



Herschel Island



"Some caskets are tumbling with the slumping soil and are being broken into pieces and pushed out... archeological evidence has already been lost..."

UNESCO, CASE STUDIES ON CLIMATE CHANGE AND WORLD HERITAGE, 2007

"Spiritually, we were told never to be around grave sites. It is a taboo for us to touch graves. But we can't leave it the way it is."

ANDY TARDIFF, PARK RANGER HERSCHEL ISLAND QIKIQTARUK TERRITORIAL PARK

"The catastrophic loss that is happening on Herschel Island is going to happen to many more places in the future."

MICHELLE BERENFELD, WORLD MONUMENTS FUND, NEW YORK





BACKGROUND

Herschel Island is a 112 square kilometer island in the Beaufort Sea. In 1984 it became Herschel Island Territorial Park, and it is a leading contender to become Canada's next UNESCO World Heritage Site. The region is on Canada's tentative list for a UNESCO nomination in both cultural and natural categories.

Herschel Island offers significant biological diversity and is an important historic site. Its cultural heritage includes evidence of Thule people dating back one millennium, the arrival of Europeans in the 1800's, commercial whale hunting and Inuvialuit traditional use. Permanent structures were built, and at one time, about 1,500 people lived on the island. More than 100 gravesites are marked on Herschel Island.

The area is still being used by the Inuvialuit for fishing and hunting. Scientists from leading universities in Canada are studying the effects of climate change on the island as in one more generation, most of the valuable heritage on Herschel Island will be lost. The World Monuments Fund declared Herschel Island as one of the "100 most endangered sites" in the world, the only Canadian site, and the only one in the Arctic.

STORY

Herschel Island is the setting for the documentary. Inuvialuit park rangers, who work on the island are often caught in between two worlds. Their traditional Inuvialuit culture is quite comfortable with the idea of heritage being returned to sea. At the same time they don't want to see their heritage getting destroyed.

The Yukon Government wants to protect and preserve the heritage buildings on Herschel Island. Due to climate change, sea levels are rising. Longer times of open water, stronger storms and higher water levels are taking their toll on the shores of Herschel Island. Most of the heritage values are only about two feet above sea level. The Yukon Government has been forced to undertake salvage operations of ancient Thule dwellings, and moved historic buildings inland to keep them dry.

Herschel Island acts as the "canary in the mine." Around the world, as permafrost melts and ocean levels rise, other unique places will be lost. Governments, historians, scientists and inhabitants will face similar dilemmas: what do we keep, what do we preserve, how do we commemorate? This is an agonizing dilemma for Doug, a career historian and historic sites manager, who is dedicated to preserve heritage in the Yukon.

Elizabeth is an Inuvialuit elder who owns the last remaining private property on Herschel Island. She tells her granddaughter and us about her connection with the island and how it plays a role in traditional Inuvialuit lives, in teaching and in stories. What will happen to Inuvialuit oral history, once the land disappears? What is the relationship of the granddaughter to the Island? What is the impact on her, knowing that the heritage values will have disappeared within her lifetime?

Scientists from the leading Canadian universities explain what is happening to the island. Why will it disappear – and how fast? What are the implications for the people and the North?

VISUALS

In spring, when the park rangers arrive by snowmobile, the island is covered by a white snow blanket. With the longer daylight of the summer, Herschel Island becomes home to an abundance of colourful plants and birds as well as caribou, muskoxen, foxes and grizzly bears. Bowhead whales can be seen from the shores, and tourists arrive by boat and plane. Inuvialuit elders teach young people how to hunt and fish, and how to preserve the meat.

AUDIO

The different sounds of wind, the gentle light breeze or the angry storm, the sound of water and waves, various chirping birds, and the language of the Inuvialuit create a very unique and lively, almost poetic soundscape. We can "hear" the island speak.

TARGET AUDIENCES

- people who love the North
- everybody interested in history and heritage
- schools and universities
- people concerned about climate change

With Broadcaster support, this project is eligible for up to \$35,000 from the Yukon Film Development Fund, and for up to \$500,000 from the Yukon Film Production Fund.

Contact:

Werner Walcher

Fresh From The Yukon Inc.
PRODUCTIONS

Box 10287 Whitehorse, Yukon Y1A 7A1 Canada
tel 867 668 2883 **email** info@yukonimages.com
fax 867 668 3275 **www.yukonimages.com**