

Calendar for the folks from my hometown of Fort Smith, NWT  
Compiled by Richard Van Camp

“So many caribou, they were like carpet on the lake...”

Tulsan Bay in the early 50’s

-Archie Smith

May – June

Ice Breaking Up Time

- Trapping muskrats for food and fur
- **In the middle of May, there is a Salt River run of suckers. “Dry fish was made at this time”— Richard and Barb Mercredi**
- **Hunt for muskrats and beaver: Spring hunt.** Mike Beaver
- You can pick plants for medicine like spruce gum and rat root.
- Collect birch bark for baskets, canoes
- Bird hunting (grouse, ptarmigan). Some of us do it all year round!
- NHL Playoffs!
- **The little orange Buffalo calves are born in April or May. Mike Beaver**
- Wolves are raising their pups in their dens
- Caribou cows lose their antlers after the calves are born
- **Ducks and geese and prairie chickens lay eggs in May. (Archie Smith.)**
- **“People don’t hunt beaver after Treaty (time).”—Archie Smith**
- **“March to May is the best time to trap beaver, muskrats.” – Archie Smith**
- **“People return from the land before Treaty (time).” –Archie Smith.**
- **Duck, goose, spring hunt: (cranes): Richard and Barb Mercredi**
- **Pickrel fishing May 15<sup>th</sup>, 30<sup>th</sup>: Richard and Barb Mercredi**
- **Cut fire wood: Richard and Barb Mercredi**
- **Make fish net from Gill net twine: Richard and Barb Mercredi**
- **“Tapping birch trees for birch water sap”—Dot Desjarlais.**
- **“April to June hunting. May 10 abouts.”—Maggie Sikyea and Fred Beaulieu**
- **“Cut and peel logs in June. The trees would be thawed out so it would be easy to peel.” Mike Beaver**
- **“The trappers that use rat root would bring it home. Wild peppermint tea. Musket.” Mike Beaver.**

June – August

When the Water and Sun are Warm

- Waterways open during June.
- Beaver hunters return to their families and after the Treaty payments honouring the Treaty 8 and Treaty 11 payment of 1899 and 1921 respectively. Everybody has a good time.

- National Aboriginal Day on June 21<sup>st</sup>, eh. Take a break and give'er!
- Tan hides
- Make hide teepees
- Forest Fire season.
- Strawberries are good in July. **"Got to pick them when they're ripe because they dry up."** Mike Beaver.
- You can try mooching fresh strawberry jam from your granny's house!
- **Some people hunt in the summer. People still hunt buffalo because they get the 2-3 year old bulls.** Mike Beaver.
- **The men would set nets for fish: pickerel, white fish and Connie or Jacks.** Mike Beaver
- **Hunt moose in rivers because that's when there's a lot of flies so the moose go in the water.** Mike Beaver.
- In late June and early August, women prepare dry fish while the men go hunting
- Gather plants, roots, berries, spruce gum, tamarack bark
- Canoe building
- Some people start making dry meat.
- High bush cranberries and Saskatoon berries are ready at the end of July. Don't wait too long or they will dry up.
- This is the best weather for fishing in the Slave River. The best time for fishing in the lakes is when the ice goes out in the spring and in the fall before freeze up. The lakes turn over (that means they circulate from top to bottom) and the big trout come up into shallower water from down in the deeps.
- When the wolf pups get too frisky for their dens, they get moved to rendezvous sites and then start moving around with the adults.
- **"By the middle of the summer, the buffalo calves start turning from orange to brown. By the end of August, only the late calves are still orange."** Mike Beaver.
- By the middle of August the buffalo rut is on. They move around and get into larger groups. They are most likely to hang around near the highways and get into trouble with the traffic.
- **"Strawberries in July."**—Maggie Sikyea and Fred Beaulieu
- **"Did you know that when a buffalo is killed in the summer, the rest of them would gather around it and push or smell it for quite a while. We have to chase them away to skin the downed buffalo. Must be their way of saying goodbye."** Mike Beaver.

### August–September

When it Gets Darker

- Pick your berries. Cranberries are great in September.
- Make dry meat for sure as there's no flies.
- Northern lights come back to us for the winter
- The cool weather is perfect to make dry fish
- **Geese hunting in September or ducks.** Mike Beaver.
- Low bush cranberries are ready in September
- **People hunt bears to make grease before they go in the hole in late October when they're just fat!** Mike Beaver

- Wolf pups that are too small get left behind by their packs. The big strong pups run with the adults and start learning how to hunt. **“They learn to hunt when they’re big enough by their mothers.” Mike Beaver.**
- Buffalo calves have to be able to keep up with their mothers. The cow and calf groups break into smaller herds and start moving to winter ranges. Red calves are rare; most have turned dark brown like the adults. **“The mothers look after the calves ‘til they can fend for themselves.” Mike Beaver.**
- Caribou and Moose antlers are in velvet.
- **“Blueberries, end of September. Cranberries, too. Gooseberries in August, right after strawberries in July. Saskatoons in August.”—Maggie Sikyea and Fred Beaulieu**
- **“Sandhill cranes go back south in the early part of August as soon as the little ones start flying.” —Fred Beaulieu**

### September - October

When the Wind Gets Cold/When the Moose Meets its Mate

- **“That’s when the velvet falls off and the rutting starts.” Mike Beaver.**
- Richard Van Camp’s birthday on September 8<sup>th</sup>. Virgo, hey.
- The NHL starts around the first of October!
- Make snowshoes, toboggans, toboggan bags and dog harnesses
- Duck and geese hunting in September before they fly south.
- Blueberries are good from September to freeze up when they get frost. Then they fall off.
- The small, weak wolf pups die
- Buffalo hides get thick and then they grow their full winter coat.
- Caribou start moving back into the trees.
- **“The first bird that comes in the Spring is the bald eagle. The first part of April. Sandhill cranes return the first of May and seagulls, too.” —Fred Beaulieu**

### October-February

Freeze Up

- Get your wood for the long winter.
- Trapping (squirrel, weasel, mink, fox, wolf, lynx, wolverine, beaver, marten, otter)
- The wolves are busy trying to catch calves or corner older buffalo that get left behind by their herds. Sometimes they will even go after prime bulls. It might take days or weeks to wound and finally kill their prey.
- The buffalo are busy pushing snow out of the way with their huge faces so they can feed on the green sedges that are frozen under the snow in the wet meadows. When the wolves get too bothersome they might move long distances to get away.
- Caribou rut in late November and the bulls lose their antlers around Christmas time.
- **“Put up hung fish for dogs’ feed as well as eating. Dry meat made in winter for summer as well as marrow grease, dry lace fat and fat (smoked).” – Richard and Barb Mercredi**

## November – February

### When the Days are Short

- In the third week of December, the moose start losing their antlers
- Ptarmigan and wild chicken hunting
- Travel by dogs
- Make trail by snowshoe
- Trapping
- You can snare rabbits
- You use up your woodpile and the kids play video games by the woodstove. (Um, my dad sent this one in...)
- The smoke rises straight up from the chimneys. **“That’s when you know it’s cold: if the smoke is straight up and there is no wind.” Mike Beaver.**
- **“Start your beadwork and sewing for Christmas. Late January and February, days are getting longer after the cold winter months.”-Dot Desjarlais.**

## March – April

### When the Days are Long

- Caribou camp. Hunt those barren land caribou
- Ptarmigan hunting
- Ice fishing (with hooks)
- **Trapping muskrat from March to the end of May before the season closes. Mike Beaver.**
- In the olden days, men would go to the fort in April and May to sell fur. As the ice melted, they left for spring beaver and a muskrat hunt. The hunter went from their toboggans to their canoes.
- End of March, baby wolverines are born.
- In April, the caribou start migrating to their calving grounds
- The pregnant caribou cows start to show. They only have a month or so to get to the calving grounds and have their new calves.
- **“In April, getting the first duck. When they’re back from the south. Hang your laundry out to dry. No dryer sheet can beat the smell of Spring!” –Dot Desjarlais.**
- **“Frolics in March!”—Maggie Sikyea and Fred Beaulieu**
- **“January-March: the moose eat rosebud bushes in the poplar. That’s when we hunt moose. The moose do that now. Different eating habits in the season.” Mike Beaver**

Please keep in mind that George Jones is always in season!