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ADAK ISLAND GETS NUCLEUS OF CARIBOU HERD

To the places the Marines have landed, add Unalga Bight.

To their missions accomplished, add participation in the first recorded caribou transplant--a joint venture in which other segments of the Navy, the Air Force, and the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife had a part.

Unalga Bight, by the way, is a small cove on Adak Island in the Aleutians. The Bight is the only approach to a wild section of the island where caribou food and cover exist in great quantities.

The story of the caribou transplant began in 1948, when some folks on Davis Air Force Base (now U.S. Naval Station, Adak) wondered what would happen to them if their food supply from outside were cut off. Also some of them yearned for something else to do in their spare time. Thus was born the idea of transplanting caribou to the island for an emergency food supply and for recreational hunting. The Fish and Wildlife Service heartily concurred.

But for a decade--because of sundry reasons--the idea continued to exist only as a figment of the imagination.

Then out of the haze came a plan. Use of Air Force helicopters would ease the difficult task of catching young caribou calves; Navy air facilities would do the transporting; the Marines would take over the care of the calves until they were able to "go on their own". The Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife would supply "biological know-how" and have general supervision over the project.

Whether or not the Marines realized on that June day in 1958 that they were in for developing feeding formulas, bottle-feeding the calves and changing caribou beds three times a week is not known, but as these issues arose, the Marines faced them successfully. Even when the young caribou tried to eat their beds of sawdust and excelsior and got the caribou version of the colic, the Marines met the situation by substituting hay and later plain excelsior for bedding material.

Much of the labor was volunteer off-hours activity for the Marines; but four country-bred young men who had probably joined the Corps to get away from the farm were assigned to the caribou job. An abandoned building at Finger Bay on the Adak base was converted into a barn, and a 150 x 150 foot area was enclosed by a fence built mainly from surplus materials.

Getting the feeding formula for the first batch of calves took some doing. The calves were about four weeks old when the Corps took over. The first formula was evaporated milk--straight. Not good. Then the trial and error process started. Canned milk, dried milk, cod liver oil and egg were tried in various proportions. Finally, after many formula changes, the young caribou gave a hearty o.k. to the resulting concoction.

For the enlightenment of those who wonder what a motherless caribou calf eats here is the formula: To a mixture of 26 ounces of canned milk and 26 ounces of nonfat dehydrated milk, add two ounces of equal parts (by volume) of cod-liver oil and emulsified egg. This mixture turned out to be so good that some of the young animals took as much as 100 ounces of it in a day.

The youngsters soon learned the delightfulness of lichens but it was a month before they really began to shift from the formula to Nature's offering. When the calves were about 10 weeks old and they had finally switched to lichens, the formula was stopped and the bottles were stored for another day. But the gains in weight the little fellows had been making were not so pronounced on the all-lichen diet. Incidentally, the weight gains varies from .5 pound to 1.2 pounds a day.

"Medicants", penicillin and kaopectate were administered in the early stages of the bottle feeding to alleviate an intestinal condition and to rectify some inflammation of the joints of some of the calves.

Shortly after the bottle feeding stopped, the young caribou--10 of them--were transported to their home on Unalga Bight by truck, weasel and dory and released. Another group of 15, survivors of the 1959 transplant, is scheduled to be released soon.

Special care was taken at the release point. A 50 x 50 foot enclosure was se up as a temporary holding pen. The animals were permitted to leave the pen and in the course of a few days they had ceased to return to the enclosure. The first transplant was then considered a success.

(The marines were sure it was a success when the nine yearlings met them at Unalga Bight in August this year, welcomed the new contingent of calves and even seemed to recognize the men who had bottle-fed them last year.)

While some research had been done on caribou by Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife personnel, and at the University of Alaska, the transplant project for the most part had to be worked out from scratch. Taking young caribou (31 from the Nelchina herd in 1958 and 37 from the Eureka herd in 1959) is a tricky undertaking, even with helicopters available. But this was accomplished by Bureau personnel with Air Force helicopter help without untoward incidents.

Two things stand out in the transplanting operations. The mortality of the young calves (which were two to six days old when taken) was such that older, harder-to-catch calves may be used if there are any further transplants. The other thing is the genuine enthusiam shown by so many persons in the various steps

of the undertaking. This applies not only to the personnel directly concerned but to many segments of the public. At Adak on July 4, more than 500 persons turned out to see the young caribou. Similar interest was evidenced at other places. The calves "sold" themselves to the public.

During the bottle time, the calves showed some distinct traits. They did not resent having a rope halter put on them but if someone pulled the rope the youngsters became as obstinate as a burro. The "herd instinct" was noticeable, particularly if they were startled. On sunny days, they stayed inside the sheds but on cloudy days, they stayed outside. After a day of comparative ease they would stage a "nightly race" in the evening. They would run a bit, stop in unison and then all dash madly up and down the length of the enclosure. All of this appealed to the onlookers.

Of the 31 taken in 1958, only 10 survived the first four weeks "conditioning period" and took the 1,100-mile journey in Navy plane from Anchorage to Adak. Of the 37 taken in 1959, 35 arrived alive at Adak--the "conditioning period" was eliminated in 1959--but in mid-August, only 15 of these survived. Indications are that all 15 will be able to fend for themselves by late August or early September.

Of the 10 released last August, nine were known definitely to be alive. With this year's release, there should be more than 20 caribou to form the nucleus of the Adak herd.

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