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CULTURAL HERITAGE AS WE AFFECT IT AND IT AFFECTS US

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Assessments of the effects of the current developments in the Arctic (climate, resource exploitation) like to focus on such icons as the polar bears and the negative impact they may suffer. Regardless of the importance of this, natural heritage has the possibility of adapting or eventually recovering. Cultural heritage on the other hand is a limited population – what is lost cannot regrow or recover. We need to be aware of the various threats to cultural heritage around the Arctic and to find ways to encourage good management and to develop methods that ensure that we do not lose too much of our history and long-term understanding of the region.

Not as much of the Arctic as we like to think is “untouched wilderness”. Evidence of man from prehistoric times can be spotted by the trained eye, even if only some stones in a ring or made into a pile that is obviously not natural. In the Arctic cultural heritage is very tied to the land and landscape and for traditional societies it can be a stabilising factor in their lives on the margin. Evidence of earlier man is usually regarded as a plus factor by tourists, even when they are seeking a wilderness experience.

This paper will explore the realities of preserving, protecting and conveying the meaning of Arctic heritage sites in the face of increasing impacts.