



North American Hunting Expedition 2009

Author: Gábor Katona



Room 2162
Expedition Headquarters
Anchorage Hilton
19th - 20th August

I did nothing yesterday, so there was no point in writing up my diary. I spent most of the time in the hotel sorting out my clothes and equipment, and doing some shopping. But in the morning my quiet diary-writing was disturbed by an unexpected event: the earth started shaking!

Finally!

Every book I've read on Alaska mentions the frequent tremors, but I've been here for three weeks without experiencing anything. Above me the ceiling suddenly started creaking, just like in those wooden houses where I sometimes had to stay. It took me a few seconds to realise that I was in a solidly-constructed modern building and that I wouldn't be able to hear people walking around above me. I noticed that the lamp-shade on my desk was nodding. Hooray! Earthquake! Grinning, I stared at the lamp.

I ran to the window; the entire wall was shaking. The fun lasted for 8 - 10 seconds! Only later did I consider the fact that I was enjoying this natural phenomenon on the 21st floor: you can have quite a fall from that height.

That evening I had an unexpected visitor. Mark and his son had just reached Anchorage, and were also staying at the hotel. He wanted to buy a nice surprise for his wife, but didn't know where in town to look. He found me to be a real expert, and I was welcomed in all the local shops as an old acquaintance. Acting as a guide, I showed Mark the best items in various shops, and at the end of it all, he had parted with quite a pretty sum. Perhaps I should have asked the shopkeepers for a commission. We spent the rest of the evening drinking beer and talking.

This morning I am standing at the window looking through my binoculars; nothing escapes my attention! I check the air, rail and water traffic, as well as how well the fishermen are doing. The moment the tide goes out, they turn up in their waders waving their fishing-rods. The military planes are circling again. I don't see the point of making the same circle for the 50th time, but, even so, it's an interesting sight.

All this free time enables me to think about all my new experiences, memories and everything I've learnt on my first hunt in Alaska. The most important lesson is that hunting in Alaska is completely

different to hunting in Hungary. It's not better, or worse, just different. The general hunting and shooting skills that work well in Hungary are not suitable here. In Alaska you have to expect completely new challenges. I feel that my shooting practice and physical training has been time well spent. I am convinced that without all that work I would not have been successful. During a session on the rifle-range many situations can be simulated; but not one of them was similar to that unforgettable shot when I bagged my caribou. Even so, these sessions give the marksman time to become completely familiar with his gun, so that, when out in the field, an unknown situation crops up, he is able to adapt himself instantly. Anyone who's ever been to a rifle-range, even just a couple of times, will recognise the feeling of self-confidence that comes after pulling the trigger and making a good shot. It's when you don't even have to look at the target because you just know you've hit it. That is how I felt when I shot the caribou: I knew it wasn't luck. I've been thinking a lot about my shot at the Dall sheep. Afterwards, I was concerned that the bullet had entered from the back, at the very end of the diaphragm. But now I have reassessed it all. Most importantly - and this is what it's all about - I managed to bag it. I don't really think that anything else matters. If I was to go into minute detail, I would have to explain how it all depended on that moment when I moved my gun 8 ins to the right. I'd never before shot over such a distance, at least, not at a live animal. Just three days before I left Hungary, I had managed, down in Csákvár, to kill the Unicorn - to call it one-horned would be awkward - a ram famous among Hungarian hunters. That shot was around 700 ft, and, boosted my confidence for this long expedition. At the rifle-range I had often shot at much smaller targets, with good results. This is what might have happened with my Dall sheep: there is an element of the situation which you will never recreate at the rifle-range - the excitement. An accurate long-distance shot is mainly a test of nerve. I'd never before experienced such excitement and confusion as when I shot at the Dall sheep. Aiming downwards, with a gun balancing on one point; lying inconveniently on the ground; without a precision sight; from a distance of 1000 ft; and in an agitated frame of mind, because I was on the first mountain hunt of my life... thinking back, I'm surprised I managed to hit it at all. I think my success was due to all my practice. Because, no matter how nervous I was, I knew what I had to do. I knew, more or less, where to aim, and how much the bullet would drop: I knew how to do my job. It was only the difficult conditions that stopped me from doing it perfectly. Without all the practice I wouldn't even have been able to hit the mountain; without all those training sessions I have no doubt that the sheep would still be sitting on the hill.

When shooting in Alaska, you have to be more accommodating. In Hungary it is not done to shoot a young stag, on the move, surrounded by his cows. Similarly, if you were sitting around



the table in a Hungarian hunting lodge, and someone told a story about shooting a ram from 1000 ft, there would certainly be at least one person present who would give him a lecture on how shameful such a shot was to a true hunter. But, over here, however, such methods are necessary, and have gone on to influence all the culture of, and ethics in, Alaskan hunting. We shouldn't expect Hungarian hunting ethics to apply the world over, or that, where they do not, those regulations belong to a more rudimentary, and less ethical, hunting codex. I certainly don't consider Alaskan hunters inferior to European ones. They are great hunters! It's just that their hunting norms are based, not on tradition, but on real life.

Practicality and efficiency: these are the two criteria that characterize hunters who require food, rather than trophies. We mustn't condemn the Fairbanks taxi driver just because he doesn't appreciate the trophy, and often leaves it behind in the forest. For him, and many other Alaskans, hunting is a way of getting meat, just as it was for my ancestors years ago in the Carpathian Basin. Looking at it like that, I have to admit that their behavior is closer to the true nature and essence of hunting than our trophy-centered attitude, which tends to ignore the value of the meat.

Then there are the rituals. Placing a handful of grass in the dead animal's jaws, dipping a leaf in its blood to be worn on the hunter's hat and the final blast of the hunting horn: these are all gestures of respect to the game we have bagged.

Respect can also be shown in a different way: by legally obliging every hunter to remove all the usable meat from the site of the kill. If he is unable to carry both the trophy and the meat, he must give preference to the latter, and make a second journey to retrieve the trophy. What would a Hungarian say if he had to carry a stag, complete with antlers, on his shoulders for 10 miles back to the hunting-lodge? How many of us would want to go stag-hunting under those regulations, and how many would try to evade them? And we haven't even mentioned the fact that 10 miles on Brooks Range is the equivalent of 50 on one of our pleasant Hungarian forest paths. We must not think that we are particularly better than anybody else, because it's not true. There are good hunters here too, but you have to find them.

Another way in Alaska of showing respect towards the game is the fact that they can all shoot well. They rarely just wound an animal, causing wanton suffering, and they take a dim view of any non-Alaskan who shoots an animal clumsily. My guides were very polite, but I saw the looks on their faces when it turned out that Mark hadn't killed the grizzly, even after five shots. I don't see why I should follow a custom - which goes against all my convictions - just because it is a tradition. The wooden rifle-stock is traditional, but the plastic one is practical. Everyone

should follow the way of hunting that is right for them. The more hunting cultures we experience, the easier it becomes to see ourselves through other people's eyes, and to re-shape our attitudes to the issues of hunting.

After all this philosophising, let's get back to reality: today I had breakfast with Mark, and ate so much that I felt ill. For the last two hours I've been lying down in my room, cursing my greediness.

Around 12.00 I stagger to my feet and take a taxi to the Mountain View Sport Store. It was a wasted journey; it's a general sports store, and the hunting section only takes up one corner. I don't advise anyone to go there. To console myself, I go on to the Sportsman's Warehouse and buy a few indispensable things - at least, they are to me. I'm beginning to realize that I shall have to send another box home. I'll wait until this evening to do it, because, as time passes, interestingly, the number of items seems to increase (could it possibly have anything to do with shopping?).

19th - 20th August
Afternoon

At about 2.00 my phone rings; they have delivered my new NightForce riflescope. I go and collect it and bring it up to my room. It is a really nice piece of optical equipment, nearly twice as long as the average hunting binoculars; so, in an emergency, you could always use it to club an attacking bear to death. I try out the x40 magnification, but, strangely, I can't find the focus mechanism. I don't have the patience to keep trying to work it out, so I put it back into the box. I'll examine it in more relaxed conditions when I get home. I shouldn't need it on my trip, so I'll leave it here in the hotel. I walk over to the post-office and mail yet another giant box: I feel better immediately. I've decided to continue my journey with just one bag, apart from my gun-case and some hand-luggage. My next destination is Canada, and from there I will return to the US, to Montana. I try to work out what I will need for my Canadian hunts and my Montana one. I finally fill a large bag with clothes and objects designated as superfluous, and leave it with the Hilton staff. Then I clean my gun; I should have done it days ago, but I didn't have the energy.

After that: an endlessly-relaxing time in the jacuzzi, followed by a lengthy beer-drinking session in the hotel bar. I'm beginning to learn what northern towns are like; in many places it can be hard to find a beer, so now I'm filling up the tank.

Tomorrow I shall be flying all day.



Waiting in front of the C2D departure gate of the international airport,
Seattle, Washington,
USA.
21st August
Noon

I book an alarm call for 5.00am. I packed everything last night so that I would be ready to leave. But this morning, however, some things have turned up from the most unexpected places. One from under the bed, another from a drawer that I looked in accidentally, and would have sworn that I had never opened before... Completely unfamiliar things: I didn't know when or where, I had bought them. Many were still unwrapped, which meant that I had never used them.

I put my rucksack into my large The Northface bag, which means that I will be travelling with one bag less. I haven't gained a lot doing this.

The rules for checking in luggage with Alaska Airlines are difficult to follow. At the desk they said I must pay for every single item of luggage that I check in. I have a few flights behind me, and I've never come across this before. Leaving so much behind in the Hilton didn't really help; my bag was so overweight because of my rucksack that I had to pay for excess-baggage after all. But this time they did not make an extra charge for taking my gun, as they did from Chicago to Anchorage. In a television quiz, the final question for the main prize could be - "Explain the luggage check-in regulations for this airline". Bit by bit, I am paying so much for my excess weight and extra bags that I could have paid for another hunt back in Hungary. I decide that the next time I go online I will send them an email asking for an explanation.

I've just flown 3 1/2 hrs to Seattle, and now I'm waiting for the plane that is supposedly taking me on to Edmonton, in Canada, to leave. When I get there I will have to transfer my luggage myself, as Alaska Airlines does not have any arrangement with Canadian North, the airline that is going to fly me - assuming there are no problems - on to Yellowknife, my final destination for today.

Sitting in front of Departure Gate 49
International Airport
Edmonton, Canada
Late afternoon

Whoever says that Canadian Customs and Immigration are hostile and unfriendly, is lying. I really did not expect them to be so helpful and accommodating. On boarding the plane to Edmonton, my hand-baggage was taken away from me as it was too large to fit in the overhead locker (my hand-baggage is as large as the combined suitcases of a family with five children setting out on a two week vacation!). The flight attendant snatched it from my hands and gave it to the luggage-loaders who then put it in the hold, along with the rest of the checked-in bags. The only problem is that this bag has no lock, so anyone can take out anything. It contains all my permits, my tickets, my hotel confirmation, my itinerary, my camera, the HDDs with all I've recorded so far, and my netbook... in one word, everything.

If it gets lost, there is a good chance that my trip will end right here. The 90 min. flight passed slowly; I could not stop worrying about my bag. The first immigration officer I saw asked to see my hotel booking, which, of course, was in my hand-baggage. I told him how it had disappeared into the labyrinth of the airport, whereupon he closed down his work-station and set off with me to find it. And, indeed, we did find it; it was at a separate desk, where they hand over all the bags.

After that, I had to see one more immigration officer, and he, finally, let me enter Canada. Then there was a customs officer, and he wanted to know if I had removed the bolt from my gun. I'd completely forgotten to do it. I'd only been in Canada five minutes and I had already broken the law. It was not a problem; I took out the bolt, we filled out some forms, and I was asked for Can \$25 to pay for some sort of permit - I don't know what it was for. I only had US dollars, so the customs officer, via some secret doors, took me through to the departure lounge, where he waited patiently as I exchanged some money, and then we went back to my gun, where I paid for the permit. At last I reached the Canadian North desk, checked in my luggage, and didn't have to pay a cent. I had to set my watch two hours ahead as I have travelled so far east.

The flight to Yellowknife is delayed by an hour, which means I'm not going to arrive at the hotel until 10.30, but I'm past caring. I'm on Canadian soil, and my gun is with me: what else matters?

We are still waiting for the plane.

A large part of this hunting trip is taken up with waiting. So far, I've waited for trains, planes, buses, organizers, breakfasts, good weather, luggage and for someone to fix the internet in my hotel room.



I have been waiting for a lot of things.
I'm a professional waiter!

Room 309
Chateau Nova Hotel
Yellowknife
North West Territories
Canada
Evening

So, with all my baggage, including my gun, I arrive at the hotel.

I flew 2288 mi. from Anchorage to Seattle, 812 mi. from Seattle to Edmonton, 929 mi. from Edmonton to Yellowknife, so altogether I have travelled 4029 miles, making two stops. I have made a huge aerial detour, as I am now only 1871 miles from Anchorage, where I started. The plane to Yellowknife was not able to make up any of the delay, so it was past 11.00 before I was able to switch on my netbook. To compensate for this, I saw the most beautiful sunset in my life, and then arrived in a very hunter- and visitor-friendly town. At the airport there are some stuffed animals posed in a "Polar bear on a seal hunt" scene (that's not the official title - I just made it up). On seeing my camouflage pants, several people come up and ask me where, and what, I am hunting, and wish me good luck.

At the hotel a letter, a fax and an email, all from Boyd Warner, the local outfitter, are waiting for me. It's a flood of information, but, sadly, not of much use. In the email he writes that he will fax me the details of tomorrow's program: how and when I will travel to Holman, on Victoria Island, and from there to the hunting ground. I have the fax, but it doesn't say anything about this. I was collected at the airport by the hotel bus; among the other passengers were four other hunters, two of whom are Boyd's clients. They say that they are being met at 8.00 tomorrow morning, but aren't absolutely certain about it. I'm not at all worried. I've been here long enough to learn that here in the north things rarely go as planned, but, eventually, things do get sorted out. I send an email to Boyd and Cabela's, telling them that if they have any information about tomorrow, they must feel free to share it with me.

The hotel is barely up to my expectations. The air-conditioning sounds like a Soyuz rocket in the first stage of take-off.

I'd rather sweat.

Morning Chateau Nova Hotel
22nd August
Morning

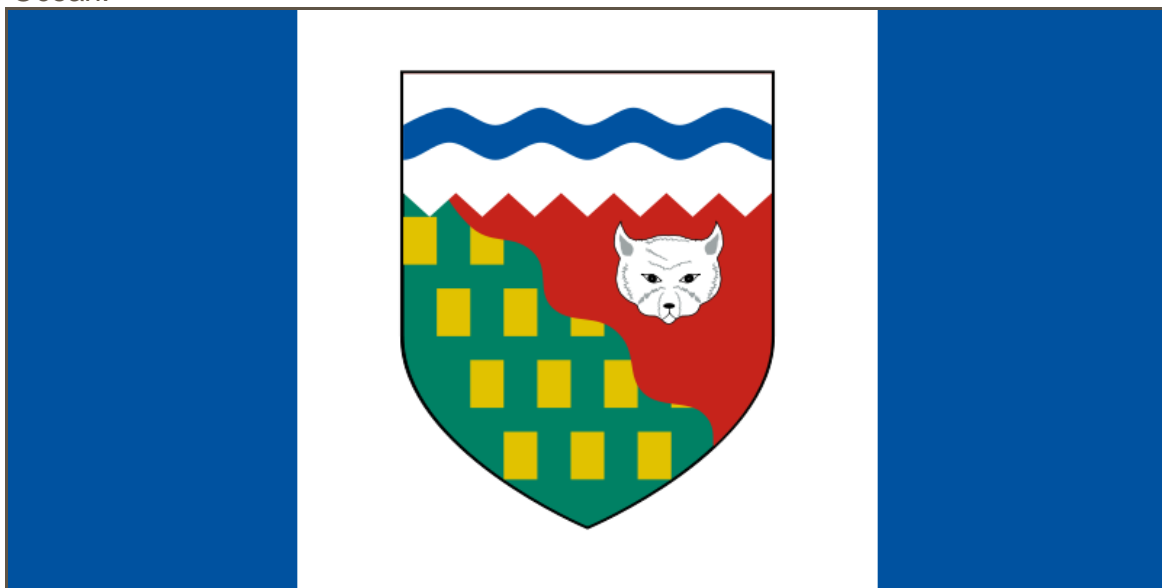
Because of the time-difference I have woken up early. I'm sitting in my room, writing up my diary, waiting to see what happens. Until then, I shall write some words about where I am, and why I am here.

In Alaska, if you travel east to 141 longitude, you come to the border, a perfectly straight line separating the USA from Canada; crossing this line takes you into the Yukon province. This is the area where you will find Dawson City, the Klondike River and many other historical places from the gold-rush era. Continuing east, you will reach another huge part of the country, which takes up almost all of the north-west area. Canadians - with impeccable logic, and a burst of creativity - have named it The North Western Territories. It is usually abbreviated to NWT, so from now on I shall use that simplified term.

It is a gigantic land.

Its 533,000 sq.mi. is almost the size of Alaska, but, in contrast, the population is only 41,000. If you enjoy solitude, you will certainly be happy here. The NWT were originally more than twice this size; in 1999, after negotiations, the indigenous Inuit carved out a section and founded the independant Nunavut Province, which, at a staggering 772,200 sq.mi. is more than twenty times the size of Hungary!

To the west the NWT border on the Yukon Province, and to the east, Nunavut; to the south are Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia, while the northern part ends on the shores of the Arctic Ocean.



Its flag is particularly beautiful.

The blue stripes on the left and right symbolize natural waters, while the white represents snow and ice. In the center is the province's coat-of-arms, in use since 1956. This shows a wavy blue line, symbolizing one of the greatest geographical discoveries: the North-West Passage. The red is for the tundra, the yellow for the natural resources and the arctic fox for the fauna.

The greater part of the NWT is the constantly frozen permafrost, which is mainly tundra, though in recent years the tree-line has moved 6 mi. north; according to scientists, as I have said before, this is due to global warming. One of the most exciting parts of the NWT is the much-dreaded McKenzie Basin, perhaps the coldest spot on the North American continent: -76 F in January is not an unusual temperature here. It might be a useful training-ground for me before the planned Antarctic (or will it be Arctic?) expedition.

I should be embarrassed to admit it in front of any fans of Canada, but for me, Alaska has always been No.1. Completely by accident, in a fit of madness, I happened to click on to the hunting possibilities in Canada, on the Cabela's website. I saw that there I would even be able to hunt musk ox, though, of course, it would involve leaving the US. Frank Cole, the ingenious main organizer of my trip, assured me that flying here and there between the two countries would not add significant difficulties, or unnecessary risks, to my plans; on the contrary, he thought it would make my trip complete. I didn't hesitate, and asked him at once to include a musk ox into the plan; in fact, to make it two. And as I would be there anyway, I could fit in two more caribou hunts: you can never have too many deer hunts.

With Boyd's letter was a hunting permit, in which it said that it must be carried on me at all times. Also included in the letter was one of the now-familiar aluminum tags, to be fastened to my caribou. I don't understand; I asked for permits for two, but I only have one tag; we'll have to sort it out.

Yellowknife has proudly born the title of capital of the NWT since 1968. This town of 173,000 lies on the shores of Great Slave Lake, and from here it is a drive of only a couple of hundred miles to the Arctic Circle. It fulfills the same function as Fairbanks in Alaska; it is the start of all hunting and exploratory expeditions into the northern wildernesses. Any further north from here you would not be able to find runways suitable for large passenger-planes. It is a center for trade and distribution, and most companies organizing hunts in the NWT have their headquarters here. It is a perfect place from which to see the Northern Lights, particularly on winter's nights. In 1935, in Yellowknife harbour - who'd have guessed it? - gold was found.

It seems that in the hierarchy of northern settlements, those that do not possess this rare yellow metal are placed firmly at the bottom. They might have grizzlies by the thousand, innumerable

places of natural beauty and be of great historical significance, but if they don't have gold, then they're not part of the elite. Their inhabitants walk around in a constant state of shame, with downcast eyes; and at national assemblies their mayors are given the lowest seats. For a small town not to have gold is a disaster - its residents will suffer a never-ending sense of inferiority. I wouldn't be at all surprised if some gold-less villages take surreptitious steps to ensure that some is finally found in their soil.

Despite its sinister name, Great Slave Lake has a rather peaceful history. The somewhat unfriendly name is based on a misunderstanding. It comes from the local Slavey Indians, who were previously referred to as Slave. Unsurprisingly, they decided to change their name to Slavey, but the lake will bear that name forever, along with its mistaken association with slavery. With a depth of 1842 ft. it is the deepest lake in North America, and its surface area of 11,000 sq.mi. is almost 1/3 of the size of Hungary. That's big enough to take quite a cruise. And several thousand people have already done so; during the gold-rush many routes led from the eastern regions, over the lake, to the gold fields of Dawson.

I'm off to find my breakfast.

Room 305
Chateau Nova Hotel
There has been an error in the Force!
22nd August
Noon

My original journey-plan was that today one of Boyd's men would drive me to the airport, and from there I would fly the 800 mi. north to Holman, on Victoria Island.

But I have not been booked on to the flight; not by Cabela's, nor Boyd, nor anybody else. I'm stuck in Yellowknife. Today is Saturday and the next plane doesn't leave until Tuesday, the 25th.

My program would have been:

- 22nd (today), travel to Holman.
- 23rd, transfer to the hunting camp.
- hunt until the 25th for two musk ox.
- 26th, travel back to Holman.
- 27th, return to Yellowknife, until morning of 29th.

And then:

- morning of 29th: descend from the skies into the caribou camp.
- hunt for two caribou until 4th Sept.
- 5th, back again to Yellowknife.
- 6th, travel on to Montana.

So my plans have been upset.

Boyd is trying to move forward the two nights (27th-28th August) that I was originally to spend in Yellowknife (which because of my forced inactivity I must now pass here). This means that the period between my two hunts would be shorter. He has already booked my ticket to Holman, leaving on the 25th. With this new ticket I will return to Yellowknife on the 29th, which means that my original plans for the caribou hunt will still be valid. The big question is whether I will still have enough time to bag two musk ox.

Right now, we don't know how, or when, the mistake was made. Cabela's cannot be reached on Saturday, so we must wait until Monday to find out the truth.

My trip is at a critical point.

The question is not whether my hunt will be successful, but how I will cope with the next few days, and how I will react to these new situations. Whatever decisions I make are bound to affect the remainder of my trip. One possibility is that on Monday I make a very angry phone call to Cabela's the moment they open, demand to speak to the director and threaten to sue them, and have people fired. This would probably spoil the rest of my time hunting; it would make it awkward, at the very least.

I go for another option.

I will try to find a solution by co-operating with Boyd and Cabela's.

Being a good organizer doesn't mean you never make mistakes. Anyone doing a job - any job - will make a mistake sooner or later. The important thing is what you do afterwards. Whether you try to blame someone else, or admit it and try to put it right. The company that I work for is able to weather the economic crisis because we do our utmost to provide the highest standard of service for our clients, as well as ensuring we maintain a good business relationship with them. Despite our best efforts, things do go wrong from time to time, and could result in the loss of orders. The main reason this doesn't happen, is that our clients trust us not to hide our errors; quite the opposite: we draw their attention to them, before they have time to discover them themselves.

They also know that, in the internet media market, there is no situation that cannot be sorted out, and no mistake that cannot be rectified. But all this can only be done successfully and efficiently if our clients have a co-operative attitude to the problem and its solution.

Now, it's me that is on the other side; I have to be co-operative. And co-operation does not mean writing threatening letters to every Tom, Dick and Harry. There's no way of going back two days, and such an attitude leads nowhere.

Back at the hotel, I learn that my stay here will be paid for by Boyd. I wait for further developments. There's no WIFI in the room, only cable internet.

In 2009! Only cable!

I've found a prehistoric fossil in Canada. In a hotel that the staff claim is the 2nd best in Yellowknife (what on earth can the third be like?). I try to connect the cable I've been given by the receptionist into the socket, but the whole thing sinks into the wall, and half my hand goes with it. I try to call reception, but the phone doesn't work. I go down to the desk and they promise that the hotel handyman will come soon, but he doesn't. I go down again: the handyman does not work over the weekend. I have to move to another room. Now I'm in room 305. But here the desk lamp isn't working; I have to bring the one from 309.

Damn and blast the Chateau Nova Hotel!

This would never happen in the Anchorage Hilton.

Alaska! Hunting paradise! Why did I ever leave you?

22nd August
Evening

I spend most of the day feeling sorry for myself.

By the afternoon I pull myself together and go out to take a look at the town. If it's my fate to be here for three days, I ought to see some of it, at least. I try to summon up all my goodwill, so that I can write something positive about the place, but I'm not totally successful. The town center, if we can call it that, is 50th Ave. ,also known as Franklin Ave. To be more accurate, it is actually just a stretch of 600 ft. along this road. I go to explore the local shopping center - it doesn't require any special skills to find it on this 600 ft. - but, being Saturday afternoon, it is, of course, closed. As is almost everything else as well; though this place wouldn't be that exciting even if its three shops did happen to be open. The tourist guide to Yellowknife is the size of a small brochure. Even listing every event of every season, it's still pretty thin. There are four lakes in the town itself, and

another two nearby. I walk around Frame Lake, which is the biggest. There's a well-signed tourist path going round it, and information boards point out the things of interest. The town's official buildings are also located on the lake, but, as they are all closed, I can't tell which is which. It is amazing the number of trees and bushes here that live in a form of symbiosis. It might be contrived, rather than an act of nature, but the vegetation along the path is, without doubt, very beautiful. At the start of the trail there's a monument to those miners who died in the NWT mines. This time I'm not happy to see a Hungarian name: a compatriot of mine named Róbert Mészáros, who was killed in the Giant Mine in 1995. R.I.P.

On the way back I pop into the Black Knight Pub, on 49th St., just a couple of hundred feet from the hotel. Inside, in the semi-darkness, there are a few local characters hanging around. In one corner sit some bleary-eyed old soaks. This is my kind of pub; it will be my haunt during my enforced vacation. (They don't even sell beer in the damn-and-blasted Chateau Nova Hotel ; it's really, really insane. This hysteria over beer is just not normal.) The pub has WIFI: yet another reason to come here, rather than sit in my boring hotel.

I've got an email from Andy Morrison, my excellent Alaskan organizer and friend. He still feels guilty about the cancelled hot-air balloon trip, and asks if a helicopter ride will make up for it. I say yes. When I finally get back to Alaska, this will be the first event on my program. The cook advises me to take advantage of my nights here by going to look at the northern lights. I must wait until midnight and then walk to the shore of Great Slave Lake; that is the best place to view them.

The northern lights are a physical phenomenon, the description of which I have read many times, but somehow can never quite remember. So, now I'd like to write down all the information I have read about it, word for word, as I can't really enjoy something if I don't fully understand it:

Auroras, also known as northern and southern (polar) lights or aurorae (singular: aurora), are natural light displays in the sky, particularly in the polar regions, and usually observed at night.

They typically occur in the ionosphere. They are also referred to as polar auroras. This is a misnomer however, because they are commonly visible between 65 to 72 degrees north and south latitudes, which place them a ring just within the Arctic and Antarctic circles. Aurorae do occur deeper inside the polar regions, but these are infrequent and often invisible to the naked eye.

Auroras result from emissions of photons in the Earth's upper atmosphere, above 80 km (50 miles), from ionized nitrogen atoms regaining an electron, and oxygen and nitrogen atoms returning from an excited state to ground state. They are ionized or excited by the collision of solar wind particles being funneled down and accelerated along the Earth's magnetic field lines;

excitation energy is lost by the emission of a photon of light, or by collision with another atom or molecule.

There is a color differential with altitude; at high altitude oxygen red dominates, then oxygen green and nitrogen blue/red, then finally nitrogen blue/red when collisions prevent oxygen from emitting anything. Green is the most common of all auroras. Behind it is pink, a mixture of light green and red, followed by pure red, yellow (a mixture of red and blue), and lastly pure blue. In rare cases they have even been seen in Hungary.

So much for my little lecture on physics.

As told, I wait until midnight. Before leaving the hotel I ask the receptionist if it's the right time to see them. He points outside and gives me a pitying look. It is pouring with rain, and you can't see the lights if the sky is cloudy. To be frank, I could have worked that out myself...

I can't make up my mind about this place; it's not big, it's not small; it's not a town, it's not a village. I shall not be overcome with sadness when I finally have to leave.

I wait and wait and wait...

Room 305
Chateau Nova Hotel
23rd August

This hotel was obviously a bad decision. Not far away is a large building, The Explorer Hotel. I should have stayed there. Unfortunately, I had no choice as Boyd puts all his hunters here; they are collected at the airport by the hotel minibuss, and stay here briefly before flying on to Holman – at least, those have a ticket - so, it is the official hotel for the hunt. I'm not happy because I have to spend the next two days here, and that matters.

I shot my caribou on the 15th August. I haven't been hunting since. I'm beginning to lose my patience. What am I doing here? Hunting or reviewing hotels? What I'd really like to do is hire a jeep, and go off for a good stalk in the neighborhood. There must be something to shoot around here.

I've got a lot of time on my hands, so I'll write a few lines about the musk ox. This animal is not very familiar to Hungarian hunters, and does not often crop up in their gunsights.

The musk ox (*Ovibos Moschatus*) is one of the most mysterious, large-bodied species in the north. It looks like a mutant, four-legged [Tauntaun](#) from the ice-world of Hoth - the only thing missing is Luke Skywalker sitting on its back. Even its taxonomic categorisation is difficult, though there has never been any doubt that, unlike the tauntaun, it is not a lizard. For a while experts

insisted that, because of the similarity of the horns, it was a type of steer (Bovine). But they later changed their minds, and thought it a type of goat (Capriane). Its nearest relative was believed to be the Takin, found in Tibet and Western China; this information was even put in the SCI record book. However, genetic research has - hopefully forever - finally proved that the two species are not closely related. It also went on to prove that it's closest relative is the ...Goral (Nemorhaevus Sp.)! These small-bodied types of goat live in Asia, so they are a long way from their Big Brother. The musk ox is mainly found in Canada and Greenland, so if you want to hunt them, these are the places to go. Although they have been introduced to Wrangel Island in Russia, and apparently to Sweden and Norway as well, they cannot be hunted in these countries. During the 19th century, they successfully managed to exterminate them all in Alaska, and, although they are still being re-introduced, it is possible to hunt them during the winter, near Nome. The best description of the animal is found on Uncyclopedia: *"The musk ox is smaller than people who've only seen it in photos think it is. But it's bigger than those people think, who think it's the same size as a mouse or rubber spider."*

It is about 6 ft. long, and its height to its withers rarely exceeds 4 ft. Interestingly, the span of its horns can be up to 3 ft. These are essential to its defence strategy, which is for the herd to form a tight semi-circle, horns facing outwards, so presenting a living shield towards their predators. On average it weighs between 600 - 780 lbs; there are larger ones found in the less northerly parts of Canada which can weigh over 1400 lbs. They live in herds ranging in size from 10 - 100; they never rest, but are constantly on the move. This makes tracking and hunting them very difficult. They have excellent vision and hearing. Their long shaggy hair can hang down for up to 3ft beneath their body, so it can be hard to tell where the musk ox ends and the hair begins. They do not move quickly, needing to conserve their hard-found calories, but, if threatened by wolves can sprint at up to 25 miles per hour. The SCI categorises three separate types, which taxonomically belong to two different groups. One is the Barren Ground Musk Ox, also known as the Arctic Island Musk Ox - this is the one I intend to hunt - either because the animals living on the islands belong to the same sub-species as those on the mainland, or because people do not always follow the SCI categorisation. It has a bigger body, longer legs and darker hair than the other sub-species. It can even occasionally be found as far south as latitude 63, far below the Arctic Circle. In March 1993 one was shot in Nunavut Province, which is still a world record. The other, the Greenland Musk ox is - you've guessed it! - mainly found on Greenland and its neighboring islands.

There is a newly introduced population of Greenland Musk ox, which is considered to be in a separate category: this is the third group, and they are not allowed to be hunted, which seems reasonable.

In Canada the herds remain stable at 85,000, ensuring the survival of the species, and allowing them to be hunted in limited numbers.

In the afternoon I walk down to the shore of Great Slave Lake and go to The Rock, the best observation point. Yellowknife has two parts: the old town and the new town. From The Rock I can see both areas very well; it is also the best place to view the northern lights. So far, I've spent most of my time in the new section of town, typified by the functional architecture of these northern settlements. The streets are full of square houses built from pre-fabricated parts. Now I can also see the old town, and it looks poor and shabby. The small, dilapidated houses, all in need of redecoration, are scattered about at random. In the gardens are old, abandoned cars and unusable motor-sleds, exposed to the elements and getting overgrown with weeds. Nothing is open; the wooden buildings are rotting away, and everywhere there is peeling paint and rusting metal. In the unkempt gardens the plants run wild. There is a center for the homeless just in front of my hotel, which fits in perfectly with the general look of the town. The Chateau Nova Hotel lies on the border of these two parts, and is only 300 ft. from the "city center".





I don't like it when, in giving an account of his travels, someone criticizes the place he is visiting. If he doesn't like it why is he there? Why didn't he get more information about where he was going? And what gives him the right to pass judgement? I would not like it if a resident of Yellowknife came to Budapest and then wrote a disparaging book about it. I'm sure this town has many positive features which I have not yet seen. Perhaps we have just come together at the wrong time; if I'd come here with two caribou and two musk ox trophies - with the pictures on my hard disk - I'm sure I wouldn't be able to praise it enough. But this is a record of my journey, not a tourist guide book. I make my entries regularly, and have never fallen behind more than a day.

This is important, because then I can clearly remember, not only the events, but also the moods and emotions that accompanied them. During this enforced period of inactivity it is difficult for me to remain up-beat, and possibly I am seeing the town in a worse light than it deserves. I felt the same about Deadhorse.

But at least there I could find some good food. In the Chateau Nova they don't even serve dinner on a Sunday. In the afternoon I go to the hotel gym.

There is a sauna. It doesn't work.

There is a jacuzzi. It doesn't work, either.

I work out on the decrepit machine. There is only one.

Room 305
Chateau Nova Hotel
24rd August

This morning I was woken up at 9.00 by a phone call.

On the other end of the line were Frank and Jennifer from Cabela's.

They apologised for what had happened. There was a breakdown in communications between Boyd and Cabela's over who should book the ticket, and how. It was a mistake and they admitted it. They assured me that Boyd was going to do everything he could to make my hunt a success, and Frank thought that I would still get all four of my trophies, despite this mishap. It was a calm and constructive discussion, and he promised to call Boyd, once more, to remind him that I was allowed to shoot two, not one, caribou. (In my letter from Boyd there was only a permit for one.)

I find this attitude very reassuring. Whether I lose a day at the hunting camp, or not, is not a vital issue. But what is, is who is going to take responsibility for the situation? Because if nobody does, what can I do about it? I'm here in Canada, a foreign country 4700 miles by air from Budapest.

I have to say that, on going through my itinerary and accounts, I can not see any mention of a ticket to Holman, or having paid for one. I've only just noticed it myself. According to Boyd, he didn't book the ticket because it was not part of my hunting package; he says it was the responsibility of the organizing company. (Cabela's thought exactly the opposite, which is what caused the misunderstanding.) I was given ten pages of detailed accounts by Cabela's and nowhere in it was such a ticket listed. Well, the ticket has now been bought for me by Boyd - or rather by Carlos, his employee - who said that on Monday - today - he will sort out with Cabela's who is going to pay for it. This is going to be interesting as First Air is charging the eye-watering sum of CAN \$2295 for a return ticket on a scheduled flight: that's really fresh of them. Taking a rate of HUF170 to CAN\$1.00 makes it come to HUF390,000 - for that amount you could fly almost anywhere in the world - and Holman is only 620 miles away. Frank has not asked me to pay this yet. I don't know who is going to pay for it, but, as long as it isn't me, I don't care.

It was a wise choice to use Cabela's. There was no attempt at evasion, argument, trying to shift the blame or suggesting that other people were idiots... there was just a solution.

Yellowknife is beginning to show signs of life.

The shops open and, at last, there are people and cars in the streets. I discover that there is one hunting shop in town, Wolverine Sports. According to the map on Google it is just over 2 mi. from the hotel, so I will get my daily walk, as well as having something to do during the day. Wolverine Sports is a small store, but has a well thought out stock; it's owner-manager is a cheerful, friendly, elderly man. Anyone who suddenly realises that he's lacking some accessories, stands a good chance of finding them here.

In the evening I see that my phone is flashing: I have a message. The machine's voice tells me how to access it. I listen to it five times, but still can't make out what the machine is saying. I ask the receptionist to come up to my room and help - he must speak better English than I do.

He can't understand it either.

We sit and look at each other.

We randomly press every button on the machine, and guess what - it worked! Suddenly, we hear Boyd's voice saying that he will call me tomorrow morning to tell me what to do. Then Carlos calls, telling me to take the hotel bus to the airport. I then make the last error of all the errors



made in Yellowknife; I confuse the flight number with the departure time. If the receptionist hadn't put me right I would have arrived at the airport an hour late.

Tomorrow I shall be leaving Yellowknife.

I hope...

Sitting under a polar bear
Airport Departure Lounge
Yellowknife
25th August
Morning

This morning I have just found out that I was right about the departure time mix-up with my ticket. First Air are using a new program to print out their tickets, and it has not been completely worked out.. So, where they should have put the departure time, they put the flight number, and vice-versa. That's why all the other hunters are also here two hours early.

You have to be on the look-out all the time over here.

While travelling on the bus to the airport, I met Boudie Schneider, who is also here to hunt musk ox. However, his case does not contain a gun, but a bow. At the airport I have a look at it; it's khaki color, and so strong I can hardly draw it. Boudie has already finished his caribou hunt, and managed to bag a very good one with his bow. He's proud of his achievement, and has every reason to be.

In Hungary, archers do not deserve their lack of appreciation and recognition. I've even heard some nonsense that archery is not in accordance with the traditional hunting values. Well, if archery is not a traditional method of hunting, then I don't know what is. Here, in Canada, even the law favors them, as their hunting season begins earlier. To approach an animal step by step, getting near enough for it to spot you, even while wearing camouflage, and then to draw the bow and let fly a successful shaft... that's real hunting! Gun-users are forever searching for bigger and

bigger capacity ammunition, and accessories - such as laser-sights and precision optics - that will enable them to expand their shooting distance. Meanwhile, there are those who, armed only with a bow, hunt every species under the sun - elephants included - and their shooting distance never exceeds 120 ft. Within this distance an arrow causes no more suffering to an animal than a bullet from any super magnum caliber. I can't remember if it was Greg, or Striker, who told me the story about their archer friend who hunted Dall sheep in Brooks Range. He had clothes made out of ram skin, even wore a pair of horns, and spent days creeping up on the animals. During the nights he slept on the mountain, without a tent or sleeping-bag, close to the rams, and was only able to eat the occasional energy bar. He constantly had to make sure the wind did not carry his human smell, or the whole hunt would have been endangered. Eventually, the animals must have considered him some sort of distant relative, as they let him get close enough to try a shot. Which he did. And now he has a beautiful trophy, which completely justifies this particular hunter's thoroughness, determination and patience. Such sportmen deserve much respect.

Checking-in my luggage went smoothly; it didn't weigh anything.
It certainly looks as if Boudie and I will reach Holman today.

Musk Ox Camp
Victoria Island
25th August
Afternoon

We fly up to the Arctic Circle in a little turbo-prop plane.

When I flew to Brooks Range I could see thousands of lakes beneath me, but on this flight I can see literally tens of thousands. You wouldn't be able to walk for 600 ft. in a straight line without falling into a lake. From what I can see, large expanses of water seem rare, most being no bigger than several acres.

It seems unkind to send such a small plane on such a long journey. It can't keep it up for long, and has to land at Coppermine to regain its strength (and to take on some fuel). I've never come across a more isolated place. The landing strip is compressed earth, covered with gravel, and the terminal building a precariously-built wooden hut. The washroom seems to be the only functioning communal institution; even the chocolate-vending machine is out of order. I haven't

the faintest idea what the locals here can do for 365 days a year. Tranquillity is very pleasant, but this is too much of a good thing. When we, and the plane, have caught our breaths, we fly on. Always heading north.



We are leaving the continent behind us. Below us, through the clear air, lies the blue sea, peppered with small white dots: the remains of icebergs sailing south towards their certain demise. We are flying over the Arctic Ocean! The pilot lets the plane drop lower and lower, and a desolate wasteland appears beneath us. The landscape has a wild, monotonous beauty, and seems to go on forever. It's the land of the Inuits - Victoria Island.

In most of the records of northern hunting expeditions the term Inuit and Eskimo are equally used, so I was initially unsure which applied to the local people. This might not sound important,

but I feel that, if I am hunting on their land, even showing them the minimum of respect demands that I know how to address them correctly. I've taken the trouble to ensure I get it right. Lawrence Kaplan, the resident expert at the Native Linguistics Center of the University of Alaska, in Fairbanks, sums up the difference as follows:

"Although the name "Eskimo" is commonly used in Alaska to refer to all Inuit and Yupik people of the world, this name is considered derogatory in many other places because it was given by non-Inuit people and was said to mean "eater of raw meat." Linguists now believe that "Eskimo" is derived from an Ojibwa word meaning "to net snowshoes." However, the people of Canada and Greenland prefer other names. "Inuit," meaning "people," is used in most of Canada, and the language is called "Inuktitut" in eastern Canada although other local designations are used also. The Inuit people of Greenland refer to themselves as "Greenlanders" or "Kalaallit" in their language, which they call "Greenlandic" or "Kalaallisut." Most Alaskans continue to accept the name "Eskimo," particularly because "Inuit" refers only to the Inupiat of northern Alaska, the Inuit of Canada, and the Kalaallit of Greenland, and is not a word in the Yupik languages of Alaska and Siberia. "

After all that, I think the safest thing to do is to ask, in person, what they call themselves, and stick to that.

Our run-down little plane lands at Holman, the center of the largest Inuit community on the island. I'm met at the airport by some of Boyd's staff, two Inuits who live locally on the island. Greeting me is Jack Akhiatak, a small man, who with a wide grin, struggles to pronounce my name. He will be my guide on my musk ox hunt, as well as my instructor, advisor and nanny. I must have developed a slightly dubious reputation, as they've sent two people to look after me; the other is Isaac Inuktalik, a gentleman related to Jack in some incomprehensible way. Supposedly, everyone speaks English here, but it is an "English" of which I can barely catch, or understand, a word.

A taxi takes us to the town hall; at least, it is a building that looks like a town hall. This is where registration takes place, and it is swarming with hunters. The streets of Holman are dusty and covered with gravel. In dry weather each ATV - the no.1 vehicle for the summer; there are virtually no cars - creates a long, thick column of dust behind it. With its wooden houses, narrow streets and speeding ATVs, I'd compare it to a town in the old Wild West.. if we weren't so close to the North Pole. The weather is so good that I'm starting to get worried. According to my brief polar experience, good weather on this parallel does not usually have a happy ending. It could mean trouble. It is very hot, which baffles me, as I am much further north than I was Alaska.



At the town hall after a lot of faxes, we receive our tags: aluminum bands that we are to attach to the horns of the musk ox that we bag. After the usual difficult beginning - no-one seems to realise that I've paid all these additional charges in advance - all the hunters get their ATVs. On the island this name is not used for these vehicles; they might be Yamahas, Hondas or Polarises, but all are referred to as hondas.

- "I'm getting the honda!" (and back he comes on a Yamaha). Just like the sherpas in Nepal, who call all trainers adidas. I doubt if you could find better PR anywhere in the world. In no time, Jack and I are firm friends. I once read that Inuits are a reserved people. They don't open up before strangers, and generally only converse with each other. They do their jobs well, but foreigners shouldn't expect much more from them.

Well, that is simply not true.

I have not come across a happier, wittier and friendlier couple of people in a long time. Although we don't speak each other's languages - including English - we still laugh at each other's jokes; the atmosphere is excellent. All the hunters are standing around outside, shuffling their feet, looking for their guides and trying to learn their names. Each hunter will be taken to a different area, so that we don't disturb each other. The guides have a brief discussion together, as there is an overweight American in the group, who would find it difficult to stalk an animal over a prolonged period. They finally work out where it is possible to shoot musk ox from an ATV; sorry, a honda.

As in Alaska, driving regulations in Canada also forbid two people to ride on a honda together, because of the danger; but here necessity overrules the law. On the rack at the back of the vehicle they place a thick plank, and then put several layers of sponge on top: this is where I shall sit. I take my rucksack out of my yellow suitcase, and put various things into it; sitting on the ground, I first put on my boots, then other items of clothing and begin to look like a hunter. I have brought only the absolute necessities. We don't have much space, so we have to carefully consider everything we take. Thankfully, my gun can stay in its Peli 1750 case, which is a relief, as, according to the instructions I received from the outfitter, I should have brought a soft gun-case, to save room, because the hard cases demanded by airlines are "too bulky". Through my job at home I am quite familiar with insane ideas, but I haven't come across something as nonsensical as this for ages. How did it occur to them? Since leaving Budapest should I have constantly been checking-in a soft case on every flight as an extra piece of luggage? Or should I have folded it up into a suitcase, taking up 2/3 of the space? Or should I have been carrying it onto the plane as hand-baggage, using it to hold a change of clothes? But I don't care any more, as the Inuits are cleverer than their bosses, and there is still room for a hard case.

Jack's honda roars loudly as he drives us around; I can hardly hold on. As we go here and there, he introduces me to relatives, pals and acquaintances; I can't really work out who's who. We finally end up at his house and I meet the numerous children, and examine the preparations for the trip. We are leaving for the hunting grounds today; I shan't be spending the night in Holman, which makes up a little of my lost time.

We have to set up our camp on the hunting grounds today, which means that the whole day can be devoted to a successful hunt. All our equipment, and the inevitable camp paraphernalia, will not fit on to the two hondas, so we have to tie sleds behind them. The fact that it is now summer,

and that consequently there is no snow, does not seem to bother anybody. The rope is attached to the tow-bar, and Jack - who considers himself a dead-ringer for Jack Sparrow in the Pirates of the Caribbean - gives a big grin, revs the engine and we whizz off. The metal runners of the sleds screech over the dry, gravelly ground. We leave Holman on a good, firm road. I agreed in advance with Jack that, because my seat is so unstable, he would drive slowly. We also discussed how each of us defined "slow". The result is, we are travelling between 20-30 mph; I enjoy watching the landscape, happy to be hunting again. Occasionally I glance back at the sled, and at poor Isaac's honda, which has to swallow all our dust.

We are racing along in the polar summer.



Unfortunately, this regal life only lasts for 10 mins, and then we leave the road for a track. What follows is a bone-shaking, 3 hour journey sitting on the honda. We go along untrodden ways, through deserted, barren, completely isolated country, without a tree in sight. Sometimes we follow a faint path, but it is mainly Jack's memory that dictates our route. He laughs at the idea of a GPS: he grew up on this island, and it is impossible that he should not know where we are. We sink into the mud; climb up hills; ride over rocks; but, most of all, we shake. A lot. Although the honda's suspension is a bit softer because of all the extra weight, it is still no picnic. I don't envy this little Inuit; I know quite well how difficult it is to drive one of these machines. Colleague Isaac's machine, having only rear-wheel drive, gets stuck in one of the bogs. We go back to the stranded vehicle and unhitch the sled; that is the only way for it to get out of trouble. We have to stop three times for the engines to cool down, as the hondas are so overloaded. On one of these occasions, I notice another gun-case among the rucksacks. It's an old Tikka T3 rain gun, a .223 caliber Remington with a plastic stock, belonging to Jack. Actually, it's the property of Jack's lovely mother; the old lady goes hunting with it when she wants a goose for the cooking-pot. I've forgotten to mention that our ATV also belongs to her. This place must produce a lot of tough old ladies. On any afternoon they make a quick decision, hop on their hondas, and go off hunting. Jack uses the Tikka not only for hunting birds, but as an all-round weapon; he also thinks it is perfect for hunting polar bears. He has shot six in his life - there are different laws for Inuits and foreigners - but not with this gun; on those occasions he used his own. That is a .22 caliber, which he felt was too small, and that was why he now uses his mother's... He looks at my .300 Winchester Magnum bullet with horror. He has never seen such a cannon, and he's sure it's not the right caliber. Its diameter is too large, he says, and it will just make the meat disintegrate... How these machines cope with this brutal usage, I can't imagine. There can not be a tougher test of strength than this. The manufacturers should use this place as a testing-ground. We move on slowly, and eventually, in the late afternoon, we reach an area that has possibilities for musk ox. Jack scans the land with his binoculars every 10 mins, studying the endless wilderness. At the moment, I can't work out what our hunting strategy will be, as there is absolutely no cover here at all.

Musk ox! - Jack points into the distance.

And indeed, there, far away on the horizon, six small dots are moving forward! Jack needs no encouragement, and we set off towards them. We head directly for them. We come to a small hill, which affords slight cover, but we need to get our hondas closer. The distance is at least a mile. As we approach, they seem to become nervous, and move away a little; there's no point in

forcing it, so we dismount. We start searching through the bags and the sleds; all my stuff is still packed up. It takes me at least 15 mins to find my gun-case key, get my bullets and ear muffs, and produce both cameras (still and video) from all the luggage. Nobody hurries me; they talk to each other calmly, and wait to see what gun I am going to use for the hunt.

I have to say that it is difficult to hunt musk ox in a sportsman-like way. Once a herd has been spotted, there is no way for them to escape. There's not one bush for them to hide behind, and they can't just disappear from the landscape. It is merely a matter of time before you get close enough to shoot.

For me it took 1 1/2 hrs.

The noise of the machines has disturbed them, and they run over some small rises. We are sure that we'll spot them from the next elevation, but it's just moss and stones that stare back at us. I can't understand what we are doing or hoping for; are we really going to try to run after them? But Jack knows his job.

He tells me that a musk ox never runs far. When its momentary panic subsides, it will begin grazing again; it has no other choice. In order to maintain such a large body on the poor grass of the polar region it needs to eat non-stop. My guide knows all the nearby lakes, and which one they will go to to drink. We follow along trails, apparently stretching in front of us, but I can make out nothing but stones, moss and bare ground. Finally, after following for a couple of miles, we catch up with them. They are walking towards the lake, and all we can see are their rears. The Inuits haven't brought their binoculars, and in the rush I have forgotten mine too; but my guides don't need them. All they need is a few seconds to decide which animal will be the target. We can't see its horns, because of the angle we are at, but its dark hair, huge body and slow movements tell Jack that it is a mature male. I quickly take the gun from my shoulder, and set the laser, just to test it... 1800 ft. They are not very far, and are now moving even more slowly. But... suddenly, one turns back... he can't have smelt us, as the wind is in our favor... he watches the horizon. We don't move a muscle, crouching on the open ground. The ox cannot see anything moving, relaxes, and then joins the others. We continue the stalk, slowly closing on the herd. Stealthily, we are reducing the distance.

The wind blows constantly, never stopping. Its sound is now a familiar noise, part of the landscape. There is no polar region that has no wind. It may be hot or cold, or rainy or sunny, but there will always be a wind. I'm just starting to get used to it.

The oxen reach the lake. They look around for a while, staring into the distance. We are now less than 600 ft away: we daren't go any closer. I get ready for the shot, and stretch out on the ground.

We aim the camera at the chosen ox, standing it on a rock sticking out of the ground. One last check, and I get the OK to fire.

I eye-up the target; it is standing sideways... 855 ft.

Too high!

A stone explodes in a cloud of dust! Big mistake!

I've missed an unmissable target in a completely inexplicable way! The Inuits begin shouting instructions; the herd is escaping to the left, and there's no time to start thinking about what went wrong... which one shall I go for? One says, the one on the left, the other says, the one on the right... not because they can't decide which, but because, in their excitement, they are mixing up their English words. It does not help me to calm down; we eventually decide to go for the one on the left, but by then it is far away...

The bullet whistles off from the Blaser!

It hits near the spine! Another shot at the jumping ox... I'm not quick enough: it hits a fleshy part.

I fire again... this time I'm on target, but the magazine clicks!

It's empty.

With shaking hands, I take out two more bullets from the cartridge case hanging from my rifle butt; I load them; I aim...

It's had it. This time it falls down. At least, that's what Jack says. I'm so nervous, I can't see it through my gunsight and I jerk the gun from left to right.

I keep asking, and for the fifth time they patiently reply: it's OK, it has been downed.

I am overwhelmed by a feeling of relief. I get up. Congratulations!

I've got my first musk ox! My first musk ox! Great joy; we slap each other on the back; it is difficult to say who is the happiest out of the three of us.

A quick camera adjustment, and we set off to the ox... Jesus, the size of this animal! The thick hair blows in the wind... Jack checks that it is really dead by tapping on its eyeball: there is no reflex. When I touch its woolly hair I can feel its warmth, as if heating elements were running through it. Musk ox need such insulation to survive the -60 to -70F of their winter. As my excellent guide begins to remove the head, I start to analyze my failed shot.



My biggest mistakes, the most inexplicable and bizarre, occurred at my favorite hunting ground in Hungary, a place near a town called Csákvár at the foot of Mt. Vértes.

As usual, I was out with Robi, a wonderful, professional hunter, in the hide code-named Nagytiszta Külső. Robi was leading the stalk, and, as we approached the hide, he indicated with a sharp gesture that a herd of wild boar were in the clearing. This was very unusual; it was nowhere near twilight, and, up until then, any self-respecting boar should be hiding in the undergrowth.

Traditionally, in Csákvár, there is a complete ban on hunting from the end of the season until the 15th April. This is how they protect the sows - the penalty for shooting one out of season, which is most of the year, is HUF 50,000 (US\$200) - and the rest of the large game after the intensive hunting in winter. This six week ban is long enough for the boar to return to their normal routine and to start moving about during daylight.

As we are creeping, crawling and sneaking towards the hide, and the grazing herd, we are startled by the sound, on our left, of a roe deer scraping its antlers against a tree. Peering into the forest, we can see it less than 15 ft. away. It's a stalemate; we stare at it, and it stares at us; none of us quite know how to resolve the situation. Shooting it would not require any great skill - if it

came to the worst, I could knock it down with my gun-stock - , but, firstly, I do not have the landowner's permission to shoot it, secondly, the young warrior only has rather under-developed antlers, and thirdly, we are here to shoot boar.

And I don't usually shoot bucks from 15 ft.

We daren't move as the boar can not be more than 240 ft. away, and alarming them would not be very productive. I'm beginning to feel that I might be standing here, motionless, until the end of the season; but Robi has had enough, and, very slowly, he starts to move. The buck begins to run, making a terrible racket. But, thankfully, the herd, still feeling quite safe, are not disturbed by the roe's din.

Down on one knee, I scan the clearing with the riflescope and try to get into a firing position in which the RWS Evo bullet, from my .30-06 ammunition , will not be affected for the first 60 ft. of its flight by the blades of grass. I find an opening in the grass; Robi points at a suitable young boar, and then it's up to me.

On firing the Remington 700 XCR, the medium-sized boar falls over, and doesn't move. Hooray! For safety's sake I keep an eye on it through my sight, but this is being somewhat over-cautious. We climb up into the hide and spend the next few minutes examining my new GPS.

The good thing about this hide is that, from it, we can watch two clearings. The nearer one is about 90 ft. away, and the further one no more than 210 ft. ; so none of the ever-vigilant guardians of hunting ethics can reprimand us magnum-carrying fighters for shooting at game from an unfair distance, something that is unworthy of a true hunter.

As we discuss the merits of my new toy, two young boar cautiously enter the nearer clearing. One is standing right in front of the other, exactly in my line of fire; it would be hard to miss it, and gives me the opportunity to perform the "two with one bullet" trick. Once again, it was a success, the single Evo knocking down both animals; but just to be certain, I fire off two more shots. Some hunters are rather sceptical about these stories of trick shots. I tend to believe everything I'm told, especially these reports of "two-with-one-bullet". If there are two young boar in a clearing, and you are prepared to wait, then, sooner or later, they will get into a position where such a shot is possible. I don't particularly consider it a great example of shooting virtuosity; you don't even need much luck. I have had two chances for this kind of shot, within a couple of months. I know for certain that an Evo bullet, fired from a .300 Winchester Magnum, or a .30-06, is capable of doing the job within a distance of 300 ft. if they are young animals. But I'm not entirely convinced that this technique is true to the spirit of hunting and the demands of fair play... if the latter expression can be used in connection with hunting, anyway. For me the most important thing is that I kill the game causing as little suffering as possible. If we truly understand our own

capabilities, and those of the gun well enough to attempt the shot, and are satisfied with the position of the animals, then I don't see that such a shot would be considered unethical. Especially considering the amount of damage that game has recently caused.

Problems only arise when we over-estimate our own abilities; something I was to do just a few minutes later...

We are both happy with my first shots, and a good day's hunting, but it isn't over yet. Despite the commotion caused by my four shots, a decrepit old fox ventures into the clearing to investigate the two dead boar.

Shoot it! - whispers Robi, and "White Barrel" roars.

Too high. Not by very much, but still too high.

I look at the gun, at Robi, and then back at the gun: I do not understand. How could I have managed to miss? I have hit much smaller targets from a far greater distance. To miss a fox from just 90 ft. ... that is too much. We have a quick discussion; Robi is puzzled too, and tries to console me, but he hasn't got an easy job. Then, contradicting all our expectations and its own common sense, the very same fox turns up in the farther clearing.

- OK. Now. It seems that Robi still has faith in me.

Bang. Missed again!

Robi starts to snigger.

I'm so annoyed I start tearing at the branches of the hide. I stand up, swearing under my breath; I curse the gun, the fox, the weather; I curse everything. For a while Robi listens patiently to my monologue about how I had set the sight properly, but somehow it had got reset incorrectly, and about the ballistics and trajectory characteristics of shooting at a close target; then he quietly says:

- It's back! It can't be normal.

I look again at the farther clearing, and the fox - who has gone on to become a hero in my Csákvár hunting stories, as the Mad Fox - is indeed tottering around the first boar I shot.

OK.

Just relax.

You have to aim precisely, fire carefully and that's it. That's all that is needed for a good shot. I've done it several times before. It's got to succeed. If only my heart wasn't thumping so hard. And my hand wasn't shaking with nerves. It can't be helped; there's nothing else to rest the gun on.

Next time, I'll bring along a vise, and put the gun in that.

Again, I take careful aim. I fire so perfectly it should have been filmed.

I miss it effortlessly. The fox runs off, frightened and somewhat indignant.



I start laughing too : this can't be happening.

I'm beginning to run out of bullets; when you use a hide you do not expect to need a constant supply of fresh ammunition.

I relax and start talking to Robi: that fox is definitely mentally disturbed. In its desperation it chose death, but, sadly, I couldn't aim well enough to help it. My shots landed right beside it, and what's more, the first one made such a large hole, it looked as if a grenade had gone off. And it kept coming back.

Robi says nothing and merely points ahead.

That Mad Fox is back again!

It must be stupid.

It just won't give up; it must be very determined.

I have another fit of the giggles, which, at least, calms my nerves. Without any particular care, I take a shot. The poor, old Mad Fox - I've got rather fond of it by now - collapses. The shot was dead-on, right through the shoulder.

It has been said many times that accuracy in shooting is predominantly a psychological issue, and I doubt if anyone could show me a better example than this. On the whole, this has been the best hide-shooting I've had so far in my life. I've never shot more than four game in a single session, and only once before have I achieved three.

Shooting practice has helped me to reduce my errors, and so the chance of only wounding an animal - thus making me a better hunter - and helps me understand the reason for my mistakes. Once I have spotted a mistake, it's up to me not to make it again. In my head I am continually replaying the shooting of my musk ox, trying to remember my state of mind exactly. I wasn't particularly nervous. In fact, I was in a healthy state of "hunting fever". A wise old hunter once said to me that if I ever lose that feeling, then I should give up hunting, as then it will be nothing more than target practice for me. I was nowhere near as nervous as I was when I bagged my Dall sheep, which was only 1/4 of the size of the musk ox and 1000 ft. away.

Then, I was not resting my gun properly.

That must have been the problem. Unwisely, I had my left hand resting on a rock, instead of taking off my jacket, rolling it up, and laying my gun on that. A very basic error. Whoever goes to shooting practice, will learn on the first day how to support their gun correctly. It served me right. It's lucky that I missed the animal completely, and didn't just injure it. Also, it didn't help that I hadn't taken the transparent lens-cover off my gunsight. At the start of my trip I had two lens covers, but I lost the rear one while battling my way through a thicket on Brooks Range. Whoever uses these lens-covers, will know that they significantly reduce the visibility of the lens, especially

during twilight. It is also probable that it alters the focus of the image - that is, the target - because, unlike the Zeiss lens, the plexiglass changes the passage of the light. Whether this distortion is the real reason for such a big mistake at a distance of 855 ft. , I am not sure. I'll have to ask some marksmen; they'll know. A professional shooter differs from an amateur in that, if he makes a mistake, he is able to rectify it at once. He won't brood over his errors for too long, but will repeat the shot, and hit the target with his second bullet. I must not let one mistake ruin my confidence, and prevent me making successful shots in the future.

Meanwhile, Jack has finished cutting off the head. We leave the rest of the carcass behind, as it is of no use to the Inuit. Isaac comes up on one of the hondas; they load it and go to get the other machine. I am alone on the Arctic tundra.

The wind is blowing, the temperature is dropping and the sun is slowly setting over Victoria Island.

I could never get used to living on this island. I'd miss a proper summer. I'd miss spring in the woods, warm rain, thunder and lightning of summer storms and the smell of autumn leaves on the forest floor. I wouldn't make a good Inuit. I could not survive without the comforts of civilization; Coca-cola, Macdonalds and multi-plex cinemas. I wouldn't enjoy being without a well-equipped gym; or restaurants; being able to have a beer; and brick houses. Here they live to a completely different set of values. They don't require any of the things I've just listed. They don't need lots of stuff to make them happy. A good day's hunting and fishing, watching their children grow and the strength of their community: these are what give their lives purpose and pleasure. We live in two different worlds, separated by distance, values and our way of thinking, but, nevertheless, brought together through hunting.

My two guides are back.

It is nearly 10.00pm, time to find a place to set up camp. We have to put up the tent near a lake, as we need drinking water. I don't think it will be a problem. There are so many lakes about that it would be difficult to die of thirst. Lake upon lake. We arrive at the shore of one; the water is clear right down to the bottom, and the blue evening light reflects of the surface.

They begin unloading.

I'm a bit surprised to find out that all three of us will be sleeping in the same tent. And what's more, it is not a very safe-looking structure. It's ordinary canvas, and looks as if it was made several decades ago. The whitish fabric is spotted with innumerable marks of an indefinable color; the whole thing is supported by battered wooden tent-poles. They quickly assess the wind direction, and erect the tent with its back facing into it. Every single movement they make demonstrates their expertise; they work well together. While doing it they are constantly making

jokes, but they never use their mother-tongue in front of me. All their behavior shows an innate sense of tact.

They re-enforce the side of the tent that is facing into the wind with an old sheet of plastic that is full of holes. The tent-ropes cannot be pegged into the ground as it is too stony, so instead they use the hondas, gas cans and sleds to secure them. It doesn't have a ground sheet. They put down a thick, shaggy caribou skin, and, on top of that two thick, wide mattresses. In the space for the third mattress they put down extra caribou skins. I'm a bit concerned as, in Brooks Range, my sleeping bag wasn't really warm enough. Jack reassures me that the tent will be warm enough; I will sleep in the middle ... that will be the warmest spot. We hang a line near the top of the tent: warm air rises, and this is where we will put our wet things to dry. They hang up their boot linings and two pairs of socks... it's starting to get a little stuffy. It has cooled down outside and the wind is rising. One of them unpacks an antiquated Coleman cooking-stove, fills it with kerosene, and takes it into the tent. He puts another burner, for heating, beside the stove and lights it, blissfully indifferent to any safety regulations. Naked flames inside a tent... this is not what we've been taught in mountaineering school! I'm worried about the fumes from the stoves; I just hope we all haven't snuffed it by tomorrow morning! The Inuits merely smile, and promise me that we'll survive until the morning. By the time I've dug out my pack from the sled, the tent is cheerfully lit up by a kerosene lamp. I venture back in. I'm met with such a cosy atmosphere that all my reservations vanish. We potter around inside, and, despite the language barrier, I have a nice chat with these two excellent men. They are not going to cook dinner; a few biscuits will do us, as none of us are very hungry. I get into my sleeping-bag and write the last lines.

Soon we are fast asleep.

The three hunters.

Two Inuits and, in between them, a Hungarian.



Room 1
Arctic Inn Hotel
Holman
26th August

I can't remember when I last slept as well, and as deeply, as I did in the Inuit's tent. I could hardly wake up. The cosy warmth, the comfy mattress, and beneath it the thick, insulating caribou skins, along with the friendly atmosphere, guaranteed a good night's sleep. And the fact that nobody snored. It was after 8.00 before I was able to force myself out of my sleeping-bag. Isaac is preparing breakfast; finally, the old Coleman stove is being used for its original purpose: he's about to cook on it. Space is rather tight, so we are forever moving around each other, something that prompts an endless stream of jokes from my two constantly good-humored hosts. I'm taking some videos of the inside of the tent; they're quite happy about it and we all clown around in front of the camera. Jack contacts the other hunters over the radio. The harvest continues: this is the

height of the season and many musk ox are falling. The radio aerial is a long cable, at least 60 ft., which they drape over the tent. They're always having to move it to get the best reception.

The weather is excellent: there's not a cloud in the sky. The wind is blowing again, but this is normal for the tundra; it's never still here, unless you're inside a well-insulated tent. I've almost decided to leave the tent, not just stick my head outside, when Jack says:

- Musk ox!.

The ox are right here beside our tent.

I jump into my boots and quickly search for my sight, before realising that I haven't yet unpacked it: it is still buried somewhere on the sled. Because of this, I decide to aim my camera, rather than my gun, at the animals grazing 1800 ft. away. They've chosen our lake for their morning watering-place. It's very exciting, but only for me. Jack and Isaac just smile calmly, and ask which I would prefer to do first: go hunting or have breakfast? What a question! Of course we must go hunting first. They turn off the stove, and I fish out my gun: let's go! Jack has already picked out the strongest bull, but by the time we get there the herd has taken to its heels. They have disappeared into the vastness of the tundra, But we are still going after them; I don't need to ask why, as I now know that at some point soon, they will stop. And when they do, we'll be there. At times we have to slow down, as the herd spreads out; we'd rather they remained close together, as it is easier to make comparisons then. Occasionally the rear guard looks back, and then, like experienced soldiers, we fall on our stomachs. The chase goes on over difficult, stony ground. I follow behind Isaac as I can tell he knows best how the game will behave; he was leading yesterday, as well. We cross one small ridge after another: we must be at least 2 miles from camp by now. The ox have been within visual range several times, but have disappeared again.

Finally, we catch up with them.

All we can see of the strongest bull is its rear, so we start looking at some of the others. But then it turns sideways and its thick hair is tugged by the wind. The Inuits agree that is the best choice, and give me the OK to go ahead. Despite the rocky ground, it isn't easy to find a good stone to use as a gun-rest. We move 60 ft. forward, until we find a suitable place.

We don't have to crawl on our stomachs here, like I did at Brooks Range. I lie down; looking over the rocky ground through the sight I can just make out the target, but only the upper part. The laser is on it... 700 ft. - the perfect distance. I prepare for the shot. I take off my light jacket, roll it up, put it under my gun and continue to watch the ox. Now it is facing us head-on; it is looking in our direction, but hasn't noticed us. For long, long seconds we both continue to stare, and then it

turns sideways once again.

There's no point in waiting any longer.

After the shot, the ox collapses, accompanied by loud cries of delight from the Inuits. I can't see anything, as it disappeared from my field of vision when it fell. I keep looking at the target area, scanning it with my sight, but I can't see any sign of movement. I give a big sigh: I have managed to rectify yesterday's mistakes.

I have my second ox.

I celebrate with Jack and Isaac. Our whoops can even be heard by the musk ox, who are fleeing into the distance.

We approach it slowly, with the camera rolling. It is alive, but only just. Once again Jack taps an eyeball; the reflex still works. I'm not happy about it, but the Inuits say there's no need for another shot to finish it off. I give it another minute, but it is still alive. This can't go on; this "let's just wait, it will die soon" attitude is completely foreign to me, and I say so. In cases like this, the Inuits don't use a second shot. Usually, they kill it with one shot; they can't afford, in the case of a large animal, to destroy several pounds of valuable meat, which is what a second shot would do, because in winter they need all the meat they can get.

I call Jack over and, to take the sting out of my remark, I offer him a go with my gun. I've suggested it several times before, but he always shook his head, saying it was too powerful for him. Now he crouches down and grabs the gun: it's almost as big as he is. I release the safety catch of the R93 as usual, and reduce the sight magnification down from x12, warning the little Inuit not to put his face too close to the sight: it's not a .223.

He looks through the sight, tells Isaac what he sees and touches the sensitive trigger... and starts to fall over. I'm worried that he'll fall on to the stones, but he manages to regain his balance. He wasn't properly balanced and the recoil almost knocked him over, but, luckily, the sight has not hit his forehead. He picks up the empty cartridge case and proudly shows it to Isaac.

In the rush leaving camp this morning, I left behind the GPS and my other camera. I take some photographs using the video, but the quality won't be that good. The main thing is that I have it all on video - I can describe everything else myself.



I replay the video, and my shot can be seen clearly; finally, I have one of my kills recorded live! Jack handled the camera like a real professional. After removing the head we all return to camp, leaving the carcass behind. Back in the tent Isaac starts to make breakfast, which, because of the time we've been out, has now become lunch. They had already beaten the eggs back in Holman and brought them here frozen, in a bag. - a novel and practical way to carry them. They've thawed out and make a huge portion of scrambled eggs, accompanied by fried luncheon meat and bacon. After that I devour two cans of preserved fruit: this hunt has really given me an appetite. It is the most cheerful breakfast/lunch that I can remember. These Inuits joke non-stop; their eyes sparkle mischievously with genuine kindness. It is impossible not to like them. They manage to please their clients, but still retain their dignity; and after a successful hunt they are truly as happy and pleased as their guests are themselves.

Slowly, we pack up the camp.

We've got to go. This has been the most enjoyable part of my trip so far; I've never slept sounder, or had a better breakfast than I have with Jack and Isaac. I have my two musk ox, so we can leave the hunting grounds: we are going back to Holman. They dismantle the tent and camp without haste, while I say my farewells to the landscape. Before we leave, Isaac goes off on a honda to collect the horns of the first ox and we load up the sleds. All the meat will be left behind as they do not need it. Jack is very good at knots; everything is tied up so tightly that we won't lose a thing. We leave, retracing our path exactly. We pass the remains of an old motor-sled which I noticed on our way out. Jack says it has been there for at least 30 - 40 years. It broke down, couldn't be repaired, so its owner just abandoned it. It's a long way home and even sitting on the plank on the back is very exhausting. By the time we reach the gravel road, I've had enough. And by the time we reach Holman we are all covered by a thick layer of dust. We go straight to the only hotel in town and I am given Room 1. After a few tries, I finally get a WIFI connection - while doing this, I gratefully thank my company's programmers who prepared me for just such a situation by explaining how to reset a bad connection - and send a report of my success to those concerned. We have arrived at the hotel after dinner-time, but Jack finds a member of staff who takes me to the kitchen. I find a hunk of caribou-meat in the fridge and cut myself a liberal slice.



Room 211
Chateau Nova Hotel
Yellowknife
27th August

Hunting is strange! Is it a hobby, a sport or an obsession?

Nothing else in the world can create such strong bonds between two people from such utterly different backgrounds. I have only known these two brave Inuits for less than 48 hrs. but, already, I know that I will never forget them. Their cheerful smiles, constant joking, shouts of joy at my successful shot and that night in the tent, will be things that I will remember forever. My whole trip would have been worth it just for the last 1 1/2 days. It was a pleasure to get to know these two happy, well-balanced and friendly men, who understand this land so well and to whom it truly belongs.

In his morning email Boyd asked me to leave Holman as soon as possible and return to Yellowknife. They'd like to take me on a caribou hunt tomorrow, which means I must say goodbye to my two dear guides. This makes me feel very sad, and even the fact that they don't seem very happy about it either, doesn't really console me. Unlike during the last 1 1/2 days, our usual jokes now seem rather strained. Even though they each have their own house in Holman, they have come to the hotel to have a farewell breakfast with me. We chat about the last two hunts over and over again, with inexhaustible high spirits. We laugh loudly at the same joke many times over, and then Jack introduces me to some other members of his family that I have not yet met. After this, I go to pack my bags and Jack goes off to organise my seat on the plane leaving at 1.30. I have not been alone for 10 mins, when Isaac knocks at the door. We sit and talk, while watching a TV quiz. He has shot 14 - 15 (he can't remember the exact number) polar bears, using a .222 caliber gun. He's perfectly satisfied with it and doesn't want a larger one as most of his shots are within 120 ft. When I ask him if he's not scared to be so close to his quarry, with only his small gun, he shakes his head resolutely. Fear - he says - is all in the mind. You just have to switch off and ignore it. You must concentrate only on the shot, and then any fear disappears. Such is the wisdom of an Inuit hunter. It is a wisdom based on the accumulated hunting experiences of thousands of years.

The children here learn to hunt from a very early age.

They don't know about the laws of ballistics, but nevertheless, without exception, they are all excellent shots. They learn to shoot before they learn to read and write at school, and their knowledge comes, not from books, but from their fathers and grandfathers. The yearly diet is mainly comprised of meat from hunting; no-one buys any from a shop, except perhaps, for the occasional piece of bacon. It would not be worth opening a butcher's shop in Holman. Although he's over 47, Isaac has never been abroad. He has no particular desire to travel. A distant relative once went to a country - he can't remember which - far, far away in the south, but he soon came back. He said that all the white people went into the ocean, so he did the same, but it was so unbearably hot that he felt he was standing in boiling water. As well as that, the air was intolerably hot too. Isaac has never experienced 95 F and he doesn't want to. He loves this land and this weather, and is happiest among his own people.

This is his country and where he belongs.

Although he's not obliged to, Jack takes me to the airport on his honda. A new group is arriving and he has to meet them there. The three of us wait for the plane delivering the new batch of greenhorn, musk ox hunters. Two days ago I was one myself, but that now seems ages ago.

Many people say that time passes quickly when you're busy and having intense experiences, and goes more slowly when you are bored and have nothing to do. Well, for me, it has been exactly the opposite. When I'm back at the office in Hungary, work begins on Monday, and, by the time I've read all my emails and done something constructive, it's already Tuesday. I don't even notice Wednesday, and spend Thursday making sure that everything is up-to-date for Friday. By the time I get a moment to think, the weekend has arrived. This is how week follows week, year in, year out.

But now, in contrast, when I look at my reliable Fortis Astronaut Chronograph I see that it is only 7th August.

The 27th August!

Can it really be true that I left home barely a month ago? It feels as if it's been years. I can't even remember what my company does; it's as if I'm on another planet. It is astounding, the number of things that have happened to me during this last month. Enough adventures to last a lifetime. And I'm not yet even half-way through my trip.

Most of my hunting time still lies ahead of me.

The new batch of hunters get off the plane and I prepare to get on. Jack, of course, knows First Air's local representative - he's another distant relation - which means I do not have to pay the

extra charge incurred for changing my ticket to an earlier date. It is hard saying goodbye. We shake hands three times. So far, I've been promising to write to absolutely everyone when I get home, but I am, without doubt, 100% certain that I shall be writing to Jack and Isaac when I get back. The plane takes off, leaving the Inuits behind in the small waiting-room.



On the way to Yellowknife we land at a small place called Coppermine, well-known for its air of tranquillity. There's not much going on: right now, I'm playing with a beautiful black labrador. It belongs to the woman in the control tower, so it roams around freely. It is a dignified Inuit dog that only responds to the local dialect, and ignores English completely. At Yellowknife, having learnt from previous experience, I walk past the army of waiting taxis, straight to the free hotel minibus. The moment I get into my room, the phone rings.

It's Frank Cole from Cabela's. He's written a letter to Boyd telling him to ignore the original plan that I would only shoot one caribou: I now have permits to shoot two. Tomorrow, once more,



Carlos will be picking me up from the hotel. Frank advises me to ask him to get me one more permit. Frank and Jan have been investigating the worrying affair of the plane ticket. Yes, it was their fault. While booking my many tickets, they somehow overlooked this one. They've been through all the accounts and payments and whatever - it can't have been a quick read - but have found no record of me paying for it. They are terribly sorry about all the inconvenience, and so, to alleviate the general air of dejection, I offer to pay for the ticket.

The hotel is the same as ever: still nothing works. Because of some unknown problem the jacuzzi only has cold water, and I do not feel up to that. But I am successful in getting the staff heat up the sauna. It's not actually a sauna, more of a steam-bath! I seriously consider spending the night there, but the lady at reception manages to talk me out of it.

Another caribou hunt tomorrow!