
Project Caribou

An Educator's Guide to Wild Caribou of North America

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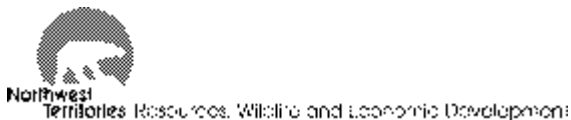
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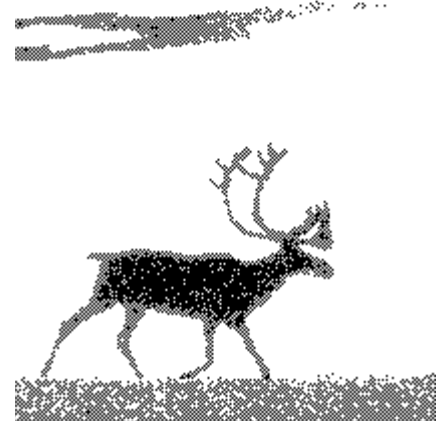
For more info: www.projectcaribou.org

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Beverly and Qamanirjuaq Caribou Management Board



Age

Grades 4 – 8

Subjects

Science, Visual Art, Social Studies

Skills

Discussion, description, analysis, drawing, evaluation, research

Duration

Two 45-minute class periods

Setting

Classroom

Materials

- Books and other resources on Beringia
- Two very large sheets of paper or poster board suitable for creating a large diorama
- Paper and drawing supplies
- Double-sided tape or other removable fastening material

Caribou and mammoth together?

Objectives

Students should be able to:

1. Recognize that caribou are an ancient deer that have been in existence for millions of years.
2. Describe how a good portion of northern Canada and Alaska, known as Beringia, was never glaciated.
3. Identify some of the animals that lived during the time of Beringia.

Method

Students will learn about Beringia and the animals, including caribou, that lived at the time. They will use their knowledge to create a diorama of animals at the time of Beringia and today.

Background

During the last ice age, when most of North America was covered by thick sheets of ice, parts of what is now the Yukon and Alaska remained ice-free. This refuge, or *refugium*, was called Beringia. The animals and plants that lived there escaped the glacial onslaught. Caribou were present at the time of Beringia and ranged the same areas as the woolly mammoth, steppe bison, camel and giant beaver. Many of these exotic animals did not outlast the cold climate, but some of the Beringian animals that did survive include caribou, moose, muskox and grizzly bears.

The caribou is an ancient relative of the deer that may have originated in northeastern Asia or northwestern North America. The earliest fossils of caribou date back 1.5 million years and were found at Fort Selkirk, Yukon. Caribou were living in North America during the last few ice ages (Wisconsin and Illinoian). They have evolved over a million years of glacial influenced climates. Because of this, caribou have developed adaptations that allow them to thrive in landscapes covered in snow and in cold climates.

Procedure

1. Share information about Beringia with the students.
2. Have students do independent research on Beringia, studying the climate, environment and the variety of animals that lived during that time.
3. Divide the students into two groups. Ask one group to create a mural of a Beringian landscape as it may have looked in the past, using a large piece of paper or poster board. Ask the students not to add any animals to the dioramas. Tape the paper to a wall so that all the students can work at once on different parts of the diagram.

4. On a second piece of paper, have the second group of students create a mural of the environment of an area of the northern Yukon as it looks today. Again, ask the students not to add any animals to the dioramas.
5. When the landscape posters are complete, ask the students to draw some pictures of Beringian animals on cardboard or sturdy paper. Some examples are mammoth, giant beaver, hyena, large camel, giant moose, giant pica, short-faced skunk, giant beaver and ground sloth. Other, more familiar examples are caribou, muskox and grizzly bear. Have the students cut out the pictures they have drawn
6. Attach double-sided tape or other fastener material to the back of the animal cutouts.
7. Place the cutouts on the Beringia mural. Experiment with which animals can also be placed on the present-day mural. As you move the animals back and forth, have students think about the following questions: Which animals from Beringia, besides caribou, are still found in the Yukon and Alaska today? Which animals have relatives that survive today? Are they all in Canada? Animals such as the camel are no longer found here. Why not? How have animals adapted to the changing temperatures? Which Beringian animals are now extinct?

Variations

Have each student do an individual research project on a Beringian animal.

Extensions

Take the class on a field trip to the Yukon Beringia Centre, if in the Yukon, or to another museum of prehistory.

Evaluation

1. Ask students to name two kinds of animals that lived in the time of Beringia and are now extinct.
2. Ask students to name two kinds of animals that lived in the time of Beringia and still exist today.
3. Ask students to explain what a refugium is.

