

For hundreds of years, maybe thousands, peoples of the Arctic region used the limited resources at their disposal to communicate with others in their isolated wilderness. One such communication tool was the construction of stone pylons called inuksuit. Each inuksuk had its own meaning and served various functions. Some marked migration routes, while some pointed to places of value, like hunting or fishing spots, or nearby shelter. Others stood as memorials, sacred designations, or maybe simply indicators that others had passed this way. Some, called inunnguag, were fashioned in the likeness of a human. The logo for the 2010 Winter Olympics was based on an inunnguag.

I knew very little about inuksuit until my wife and I traveled to the Canadian Rockies recently. Early on our first morning, hiking a rocky canyon, we came across a couple of small, but interesting, stacked, rock pylons. One was perched on the precipice of a great waterfall, the other high on a seemingly inaccessible ledge. As our first day and our exploration progressed, we saw more of these stacks in other locations. That evening, a bit of conversation with the locals explained the tradition of inuksuit.

Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. So, at first I thought it was rather cool that a few of today's mountain visitors were paying homage to an ancient tradition. I was even tempted to construct one myself.

But it's also possible to have too much of a good thing. As our journey continued, we discovered that no place was immune to the presence of little stone stacks. Everywhere we went — along

footpaths, next to congested tour bus parking lots, on the summit of mountains — visitors had cobbled together their own inuksuit. Just as the magic of a spectacular rock formation can be spoiled by the guy who spray-paints it with "Nate + Sue 4-ever," little stone stacks also began to intrude upon the wild vistas of the Rockies. Soon, I began to view them as a benign form of graffiti. While we all have some primitive urge to leave our mark on the world, there is very little value to the wilderness hiker in knowing that eight previous tourists built miniature inuksuit on this same isolated spot.

Apparently the problem has become so prevalent in some parts of Canada that national park personnel are routinely forced to dismantle inuksuit constructed by hikers and campers. Killarney Provincial Park on the north shore of Ontario's Georgian Bay has even issued notice to visitors to "stop the invasion" of inuksuit.

As we journey through life we all leave an impact wake behind us — for better or worse. But perhaps we should also be more sensitive to those situations in which a "no wake zone" might be preferable — whether in the mountain wilderness or back in daily civilization.

*Dan Linssen of Green Bay advocates for personal responsibility and thinking outside the box. His book "Who's to Blame?" is available at [www.whostoblame.net](http://www.whostoblame.net) and other online sources.*

## Dan Linssen

Commentary



A sincere form of flattery? Hikers are leaving stone pylons all across Canada, spoiling the magic of the original inuksuit formations. Submitted