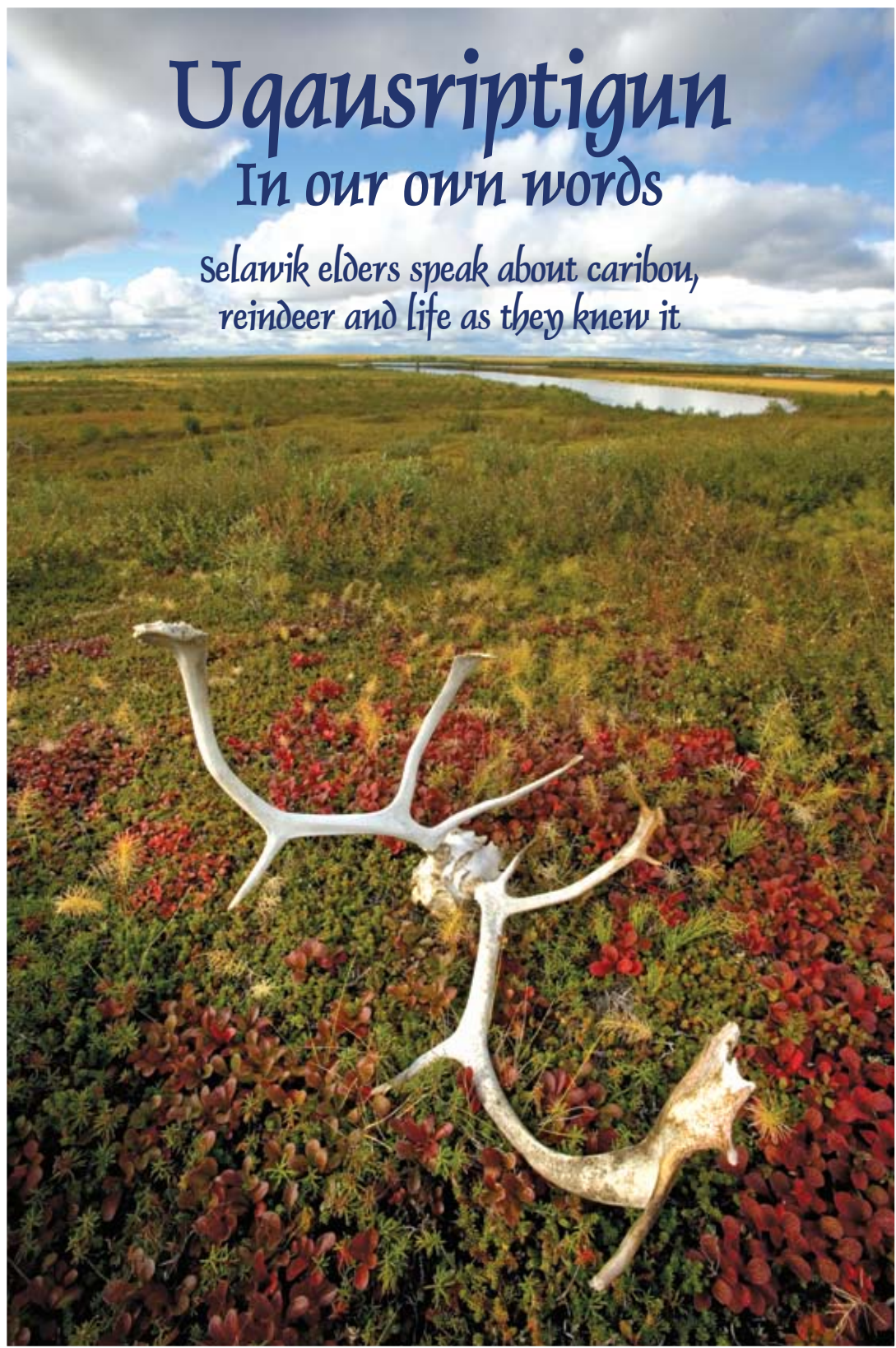


Uqausriptigun

In our own words

*Selawik elders speak about caribou,
reindeer and life as they knew it*



A publication by the Selawik National Wildlife Refuge

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reindeer and life as they knew it*

Hannah Paniyavluk Loon, Principal Researcher

Sue Steinacher, Editor/Designer

Selawik Elders



Published by the Selawik National Wildlife Refuge

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Cover and title page photos by Steve Hillebrand/USFWS



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The upper Selawik region has nourished the spirits of countless generations.
Photo by Steve Hillebrand/USFWS

Acknowledgments

An important note about historical photos:

We have found very few historical photos from Selawik. In order to help you visualize the scenes and activities described in the elders' interviews, we have included historical photos from other parts of northern Alaska.

You can search online for these and other historical photos at www.vilda.alaska.edu

Just as the elders speak of how a successful hunt required the effort of everyone working as a team, a project like this requires the consent and support of many.

We wish to thank the 2003 council members of the Native Village of Selawik for granting us permission to undertake this project. We also thank the NANA Regional Corporation and the *Iñuuniat̃iqput* Committee for their unwavering support and encouragement.

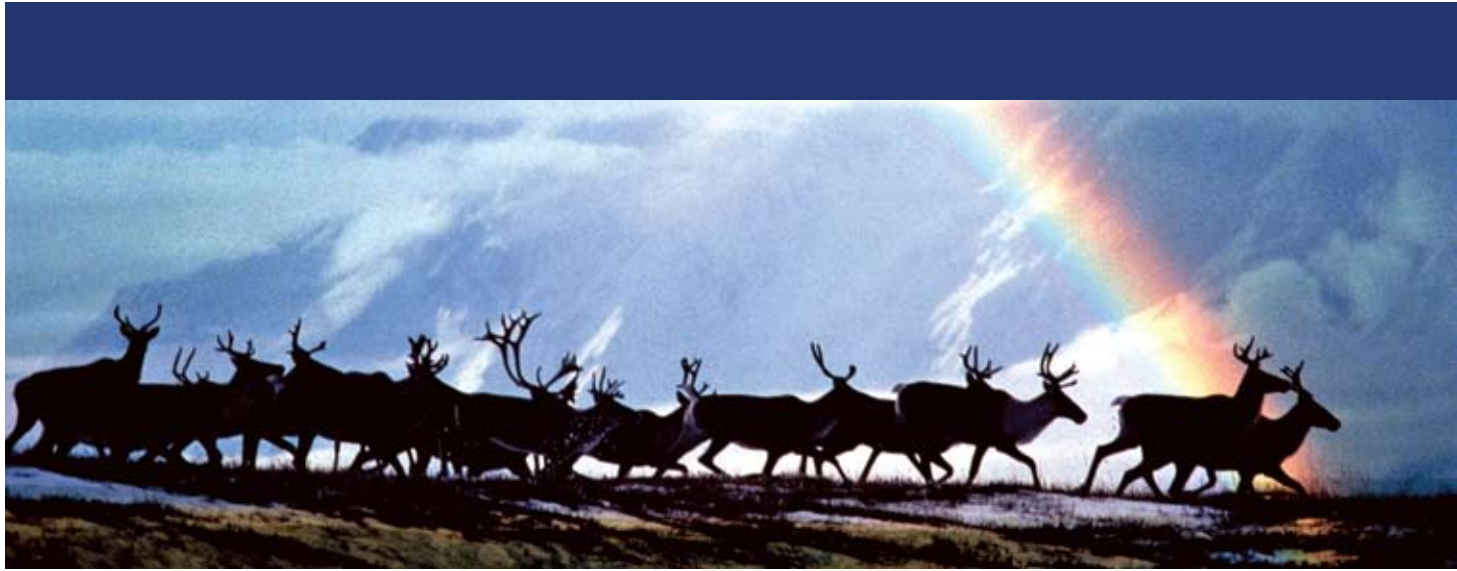
We offer thanks to Attamuk Shiedt, Susan Georgette and John Trent for guidance on developing the questions asked of the elders, and to Julietta Minerva for recording and videotaping interviews. This project could not be shared with so many without the expertise of translators and transcribers. For their skills we are indebted to Barbara Armstrong, Bert Greist, Ellenore *Sunii* Jackson, Sue Norton, and Johanna Ticket. We thank Ruth Sampson with the Chukchi Campus Iñupiaq Language Program for her expert assistance with Iñupiaq spelling and meanings and for her help with the elders' biographies.

We are grateful to Clyde Ramoth for arranging meeting times, asking questions, taking notes, interviewing some of the men, and reviewing this publication. We thank Sue Steinacher of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game for her keen ear and creative vision in editing and designing this booklet. We extend an extra special thanks to Hannah Loon, who provided the desire, the sensitivity, and the skills to conduct the interviews, pulled all of the material together into a final report, and meticulously reviewed and corrected this publication. We also appreciate the careful work of Barbara Armstrong, Ruth Sampson, and Ellenore *Sunii* Jackson in reviewing this publication.

We are very grateful to the following elders who provided names and locations of the caribou hunting areas and reindeer camps: Hannah Davis, Ruby Foster, Bert Greist, David Greist, Delbert Mitchell, Sr., the late Johnny Norton, Emma Ramoth, Pauline Ramoth, Laura Smith, and Roy Smith. Thanks also to Jim Magdanz for creating the map from the information provided by the elders.

While this project took teamwork by everyone already mentioned, there wouldn't have been a project at all if not for the willingness of the following elders to share their life experiences and knowledge of caribou: the late Frank Berry, Sr., the late Marie Clark, Daniel Foster, Sr., Ruby Foster, David Greist, the late Eva Henry, Delbert Mitchell, Sr., the late Johnny Norton, Ralph Ramoth, Sr., and Laura Smith.

Taikuu from the Selawik Refuge!



Top photo 2007 © Mark Newman/AlaskaStock.com. Above photo of caribou trails by Steve Hillebrand/USFWS.

“What is given in the right way cannot be forgotten.”

—David Nasraḡniq Greist, Selawik Elder

Introduction

Wildlife biologists have recorded the movements of Alaska’s Western Arctic Caribou Herd using small planes and radio collars since the 1970s, but their methods tell us very little about the migration routes and behavior of the caribou before this time.

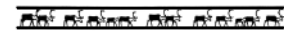
To better understand the history of this caribou herd that now ranges seasonally from Norton Sound to the North Slope and from Point Hope to Anaktuvuk Pass, staff at the Selawik National Wildlife Refuge turned to the knowledge of elders in Selawik. They also enlisted the help of Selawik resident, Hannah Loon. This booklet is the result of Hannah’s efforts, assisted by Clyde Ramoth, to document Selawik elders’ knowledge about caribou, caribou hunting, and reindeer herding in the Selawik area.

Hannah and Clyde recorded interviews with a number of Selawik elders in 2003. These elders spoke eloquently and knowledgeably in their Iñupiaq language, which is the way Native wisdom and experience have been shared for thousands of years. These interviews have now been translated from their original Iñupiaq, and edited for print.

Despite the limitation of the English language and the printed page, we hope that you will appreciate the life experiences of Selawik’s elders, and understand how their customary caribou hunting practices reveal valuable knowledge about caribou. Their personal stories also dramatically highlight the remarkable endurance, ingenuity, and compassion that are the foundation of the Iñupiaq way of life.

This historical knowledge of caribou and reindeer, in combination with current observations by local residents and on-going biological research, gives us the best foundation for insuring the future health and abundance of the Western Arctic Caribou Herd. We also hope that this project will serve as a model for other villages that wish to document and preserve the knowledge of their elders.

We need the wisdom of the past to guide us wisely into the future.



*The knowledge of
elders is much like
the trails of caribou.
Etched into the
memory of the earth
by the passage of
countless preceding
generations, they
point the way for
future generations
to follow.*



Pauline Ramoth,
Laura Smith,
and Hannah
Davis



Ruby
Foster being interviewed by
Hannah Loon



Daniel Foster, Sr.
being interviewed by
Clyde Ramoth



Ruby Foster, Roy
Smith, and the late
Johnny Norton

Photos by Hannah Loon (top and bottom), Clyde Ramoth, Sr. (center right), and Steve Hillebrand/USFWS (center left).

Introducing the Selawik Elders

The elders highlighted below were willing and available to be interviewed at the time of this project. Many additional Selawik elders contributed to this project by assisting with map locations, encouraging friends to share their stories, and by simply living a life that has embraced the traditional knowledge which we hope to preserve and share in this booklet. We appreciate them all because every elder has contributed in one way or another.



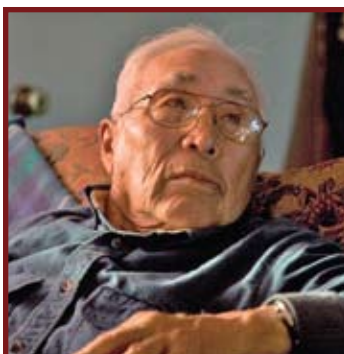
Daniel Sipahk Foster, Sr.

Daniel *Sipahk* (*Sipaaq*) Foster was born in Selawik in 1942 to Johnny *Tuuyuq* and Faye *Uyugaq* Foster, and grew up in a big log cabin near the church. From an early age, he was taught the traditional way to hunt, fish, and gather. At 14, *Sipahk* got his own dog team and traveled with other hunters to learn from them. As he got older, he started to hunt by himself. He learned the country well, the different ways to hunt for animals, and especially the seasons for getting them. *Sipahk* hunted for his parents and his wife's parents, and also shared his catch with others. He is a long-time carpenter, village leader, and church pastor. He and his wife, Mildred, have a large family.



Ruby Ayaqiñ Foster

Ruby *Ayaqiñ* Foster was born in 1922 in *Mağlausriaq*, at the mouth of *Kuugruaq* River. Her mother, *Ağnaqialuk*, died when she was two, and she was raised by her father, *Nuiyaaqpak*. Around 1930, her father moved the family to *Tivlich* where he trapped. *Ayaqiñ* and her brother and sister were looked after by their aunts, Eunice *Ağniyalaq* Clark and Maggie Russell, who sewed parkas and mukluks for them. Their father trapped and provided food for the family until he died in 1944. In 1947 *Ayaqiñ* married William *Annasrugaq* Foster. They moved to Selawik and raised five sons and three daughters there. *Ayaqiñ* worked for many years as a bilingual teacher in Selawik for the Northwest Arctic Borough School District. She loves to fish and pick berries. She is also an active member of the Friends Church.



Ralph Ayyatañaq Ramoth, Sr.

Ralph *Ayyatañaq* Ramoth was born in Selawik in 1932 to Frank *Alġan* and Topsy *Atañaiyiq* Ramoth. His father, who had moved to Selawik from Kobuk around 1920, died when *Ayyatañaq* was six. *Ayyatañaq* continued to learn and became a highly respected traditional hunter and trapper. He has also been a lifelong carpenter, electrician, and maintenance man. *Ayyatañaq* has devoted many years to Selawik as a tribal leader. His excellent skills in both English and *Iñupiaq* have helped the village successfully communicate and coordinate with outside agencies.

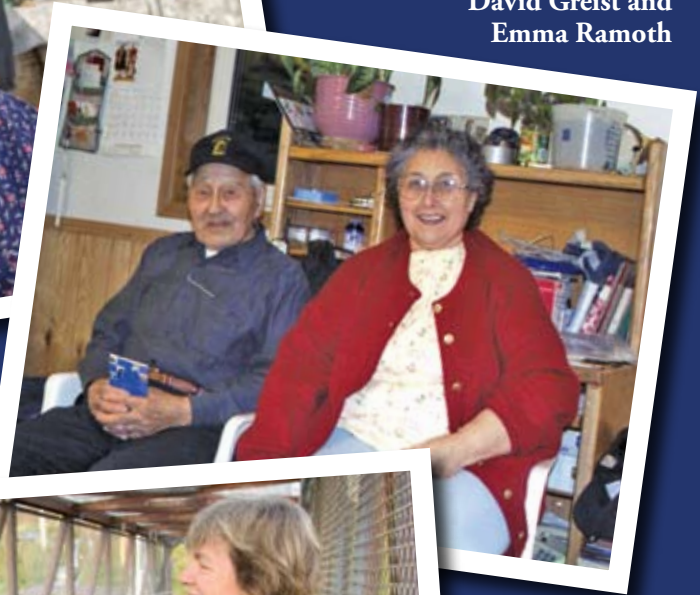
Laura Smith
and Hannah
Loon



Mildred Foster



David Greist and
Emma Ramoth



Johnny Norton and
Susan Georgette



Photos by Clyde Ramoth, Sr. (top), Hannah Loon (center right), and Steve Hillebrand/USFWS (center left and bottom).



David Nasragñiq Greist

David *Nasragñiq* Greist was born to *Kunagrak* and *Katak* Greist in 1917. An older brother of Laura Smith, he was raised in *Anallaaq* (Collinson Point), 25 miles west of Kaktovik, and also in *Kitliq* (Killik River). In spring his parents fished and hunted sea mammals, and in fall they hunted sheep. His father died suddenly in 1938, and the family traveled from *Kitliq* to Shungnak. *Nasragñiq* later moved to Selawik, where he met and married his wife, Bertha, and raised a family. He is still active as a commercial fisherman and community volunteer.



Marie Iqitqiraq Clark

Marie *Iqitqiraq* Clark was born in 1928 to Mike *Qanaiyaaluk* and Emma *Nasraqpiinaq* Burnette of Selawik. She was taught how to hunt small game, tan skins, and sew clothing. It was essential for young women to become skilled skin sewers before marriage. *Iqitqiraq* lived around *Ukallit Ingii* (Rabbit Mountain), where rabbits and ptarmigan were abundant. She moved to Selawik after she met and married Virgil *Sikitkuaq* Clark, Sr., who built a log cabin for her. They hunted in the Rabbit Mountains and rafted down the Selawik River in spring. *Iqitqiraq* was a church pastor and community volunteer for many years. She taught her children how to gather subsistence foods and preserve them for winter use. *Iqitqiraq* passed away since recording these interviews.



Johnny Mikiana Norton

Johnny *Mikiana* Norton was born in Selawik in 1930 to Edward *Inuġuq* and Nora *Paaniikaaluk* Norton of Selawik. He attended school up to 6th grade. He left school when he was old enough to help his family with boating, fishing, and hunting. *Mikiana* was a journeyman carpenter, painter, and mason, and traveled to many parts of Alaska. He was a volunteer head cook for many Selawik gatherings, and one of the community's skilled coffin makers. He enjoyed making people laugh. He loved to share his knowledge and talents with his children, grandchildren, and others in the community. *Mikiana* passed away in 2006.



Laura Iguaqpak Smith

Laura *Iguaqpak* Smith was born to *Kunagrak* and *Katak* Greist in 1926. Younger sister to David Greist, she was raised in *Anallaaq* (Collinson Point), 25 miles west of Kaktovik, and also in *Kitliq* (Killik River). In March 1938 her father died suddenly, leaving behind her mother and siblings Levi, Flora, Stephan, David, Nelson, and Sarah. Later that spring her family left *Kitliq* and traveled by dog team across the mountains to Shungnak. In 1945 *Iguaqpak*, her mother, and an uncle moved to Selawik where two of her brothers lived. *Iguaqpak* met and married Roy *Atauqutaq* Smith. She worked as a school cook until her retirement, and is well-known for her sewing skills. She and her husband raised a family and have many grandchildren now.

Clyde Ramoth
and Eva Henry



Emma
Ramoth



Laura and Roy Smith

Bert Greist,
Delbert Mitchell,
and Johnny Norton



Photos by Hannah Loon (top and bottom), Clyde Ramoth, Sr. (center right), and Steve Hillebrand/USFWS (center left).



Frank Qunuyuk Berry, Sr.

Frank *Qunuyuk* Berry, Sr. was born near Shungnak in 1924 and raised in the headwaters of the Kobuk River. His parents were Louis *Tulugaq* and Pansy *Iñagak* Berry of Shungnak. *Qunuyuk* grew up where there were very few people and did not attend school much, but he was well-educated in the traditional ways. When the salmon would return, he learned from his mother how to harvest them, and from his father he learned how to hunt many kinds of animals. *Qunuyuk* moved to Selawik around 1950, married Mabel *Puya* Kolhok, and raised a family there. Among his many other activities, he was also a long-time gold miner. *Qunuyuk* has passed away since these interviews were recorded.



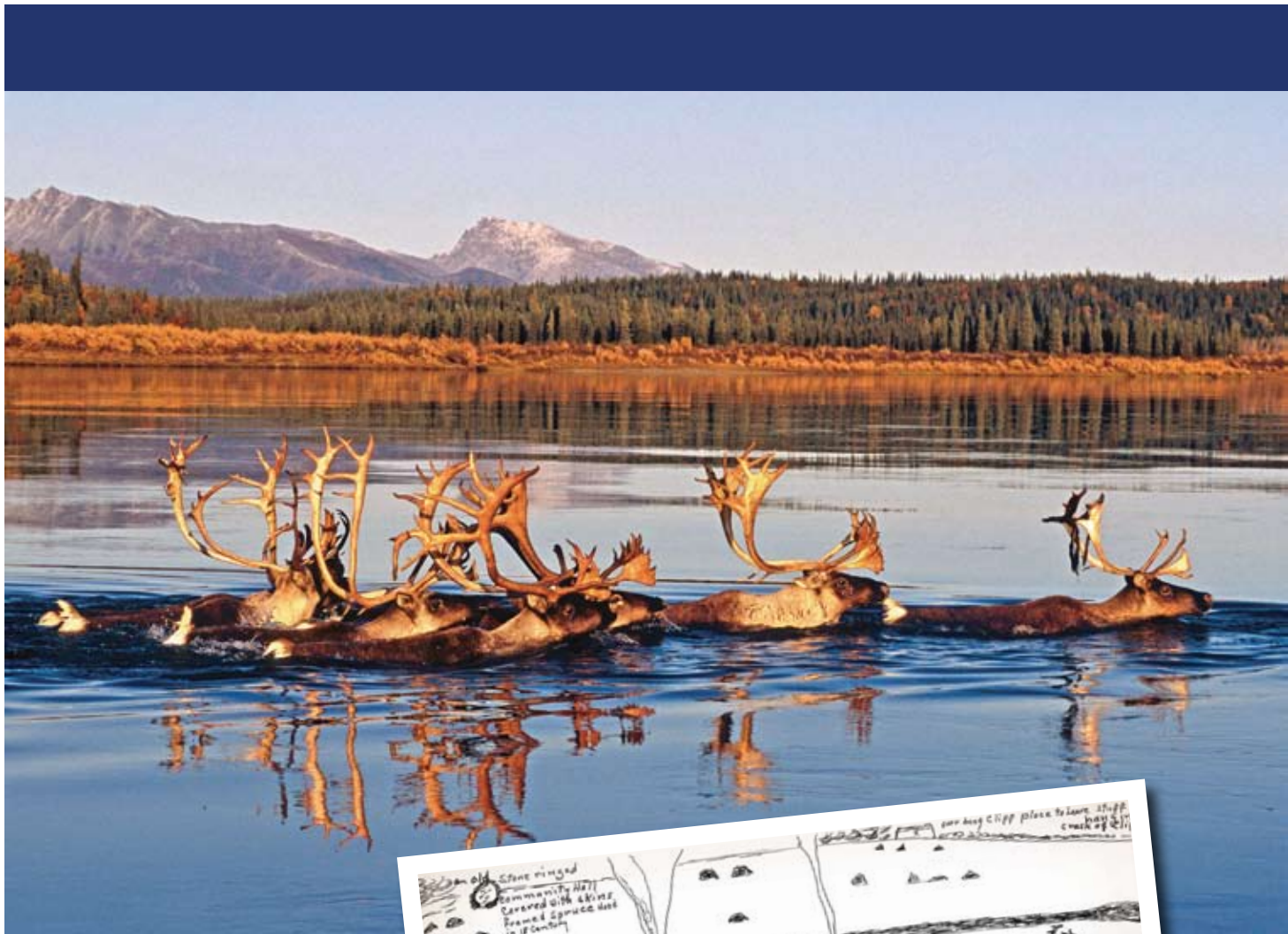
Delbert Qigñak Mitchell, Sr.

Delbert *Qigñak* Mitchell has been a resident of Selawik all his life. His parents were Harry *Utuayuk* and Mabel *Qutan* Mitchell. Born in 1932, *Qigñak* grew up in the traditional life, gathering wood for fuel, trapping, and hunting muskrats in his early years. He first learned to hunt caribou on a two-week dog team trip with his father. He proudly served in the National Guard, and has been a skilled carpenter all his adult life. *Qigñak* is married to Mary B. *Tuungauraq* Mitchell, and actively supports his community as a volunteer member of the search and rescue crew.



Eva Kitik Henry

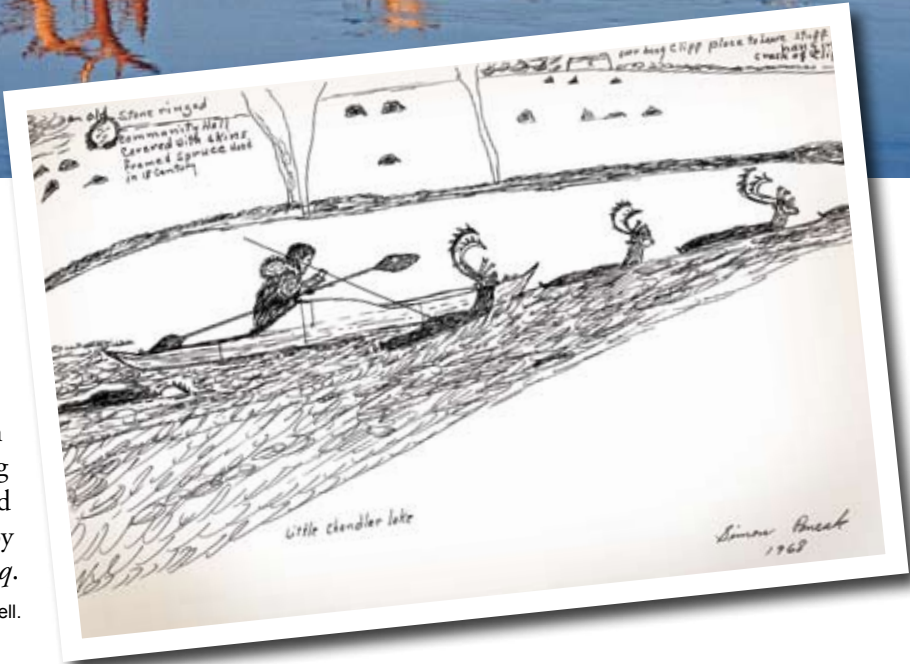
Eva *Kitik* Henry was born in Selawik in 1919 to *Naagaayiq* and *Niaqutchiaq*, and was raised in the village by *Igauna* and *Paniyauraq*. She attended school, and did especially well in English and math. She recalled that school started only when the ice was thick enough for people to cross the river, and that children went home for lunch. *Kitik* wore berets of many colors and knew many songs, Bible texts, and stories by heart. She was an avid berry picker and loved to knit, crochet, and make and repair gillnets. She is remembered for being outgoing and full of laughter, and for always having kind words of advice for children. *Kitik* has passed away since these interviews were recorded.



Caribou crossing the Kobuk River.
2007 © Nick Jans/AlaskaStock.com

This drawing was done in 1968 by Simon Paneak of Anaktuvuk Pass, showing how they hunted caribou from kayaks long ago. While the drawing isn't from Selawik, the hunting method is very similar to that described by *Ayyataṅaq*.

Drawing used by permission of Jack Martin Campbell.



The long-ago years of caribou hunting

Some of Selawik's elders remembered what their own elders told them about how caribou were hunted long ago. For thousands of years critical survival knowledge was passed on from generation to generation through the telling of stories.



“The people would be waiting there with their kayaks. They killed the caribou with spears while they were crossing the lake.”

—Ayyataᅇaq



Ralph Ayyataᅇaq Ramoth, Sr.

Long time ago, before the white man, some tribes were living around the Kobuk River area, back in 1885. They would scatter and move seasonally. They moved around from their fishing area to look for caribou. In August or September they traveled north to hunt for caribou and camp. My mom used to talk about how our grandfather used to go hunt out in the Brooks Range.

There was a ridge the caribou followed. The people piled up the rocks to make them look like humans. Some people were behind the caribou and drove them down that ridge to the lake. The people would be waiting there with their kayaks. They killed the caribou with spears while they were crossing the lake. That was back somewhere like 1885. These are true stories that I heard about the caribou.

Daniel Siyaᅇk Foster, Sr.

The caribou were far. In the earlier years our fathers went hunting *qaᅇᅇa* [out there] past Shungnak. They would be gone for weeks and months. That's how far the caribou were in those days. They hunted in the winter time. In the fall time, the caribou didn't migrate this way. This was around the 1930s and 1940s. We used to *uumagᅇaq* [go get alder for firewood] when they went hunting north.

Ruby Ayaᅇiᅇ Foster

One wonders about those who lived in other places and time before us, and how they did it. The ones before us starved when they had no food. Back then there was no white man's food like flour, coffee, salt.



“One wonders about those who lived in other places and time before us, and how they did it.”

—Ayaᅇiᅇ



Early 1900s photo of a Selawik family.



Archives, Univ. of AK Fairbanks, 1988-53-2

These are early 1900s photos from Selawik. They can be found online by searching under 'Selawik' at: www.vilda.alaska.edu

All photos on this page courtesy of Archives, Alaska & Polar Regions Collection, Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks



Rafting the Selawik River, 1920s.
2003-183-3



The above couple is identified as Lydia Foster and Jim Sheldon, 1908.

1988-53-5

The group is identified as:
Top row, L-R: *Aniuvak*, Robert Smith, *Taluqruaq* Jones, Kitty *Qitupan* Gravey.
Bottom row, L-R: Charlie Jones, Sr., Ellen *Makpii* Jones, Mabel Jones Mitchell, Bert *Akumgan* Jones, 1908.

1988-53-6



Selawik musicians, with Emma Skin (Ralph Ramoth's father's sister) in front with guitar, 1908.

1988-53-4



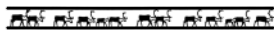
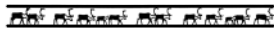
Subsistence in the time before caribou

During much of the lifetime of the elders interviewed, caribou were scarce and very far away. Selawik people relied heavily on fishing and trapping in earlier days. The elders describe the main foods that people of Selawik harvested and ate before caribou became more available.



“We just ate fish, ptarmigan and rabbit. That is all. There were no caribou around during that time—absolutely none.”

—Ayaqiñ



“When fall season started we went to Ikkuiyiq to get fish. When we were done with fishing, we started preparing for trapping. There were no caribou or moose around here then.”

—Nasragñiq



Ruby Ayaqiñ Foster

Around my time there were no caribou. We just ate fish, ptarmigan, and rabbit. That is all. There were no caribou around during that time—absolutely none. There was no moose and not much bear. I even used to go pick berries or *nasriqsruuraaq* [climb to a higher place to look around for game]. I was not afraid. There was nothing to fear from black or brown bears—there were none of these. There were no beavers, either.

Eva Kitik Henry

My earliest recollection of life in Selawik was fishing. Our livelihood centered on fishing. We had no caribou around here during those times, and we had no beaver or moose. Just fish, ducks, and jack rabbits. This was during the 1930s and 1940s.

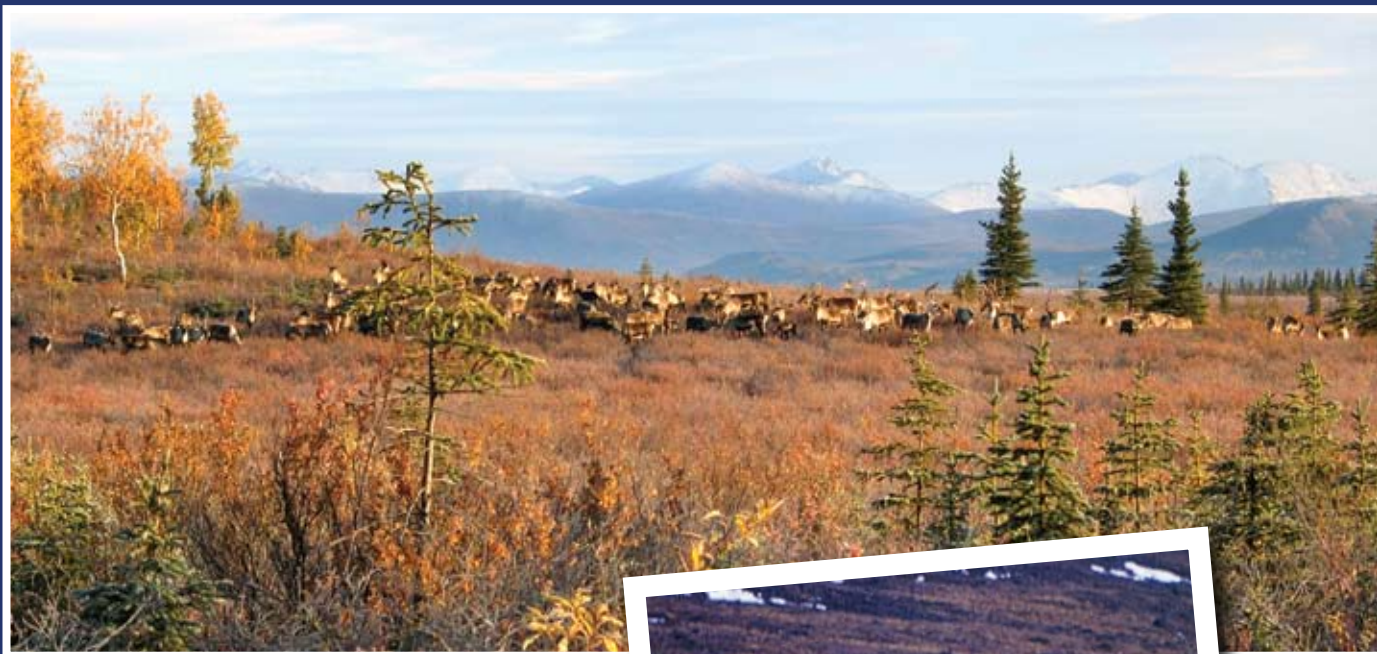
David Nasragñiq Greist

When it was time to trap they trapped for mink, otter, and marten. They went to *Uummaq* [wooded hills near Purcell Mountains] to trap for *qapvaitchiaq* [marten]. As spring neared and the trapping season closed, they traveled with their belongings to their spring camps. They went to the *Tagragvik*, *Siilvik*, or *Kuugruaq* rivers.

In fall the Iñupiaq people in Selawik would start to think of gathering fish for dog food to be used in winter. When fall season started, we went to *Ikkuiyiq* [Fish River] to get fish. When we were done with fishing, we started preparing for trapping. In the fall I trapped in the *Kuugruaq* River, ever since I got married. At that time dogs were the only means of traveling. There were no snowmachines, and we didn't have light powered with electricity. We only had *akiyaqataurat* [lanterns] that used kerosene oil. There were no caribou or moose around here then.

Marie Iqitqiraq Clark

During winter there were ptarmigan and rabbits. In spring there were lots of muskrats, and in summer fish and berries with greens. When my oldest son, Roger, was born, my sister-in-law, Sarah Clark, and I would hunt for muskrats when caribou were not in our area. There weren't even any beavers in our area yet. During the winter, we lived at *Tivlich*, past *Niliq*, where there were trees, and where snares and trap lines were common.



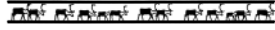
The Western Arctic Caribou Herd north of the Kobuk River near Ambler.

Photo by Heather Jay Huson



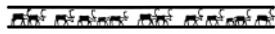
Anaktuvuk Pass hunter in 1950s packing with dogs on a caribou hunt.

Photo by John Martin Campbell.



“I followed and learned about these from my father while I was a young boy.”

—Qigñiak



Delbert Qigñiak Mitchell, Sr.

At that time in Selawik the people trapped in winter and hunted muskrats in spring. I followed and learned about these from my father while I was a young boy. People also gathered wood, grass, and ducks—the whole works. In winter it was the only way—to hunt and to gather wood.

Daniel Sipahk Foster, Sr.

We did any subsistence gathering like rabbit or ptarmigan. If you were lucky, you ran into a moose. There were lots of snowshoe rabbits.

Traveling long distances to hunt caribou

In the 1940s and 1950s, caribou were still many miles away from Selawik. People had to travel long distances by dog team and snowshoe to hunt caribou north near Noatak River, or in the headwaters of the Kobuk River. Selawik elders describe a challenging but rewarding life before snowmachines and electricity, when a caribou hunting trip took weeks or months, instead of a day or two.



“Before caribou came to Selawik, the people walked and backpacked over to the Noatak River, to the headwaters. They would leave early in the fall while the caribou hides were thin and could be used for clothing. The hunters also took dogs to help pack.”

—Iguaqpak



Laura Iguaqpak Smith

Before caribou came to Selawik, the people walked and backpacked over to the Noatak River, to the headwaters. They would leave early in the fall while the caribou hides were thin and could be used for clothing. The term used was *qakirut*, meaning they went north up and over the Brooks Range to hunt. The hunters also took dogs to help pack. They traveled one day at a time, and relayed their possessions to and fro.

They also went up towards *Kuugruaq* area and also close to Rabbit Mountain. The caribou never came here, but they would go near Ambler, about 40 miles out. Sometimes when my husband wanted me to follow, I would go. I sure enjoyed it when we set up camp out in the country and the hunters came back with their caribou harvest. It was so good.

The first caribou came back around in 1944. They came over to Selawik later. The caribou came through Ambler one time when people were at church. While preaching, their pastor, Mr. Melton, called out, “There’s caribou!” and his congregation made for the windows to look.

In the 1950s, the hunters from Selawik would get as many caribou as they could. They would be gone for one or two weeks depending on their families at home, and if they needed wood. We always pulled sled loads of wood like alder [*uummaq*] or large willows for our use while our spouses were out hunting. Harold *Kinnaq* Ballot and I used to walk and get wood. The woods must be thick now that we don’t use them.



The Western Arctic Herd in winter migration.

2007 © Nick Jans /AlaskaStock.com



The title of this 1920s photo is 'Noatak Trail.'

UAA, Archives and Special Col.,
UAA-hmc-0401-album1-13b



Anaktuvuk Pass caribou hunters enjoying tea and a snack along the trail, 1960s.

Anch. Museum of History & Art,
AMRC-wws-3421-4



“They traveled by dog team to search for caribou, and would be gone for a long time sometimes—one week, two weeks, one month and longer.”

—Kitik



“Long time ago people hunted in the Noatak River area before the caribou started coming around here. We were always gone for several weeks primarily to hunt for caribou. We had to travel by dog team taking tents and other things we need.”

—Qigñak



“Hunters were always away from their homes for a long time. It is a much easier life for hunters now.”

—Quñuyuk



Eva Kitik Henry

In the 1950s my father would go to the upriver areas to hunt caribou, being mindful and watchful of the reindeer herders. In winter he would go north through the Kiana and Ambler areas. They traveled by dog team to search for caribou, and had eight dogs or so in a team. They would be gone for a long time sometimes—one week, two weeks, one month and longer. They would leave their children and their homes during this time. They would take wood stoves along because of the cold weather. They didn't have the luxury of using small Coleman gas stoves back then.

Johnny Mikiana Norton

We also hunted at *Arguurañani* or below *Salliağutchiich* Hills, or around *Anmanauraq* [a pass through Rabbit Mountain to Kobuk River]. It was one day's worth of traveling from Selawik to *Ukallim Inñii* [Rabbit Mt.] by dog team when it *uvluqtusri* [has longer daylight]. If you went to Kiana, you spent the night there, then spent another night, and go again.

Delbert Qigñak Mitchell, Sr.

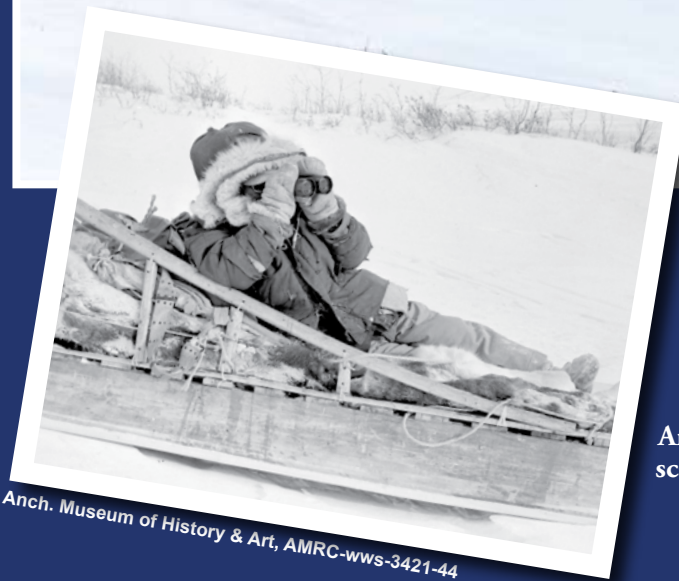
Long time ago people hunted in the Noatak River area before the caribou started coming around here. In those years the caribou didn't go south of Buckland in winter. When caribou first came, people hunted mostly towards Shungnak. It was around the 1950s or around 1947. They also went north of Kiana, and by *Uummaq* [wooded hills near Purcell Mountains] in winter. And towards Rabbit Mountain or *Ukallit*. We used to hunt there and camp in *Nullağvik*. We only hunted in winter then because in fall—no caribou. In spring—none. In summer—none, because we have to walk and it's quite a ways.

When I was a boy, I used to go upriver in *Tagrağvik* and all over with my father. We were always gone for several weeks primarily to hunt for caribou. Once it was with my father, Andrew Skin, Billy Neal, and others. We were gone for two weeks with dogs. We had to travel by dog team taking tents and other things we need.

Frank Quñuyuk Berry, Sr.

Perhaps people were hunting for caribou in Selawik around the 1950s, but the caribou were not close. I didn't hunt much, but others did. One time I followed Marion Kolhok, my wife's brother. We went to the headwaters of the Selawik River, the *Tagrağvik* River, the *Salliağutchiich* Hills, towards upper Kobuk, and to *Kuugruaq* River. We had to travel far upriver by dog teams. I had nine dogs, and that was considered lots of dogs. There were no caribou around us here.

It was only in the winter when people hunted for caribou. Long ago they used to go way north to hunt. They also used to hunt near Kiana. They were gone for however long they needed to be. Sometimes more than a month. We had to travel by dog team, and people couldn't make it back in the same day. We took our bedding, food, mukluks, guns, and whatever else we could use while out there.

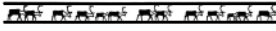


Anch. Museum of History & Art, AMRC-wws-3421-44

**The Western Arctic Caribou Herd
on the move.**

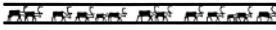
2007 © Patrick Endres/AlaskaStock.com

**An Anaktuvuk Pass hunter
scans the landscape, 1960s.**



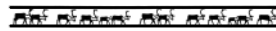
“It was around 1946 or 1947. As I started to set traps, caribou appeared! That was the first time caribou came in the fall time.”

—Nasragñiq



*“When we didn’t run into caribou, we went home *añiiñaq* [empty-handed]. Some years we had no caribou in the area. Even so, we kept going hunting. We rarely went home. Our dogs and our family ran out of food and we barely got home.”*

—Sipahk



The caribou were far and sometimes we could not find any. Sometimes we would track their trails and find them. There were not that many caribou then. We had to look for them. Hunters were always away from their homes for a long time, and sometimes hunters went home with nothing. It is a much easier life for hunters now.

David Nasragñiq Greist

It was around 1946 or 1947. As I started to set traps, caribou appeared! I had a gun, and I didn’t lack anything. I didn’t set traps—I started getting caribou. I caught as many as I could. Yes, when I went home that time and brought lots of caribou, many others started going caribou hunting behind *Kuugruaq*. They ate caribou all winter when the caribou arrived. That was the first time caribou came in the fall time.

Daniel Sipahk Foster, Sr.

The caribou started coming this way around the 1950s. There were less caribou then. When I started hunting caribou, I followed hunters as far as Rabbit Mountain across from Ambler and *Tagragvik*. I remember hunting towards Kiana. My relatives took me to Baldwin Creek. That’s where the caribou were. They didn’t migrate this way. The caribou didn’t go south of Buckland in those days because there were reindeer in Selawik, Buckland, and Deering. The herders protected their reindeer. When caribou arrived, they chased them away.

When we didn’t run into caribou, we went home *añiiñaq* [empty-handed]. Some years we had no caribou in the area. Even so, we kept going hunting. We rarely went home. Our dogs and our family ran out of food and we barely got home. When we returned home, we had fish which we had stored for winter. During those days, we made pits and stored as much as we could.

If you were lucky to have one, you carried a camp stove. There were hardly any camp stoves in those days, just gas lights. If you could not afford Blazo, you went without light. But we got by. When you had a wood stove going, it served as light. When you go out, you know what’s out there and get what you need.

Ruby Ayaqñ Foster

Maybe around 1954–55, and I am guessing, the caribou started coming here. I followed my husband in the 1950s to near the Ambler area. We went by dog team. There were several people that traveled together: William Sheldon, Sr., Billy Neal, Joe Field, Homer and Ruth Larkin, Lawrence and Ada Jones. Ambler River is a long way with dogs. We would break trail by foot with snowshoes, taking turns in the lead. I was carrying a child at that time. William Sheldon, Homer Larkin, Lawrence, and I took turns breaking trail. When we got tired, someone else *sivulliqsrug* [led].

It was a long ways, as Ambler is quite a distance from Selawik. I think we were gone for a month hunting there. We had no groceries or *naluagmiutaq* [commercial food] then. We would spend the winter upriver in sod houses. We and the old women would set snares for rabbits or ptarmigan. I used to check traps and snares above *Niliq* with a dog team.

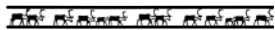


The Western Arctic Herd heading north over the Selawik Hills in spring.
2007 © Joel Bennett/AlaskaStock.com



“It was in the 1950s when I first started going out to hunt caribou. In later years, the caribou started going south—more and more south until they started grazing around the upper Selawik area. That’s where a lot of people started going to caribou hunt around there.”

—Ayyataᅇaq



At first it was difficult to hunt, so hunters would go in groups. They took tents and stoves and would stay for weeks or until they got caribou to bring home.

—Iqitqiraq



Ralph Ayyataᅇaq Ramoth, Sr.

It was in the 1950s when I first started going out to hunt caribou. Well, at that time we had to go about 80 to 100 miles from here—from Selawik to the headwaters of Selawik River and around Ambler area. In later years, the caribou started going south—more and more south until they started grazing around the upper Selawik area. That’s where a lot of people started going to caribou hunt around there. I even ran into some people from Shishmaref, Deering, and Buckland there.

Dog teams were the only transportation we had before snowmachines came. We used dogs to gather wood and to hunt for caribou. There were a lot of people who didn’t have any dog food at all—there were no commercial dog foods or anything like that at that time. They had to go where the caribou were to keep their dogs healthy during the winter. That was the only transportation we had—we had to keep them healthy. When the fishing season ended in fall time, why, you had to go up to where the caribou were and start feeding the dogs caribou in order to keep them healthy.

When the caribou were far away, you must keep looking for them, whether you catch caribou or not. We traveled in groups. You just kept on going until you started running out of dog food. Once you started running out of dog food, you had to share with the others. We’re used to sharing, and everybody knows that. And when you got caribou, then you shared with the others who didn’t get enough.

Marie Iqitqiraq Clark

In the 1950s people found caribou at *Aᅇmanauraq*—close to Shungnak, and *Salliaᅇutchiich*—Rabbit Mountain. There was a place close to *Argaitchuaᅇs* (Joe Knox’s), even as close as *Kuugruaq*—*Ukallit Iᅇᅇii*. At first it was difficult to hunt, so hunters would go in groups. They took tents and stoves and would stay for weeks or until they got caribou to bring home.



Photo by Helge Larsen, courtesy of the Simon Paneak Museum, Anaktuvuk Pass.

Historical photos of caribou hunting from the Anaktuvuk Pass region in the 1960s.



AMRC-wws-4077-142



AMRC-wws-4077-133



AMRC-wws-3421-81

All black & white photos on this page courtesy of the Anchorage Museum of History & Art, Library & Archives

How the elders hunted caribou

In the time before snowmachines, hunters had to work as a team to select and shoot a caribou. They needed to practice patience, and even wore special mukluks.



“You have to use somebody to go move the herd, and someone else to hide while the other person drives them to them. That was how they hunted a long time ago.”

—Mikiana



Johnny Mikiana Norton

We used heavy rifles in those days: .30-30 and .25-35. They also used .303 Remington with no scope. Sometimes one would not take any caribou home. Most of the time one could take a sled load home. They would harvest about four or five caribou. You have to use somebody to go move the herd, and someone else to hide while the other person drives them to them. The people hiding would shoot them. That was how they hunted a long time ago.

Delbert Qigñak Mitchell, Sr.

You have to walk to the caribou and try to get close.

Ruby Ayaqñ Foster

It was not *qaganangitchuq* [easy] to hunt for caribou then. You really had to hunt making no noise. When you *iñuk* [spook] them, they will go far and they run fast. You practically have to crawl to get near them and not use snowshoes.

Laura Iguaqpak Smith

My mom used to skin the bottom-side fur of a caribou hoof. These were patched together and used to make real quiet mukluk bottoms that helped hunters when they needed to sneak up on an animal to harvest.

How many caribou they harvested

Hunters tried to fill their sleds with caribou to bring home to their families, but they also needed caribou meat to feed to their dogs. They brought home all the edible parts of the caribou, and stored what they couldn't carry to be transported home later. They could not afford to let any meat go to waste.



“None of it went to waste.”

—Sipahk



Daniel Sipahk Foster, Sr.

When we absolutely had no food, we traveled upriver and tried to get a sled load and return in one to one-and-a-half weeks. But when you have stored caribou, you just go get them. Sometimes you would get one, two, or three caribou. When you luck out, you would get about eight to ten more. None of it went to waste. They were all put away.



Hanging caribou meat to dry at Anaktuvuk Pass, 1960s.

Anch. Museum of History & Art, AMRC-
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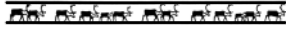
In subsistence both the work and the food are shared.

Mike Jacobson, USFWS

Barrow women butchering reindeer, early 1900s.

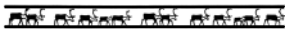
Alaska State Library, Historical Col.,
Rev. Spriggs, ASL-PCA320-48





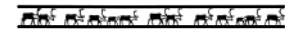
“They would get as much caribou as a person is able to—and they didn’t leave anything like right now. They brought home the skins, feet parts, and head.”

—Ayaqiñ



“Any of their catch left behind they stored. None was wasted.”

—Iguaqpak



“Nothing was spoiled. The meat and skins were equally divided among the hunters. Unlike today, itchaurat, kivviq, kidneys, even the injalaq would be taken home.”

—Iqitqiraq



Ruby Ayaqiñ Foster

They would get as much caribou as a person is able to—and they didn’t leave anything like right now. They brought home the skins, feet parts, and head. Today the head and caribou feet are not taken home. The heart, liver, *tunusrisaq* [the “bible”], and *kivviq* [“appendix” or cecum] were taken home. The only thing left was the stomach contents, and they used the stomach as a bag to put the innards in. That was real good.

David Nasragñiq Greist

If a person had a small sled, then he would not take a large load. And if a person had a large sled, then he was able to take a large load. They hunted however much they were able to carry. When you spent time arranging the caribou in a large sled, then you could take as much as ten caribou. A caribou is light when butchered and set to freeze.

Laura Iguaqpak Smith

When the hunters returned, they came back with five or six caribou in a sled load. The caribou would be butchered to make more room. Any of their catch left behind they stored by digging into the snow and covering them with snow. None was wasted.

Frank Quñuyuk Berry, Sr.

Whatever animals they saw were taken for food. It could be rabbit or ptarmigan. They took however much caribou they could harvest. When they were unable to load all the caribou, they left some behind to get later. The carcass was cut into pieces and stored good to keep other animals from getting into it.

Marie Iqitqiraq Clark

At that time there were no [bag] limits. The hunters would get as many as they could, to be divided equally. Nothing was spoiled. The meat and skins were equally divided among the hunters. Unlike today, *itchaurat* [stomach fat], *kivviq* [“appendix” or cecum], kidneys, even the *injalaq* [intestines] would be taken home. Now I just have *isigaaq* [caribou feet] with beans. Mmmmm.

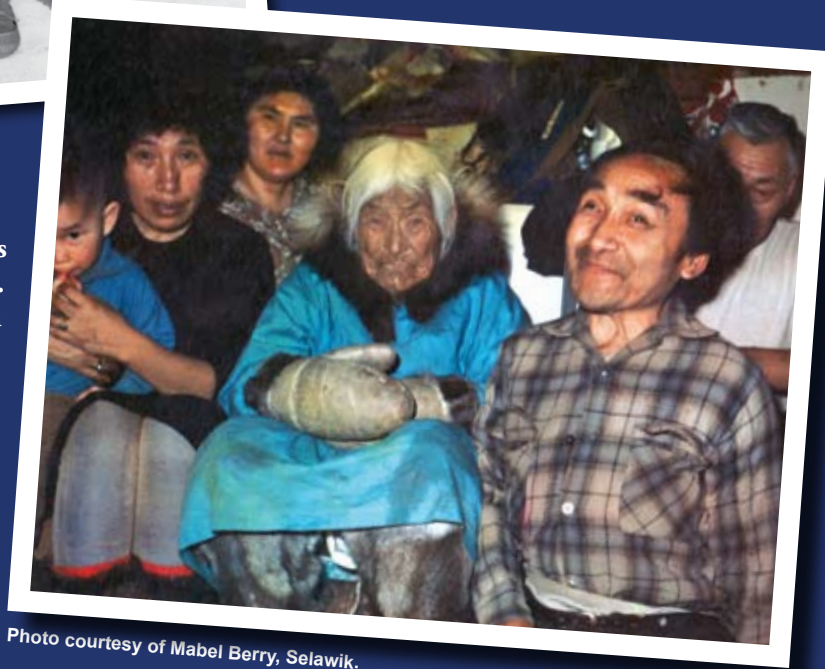
Ralph Ayyatanaq Ramoth, Sr.

How many we catch—well, it all depends on what size of a sled you got. We would always try to catch as much as we can while we’re close to the caribou. You would start feeding your dogs what you couldn’t carry home. You had to think about home, too, and what you needed to bring home. When the caribou were in good condition, you saved those for home, for the family.



Helen (Seveck) and Bob Tuzroyluk of Point Hope show off the beautiful and skilled handwork that went into traditional caribou skin parkas and mukluks, 1950s.

Archives, Univ. of AK Fairbanks, 2001-129-45



Back row: Myrtle Williams and husband.
Front row: unidentified child, Beulah Ballot, Ruth *Amianiq* Ballot, Edwin Ballot.

Amianiq, who lived to be over 100, is wearing traditional caribou skin mittens and above-the-knee mukluks made of caribou hide.

Photo courtesy of Mabel Berry, Selawik.

Hunting caribou for clothing, too

Before western-style clothes became available, people used different parts of the caribou at different times of the year to make specialized clothing. They also relied on caribou to provide sinew for sewing, hides for bedding, and other uses. Young hunters learned from elders when to harvest animals for the best meat, fat, and other favorite special foods.



“During my teenage years I learned to sew and tan. We had to learn before marriage. My older sisters taught me, and would let me start over and over until I could perfect a pair of mukluks or could make a parka.”

—Iqitqiraq



Marie Iqitqiraq Clark

My husband would hunt all seasons for skins because we had lots of kids. We couldn't afford to throw away skins. I would sew *mamuqqaak* [soft-bottom mukluks with fur side in] for my children, and *siktuuk* [knee-length mukluks] for my husband.

During my teenage years I learned to sew and tan. We had to learn before marriage. My older sisters taught me, and often Esther would let me start over and over until I could perfect a pair of mukluks or could make a parka. Eva Henry's mom, *Paniyauraq*, taught me how to crimp *ugruk* [bearded seal] hides for hard-bottom mukluks.

Daniel Sipahk Foster, Sr.

People prefer to get the *amiq* [caribou skin] in fall time. I have never done that, but that is what I always heard from older people. When you seek fur for clothes, it's August. The fur is just right for parkas and pants at that time.

David Nasragniq Greist

The bulls develop fat in September. In August, the fawn hides are good for parkas. The caribou are good when taken in fall because the hair is thinner. The hide is good and thick for mattress. In winter the fur is good, alright, but it sheds. Hunters also gather caribou leggings and sinew.

Laura Iguaqpak Smith

The caribou with the best fur for parkas are hunted in the last part of July. Four fawn hides are needed for a parka. The hides are dampened and tautly stretched. Then they are ready for tanning. They are folded and set aside overnight. My mom used to clean and scrape four hides plus a bull in one day. In August they take bulls to make the soft bottom of mukluks.



Iñupiaq hard-bottom mukluks with caribou skin uppers and bearded seal soles.

© 2007 Jeff Shultz / AlaskaStock.com

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The Western Arctic Herd on its fall migration through the Kobuk River valley.

2007 © Nick Jans/AlaskaStock.com

Traditional hunting 'laws' and practices

The Iñupiat were the original wildlife managers. They took only what they needed, and they understood the best seasons and hunting methods for protecting the future of the caribou. Selawik elders relate some of the long-held but unwritten rules that they hunted by.



“As we were growing up, we learned from our parents and other people. In springtime, we don’t get females because they are having fawns.”

—Sipahk



“You must let the first caribou go by. Let the first bunch go by and the rest of them will follow. For example, if the caribou start coming down those hills right there, and if I go out and hunt them right now, I could re-route them away.”

—Ayyatañaq



Daniel Sipahk Foster, Sr.

As we were growing up, we learned from our parents and other people. We followed what they showed us. We pick and look for bulls in fall. In winter, we don’t hunt for bulls because they get skinny. In wintertime, we get cows. In springtime, we don’t get females because they are having fawns. We don’t shoot any kind. We don’t just go after them and start shooting them.

Frank Qunyuuk Berry, Sr.

Hunters do not hunt for female caribou in spring when they are giving birth to calves. The Iñupiat did not have regulations. They were not familiar with [western-style] laws then. They hunted for what was available to them.

Laura Iguaqpak Smith

Some caribou were nice and fat and some were skinny. We used all the fat on the outside or in the intestinal areas for *akutuq* [Eskimo ice cream] or to eat. The skinny ones we used for dog food. If a female caribou was carrying, the elders loved to eat the unborn calf. One-year-old calf heads were also a delicacy. They did not waste food then—they ate them. But you cannot hunt caribou in rut.

Ralph Ayyatañaq Ramoth, Sr.

You must let the first caribou go by. Let the first bunch go by and the rest of them will follow. The caribou will follow the trail all the way as far as those caribou go. That’s what all young people should be aware of. When you start catching the first bunch, it means you can make them re-route. For example, if the caribou start coming down those hills right there, and if I go out and hunt them right now, I could re-route them away. And the caribou all through the migration would be coming down from the hills and would turn and follow.

Marie Iqitqiraq Clark

Siiḷviñmiut [Selawik people] wouldn’t eat meat from bulls in rut because it smells so strong during fall time. We also would not kill mother caribou with calves.



Hunters on the Kobuk River take a break after a successful hunt.

2007 © William W. Bacon/AlaskaStock.com



Caribou hunting at Anaktuvuk Pass, 1960s.

Anchorage Museum of History & Art, AMRC-wws 3421-73



“We had to share everything we got.”

—Ayaqiñ



Ruby Ayaqiñ Foster

We hunt bulls for meat in the fall before they start rutting. They are not smelly. They are good to eat in winter, too. Although they get skinny, they are still edible. The caribou harvested in fall are good for *killiguaksraq* [narrow strip of caribou or seal skin between sole and upper part of mukluks] or *atuñak* [mukluk soles]. The fur of the legs is short and very good. We had to share everything we got like moose, caribou, or rabbit. The families with hunters shared with the widows, like me presently.

Subsistence and western-style regulations

In the 1960s and 1970s, biologists reported that the number of caribou in the Western Arctic Herd had dropped dramatically. The State began to impose increasingly strict limits on the number of animals a hunter could take. This western-style approach to protecting the future of the caribou was not always welcomed. Today there is an effort for the hunters and the biologists to work together to make regulations that everyone agrees to and understands.



Ralph Ayyatañaq Ramoth, Sr.

“This is what you call subsistence. It’s not a sport. Subsistence is what you need at home.”

—Ayyatañaq



“Lately when lots of caribou start migrating during fall and spring times, we don’t take much—just what we need.”

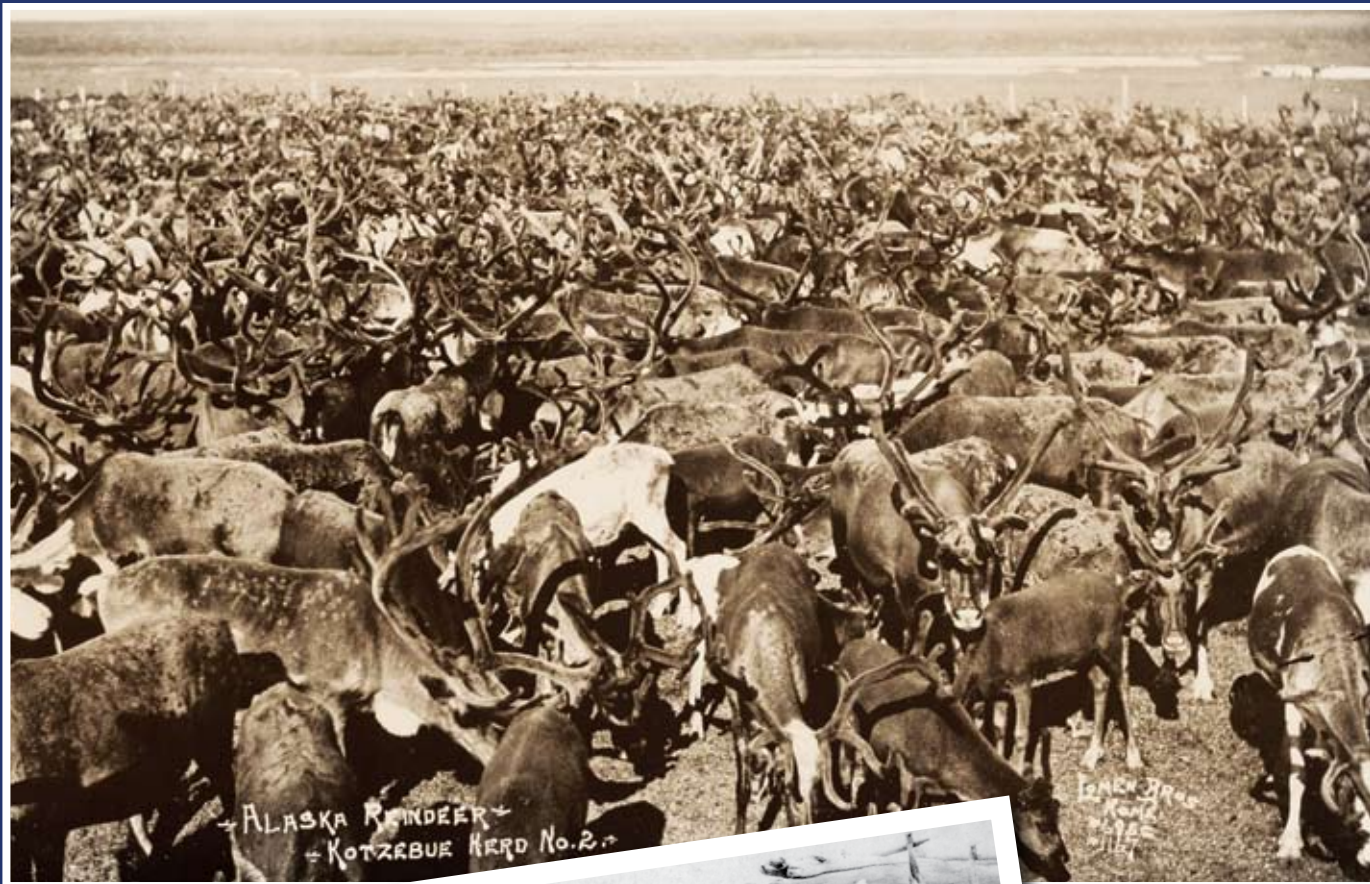
—Sipahk



This is what you call subsistence. It’s not a sport. Subsistence is what you need at home. You always know what you’re going to have to get out there. Like, if you go out right now for caribou, you could go way up there and you could see a moose. The moose season is open already, and you’d get the moose. In earlier times, they didn’t worry about regulations. One person said, “Well, I don’t have no regulations. Nobody tell me about regulations. This is my regulations—right here in my stomach, when I’m hungry.” That’s subsistence.

Daniel Sipahk Foster, Sr.

We *ajuniaragniaq ami* [worked hard to hunt and fish]. We lived the subsistence way. Even though they put limit on us, we caught caribou for the purpose of eating. I always tell my kids that I am an outlaw because I didn’t follow the rules back then, because I hunted subsistence for my kids and family. Lately when lots of caribou start migrating during fall and spring times, we don’t take much—just what we need.



Kotzebue reindeer herd in 1915.

Alaska State Library, Historical Col.,
ASL-P240-215



Reindeer meat butchered for the Friends Mission in Kotzebue in the early 1900s.

Archives, Univ. of AK
Fairbanks, 2003-183-21



An Alaska reindeer camp in the 1910s.

Alaska State Library, Historical Col.,
PCA-307-0095

Reindeer herding around Selawik

Reindeer were introduced into the Seward Peninsula and Selawik area in the early 1900s, and most Selawik elders commented on seeing large numbers of reindeer. They also remembered who the herders were and where they corralled their animals.



A 1950s reindeer round-up
in Kotzebue.
UAA-hmc-0396-14o-f34-6

“There were lots of reindeer when I was a child. Reindeer herders kept the reindeer safe from wolves. When they were corralling in Ikkalġuq, there were about 1,000 reindeer.”

—Ayaqiñ

Daniel Sipahk Foster, Sr.

Charlie Smith had his reindeer herd at *Sauniqtuuq* [spit near the mouth of Selawik River]. In one incident, they drove large numbers of the herd to *Sauniqtuuq*. The point [of the spit] was then very large and it had a corral. They drove the reindeer there around the 1950s.

In earlier years, the Smith’s used *Paniqsigvik* and *Sijiaġruk*. Virgil Clark, a young man then, also had reindeer in *Paniqsigvik*. I have heard stories that as a young boy Virgil Clark used to fetch water for those working in the corral. That was when they marked the ears of the reindeer. They did not put tags then which showed ownership of the reindeer. Chester Seveck brought reindeer from Kivalina side and bred them up there. Lawrence Gray took over that herd and had them in *Ikkalġuq* by *Aasriġraġaaniq*. Buckland side had their own reindeer.

The herders had real smart sheep dogs. They called them *laavlaa* [lap dogs]. When they *qunġisaqtaq* [go get reindeer], they went way up north, from Barrow side. They traded like that. They bred them. They got reindeer from the Nome area, too. I heard this from George Keats and Wesley Woods. *Pupik* [Ray Skin] used to record reindeer numbers. Superintendents used to pass by and report on reindeer numbers.

Ruby Ayaqiñ Foster

George Keats used to say that he came to Selawik around 1944 to go reindeer herding. Other herders were Chester Seveck, Lawrence Gray, Ernest Loon, and William Sheldon. There were people from Noatak, too. Lottie and Elmer Ballot were there, too.

There were lots of reindeer when I was a child. Reindeer herders kept the reindeer safe from wolves. When they were corralling in *Ikkalġuq* [along the southeast shore of Selawik Lake], there were about 1,000 reindeer. August was when they slaughtered reindeer for meat. The spotted reindeer were good for skins, including the fawns. The fawn skins were good for parkas.

Frank Qunġuyuk Berry, Sr.

I don’t recall when reindeer arrived, but I was told there were many reindeer long time ago. They camped in *Sauniqtuuq* caring for their herds. Including *pavani* [back there—towards *Utauraq*]. William Sheldon cared for his herd at *Ikaaġiaq*. Other herders were *Nalikkatuk* [Charlie Smith], *Panitchiaq* [Tommy Skin], and *Ailluk* [William Sheldon, Sr.].

Caribou or reindeer?
Perhaps an elder
can help you tell the
difference.

© istockphoto.com



Chester *Sivviq* Seveck
was a reindeer herder
in the Selawik and NW
Alaska region. He was
an Episcopal lay reader
as well.

Archives, Univ. of AK Fairbanks,
2001-129-179



The parkies worn by this Noatak family in a photo from the 1920s shows the influence of reindeer on traditional clothing. The spotted parka on the left is clearly made from reindeer, while the man's parka could be either reindeer or caribou.

UAA, Archives & Manuscripts, hmc-0401-album1-18d



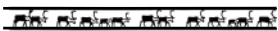
Intermixing of caribou and reindeer

There has been some intermixing of reindeer and caribou over time, which Selawik elders say has influenced the size and shape of the caribou and the taste of the meat. A recent change in the caribou migration brought huge numbers of caribou far onto the Seward Peninsula for several winters. Contemporary reindeer herders were unable to keep their herds separated from the caribou, and their reindeer followed the caribou north in the spring.



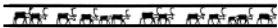
“You can still recognize that it is reindeer because it has short legs and a short qiqaq, and also by the color. They are short when you see them.”

—Sipahk



“The reindeer got mixed with the caribou. Although the reindeer herders watched their herds, the reindeer ran off with the caribou. The Selawik people kept their reindeer for a little while longer, but eventually lost them, too.”

—Ayaqiñ



Daniel Sipahk Foster, Sr.

People lost their reindeer because of the wild caribou. The reindeer went with the wild caribou. Today, when you hunt caribou, you get half-breed animals. You can still recognize that it is reindeer because it has short legs and a short *qiqaq* [nose], and also by the color. They are short when you see them. You can notice the difference in taste—even the half-breed. It’s better to have reindeer. It just tastes good. I would not know how else to describe it. The caribou is wild. You just know the difference.

Once when I was hunting in stormy weather, there was a herd of runaway reindeer way up there by Kobuk. From a distance, I thought they were caribou. I headed toward the mountains and waited for them at the top. They took their time going up the mountain. When I started shooting, they didn’t run. Caribou usually run when you start shooting. So I quit because I understood then that they were someone’s reindeer.

Laura Iguaqpak Smith

Caribou are easy to recognize. They have long legs and reindeer are short. I can eat reindeer, but I cannot eat it all the time. I have been raised with eating caribou and they can be eaten frozen. I cannot eat a frozen reindeer too much.

Ruby Ayaqiñ Foster

The reindeer got mixed with the caribou. Although the reindeer herders watched their herds, the reindeer ran off with the caribou. There was nothing left. The Selawik people kept their reindeer for a little while longer, but eventually lost them, too. The taste of reindeer is different today. I used to buy reindeer from the store. Once I made soup, and it tasted different. It was not like the reindeer we used to eat a long time ago.

Marie Iqitqiraq Clark

Yes, the meat has changed, the taste especially. Just like you buy from Hanson’s [a former Kotzebue grocery store].

Man with reindeer in front of a small sod building in the Kotzebue area, 1950s-60s.
Anchorage Museum of History & Art, AMRC-b85-27-2687

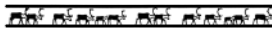


Caribou racks on display in the Selawik area are now common—but not so 50 years ago when caribou did not range into this area.
Photo by Steve Hillebrand/USFWS



“When the caribou got mixed with reindeer, the caribou took the reindeer. The reindeer never came back once they left.”

—Qujujuk



Frank Qujujuk Berry, Sr.

When the caribou got mixed with reindeer, the caribou took the reindeer. The reindeer never came back once they left. Those who had gone hunting for caribou ran into reindeer and shot them. This was later on while people in Buckland still had herds. The caribou can live with the reindeer.

David Nasragniq Greist

The reindeer’s meat is different than the *tuttupiaq* [caribou]. The reindeer are domestic and handled by people. They let them graze. They are not like the caribou. The *tuttupiaq* have longer legs. Today all the caribou around here have short legs. They have become reindeer. North Slope caribou have long legs.

Changes in caribou migration since the 1960s

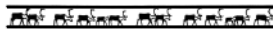
Caribou numbers are now very high, and they migrate right through the Selawik area—a dramatic change from what elders remember from their earlier years.

Daniel Siyahk Foster, Sr.

It sure has changed, and now caribou are migrating by the ocean along the coast through Point Hope and Kivalina.

Frank Qujujuk Berry, Sr.

In the last 50 years it has changed. This area started having caribou around the 1960s. They arrived from the slopes in the fall time. We heard many caribou had crossed the Kobuk River. Then the caribou would migrate back to the north in spring.



“It is different today. Now the caribou come right through our fish camp.”

—Iguaqpak



Laura Iguaqpak Smith

It is different today. Now the caribou come right through our fish camp.

David Nasragniq Greist

Since then, the caribou started coming. At a later time, they started passing through Selawik towards the south. They started going farther behind Koyuk today. Even Unalakleet people are getting caribou in winter.

Marie Iqitqiraaq Clark

There are more caribou now than ever as close as *Kuvraqtuḡvigruaq* [Pauline Ramoth’s camp, about five miles northwest of Selawik].

More recent Selawik homes reflect a culture that relies on caribou, unlike several generations ago.

Photo by Joe Youino/USFWS



Biologists have listened to elders' concerns and have made the collars smaller and lighter, with the ability to expand if the animal's neck size changes. The collaring takes only a few minutes and no drugs are used. Each fall different groups of students work side-by-side with the biologists in the collaring project.



Above:
Selawik students, Lee Mitchell and Sam Ballot, help Selawik Refuge biologist, Nate Olson, place a collar on a caribou cow.



Left: Selawik student, Esther Dexter, places an expandable collar on a bull caribou.

Collaring photos by Kaci Fullwood/NPS



“Caribou are much closer now. The caribou even started coming to the village of Selawik.”

—Ayaqiñ



Ruby Ayaqiñ Foster

Caribou are much closer now. The caribou even started coming to the village of Selawik. When I worked at the school, there were caribou across from there. There were so many. Some even spend the summer and don't migrate north.

More caribou today—but are they as healthy?

Even though caribou numbers are high and they are easier to hunt, Selawik elders believe that caribou are not as healthy as they used to be.

Daniel Siyahk Foster, Sr.

The caribou health was good back then. But today some have white worms in their meat. Today some are really skinny. The ones with radio collars look pitiful. Even moose. I have seen them very skinny, including bulls. The collar is in the way when it's feeding.



“The caribou were delicious to eat back then. We didn't find sick ones then. Today some caribou have abnormalities or things in them.”

—Qujujuk



Frank Qujujuk Berry, Sr.

There is never a shortage of caribou, and they are all around us. But some caribou have become bad today. Eating caribou today is not as appetizing [*qiñnaqnaqsiruq*]. The caribou were delicious to eat back then. We didn't find sick ones then. Today some caribou have abnormalities or things in them.

Biologists agree with elders' observations that there has been an increase of parasites in caribou, but say this is natural because the herd has grown so large. They also say that eating the meat poses no health threat to humans, but recommend cutting out the parasites.

Blood samples are drawn from about 100 caribou every year to check for diseases and the general health of the animals. Even with the herd so large biologists are finding most animals are in very good condition. More extensive studies done in 2007 showed the Western Arctic Caribou Herd to be one of the healthiest caribou herds in the state.



The Kuugruaq River (left) where it joins the Selawik River.
Photo by Steve Hillebrand/USFWS

Parting Words — Advice to to live by

Some of the elders interviewed have since passed away, and some—thankfully—are still here with us. All have seen dramatic changes in their lifetimes. They offer words of advice to the next generations, about hunting and how to live a good and happy life.



“As we were growing up, our parents and elders always told us not to get more than we needed. We should select what we need and not overshoot what we don’t need. You don’t kill them and leave them. You must get only what you need.”

—Sipahk



“The elders worked together in the past. Together they worked as a team. Today it is first come, first served.”

—Mikiana



Daniel Sipahk Foster, Sr.

As we were growing up, our parents and elders always told us not to get more than we needed. I want to pass that on to young people. Today we have fast snowmachines and good rifles, and we can shoot however much and anything. And sometimes we get to the caribou and find it’s a skinny one, one we don’t want. I hope they don’t do that. We always try to tell our kids these things. We should select what we need and not overshoot what we don’t need.

That is what I would like to pass on. Even the ducks when they are skinny, we don’t shoot at them just for sport or to let them fall. There is a season for them that we like, and so we wait until then. This is what we advise our young people. You don’t play with any of the animals. You don’t kill them and leave them. You must get only what you need. Taikuu.

Frank Qunuyuk Berry, Sr.

We should only hunt when we need it and not play around with the animals.

Laura Iguaqpak Smith

Pray without ceasing, help those who need, ask, and equally share your harvest. These were taught to us—never be greedy for more than you need. The owner of the boat gets more share, and the one who provides the gas.

Ruby Ayaqin Foster

Take the Lord and hold to him and don’t play. I did before and now I know to have the Holy Spirit in my heart. Ask the Lord to forgive us for our mistakes.

Johnny Mikiana Norton

The elders worked together in the past. We followed the elderly men—that was how they made us hunt. Together they worked as a team. Today our young people don’t do that. It is first come, first served.

Marie Iqitqiraq Clark

I am very pleased I taught my kids and my grandkids the camping lifestyle—how to fish and to live at camp during the summer, to store fish, and to put away caribou for the winter. We must all remember to camp, to subsist, pick berries, get ready for winter. *Pimaktuuraǵniaǵlugich*—be kind and friendly to all—even if they are not your relatives. Set net anywhere, even at my camp. And don’t be stingy!

Jetta Minerva learning from stories told by her grandmother, Laura Smith.



Jetta Minerva and Hannah Loon spending time with Ralph Ramoth, Sr.

Emma Ramoth demonstrating yarn braiding to Delbert Mitchell III at culture camp.



Roy Smith with Selawik's future leaders, Jo Savok and Lona Norton.

Photos by Clyde Ramoth, Sr. (top right and center), Hannah Loon (top left), and Susan Georgette (bottom).

Looking to the future with knowledge from the past



Ruby Foster surrounded by some of her family.

Photo by Hannah Loon

Hannah Davis and her grandson, Shawn Woods—a future Selawik caribou hunter and provider!

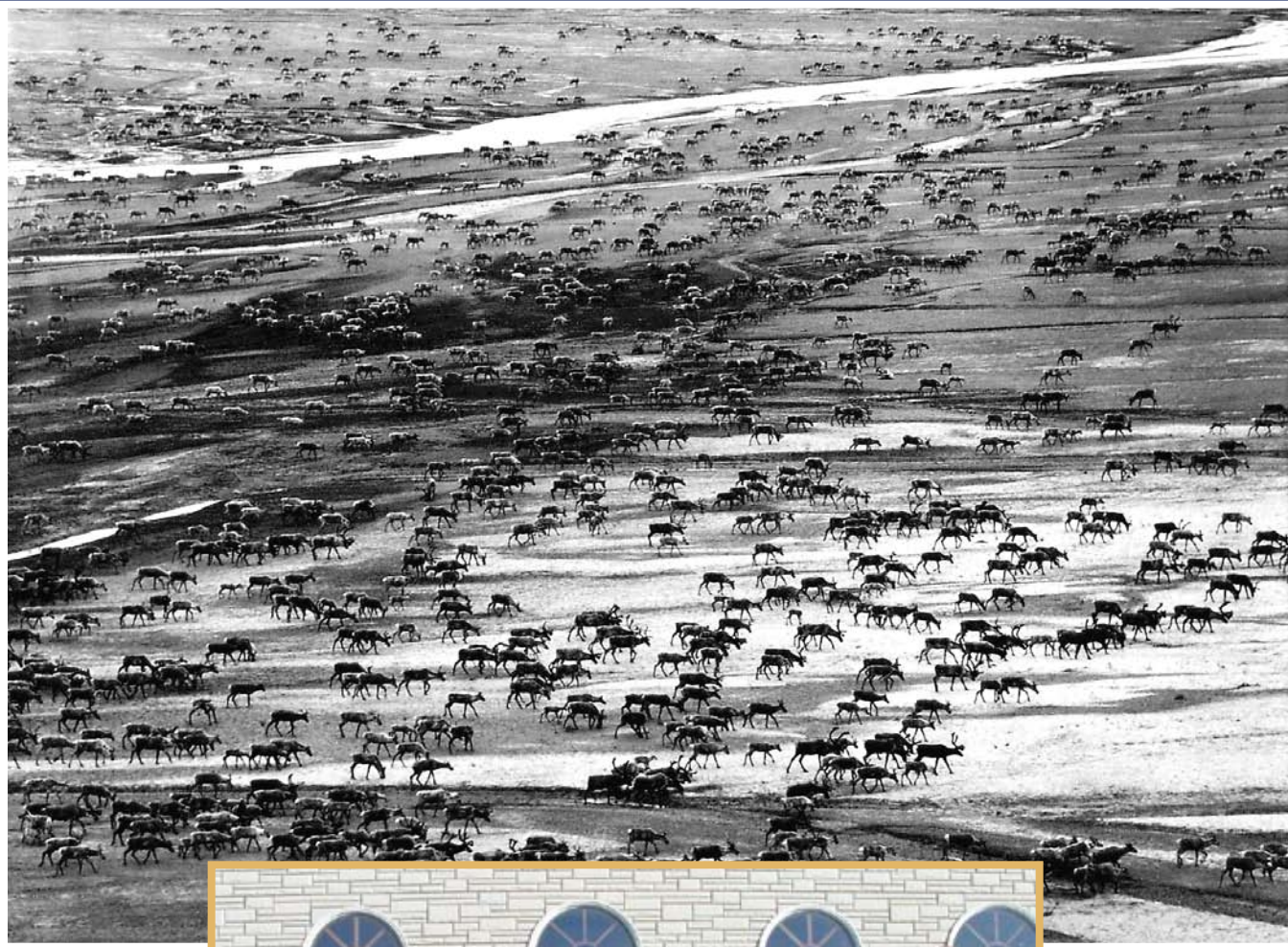
Photo by Steve Hillebrand/USFWS



Daniel and Mildred Foster introducing the joys of camping to future generations!

Photo by Steve Hillebrand/
USFWS





University of Alaska
Museum of the North,
© Barry McWayne



Caribou Working Group members and technical support team, 2002.
Photo by Sue Steinacher, ADF&G

Caribou and the future

By integrating and applying traditional Native knowledge, local observations, and western scientific knowledge about caribou, we all hope that caribou will always be in our future.



The Caribou Working Group strongly recognizes the need to seek out, preserve, and share unique traditional Native knowledge about caribou. This booklet is one way in which that goal is being reached.



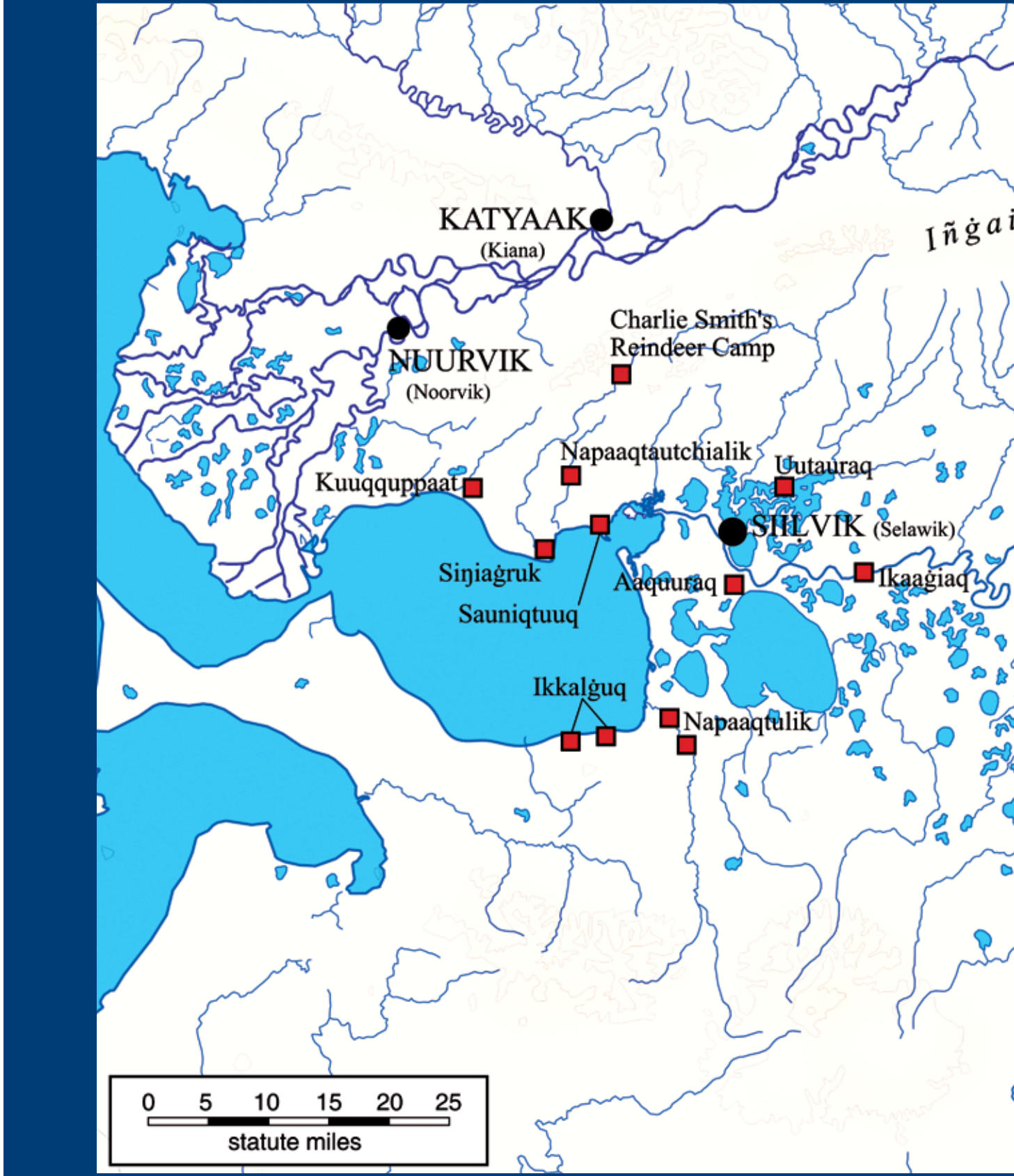
Life has changed tremendously since the early days of caribou hunting and reindeer herding described by the elders in this booklet. One change has been the growth of the Western Arctic Caribou Herd, and along with it an increase in the number of Alaskans with economic, subsistence, and personal interests in the herd.

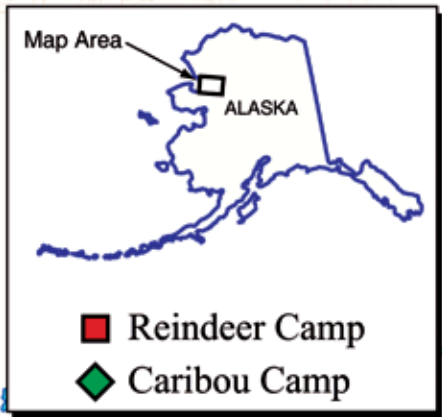
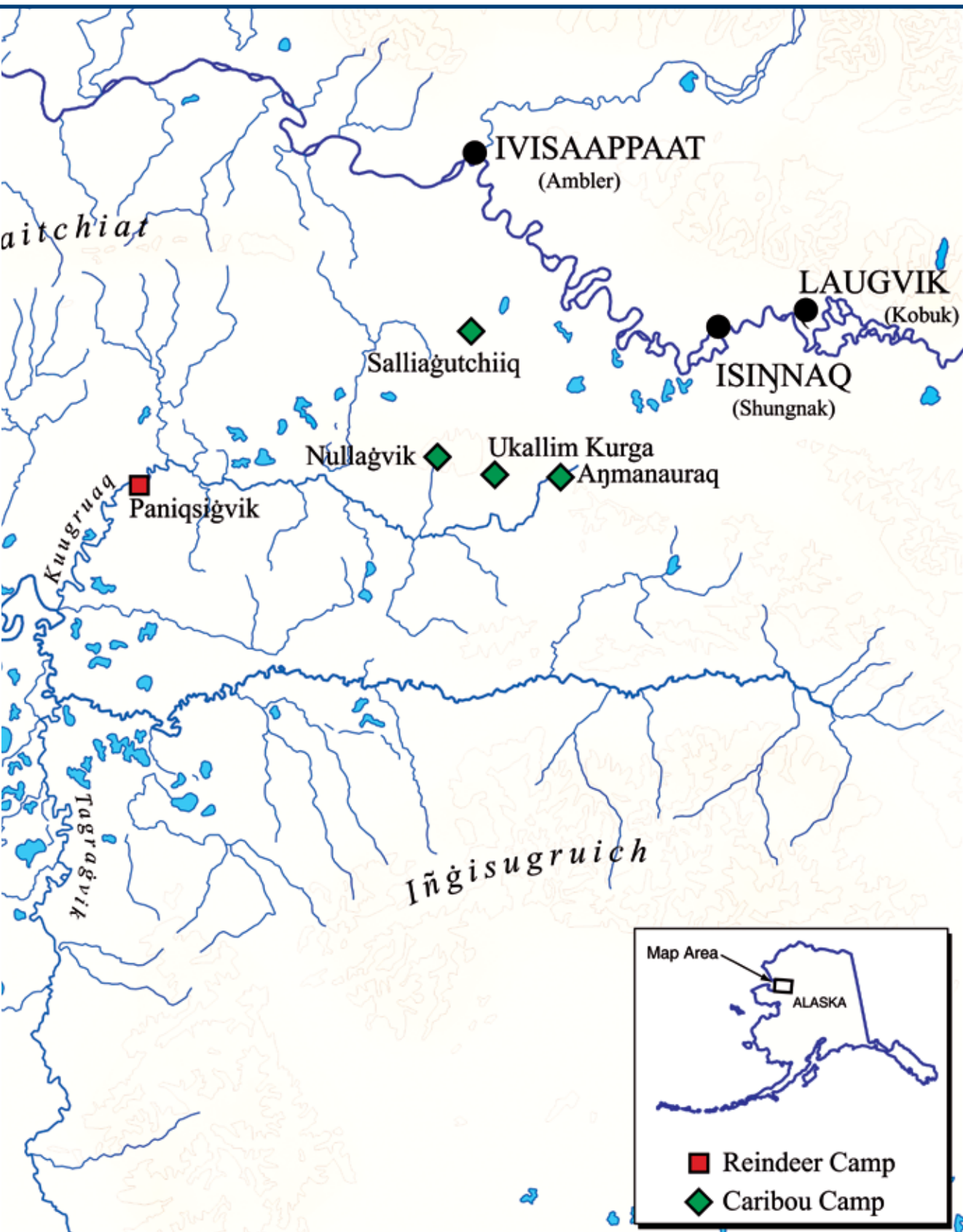
Some of these changes bring new challenges for caribou hunters, but at least one positive change has been the recognition by wildlife managers that everyone with an interest in the herd should have a voice in how the herd is managed for the future. To accomplish this the Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group was formed in 1997.

The Caribou Working Group includes representatives of subsistence hunters from across the range of the herd as well as representatives of reindeer herders, big game guides, transporters, conservationists, and non-local Alaskan hunters. The group works as a team with state and federal wildlife managers to address issues about the health of the caribou herd.

Native knowledge and western scientific knowledge have typically existed as two separate knowledge paths, but the Caribou Working Group recognizes the importance of both and the need for them to be integrated. The Caribou Working Group supports biologists placing radio and satellite collars on a number of animals, and conducting population counts and habitat studies. But the group just as strongly recognizes the need to seek out, preserve and share unique traditional Native knowledge about caribou. This booklet is one way in which that goal is being reached.

No one knows the mind of caribou, or whether their numbers will stay the same, increase or decrease. However, we hope that by working together as a team—much like the elders did who hunted caribou long ago—and by combining all available traditional, local and scientific knowledge about caribou, we can insure that this magnificent herd will always be there for the future.







The upper Selawik River region.

Photo by Steve Hillebrand/USFWS

*We must all remember to camp, to
subsist, pick berries, get ready for winter.
Pimaktuuragniaglugich—be kind and friendly
to all—even if they are not your relatives.*

—Iqitqiraq