



ROBERT SEMENIUK first went to the Canadian arctic in 1968 and has been back many times since. Here are 80 of his astonishing photos, taking over three decades living and travelling with some of the world's last remaining nomadic hunters.



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Foreword by Hugh Brody

Afterword by Wade Davis



## INTRODUCTION ᓄᓐᓂᓐᓂᓐ ᓄᓐᓂᓐᓂᓐ

### Robert Semeniuk

I cherish the summer of 1976 when I first camped with Paulosie Attagutalukutuk's family of nine in a canvas tent on Baffin Island. We ate raw seal liver on the sea ice and cracked open caribou legs to slurp out the marrow. I arrived a stranger, and left with new tastes and deep respect for my Inuit friends. It was a good day when other Inuit came to our camp and joked about me, the "qallunaaq", the white man, and Paulosie told them that the "qallunaaq" had travelled with them for a long time, that he hunted and ate raw meat and was like a member of the family.

**The lessons were endless.** Being lost, not knowing how to get back to Igloolik, whether at sea or on land, was a common condition, for me. For Paulosie, however, everything was familiar. He was home. He belonged to the land more than the land belonged to him.

All the photographs in this book, with a few exceptions, are about being on the land. This is what led me to Igloolik, — to document people who live on the edge of habitability. One of the most adaptable cultures on earth. I found a big difference between "settlement life" and "being on the land." I didn't much enjoy being in the settlement. It represented too much disharmony, disfunction, and dissatisfaction. People were different on the land. More heartfelt, my genuine, happier, many many things were different. Ami Panimera, an old friend once told me "we don't belong in houses". But the fact is all Inuit now live in houses. One old fellow I know is considered kind of 'crazy' in town, but when he is out on the land he is considered one of the best hunters around. He surprises even his relatives.

Caribou hunting involves driving around in boats, or snowmobiles, stopping often, looking for signs, walking up to high places to better scan the tundra for movement. One time, during the darkness of December, while hunting with Andy Attagutalukutuk, Paulosie's eldest son, we came upon the frozen entrails of three caribou. On closer inspection with my flashlight I could see how diligently the ravens had pecked away at the rock hard piles. Andy tells me that these caribou were shot two weeks ago. He names the hunters and tells me who their relatives are. Earlier we stopped where he said his father always found caribou. And before that was a place























Seal hunter Augustin Taqqaugaq and his son Lukie motor through the shifting autumn ice floes of Foxe Basin. At this time of year, seals sink quickly after they are shot, and many are lost before they can be hauled into the boat.  
Foxe Basin, September, 1979.



Herve Paniam, an avid and dedicated hunter.  
Igloolik, February 1977.



Deporah fillets and prepares big red slabs of arctic char, fresh from the nets in front of the camp. Often indistinguishable from the fish, her hands, like those of a sculptor, move with speed, precision and dedication. She reminds me that our needs are met by the earth.  
Oopingivajuk, August, 1997.



Seal hunters head their dogs towards the mist of the floe edge, where open water meets land-fast ice and the mixing currents of the Fury and Hecla straits keep the water open all winter long. People have lived in and around Igloolik for thousands of years because it is near this floe edge.  
Fury and Hecla straits, Foxe Basin, 1978.



Papa standing over a seal breathing hole, waiting. Inside her amunti, her parka, she carries a small baby.  
Foxe Basin, 1977.



Two Igloolik hunters have tea and wait by their qamuti (sled) at the floe edge. It is very cold, but calm, quiet and still here, unlike during the ride from Igloolik, when hanging on to the qamuti and contending with the biting wind chill was a relentless challenge. With every turn, I adjust my caribou parka hood and the angle of attack of the wind against my face. When I feel solid spots I hold my mitts against my cheeks, but then there is a gap between my mitts and parka, where searing wind bites a thin frozen ring around my wrist.

The qamuti creaks, rumbles and whispers differently with each moment of terrain. The two heavy timber runners and 12 wooden cross-pieces are all lashed together with bearded-seal skin, so the sled is flexible and pliant in all directions, changing shape and adjusting to every bump and contour. Over ice, the qamuti resonates like a hollow drum; passing over deep snow drifts, it whispers softly. Gravel produces a horrible rumble. When we pass over pressure ridges it becomes critical to keep both legs away from the edge of the sled, especially when bigger pieces of ice hit the runners. At times it is like riding a bucking bull on fast-moving conveyor belt.

Floe edge, Fury and Hecla straits, Foxe Basin, April, 1976.



We stop on pan ice to eat seal meat and collect fresh water for tea. The first time I ate raw seal liver I was very pleasantly surprised that it tasted so sweet and mild. It seemed like the perfect food to eat out there.  
Foxe Basin, 1976.



Paulosie, Andy, and Molokai hunting seals near Steensby Inlet, north Baffin Island. Hunting seals is mostly a matter of waiting, quietly, for long periods of time, until a seal sticks its head up out of the water or until people get tired of waiting, which is hardly ever. Paulosie had enduring patience. Time didn't have much meaning for him; he just did what had to be done, no matter how long it took. We once spent a week camped on the beach of a small unnamed island fixing and replacing the bushings around the propeller shaft of his old boat with walrus skin.  
Steensby Inlet, north Baffin Island, August, 1998.



Woman inside an igloo with a kudlik, seal-fat lamp, that needs constant attending. One time when I was sleeping in an igloo the kudlik got out of control and blackened the inside of the igloo. The next morning my nose was full of black carbon from burnt seal fat.  
North Baffin Island, 1976.



Winter hunters stopping for tea on the sea ice. Harsh arctic realities are nowhere more manifest than in winter on the land or sea ice. The distinction between "land life" and "settlement life" becomes very obvious when returning to Igloolik after sleeping in igloos or hunting cabins with only a qulliq (seal-oil lamp) for light and warmth. From a distance, Igloolik appears like a flickering jewel on the horizon, a grand spectacle, an intensely inviting womb of warm light which I am desperate to reach.  
North Baffin Island, 1976.



Harpooning a seal after it has been shot and before it can sink. How quickly a seal sinks depends on the season, how fat the animal is, and the currents, temperature and salinity of the water.  
Foxe Basin, 1976.