

Interview with Elder John Avaala

Peter – Can you speak first?

John – Yes, I said these months January, February not really I have traveled in this area, but around the middle of March, caribou start walking, they will start moving at starting from here (points to Pelly Lake on map). This is a road as they start to spread but in the wintertime if they are going to stay, the caribou, there will be caribou there.

Peter – Pelly Lake?

John – Yes, Pelly Lake area.

Peter – Avaala, as the caribou are travelling, do they stop a lot if we are to be traveling this way and now disturb them? What would the caribou do?

John – When the caribou start arriving and gathering into larger groups, we can just travel through the herd. They may part a way for you, but they will always regroup. If we do not travel at a high speed. And now to bother them, and we normally don't drive too fast, they will not mind. I am not even worried or concerned on this matter. You guys don't even move at a high rate of speed. Because I have experience, I used to love to hunt when I was young. I used to follow wolves and drive in between them. They would spread apart and then when left alone, they would just continue on their way. Around March, April is when we expect caribou in this (Pelly Lake) area if there are any caribou. The caribou in this (Pelly Lake) area will move out and be very scarce. I have been there in January, February. There will be nothing.

Ami – What about musk-ox? Are there lots of musk-ox in the Pelly Lake area?

John – Back then, there would be musk-ox in the area, may not have too many also at Sanningajuk (Garry Lake) there use to be musk-ox. Even while travelling through the area, the sightings were few and far between so I am not even concerned about them.

Jamie – I have even come in contact with them a number of times. We have black 45 gallon barrels, a group of musk-ox came to me and they never for scared and ran off. They came to me and surrounded me.

John – When they are in large herds, they have no fear. I have never seen musk-ox travel in massive herds. They may flee, if they flee.

Peter – Anymore questions for Avaala?

Ami – Yes. There might be areas with just a little bit of snow. I know it's different every year, but is there generally lots of snow on our established trail in January/February?

John – January, February not too much. But March is when the snow comes. As long as I can remember. And there have been years when there was less snow. The top of the hills the one that are the peaks of the hill. They don't have any snow. They are made of sand. It was no fun while travelling by skidoo, but no choice to.

Peter – We will be using equipment with cleat tracks and sleighs that will be dragging behind the equipment. How much damage this will cause? Areas with snow on the intended trail, will it change the ground or help or not? Or will the ground remain the same?

John – It is going to be frozen. I don't think there will be any damage. It is going to be frozen. There may be minor damage, and plus you will not go at a high speed. I don't think there will be too much damage. There may be minor damages left.

Jamie – and when we first break the trail, first trip, our trails when the snow drifts from wind will fill in our tracks. Third trip maybe, we would start pulling a drag to smooth it out if our loads are full. That is what I have planned.

John – With the first trip, there will be a little damage but you will not break trail with a dozer or loader and the tracks are not going fast. I would say that I don't see any damage. And if you follow your plan, things will return to their natural state.

Peter – Back to its original (the land)

Ami – And that's something that we have to think about too, if we disrupt any land we have to go back and fix it.

Ami – How fast do you guys go? What is your top speed?

Jamie – 8 miles an hour at best.

Ami – OK. Are we going to reduce speed when there are animals around, or we already do that?

Jamie – Yes, we already do that. We stop. We even shut down a season before to a certain time because of lack of snow and that was by our own judgement.

Peter – The other thing I remember is the vegetation will grow even better after through our trail, it's been proven. Back then we use to deliver, the flowers would re-bloom in more abundance after the soil is overturned from the tracks.

John – This is true because we have a cabin over there to make nipku. When I found it, there was mainly just gravel and no vegetation, plants are now growing and right to the back.

Ami – Can we talk about archeological sites or any other sites that might be affected; grave sites?

Peter – Yes we know that we have to go around. We have to avoid graves. I mean we know that we avoid tent sites that we know of, graves we go around them. We don't know travel any how. Also inukshuks and markers, we try not to touch them at all. Yeah I know we always avoid fish pointers, inukshuks, grave sites, tent sites; anything that is related to Inuit culture. We do everything we can to avoid them.

Jamie – This here is probably all sand on top (area around Pelly Lake). They are very clean, the loads we are carrying. Do the hill tops get covered with snow?

John – They don't get too covered, those that look like cheeks. The snow drifts that look like cheeks those are the area, but they don't get too covered with snow. Sandy bar, very sandy it doesn't form no snow. The stuff will be covered with snow, the ones on the south side.

Ami – Are there any other areas that are like that or might be difficult to travel?

Jamie – If it doesn't get too much snow, the way we are going to go, if it is usually like this, or between the hills, I would try to go through snow covered areas.

John – These hills over near the eskers beyond the place you guys are going, will be covered in snow. How will you get to the top of the airstrip?

Jamie – Kenny (son of John) said if we approach the Pelly Lake site from the north, the climb will be easier.

John – This summer with the search party, I went by Tiritkuut, the skidoo trail on the northside. Looked like it would be easy. I did not get a good look as we were going too fast.

Peter – Would it be too much to scout the area before the trip?

Jamie – Before the CATs go up, go with just skidoos first.

John – You can scout the way, the only thing will be the weather. Kenny was up there for about 3 weeks. He looked around and he said it should be easy.

Jamie – I don't know how heavy those loads are, that's the thing. First trip will tell me exactly how many more left after that, and the trail conditions. Immediately south from the runway plateau, that's just a drop off; right down to the lake. Too steep. We have to approach from the North, south to the plateau and start loading. I'm just worried about the sandpaper affect on our sleighs.

Peter – Don't worry about that, and that sand is going to fill in again from the wind.

John – There are even blizzard conditions in the summertime.

Jamie – Also the sand will drift back, like we were never there.

John – The airstrip, when it first started going up there was very distinct. I use to follow and the sand would drift back. It does not look like an airstrip anymore. This was the only thing I was worried about, when we first went up.