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## Canadian Rangers on Long-Range Patrol: A Perspective from Yukoners

Daniel Beaudoin, Philippe Brient, P. Whitney Lackenbauer, Maya Poirier, and Jim Welsh



This last week has brought the welcome announcement of a comprehensive \$35-billion plan to modernize and expand military infrastructure, including upgrades to forward operating locations that enable NORAD operations, Northern Operational Support Hubs (including Whitehorse) and Nodes to enable Canadian domestic missions, and multi-use infrastructure such as runway improvements and road construction in various locations across the Canadian North.

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Concurrent to these announcements that will expand the military's future footprint, 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Ranger Patrol Group are currently undertaking a long-range patrol across the Arctic coastline. As Rangers, we are the military's permanent presence in every community in the Yukon. We are not combat forces, but we have the experience and expertise to operate in challenging northern conditions. We are not just the eyes and ears of the Canadian Armed Forces in the North, we also guide and support a wide variety of military operations.

The first phase was to assemble the team that would travel from Inuvik to Churchill, Manitoba, on Operation NUNALIVUT. One Ranger from Atlin and two from Whitehorse drove the Dempster, accompanied by two other Ranger family members and three Junior Rangers. Three more members would join the core team, with another Ranger from Whitehorse eventually joining them in Paulatuk. The plan was that, over the next fifty days, we would cover approximately 5000 kilometres – the vast majority of which would involve breaking their own trail.

An operation of this sort involves intense planning and preparations, and the Yukon is proudly on display in the equipment and clothing. The entire core team is wearing Skookum Brand parkas. Our snowmobiles have extended windshields



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built locally in Whitehorse by Ray Holle. We are towing Yukon Expedition Sleds, which have proven extremely rugged and dependable in extreme terrain conditions.

In mid-February, two teams of Rangers and personnel from 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Ranger Patrol Group headquarters headed out from Inuvik with the first heading to Fort MacPherson before traversing extremely difficult conditions to Old Crow. From low snow and hummocky ground in the mountains to deep snow, river overflow, total whiteouts, and extreme cold, the conditions tested the team's limits. The compounding effects of having to find routes and break trail in blizzard conditions made it a harrowing experience. The other group had a more favourable experience travelling to Aklavik and Shingle Point before high winds forced shelter in cabins for two days. Plans to meet at Herschel Island were adjusted so that the teams linked up on the Babbage River,





where glare ice, overflow, and high winds convinced the group to hunker down. Our now combined group returned to Shingle Point before pushing east across the Delta to Tuktoyaktuk.

Amidst the arduous journey, the team was warmly welcomed in various communities and at the BAR-2 North Warning System site on the Yukon North Slope. Rangers from local patrols rode their snowmobiles to guide the core team, given their intimate knowledge of the trails around their communities.

Visibility improved as we headed east from Paulatuk, but conditions continued to demand constant vigilance. Sunny skies and mild winds propelled the group to Kugluktuk, with the temperature plummeting and no cover on Coronation Gulf making for a frigid crossing to Cambridge Bay. Here we have paused for a few days before the next bound to Gjoa Haven. Supported by the noble Twin Otter crews of the Royal Canadian Air Force's 440 (Transport)



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Squadron and other military elements, we will head east to Kugaaruk before heading south along the Kivilliq coast to Churchill, Manitoba.

This operation is not only a celebration of Canada's sovereignty and military presence in the North, but also a demonstration of Ranger agility, expertise, adaptability, and resourcefulness. It shows how land skills honed in the Yukon, when coupled with the knowledge of local experts, can be applied across the Canadian North.



Our snowmobile tracks may be temporary, but our trek showcases the strength and capacity that resides in the Canadian North – and our unique form of dedicated service as Canadian Rangers.

*Photos by Sgt. Jim Welsh*

