

Tales from Old Davis Inlet

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Jim and Maggie, Old Davis Inlet, 1985

Eric Loring Photo



Jim and Maggie, Davis Inlet, Aug. 1985.

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Davis Inlet

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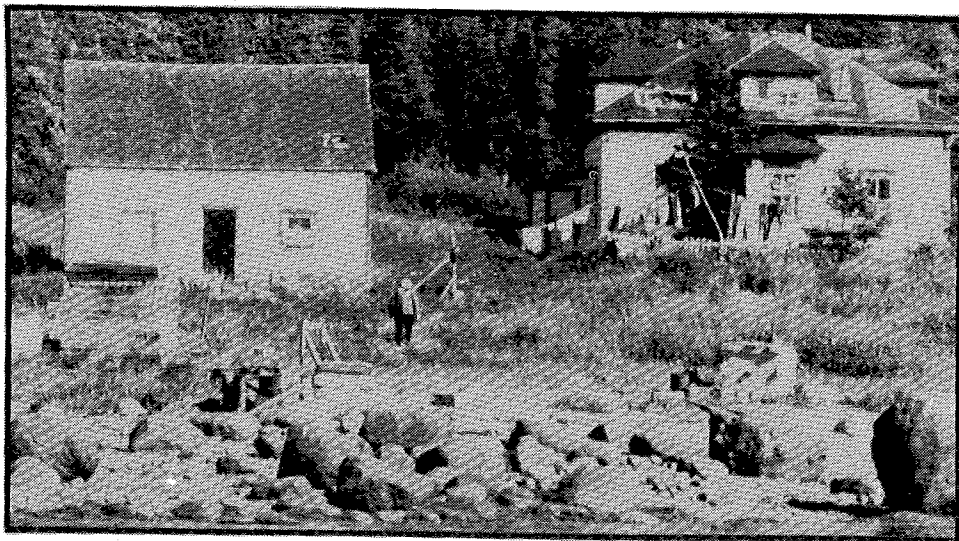


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Old Davis Inlet



The Saunders' home at Old Davis Inlet

Eric Loring Photo

Among the brightest memories of Labrador are the nights at the old post at Davis Inlet, with Jim and Maggie Saunders spinning stories of those days, while the northern lights danced up and down the quiet waters of the run. No matter what the weather, or the hour, one could always expect to be invited in for a 'warm', and I always considered myself a lucky one to be able to avail myself of their hospitality and welcome.

I think that there are few people who so clearly fit their homes as did Jim and Maggie. Jim stood tall and proud, well weathered, but solid. Their house, although not as old as the man, was the same way, in that it was ramshackled and worn. The Labrador winters and the twenty years it stood abandoned have aged the house prematurely, but the care and skill in the hands that built it are evident. The weathering has not been accompanied by decay. The Saunders' home at 'Old Davis' is situated on the spot where the Hudson's Bay Company post once stood. All that remains of the old post now is the shed that stands beside the house and, back in the woods, the old cemetery with its marble stones and wrought iron fencing. Sitting beside the window looking out the Run towards Massacre Island, Jim allowed as how 'Goose Bay is a nice home, but after dinner I look out the window at the cars. It's not like this!' and spreading out his arms he embraces all that he could see. It is the same window out of which Maggie saw a black bear come into her rhubarb patch in 1978, the bear was smart and didn't come back.

Wolverines



Wolverine shot by Robert Walcott and William Brooks Cabot in the barren grounds west of Mistastin River, Labrador, August 4, 1904.

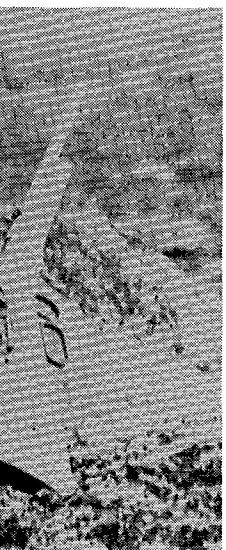
William Brooks Cabot collection

Courtesy National Anthropological Archives,
Smithsonian Institution, Washington.

Once I asked Jim about wolverines.

"Oh yes, devils! They were devils!" he said. "You'd have fox traps out and they would come along and tear them right up. In the country you can cache your stuff, build it up on a scaffold as high as that, and they get up there and take care of everything you got. You can cache stuff on the ground, put rocks up on it, and they'll dig that up. No way you could keep them from getting it. Oh, they were devils! they weren't common around here for years, they have all disappeared. They were really smart, you couldn't get them in a trap. Old man Broomfield got four one winter over in Jack Lane's Bay, he got them to shoot themselves. What he used to do was to build a sort of box and put a loaded gun, that he had into it, set with a spring and maybe a seal flipper tied to the spring. They'd shoot themselves."

"They was a nuisance, them things! They'd get up on your scaffold and wreck everything! I don't know why they have disappeared. They've been completely gone for years and years even before I went to Goose Bay. The last one that I saw was one Arch Goudie had. I've seen three or four but that was the last one."



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Jim had had a cancer operation during the winter of 1980 and when I saw him during the following summer at Davis Inlet he allowed as he was getting old, but you wouldn't know it for trying to keep up with him.

"I left this place once thinking that I'd never come back again," Jim told me.

It was 1947, and times were terribly hard. A quintal of trout brought \$2-\$3, a red fox pelt \$1.50, and the nearest store for supplies was Hopedale. That fall Jim realized that he had only three dogs, two still not full grown, not a strong enough team to haul the winter grub, and he up and moved his family to Goose Bay.



Old Hudson's Bay Company Post, Davis Inlet
- 1903

The Naskapi/Innu

I guess Jim Saunders knew as much about the Indians as any white man. He had grown up with them and spoke a little of their language.

"Our Indians, the Naskapi Indians, weren't for trapping. They'd go into the country and get a bit of fur, not very much, not like the Hudson's Bay Englishmen who caught fur where the Indians couldn't get it. The way the Indians live, they go up in the country in the fall of the year. Back in the bush, they take off and go up Sango Bay, Jack Lane's Bay, Flowers Bay, different directions. When they found the caribou that's where they stay, and they wouldn't go trapping or anything like that. Stay there and dry meat. Before the meat was all gone and scarce, the young ones would take off again and leave the families there and hunt again until they found the herds again. Get a whole bunch more and come back and then all move there. But they didn't do much with trapping. Never did bother that much with trapping. All down through the years you get Indians from St. Augustin and Seven Islands, , they come across country, they get a bit of fur, but they didn't go after the caribou like our Indians here. They get up about the headwaters in the fall of the year, in September, leave their canoes there. They had a nice bit of fur like minks, martens and otters. Our Indians never did get after that much fur."

War between the Indians and the Eskimos



Sam Broomfield near his home in Jack Lane's Bay - 1906

William Brooks Cabot Collection
Courtesy National Anthropological Archives
SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION, Washington, D.C.

It was from Jim that I got the story of the battle between the Indians and the Eskimos that was supposed to have happened on Massacre Island a long time ago.

"There's only two places I know of that I heard of the Indians and the Eskimos fighting, Massacre Island and Mountaineer Rock and Mountaineer Brook, and the place up there by Nain. The only two places I heard the old people - Old Man Broomfield and the old Edmundses, tell about - the real old people, see, when I was just a boy growing up."

"Now, the man that told me the story about what happened was ol' Sam Broomfield. He lived in Jack Lane's Bay. He told me what people told him when he was only a young man. 'Bout the Indians come out of the country, came out from Jack Lane's Bay, went out on the island, Kutallik, but we call it Massacre Island. The Eskimo men were out hunting so they (Indians) killed the women and children, and then they went over to that island there, Mountaineer Rock. When the Eskimo men came back from their hunt, coming back to Massacre Island - how they come to find out what happened, a fellow sees what he thought was a floating log and he hove his dart at it. When he hauled it in it was his wife. This is a part

Eskimos



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Phot Collection
Anthropological Archives
Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

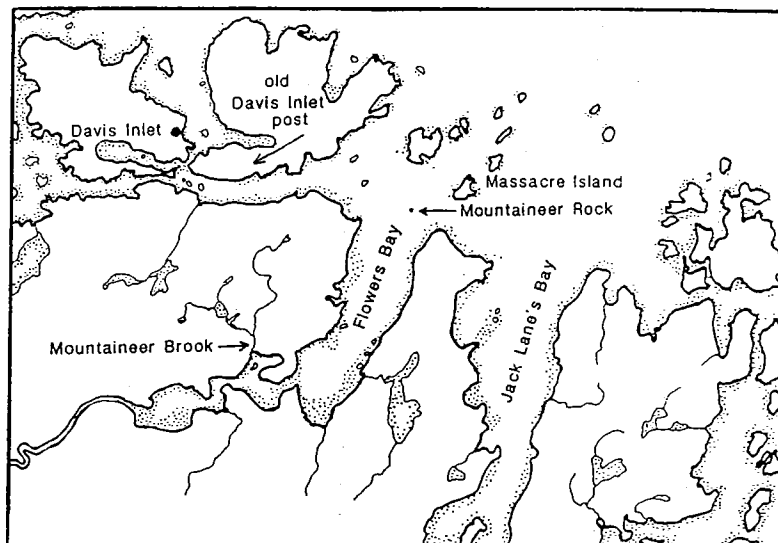
story of the battle that was supposed to have taken place some time ago. I heard of it from an Eskimo, Massacre Island, and the place where I heard the old man Edmundses, tell me that I was just a boy

story about what happened in Jack Lane's bay when he was only a boy. I got out of the country, but on the island, Massacre Island. The Eskimo told me that the Eskimo killed the women on that island there, and when they came back from Massacre Island - how they know how he sees what he has his dart at it. This is a part

of the story too. The Eskimos caught three canoes there hauled out on the rock. Now, I never been ashore on that rock. I've been around it different times but I've never been ashore. People told me, that have been ashore on it, they seen like blood on the rock. That's part of the story too. Not much of a place to go, the sea breaks right over that place. Its covered right over when there is a big sea on. They said that some were under the canoes. Some of the Indians got away, they got right into Flowers Bay, up through the rattle to a big cove. There's a brook over there that they call Mountaineer Brook. That's the name of the brook, Mountaineer Brook. They say that is where the Eskimos saw the lights, that the Indians had a fire there. They came in there with their kayaks. They say that when the fire went out they figured that the Indians had gone to their tents, to bed, and they went ashore and killed them off. They had another battle there. How that battle came off I don't know. If that was the war that killed off the war, I don't know, but ol' Man Broomfield was told the story when he was only a boy. And that's why they call it Mountaineer Rock and Mountaineer Brook."

There was one other story that Jim told me about the fighting between the Indians and the Eskimos.

"Richard Winters tells me of a place down there, between Kauk and Nain, where the Eskimos drowned a whole lot of Indians. Along those shores there are all those hills. Big, high, hills. They were going along there and the Eskimos seen them coming. They were camped up on the hills and they rolled the rocks down on them."



Map by Stephen Loring

Merrifield

In 1982, with the support of the Newfoundland Museum, I spent the summer surveying for old Indian camping places between Nain and Davis Inlet. Jim had long been interested in archaeology, having guided William Fitzhugh and the Smithsonian team to several Indian sites that were about 4000 years old. Jim had tramped over much of the Davis Inlet region as a boy and knew the local history as well as anyone. Near the mouth of the Notakwanon River in Merrifield Bay, I found the remains of an old Innu camp, that was perhaps a hundred years old. Nearby, hidden in the woods and almost completely overgrown, were the remains of an old house. The house had long ago vanished, all that was left was a low rectangle of earth where sods had once been used to bank a wall. Later, when I went into Davis Inlet, I asked Jim if he knew whose old cabin site it was that we found. Merrifield had been a Settler who arrived in the 1840s or thereabouts. One day, he stopped with his wife and two sons on an island to pick berries. They were able to bring their schooner right up to the sandy beach and wade ashore. As there had been no wind, they felt it safe to leave the schooner's sails set. Once ashore a sudden squall came up and the boat bore away dragging her anchor and marooning the family. In order to escape from the island the whole family clung to a flimsy log raft and tried to cross over to the mainland. Old Merrifield's wife was overcome by the cold water, and she lost her grip and drowned. According to Jim and Maggie, Merrifield and the boys made the long trip back to the cabin where they packed up and left Labrador forever.



Woman at campsite, Davis Inlet - c1930

Courtesy Mon. Edward O'Brien

Jim Saunders Goes Home

20 August 1982.

I arrived at old Davis Inlet late the evening before, having been down in Flowers Bay and out on Solomon's Island at the head of the Run. I had promised to come back in time to help Jim pull up his boat for the winter, but he had decided to do it himself. Maggie was cross at the 'ol' man' for being so stubborn and not waiting for me or making a run into Davis Inlet and getting some help. Jim had a big, heavy boat, and I was astonished that he'd been able to beach it by himself! He had used an old block and tackle and gotten Maggie to rock the boat back-and-forth while he pulled, a foot or so at a time. Now he allowed as how his back was a bit sore, too stiff to climb up through the forest behind their house to the bake-apple bog. Maggie's own mountain climbing days were over and the prospects of going back to Goose Bay without any berries did not improve her disposition. As the day was calm, I had thought to get an early start and go visit the soapstone outcrop in Freestone Harbour to see if I could find any evidence of prehistoric quarrying activities. However, after all the kindnesses I'd received from the Saunders' it seemed that a bucket of bake-apples would be an appropriate form to begin to pay back all the company, the smoked trout and tea, that I'd enjoyed over the years. Still, I had to laugh when I came back and Maggie wasn't going to let Jim have any berries. "Teach him to be such a stubborn ol' man."

Thinking about Jim Saunders, and his return to Davis Inlet after more than twenty-five years in Goose Bay, I am reminded of a passage in a book by Henry Youle Hind who visited the southern Labrador coast in 1860. He wrote about the Settlers, the Canadians and former Hudson's Bay Company men, he met who had left Labrador in order to visit, once again, the land of land of their youth:

"The insatiable desire for the wild free air of Labrador comes over them as soon as spring returns; they miss the glorious sea, the coming ships, the excitement of the seal hunt, the millions of wild birds which make the coast their home for the summer; they pine to return, which in five cases out of six, if not an impossibility, they succeeded in doing."

I am glad that **Jim Saunders** found his way back home.



Courtesy **Mon. Edward O'Brien**

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DAYS

STORIES OF EARLY LABRADOR

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