



Training guides for tomorrow's tourists

by Vicky Latour

In the Northwest Territories you cannot just go hang out your shingle and declare yourself a guide, at least, you can't if you hope to be recommended by the government and the tourism industry.

You have to earn that title, along with a special badge and certificate and a listing within the Department of Economic Development & Tourism as trained and graduated guide, Level I or II, Sport Fishing or Sport Hunting.

Guide Training Programs were introduced in NWT just about five years ago in response to the need perceived by both government and the industry to provide qualified, reliable persons who could work well with clients in either a passive, interpretive vacation scene or out in a camp fishing or hunting for trophy fish or game; in



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Firearm training

Considerable and thorough training in the handling of firearms as well as in target practise formed part of the course. Students learned to hit tin cans thrown in the air, as well as still targets.



Bison Harvest

The meat from the four bison the Guide Training group's tags allowed them, was cut at their camp. Once the animals were caped and skinned, the carcass was quartered and hung. Edward Landry, above, who has retail butcher's training, did much of the cutting. The meat was given to the people of Fort Providence.

short for specifically trained personnel.

Wes Werbowy of Wilderness Consultants, Thunder Bay, Ontario, produced for the government, in conjunction with Arctic College and CEIC (Canada Employment & Immigration Commission), a pilot program for training and conducted the first courses in 1984, one each in the Eastern and Western Arctic. Since then Werbowy has criss-crossed the NWT conducting programs of three to four-weeks length, in all seasons, for all fish and most game species, as well as the Level I course which deals with the basics of tourism operations and includes some first aid and training in feeding and caring for clients on-the-land (i.e., away from a lodge or central housing area). All guides must take this course before they can progress to the more advanced and detailed training in the the Level II

series.

Training others to instruct the various courses has been an aspect of the programs also and there are now several other qualified instructors delivering the courses.

Last November, a group of men (the programs are open to women as well and a number of women have graduated and are working as guides) in Fort Providence received the Level I course from instructor Clayton Bourke. Last month, Werbowy took this group through the paces of the Level II Big Game Guiding, Bison. Nine students graduated out of a beginning class of 12, having completed 10 days of classroom work and nine days on-the-land with a final two days back in the classroom.

The group had been in camp on the north shore of Calais Lake in the Mackenzie Bison Sanctuary a week when I joined them; they had

already taken three of the four bison for which they had been allowed tags. The plan was to take the last one while I was with them, providing a Wildlife Officer from Renewable Resources joined us.

The guides/hosts took excellent care of me, providing warming coffee when I arrived after a 12-mile snowmachine ride in, making sure my accommodation was ready and that I understood just how the airtight worked - their training was showing!

A quick tour of the camp area and I saw three kinds of emergency shelters prepared as well as a signal fire being built. Later, the men spoke of learning to incorporate some of the ideas they were being taught with their own already well-honed skills of land-living and survival.

"Every time there is something different from each people, always something to learn," Johnny Landry said. "It's like music, enriched - you

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try what the guys say, try it and learn."

One of the other students, Edward Landry, was putting to excellent use what he had learned in a butcher's shop in Yellowknife - retail cutting of the incredible amount of meat that comes from a healthy, heavy bull wood bison! The meat was all taken to Fort Providence where it is available, at no charge, to any member of the community who wishes to dine on some of the best meat you can possibly get - compared to beef, which has a protein quotient of 25 per 100 grams, bison has 33; fat content of beef is 23, of bison it is 3. (And bison steak for supper was delicious!)

Target practise was going on at a range some distance from the camp. Werbowy drills his students not only in the proper and careful handling of firearms, but in becoming consistently good shots. "There is only a window about the size of a shoebox for a killing shot on a bison," he explained. "The guide has to be ready and able to take that shot if the client is not able to pull it off him or herself. And it may be anywhere from 100 yards to many, many more if you can't get closer or the animal is wounded and is running."

Being a good shot is necessary no matter what animal you may be guiding for, and not just for the sake of obtaining a trophy animal for the client, but for the sake of the animal. "Killing must be clean and as humane as possible," Werbowy insists; for this reason, all the students needed to attain a minimum of shots within a six inch group at 100 yards, kneeling; some of the Fort Providence group went from 'infinity' down to three and three-quarter inches at 100



This is how ...

Learning was an exchange, not just one way. Several of the student guides demonstrated to the instructor different snare methods. Above, Lester Antoine, r, explains how this snare works.

yards.

Werbowy has just finished re-writing the GNWT Firearm Instructor's Manual and he gave parts of it a dry-run with the Fort Providence group. One of the reasons clean shots and kills are so important on a sport hunting expedition, especially if the client is not a Canadian resident, the only thing the hunter will be able to take away is a picture - and memories. Part of the Level II training includes learning how to dress the animal for head and full body mounts. Cuts are quite different to what may traditionally be done, which is often the most expedient way.

Photography plays a big part in a hunt and learning to pose the quarry once it is bagged is also part of a guides' lessons. No blood must show, the animal must be raised to a headup position, if there is mane or facial hair, it must be combed and in place.

"Dignity must be allowed the animal, even

in death," Werbowy says, and the students seem to understand this.

The student guides also learn to talk about their land and the animals and plants that inhabit it, to talk about their traditions and how they and their ancestors live with the land. "When you tell them why the Dene people don't hunt the wolf, because the wolf has power and if you give it respect, part of that power comes back to you, you are making memories for your client," the instructor explained.

This was demonstrated that evening in camp as the students talked about rat root and let us try a little and as they demonstrated a traditional type of snare. It was obvious the next day, too, when we went in search of that final bison, tracking through the forest and across stretches of the lake until finally four bulls were sighted.

The excitement of the hunt definitely took over, then, although until the animals were located the

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Doing it right

The group of bison is sighted and the hunters prepare to stable the animals, identify one beast and hopefully make a clean kill. Donning white garments (one is a garbage bag) will give the hunters a small edge in the stalking game. Albert Samble, l, takes the glasses, Louis Lacorne, r, will take the shot; Werbowy, centre, will serve as back-up.



A venerable monarch

After a chase of at least 2 miles through brush and deep snow, this venerable bull was finally taken by Werbowy on a 400 yd. shot. The animal had been wounded with Lacorne's earlier shot. Estimated at 24 years old, the bison measured 10 ft. from nose to

tail. The Guide Training Class, above, l to r: Charlie Lafferty; Edward Landry; John Landry; Ronald Squirrel; Louis Lacorne; Walter Landry; Albert Samble; Wes Werbowy; kneeling, l to r: Lester Antoine; Dennis Bonnetrouge.

Bison hunting could be a problem

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men had been relaxed as they scouted the various sign. Those who were to hunt got into white camouflage and circled around to stalk as close as possible, while the rest of us watched through the hastily set-up spotting scope. The first shot wounded a huge bull and it took an hour and a half's tracking before Werbowy made the final shot through the heart at 400 yards. The massive and magnificent beast measured approximately 10 feet from nose to tail, about nine feet around the enormous hump; he was estimated at 24 years

old, and although in very good condition, Wildlife Officer Jim McPherson said the old bull would likely not have lasted many more years.

Werbowy and the student guides took blood samples, pulled two teeth and made numerous measurements for Cormack Gates of Renewable Resources, Fort Smith. "Gates has studied these wood bison

for years with great dedication," Werbowy said. "He's probably the foremost authority on wood bison at present. He estimates that the herd here may face real problems from wolves and black bear in the next few years, as these are their only enemies other than man. The wolf and bear are not hunted and their numbers are growing as the bison herd increases.

If hunting is allowed on any commercial scale, there could be a problem."

The guide graduates of Fort Providence hope they will be able to establish commercial operations, whether for hunting or for observation, 'buffalo creeps', and put to use their training and expertise in the next year or two.