

Destina



**LABRADOR AREA
OF NEWFOUNDLAND**
9 Entries

QUEBEC
124 Entries

**Quebec-Labrador Caribou
Entries From 1999-2009**

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Quebec-Labrador Caribou

Caribou hunting is always an adventure. You never know what is going to happen. The weather can be as changeable as a politician's platform in an election year. One day it can be sunny and warm; the next, dark, stormy and cold. And sometimes it can be both in the same day! The caribou is an enigmatic animal,

moving across the seemingly endless tundra often without rhyme

By Bob Robb
B&C Professional Member

or reason. Those who catch the fall migration in full force are treated to a sight like no other on earth as literally thousands and thousands of animals parade past every day. Those who miss the migration see only a desolate landscape with few animals, save the ever-present biting insects, scattered flocks of ptarmigan, and the occasional fox or wolf. At times like this, it is a blessing that the region's waters are full of fish that are both easy to catch and delicious to eat.



The Boone and Crockett Club recognizes five different caribou categories – mountain, woodland, barren ground, central Canada barren ground, and Quebec-Labrador. The Quebec-Labrador category was established in 1968 to remove the competition this large woodland caribou would have had with the smaller-antlered caribou of Newfoundland. Thus, the boundary for the Quebec-Labrador caribou is just as the category name implies – all of Quebec and the Labrador region of Newfoundland. Caribou found in the remainder of Newfoundland are classified with those found in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick and called woodland caribou.

In early September 2007 I journeyed to Montreal before heading to the Far North to hunt with Safari Nordik to pursue Quebec-Labrador caribou, an adventure I had heard lots about and was eager to experience for myself.

Mother Nature Rules

Once in Montreal I met the guys who would be sharing camp with me. All were great guys from around the country, and we ended up having a fine time. The Safari Nordik crew made sure we were ready to roll the next day. Sure enough, early that morning our journey began with a commercial flight to the northern town of Kuujuaq,

where we boarded a chartered single-engine Otter for the one-hour flight to camp. There our guides greeted us with some sobering news – the migration had not yet started, and while there were animals around, we were going to have to seek them out.

These hunting camps can hold a maximum of 12 hunters per week, but in this case, the other party scheduled to share camp with us had cancelled at the last minute, so there were only five. Larry, Jim, and Jimmy were all bowhunters who had hunted together for many years. Nick Tosi, a 20-year old lad from California, had never killed a big game animal before. He and his dad had purchased the hunt at a California Deer Association fundraiser, so Nick was off hunting on his own, as was I. Naturally, we paired up and had a great time together.

It was a challenge. On top of the fact that the migration had not yet kicked in, Mother Nature, as she is wont to do, decided to treat us to some nasty weather. On two of the five days, winds blew a sustained 30 miles an hour, and often much stronger. One night the winds took down the chimney of our oil stove! Mix in some torrential rain, and conditions were less than ideal.

We got out after it anyway, and soon discovered the guides had been correct about the migration. Still, we saw plenty of caribou the first day. In fact, the bowhunters got into them in a big way. Jimmy shot two

with his compound bow and both Larry and Jim stalked in close enough to use recurves to kill very nice animals. Meanwhile, Nick and I accompanied Trent on a little walk-about that covered maybe ten miles. We saw a couple of mature bulls, but nothing either of us wanted to shoot on day one.

Our Best Day

After a good, old-fashioned North Country monsoon that washed out most of our action on day two, day three broke clear and relatively calm. This proved to be our best day afield. Trent took Nick and me for a canoe ride down the lake and its feeder river, where we saw numerous bulls. When we finally spied a good one, we beached the boat and hopped out. After a short stalk, Nick used his brand new Weatherby Vanguard in .270 Winchester to take his first-ever big game animal at a distance my Bushnell laser rangefinder said was right at 200 yards. He tried to be cool, but his shaking hands as he cleared his rifle gave away an excitement we all found infectious.

Later that day I shot both my bulls. The first we found bedded right along the shoreline, and a quick sneak brought me to within 100 yards. Later that day we found what proved to be the best bull of our camp, a true double-shovel whopper that I took at 350 yards with my custom .300 Win. Mag. For someone who had never hunted



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Quebec-Labrador caribou before, this was more than I could have hoped for!

As the hunt wore on, our team of bowhunters lost another day to terrible weather, but Nick and Trent kept right on trucking through the wind and rain and cold. They had some close encounters, but it was not until day four that Nick connected on his best bull after having a true dandy slip away from his grasp.

The last day turned out relatively calm and crisp, with a skim of ice on the cabin steps. This day everyone managed to fill their remaining tags, giving us a very full airplane back to Kuujjuaq.

Locating the Best Trophy Areas

Of course, for those who want to target truly big caribou and not just experience a caribou hunting trip, the best way to go about it is to do lots of research, and then, when you arrive for your hunt, hope that Lady Luck smiles brightly upon you. When it comes to locating potential trophy hunting hot spots for all North American big game, I have found the Boone and Crockett Club's *Records of North American Big Game* to be an invaluable source of research material. Sure, there are other sources of information, but this book is like the cornerstone of a well-

built house. It's where I turn first.

The best way to mine the Boone and Crockett Club's massive database is to use the Trophy Search section on the club website, www.booneandcrockettclub.com. This is a subscriber-only section, but believe me when I tell you the value for the minimal fee is priceless when it comes to quickly and efficiently searching the records.

Here's what you do. Go to the Trophy Search area of the web site and search Quebec-Labrador caribou. And while you can mine data from way back when, I like to concentrate on the data from the last 10 years. That gives me a perspective of where the very best hunting potential is *today*, not 20 or 40 years ago.

Top Quebec-Labrador Caribou Areas

Searching for specific areas from which top-end Quebec-Labrador caribou have been consistently taken through the years is a bit different than when seeking similar trophy-producing spots for many other North American big game animals. That's because if you choose to go and hunt them,

LOCATING AN OUTFITTER

There are several old-time outfitters offering caribou hunting in Quebec and Labrador. In Quebec these include:

Ungava Adventures

www.ungava-adventures.com
1-866-444-3445

Arctic Adventures

www.arcticadventures.ca
1-800-465-9474

Jack Hume Adventures

www.jackhumeadventures.com
1-877-563-3832

Safari Nordik

www.safarinordik.com
1-800-361-3748

Twin River Lodge

www.twinriverlodge.com
1-888-674-0292

You can find several caribou outfitters in Labrador and Newfoundland at:

www.newfoundlandlabrador.com,
and more information on hunting Quebec at
www.bonjourquebec.com.

For those seeking a book bull, Safari Nordik offers a unique program that may be worth considering.

"We do offer guaranteed Boone and Crockett caribou hunts," said company executive Armando Vendittozzi. "These are 10-day, one-on-one hunts. The unique feature of these hunts is that we will honor this guarantee for as many seasons as it takes to harvest the bull."

When is the best time to hunt for a whopper bull? "As a general rule the latter part of

the season is a better time for big bulls," Vendittozzi said. "That said, we do take many book animals in the early season, too. I wish I could lock down exact times but I truly cannot. The end of the season is usually when the bulls are out of velvet, and a migratory push of animals can contain hundreds of bulls per group of animals, making the choice vaster. Also, the lack of velvet helps the guide judge the size of a bull's rack."



BACKGROUND: How close do you want them? This hunter takes aim at a dandy bull after stalking to within 75 steps of him. **ABOVE:** The author's second, and best, bull of the trip was a dandy double shovel whopper taken at 350 yards with his custom .300 Win. Mag. **LEFT:** 20-year-old Nick Tosi of California had never taken a big game animal before this trip. Here he poses with his first bull, taken at 200 yards.

you'll end up booking your trip with one of the professional guides and outfitters who conduct hunting trips in Quebec and Labrador and, generally speaking, you end up hunting where they send you.

However, if a book bull is your goal, you can always discuss this with them beforehand and try and arrange your hunt in an area known for producing record-class animals.

According to my recent search of the B&C Trophy Search database, during the period 1999-2009, Quebec produced 124

caribou that meet the Boone and Crockett Club minimum score of 375 points, while Newfoundland yielded just 9. Since records have been kept on this species, Quebec has produced 423 book caribou, and Newfoundland just 16.

During the last decade, the locations in Quebec that have produced the most book bulls are Minto Lake, 14; Mollet Lake, 10; Leaf River, 7; Clearwater Lake, 6; Caniapiscou River, 5; Pons River, 4; Nastapoka River, 4; and George River, Lac a L'Eau-Claire, and Messin Lake, 3 each. Interestingly, no location in Newfoundland during this same period has produced more than one book bull.

The top record-book bull producing areas of all-time in Quebec are George River, 49; Ungava Bay, 31; Caniapiscou River, 24; Pons River, 17; Mistinibi River, 16; Minto lake, 15; Tunulik River, 14; Mollet Lake, 10; Leaf River, 7; Clearwater Lake and Delay River, 6 each; and Nullualuk Lake and Ungava Region, 5 each. The only area in Labrador to have yielded more than one record-class bull all-time is Black Duck Lake, with just 2.

Other Reasons to Come

Generally speaking, the bag limit is two bulls. And in the better camps with top outfitters, success on two bulls runs about 90 percent. Safari Nordik also has a unique guarantee for their caribou hunters which simply states that if on your hunt you do not have the opportunity to harvest at least one mature bull caribou you come back on them the next season, from Montreal. There are a few caveats, but how can you beat this? It's also very possible to have your meat processed, vacuum packed, and flash frozen in Montreal so you can bring it back to the U.S. without any hassles from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. And the fishing for Arctic char, lake trout, and brook trout can be world class.

Then there's the vast, open tundra. It is like no other place you've ever been. When the caribou begin migrating through and you have thousands upon thousands of animals passing through your optics in a week's time, it is truly a sight to behold. I have seen it many times and still find it difficult to explain to someone who has not.

There is just something about the antlers of a huge caribou bull against the arctic skyline, their brownish hue accented by that white mane and the kaleidoscope of colorful tundra flora that still takes my breath away. ■

BACKGROUND: The northern Quebec tundra appears vast, the big reason why top-quality optics are essential. **LEFT:** Nick Tosi, right, and guide Trent motor back to the lodge with a boatload of antlers after a most successful day of hunting.



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