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***Report On The Commercial Cariboo Hunt
Operated By The Labrador Inuit Delopment
Corporation
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Commercial Caribou Hunt
operated by the
Labrador Inuit Development Corporation
Spring 1987

During the spring of 1985-86 there was a commercial caribou hunt operated in 1985 by the Labrador Inuit Association (LIA) and subsequently turned over in 1986 to the Labrador Inuit Development Corporation (LIDC). The hunt and accompanying marketing efforts in 1986 established a prime market for a quality product. Based on market demand (current or future) LIDC proceeded with plans to secure funding for the construction of a major processing and storage facility to be built in Nain to service the hunt. This facility should be completed by winter 1988.

In the meantime, there was considerable pressure from the Labrador Inuit hunters for LIDC to operate a hunt in the spring of 1987. That pressure, along with a desire to keep market interest up resulted in LIDC operating a spring hunt even though it meant using the fish plant in Nain and chartering aircraft to fly the meat out to market.

LIDC wanted to use the opportunity to make some changes in the field operation of the hunt in anticipation of the full scale operation that would be under inspection at all stages by federal meat and plant inspectors.

The major change to the operation of the hunt (from those hunts in 1985, 1986) would be the establishment of a base camp or a suitable camp which would avoid the need for the commercial hunters to return to Nain from the hunt site each day (a return trip of approximately 120 miles). LIDC had special tents ordered from the Northwest Territories and provided as well all the essential elements necessary to supporting a base camp operation.

Special racks were designed to hang the caribou for gutting. All of this was to be done inside a large, specially designed eviscerating tent. The caribou carcasses, with hides still on would be flown in from the base camp to Nain by single otter. Once in Nain the carcasses would be processed in the fish plant. Essentially all other aspects of the hunt would be as in the previous two years.

Account of 1987 Hunt

The caribou were extremely late moving into Labrador and the startup of the commercial hunt was delayed in stages from the beginning of March until 20 April. Instead of eight weeks of hunting there were only eleven days, of that only six days were actual hunting days because of 'bad' weather on the other days. There were initially fifteen hunters but one hunter had to be evacuated after the first day. A total of 729 caribou were taken by frustrated hunters over a period of six hunting days.

The location of the base camp was determined after several reconnaissance flights to locate the herd and the progress of its migration. The base camp location was selected by the lead hunter and it was about sixty to sixty-five miles west of Nain between Fraser Canyon and Anatalak Brook.

LIDC sent a crew into the site in advance to set up the tents and generally get things ready for the beginning of the hunt. The commercial hunters began the journey in to the barrens by snowmobile on 18 April. The hunters took nearly thirty-five instead of the usual six to seven hours because a spell of mild weather had opened up the brooks and made traveling especially difficult.

The hunters arrived at the base camp site about noon on 20 April and began hunting that afternoon. At the end of the day a single otter on private charter from Goose Bay arrived to drop off some sport hunters. The plane loaded the animals that were killed that afternoon and flew them to Nain. From there the otter was

on charter to L I D C to fly the meat from the country to the fish plant in Na in .

When the first caribou were brought back to the site attempts were made to hoist the caribou on the racks for purposes of evisceration. The racks were not only too short but there was no pulley system on them. After a few very futile and frustrating attempts use of the racks was abandoned.

The evisceration tent was not set up when the commercial hunters arrived. The hunters in consultation with the Labrador Inuit Association (LIA) representative (in for sample collecting) decided that under the circumstances it would not be worthwhile to set up the tent. The tent would only be able to accommodate a maximum of six hunters at a time and the hunters were working to a very tight deadline (the close of the season being one week away and the rapid deterioration of the snow cover) . The hunters could not afford to be delayed further in the base camp by a line up outside the evisceration tent.

In addition the snow cover was virtually gone at the site and on the days when it was mild the tundra got very soupy. Conditions would very quickly have become grim if all the caribou were gutted inside the evisceration tent. It was also the opinion of the hunters that the tent would never have stood up under the battering winds - at times estimated to be between 110-130 kilometers.

The caribou were hauled back to the base camp on the hunters' komatiks and gutted outside. The samples were taken from the guts as the caribou were eviscerated.

Sample Collecting

LIA and Provincial Wildlife each put a team of sample collectors in the field to maximize the opportunity to collect data on the winter animals. The teams worked well together and were able to collect the best set of data yet. The following samples were

1. histories for animals

jawbone		sex of animal	
fecal sample	- collected	presence of fetus	- rcrd
lybone		weight and sex of fetus	
liver			

2. 6) 100 blood samples

3. 140 diaphragms

4. lung samples

5. nasal swabs

6. samples for testing for cesium 137

- 2 animals - legbone
- liver
- kidneys
- rumen
- lungs
- heart
- muscle

muscle samples from an additional 8 animals

None of these samples could have been collected without the cooperation and support of the Labrador Inuit hunters. The results from the analysis must be eventually collated and passed on to the hunters in a meaningful format.

Discussion

The hunt was operated much as it was in 1986 apart from the base camp operation. The base camp concept proved to be a very valuable improvement and in fact without it a 1987 hunt would

have been impossible .

The hunters had a very hard time because of the late arrival of the caribou and the lack of snow cover. Out of the ten days that were spent in the barrens only six of them were good enough to hunt so they were under a lot of pressure to get their quotas quickly. As a result the carcasses ready for shipment to Nain began to stockpile quickly on the ice at the base camp. Weather problems and the limited capacity of the single otter contributed to the stockpiles. Problems in Nain with the freezers at the fish plant breaking down severely handicapped the plant workers' ability to process the carcasses as they did arrive. That resulted in a stockpile of carcasses in Nain as well. The total loss of meat due to spoilage either from delays being flown out of the country or because of problems at the plant was 60 animals or 25% of the overall kill.

One of the ways to reduce the problem of stockpiling in the barrens is to keep the hunters or, a daily quota that reflects the ability of the plant workers and the capabilities of the facilities to process the carcasses. It should also ensure better accuracy as hunters *will* be less likely to shoot at animals that they cannot take with a clean shot.

The hunters by now are aware of and used to the need to collect samples and the importance of quality meat. Although we did not get an opportunity to test out the proposed evisceration process the hunters can adapt reasonably easily providing the system is sensitive as much as possible to their concerns.

Because- of the problem with the stockpiling of carcasses and the breakdown of the freezers at the Nain fish plant LIDC directed the hunters to stop hunting on 29 April. This was three (3) days earlier than expected. All the hunters left the site that evening and headed for Nain via the Fraser Canyon. Each hunter had a komatik load of caribou for his family's food.

One of the real concerns the hunters had while on the commercial

hunt was the assurance that his family would be able to get meat that would normally be provided through subsistence activities. LIDC worked out an arrangement in Nain that all rejected meat would be offered first to the hunters' family and then to the community.

This has become a very vital part of the spin off benefits to the community and is one way to ensure that at least the commercial hunt will not impede the subsistence hunt.

Because of the premature and hasty departure of the hunters and base camp personnel the base camp was not dismantled. There were also 243 carcasses on the ice. It took two more days, using a twin otter and a single otter to retrieve all the caribou and to dismantle most of the camp. One tent, a komatik, skidoo (LIDC), fuel drums and tent poles were left in the barrens because warm weather put an end to any more fixed wing flights.

On 7 June Provincial Wildlife flew in to the site with a helicopter and LIA's environmental advisor, a commercial hunter and a volunteer to 'finish cleaning up'. Bear(s) had damaged beyond salvage the remaining tent and the skidoo. All garbage was burned on site. Firewood and tent poles was stacked up on a rise so that they would not be buried during the fall and winter. What was left behind should be relatively easy to spot and to retrieve. Already the foxes were doing their work on the waste entrails and body parts.

As soon as the hunters got back to Nain there was a meeting between them and LIDC management. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss with the hunters the problems they had. The hunters recommended design changes to the evisceration racks and to the tents to reinforce them so they can withstand the constant battering of the winds. All the hunters expressed interest in participating in the hunt in 1988 and gave support to LIDC's efforts to operate a hunt this past spring.