Asbestos Hill: Inuit Experiences with Nunavik’s First Mine

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Historical Mining in Arctic Canada

- Increasing federal government presence in the Arctic (’50s- ’60s): housing, education, and welfare payments
- Boom in mineral exploration after World War II
- Mine operation creates jobs and changes Inuit lifestyles
- Impacts of mine closure
- Negative legacies of past mines
Asbestos Hill mine

- **1972-1984**
- 1\textsuperscript{st} in Nunavik
- 2\textsuperscript{nd} in Arctic Canada
Research Questions

1. What is the history of the Asbestos Hill mine?

2. What were the experiences of Inuit working at the mine?

3. What were the impacts and legacies of the Asbestos Hill mine?
Methodology and Fieldwork

- Oral history and archival research methods
- May – July 2015
- In Salluit and Kangiqsujuaq
- 17 interview participants
- Mainly Inuit men (past Asbestos Hill mine workers)

Photo: Salluit, June 2015.
Source: Jeanette Carney
Mine Operation

- Fly-in fly-out
- 3 months on/2 weeks off
- 400 male workers

Asbestos production:
- Asbestos Hill mine: 1,550,000 tonnes/year
- Average mine in southern Québec: 884,000 tonnes/year
Inuit Work Experience

- Inuit were recruited to work at the mine by federal government officials and friends and family
- Labourers, heavy equipment operators, mechanic and electrician helpers, “dynamite boys”
- Overall experience: Positive
- “Wild West”

Photo: Inuit Asbestos Hill mine workers returning to Salluit
Source: Centre d’archives de la région de Thetford
“At the [Asbestos Hill mine] there was a bar and even if that bar had closed there was all the time alcohol, gambling, and some prostitution. They used to send prostitutes to the mine to keep those mines up and running”

- Yaaka Yaaka, resident of Kangiqsujuaq

Photo: Bar at the Asbestos Hill mine
Source: Centre d’archives de la région de Thetford
Impacts and Legacies

- Mine closure
- Social and Health
- Cultural
- Economic
- Environmental

“[Just] prior to the closing of the mine, it was an open season for getting some cheap, cheap booze and that really affected [Salluit]. For a small community, it has a big impact on everyone. … It affected [families] quite dramatically”

- Willie Keatainak, former mine worker
Conclusions and Implications

- Overall: positive work experience and a negative community experience
- Led to Canada’s first Impact and Benefit Agreement (IBA)
- Introduced mining policies in Nunavik
- Contributes to the knowledge of Inuit experiences with mining

Photo: Raglan Nickel mine
Thank you!