

Google online maps embark on Arctic adventure

August 23 2012, by Glenn Chapman



Photo illustration shows people on a dogsled crossing a frozen Frobisher Bay off Iqaluit, in Nunavut, Canada. Google set out to take users of its free online mapping service on an Arctic adventure with help from an Inuit community in the Canadian tundra.

Google set out Wednesday to take users of its free online mapping service on an Arctic adventure with help from an Inuit community in the Canadian tundra.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper joined the effort as the Internet titan's Street View team arrived in the hamlet of Cambridge Bay in the Northwest Passage for one of its most remote projects to date.

"The goal of this project is to share with a global online audience the beauty of Canada's Arctic and the culture of the Inuit people who live

there," said a Google team member.

Google spent 11 months planning the mapping endeavor with Nunavut political leaders and elders in Cambridge Bay in the Canadian Arctic Archipelago.

"People are always asking how we live; how we survive," Cambridge Bay elder Anna Nahogaloak said in a Kitikmeot Heritage Society interview.

"They're always asking about everything," she said. "This will help them understand and learn more about Nunavut."

Nunavut is Canada's northernmost territory and was officially separated from the Northwest Territory in 1999.

Nahogaloak recalled being 10 years old when her family traveled by dog sled from Brownsie River in 1958 to Cambridge Bay, where they built a cabin and became part of the small community that has grown to about 1,600 residents.

She recounted how many of the dogs starved along the way because game was scarce.

The Street View project began with a "Mapup" at which a dozen residents worked on Chromebook laptops to enhance a Cambridge Bay map with local knowledge—from roads and rivers to the curling club and a stone church.



Photo illustration shows a Google Street View Trike. A Street View trike equipped with gear to capture 360-degree images was scheduled to be pedaled through Cambridge Bay and portions of the nearby tundra on Thursday.

"It is important for the Inuit people to contribute to the maps," Nahogaloak said. "The land is everybody's land. We all share it."

Google map software supports the local Inuktitut language.

Cambridge Bay teenagers Mia Otokiak, Siobhan Bligh, and Kean Niptanatiak were among the dozen residents who gathered at Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. (NTI) to add local knowledge to the Cambridge Bay online map.

Map enhancements included a game hall complete with foosball table and an ice hockey arena that relies on nature to freeze water for the rink.

"I think I'm going to gloat about it," 16-year-old Otokiak said of fine-tuning a Google Map to be seen by people around the world.

Harper and his wife stopped in to learn about Google software tools being used to craft maps in the way that Wikipedia harnessed knowledge

for an online encyclopedia.

"The community accepted Google with open arms," said NTI coordinator Christopher Kalluk, who sold Google on the project last year.

"They are visitors in our home and we want to show them a good time," he continued. "That is how we will be feeling with the world viewing Cambridge Bay with Street View as well."

Google donated 10 Chromebooks to the effort and is lending NTI special 360-degree picture camera gear "indefinitely," according to Google Maps team leader Karin Tuxen-Bettman.

NTI administers land claims for the people of Nunavut.

"I feel the (people of Nunavut) will benefit with Street View because they will be able to show their communities off to people around the world," Kalluk said. "It gives them more pride and passion for where they live."

A Street View trike equipped with camera and satellite positioning gear will be pedaled through the town to the nearby tundra on Thursday and Friday.

Google will not be leaving the trike behind because it wants to deploy it in other Nunavut hamlets next year.

"It is about providing all the tools to perfect that map and then letting the community do it itself," Tuxen-Bettman said.

"Weather and the remoteness are the biggest challenges."

Street View teams have cycled, driven and walked through cities and towns around the globe capturing images to add to online maps, letting people see what it might be like to stand at a spot they are curious about.

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