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Coming Soon, Google Street View of a Canadian Village You'll Never Drive To



Google

Karin Tuxen-Bettman, above, captures images of Cambridge Bay, Nunavut, with a Google Street View tricycle.

By IAN AUSTEN

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OTTAWA — There are no cars in Cambridge Bay, Nunavut. Aside from a few trucks, snowmobiles are the preferred form of transportation for much of the year in the hamlet high in the Canadian Arctic.

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Catherine Moats of Google, far left, works with residents, including Chris Kalluk, seated on the left.

And given that only 1,477 people live in Cambridge Bay, and that the population lives on about a quarter of a square mile, probably no part of it is unknown to its residents.

All that would suggest that Google Street View has limited value there. But a pitch to Google from an Inuit man brought a tricycle fitted with Google's camera system to the streets of Cambridge Bay on Monday as part of what the company expects to become a long-term project in Canada's Far North.

The Inuit man, Chris Kalluk, said he approached Google with the idea of bringing Street View to the Arctic last year as a way to educate the rest of the world about the region. "People that have never been in the north, past trees, in communities you can only get to by airplanes; they just don't know," Mr. Kalluk said by telephone from Cambridge Bay, where he has lived most of his life. "They wonder if we live in igloos and travel by dog team. I spoke with an elder the other day who said that the land belongs to all the people, so everyone should be able to see it."

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Fishing and hunting trips, often covering long distances, remain an important part of life for the Inuit in Cambridge Bay, or Ikaluktutiak as its known in the native Inuinnaqtun language. But because magnetic compasses do not work in the far north, paper maps were rarely used for navigation in the past.

"People got around by recognition," said Mr. Kalluk, 28, who is a geographical information systems coordinator for [Nunavut Tunngavik](#), an organization that manages land claim settlements between the Inuit and the federal government and runs wildlife management programs.

The arrival of GPS, which is unaffected by the magnetic pole, has now made maps, digital and otherwise, a fixture in the lives of hunters and fishermen.

Nevertheless, Mr. Kalluk said that while he was dealing with Google, he had to educate the other residents of Cambridge Bay about Street View. While the Internet came to the community several years ago, it is a relatively low-bandwidth satellite connection. Mr. Kalluk said that if just one person watched an online video, the rest of the community was temporarily shut out of the Web. As a result, he said, most residents stay away from image-laden online applications like Street View.

Mr. Kalluk proposed the northern excursion to Karin Tuxen-Bettman, a geostrategist with the Google Earth Outreach, a branch of the company that develops projects with nonprofit groups. Last August, Ms. Tuxen-Bettman led a group that created Street View images of some of the [Amazon rain forest in Brazil](#). "It was very exciting," Ms. Tuxen-Bettman said of the meeting with Mr. Kalluk. "What place is as different and the opposite extreme to the Amazon as the Arctic?"

Currently the most northern place available on Street View is [Deadhorse Airport](#) near Prudhoe Bay, Alaska. While it sits about one degree of latitude farther north than Cambridge Bay, it is far less isolated and is connected by a road to the south.

Because Cambridge Bay can be reached only by air or, for a few weeks in the summer, by barge, using one of Google's camera cars to photograph the community was quickly ruled out.

"A car seemed like overkill," Ms. Tuxen-Bettman said.

Ms. Tuxen-Bettman said that it would take several months for Google to process the final street view images, a step that involves, among other things, blurring out faces. The trip to Cambridge Bay will create a higher amount of blurring than normal. The trike has generally been followed by a small army of children on their own bicycles while making its rounds.

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