

Report for

Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit Research in Nettilling Lake 2024

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Summery:

Nettilling lake have been used by hundreds of years by Inuit both in Pangnirtung and Cape Dorset. It was mostly used to get caribou meat, skins, fox trapping and making qamutiks. Nettilling lake is also the main route for caribou to cross from north Baffin to south Baffin, sometimes either way. Inuit knew that if abundance on caribou was in Nettilling Lake, then it meant that most of the whole Baffin region would have caribou.

Nettilling Lake Caribou Population

Now move forward to the year of 2013-14 The caribou population got low around the whole Baffin Island. For us here in Pangnirtung, I went to Nettilling Lake every year between 2007 until the caribou hunt was stopped by GN due to low count in Baffin Island. During 2013-14 just before they stopped the hunts, we were looking for them all around Nettilling Lake and had a hard time finding them. We noticed the population of caribou was going low in numbers. There weren't many caribou tracks, mostly all-around Nettilling Lake. This was my first time seeing it like that. I ended up asking elders what is really happening to our caribou, and most replied was they do have their population cycle. Once they have big numbers in population, soon or later, they will die off or migrate due to low lichen plants in the area surrounding them, and this was one of the reasons why the population got low.

So, that's when I decided to apply for funding from NWMB to go do my own research on caribou around Nettilling Lake to see if there have been any changes since 2023-14

Planning stages for 2024 on Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit Caribou Research



Figure 11st Drop-off small boats

Nettilling Lake is roughly 225 kilometers either by boat or by snowmobile. It is between Pangnirtung and Cape Dorset, on the southwest side of Baffin Island, and it is closest to Pangnirtung of the four south Baffin communities.

Best way to follow through big plans is to put small boats on each lake including fuel and some small supplies then drop them off during winter or early spring around April or May. This will make a huge difference during summer if all lakes have small boat. By doing so, it will save time and energy as it is all mostly doing portage gears and supplies five times when trying to reach the research area.

Project Objectives



Figure 2 2nd drop-off another small boat and supplies

To go up to Nettilling Lake during the summer months and go see if the caribou are back around that area as it is the main route for caribou to migrate to the north and then back to the south. This happens for a reason, for birthing and for the vegetation of their diet. Also, other main thing is to see if there is any sign of caribou with calves.

Materials and Methods



Figure 3 Getting ready to go through Ammituq lake towards Isua

Materials and methods to get to the area is a challenge, it has five lakes, and you must portage and carry gears lake to lake. The final lake is the Nettilling Lake. Each portage to a lake is different and have certain lengths to portages gears and supplies. Two of those five are

kind of long portages. To make the trip go easier, it is best to have small boats (dingy, Sikauq) on each lake to save time and work. Those small boats are all 16' home made boats as mentioned above. And the last one requires a biggest one, that is Nettilling Lake. Another thing to have is quad and small qamutiks, especially on the two longest portages that takes longest to pass through.

Drop-offs and supplies



Figure 4 Starting the first Portage

So, during the first trip to Nettilling Lake in mid May by snowmobile, we brought three small boats, all 16 footers on lakes. Also, to be more efficient, we brought my quad with qamutiks plus drop off gas, camp stove fuel, and supplies on the last two lakes.



Figure 5 Drop-off boats and gas

First trip in May

The first trip happened in mid May 2024. This was by skidoos that went through inland by Kuulik trail instead by the ice of Cumberland Sound. The trip lasted four days in all and had brought two small boats plus gear

and gas. These were dropped off on certain locations on those lakes. One of them was on the third lake and the other one was at the last lake and that is Nettilling Lake. They also dropped off gas and camp fuels on same locations. During the trip, just before they reach the Nettilling Lake cabin, they came across two different caribou tracks. The first track was small herd, total of seven caribou and it was mothers with calves. This was in Amittuq Lake at the far end area. The second tracks they came across were set of three caribous and they were in Nettilling Lake around Qusunittuq. Both tracks were heading towards northwest. Both were at different dates as one of the other tracks were a bit older.

- **Caribou with calves sighted 4**
- **Caribou tracks total 10 all female with calves**

Second Trip in August 2024



Figure 6 Portage Quad gear and qamutiks

The second trip started in mid August. The plan was to bring all the gears plus Honda (Quad) and small boat to one of the lakes. It took four of us to get all the equipment in its place. We portage all gears, boats, small qamutiks and Honda to certain lakes so we can get everything ready for the actual caribou research in Nettilling Lake itself. We turned back after we went to second lake called Ippiqtuuq, where the place takes longest to portage gear and stuff. We did not go further as we wanted to towards Amittuq lake, and that is the fourth lake. The reason was two of our small motors did not work properly and

required new spark plugs and fuel pump. The other reason was the mosquitoes. The regular mosquitoes and the other short stubby ones were very nuisance that drove my crew and

myself to turn back. This trip took five days, but we managed to put another small boat, Honda, qamutiks, and gas to certain spots that were ready for the next trip. We did hike in one of the days when there was some lite breeze around the second lake at Ipiqtuuq. We did not see any caribou but came across some tracks that were fresh tracks. The tracks were calf and the mother and young buck (Angusalluq) There was some tracks at Ippituuq area, few old and some fresh tracks.

- **No caribou sighted**
- **Tracks spotted total 3**

Third trip

Third trip started in the last week of August. The first plan was to head north and go further up to look for any signs of wildlife. They plan was to make few stops and check for any signs of caribou tracks and there was few here and there but did not see many tracks nor caribou. The area covered was called Ayuraq and went further around the islands and parts of mainland. There were tracks, both for male and female caribou, some had calves with them. That day, the caribou sighted came to **four caribou**, but in separate islands. On second research, the crew went more towards the main land area towards the northeast and saw some more tracks but only came across two young buck (tirituraq) caribous.

Third day was too windy, and the small boat was not best suited for that, so we stayed put.

When winds plan was to make 35 kilometres camp, saw four calves on the wasn't a whole saw some mostly with **mothers** was plenty of see a whole lot, more than **twelve** towards plan was to reach



Figure 7 One of our Camp in Nettilling lake

finally died down, a new camp about from the previous on the way with islands, there lot of tracks, but single tracks and **with calves**. There tracks but did not roughly saw no on the west side Tikirajuarusiq. The where we had

marked but did not reach the point; had to return due to run low on gas and supplies. Total in that area that were spotted came to twelve, and these were all female caribou with calves, some were alone.

- **Caribou sighted total 16 Mostly all female caribou with calves**
- **Plenty of tracks**

Fourth Trip



Figure 8 Going towards Ujarajuaq 4th portage

Fourth trip happened in mid September and the plan was towards more north northeast Qusunituuq and Aayuraq area, as this was more promising when it came to tracks and seeing caribou. They saw some caribou tracks and they were more of young male caribou

(Angusalluq) tracks. They saw **three** around on mainland and mostly were alone. The caribou had started migrating walking kind of fast, not stopping for anything. Caribou sighted came to **total of seven caribou walking** and this was more on the north-northeast side mainland. The weather was getting much cooler up there and the land was dry mostly on all places as it did not rain the whole time.

- **Young male caribous sighted in total 10**
- **Some tracks**

- **Total in all females with calves 23**
- **Male** 7
- **Total sighted** **30**
- **Total overall lots of tracks**



Reporting to the community

Back in February, I appeared to the Pangnirtung HTO board to announce that we have completed the caribou research at Nettilling Lake in 2024 Pang HTO. The board asked questions regarding the caribou research and informed them that they are slowly coming back. They also wanted to know if I will continue to do in winter, my reply was to submit my report

and see what they say. To my opinion, I think its great idea. Plus, it would be much easier to go research by skidoo and cover more ground then by boat.

Figure 9 Looking any signs of caribou

More information about the Nettilling Lake research trips



Figure 10 Just another load of required gear

Overall, to my understanding, the research went well, even though we did not cover all the areas we wanted to. But most of them we did. The plans we made ahead of time, did not all work out. We did request to charter a Twin Otter for pick-up, and that never happened as they were already on a contract with DeBeers during that summer.

Also, we were supposed to have couple older men to go with us, but we couldn't, due to the capacity limitations of the small boats plus the stress it would have on them coming back, after a long trip. Also, we had small engine issues and above all, weather was factor. There were days the crew could not travel due to weather as it would be too windy, even at ten to fifteen knots. Lakes tend to have bigger waves then salt water. We now know that it would make more sense to go in winter then summer as it is much easier to cover land by snowmobile then by boat and hiking. We noticed that too, it is way more costly during summer, then in spring by snowmobile. This made the project way pass the project costs, due to portage equipment's, weather, and equipment issues. From these trips, we learned a lot, what to bring, and where to go next time.

Conclusion



Figure 11 Amittuq camp Isua

The caribou research around Nettilling Lake was successful. Even though all the plans we had did not go as planned, but overall, we now know that there is caribou around Nettilling Lake. What we've seen and saw, there is caribou with calves, and that is a good sign. Also, there was plenty of single male caribous that we came across.

There were plenty of tracks, a whole lot of tracks once they started migrating, but only came across few. The places we covered was small scale as we were only able to do the research during summer seasons.

There were other wildlife's that we saw during the research, such as loons, snow geese and Canada geese. The land up there was mostly dry, as it did not rain most of the times. Half of the time during the research was windy, not able to travel.

Hopefully this information will help and understand that the research we did went well and one day that the population of caribou will once again be abundance.

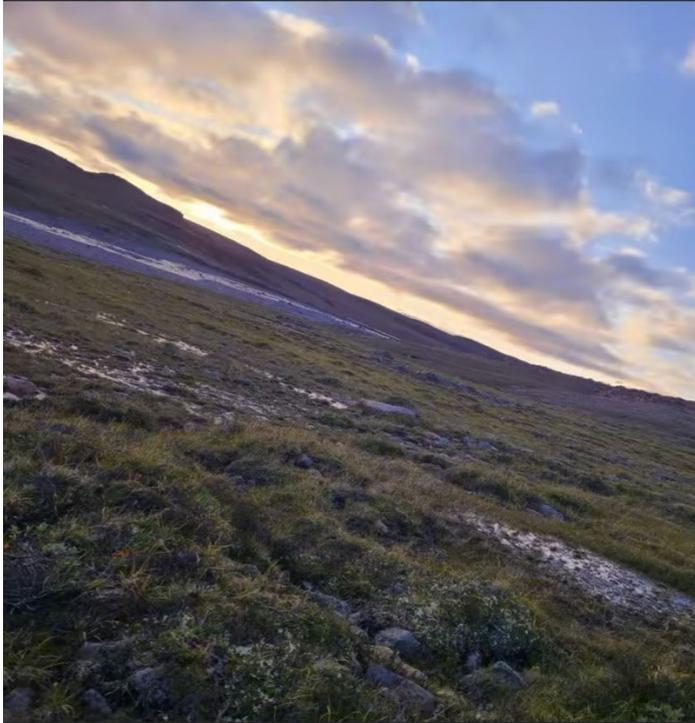


Figure 12 The longest portage ppiqtuuq

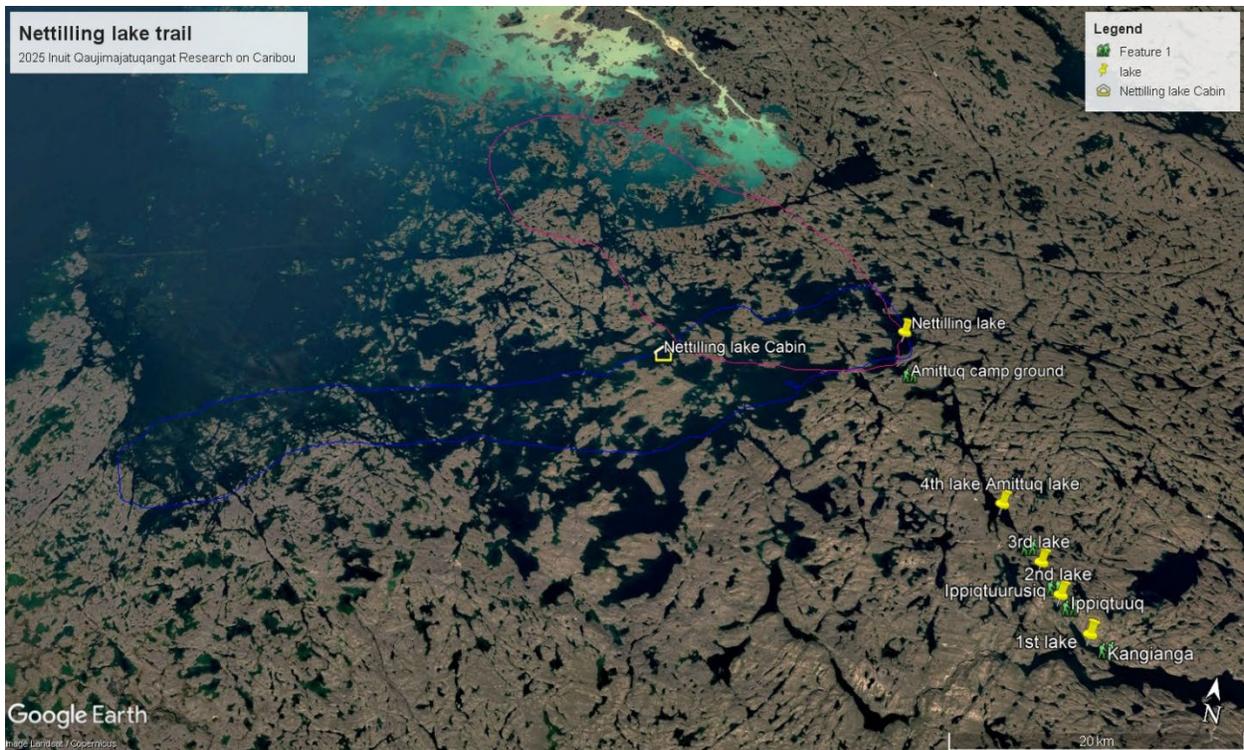


Figure 13 Nettilling lake

- Pink highlighted is in May 2024 by snowmobile
- Blue is 3rd trip Summer 2024
- Pink again 4th trip only towards the aayuraq Mid September 2024