

Inuvialuit of Aklavik, NWT, Canada

Interviews and report by Annie B. Gordon

Overview

I started the interviews about the middle of December, soon after I got all the forms and maps. I couldn't do too much during the holidays but got whatever I could done (over 20 interviews). I asked about how much time people spent on the land. Very few people go out on the land, maybe day trips with occasional overnights. Not many really spend time on the land anymore – maybe for a week or more at a time. The few people that used to stay out on the land almost all the time don't stay out too much now due to illness or doctor's orders to stay in town. But we still have a few people who still get to go out on the land (due to the high cost of living).

Weather

- We had a lot of winds this summer, lots of east or southeast winds. Winds just calmed down, then they started up again. There was some rain.
- In August we had a big storm on the coast, with a very strong northwest wind. We even got a warning from the people in Kaktovik, phoning Aklavik to let us know by trappers' radio that a big wind was coming. But luckily, we only got the tail end of the wind. Even that was strong enough to cause a problem for us, like losing our new mukluk stage at Shingle and table to work on if we had gotten a whale. Plus, we lost the old stage from the year before. The wind was very strong so we had big waves, causing a break through between middle camp and the point, and leaving us on an island. We had to be taken out by a chopper! It was too rough to even try with a boat. When we flew by chopper, all we could see was water right up to the hill. You could just see patches of land here and there all the way to Bird Camp. Also, for the first time in this region we had a thunderstorm and tornado weather warning. I think we were lucky it didn't reach Shingle Point. We saw the

dark clouds and it went towards the east from around Blow River. So we never got that weather.

- Because of changes in the weather we have to be very careful traveling in summer now, as we never know when the weather will change, especially the winds.
- Most people stayed in town during freeze-up this year. The freeze-up was an average (timed) freeze-up.
- Snow this year was early and there was lots. We had deep snow in some areas, also making for icy conditions in some areas. Lots of snow makes it hard to get out due to too much snow and overflow.
- The water level was a bit high when it froze up this fall, and later on the ice dropped. It made for more overflow again.
- Due to warmer weather, the willows and grass seemed to grow faster. For example, we cut willows and grass around camp and by fall time we have to pretty well cut them down again. Also, some people say they notice more shrubs growing closer to the coast.
- Some people said that due to the warmer, hotter summer, aqpiqs (salmonberries) never grew too much in some berry patches. Some find they grew well in moist and shady areas, so some people got a few berries. Cranberries hardly or never grew this year.

In August we had a big storm on the coast, with a very strong northwest wind.

People said it was pretty good for fish this year.

Fish

- People said it was pretty good for fish this year. Cones died quickly, maybe from tags. Any animal could die from a wound so it could be like that for fishes.
- There was a lot of whitefish and coney, also lots of loche. Loches' livers seemed to be good. Very few report on bad livers.
- Not too many people got Arctic Charr and Herring, but what few people got were good. Maybe it was just a little late run for the fish.

- There were lots of Crooked backs. People got lots of fishes, enough for winter. Maybe some could have gotten more if they had sled dogs, but they didn't.

Caribou

- Last spring, caribou came down to the flats (North Slope) at the end of June. Some hunters got some, and some didn't. Some people say that the hunters who hunt with ski-doo's chase caribou and make it hard for other hunters who don't have ski-doo's. Those hunters have to hunt caribou by walking and if they get any, they have to carry their meat back. So we should try and do something about this, for everyone to hunt without ski-doo's in summer time. Some reported some hunters only take certain parts of the caribou and leave the rest of the meat. Young people should be taught how to hunt right, and to listen to elders when they talk about how to hunt caribou the right way.
- There were no caribou for Aklavik this fall. Caribou came early and probably hunters went after the leading herd, so they scattered all over. They went further back to the mountains, making it hard to get caribou. When we don't get caribou, we have to try to get moose meat. This past fall we never had caribou close by like in other years. So it made it very hard for people who depend on caribou meat. We still never got caribou close by yet.

When we don't get caribou, we have to try to get moose meat. This past fall we never had caribou close by like in other years.

Other Animals

- Not much trapping happened. Gas costs too much. Weather was too warm. There was too much snow and overflow. Very few people even tried to trap.
- No matter what we get short of – animals or fish — we never get short of mosquitoes. There are always lots of mosquitoes. When people travel in the summer time, if we didn't have mosquitoes life would be boring.
- We used to see whales early summer, but not too close for hunting. This year there was also too much wind. Every time the hunters go out, the whales seem to head for deep waters. So Shingle Point Area only got one whale this past summer.

Community Life

- Many people from the community don't go out hunting or fishing much because of the high cost of gas or groceries. People want to get their winter supply of food, but some can't afford it.
- There are a few more jobs than before, since the oil companies are working in or around the Delta area.
- The language is being taught in school, but is not really used in the homes. Also we're trying to keep our drum dances going and bringing young people out on the land to teach them about how people used to live on the land long ago.

Many people from the community don't go out hunting or fishing much because of the high cost of gas or groceries.

