



## Tuktujaq Commentary

By Bernard Saladin d'Anglure

My goal with this film was to illustrate how the caribou occupied a prominent place in the traditional life of the Inuit of northern Nunavik and in all of Nunavik before the species all but disappeared during the Second World War, or perhaps a little earlier. The virtual disappearance of the caribou meant that the Inuit found them only with great difficulty. They had to travel a great distance towards the forests, where there was a larger type of caribou, the woodland caribou, and some of these caribou migrated into Nunavik, towards the tree line.

The idea here was to contrast the three cultures: the minority island culture that did not have or no longer had caribou at all, and so replaced these skins with skins from eider ducks or dogs or with a little sealskin for certain parts of clothing, or even – in extreme situations– with fish skins; the coastal Inuit, who had marine resources and resources of caribou from the interior (at this time they had to travel quite far inland to find them); and then a minority of families that lived the entire year inland, close to large lakes full of fish and river fords where the caribou had to swim across, making it relatively easy to harpoon them because they were much slower than the Inuit in kayaks.

Nonetheless, there were a few specific areas in Nunavik, on the Ungava Bay side up towards Kangirsuk and Quaqtuaq, areas not too far from the coast where they could find caribou herds which came to graze in these areas in the summer. And in that case, another technique was the collective hunt, which was done by small camps of a few families that would drive the caribou towards hunting blinds, *taluk*, constructed of rocks, behind which the archers were waiting. The archers had short bows made of wood or caribou antler, and would fire when the caribou were less than 30 feet away (about 10 metres). The arrow had to be traveling with enough power to reach the vital organs of the animals, to kill or mortally wound them.

As for the Hudson Bay coast of Nunavik, there was a very interesting area in the Puvirnituq region, up towards Akulivik, and especially near the Kuuvik River, at least 15 kilometres from the coast, where there are some meadows, and in the summer small herds of caribou would come quite close to the sea there. We have some exceptional testimony in the illustrations of Noah Kilupaq Qinnuaq, who was living in Puvirnituq when Asen Balikci was there in the 1960s; Noah Kilupaq was the son of Qinnuaq, who had lived there and used this hunting technique at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, and who inspired his son to produce this very beautiful single drawing of the collective caribou hunt in this area, the





Kuuvik River valley, so about 15 kilometres from the sea. The Inuit of Puvirnituaq remember very well how every year after the snow melt, at the end of winter, they went up into the interior, traveling in families, taking with them a small river or bay kayak, shorter than the big kayaks used in the open sea in the Kangiqsujaq area (the kayak on display at the interpretation centre is 21 feet long, if I remember correctly). These ones were shorter. And I even had Tuumasi Kudlak in Kangirsuk reproduce a small river or lake kayak that was much shorter, and that he covered in shaved caribou skin (it's in the collections of the Canadian Museum of History in Ottawa). That one was typical of the Inuit who lived permanently in the interior. In his childhood, Tuumasi Kudlak lived with his parents, and his father was considered to be a *Nunamiuq*, someone who lived all year inland, subsisting on fish, small game, and caribou.

So the people from Puvirnituaq, and also from the Inukjuak region, could head inland, and even meet up inland, and meet people from Salluit and possibly Kangiqsujaq also, at the places where the rivers to these various communities originated, either at the large lakes or nearby. And when they met each other inland, these were occasions for celebrations, for trading news, etc.

Two of the great hunters in Puvirnituaq had vivid memories of the annual trip into the interior; one was Juanasialuk, the famous engraver who filled notebooks with drawings showing us the trips inland and the uses of caribou, and his younger brother Putuguq, who, with his family, also made the journey into the interior. For the purposes of this documentary, which is intended to show how people prepared for these journeys and particularly how they treated and cut the skins and made the clothing, and even how they cast decorative beads by melting tin in a small soapstone pan and making a small hole, a technique shown very clearly in the film, to make pendants for the front and back tails of the women's coats so the tails would not fly up in the wind, and so protecting the women. We can place this period in the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, or the first third of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, when some imported European products were available on the store shelves of the Hudsons Bay Company: metal blades that were used to make women's *ulus*, the large ones and smaller one that the seamstresses used, and at the same time they were using caribou skins, and caribou tendons – which made the best sewing thread, and then the practical traditions for taking the measurements for the garment you wanted to make for someone, using the notions of fingers, hand, hand up to the elbow, arm up to the armpit, in order to make a pattern for cutting the skins for the garment, to make the pieces that would then be sewn together.

Juanasialuk filled several notebooks with drawings, one of them devoted to the treatment of skins, as well as to his knowledge about caribou – by their sex, age and the tracks they left – and how they were tracked and spotted. This knowledge provided the Inuit with fresh meat





and more importantly, skins, because they could not use just any skin, harvested at just any time, to make every kind of garment. There were winter garments, made from skins harvested around mid autumn, when the hair is longer. There were ceremonial garments with shorter hair, harvested just after the July moult, so in early August when the hair is starting to grow back, and when the hair is very brown and very white on the belly, which could be used for ceremonial garments. And then there was the intermediate length, the fall skins, at the beginning of autumn, which were the most valued because the hairs held up well, unlike the hairs from mid-winter skins which are longer but tend to fall out more, and so were used more as bedding to sleep on, so that when people woke up in the morning there was always lots of caribou hair in their hair and on their clothes.

Likewise, they used the female caribou skins for certain garments, and the male skins for others. The technology involved in caribou skin clothing was, in short, a highly developed art. So there was a whole set of tools associated with this work, which were usually fabricated out of materials taken from caribou. There were various kinds of scrapers or fleshers, either made from a long caribou bone such as the tibia, sharpened slightly by rubbing it on stones or by filing it, or from a caribou shoulder blade when it was for scraping the hairs from a skin or for transforming a raw, dried raw into a soft, supple skin for making garments. There were several steps in the process, the first with the scraper made from a long bone, and a second step that was more for softening the finished skin, because the Inuit did not know about tanning.

As for the sewing kit, it was necessary to moisten the thread with grease, especially for waterproof seams for boots and sometimes other garments, and possibly for mittens or mitts. So a small round bag with an opening was fashioned out of raw sealskin, it was filled with fat, and the thread was drawn through while pressing on the little round cover, moistening the thread with fat so it could be used to sew a seam that would be really watertight. These sewing kits were made of reverse bird's skin, also contained caribou tendons, generally from the backbone of caribou, the part called *uliutit*. The tendon was first removed, along with the surrounding meat, and the skin was scraped off and what was left is this lovely bit that, once dried, is separated into threads that are – depending on the part of the garment to be sewn – used for sewing as is, or are braided together for sturdier stitching and possibly waterproof seams, especially for the soles of boots, which were made made from heavier leather. There were also leather finger protectors, small cylinders of leather. Usually these were worn over three fingers – the index, the middle finger and the little finger, to protect them from cuts caused by pulling on the thread, because the thread can be sharp. There was a thimble made of dried skin, quite hard, which was placed over a finger for threading a needle, so as to be able to use a little force. There was a leather needle case for storing the bone or ivory needles. So the tools included the two scrapers, the needle case, the little pouch of fat for greasing, and the small *ulu*, smaller than the *ulu* generally





used for scraping or cutting meat or skins. This small *ulu*, used on top of a board, made it possible to very accurately cut the pieces that would be assembled into the final garment, following a pattern based on the measurements taken to make the appropriate garment for the age and sex of the wearer.

So all this involved heading inland, each hunter with a kayak, with a tent made from shaved caribou skin that was made in two pieces that could be rolled up. This tent was translucent, and obviously not as warm as the ones made with haired skins that were used in the cold period, in winter. The tent was made of caribou skins, or, on the coast, sealskins or sometimes a part was made from *ujjuk* skin, and had translucent parts where they had cut through the thickness to make a thinner layer that was dried to make the translucent sections, particularly at the front of the tent, nearer the entrance, to let a little light into the tent on summer days. The advantage of the caribou skin tent was that it was made in two sections that were laced together at the top, at the peak of the tent. It was laced together with a rope or thong, and was much easier to transport because it was rolled up in two sections and two people could each carry a section, a section was very light, there was no caribou hair and so it could be carried either on the kayak when the man was paddling, or on one's back, using a head-band to steady the load and also a chest band, which was the carrying system used by both men and women. They could use the same system to carry children, or bags of clothing, or the skins used for bedding, and they made sleeping bags from caribou skins, sewn together, to use during these summer periods when they traveled to the interior.

The women traveled on foot, walking alongside the rivers or lakeshores and trying to stay in visual contact. But sometimes the man would follow his own route over the rivers and lakes, portaging when necessary with his head in the kayak's opening so that he could still see a bit, his shoulders supporting the weight of the kayak although it was not all that heavy, and often carrying a small load on his back as well.

They also used pack dogs, each with a backpack equipped with two pockets for carrying utensils; the dog would often be hauling tent poles as well, tied to the pack over the dog's flanks, which they would use for erecting the tent they were carrying. These dogs were specially trained to obey voice commands, especially when they were getting close to game, they didn't want the dogs chasing the game away. And when they were heading home with meat, they could carry some in the dogs' packs too.

Women traveled with their skin buckets that were made from the skins – shaved *ujjuk*, seal or beluga skin – salvaged when the covering of the kayak was replaced. The bottoms of these buckets were sewn with watertight seams, so the women could fetch water that, traditionally, was heated in stone pots; they had small pots for travelling inland, and also







the same time, but to shoot them one by one. So the herd is committed enough that there is a chance of a successful hunt.

So here we see a woman, Niali Putuguq, Putuguq's wife, Putuguq being Juanasialuk's younger brother, travelling on foot, accompanied by her pack dog, with its saddlepack, a *nangmautik*, on its back, and the dog is hauling a tent pole. In her hand she is carrying this famous waterproof skin bucket (*Imirtaqauti*) which was made from a piece of an old seal skin which had been used to cover a kayak, bucket which allows her to fetch water, and she is accompanied by her son, who is wearing a little parka with the hair side out, a little warmer garment, a garment meant for winter or the in-between seasons. They are heading inland while the man is travels by kayak, paddling up the rivers or lakes when possible and portaging across the sections where he can't, in which case he carries his kayak over his head and shoulders. The man here in the kayak is Juanasialuk. And we can see in front of him some skins that will be used for bedding or to make clothing, dried skins, unworked, and on the back, at least one section of the skin tent made from shaved caribou skin.

Here the woman has grabbed the bow of the kayak and is helping Juanasialuk to land it so he can get out; the opening is called the coaming in English and the *paa* in Inuktitut. In this scene, on land, we can see the beads, the decorations on the front of her *amauti*, beads of various colours. They have all sorts of equipment with them.

Now we see the caribou skin tent being set up: there are several poles at the front for keeping the front of the tent spread open, a pole for the tent peak, and then the whole tent is held down with rocks. The man has his sealskin hunting bag, where he keeps his hunting equipment, and is looking for caribou through his telescope for a first hunt. Meanwhile the woman, with her scraper made from caribou bone, a long bone that has been shaped and sharpened, is removing the thin layer of fat under a dried skin to soften it so it can be made into clothing. This is a long job, and she starts using the first scraper, and finishes with a smaller scraper that was often made from a caribou shoulder blade or another bone that was sufficiently wide and sharp to soften properly. Here she is taking her husband's measurements to be transcribed onto the skin, and cut accordingly. And so each time she cuts, especially one of the more important pieces like the front or the back of the coat, she checks that it's the right size. She uses here large *ulu* to cut the skin to make the adjustment. Here you can see her folding, so that the left and the right side of the garment will be symmetrical. So here is the tool, the long scraper, and the large *ulu* for cutting. Here's the small scraper, shaped from horn, from caribou antler, and the small pouch of fat that can be used to moisten the thread. This is a sort of sewing kit, with its clip.

Here, we can see the two scrapers. The first one, the long scraper, is what we saw used in the first stage of the process to remove the remaining flesh and dried blood; it is more







Now back to the sewing of the man's coat: once the front and back have been sewn together, the sleeves have to be attached. Notice how she always uses her teeth on the part where she's going to put her needle, biting down to crush the skin a little with a bit of saliva to moisten it, which makes it easier to push the needle through. It was always said that for the Inuit, both men and women, the teeth and jaw were like a third hand. And so, always, they soften the skin very thoroughly, moisten it, even chew it a bit to crush it, to make the sewing easier.

Here, we see a woman sewing inside her tent. She is making boots, if I'm not mistaken, the uppers for boots. She is dressed entirely in caribou skins, including her women's pants, with two horizontal white bands. And there is the qulliq, on a stand made of caribou antler, and the fire poker.

This woman is Maina, the wife of Davidaluk. There are the tools: the little piece of metal, something like a small ladle with a wooden handle, which will be used to melt the tin over the heat from the qulliq, a mold made of stone, where the liquid tin will be poured, also with a wood handle, and a third item but we can't quite see all of it... And these are the bullets, the lead projectiles from the cartridges for a .22 long rifle, which can be used the same way as tin. And this is a sort of pin which fits into the mold, you can see a little transverse shape near the round mouth of the mold, and she place the pin so that it will make a hole in the tin bead, so that it can be attached to the bottom of the coat. So she places the pin, and then she puts on a little fat, if I'm not mistaken ... She greases the mold well so that the bead will release from the stone. She uses fat from the qulliq. Now she is pouring the liquid lead. The pin has remained in place. She removes little bits of debris, and voilà, she has her tin bead, her pendant.

Here we see different items that were melted and cast in soapstone molds. We can see two molds, so she can make two kinds of lead beads. And then pieces of a tin spoon that she has added to the front panel as decoration, to add some weight and which might sometimes jingle like little bells.

This is Maina here, the wife of Davidaluk. And here we have some Inuit coming from the îles Belcher Islands, where Maina is from. Her grandfather Aqksapa was an islander and lived a good part of his life in the Belcher Islands. These people are wearing parkas made of eider duck skin, both the men and women. You can see that for the woman, the hood is part of her inner coat, which has the feathers inside. The hood is worn outside the outer coat, which forms the second layer and has the feathers on the outside, but which has no hood. The panels of the inner coat on the Belcher Islands were made of dog skins, because bird skins would have been too fragile.







They are hauling a small sled with minimal baggage, and are coming to see people on the Nunavut coast. We can see a child in its winter suit, a one piece outfit, often with mittens attached and then with sort of little boots attached to make it all one piece. There's a second child, a little older, whom we saw earlier, wearing his caribou clothing. So this is the winter coat for a male, with the white border at the bottom of the coats of a father and his little boy. And they are greeting their cousins who have come from the Belcher Islands. They are related; the people of the Belcher Islands descend from many families from northwestern Nunavik. It's the hood from the Belcher Islands that is different. The hood stops at the pouch. The woman's hood that we see here is part of the inner coat. So she can put her child under her hood and right into the pouch on her back. I said just before that there was no back pouch, but when you look at this, you can see that it is only the hood that does not have two layers. While the one on the right has a big hood made from caribou skin. The man from the Belchers, he has a hood on his birdskin winter coat.

They unfasten their small load, their baggage, which had been securely tied to their little sled. And they have blankets, if I'm not mistaken, that are made of bird skin too. Or possibly of dog skin. So here we can see the two tails, which for the Belchers people have no lining, as well as the woman's hood. And we can see that the child's one-piece is split in the middle, so he can relieve himself by squatting.

