ASEN BALIKCI was educated in Switzerland, France, and the United States, where he received his Ph.D. degree in anthropology from Columbia University in 1962.

From 1954 to 1961 he was a staff member of the National Museum of Canada. Since that time he has been on the faculty of the University of Montreal, where he is now Professor of Anthropology, specializing in social organization, cultural ecology, community studies, and ethno-cinematography.

Dr. Balikci has done field work among the Macedonian ethnic group in Toronto (1955); the Great Whale River Eskimos of East Hudson Bay (1957); the Povungnituk Eskimos of East Hudson Bay (1958); the Vunta Kutchin Indians of the Yukon Territory (1961); the Veliko Selo Villagers of Yugoslav Macedonia (1962); and the Malinke of Eastern Senegal (1965). His work among the Eskimos of Pelly Bay began in 1959 and culminated in his direction of nine comprehensive films, complete with natural soundtrack, of the seasonal camps of the Netsilik Eskimos in traditional times. Released in the fall of 1969, the films were made in collaboration with Education Development Center and the National Film Board of Canada.

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THE NETSILIK ESKIMO

Asen Balikci

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To Franz Van de Velde, O.M.I.

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FOREWORD

Margaret Mead, The American Museum of Natural History

This book, written about a contemporary exploration of the ancient ways of a contemporary people, the Netsilik Eskimo, records an unusual and felicitous adventure. The modern anthropologist studies primitive people as they are; if they hunt with guns instead of bows and arrows or build their houses with modern materials, he describes these innovations, however much they mar the aesthetically satisfying picture of an earlier form of life in which every detail had been polished into consistency by a thousand years of use. And so, often enough, especially when he works among a much-studied people who have been in contact with technologically advanced civilizations for a long time, he pays for his fidelity to the way in which the people live today by never seeing, in the flesh, the way they once lived. And yet it is the way in which they once lived, before the introduction of steel and canvas and porcelain and tin, that particularly interests the ethnographer and fascinates the general reader.

Because his mission was unusual, Dr. Balikci has been able to bridge the chasm that separates the Eskimo of Pelly Bay as they once were from the Eskimo as they are today. In addition to the usual type of field work, he had a special mandate—to make films which would demonstrate for today's students and for posterity the way the Eskimo once lived. Those he filmed still lived close enough to their an-

cient skills so that they could return to them without a sense of loss or unreality. His purpose was one that they could understand. The Netsilik Eskimo are a sturdy people, proud of their abilities, their heads unbowed in the presence of merely superior technology. So he and they and three successive cameramen made a series of nine films. As they did so, he was able to see the past as it unrolled on film—in the camera, and before his eyes. The result is a delightfully vivid story, told now, through the perception of present-day man, in response to questions that are being asked today about how primitive people lived.

To complement this story there are sections based on older records and on memories of old men that keenly point up the difference between a living present, where every member of the group becomes an active and willing participant informant, and the kind of ethnography that we will be driven to in the future, in cases where no films have been made and where everyone has lost his touch with harpoon or snow knife and some of our most precious diversities have completely disappeared without a record.

PREFACE

Most of the data presented in this book were collected during several field trips among the Arviligjuarmiut of Pelly Bay between 1959 and 1965. Several papers covering distinct aspects of Netsilik ethnography were published following this initial field experience. In 1963, I joined Educational Services, Inc., in order to take charge of an ethnographic film program with the aim of making a detailed visual record of the daily activities of the Netsilik Eskimos (Balikci, 1966). In the course of several expeditions to the Arctic coast enough footage was exposed to produce nearly ten hours of edited film.

Meanwhile, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, a curriculum development unit was at work, synthesizing Netsilik anthropological data, film material, and new teaching techniques in order to prepare an original social science program for the elementary schools. It was also necessary to prepare a manual on Netsilik ethnography for the training of the teachers who were to apply the new program. Such a book was also intended to help wider audiences understand better the various sequences of the Netsilik films; hence the idea for the present book.

The first chapter, describing the annual migration cycle of the Netsilik Eskimos, is closely related to the subject matter of the film series. The rest of the book is a summary of the published literature with new material added here

and there. I have drawn heavily on Rasmussen's classic *Reports of the Fifth Thule Expedition*. My papers dealing with marriage, suicide, and infanticide among the Netsilik served as additional source material. Substantial portions of my study on Netsilik shamanism are reproduced here with permission of the *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*. As for the drawings, for reasons of efficiency and economy they were made from the pictures in K. Birket-Smith's *Ethnographical Collections from the Northwest Passage*, although the original artifact collections I assembled for the National Museum of Canada could have been used with similar results.

Dr. Helge Larsen of the Danish National Museum kindly provided the pictures of Netsilik men's and women's fur clothing. Since several of the Eskimo words used here have appeared already in previous publications, no attempt was made to introduce a new spelling of Netsilik names.

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INTRODUCTION

This is a short ethnographic description of the traditional way of life of the Netsilingmiut, an isolated tribe of Arctic hunters living on the Arctic coast of northern North America. These People of the Seal, referred to below as the Netsilik Eskimos, were primarily seal hunters armed with harpoons, although they relied on other game and other weapons as well in their struggle for survival. They hunted caribou from kayaks with light spears on rivers and narrow lakes; they brought down musk oxen and polar bears with bows and arrows and heavy spears; they fished for salmon trout with crudely-fashioned spears. To protect themselves from the extreme cold in winter, the Netsilik wore tailored clothing of animal fur, and they lived in snow houses heated by soapstone lamps. For travel they possessed a few short sledges made of wood or sealskin, which were pulled by just two or three dogs.

In contrast to this highly specialized and well-adapted technology, the social organization of the Netsilik was relatively simple. They had bilateral families with a strong patrilateral slant, they were generally monogamous, and of course they had personal kindreds. Partnerships and other more or less formal bonds linking two non-relatives were numerous. There were no lineages or clans, no institutionalized chiefs or formal government.

The Netsilik believed in many supernatural beings: hu-

man and animal souls, various ghosts, good and evil spirits, monsters, and several major deities. Their lives were burdened by innumerable taboos and religious observances. They believed that any breach of taboo could have dangerous consequences for the individual or society. They built no graves, and their only religious practitioners were shamans—half priests, half sorcerers—who could fall into trance and evoke helpful spirits to cure the sick, aid the community, or satisfy personal grievances.

Many of these cultural traits were shared by other Eskimo groups, who cover an area from the eastern tip of Siberia across Alaska and northern Canada to West and East Greenland—and other of these traits were peculiar to the Netsilik people. The Southwest Greenlanders lived in stone houses and were extremely skilled seal hunters in open water, using kayaks and throwing harpoons. The Polar Eskimos, living at the northern tip of Greenland, had lost the kayak, the umiak or large skin boat, and the sled. They did not hunt caribou nor fish salmon. Meanwhile the Caribou Eskimos of the Barren Grounds had practically no relations with the sea. They relied almost exclusively on caribou hunting and fishing. Their material culture was probably the simplest and poorest of all known Eskimo technologies.

At the other extreme were the Eskimos living in Alaska. Timber there was rather abundant, and many Alaskan Eskimos lived in wooden houses. Some groups had elaborate masks, wore hats in place of hoods, knew how to make coiled baskets and earthen pots, erected grave monuments, and had a much more complex social organization comprising strong chieftainships, complicated trading patterns, embryonic clan formations, and warfare activities. Further, ceremonial life was strongly developed.

Thus, there were substantial cultural differences among the various Eskimo groups inhabiting the northern end of the continent and Greenland. Several ethnologists have attempted to establish major groupings for these people living

in such scattered and generally widely separated settlements. Kaj Birket-Smith (1959:233) proposed a subdivision of seventeen distinct units grouped in three major cultural subareas: the Alaskan Eskimos, the Central Eskimos, and the Greenland Eskimos. A. L. Kroeber (1953:27) divided Eskimo culture into two major components: Western or Alaskan, and Central-Eastern (including Greenland). The first was considerably richer and was probably under strong influence from the neighboring Indian tribes. The second was somewhat simpler and more "Eskimo" in general outline.

The Netsilik belonged to the Central branch of the Eskimo family, the igloo dwellers, the seal and the caribou hunters. Their habitat was within the Arctic Circle (100°W. −88°E., 73°N. −68°S.), covering an immense area of nearly 9000 square miles from Committee Bay in the east to Victoria Strait to the west, and to Bellot Strait to the north. This part of the Arctic coast contains huge land masses: King William Island, Boothia and Adelaide peninsulas, the vast hilly region between Sherman Inlet and Pelly Bay, and Simpson Peninsula. The coast is deeply cut by many ocean inlets and lined by innumerable islands. There is every kind of terrain: while Boothia Peninsula and the land just south of it are covered by rocky Pre-Cambrian hills and offer a generally uneven landscape, King William Island and Simpson Peninsula are flat, representative of the typical mossy tundra topography. Countless lakes, ponds, and rivers are found everywhere, but the harsh climate precludes much vegetation. There are no trees; instead, lichens, mosses, and various grass-like plants cover the tundra and hills, sometimes growing with creeping shrubs along the sheltered river beds.

The climate is rigorous. As early as late September, the sea begins to freeze. The sea ice in midwinter is six to seven feet thick and does not disappear until the end of July. Winters are extremely cold. The mean daily temperature in

January falls below −20°F., and often it falls to −40°F. Summers are short, cool, and misty, with a mean daily temperature below 50°F. in the warmest season. Though precipitation is low, the tundra in summer is very wet, mosses acting as sponges full with water. This is due to the solid permafrost beginning just a foot below the surface. Melting snow and rain water remain on the surface, giving to the tundra a marshy appearance.

Certainly this is one of the most desolate environments on earth, particularly inappropriate for human occupation. Yet the Netsilik survived here, their success in adapting to the extreme rigors of the Arctic climate made possible largely by the abundance of certain animals which they used for food, fuel, clothing, and tool materials. The most important of these animals were seal, caribou, and musk oxen. The entire Netsilik society depended on the successful hunting of these animals. Salmon trout, abundant in certain rivers and at particular seasons, were also an indispensable source of food.

There was considerable variation in the seasonal and regional distribution of caribou herds in the Netsilik area. The caribou, essentially a gregarious animal, lived in herds of varying sizes, and in this part of Canada it migrated according to a definite pattern. These herds spent the winter hundreds of miles south of the Netsilik country, in the general area of the tree line, in southern Keewatin or northern Manitoba. In spring they migrated north, the cows reaching the Arctic coast area in mid-April, followed by the bulls a month later. In June, caribou were very common around the large lakes on Boothia Isthmus. The return migration began in September, and only stragglers remained in the country the following month.

In addition to the caribou, there is substantial evidence of the presence of numerous musk oxen in the Netsilik area in traditional times. According to early travelers' accounts, the regions south of Boothia Isthmus, Pelly Bay, and Committee Bay abounded with musk oxen. Polar bears were also present; irregularly distributed, they were usually found near the coast line of the mainland and the major islands.

But of far greater economic importance than musk oxen or polar bears was the ringed seal. Seals could be found in many bays and straits on the Netsilik coast, and were particularly abundant in three areas: the central and northern part of Pelly Bay; the Lord Mayor Bay; and the Shepherd Bay–Rae Strait district. The large bearded seal was much less common and was to be found in a few well-known bays with rather shallow waters.

Salmon trout (or arctic charr) was essential to the diet of the Netsilik. This is a migratory species that swims in large schools down the main rivers to the sea in July and returns to the inland lakes in the middle of August (with local variations in their migratory pattern). But this was by no means the only kind of fish caught by the Netsilik. Many deep-water lakes abounded in lake trout, and arctic cod was also used as emergency food by some of the western Netsilik. Birds were of little importance in Netsilik economy, with only a few ptarmigan caught in the warm season, and some wild fowl taken in their molting period.

Although cut off from the rest of the world by enormous expanses of arctic desert, the Netsilik were not entirely isolated from the other neighboring Eskimo tribes. In fact, intercourse between widely separated groups was a quite common occurrence in the North. Since the Eskimos are known for their great skill as travelers under difficult conditions, it is not surprising that in traditional times (around the end of the last century and the beginning of this), the Netsilik had contact with the Aivilik Eskimos to the east. The Aivilik, who lived near Repulse Bay and belonged culturally to the Igloolik Eskimos, had been in contact with European and American whalers since the last quarter of the past century and thus had the opportunity to acquire firearms. They feared the Netsilik for their allegedly belli-

cose character and also had considerable contempt for their slovenly manners and coarseness. Relations between the Netsilik and their southwesterly neighbors, the Utkuhikjalingmiut (Soapstone People) living near Back River, were better, with many intermarriages taking place between the two groups. This was not the case with the Kitdlinermiut (Those of the Farther End) of Victoria Island west of the King William Land, who had an evil reputation among the Netsilik as murderers and sorcerers.

The Netsilik were a divided and unstable group of people. They were nomadic hunters who traveled in small bands from one hunting area to the next. Each band was identified with a particular region where its habitual hunting grounds were located. A man born and raised in a given band was identified with it for the rest of his life, even if he emigrated and settled among another tribelet.

Ethnologists and explorers traveling through the area at different periods during the last hundred years have given both different names and sometimes different locations to these bands. The distribution of Netsilik subgroups I observe here is the one given by Knud Rasmussen based on the detailed information he obtained from native informants during his eight months' stay in the area in 1923 as leader of the Fifth Thule Expedition. The eastern branch of the Netsilik was known as the Arviligjuarmiut (People of the Big One with the Whale), and they lived around Pelly Bay and Simpson Peninsula. The Netsilingmiut proper lived around Boothia Isthmus. They were named for Netsilik Lake, lying just southeast of Spence Bay, the area the Netsilik considered as their country of origin. The Netsilingmiut occupied one of the richest game areas in the whole country. Many narrow lakes cut across Boothia Isthmus, and this was considered excellent caribou hunting country. Further, Lord Mayor Bay on the eastern side of the isthmus was the best seal hunting area in this vast region. The northern end of Boothia Peninsula, near Bellot Strait, was occupied by the

Arvertormiut (People of the Whales) while the eastern and southern parts of King William Island were inhabited by the Qegertarmiut (Island People). Immediately south, on Adelaide Peninsula, lived the Ilivilermiut (People Living at the Place Where There Is Something). They frequently migrated across Simpson Strait to the southern end of King William Island. And in the general area of Shepherd Bay and Murchison River resided the Kungmiut (River People).

Although individuals and families frequently migrated from one group to another for varying lengths of time without losing their group identity, there is historical evidence that the Netsilik as a whole were involved in some westward movement that resulted in their occupying new territory. Explorers from the last century noted, on Adelaide Peninsula and King William Island, the presence of a culturally distinct group called the Ukjulingmiut (People of the Great Bearded Seal); at that time the Netsilik were occupying their traditional hunting grounds on Boothia Isthmus, and there was little apparent intercourse of any consequence between the two groups. Yet when Rasmussen visited the area in 1923, the Ukjulingmiut as a distinct group were practically extinct and their territory was occupied by the western branch of the Netsilik. Elderly informants told Rasmussen what happened in the Ukjulik country:

> Once, the winter was a very severe one, blizzards blowing incessantly over Queen Maud's Sea; famine broke out and the Ukjulingmiut tried to escape from death by starvation by moving to Simpson Strait to fish for arctic cod. A great many people died however: some froze to death, others starved, and the bodies of the dead were eaten by the living—in fact many were killed to provide food, for these poor people were driven almost mad by their sufferings that winter (1931:120).

The survivors of this famine moved south to the rich fishing sites of Back River and mingled with the Utkuhikjalingmiut to form a single group, leaving their traditional

country unoccupied. The neighboring Netsilik soon moved in, apparently attracted by the stores of driftwood to be found along the western shores of King William Island and Adelaide Peninsula. Driftwood was precious to the Netsilik, since it was very rarely found in their country.

Despite the remoteness of their habitat the Netsilik were visited by numerous expeditions in the nineteenth century. The main reason behind these expeditions was the search for a northwest passage from the Atlantic to the Pacific oceans that could considerably shorten the route from Europe to East Asia. Sir John Ross was the first to winter with two ships near King William Island in 1830–33. He lost a ship due to heavy ice conditions, thus providing the Eskimos with an enormous supply of wood and iron. In 1833, Sir George Back traveled along the river that carries his name and reached Chantrey inlet from the south, while Sir George Simpson approached the eastern part of the country, reaching what is today Simpson Peninsula. Then in 1847–48 the large expedition of Sir John Franklin arrived near King William Island. Blocked by thick ice, unable to sail, the crew abandoned the ships, and all died of starvation. Subsequently, a number of smaller expeditions came to find out what had happened to Franklin; but none of these various travelers wrote much concerning the Netsilik's customs and manners.

This was not the case with the expedition led by the famous Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen who wintered in 1903–5 in Gjoa Harbor on the south coast of King William Island and gave a valuable description of Netsilik culture. Then in 1923 came Knud Rasmussen, the Danish ethnographer and folklorist who traveled the entire Arctic coast of North America from Igloolik to western Alaska by dog team. In the eight months he spent with the Netsilik he amassed innumerable data about the subsistence techniques, migration patterns, social organization, and, most important, the intellectual culture of the tribe. Being

partly of Greenlandic origin, Rasmussen spoke the Eskimo language fluently and was already well acquainted with Eskimo mentality. This allowed him to view Netsilik culture with considerable insight and interpret it with brilliance and ease.

The Netsilik Rasmussen met were a sturdy people sharing the physical characteristics of most Central Eskimos. They were of medium stature without being short, had abundant head hair which was straight and black, very thin beards among the elderly only, and rather thin eyebrows. Their skin color was light, grayish-yellow in tone. They had relatively large heads with the faces markedly flat. This was due to a narrow forehead, wide and prominent cheekbones, massive jaws, faintly developed brow ridges, and only a slightly protruding and narrow nose. These traits gave the face a peculiar pentagonal form. The teeth of these meat eaters were extraordinarily sound and strong. Together with other Mongoloids, the Netsilik had an abundant deposit of fatty tissue in the region of the eye orbit. In relation to the trunk and general stature, the legs were very long, the arms short, and the hands and feet definitively small.

The language the Netsilik spoke was so similar to the language spoken by all Eskimo groups from Greenland to northwestern Alaska that in his long journey along the Arctic coast, meeting with many different Eskimo groups, Rasmussen never needed an interpreter. He was able to understand each local dialect with ease.

When Rasmussen met the Netsilik in 1923, they numbered 259 people in all and were already in possession of firearms, obtained a few years before from the Aivilik Eskimos. This changed their subsistence activities profoundly. Instead of having to wait in kayaks in order to attack the caribou at special crossing places, they could now chase after herds practically at any season and kill as many caribou as they wanted from a long distance. And with guns, they could also more easily kill seals in winter in open water at the ice edge.

These changes had a great impact. The migration patterns changed and caribou hunting could easily take place in winter. Further, with more food available, larger dog teams could be kept and this increased their mobility. This led to the gradual abandonment of breathing-hole sealing and the associated seal-meat sharing pattern. And a new activity was introduced in the area, namely trapping white foxes. The fox pelts were traded against various imported goods: rifles, ammunition, woolen clothing, canvas tents, tobacco, tea, and canoes that replaced the now useless kayaks.

In the 1930s both Catholic and Protestant missionaries arrived in the area and the Netsilik were rapidly converted to Christianity. They abandoned their various taboos and religious observances together with their use of amulets, and the local shamans stopped their practice. They began to concentrate near three stable settlements: Gjoa Haven on King William Island, Spence Bay, and Kugardjuk on Pelly Bay. Missionaries, traders, and constables of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police radically influenced and transformed Netsilik culture and social life. A rapid acculturation process began, accelerated in the late 1950s by the establishment of government schools and nursing stations. Many young Netsilik boys and girls now speak English, dress in imported clothing, eat imported foods, and dance to Western tunes. The traditional Netsilik culture remains only in the memory of a few elderly persons.

This book is an attempt to describe Netsilik traditional ways prior to the introduction of firearms, elaborate steel tools, imported clothing, and foodstuffs. I will look at the Netsilik essentially as they were when Rasmussen first came upon them nearly fifty years ago.

Part I / MAN AND ENVIRONMENT

skin thong. The mouthpiece was a caribou anklebone, and the drill had a sharp iron point set into a wooden shaft. (A well-supplied tool kit included drills with points of varying sizes.) The bow drill could perforate any kind of bone or wood object. An *adze* had a narrow iron blade fastened to an antler handle with skin thongs. It was used to thin down antler or, less often, wood. A *whittling knife* had a small, pointed iron blade with a curved edge. The blade was riveted to a very long handle of antler. The lower end of the whittling knife rested under the man's arm as he drew the blade toward his body. Special implements were used for splitting and incising antler. They consisted of short and sturdy blades—either slightly curved, ribbon-shaped with a transverse edge, or beak-shaped—inserted into a bone handle.

Although the saw was not an Eskimo implement, the Netsilik Eskimos made and cut antler with small saws patterned after the European saws of the early explorers. The

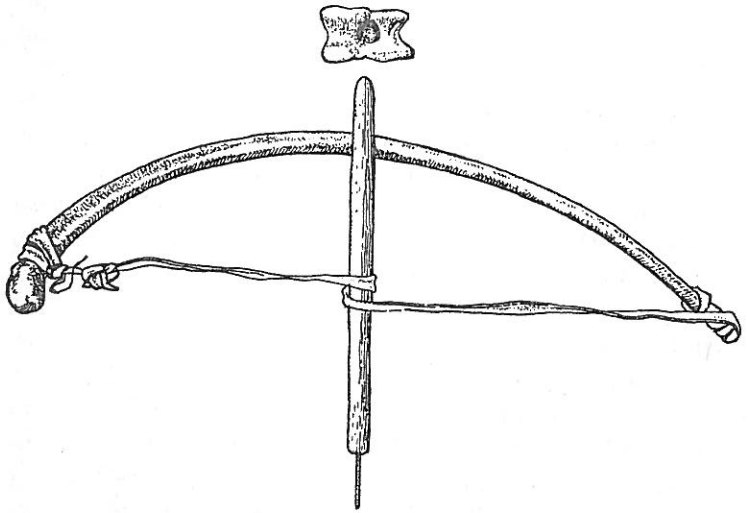

Figure 5 Bow Drill

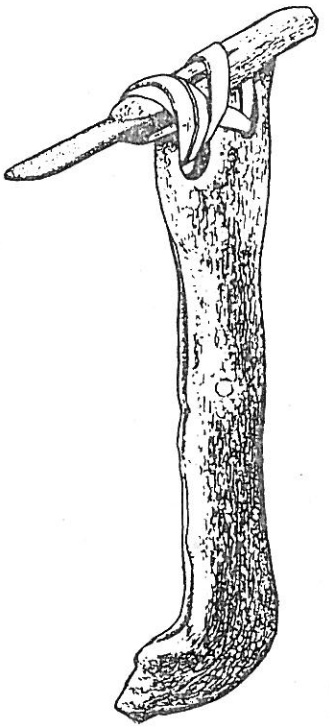

Figure 6 Adze

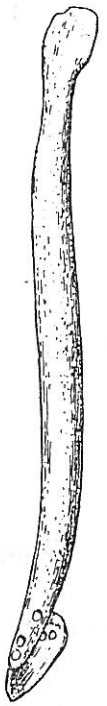

Figure 7 Whittling Knife

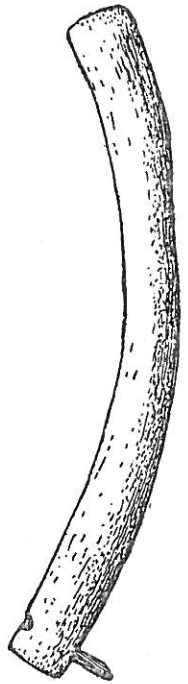

Figure 8 Splitting Knife

Netsilik saws consisted of small, rectangular pieces of sheet metal inserted into antler handles. The teeth of the saw were regularly recut and sharpened with the adze.

These few implements were all the tools needed for working caribou antler. To prepare antler for use, first the lateral branches of the antler were cut off with the saw, then the main antler trunk was split into two or more long pieces by making a longitudinal groove with the splitting knife and gradually deepening it while at the same time applying pressure downward. The sharp edges of the resulting slabs were rounded with the adze and smoothed with the little scrap-

end of February or even the beginning of March. In most normal years, the Netsilik congregated in their large winter camps on the flat sea ice by January.

SEAL HUNTING IN MIDWINTER

Midwinter in the Arctic regions is the darkest and coldest season of the year. At its highest point, the sun barely shows above the horizon and twilight reigns for the rest of the short day. Land and sea are frozen hard, with the sea ice over seven feet thick. The tundra looks more barren and desolate than ever, with nearly all caribou and migrating birds gone south, and lemmings, marmots, and hares burying themselves under the snow. Frequent winds sweep the snow, making it drift and piling it high and hard under slopes and hills. Blizzards and snowstorms greatly reduce visibility.

It was through this frozen desert that the Netsilik had to travel to reach the seal-hunting areas, taking with them their women and children, their sledges loaded high and heavy with all the necessities of life. The Netsilik had very little food to spare for their dogs and consequently could afford to keep an average of only one or two dogs per family. This meant that the men had to help the dogs to move the heavy sledges while at the same time guiding the dogs with the whip and directing the sledge between all the crevices and pits in the broken ice that the caravans had to cross. The wives usually led the dogs, walking in front of them at a distance of five to ten yards, turning frequently and shouting the signal cries. Sometimes, however, the women had to join the men in dragging the sledges. Only small children incapable of walking over long distances were allowed to sit on the sledges. As for the older people, they dragged themselves behind the caravan, painfully stumbling over the protruding ice, moving their feet with difficulty

through the thick snow, and falling farther and farther behind the caravan. Often the main part of the group had reached its destination and completely set up camp before the older people caught up.

Seals were to be found in many bays and straits of the Netsilik coast; they were especially plentiful at Pelly Bay, Shepherd Bay and Rae Strait, and Lord Mayor Bay. Many factors influenced the choice of a particular camp site within a general marine area, but the most important was the presence of clusters of seal breathing holes, an unmistakable indication of seal availability. The sealing area also had to be well covered with snow. The seal could easily hear the hunter's steps on the ice if there was no layer of snow to dampen the noise. But the snow cover could not be too thick or soft, as then the breathing holes were extremely difficult to find. It was also essential for the settlement to be located near a pile of old, broken ice imprisoned in the fresh and smooth ice sheet. Old sea ice has the characteristic of losing most of its salinity after a year, and it was necessary that old sea ice be available in order for the camp to have a supply of drinking water.

Hunting seals at the breathing holes was the main subsistence activity of the Netsilik from January until the end of May. It was essentially a group activity requiring the collaboration of numerous hunters, which is easy to understand when the winter habits of the seal are taken into consideration. The seal is an air-breathing mammal, and he has to come to the surface of the sea every fifteen or twenty minutes and breathe prolongedly. This is easy enough in summer, but in the winter, when the sea is covered with a continuous sheet of ice, the seal has to breathe through a hole in the ice. This hole the seal makes himself, right after ice formation in autumn, by scratching the lower part of the sea ice with his sharp claws. This creates a small air-filled ice dome which is gradually covered with snow. As the sea ice thickens to six or seven feet through the win-

ter, the seal keeps his breathing hole open by continuously destroying any new ice that forms in it, until his breathing hole has taken on the form of a tall funnel with a small air chamber on top. The warm air from the seal's breath makes a small hole through the snow cover.

Since a seal has to move over a considerable area in his search for food and cannot return constantly to the same breathing hole, he generally uses a number of breathing holes over a wide area. This makes it very difficult for a single hunter to catch a seal, since he could not possibly watch all the breathing holes that a seal might be using. If, however, a group of hunters attends a number of breathing holes lying in proximity, their chances of catching a seal speedily will be considerably increased; thus the Netsilik joined in large winter camps so that a maximum number of hunters could collaborate.

The size of these winter settlements varied considerably from large camps containing up to one hundred persons to the more common camps of fifty to sixty people. The hunters, including the boys capable of contributing to seal hunting, constituted about one third of the population. Thus there were at least fifteen hunters in most sealing stations, though there were also some camps only about half that size.

Numerous factors influenced settlement dimensions. One was seal availability. Under decreased ecological pressure, the necessity for large groups of people to hunt and stay together decreased and sections of the big community might break away. As soon as the seal returns became less regular, the tendency toward larger group formation reasserted itself. Camps sometimes broke up into smaller groups toward the end of the winter sealing season in order to get nearer to their spring sealing areas. And sometimes smaller winter camps could be located near each other with frequent intercommunication. Obviously, purely social factors influenced the fusion of the camps, as well as hunting necessities. Winter camps rarely remained for over a month

in one locality. After the seal resources of an area were considered exhausted, the people moved to another hunting place, constantly in search of better opportunities. Winter life was one of frequent migrations, though the distance between old and new camps rarely exceeded ten miles.

The first task that faced men and women upon arrival at a sealing area was the construction of snowhouses and the setting up of camp. This was doubly tiresome, since it took place at the end of an exhausting journey. The selection of an appropriate site was made with the help of a special tool, the snow probe, a long, thin rod of antler, three to four feet long, with an ovoid ferrule at one end and a small handle at the other. The igloo builder pushed the snow probe gently through the snow in various places in order to find a building material of the right consistency. A sizable snow bank is always made up of several layers of snow, frequently of unequal thickness and density. The snow probe could go down through the top layer of soft snow and help to find a good layer, thick and hard enough so that snow blocks could be cut in it.

Once the proper sort of building snow had been found, the igloo builder went to work. The thin top covering of soft snow was removed quickly with the snow shovel, an ingenious tool illustrating the Eskimo's ability to employ substitute materials for hard-to-find wood. The frame was made of split antler, four or five pieces held strongly together with plaited sinew threads, to which a piece of depilated sealskin was tightly fastened. It was held very low, almost horizontal to the snow surface, by an antler handle and was operated with short quick thrusts.

The soft snow thus removed, a large circle was drawn with a snow knife on the harder snow surface, representing exactly the dimensions of the igloo. Then the cutting of the rectangular snow blocks proceeded quickly. These were about twenty inches wide, twenty-five inches long, and four inches thick. Usually the building site within the drawn

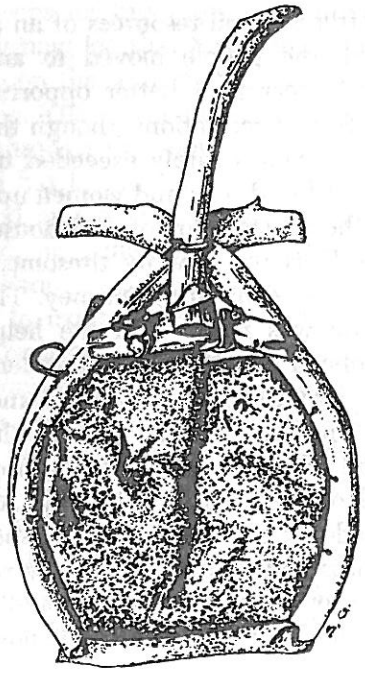

Figure 21 Snow Shovel

circle provided all the material needed for the construction. After each few snow blocks were cut, they were placed on the circular wall, one beside the other, in a spiral manner, with each ascending row extending a little further inwards. This, of course, created the igloo's characteristic beehive shape. To ensure that the blocks fit closely together, each new block was gently pressed against the preceding one with a slight stroke. Chinks were eliminated with the snow knife and the sides of the snow blocks were smoothed and straightened. As blocks were cut out of the snow for the walls, the igloo floor was cleared downwards. The last blocks for the igloo were cut and shaped with particular care. They were smaller, and when set in place they completed the roof of the snowhouse.

All this construction work was carried out by the man, standing inside the igloo. As he built up the walls, his wife stood outside, using the snow shovel to plaster over the outside of the igloo with fine, soft snow which concealed the outlines of the blocks and filled in all the holes. The completed igloo consequently looked something like a snow heap.

The snow furnishings inside were constructed next. First a hole was cut through the igloo wall at the level of the sleeping counter, two or three feet above the floor. It was through this hole that all excess snow was thrown out and people's belongings moved in. To build the sleeping counter, a row of snow blocks was placed at its front limit and all the snow lying on the floor space was piled up behind them with the snow shovel, then the irregular surface was packed hard and smoothed with the snow shovel. At one corner of the floor adjoining the wall, the "kitchen table" was similarly erected. It was of the same height as the sleeping counter. A small block of snow was placed between the kitchen compartment and the sleeping area for the housewife to rest her feet on.

The main part of the igloo was now almost complete and ready for the housewife to move in. At this point the sled was unloaded and all household furnishings thrown in through the wall opening. This opening was then closed, and while the woman put away their belongings, the man built the porch and the doorway. The round porch stood at the entrance of the igloo and had the same semispherical shape, although it was much smaller. The entrance hole connecting the igloo itself to this porch was very low, rarely higher than two feet, and it had a rounded top. To the porch he added the doorway, a long, low, and narrow corridor with straight walls and flat roof consisting of a single row of snow blocks. The entrance from the long doorway to the porch was somewhat bigger than the entrance to the igloo itself. The long doorway functioned as a windbreak, since it

could be moved to the left or right in order to keep the prevailing winds from blowing directly into the igloo. A shifting doorway was a necessity, since the igloo's entrance was never closed during the daytime. Finally a ventilation hole two to three inches wide was cut through the igloo's ceiling, which caused a constant circulation of fresh, cold air throughout the igloo (see plate 11).

The following day, or even later, a window was placed in the wall, most frequently above the entrance. This was a large panel of fresh-water ice (always clearer than sea ice), rectangular in shape with rounded corners, about three inches thick. First a square hole was cut in the wall, somewhat smaller than the window. Then the ice panel was placed over it from outside and the joints were trimmed with the snow knife until the window fit tightly into the wall. The window faced east or south, and frequently a snow block was placed on the outer wall nearby to function as a reflector. The ice window was carried along during the migrations, as there was no fresh water available with which to make a replacement.

There were many variations of this basic building pattern. Very often two related families shared the same igloo, as was the case when a recently married son resided with his father. In this case, kitchen tables were set up in front of both ends of the sleeping counter, with two lamps. Or sometimes an adjoining igloo was erected, sharing a common porch with an older igloo. Extensions of an existing igloo also could be added to accommodate a friend or a relative. And up to four igloos could be joined to provide support for one communal dance house.

The dance house was a very large structure erected several days after camp had been set and requiring a joint effort. Usually the four foundation igloos had already been built in the necessary circle, facing each other, with an eye to the forthcoming construction of the festive hall. To build the dance house, snow blocks were laid in a circle that included the front halves of the four base igloos. As the dance-house walls rose, they came together in the typical beehive shape, topping the four base igloos at a height just below where their ice windows were placed. After the completion of the large building, the snow walls of the base igloos now inside the new, bigger structure were knocked down. Through these large openings one could easily observe the neighboring families. The whole architectural complex sheltered a social unit.

In size as well as complexity the igloos varied greatly. There were very small igloos built by travelers for an overnight stay and designed to provide shelter for one or two men. The usual family igloos may have ranged from nine to fifteen feet in diameter and slightly over six feet in height. In these the sleeping platform was twenty to thirty inches high and extended in depth to nearly two thirds of the igloo. The doorway was less than three feet high. Among neighboring tribes the Netsilik were highly regarded for their igloo-building abilities. When working at full speed, a man helped by his wife could erect a family-size igloo in slightly more than a hour.

Arranging the furnishings inside an igloo was mainly the woman's task. After all the family's possessions had been thrown inside on the sleeping platform and the opening in the wall closed, the woman lit her soapstone lamp. She placed this lamp on the kitchen table, making it stand flat with three antler or wooden sticks stuck vertically in the snow table. The lamp was placed with the inner edge of the crescent turned toward the interior of the hut. To provide fuel for the lamp, she extracted a piece of frozen blubber from the blubber bag and beat it with the blubber pounder on a board until it became soft and the oil liquefied. (The blubber pounder was a common tool made of the distal end of a musk-ox horn with several incisions serving as a handle.) The woman then threw this dripping piece of blubber on the lamp. From a round sealskin container she

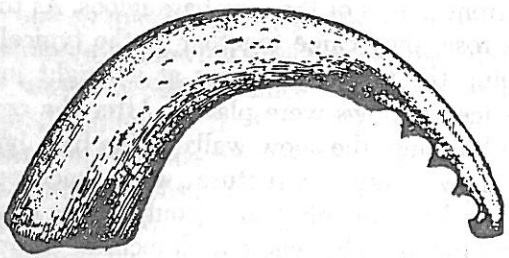

Figure 22 Blubber Pounder

then took some finely chopped wick moss soaked with oil and skillfully laid it all along the outer edge of the lamp. It was essential that the lamp be lighted to its maximal capacity.

Then the housewife either made fire herself with pyrites and a piece of iron or went out to bring fire from a neighboring igloo, in which case she carried a flaming piece of moss in her hands, under her coat. She lit the long lampwick, and soon the entire length of moss would be burning. As the burning wick heated the lamp, the blubber melted completely and the lamp was fully operative. The housewife controlled the wick with a stone wick trimmer, which she used to sharpen the upper edge of the wick to eliminate smoke; and underneath the lamp she put an oval sealskin container to catch any oil that might drip through the porous stone. The heat generated by the fully lit lamp led to a slight melting of the inner surface of the igloo, which helped the blocks settle down and caused a thin crust of ice to be formed which welded the blocks together and increased the strength of the ceiling. Her lamp lit, the wife then set about ordering her household.

In order to set the drying rack above the lamp, three long sticks were necessary. The first usually came from the leister's shaft. It was stuck vertically in the floor, right at the outer corner of the kitchen platform. It supported the ends of the other two sticks, which were horizontally stuck into

the igloo wall. These sticks provided the support for the drying rack, which was indispensable for the drying of wet clothing.

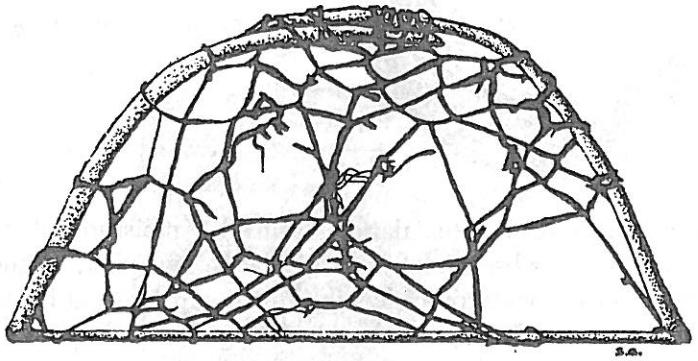

Figure 23 Drying Rack

The drying rack itself consisted of a rectangular frame of antler over which a net of thin caribou-skin thongs was hung. One of the supporting sticks was arranged so that it was parallel to the lamp's axis, and it was from this stick that the soapstone pot was suspended on thongs, right above the lamp wick.

Meat sticks and soup ladles were usually placed on the kitchen platform. The soup ladle was made of the proximal end of a musk-ox horn, with a small handle at the back. Many cuts of meat were also thrown on the kitchen platform, behind the lamp. Near the drying rack a piece of antler was driven into the wall for hanging various dippers and sealskin containers, which were used mostly for water carrying.

Once her kitchen was in order, the wife looked after the bedding. She placed the tent pole at the edge of the sleeping platform, to provide additional resistance to the friction caused by constant climbing and sitting at the platform edge. The sleeping skins were never laid directly on the

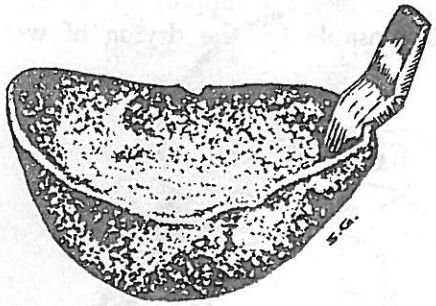

Figure 24 Soup Ladle

snow platform. For insulation from the moisture of the snow, caribou ribs were frequently laid down first, aligned in rows, or the waterproof kayak skins might be used for the same purpose. On top of the insulating material came the mattress skins, two layers of the thickest caribou fur, the hair of the lower layer facing downwards and the hair of the upper layer upwards. Then came the blanket or sleeping skins, sewn together. The Netsilik did not use sleeping bags. In addition to their bedding, they threw old clothing at the back of the sleeping platform.

They neglectfully stored extra skins, various amounts of meat and blubber, and all the weapons and tools on the floor at the opposite corner of the kitchen platform and in the snow porch. Small pups were usually kept on the igloo floor. Harpoons and spears were stuck in the outside igloo wall near the entrance, and the snow beater was stuck into the wall on the inside.

There were several snow constructions outside, nearby the igloos. Dog feed was kept high on an elevated snow platform, out of reach of the dogs. For the sealskin sledge a special shelter was dug out in the snow and well covered with snow blocks. Finally, a small toilet room was built near the igloo settlement. It was a small, round shelter constructed of snow blocks, sufficient for protection from the drifting snow.

Figure 25 Sealskin Container

After camp was set, seal hunting began. During the winter, the Netsilik practiced the breathing-hole method of sealing, called *maursurniq*, almost exclusively. Among the Netsilik Eskimos seal hunting at the breathing holes was an elaborate and demanding artful technique requiring prolonged training, enormous endurance, and patience. Many ingenious and delicately carved tools were necessary for this method of hunting.

The ice-hunting harpoon was the most important weapon. It was made almost entirely of antler, and was about four and a half feet long. The shaft was round and strong.

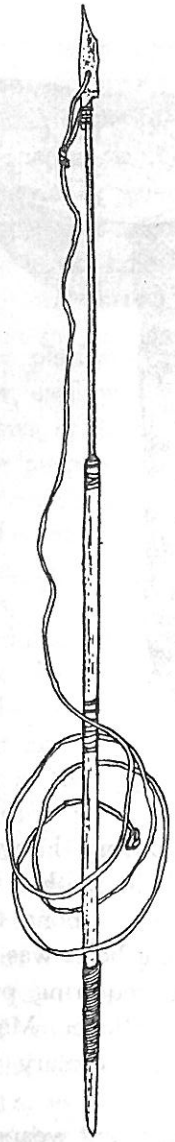

Figure 26
Ice-Hunting Harpoon

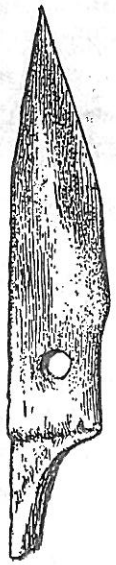

Figure 27
Harpoon Head

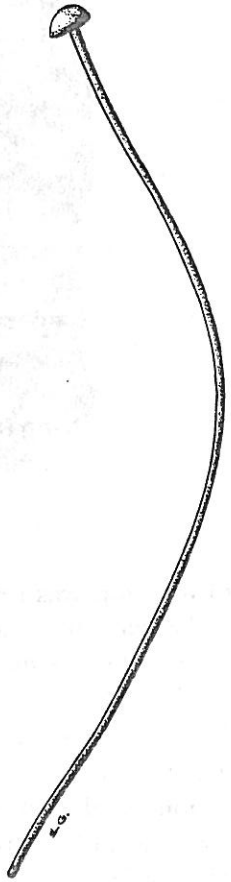

Figure 28
Breathing-Hole Searcher

At one end was inserted a long and thin foreshaft, also of caribou antler, while at the other end a strong blade of hard bear bone was fixed, used as an ice pick. Various kinds of harpoon heads were utilized, originally with chipped flint blades, then during the historic period with iron blades. Often harpoon heads were made entirely of bear bone with no separate blades inserted. All harpoon heads were barbless, with sharpened stems. Thongs of bearded sealskin or plaited sinew were used as harpoon lines, the latter preferred in midwinter.

The snow probe was also taken along and used to locate the breathing hole. Another important tool was the breathing-hole searcher, a long and slender piece of caribou antler, curved in the middle, with a knob-like handle on one end. With this searcher inserted in the seal's breathing hole and turned around, the hunter could test its exact contours. This was necessary, since some breathing holes had irregular shapes. The seal, in keeping his hole free of ice, might scratch one side of the hole's wall more than the others, thus giving it a somewhat curved shape. The hunter had to be informed of this in order to strike down in the hole in the proper direction to kill his seal.

Out on the flat ice, the harpoon without the head, the snow probe, and the searcher were held in the hunter's left hand while the dog was held on leash in the right hand. All the other tools were kept in the hunting bag, which the hunter carried on his back. The squarish hunting bag was made of caribou fur, foxskin, or fetus-seal skin. Besides using the bag as a tool container, the hunter stood on it during the long motionless watch at the breathing hole, even sometimes putting his feet inside it. This was done not only for additional protection against the intense cold, but for reducing any possible foot noises on the snow, to which the seals were highly sensitive.

Figure 29 Game Bag

Inside the bag he kept a harpoon head and line, one of two kinds of indicators, a wound pin, the two harpoon rests, a horn scoop, the breathing-hole protector, and a short thong with a toggle to drag the seal home.

The indicator was a device used to signal the arrival of the seal at a breathing hole. The down indicator was the most commonly used. It was an extremely delicate device, consisting mainly of a piece of hard caribou leg sinew, split so as to resemble a small spider with two claws. A bit of swan's-down was attached to this by a sinew thread. The horn indicator was much simpler, consisting of two very thin

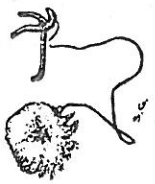

Figure 30 Down Indicator

antler rods of unequal length connected by a cord. The longer rod, about twenty inches in length, had a bone knob at the end.

As for the two harpoon rests, they were made either of wood or of antler, pointed at the bottom and with a fur skin-lined notch in the upper edge. This addition of skin was necessary to reduce any possible noise that might be pro-

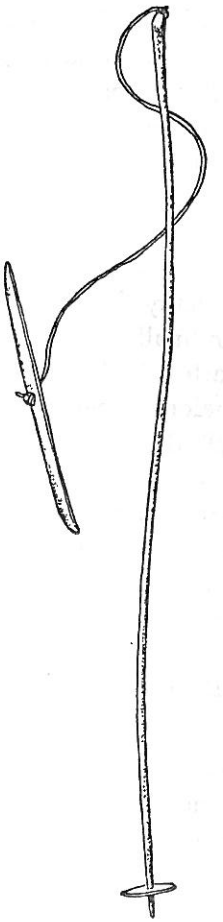

Figure 31 Bone Indicator

Figure 32 Harpoon Rest

duced when the harpoon was lifted from its rests at the crucial moment before the strike. The breathing-hole scoop was a musk-ox horn, with a narrow, deep bowl and a straight handle. These tools and the indispensable snow knife made up the complete equipment of the seal hunter.

The decision where to hunt was taken after much discussion and deliberation. The hunters concentrated their attention on the areas consisting entirely of fresh flat ice, since seals avoided all old broken ice. After each hunt, long comments were made on the seal availability in particular areas. These discussions were sometimes continued in the morning before preparations for the new hunting expedition had started. The say of the elderly hunters naturally carried greater weight, although the younger men freely expressed their views.

Each winter camp had a leader, usually the eldest of the capable hunters, and it was up to him finally to decide when and where to hunt. The hunters started their preparations early in the morning. A good meal before departure was indispensable, since that was often all the food the sealers would eat on a hunting day, at least until their return in the evening. After the meal they put on their outer clothing and thick footwear, then checked and assembled the various instruments to be used during the hunt. The dogs were put on leash, the harpoons were tested for strength, and everywhere there was an atmosphere of general excitement. As Amundsen, who watched the departure of a large sealing party, skillfully observed:

> They have a great deal to talk about. One would think they were living in a world of stirring events, and offering a variety of topics for conversation and discussion, and not here in an ice field, which has been lying silent and desolate for aeons, and where life from day to day, yea, from century to century, has gone on in changeless monotony (1908:30).

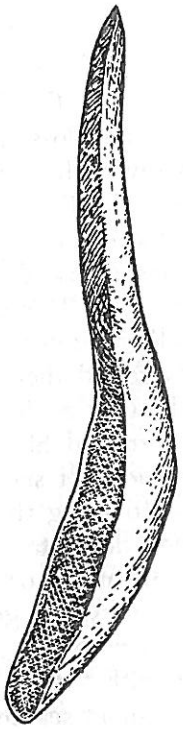

Figure 33 Breathing-Hole Scoop

The group set off together toward the selected hunting area, which was not too far, usually within walking distance from camp. Once there, the group split up and the hunters moved individually in different directions, led by their dogs. The role of the dog was of crucial importance in winter sealing. Since there was no sign on the snow surface that might indicate the presence of a breathing hole below, the hunters relied on their dogs' sense of smell to find them. As soon as the dog smelled a breathing hole he stopped and either turned around at the same place or lay down. Not all dogs were good at this task, so a dog with a good smell for

breathing holes was highly prized for his usefulness in sealing.

Once his dog had indicated that a breathing hole was nearby, the hunter announced the discovery with a loud cry. Other hunters searching close by then rushed to the scene and thrust their snow probes into the snow, trying to find the narrow breathing hole. The hunter who first actually hit the hole became its "owner" and remained there, though he was not always the one whose dog had initially discovered the presence of the hole. This custom of course, was not observed by those other hunters who were out of earshot or who had already found their own holes.

Having found a breathing hole, the hunter then prepared for the watch. First he removed his dog from the hunting place and tied him to a block of snow. Then he cut away the upper layer of snow covering the breathing hole with the snow knife and leaned down to see and smell whether the breathing hole was still in use or whether it was abandoned and frozen. If the hole was a good one, he broke the hard, ice-like snow on top with the ice pick fixed on this harpoon and removed it with the ice scoop. Then he took his long, curved breathing-hole searcher and examined the contours inside and the curvature of the hole in order to determine the direction in which the harpoon should be thrust. After this the hunter again covered the breathing hole with snow, holding the snow probe straight in the middle of this snow heap, right above the hole and in the proper striking direction. When he lifted the snow probe out, a tiny dark hole of about half an inch remained below in the snow. The down indicator was then prepared for use. With a little saliva, a single piece of down was attached to the claws of the hard sinew so that the swan's-down appeared like a barely visible, curved thread between them. The indicator then was placed on the snow, with the single piece of bright down resting exactly above the dark little hole. In case there was drifting snow that might cover the hole, the

breathing-hole protector, a small cylinder of translucid sealskin, was placed right on top. The agitation of the water below following the arrival of the seal sent an air movement through the tiny hole which made the swan's-down vibrate. This was the signal for the strike.

Some hunters preferred the horn indicator. The shorter antler rod was stuck in the snow near the hole, while the longer rod was inserted in the water in a breathing hole. When the seal came to breathe, the rod either fell down or came up. In both cases the harpoon strike had to come fast.

After setting the indicator the hunter stuck the two harpoon rests in the snow and placed the ready harpoon on them. He put the furry hunting bag under his feet, pushed his hands in his sleeves to keep them warm, and began his watch, his knees slightly bent and the body leaning forward. This may have lasted several hours, depending on numerous conditions. As Rasmussen writes, "the hunter stands as motionless as a statue . . . eyes fixed intently on the swansdown. . . . Hour after hour goes by, and I realize what a fund of patience and hardiness is required when this hunting has to be pursued in a storm and in a temperature of about −50° Celsius" (1931:153). Rasmussen's party of fifteen hunters kept watch for eleven hours and caught one seal.

The actual harpooning came immediately after a positive signal from the indicator. The hunter seized the harpoon with his right hand while holding the coiled line with his left. The thrust was given with the whole strength and weight of the hunter's body. With the harpoon head sunk deeply into the seal, the hunter quickly withdrew the harpoon shaft and let some of the line go. The seal pulled down with all its strength while the hunter kept the lines firmly in hand. After a short struggle, the seal generally lost strength and the hunter was free to enlarge the ceiling of the breathing hole with his ice pick and pull the seal out.

This was the signal for all the hunters to assemble and

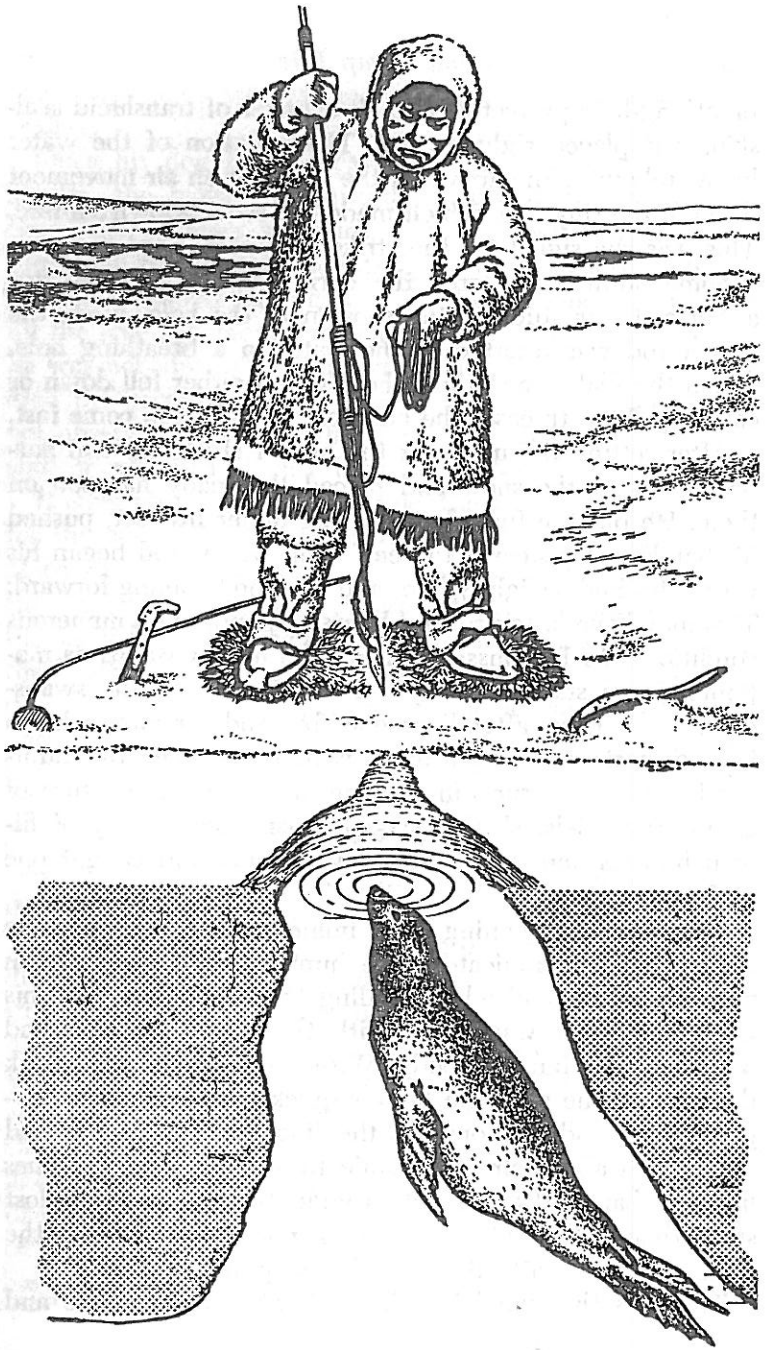

Figure 34 A Seal Hunter Prepares to Strike

partake of a minor feast. An incision was made on the seal's belly, the liver and some blubber removed, and these parts shared and eaten by the gathered hunters on the spot. The incision was then stitched with the wound pin and the seal strapped to the dogs to be dragged to camp. Once in the igloo it was laid on fresh snow and butchered by the wife of the lucky hunter. Meat and blubber were shared throughout camp according to complex rules to be described later.

This was the principal sealing technique of the Netsilik in winter. Only in Tuat, on the east coast of Boothia Isthmus, was a method of sealing different from the breathing-hole method just described in practice. This other method was called *itertalerineq* and was related to the ice cracks formed by sea currents in that region. As soon as such cracks occurred in the ice, the seals abandoned their breathing holes and came to breathe freely along the cracks. Taking advantage of this concentration of seals, the hunter built a snowhouse over one of these open cracks, closing the door with skins so that the interior should be as dark as possible. Inside his house he made an "artificial" breathing hole. A piece of ice with a hole in the middle resembling the seal's natural breathing hole was carved and placed over the ice crack in the igloo's floor. The seals swimming below were particularly attracted by this little hole, came up to breathe, and became easy prey to the hunter's harpoon. It was essential for the seal to be removed from under the ice very quickly in order to keep the crack clean from blood and leave it ready for another strike. This method of individualistic hunting was considered highly rewarding later in spring. It was also comparatively comfortable, since the igloo protected the hunter from storms and cold.

Occasionally bearded seals were caught in some areas, such as the northeastern part of Pelly Bay and the area around Ukjulik. The large bearded seal was killed in exactly the same manner as the ordinary ringed seal, but being a much larger animal, it offered considerably more resistance

and could drag the unwary hunter right down into the opening of the breathing hole. Letting a bearded seal go was considered very shameful, and usually the hunter struggled to the last. "No wonder that one often sees stiff and misshapen fingers as memorials of these bearded-seal hunts" (Rasmussen 1931:162).

Occasionally traveling or hunting the Netsilik came across polar bears, or their tracks. These bears were almost always pursued, and ferocious battles followed. First they let loose the dogs, who rushed madly at the bear, attacking it from all sides. The bear clawed viciously at the dogs, but they were quick enough to avoid his attacks and were able to keep the bear at bay until the arrival of the hunters. The hunting strategy depended on the number of hunters and the nature of the weapons. Generally the Eskimos carried with them a special barbless harpoon head, specifically designed for bear hunting. If heavier spears such as those used for musk-ox hunting were not available, the bear was attacked at close quarters with the sealing harpoon armed with the special head. It was a dangerous fight, and often the hunters suffered many scars and wounds, but the Netsilik never withdrew from a bear hunt. Bear meat was highly valued and was shared by all the hunters, while the man who gave the bear the fatal thrust kept the skin.

While the men hunted on the flat ice, domestic routines followed their usual slow rhythm in the igloos. The housewives tended their lamps, adding fresh blubber as needed, trimming the moss wicks. Old sea ice for drinking water had to be chopped in small pieces with the ice pick, brought home in the sealskin pail, and put in the soapstone pot to melt. Unused clothing and boots had to be put to dry on the drying rack. Both kitchen table and igloo floor had to be scraped clean from time to time with the ulu. Some boots had to be softened by chewing, and the children had to be fed and looked after.

While boys over the age of twelve were hunting seals already with the men, smaller children stayed in the camp and played outside, oblivious of the cold. Off and on they would duck inside for a bite of meat or a drink of water, or they might move their games into the dance house, filling the air with laughter. Older girls and even married women, after having watched the younger ones for some time, would suddenly jump and excitedly join the play, only to withdraw later just as abruptly and resume their work. Relatively small girls around the age of ten actively helped their mothers, some even carrying babies on their backs. Women abstained from sewing. As long as the sun was low, there was a taboo forbidding all sewing work. Around March, however, the sun moved high enough for the taboo to be relaxed, and the women were able to repair some clothing at the camp.

While the hunters were sealing, a great deal of visiting went on in camp. The large winter settlements united people who were separated the rest of the year, and were the ideal place for endless chatting and gossip. Visiting took place informally. The women, often accompanied by their small children, walked in and out of the igloos, visiting several households in succession and spending much time in each one. This went on all day until, in the evening, somebody spotted the returning hunters on the horizon and gave the call. Then the whole community came out of their igloos to scan the horizon for the hunters, trying to guess about their success.

Lively conversation greeted the hunters on their arrival. The exhausted men removed their outer clothing together with their caribou fur boots. Coats, trousers, and boots were carefully beaten with the snow beater to remove any snow remaining on the fur, then the clothing was spread to dry on top of the drying rack while the men put on short sealskin boots sufficient for walking around camp.

The evening meal followed quickly. All members of an extended family usually ate together, men and boys on one

side, women, girls, and small children on the other. Then came the men's turn to do some visiting. Informal gatherings took place here and there, all the events of the day were discussed, and plans for future hunts were worked out. Then, one by one, the men withdrew to their igloos and prepared for sleep.

During the night the igloo door was closed with a snow block functioning as a door. When bedtime came, people undressed completely, quickly jumped under the sleeping skins, and slept naked with their heads toward the entrance. The housewife was the last to go to bed, for she had to turn down the flame on the lamp, leaving a very small flame burning all night, and to place the *korvik*, a long chamber pot of sealskin, on the floor within easy reach.

CAMP LIFE IN SPRING

As winter went along, gradual changes began to take place in the environment. The days became longer, the sun brighter and higher in the sky, so that the warmth of its rays could be felt on the face at midday. New activities were added to seal hunting at the breathing holes. The end of March was the time when the seals gave birth. They did this by digging their way through one of their breathing holes to come onto the ice, where they opened a round little cavern in the thick snow cover. There, beside their mother's breathing hole, the baby seals were born, and they became easy prey for the Netsilik hunters. Since these young seals had not yet learned to swim, the hunters could capture them by hand.

Some trapping of white foxes took place in the early spring. Among the traditional Netsilik this was very much a secondary activity, not necessarily restricted to the spring season. The intensity of trapping generally varied with the need for clothing skins. Although the Netsilik were acquainted with several trapping techniques, they relied mostly on the stone trap, a rectangular structure of flat stones. A piece of bait was placed so as to lure the fox inside the trap, at which point the trap door was knocked into place and the animal was caught. Spring was also a good time to catch ground squirrels, and there were excellent places for catching them throughout the Netsilik country. A thin snare was hung on a short stick just over the squirrel's burrow. The hunter, lying concealed a few yards away, held the end of the line. As soon as the squirrel appeared, the hunter pulled the line and the small animal was caught by the neck.

By early May, the igloos began to be somewhat uncomfortable. With the warming up of the weather there was sporadic dripping from the ceiling. Dampness inside the igloo increased, making the sleeping skins wet. As new igloos were built later in the season, their domes were made progressively higher and more pointed to prevent them from collapsing. Most families finally did away with the ceilings altogether and covered their igloo walls with a sealskin tent sheet. This structure, half igloo-half tent, was called a *karmaq*. Although it eliminated dripping, it was dark and remained somewhat damp.

As the weather warmed up and the snow began to melt, sledge travel became more difficult. The ice patina on the runners did not last long enough, and the peat shoeing began to wear away, leaving dark traces on the snow. The sledges sank in the softening snow, and dragging them forward required exhausting efforts. Under these conditions, the Netsilik sometimes added ice "skis" to the runners. Long blocks of fresh-water ice were cut and trimmed down to a suitable size and thickness and then glued to the runners with wet snow. This was done on cold nights and allowed for smoother sledging for a day or so. Then the sealskin runners gave out and started melting. At this point, sledging had to be abandoned altogether. Bearskins or the skins of