

In 1988, hundreds of Innu occupied the runways of Canadian Forces Base, Goose Bay, Labrador, starting a civil disobedience campaign that has brought them world attention.

For thousands of years the Innu criss-crossed the Quebec-Labrador peninsula, on foot and by canoe, hunting caribou in one of the coldest climates on Earth. And from the time of their first encounter with Europeans in the sixteenth century, until the mid-point of the present one, these ancient rhythms of Innu life remained essentially intact.

In the 1950s industrialists and governments took over their homeland for mines and hydro-electric projects. This forced them to settle year-round in villages, where their society began to collapse from alcoholism and other social problems. Hunters and their families began returning to the bush for several months a year to ensure their survival.

Now the Innu fear their culture may disappear forever. Bombing ranges are being created in their homeland, and European low-flying jets spread noise pollution and danger.

"You've seen the ugly pattern in any number of 'disappearing tribes' documentaries. This one colors in another square."

- Weekend Guardian, London, U.K.

Co-produced by the National Film Board Atlantic Centre and Nexus Films, London, England. This video is closed-captioned.

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HUNTERS & BOMBERS



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"... a gripping and sometimes moving look at the attempt by Labrador's Innu Indians to prevent low-level flying of NATO bombers over their territory."

-Toronto Globe and Mail

Chosen Best Documentary and Best Film under 60 minutes at the Atlantic Film Festival, Halifax, 1990.



ANCIENT NOMADS

Pastichit is an Innu hunter from Sheshatshit, a town 40 kilometres north of Goose Bay, Labrador. Pastichit didn't grow up in Sheshatshit, however. He grew up in Nitassinan, the Innu homeland, part of the vast interior of the Quebec-Labrador peninsula, formerly known as Ungava. Pastichit and his people hunted and travelled hundreds of kilometres each year, on foot and by canoe, from the mouth of the Saguenay River to the Strait of Belle Isle, from Lac St-Jean to Ungava Bay, and as far east as the Atlantic coast.

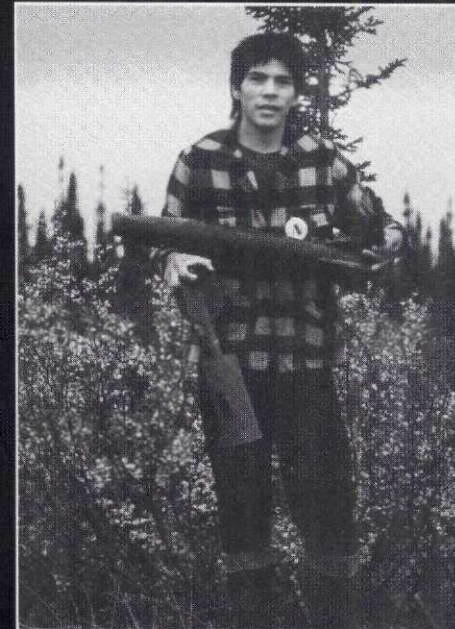
Innu means "human beings". They are an Algonquin people closely associated with the Cree, not to be confused with the Inuit. They are also sometimes called Naskapi-Montagnais.

According to legend, an Innu hero named Tshakapesh killed a mammoth, a prehistoric creature that disappeared after the Ice Age. The memory of the mammoth in Innu myth indicates that their culture is very old indeed. Despite nearly 500 years of contact with Europeans and their lifestyle, the Innu clung to their hunting way of life until the 1950s.

THE FIRST VILLAGES

Today there are 10,000 Innu who live for most of the year in 11 villages along the north shore of the St. Lawrence River and in two Labrador communities. The Innu of Sheshatshit didn't leave their tents for houses until the 1960s, while the Innu of Pukuat-shipu (near St-Augustin, Quebec) remained nomadic until 1972, one of the last indigenous people in Canada's north to settle down. The Innu didn't move to reserves willingly. They were forced to do so because much of their hunting land had been taken over by newcomers and their industries.

Hydro-electric projects and logging operations dispossessed the Innu of land and resources in Quebec. The Sept-Iles railway was built through the Innu homeland in the 1950s to transport iron ore from mines in Schefferville, Wabush, and Labrador City. The worst destruction came as a result of the massive Churchill Falls hydro-electric project, which flooded an area half the size of Lake Ontario. Fortunes were made by companies and public utilities like Hydro-Quebec, but the Innu have yet to be compensated for their losses. Today they continue to be treated as an inconsequential group of people with no rights to the land they have lived on for thousands of years.



"The beauty of low-flying in Labrador is that there is not one permanent residence in our low-flying area which encompasses 100,000 square kilometres... We don't use the land per se, we overfly it... Because of the random but determined way we plan our flight profiles, we can very easily accommodate... deviations around their locations."

*-Lt. Colonel Phil Engstad,
Department of National Defense,
Canada*

"They spread death on our land. They fly unbelievably fast, making an unbelievable noise. The animals can't feed properly. They have to feed at night when the jets aren't flying... Caribou are deteriorating because of the war planes. When they go over, it's like an explosion. You feel the ground shake. They scare the life out of me."

- Sebastian Pastichit

HUNTERS & BOMBERS

“There’s a lot of happiness living on the land—we control our lives, we hunt, we provide good food for our children. Everything falls into place... Now we have spoken out we will never be silent again... When we are gone it will be our children’s turn. Our children will follow our example. We are determined to keep our land.”

*-Elizabeth Penashue,
Innu mother and grandmother*



is the filmed story of why, since 1988, hundreds of Innu have trespassed on the runways of Canadian Forces Base, Goose Bay, risking arrest and imprisonment. In their own language, Innu aimun (with English subtitles), the Innu explain why they are resisting the militarization of their homeland.

During the Second World War an airport was built in Goose Bay to service American aircraft headed overseas. A town sprang up around the base and is now home to 8,000 people. Following a decline in the 1970s after the Americans pulled out, it became an important centre for training jet fighter-bomber pilots. In 1986, Canada signed contracts with four countries (West Germany, Great Britain, the Netherlands, and the United States) allowing them to train pilots at Goose Bay until 1996. In 1990 there were 9,000 flights over an area of 100,000 km². The number of flights could triple by 1996. European pilots fly over Nitassinan at low levels (30 m) and at dizzying speeds (900 km/h) to avoid radar detection. The Innu say the flights terrorize animals and make it less safe for their families to live in the bush.



“For many years we looked on, as strangers began to destroy our land—taking iron, taking our trees, damming our rivers—now using our land for low-level flying... We can no longer remain silent.”

*-Pien Penashue,
Innu elder*

**IMPORTANCE OF
LIVING ON THE LAND**

*Camera:
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Kent Nason*

GLOSSARY

Innu - An Algonquin people closely associated with the Cree. Not to be confused with the Inuit.

Innu aimun - the Innu language

Montagnais - the French name given to the Innu in the sixteenth century because they hunted in the mountains ("les montagnes").

Naskapi - an old Innu word meaning, "people beyond the horizon", referring to Innu hunters and their families who had less European contact than Innu who lived further south.

Nitassinan - "Our Land", the Innu name for their homeland

nutshimit - the bush or the country

REPORTS

"Task Force report on the Health Effects of Increased Flying Activity in the Labrador Area," **Canadian Public Health Association**, May 1987.

Transcript of oral presentations made to the Federal Environmental Assessment Review Panel in Labrador, Quebec and Newfoundland, 1986. (Available by writing: FEARO, Fontaine Building, Hull, Quebec K1A 0H3.)

Environmental Impact Statement on Military Flying Activities in Labrador and Quebec, prepared for the Department of National Defence, 1989. (Also available from FEARO)

SELECTED READINGS

ASHINI, Daniel, "David and Goliath: The Innu vs. the NATO Alliance", in **Drumbeat** edited by Boyce Richardson, Toronto: Summerhill Press, 1989.

ARMITAGE, Peter, "Homeland or Wasteland?," submission to the Federal Environmental Assessment Panel Reviewing Military Flying Activities in Nitassinan, 1989.

MAILHOT, Jose, "Montagnais Opposition to the Militarization of Their Land: An Historical Perspective", **Native Issues**, 7(1):47-54.

WADDEN, Marie, "Planes of Labrador", **Harrowsmith Magazine**, September/October, 1989.

Innu culture cannot be lived on reserves. Their heroic history is encoded in the land around them. Every lake, river and mountain on the Quebec-Labrador peninsula has a name in the Innu language. After they settled permanently in villages, the Innu became easy targets for the work of the well-intended, but misguided authorities. The Roman Catholic church, which first introduced them to Christianity, persuaded Innu parents to send their children to church-run schools where Innu history, language, geography and culture were ignored. The children were taught that the ways of their parents were archaic, even uncivilized, and that they must learn to be Euro-Canadian. This kind of education created confusion in many children, and self-hatred in others. Assimilation has created problems that didn't exist in Innu society 40 years ago—unemployment, alcoholism, teen suicide, violent crime and fatal accidents related to drinking and drug abuse.

To resolve the crisis, hundreds of Innu have been returning to the bush for half the year, where they hunt and live off the land as before. In the bush, or *nutshimit* as the Innu call it, their health and peace of mind are restored.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Are jet bombers in Quebec/Labrador permitted to fly as low in Europe? Is it a popular practice in these countries? Why do they like to train in Canada?
2. The Innu haven't signed a land claims agreement with Canada because they say it's an unjust process. How do you think the land claims policy might be changed to better reflect the needs and wishes of a people like the Innu?
3. Low-level flying is promoted in Labrador for economic development. Are there other ways the economy could be developed?

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