



confluence of the Paachissii and Caribou Rivers. If the Inuit were indeed tenting on Paachissii Lake as suggested by Noah Innukpuk, they had to be approaching the lake by some other route. This appeared unlikely because the lake was surrounded by high hills with snow conditions that would be difficult for snowmobile travel. Nevertheless, since the complete lake had not been seen from the hill, it warranted further checking to make certain we did not miss the Inuit.

Time was now so critical that it was imprudent to stop the progress of the expedition for everyone to search. The rest of the party moved forward with the gear toward Richmond Gulf while I made a solo snowshoe trip up the Paachissii River. No camp was found there and I turned back to the Caribou River and re-joined my partners on the north side of the final set of rapids to the sea. There was now no alternative but to press forward down the estuary and make camp in the last stand of good timber before the onset of darkness.

On the river just prior to reaching our proposed



campsite two snowmobile tracks were found leading from the Gulf. A careful examination proved them to be not more than two weeks old and likely made by Bombardier Skandiks, pulling long-runnered kometicks. The tracks of kometicks did not bode well for finding an occupied camp, because sleds provide the Inuit with the capability of carrying extra gasoline to travel great distances, possibly all the way from Umiujaq. It became apparent that, in local Inuit terms, a camp at Paachissii Lake could possibly have meant anywhere within a ten-kilometre radius.

After the wind subsided sufficiently, two shots were fired to announce our arrival in the estuary. The report of the shotgun echoed off several far-off hills ensuring us that if the Inuit were indeed camping nearby, the shots would have been heard. There was no return gunfire. That night a hill was climbed behind our tent to look for camp lights. This also proved unproductive. The following morning the last meal on the menu would be eaten and within a few days our food supply would be exhausted.

Our situation was now serious and required a carefully-planned strategy. That evening we considered several possibilities and concluded that the best course of action was to maintain the existing site as a base camp from which to search for Umiujaq. Assuming the co-ordinates from the weather office were more reliable than Noah's estimated distances, his community was situated two to three days of hard snowshoe travel north of the Caribou River. It was clear that if the community was not found, and we were forced to return from the location of the co-ordinates, this first attempt could take upwards of six days. The plan was to snowshoe northward along the more hospitable east side of Richmond Gulf, hopefully finding a trail leading through the escarpments directly to the community without travelling the barren Hudson Bay coastline. As long as the weather did not turn stormy, there seemed to be a reasonable chance that eventually an Inuit hunter on snowmobile would be encountered. With luck our problems could be quickly solved.

In the event that our party was forced to survive by hunting and fishing, our base camp was well-positioned. Compared to the interior, the Caribou River estuary is both a botanical and zoological oasis. Here even small stands of balsam poplar exist. This is obviously a good location for sea-run trout, and willow ptarmigan were in their largest observed numbers.

At sunset we had seen from a distance what appeared to be snowmobile tracks leading up the side of a hill south of the river mouth, suggesting a possible camp along the Gulf in a nearby bay. Herb Pohl volunteered to leave at first light on a snowshoe reconnaissance downriver to make a final search for the elusive fishing camp. At the same time Bill King would help Tony Bird and myself assemble a light outfit for two of us to find Umiujaq. It was essential to travel quickly for there were long exposed stretches on the Gulf that would be dangerous in bad weather.

Apart from Tony's camera, only the essentials were taken to keep the toboggan as light as possible for rapid travel. These items included: sleeping bags and foam pads; a change of moccasins, liners, and clothes; sunglasses; maps and compass; twine and snare wire; two lighters and flashlight; spare lampwick; tarpaulin; jack-knife, bow saw, and tomahawk; thermos for carrying drinking water; tea pail and two pannikans. For food we took the last of the sandwiches for our first lunch, some cheese, tea, and three