

## Caribou adventure on the Alaskan tundra

# Hunting off the map

By MATT MARKEY  
and JEFF BASTING

Tim Newlove had taken white-tailed deer, elk, and black bear with a bow, and endured a semiwilderness hunt in the mountains of Colorado.

He was looking for a new challenge, the next adventure. It was time to pursue something more exotic, more difficult, more risky.

How far away is the nearest caribou? The real estate appraiser from Bowling Green found out.

He and a longtime hunting buddy went to extreme northern Alaska, in some of the most remote and rugged terrain on the North American continent, to places that are not even places on most maps, and found caribou — along with considerable danger, hardship, and the haunting notion that you have left the world behind.

"There's a real feeling of being alone and helpless if anything goes wrong," Mr. Newlove said about the caribou hunt he experienced earlier this fall.

After more than a year of planning, Mr. Newlove and Kelly Canter arrived in Fairbanks on a 5½ hour flight from Minneapolis. They gathered camping equipment, a satellite phone, hunting licenses, a four-wheel drive truck, and extra cans of fuel, then tackled the Dalton Highway, a desolate 414-mile run dead north that would morph from asphalt to gravel to slick dirt. They had a 12-hour drive ahead of them to meet the bush pilot who would fly them into the tundra.

"It is white-knuckle driving," Mr. Newlove said. "You are swerving and fish-tailing, and trying to make sure you stay on a road that has no lines and no guardrails."

There are no cities, no gift shops, and an hour can pass without seeing another vehicle. They left the tree line at close to 5,000 feet in the Brooks Range and entered the Arctic watershed.

It's after midnight when they reach their pilot's outpost. It's dark just four or five hours this far north, and they wake to a barren but breathtaking landscape.

"It almost looked like a desert," Mr. Newlove said.

They are flown into the bush and dropped near a small lake where they set up a primitive camp. At 4 the next morning, there are caribou 100 yards away, but not the mature bulls they seek.

The pair set out for a small valley they had spotted on the flight in, thinking it was close. It takes two hours with full packs to traverse the knee-high, spongy tundra that Mr. Newlove describes as

"bowling balls of wet grass."

After reaching the valley, hours pass before Mr. Canter takes a nice bull. It takes another hour to reach the downed caribou. They skin, field dress, and quarter the bull, and it's getting dark.

On the arduous return hike to camp, an exhausted Mr. Newlove stops to rest while Mr. Canter presses on. When Mr. Newlove wakes with the sun and returns to camp, there's no sign of Mr. Canter. Hiking in the dark, he misses the small tent at the edge of a lake.

Mr. Newlove unloads his gear and starts a series of one-mile hikes in every direction, using his field glasses to search for his friend. Just as Mr. Newlove is ready to call for a search-and-rescue plane on the satellite phone, Mr. Canter returns and the rest of the day is spent recovering from the ordeal.

"He knew as soon as it got light that he was lost," Mr. Newlove said.

It takes four trips to pack out all of the meat from Mr. Canter's caribou, and after Mr. Newlove takes a nice bull with a 200-yard shot, there is more field-dressing and transporting to do.

The following day, Mr. Newlove sees a grizzly bear standing on its hind legs and staring at the campsite, apparently locked in on the scent of the caribou

meat, but the bear moves on.

With temperatures close to 70 a couple of days, they phone the pilot to come pick up the meat before it spoils. Other days the high is in the 40s, with frost at night. Several times, the bugs are so bad that the pair wear headnets.

"You would look down at your hands and they would be covered in black flies," Mr. Newlove said.

By the end of their eight-day odyssey, both men have taken their two-caribou limit. The pilot says he will be there at noon to ferry them out of the bush. He shows up at 7 p.m.

The trip was relentlessly demanding, but also the bold type of gambit that Mr. Newlove was looking for.

"It was incredibly difficult — I lost 20 pounds in nine days," Mr. Newlove said. "At first, I was hesitant to say I'd go back, but now I'd go in a heartbeat. It was the most rewarding trip I've been on. I figure you have to push it, and always look for more adventure."

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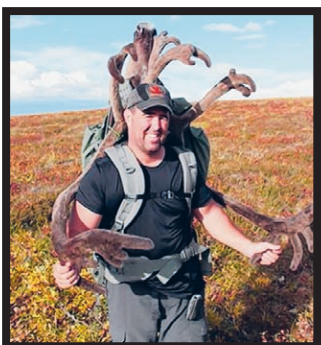
Kelly Canter took this trophy bull in the Alaskan tundra.

The caribou Tim Newlove and Kelly Canter hunted were part of the Western Arctic Herd.



The caribou range is covered with low, brushy vegetation.

Tim Newlove, right, and his hunting camp at a remote unnamed lake above the Arctic Circle.



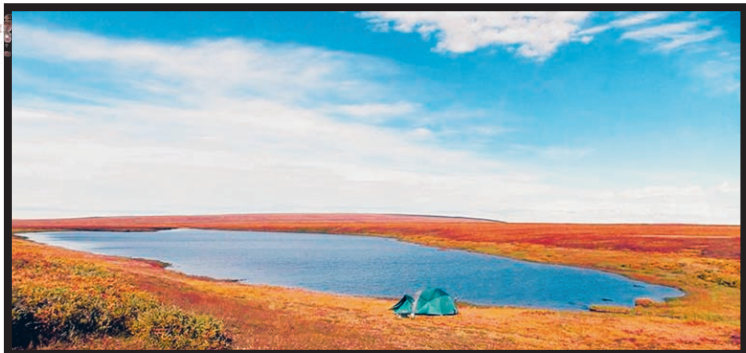
Tim Newlove packs out caribou antlers.

BLADE PHOTO ILLUSTRATION

PHOTOS/TIM NEWLOVE AND KELLY CANTOR



The Dalton Highway starts in Livengood as pavement, then changes to gravel and mud on a 414-mile run to Prudhoe Bay.



The caribou hunt took place on a treeless Alaskan landscape.



The Trans-Alaska Pipeline takes roughly the same route as the Dalton Highway.