



often more than three hours are required to complete a large one. However, unlike a tent, one can simply walk away from an igloo in the morning. For a one-night stay, igloo interiors can be heated with a lamp or gas stove to a surprisingly high level of comfort. Not all the younger Inuit hunters at Umiujaq are sufficiently skilled to build igloos, and snow conditions may not be locally suitable. For these reasons they will usually spend the night out in a hogan. These structures consist of four walls made from snow blocks, roofed with a tarpaulin or the tupek.

It was clear that along the outer coast north of the outlet of Richmond Gulf we would be dangerously out of our element. In previous tele-satellite conversations with Noah Innukpuk, the mayor of Umiujaq, I learned that the community was located north of Umiavinirtalik Point and connected by a steep 8-km trail to Richmond Gulf. It was hard for Noah in English to provide further helpful descriptions but he thought the distance between Little Whale River and Umiujaq to be around 40 km. Realizing such a description would be inadequate for ground travel, Noah offered to return a map with the community and trail marked if I could send one over the satellite telephone system to his Tex machine. Unfortunately, Dorset (Ontario) and environs are not as high tech as Umiujaq! Furthermore, no suitable scale of map could be photocopied clearly for transmission.

Before our departure from La Grande, the meteorological staff phoned out for the co-ordinates of Umiujaq to solve our problem: 56° 30' 30"N; 76° 29' 00"W. What a shock! This was at least two to three days travel north of what I believed to be the location from Noah's estimated distances, and lying directly west of an unnegotiable wall of high escarpment.

There was now a definite possibility of running out of time and food before reaching Umiujaq. Although there would be no Inuit hunters in the interior east of Richmond Gulf, Noah had previously told me that two Inuit families had a fishing camp a Paachissii Lake near the Caribou River's outlet into Richmond Gulf; they could provide help if we were able to reach the coast. (Only to the north in the Minto Lakes-Nastapoka River region do the Inuit hunters penetrate significantly inland. Here the access is easier. One is essentially above the treeline where the snowpack is so hard that inland snowmobiling is seldom impeded.)

Our pilot asked us to re-consider attempting to fly that day. Low-temperature wind warnings had been issued for both James and Hudson Bays and he predicted a rough flight. Pragmatic as ever, Herb quickly through questioning determined that the pilot was primarily concerned for our safety on the ground rather than the safety of the flight. Since the weather office forecasted little change over the next few days, there was no sense in delaying a day and jeopardizing our chances of ever reaching the Gulf on time. Since the flight was further than the normal operating range of the Otter, the plan was to pump extra fuel into the tanks, while we were landed at Clearwater Lake, from a 45-gallon drum stored in the fuselage. Fortunately, the hanger at La Grande was heated so we drove our truck inside and loaded in relative comfort.

Outside on the tarmac, the wind chill temperature was measured at -66°C. Even with the application of the plywood engine covers, we paid dearly for stopping and taking in more fuel outside the hanger. It took 29 minutes of idling the engine on the ground before sufficient oil temperature was developed to take off safely.

Shortly after leaving La Grande, just 20 km north of the massive LG2 power project, we flew over caribou standing or lying out from shore mainly on the northwest side of the lakes where they could catch the early morning sun. No doubt there were thousands of them. On our line of flight, they were confined to heavily forested zones in two major concentrations. The smaller, more northern group was south of Great Whale River, far to the south of our intended route. At this time of year they seemed to shun the barren, open areas.

Our plan was to begin snowshoeing in the thin northwestern arm of Clearwater Lake north of Kapakwach Iyatiwakami Bay. This arm provided shelter for a safer landing as the main body of Clearwater Lake is 40 km across and often develops huge snow waves on its surface which could easily flip an aircraft.

Although there were clear skies overhead, the landing was made in a fearsome "ground drifter." During the stronger wind gusts, the lake's surface was almost obscured by a half-metre layer of blowing snow. The leeward profiles of surrounding hills were hazy with snow crystals swept from the highlands. We quickly ate a late lunch in the shelter of the cockpit, unloaded, and re-fuelled so the aircraft engine would not cool to the point where re-start would be difficult.

Soon we were alone, in a vast, uninhabited winter landscape. This is a harsh, impoverished region in which human survival has always been marginal and uncertain. A short distance to the north, as recently as 1930, only three Indians survived the winter from a group of twenty-four. Now the land between Clearwater Lake and Richmond Gulf has become an empty quarter in winter, as the Indians have moved south to an easier life in the Great Whale River area.

Ahead lay an unexplored route with little time to reach a far-off, unresolved destination. Our pilot, David Peace, sincerely believed our chances of making it to be less than 50%. To reduce risk, this was my first trip on which an E.L.T. was carried. These emergency signalling devices were originally intended to locate crashed aircraft in remote areas. Once the distress signal is turned on, the military can accurately pin-point the source of the signal using satellites and computers, and will initiate an air rescue. Activation of E.L.T. would only be appropriate in the event of a life-threatening injury, illness, or starvation, and not for simply being lost on overdue and short of the destination. In view of such harsh travel conditions, our pilot convinced me to agree to another safety measure. If we did not reach our destination within four days of our planned arrival, he would make the long flight north and search for us.

Our exact route could only be tentative, especially in the canyon areas, and within days the winds would certainly obliterate most of the evidence of our passing. Therefore, such an air search of all the likely locations would have proved difficult for David. Believe me, the humiliation of an air rescue and the resulting years of economic bondage paying for it were strong inducements to succeed.

It is not my purpose to describe our snowshoe trip across the interior to the Gulf for it was truly an adventure in itself. What had been accomplished was not without difficulty. The power of the winter wind in this locale should not be underestimated. Unlike the Inuit, who can turn from the wind to protect their faces by riding sideways or backwards on their komatiks or by covering