

The 'Bous of the Tagia

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It is cold and the jack pine fire in the small stove is finally heating the tent/cabin. The structure is composed of a tent top on a plywood frame.

Six of us sleep here. Some of them snore. However, it is almost dawn and cold or not, I have to get up. I heard the generator start 30-minutes ago so I know there is hot water for a shower. Shivering in the dawn, I half-run the 30-feet to the hot shower. It is late August and I am back on the Taiga.

Breakfast is a noisy affair. There is much chatter about migration, lake crossings, brands of bows, what broadheads and as always...will it rain. I know the answer to that. Of course, it will. It does so every day. The guides are prepping boats for the 12-hunters. Six of us shoot bows, six shoot rifles. It easy to tell the ones who have never been here before.

It is after ten and I have seen maybe, 30-caribou and those too far to consider a stalk. There are three of us with Riley. We agree, let's make a move. It means a cold boat ride but it has to be done. We chatter across the waves of the nameless lake and into a lagoon for a landing.

From atop a boulder, we can glass the area for many miles. I am on one rock, Riley on another. We see the same thing...nothing. Riley holds up a shed or wolf kill antler as if to say, "They are either dead or gone." Shed antlers and full skulls are everywhere in the Taiga. Nothing gets a break.

In the boat again and toward a small island: A good caribou bull churns across the inlet and runs onto the island. It is a terrible island of maybe 20-acres. I am the only one who wants to fight the brutal shin tangle of a glacial island. Thigh-high and thick as a briar patch it is a killer in which to try a stalk. Broken legs and twisted ankles are the usual fare.

I reach the mid-point of the island and I hear Riley yell something but I cannot understand him. I climb onto a rock for better visibility. Then, I see high antlers coming through the brush. They look as though they will come by me.

I am standing on a small, not too secure rock. I knock an arrow and come to full draw. He passes me on a dead run and I swing ahead of his shoulder. At 15-yards, I pick a small opening and release. I see the arrow go somewhere. He crashes off through the brush and vanishes.

Then I hear Lennie yell, "He hit him! By damn, he's hit and he is down." Lennie Resner is the president of an archery product company and just by chance is on the hunt with me. He is a nice guy and we get along well. Maybe I can talk him out of some more broadheads. Actually, it was a heck of a shot. I can't do that every day. The third hunter in our group is impressed. He is a kid from somewhere in the Midwest. He is a bit flakey and mostly we ignore him. I can't remember his name. He spent a lot of time doing karate moves on top of rocks.

By the time I get through the dreaded growth, they have beached the boat and are at my bull. He fell in the water, just off the shore of the island making it easy for loading. Riley has a grin like a wave on a milk bucket. He likes me and I like him. We have hunted together several times and get to fish a lot on most hunts. Riley shakes his head and offers, "Dat is the second time I ave see dat man make shot like dat."

It makes my chest swell a little. Two years earlier, I nailed a fat cow on the run at 30-yards. That too was pure luck.

We load my bull and head to another spot to try to find a bull for Lennie. On the way, we come across big Wade and see he has a fine bull in his boat. He waves and gestures his hunters have killed two. They are rifle hunting and must have been behind a hill and we could not hear the shots. With my tag filled, I'll be playing guide and helping Riley fish for a few days.

There is a strange mystique to caribou hunting. I thoroughly enjoy it. Every time I have been, it has been a great trip. I think some of that is because of the element of danger.

If you hit the migration, caribou will surround you every day. If you miss it, I hope you like fishing. That is just the way it is. Tens of thousands of caribou move in vast herds. However, you have to hit it right.

I love the harsh and brutal Taiga, that forbidding area just before you hit full tundra. It is mean country where a mistake can be deadly. Lost overnight is easy to do and the wolves and bear do not care. Over much of it, there is little firewood and it gets cold -- very cold -- that far north in Quebec.

On most hunts, the camps are comfortable beyond belief. When you consider, every item is flown in on a floatplane it is amazing. Snug tent/cabins, great food, warm showers and soft beds are the norm. In addition to caribou, the lake trout fishing is superb and in some areas, 5-pound brook trout are common.

I wish I could go again. I never will I am too old and too frail. I talk with Riley once or twice a year and always, he invites me to come. All it would cost me is airfare to Montreal, my license and my flight to Schefferville. I grin at the thought of "all".

Today, that is probably over \$1500. Toward the end of August, I'll be thinking about the Taiga. I'd like to try the shin tangle one more time.

I'll be thinking about Riley and big Wade and the 'Bous of the Taiga.

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