

## **Dangers of mini-cracks on the Beach-Qungniit**

Qungniit are mini-cracks in the ice close to the beach that are horizontal and follow the shoreline; whereas the large ice cracks are vertical. Qungniit are otherwise known as “shoreline tidal cracks”. Qungniit come about when the snow and ice start to melt from the land, and the ice starts to drain water to surrounding ice and beach. Mini-cracks can be anywhere from 1 cm to 4 meters after the ice has deteriorated. Qungniit can be very dangerous so children are encouraged to play away from them especially when there is no adult supervision.

Not too many years ago, Pond Inlet lost two teenagers when they fell into the mini-cracks and could not get back up. The children had been playing on the mini-cracks without consent; they had no one watching over them. When children play around the mini-cracks, they have to be very careful not to fall into the cracks. If they do, it is extremely difficult to get back up especially if they are alone. With another person there, there is a much better chance that there will be help when it is needed. One child stated “Take me along, I’ll pull you back up if you fall in the water”. The parents thought that was very mature of the child and allowed the young child to go. The trip turned out just fine. Mini-cracks also open up opportunities for people to fish or hunt through the cracks. Young seals often bask near or around the qungniit. This is another story.

When the mini-cracks open up and become wide, it is very difficult to go ashore or vice-versa. A long sled may be needed to cross the mini-cracks to go back and forth. To travel 2000 meters, it may take 10 minutes or so to get over the cracks, which would take a minute or two if the ice conditions were fair. Another danger is when the mini-cracks are covered with snow. It is very difficult to know if the cracks are wide or if the cracks are open when the snow covers the cracks. Many snowmobiles have sunk to the bottom when someone was being careless or did not know the status of the cracks or land.

Young people often compete in jumping over mini-cracks. The danger is part of the risk they enjoy while competing to see who can jump the furthest without falling into the water. Besides, when you are young, a dip in the ocean teaches you not to fall into the cracks again. It is extremely cold! A person could die of hypothermia in a few minutes if one is exposed into cold frigid waters of the arctic for even a very short time. Some extremely athletic individuals have been known to jump over four meters of open water to cross mini-cracks. I once observed brothers jumping mini-cracks, competing, to see who could jump the furthest. They were following each other around very quickly and with very light feet. They jumped over eight or so cracks without stopping, following each other around. It seemed like it was a simple task for them. The younger one kept trying to keep up with his older brother. It was just amazing to watch them. An older chap like myself would not be able to keep up with their pace. Dry land is good enough for me. Better yet, I’ll let my grandchildren do the running around for me these days.

To enjoy the great outdoors, one has to respect the mini-cracks for what they are.

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