

Torch begins journey

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Northern News Services

Iqaluit (Apr 24/06) - Michael Putulik from Repulse Bay was on top of the world - literally. The ace volleyball and badminton player - who is also skilled on the ukulele - was in Alert, the northernmost settlement on the planet, kicking off a torch relay for the 2007 Canada Games in Whitehorse.

"I'm really proud to be representing my territory," said the soft-spoken Putulik who joined athletes from the Northwest Territories and Yukon on the trip.

"I feel tingly. I can't stop smiling."

Putulik, 20, carried a ceremonial torch along Alert's airstrip before passing the elaborately carved baton to several soldiers who continued the roughly two-kilometre journey onto the base.

Alert, a 75-person military depot and science centre, is nestled on the upper tip of Ellesmere Island - a hearty 82 degrees north latitude.

Organizers of the relay are hoping this is just the beginning of an ambitious project that will take the torches - there are three separate ones - to almost 70 Northern communities.

When the games roll around, Putulik will likely be on the Nunavut badminton squad. Top-level competition is nothing new for Putulik, whose Nunavut volleyball team finished fourth in 2006 Arctic Winter Games in Kenai, Alaska, and grabbed the hearts of Alaskan crowds.

"That was a lot of fun. By the end, they were cheering for us," he said.