

# MEMORANDUM

# State of Alaska

TO: John Vanja  
One Division  
Anchorage

DATE: January 15, 1976

FILE NO:

TELEPHONE NO:

FROM:

Jim Faro  
Game Division  
King Salmon

SUBJECT: Round Island Report, 1975

Between August 16 and September 25, 1975, Walt Cunningham was stationed on Round Island with a primary objective of preventing the illegal harvest of walrus in the sanctuary. In addition, we hoped to gain basic information on the numbers of animals using the island and to record fluctuations in numbers. Also of importance was to gain the basic information to safely station personnel there in the future. All objectives were accomplished. Cost of the program was \$5,087.15. The excess funds over those allotted were primarily the result of per diem cost not originally figured in the budget.

While on the island, two parties of photographers visited and he accompanied them to insure minimal disturbance to the walrus. With the help of Frank Bldgett, Department of Public Safety, Dillingham, all local villages were notified we had a man on the island to discourage illegal hunting. Two commercial fishing boats approached the island with the apparent intentions of shooting walrus. Walt was able to disrupt this activity and they promptly departed the area. No walrus were killed on the island during this time period.

On three occasions, mainland beaches were checked to determine the number of walrus carcasses. The result of those surveys are as follows:

Area	Number of carcasses		
	Sept. 3	Oct. 8	Oct. 15
Cape Constantine to Nichols Spit to Tyativak	27	--	20
Tyativak Bay to Hagemester Isl.	--	24	--

About half of the carcasses observed were very old carcasses from previous years.

Although data for other years are lacking, there appeared to be visibly fewer carcasses than other years. This probably reflects that Walt's presence on the island discouraged illegal hunting during the period immediately following commercial fishing and before fall storms encourage storage of boats and equipment. Of interest was the fact that the Bering Sea beaches of the Alaska Peninsula had more beach dead carcasses than in recent years (which may account in part for the reduction of carcasses in the Cape Constantine and Tofak Bay area).

Walt's memo (attached) gives his estimates of walrus numbers on the island. Peak estimates occurred on September 1 (6,150 to 7,150 animals) and Sept. 12 (8,250 animals). A series of aerial photographs taken on September 3 counted

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State of Alaska

5,943 walrus and an estimated 300 animals were not photographed when the film ran out. The walrus appeared to leave the island for feeding forays and numbers would decline to less than a thousand individuals followed by a build-up of animals.

These figures are of interest because previous estimates for Round Island were a maximum of 3,000 walrus. When I accompanied Walt to the island on August 16, I would estimate that close to 8-10,000 animals were present. It appears either past estimates were conservative or the summer of 1975 saw atypically high walrus use. One cannot help but wonder what impact this density of use at Round Island has on the Pacific walrus population.

If the Department again stations a man on Round Island, it will require better preparations than in 1975. Serious problems did not develop last summer only because of Walt Cunningham's ability to cope with adverse conditions. (One man camping out on the beach near Togiak during this time period did die when one of the storms destroyed his camp.)

A permanent structure should be erected on Round Island for Department use. Preferable would be a "Barabara" type construction dug at least half way into the ground. A 10' x 12' "Barabara" (with the excavation dirt peaked around it to form a windbreak) would accomplish the purpose. There appears to be adequate soil depth in the immediate area of this year's camp to construct a usable structure. The "Barabara" should be constructed of 2" x 4" walls covered with heavy weight aluminum and a 2" x 6" roof also covered by aluminum. The aluminum should be held in place with screws rather than nails. A wooden floor, door, shuttered window, bunk, and work table should complete it. Drain tiles should be placed under the foundation of the cabin to prevent flooding (with a downhill drain to remove excess water). Because of monetary and logistic limitations, it would probably be best not to plan to heat the cabin (although an oil stove could probably be added when larger budgets would permit fuel transportation), as there are not woods available for fuel. (Interim heating could be provided by Coleman stove or lantern.) Preferable transportation for materials to the island would be by helicopter - perhaps something could be worked out with the Air Force or Coast Guard. Boats could be used, but weather would be extremely critical and hauling the material from the beach could be dangerous. The cabin should be pre-constructed in King Salmon to minimize the weight of materials necessary to transport to the island. More complete plans could be formulated for cabin construction if desired.

It would be desirable to station a man on Round Island again next summer (minimal recommended time period August through September). This would reinforce with the local villagers the State's intention to prevent walrus hunting in the sanctuary. Hopefully, funds for this project would come from the Marine Mammals Commission or O.C.S., but even if it requires standard Department funding, I'd recommend the program be given serious consideration.

cc: John Burns  
Ken Pitcher

# MEMORANDUM

## State of Alaska

TO:

Jim Faro  
Area Game Biologist  
King Salmon

DATE : October 7, 1975

FROM:

SUBJECT: Round Island Walrus

Walt Cunningham  
Game Technician  
King Salmon

Following are some notes and suggestions for future walrus island operations. Attached is an enumeration of walrus observed from August 29 to September 25, 1975 on Round Island. A map showing beach designations follows to explain count location. Following that is a table of walrus numbers, wind velocity and tides all plotted against the date.

Probably the biggest decision for another Round Island operation is to determine how important it is to man the island. If the decision is to again man the island, then where and how to house ones self is the primary concern. I am confident that one could again live on the island in tents, but it is a situation of throwing good money after bad. No matter how well set up, the wind slowly stresses tents past their point of integral strength and they come apart.

Southeast of this year's camp area, is a dry knob that has a fox den on it (see map). Directly east of this den is a small dip with a flat bottom. It is grass covered and dry. I dug a test hole through the grass and moss on top into old vegetation below. Six to eight inches into the soil is a sand layer. The flat area is about 20' x 40'. Directly east, toward the beach, is a spring that could be developed better than this year's water.

Advantages: Better wind protection, closer to water, dryer ground under foot, better location for antenna poles, better protection for photographer's tents.

Disadvantages: Further to boat cove, one cannot see toward Togiak without going to top of knob by fox den (50 yards), more exposure to southeast weather, although not as bad as this year's camp to northwest wind. This area is better middle ground between the southeast and northwest wind, where this year's camp was protected from the southeast, but directly in the northwest wind.

On the northwest, the knob is steep enough to be the footing for a sod wall to give further wind protection. The building proper could be done 2 ways. Either a sod barabara could be built and materials taken in for a roof, door and windows; or a fold down building, pre-constructed and flown to the island. If this latter option is used, I feel a sod wind break is still necessary. The grass is Calmagrostis canadensis and excellent for sod. It would not require a huge cabin as tents could still be used in the lee of the building for general storage.

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Jim Faro  
Area Game Biologist  
King Salmon

DATE: October 7, 1975

FILE NO:

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FROM:

Walt Cunningham  
Game Technician  
King Salmon

SUBJECT: Raptor - Round Island

Following are raptor and owl sightings on Round Island from August 15 - September 20, 1975.

- August 15 - 1 short eared owl
- August 22 - 1 pair nesting bald eagles
- September 13 - 1 pair marsh hawks (west side island)
- September 17 - 1 pair marsh hawks (east side island)
- September 19 - 1 pair marsh hawks (east side island)
- September 20 - 1 pair marsh hawks (east side island)

After September 13th, I never again saw the marsh hawks on the west side which would lead me to think all sightings were of one pair. Tremendous rodent populations make the summer feeding easy.

The short eared owl was seen once more late in September, but did not get into my notes.

WALRUS OBSERVATIONS

From Walt  
Cunningham  
R.I. Fish  
1975

August 29

200 walrus - total on left hand and right hand points.  
Appeared to be more moving to the east side of the island.

August 30-31

400-500 walrus in boat cove.  
250-300 walrus in 2 coves south of camp.  
None on or beyond southeast cape.

September 1

2,150 walrus southeast cape to right hand point.  
1,100 walrus right hand point to north beach.  
3,000-4,000 walrus north beach (very conservative estimate, actually  
I believe 4,500-6,000 more accurate).

The counts of 2,150 and 1,100 were done slowly, attempting actual counts.  
No swimming walrus were included, hence estimate 200 walrus more there.

September 2 (The day 2 boats came from Kulukak)

Estimate numbers on north beach similar to September 1. Boats and my  
shooting moved approximately 50% of walrus off north beach. By late  
afternoon 80%-90% had returned. Some were seen crossing the bar to the  
west though.

September 3

1,100 walrus from left hand point to southeast cape. Many in water.

September 5

Walrus apparently gone - bad storm.

September 6

No walrus from southeast cape counter-clockwise to spit

September 7

10-12 walrus swimming around north beach. Nothing else southeast cape  
to spit.

September 8

200+ walrus on spit.  
350-400 walrus on southeast cape.  
This is total walrus on the island at this time. Only swimming walrus  
were in the area of the spit. By evening increasing numbers were in  
the water.

September 9

A few (6-15) walrus seen swimming in both directions. None on shore.

September 10

15-20 walrus on left hand point and that many in water attempting to  
haul out. 10:30 A.M.  
50-60 walrus left hand point attempting to haul out 12:30 P.M.  
100-150 walrus left hand point to spit all looking to haul out 4:30 P.M.  
500-600 walrus on north beach.  
no walrus in boat cove and only 150-200 walrus north beach at 7:15 P.M.  
because of high tides. Remainder swimming; estimate 200-300 walrus in

water between spit and southeast cape.

Walrus observed swimming both directions around southeast cape. From this I would guess the storm and high tides have forced most of the walrus off the beaches.

No walrus on left hand point yet. 9:15 P.M.

September 11

50 walrus left hand point. 7:10 A.M.

375-400 walrus left hand point, 27 right hand point. 11:30 A.M.

1,200-1,500 walrus north beach.

Some animals on west side, but no numbers obtained.

350 in boat cove. 8:15 P.M.

September 12

Boat cove	450	450
To southeast cape		350
Point south of southeast cape.		50
Below west cape		100
West cape to spit		3,200
North beach by spit (2000-2500)	2,000	
North beach east end		1,200
North beach to left hand point		900
		<u>8,250</u>

Both north beach groups could easily have been more. Conservative estimates.

Only walrus in water were 20-30 south of lion point.

September 13

Generally like 9/12/75 groups - no counts made. Many walrus in water out as far as 2 miles - floating.

Later: 700-800 walrus in boat cove.

September 14

530 southeast cape to right hand point

35 right hand point

740 boat cove

286 left hand point to north beach (east end)

1,591 southeast cape to north beach (east end)

September 16

Walrus appear to be leaving.

200-250 walrus in boat cove (evening)

September 17

15 walrus southeast cape to left hand point

200-250 walrus north beach.

September 18

1 walrus swimming

No walrus from southeast cape to spit.

September 19

2 walrus swimming off boat cove - none on land.

September 20

50-70 walrus on heel of spit.  
A few more around on northwest beach.  
8 walrus swimming off boat cove.  
100-150 walrus on spit. 6:00 P.M.  
10-12 off left hand point swimming both directions

September 21

800-1,000 walrus on spit.  
50-60 walrus on left hand point.

To King Salmon - return September 25.

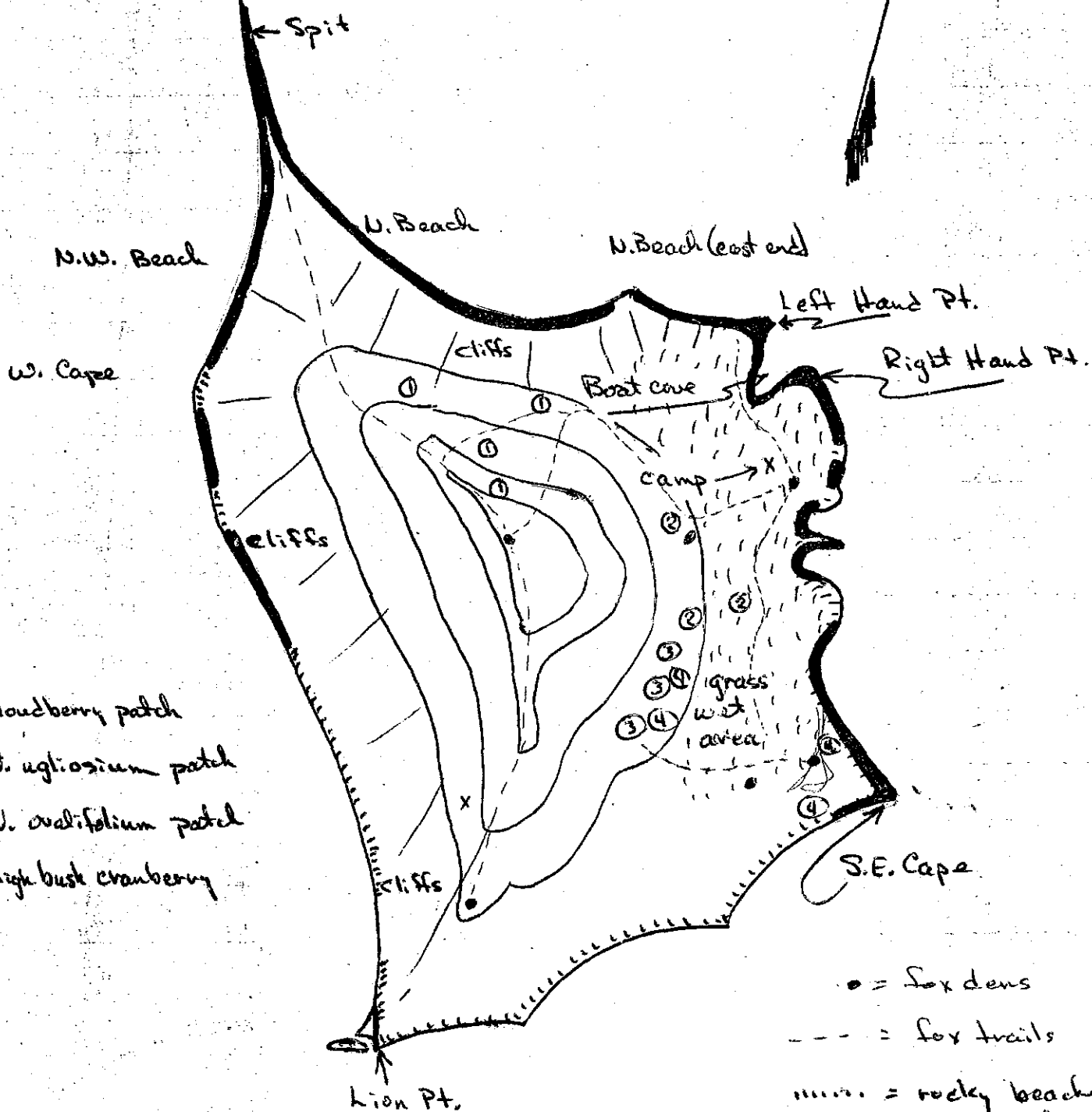
September 25

2,000-2,500 walrus on north beach  
500-600 walrus boat cove  
estimate several 1,000 on northwest beach.



# Round Island

W. Cunningham 8-15/9-21, 1975



- ① = cloudberry patch
- ② = *V. ugluosium* patch
- ③ = *V. ovalifolium* patch
- ④ = high bush cranberry

- o = fox dens
- - - = fox trails
- ..... = rocky beaches; res are gravel
- = beaches walrus use
- x = bald eagle nest



In 1975 Daily Log folder

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I think we should also retain a tooth from any skulls found on the beach -  
over the years this may prove interesting.

I will be happy to receive your comments and suggestions.

Sincerely,

*Jim Estes*  
*fw*

Jim Estes

JAE/ne