

## Newfoundland Caribou

I left my house for the Atlanta airport at 5:00am. The day before the temperature at home had gotten in the 90's. I knew where I was headed there would be times when I would miss 90 degree temperature-. I was headed to the northeast corner of Newfoundland after a quarry that you can't hunt anywhere else in the world. That would be a Woodland Caribou.

I have taken several barren ground caribou in my life, but never a woodland. My prostaffer, Richard Riddle, was meeting me in Halifax, and he would be hunting moose. If time permitted, we both would arrow a black bear. After a three hour drive, three flights and another hour and a half drive, we were finally crawling into bed at the lodge at 3:30am. Needless to say, after traveling for almost twenty-four hours, we were not about to go hunting at dawn, which was only three hours away.

We woke at 11:00am and took a shower. At 12:30pm we had brunch. It was more lunch than brunch. We spent the next 3 hours unpacking, getting organized and shooting our bows. The area we would hunt for caribou was a two hours drive away, so we decided to spend the first afternoon hunting moose.

We left the lodge at 3:45pm and were walking around the bog an hour later. At about 5:15pm we were about a mile from the truck, and that was a mile of nothing but marsh. Walking out of nowhere, Chad our guide, spotted a cow moose about 150 yards away. About seven seconds later he spotted a huge bull some 75 yards closer. The bull had spotted us, but had no clue what we were. Fortunately for us, the wind was in our favor.

Richard and I moved to our right and inched into the tree line to hide. Chad hunkered down beside a tree in the middle of the bog. Once we made it into the woods, we proceeded to stalk northward towards the bull, who was to our left out in the middle of the bog. The cow bolted from the bog to our right into the bush that we were standing in. The bull was slowly headed to a stand of woods to our far left, getting farther and farther from us. Once the bull slowly disappeared into the bush, Chad began a few cow calls. Richard and I were a little

south of the cow, but were in a good position between the bull and cow, or at least we were between where we had last seen the bull and cow.

After forty-five minutes of calling, we finally heard some tree crashing and breaking behind us in the direction we had last seen the cow. Another fifteen minutes went by, and not another sound was made. Finally it was too dark to film, so we decided to head back to the truck.

The next morning, it was snowing and the temperature was just below freezing. After an hour and a half drive in the truck, we unloaded the 4-wheelers. Forty-five minutes later, the trail ended at the beginning of a huge bog. We started across the bog on crusty frozen moss that broke with every step to reveal a foot of unfrozen water and mud. After about an hour of walking through the bog, the sun had come out and had eliminated all the crustiness. The walking surface was now just moss and about a Foot of water. Another thirty minutes later, I pulled my water bottle out to take a drink.

Both of our guides, Chad and Wade were thirty something years old. It was all Richard and I could do just to keep them in our sight. I knew better than to stop walking long enough to take a drink. Picture this now, we are walking in muck up to our shins, while navigating around large deep water pockets, which were everywhere. We had to do a balancing act while jumping from one moss clump to the next. I am carrying my bow in one hand, my pack on my back, while using my right hand to pull out my bottled water while jumping from one moss clump to the next. If that wasn't tough enough, I had just pulled out a fresh bottle of water and now I needed to twist a new safety locked cap off the bottle using only my right hand, while trying to maintain my balance, my bow was in my left hand. Once I accomplished that, I had to maintain my balance as I lifted my head back to gulp some water; mind you while I was still walking and jumping. OK. After getting my drink of water, I was home free; so I thought. All I have to do is put the cap back on the bottle while using just one hand. Then I dropped the cap. No worries, Murphy's Law did not get me for a change. The cap landed right on a clump of moss to my right. As I hopped on one foot to my right, I leaned over to pick up the bottle cap. My backpack catapulted over to my right side, sifting

all that weight throwing me off balance. My foot slipped off the clump of moss, and I fell feet first into a three and half foot pool of frigid water. Of course both my knee high boots fill up with water.

I pull myself back up onto a clump of moss, as quickly as I could. I had my pants tucked inside my boots, which turned out to be a big mistake. I yanked the pant legs out of the boots to keep any more water from running down into them. As it turns out, my silver medalist hunt gear stalker pants not only have scent eliminating technology, but they are totally water proof too, even when submerged in water.

Had I placed my pants on the outside of my boots, they may have prevented my boots from filling up with water. In any case, they did at least keep me dry from my knees up. But boy were my feet freezing. We were way too far into our stalk to go back to the truck now!

This bog was miles long, but when we got away from all the deep pot holes, I sat in the 3 inch deep water to empty my boots and wring out my socks. Wet boots and socks are a terrible combination at freezing temperatures. My big toe on my right foot got a slight case of frost bite in 2001, and it really hurts when it gets cold.

Thirty minutes later, Wade spotted a group of caribou bedded down. They were about two hundred and fifty yards in from of us. The good news was the wind was in our favor. The bad new was we only had 50 yards of cover then nothing but brush about six to eight inches high the other 200 yards. Our two guides Chad and Wade decided to stay back, as Richard and I started our stalk. Richard was running a video camera as we were filming this hunt for an episode on Outdoors with Bob Coker. I was carrying my bow, range finder, and pack. Covering the first 50 yards was a piece of cake, but after that things got tough. There was more cover to the right, but the wind was wrong. It was blowing from my right to my left. If I chose to stalk to my right, by the time I got within bow range, my scent would be blown right to where the caribou were bedded down. I kept to the left.

In order to go left, Richard and I had to do the Alabama belly crawl for over 150 yards in 3 to 6 inches of puddles of water and soaked moss. In order to be able to execute the Alabama crawl through the obstacle

course in front of me and pull off an accurate bow shot, you have to have rugged equipment. There is no way to push and pull your bow through this kind of debris unless all of your equipment can take the punishment. I shoot a Limbsaver Deadzone bow with a whisker biscuit rest. I have all the confidence in the world that when I get within bow range of the stag, my equipment will perform even though I have drug it through the brush for over 150 yards.

After about 45 minutes, I made it to a hedge row of small 8 to 10 inch bushes. I eased up and shot the closest bedded down caribou with my range finder. They were at 70 yards. I do not know what happened next, but all of a sudden, one caribou right after the other stood up and trotted off to my left at an angle going away from us. The last caribou to run off was the heard boss stag, and boy he was a nice one. He ran out in front of the lead doe and herded her and all the rest back around.

For a minute, I thought he was bringing them all right back to me, but the dominant doe had already spotted me and she wasn't going to have anything to do with that. She trotted off to my left and all the others followed her, including the stag.

Chad and Wade built a fire so I could dry my socks and boots. I never knew a fire could feel so good. We didn't see anymore caribou the rest of the day.

The next day it was about 6 degrees colder. The ice was thicker and the moss was crunchier. We spotted caribou in the same bog as the day before, but about one more mile further into it. When I speak of miles across a bog I talk of miles as the crow flies or as the GPS measures. That is straight line only. It is actually 1 to 3 times that walking because you must walk around the deep pools of water. When going on any caribou hunt whether barren ground or woodland, it is a must to have knee high water proof boots that are tight at the angles. You don't want the sticky bog to pull your boots off your feet. The second most important clothing item to have is an excellent set of breathable water proof clothing. I highly recommend the silver medalist stalker brand. This clothing saved my life twice on this one trip.

After hiking 1 mile further than the day before, we spotted a large group of caribou. The only problem is they spotted us first. There was a monster stag that ran off to our right and the rest of the herd went to our left. Richard and I ran to our right trying to cut the large stag off and possibly get a decent bow shot. The stag was 400 yards from the tree line to our right. We did have a slight angle on him. Richard and I ran as hard as we could but the bog was too much for us, we got to a clump of cedar bushes, 130 yards from the stag, before he disappeared into the woods. I was about to give up hope when Richard pointed to a doe that was coming the exact route that the stag had taken. Richard and I crawled another 60 yards closer to the wood line. This put us within 70 yards from where she would have to pass by us if she took the same path as the monster stag. She stopped directly in front of us and turned to look back. I shot her with my range finder to find that she was exactly 70 yards. I looked to my left and there was a monster stag trotting down the exact path she had just followed. This stag wasn't as big as the first, but he was still a monster. I whisper to Richard that if the stag stopped where the doe was, I was going to fling an arrow so get ready. The stag ran up to the doe but instead of stopping, he ran right past her. She followed suit. A 70 yard shot on a caribou, I can make, but I didn't want to compound the difficulty by making a running shot. With those two caribou past me, I concentrated on the rest of the herd to my left. One of the does had stopped and was staring right at us. The rest of the herd was looking at her and following her lead. There was still a trophy stag in the back. He wasn't as big as the other 2, but he was still a trophy stag. The doe began to move farther to our left and circle behind us. The rest of the herd was following her. Richard started crawling back to the clump of cedar bushes 60 yards behind us. I had to flip around before I could follow Richard. By the time I got headed in the right direction, the lead doe had reached the cedars. I knew I had to get my crawl in gear. I had crawled about 15 yards and had just pushed my bow out in front of me when I noticed Richard had stopped crawling and was filming. He was slightly in front of me and about 2 yards to my right. I looked up and the stag was walking right at us. He had swung down below us, then spotted that the does were crossing the cedars just in front of us. He circled back up and now was walking right at us. Richard is lying on his back filming. I am on my stomach and needed to get to my knees. Mind you, I have to do all this without the stag seeing me. The stag got to the cedars

but instead of coming across on our side of them, he went behind them. I took advantage of his mistake. He couldn't see me now. I flipped and got to my knees, all in one motion. I shot the cedars with my range finder and found it to be 45 yards away from me.

I figured when he popped out on the left side he would be 50 maybe 60 yards, depending how far he had veered from the cedars. We waited for what seemed like 15 minutes although it was probably 5. I saw some does running on the other side of the cedars and my intuition was correct. The stag wasn't far behind. He had turned and gone directly away keeping the cedars between us and him. It wasn't long and the entire herd disappeared into the wood line, some 200 yards away.

After lunch, Wade spotted another group of caribou. He told me there were at least 2 stags in the group. They were about 300 yards away across 2 bogs. I began my stalk very briskly at first. Up to this point all the walking I had done across the bog, I had looked very carefully where I put my feet. But now, 30 yards into my stalk, I had my eyes on the caribou herd and the tree line, we were headed for.

You guessed it. Another 30 yards of brisk stalking across the bog and right off into a deep mucky hole I went, waist deep this time. The day before the hole was crystal clear water. Today it was black, thick, and mucky mud. I was stuck. Richard reached his hand out. We clasped hands, fingers around thumbs, and he pulled me out.

Fortunately, this time I had my pants legs on the outside of my boots, my SILVER MAX STALKER pants not only kept my legs dry but, they kept my boots from filling up with water as well. Once Richard pulled me from the frigid mud hole, we had 30 more yards to go to the tree line. The tree line was only 10 yards deep, there was another bog. The caribou was about another 200 yards in front us to our left. There was a lone spruce tree about 50 yards in front of us. From where we were to the spruce tree, the terrain was slightly elevated but, was still very wet. Richard and I did another version of the Alabama crawl until we finally reached the one tree. We could see 3 of the caribou clearly now and when these 3 bedded down we knew why we couldn't see the others. They were all bedded down

now, some at 80 yards others at 150. I knew there was suppose to be 2 stags but, I could only see one. He was the farthest caribou straight in front of me at 150 yards away. The wind was blowing straight in my face with a slight flow from left to right. Richard and I crawled right next to the spruce as we whispered our strategy. We decided Richard would stay at the tree and film from there. I would continue the Alabama crawl straight toward the stag with a slight veer to the right keeping the wind in my favor. The bog tundra had changed just a little. It had a slight elevation to it and now, in addition to the wet moss, there were bushes 6 to 10 inches tall and were as thick as my hair was back in the 70s. Each inch of my crawl had to be timed perfectly to the wind gusts; especially as I got close to the bedded herd, so they wouldn't hear the noise of the crackling bushes, as the weight of my body crawled over them. Every 10 yards or so, I would shoot the tree beside the bedded stag with my range finder, to see how much I had progressed. I knew I had plenty of time to get my shot as long as I didn't spook them. Usually when a herd of caribou bed down, they sleep and chew their cud for 1 to 2 hours. It had been about 40 minutes since I saw the last caribou lay down. I knew the first one hadn't been down much longer than that. When I looked at the few caribou that I could see with my range finder, some had their eyes closed and some were chewing their cud, eyes wide open. I continued my slow but steady crawl between wind gusts. All of a sudden, I spotted a bedded doe that I hadn't seen before. She was only 7 yards in front of me and slightly to my left. I could see that her eyes were closed. I shot the stag that I had been watching with my range finder again and found him to still be 95 yards away. His eyes were closed too. A doe was between me and the stag, her eyes were open and she was chewing her cud. My mind was spinning on what to do. The wind was constantly in my face with a slight left to right cross. There were also frequent gusts in the same direction. The wind was perfect for what ever I decided to do. I had to get closer to get a good shot. My first inclination was to continue my crawl right past the sleeping doe. Now, I'm a seasoned bow hunter and caribou is a very weary prey. Who am I kidding? To crawl any closer would require me to get too close to the sleeping doe. Heck, 7 yards was too close. I decided to sit tight and wait. I knew the caribou would eventually stand up and begin to feed again. There was a good chance the stag would feed within range before any does stepped on me. I was lying in wet moss surrounded by thick 6 to 10 inch tall

bushes. I was so thankful for my medalist water proof clothing. Medalist clothing is the best human sent concealment system on the market and laying 7 yards from a sleeping caribou is living proof. I needed to focus on what had to happen to actually get a shot off in the thick tundra. My whisker biscuit rest had held my arrow in place throughout this entire ordeal. I needed to be able to raise my bow and get off a shot, undetected and without any noise, while keeping an arrow in the right spot on my rest. The whisker biscuit does that automatically, no problem. With each gust of wind, I was slowly breaking the small braches of the small bushes that were surrounding me. I needed to be able to raise my bow and arrow noiselessly. No sooner than when I had finally gotten a small shooting lane broken off in front of me, the first caribou stood and began to feed. Slowly one by one, caribou began to pop up all around me. The stag I had been perusing was still laying down as a doe feed across in front of me from my left to my right. I shot the doe with my range finger and found her to be 55 yards. To my far left stood a stag I hadn't seen before. He began to follow the feeding doe. I looked back at Richard and gave him a thumbs up sign, indicating that I was about to fling an arrow. Reacting as though he were following a script, the stag traced the exact steps the doe had previously taken. When he stopped in front of me and put his head down to take a bite of moss, I knew he was 55 yards. I drew my bow, looked through my peep and gapped my 50 and my 60 yard pins right on the shoulder of the caribou. I begin to apply pressure on my Scott release until I could see my glowing lumenock disappear right through the right shoulder of the stag. The stag world 180 degrees and bolted back to my left.

The stag stumbled and did the backward shuffle. Then he got his wits back about him and took 5 more steps. Caribou started popping up every where. I had no idea there were so many, the stag I had arrowed, staggered 10 more yards and disappeared beyond the tree line. I knocked another arrow and pursued my quarry, not even looking for my pass thru arrow or any blood trail; straight to where I had seen the stag stumble into the bush. Thirty yards deeper, I shouted, "Thank you Lord," and Richard knew I had found my stag. He hadn't gone more than 90 yards and was piled up just 30 yards inside the tree line. This was by far NOT the largest woodland stag caribou I had seen but it was a trophy to me. I had seen 25 does and 9 stags in 2 days. I take an average of 15 to 20 animals a year and



they all hold a special place in my memory banks. However, I must say that the manner in which this hunt played out will stand out in the top list of my memorable hunts. Thank you River Run Outfitting for a hunt that the memories will last for a life time. [www.riverrunnl.com](http://www.riverrunnl.com)  
709-535-6635.

As I am writing this article on the plane headed back for home, I realize how God has blessed my life with a family I cherish and an occupation I love.

The best advice I can give any young person trying to decide on a career is to choose an occupation you love and you'll never have to work a day in your life.

May God Bless,

Bob Coker