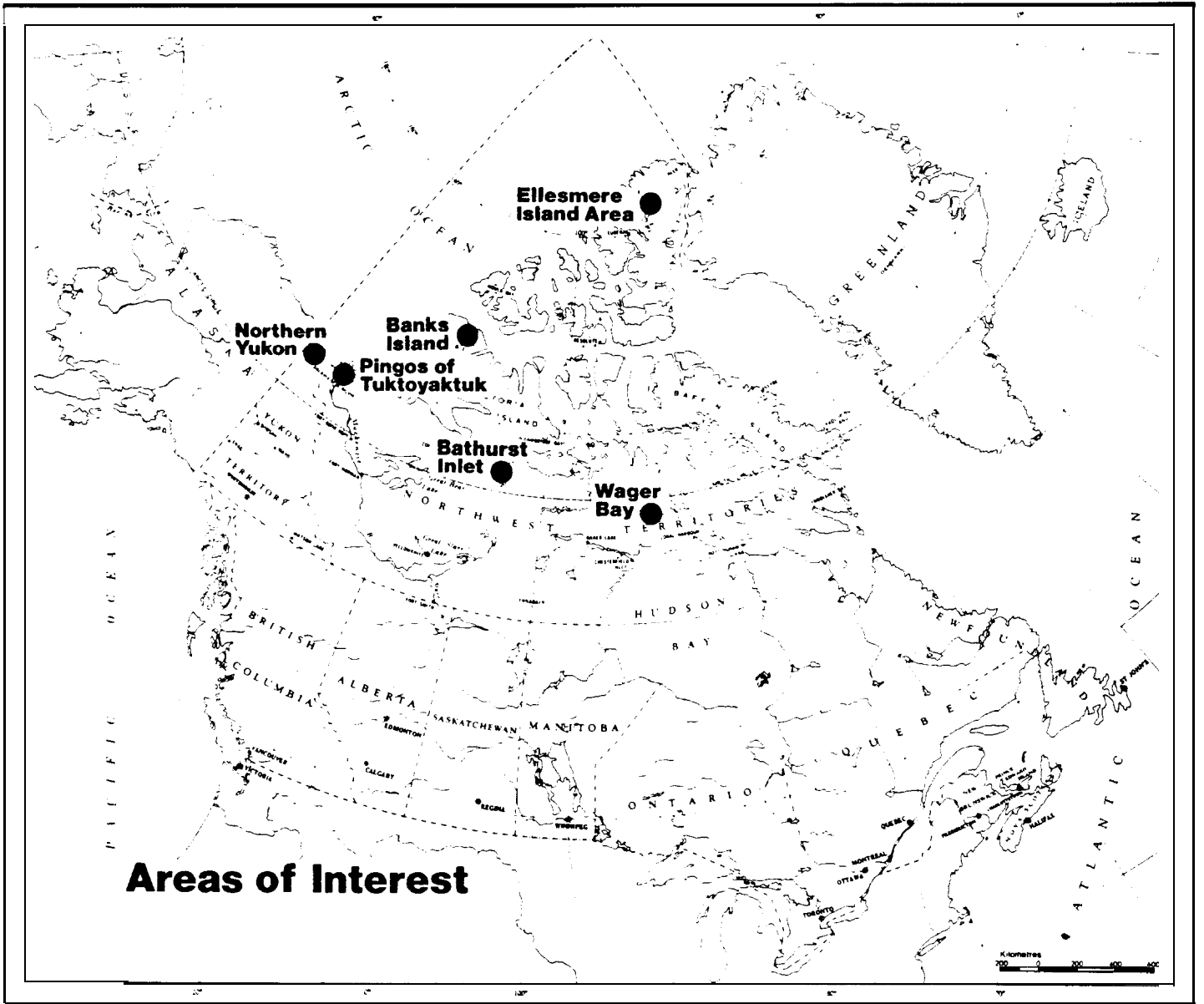
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Introduction

Natural Areas of 'Canadian Significance are areas which have been identified for preservation in a natural state and are representative of the major natural environments of Canada. They are special places which should be protected as a part of the heritage of all Canadians, now and in the future. The identification and protection of our important natural heritage areas cannot await or accommodate the advances of competing land uses. Action is required while the opportunities exist if the heritage of the past is to be passed on to the future.

Of course, there are many, many different landscapes in Canada, each with its own unique features that inspire love and pride in the hearts of Canadians. To identify the variety of Canada's landscapes, Parks Canada has divided the country into 48 natural regions. It is the aim of Parks Canada to set aside, in each of the 48 regions, an area of outstanding scenery or distinct features, that best portrays the region. So far only 18 of the natural regions have representative parks. Of the 30 regions without parks, 15 are at least partly in the Yukon and the Northwest Territories. Parks Canada, in its effort to further the completion of the national system of parks, has recently identified 6 of the more impressive natural heritage areas worthy of consideration for new parks. They are:

1. Wager Bay
2. Bathurst Inlet
3. Northern Yukon
4. Banks Island
5. Ellesmere and Axel Heiberg Islands
6. Pingos of Tuktoyaktuk



The Site

Wager Bay, a long inlet of Hudson Bay, lies approximately 1288 km (800 miles) northeast of Yellowknife, and stretches 150 km (93 miles) into the tundra of the Keewatin. The landscape varies from rocky bluffs on the southwest shore to rolling hills, shallows and low-lying islands in the northwest. The mouth of Wager Bay is so deceptively narrow that early explorers thought they were entering a river. It widens quickly, however, creating powerful tidal pressures at the mouth and head of the bay that cause reversing falls and patches of turbulent water that remain ice-free all year round.

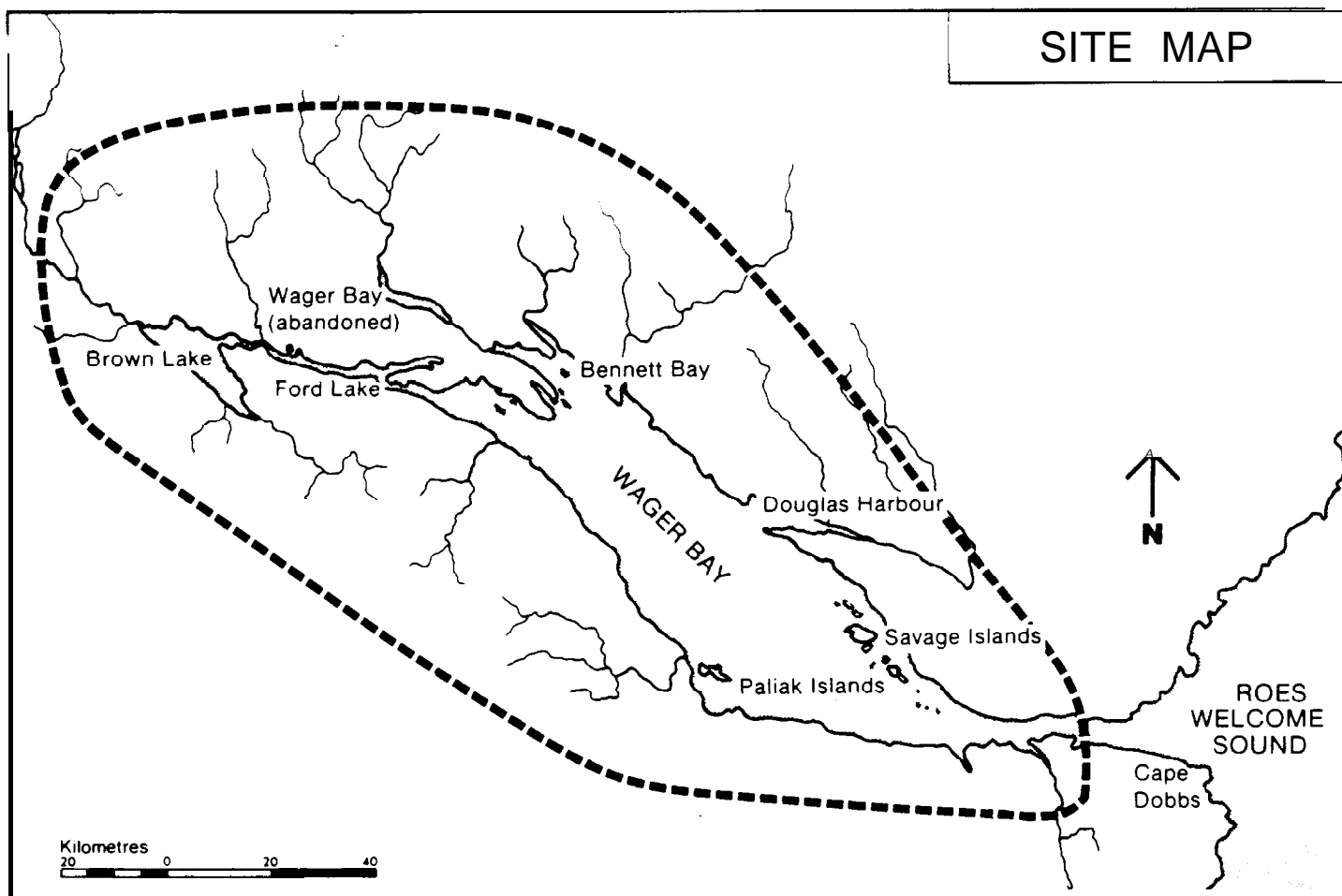
As far back as 4000 years ago, **Inuit** were using the lands around Wager Bay and evidence of prehistoric stone remains can still be found along the rocky shore.

The wildlife that attracted hunters to the area in ancient times is still an important resource. Although there are no **Inuit** living permanently in the area, people from along Hudson Bay return to Wager Bay every year to hunt polar bear, seal and caribou, and fish for lake trout, whitefish and Arctic char.

The site under consideration covers approximately 14 000 km² (5 600 sq. miles) of land and water; however, no final boundaries have been determined.

- 1 Mackay Bluff
- 2 The polynia at the mouth of Wager Bay





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The Land

Wager Bay is a fault basin that formed as a result of massive upheavals in the earth's crust. Surrounding the bay are rocky plateaux characteristic of the Canadian Shield. The meeting of rocky uplands with the deep basin creates some spectacular scenery, especially in the north around Ford and Brown lakes where river valleys cut through steep hills and cascading falls seek the waters below.

Sheer rock bluffs to the south of Wager Bay make the shoreline quite forbidding. The north shore seems inviting by comparison, with natural harbours and lowlands rising gradually to a landscape of rolling hills.

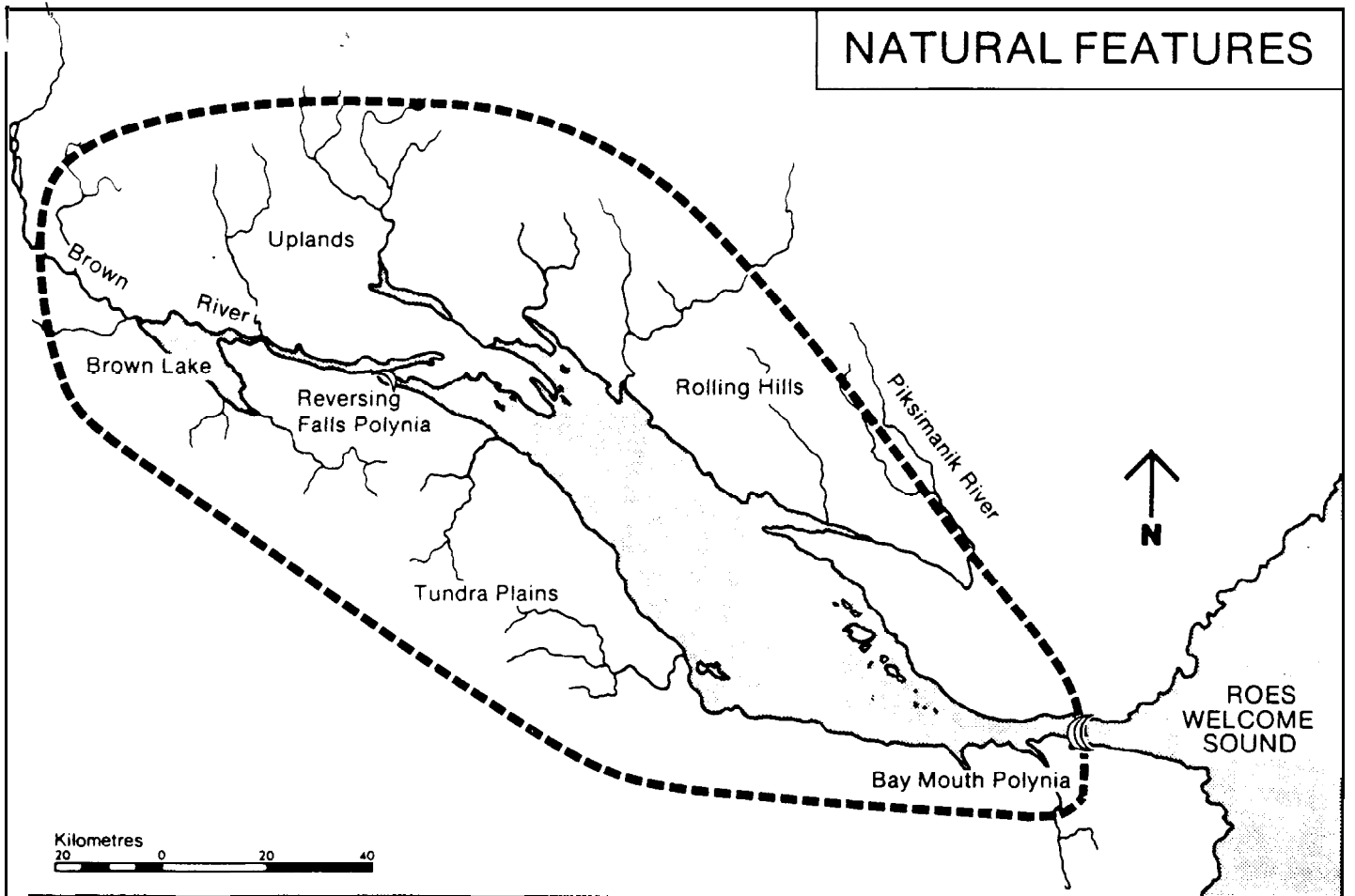
The shape of Wager Bay, with its narrow straits at both ends, creates tidal pressures strong enough to keep stretches of water at the narrows free of ice all winter, forming what is called a "polynia". In spring, loose ice is flushed out of the bay by the tides, and ice build-ups at the narrows to Hudson Bay may last long after Wager Bay is clear. At the head of the bay tidal pressures create another phenomenon, a set of reversing falls at the narrows where the salt water from Wager Bay meets the flow of fresh water from Ford Lake.

1 Rolling Landscape

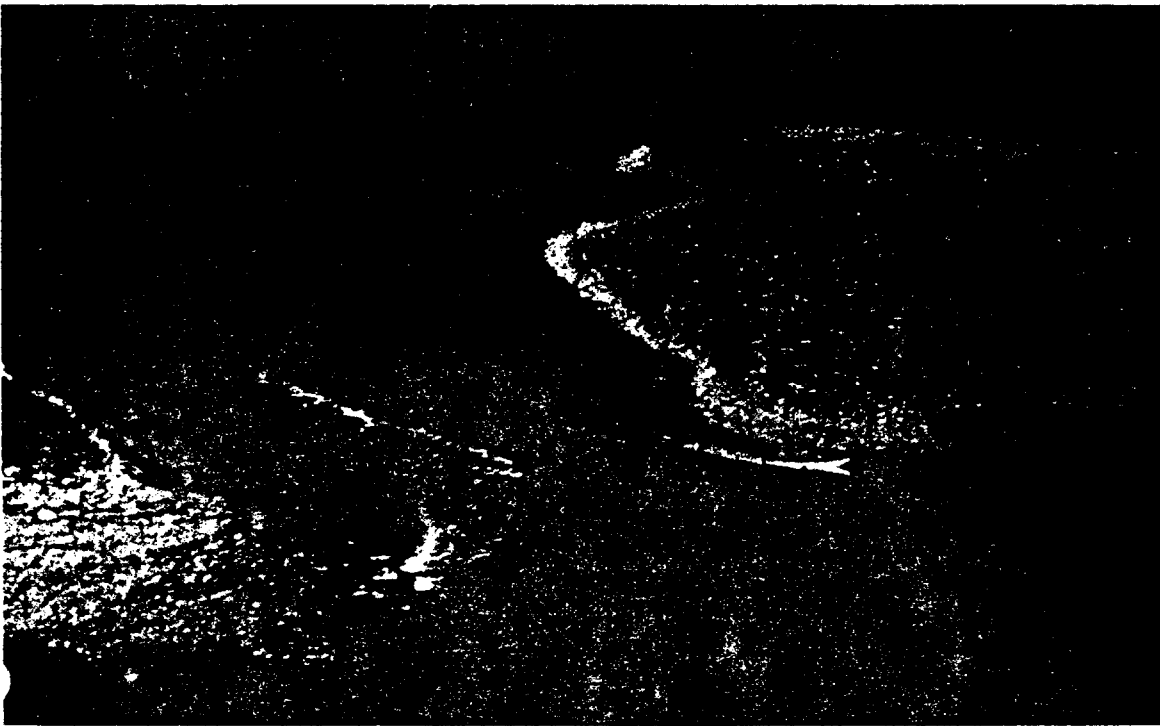
2 Reversing Falls



NATURAL FEATURES



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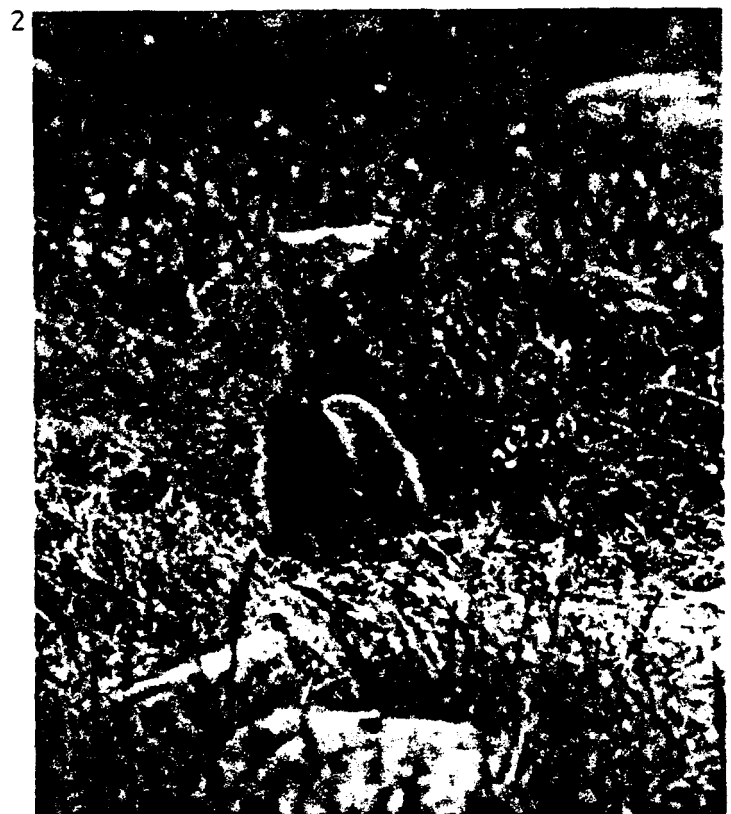
Wildlife and Vegetation .

Wager Bay is home for a variety of Arctic land and sea mammals. A local caribou population spends all year in the region, calving to the south of the bay and passing the winter in the hills to the north. Predatory mammals, such as Hudson Bay tundra wolf, wolverine, Arctic fox, red fox, ermine and polar bear, are plentiful.

Two bird species that colonize in the bay are the common eider duck in the Savage Islands and the black guillemot near the reversing falls. The landscape of rocky cliffs and bluffs also provides ideal nesting sites for peregrine falcons, gyrfalcons and rough-legged hawks.

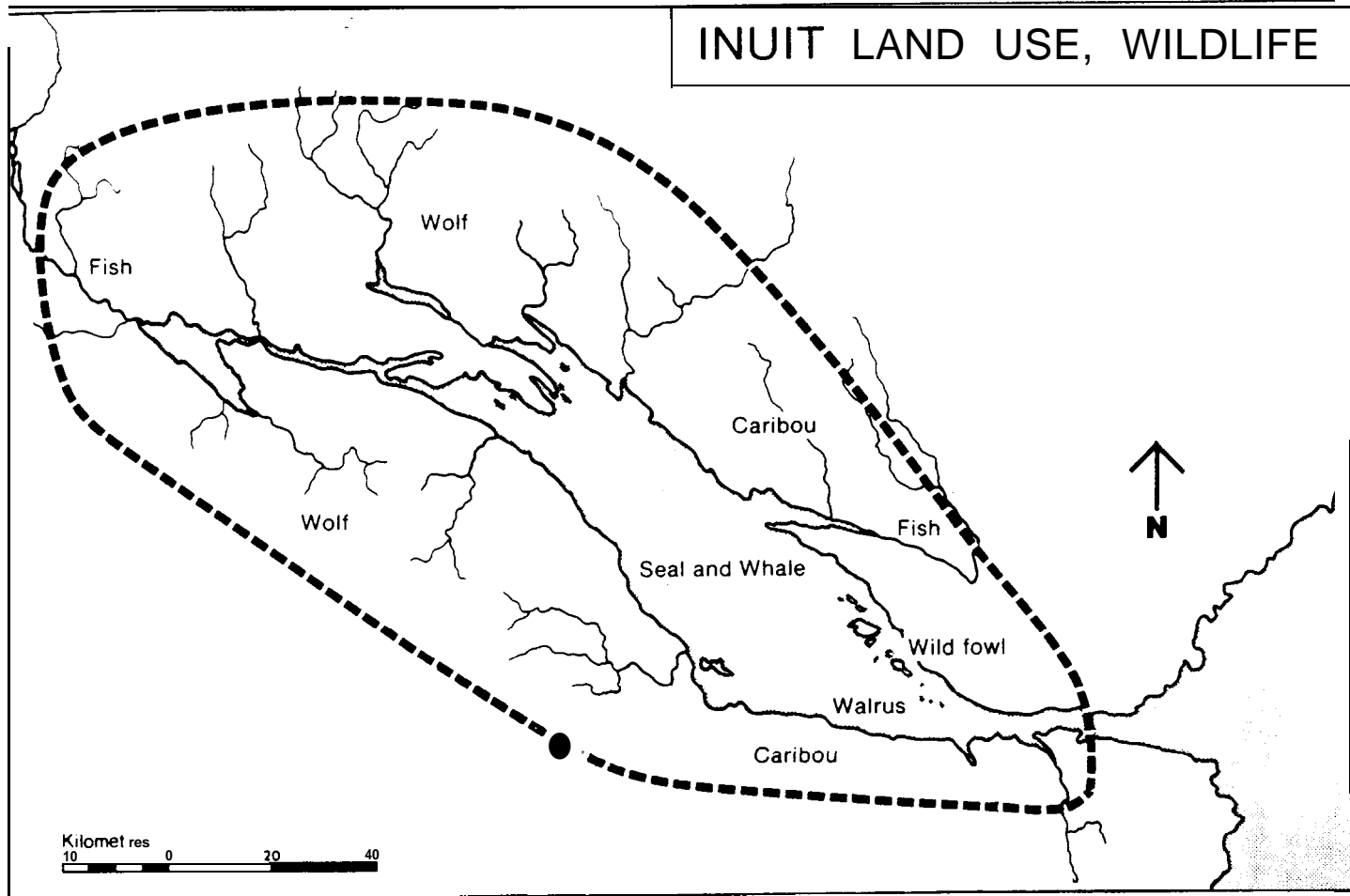
At the reversing falls a constant exchange of salt and fresh water takes place between Wager Bay and Ford Lake. Biologists are studying the submarine vegetation in this area to gain a better understanding of marine environments.

The south shore of Wager Bay is a popular area for beluga whales: in July 1975, 150 were counted in the shallows around Paliak Islands. Other marine mammals found in the area are the narwhal, ringed seal, ranger seal and bearded seal.



- 1 Polar bear near the Paliak Islands
- 2 Sicsic at Ford Lake
- 3 Divers explore the sea bed off Nuvudlik Island

INUIT LAND USE, WILDLIFE



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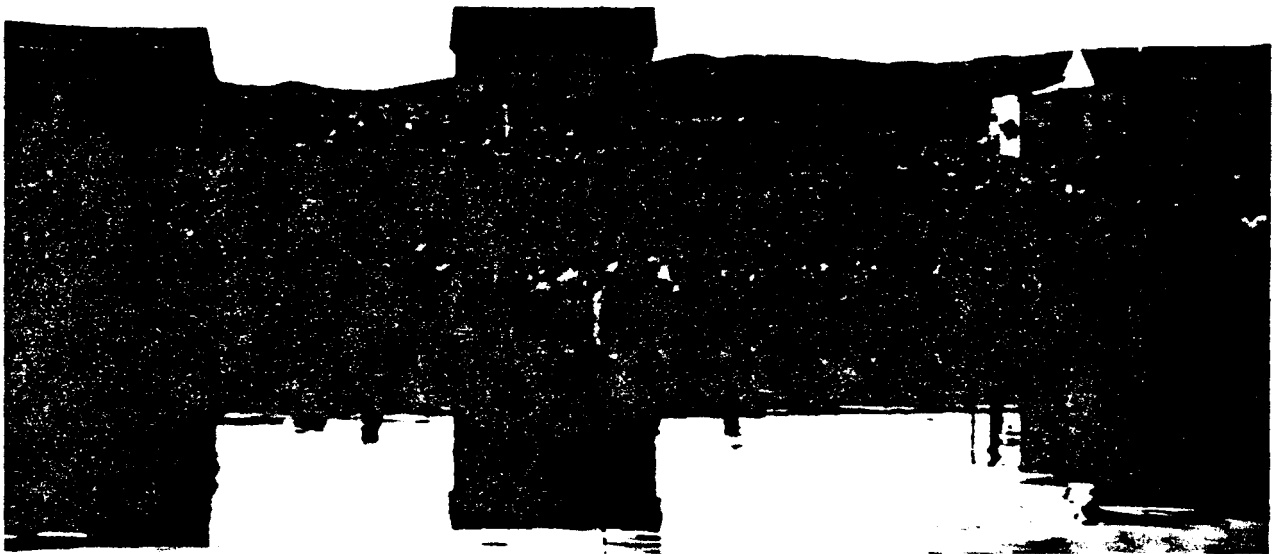
Human History

The area around Wager Bay is rich in history, with stone remains that date back to its prehistoric inhabitants. Today's Inuit population originates from the Thule Culture and can be dated in the Wager Bay area from the 18th century. Stone fish-traps exist on most of the rivers, and Inuit graves, caches and Inukshuks are found throughout the area. The Inuit name for the bay is Utkusiksalik, meaning a place where soapstone is found.

The first European to explore the area was Christopher Middleton who, in 1741, sailed as far as the reversing falls in search of the Northwest Passage. Two outposts were established in the 20th century, one a Hudson's Bay Company Post at Ford Lake and the other a Roman Catholic Mission on Nuvudlik Island. Both are now abandoned.

Transient Inuit from Repulse Bay, Chesterfield Inlet, Rankin Inlet, Southampton Island, Whale Cove and Gjoa Haven used Wager Bay as hunting and fishing grounds. They took caribou, musk oxen, wolves, wolverines, polar bears, fish, seals, walrus and whales.

The last resident Inuit families moved out of the Wager Bay area in 1961. However, its abundance of wildlife continues to attract people from the coast who use it for hunting, trapping and fishing and as a seasonal dwelling place.





- 1 Hudson's Bay Company Post, Ford Lake
- 2 Archaeological site near Reversing Falls
- 3 Ancient meat cache near Reversing Falls
- 4 Mission hut on Nuvudlik Island

