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Beaufort Gyre Exploration Project: Dispatch 14: Land!

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After many hours of steaming we have arrived within sight of land near Tuktoyaktuk. Off in the distance we can see several pingos (aka hydrolaccoliths). These are small hills that actually grow as water intrudes, is pushed upward, and freezes. Just before supper Chief Officer Don Whitty and crew set anchor in the waters of the Mackenzie River. Helicopter Pilot Chris Swannell has made a couple of flights to Tuk and beyond for ship's needs.

At the starboard stern a rigid inflatable boat, or RIB, is ready to go if needed in an emergency. This boat is always on hand any time the helicopter is being used. If there is some sort of an emergency it is the fastest and most robust boat aboard. A RIB consists of a typical boat hull but only the lower half below the water line. Above that is a large horseshoe-shaped rubber bubble. This tube is comprised of a series of chambers (usually about 9 or so) that independently provide huge amounts of floatation. By using air instead of foam this makes the boat very light and it doesn't sit low in the water. At the stern is a fuel-injected Mercury 50 horse engine. These attributes make the for a very quick boat that will take some pretty severe seas. It is also very difficult to turn over and nearly impossible to sink! The down side is limited storage and usually a pretty wet ride so as a fishing boat I would give it a 5 but as a dive, beach, or rescue boat I would give it a 10! Perhaps Santa will bring me one...

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