HISTORY OF THE REINDEER AND NEJANILINI LAKE DISTRICT TO 1820

David Norman William Hill
B.A., University of Manitoba, 1987

49

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HISTORY OF THE REINDEER AND NEJANILINI LAKE
DISTRICT TO 1820

BY

DAVID NORMAN WILLIAM HILL

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of the University of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

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ABSTRACT

The early history of what is now Manitoba's high north has in general received much less attention than districts centered on the Nelson-Hayes river system, the interior plains and the Mackenzie River basin. This neglect has given rise to the misconception of the northern taiga lands as empty and desolate. It has also led to a certain disregard of the historical continuity of the eastern bands of Chipewyan who were the primary inhabitants of this area. To address these issues this study first explores the district's land resources and their use by aboriginal people with special attention to the richness of caribou resources and the northern subsistence fisheries. The utilization and stability of the resource base had important implications in the trade relationship with early Europeans and was an important factor in maintaining aboriginal identity. In order to better understand the earlier Chipewyan, the study discusses ancient Dene movement, Dene relations with the Cree at the Churchill River and Chipewyan interactions with fur traders in the 1790-1820 period. The final section deals with the European view of the Reindeer Lake District and the strategies of early commercial development which linked the zone, in a larger way, to the external European-based economy. The thesis attempts to show that the eastern Chipewyan were not easily overwhelmed by European commercial activities nor as highly dependent or acculturated as so much fur trade literature has suggested.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to express appreciation to my thesis advisor Dr. Gerald Friesen. From the period I first began researching this thesis, Dr. Friesen has helped my progress through his unwavering enthusiasm, kind patience and scholarly guidance.

I also wish to thank the members of the committee who examined this thesis for their time and thoughtful input. I am particularly grateful to Dr. Harry Duckworth for his reflections and the documents he kindly supplied regarding the Nor'Westers and the English River district.

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Finally, I thank my parents for their support and encouragement and I would like to thank my wife Pamela who spent many hours helping me in every aspect of this research.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis focuses on the eastern range of the Dene or Chipewyan and the development of the fur trade within the Hudson Bay Drainage system between Reindeer Lake and Churchill, Manitoba. Three approaches and subjects are under consideration: the environment and its resources for human use; Dene history and Dene-Cree relations in this territory before 1820; and the development of European inland trading posts in the competitive trade era to 1820. This sequence follows a chronological framework developed by Charles Bishop and A. J. Ray for the Canadian subarctic.

This framework is tied to a spatial model of the expanding fur trade which includes the development of zones of indirect, middleman and local exchange. Ray argues that involvement in commercial trapping altered the cooperative orientation of traditional aboriginal society, encouraged Indian occupation of marginal ecozones and disrupted the seasonal cycles of food gathering. J. C. Yerbury developed this line of thought by introducing the 'culture gradient' theory which suggests that the eastern groups of Athapaskans exhibited cultural simplicity in comparison to western bands. This social differentiation between east and west, the author contends, was the result of the eastern groups' longer and more sustained contact with Europeans at Hudson Bay.

According to Yerbury, contact with a European commercial system overturned aboriginal ecological strategies and transformed Dene culture. This process is presented within a general atmosphere of poverty, disease and early death. In particular, Yerbury contends that the eastern Dene were drawn as fur trappers into the region between Reindeer Lake and Churchill and became dependent on trading posts for survival. "The environmental poverty of this zone" the author remarked, "led to deprivation and starvation which was intensified by disease for those who were displaced into it."[1] Ray believed the establishment of trading posts in 'marginal ecozones' such as Reindeer Lake, seriously disrupted traditional subsistence pursuits of the Chipewyan which led to an increased dependency on imported food.[2]

Added to these problems was resource depletion in the Canadian subarctic as discussed by Charles Bishop. The introduction of European technology -- most notably the gun -- is associated with an unbridled slaughter of game in the competitive trade period (1763-1821) and a general reduction of both animal resources and Indian autonomy.[3]

---

[1] J. C. Yerbury, The Subarctic Indians and the Fur Trade 1680-1860, (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1986), 129.

[2] Arthur J. Ray, "Periodic Shortages, Native Welfare, and the Hudson's Bay Company 1670-1930." In Krech, ed., The Subarctic Fur Trade: Native Social and Economic Adaptations, (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1984), 7-10.

[3] Charles Bishop, The Northern Ojibwa And The Fur Trade: An Historical And Ecological Study, (Toronto: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1974), 283. See also "The First Century: Adaptive Changes among the Western James Bay Cree between the Early

Recently, the view that the land immediately west of Hudson Bay was not a traditional area of occupation and that Indian groups rapidly became dependent on the trading posts has undergone some reconsideration. Victor Lytwyn in his study of the Lowland Cree asserts that a variety of resources in the area supported a distinctive culture long before European arrival.[4] A critical factor, in addition to fish and waterfowl resources, was the exploitation of the Kaminuriak herd of migratory barren-ground caribou which represented an exceedingly rich resource to the Lowland Cree and supported, to about 1830, a booming industry in caribou products around York Factory. This is an important insight.

Like Lytwyn's reassessment of the Hudson Bay Lowlands, this thesis attempts to shed light on the possibility that the resources north of the Churchill River supported a traditional society long before the arrival of Europeans. Furthermore, this research will show that the Chipewyan people did not abandon their traditional hunting and gathering strategies but, rather, maintained their distinct identity throughout the early fur trade period.

The following pages attempt to clarify the picture of Manitoba's transitional forest lands which some have regarded as empty or quite literally 'barren' and to explore the

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Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries," in Krech, The Subarctic Fur Trade, 49.

[4] Victor Lytwyn, "The Hudson Bay Lowland Cree in the Fur Trade to 1821: A Study in Historical Geography", Ph.d. thesis, University of Manitoba, 1993.

diversity and abundance of local land and water resources. There are social, economic and cultural ramifications of this resource issue; local produce served as a buffer against outside economic dependence, both in the modern and historic eras, and the processes involved in obtaining and utilizing land and water resources were important in strengthening and maintaining the identity of aboriginal culture.

Resource depletion, when applied to the lands immediately west of Hudson Bay, also deserves closer attention because the theory may overlook the significance of the northern subsistence fisheries as well as modern findings regarding the size of the migratory barren-ground caribou population throughout the early historic period. The issue is important because previous scholars have often tied "resource depletion" to the rapid development of "trading post dependency" and, thus, to assertions about the destruction of traditional aboriginal resource strategies.

Researchers such as June Helm, James VanStone and J. G. E. Smith believe that the strong relationship between the Chipewyan and the caribou, which supplied them with most of their needs, led to a weak engagement in the fur trade. In contrast to Ray and Yerbury, the research by Smith, Helm and VanStone holds that the Caribou Eater Chipewyan remained socially and economically isolated from European commercial pressures and that drastic culture change did not occur until the first part of the twentieth century. Smith offers an anthropological perspective with a strong focus on social organization, kinship patterns and larger regional affiliations as they relate to the exploitation of the migratory herds. The overwhelming significance of the caribou in most anthropological studies of the Chipewyan, however, has tended to overshadow both the use of other resources and their involvement in the fur trade.

To link an ethnographic or anthropological perspective with an historical view, this thesis first examines the relations between the inhabitants of the Reindeer Lake-Nejanilini Lake districts and the natural resources available in these ecological zones. It then turns to Dene history, Dene-Cree relations and to the era of the "indirect trade" between Europeans and the Aboriginal people to assess the changes that occurred after the arrival of Europeans. Finally, it offers a brief discussion of the "European history" of the region. The area was one of great activity and the names of David Thompson and William McGillivray are included in the development of inland trade in the zone. This development represents the foundation of European history at Reindeer Lake, which by the 1930s was regarded as the 'true gateway to the Canadian North.' These early trading posts at Reindeer Lake and on the lower Churchill River became important destinations and a part of the lives of the people whose pathways led north to the hunting and fishing lakes of Nueltin and Nejanilini Lakes and east to Fort Churchill.

The ancestors of the people who eventually formed the Tadoule Lake and Brochet bands have in general received much less attention than the Dene who lived and traded within the Mackenzie drainage system. Yerbury, Abel, Sharp and VanStone have sustained this western focus which concentrates on the Peace River, Slave Lake, Lake Athabasca and regions of northern Saskatchewan and the headwaters of the Churchill River. Birket-Smith spent a brief period in Churchill in 1930 and provided some insight into the activities of the Chipewyan as far inland as Nejanilini and Reindeer Lakes. Research regarding the eastern Dene increased during the later 1960's, as represented by the efforts of Rivindra Lal and William Koolage, but these investigations were associated primarily with the 1957 relocation of the Duck Lake Band and the social problems they encountered at Churchill. This thesis attempts to reassess the early history of what is now Manitoba's far north and to provide a land-centred and Dene-centred focus that corrects the European bias of so much of the fur trade literature on this zone.

CHAPTER 1

The People and the Environment

Overview

The area of boreal and transition forest west of Hudson Bay and east of the Mackenzie drainage system, centered on Reindeer and Nejanilini Lakes, is the focus of this study (fig. 1). The innumerable lakes and rivers of this part of the northern Pre-Cambrian Shield empty east through the Hudson Bay drainage system. The major estuaries of this water system are the Seal and Churchill Rivers. Reindeer Lake is the largest body of water in the zone, approximately 150 miles long and oriented on a north-south axis. The lake occupies two ecozones: the continuous boreal forest in the south and transition forest (taiga) towards the north (fig. 2). Nueltin and Nejanilini Lakes lie within the taiga or 'edge of the barrens.' The taiga, or 'land of the little sticks,' defines the areas between the full boreal forest and the open tundra and is characterized by patchy growths of small black and white spruce. Aspen, birch, poplar, tamarack and willow can be found in the taiga, particularly in low lying sheltered areas. These species become more predominant towards the northern coniferous forest zone. A distinct treeline is not readily apparent. Rather, patches of spruce become progressively more discontinuous and sparse as the true tundra

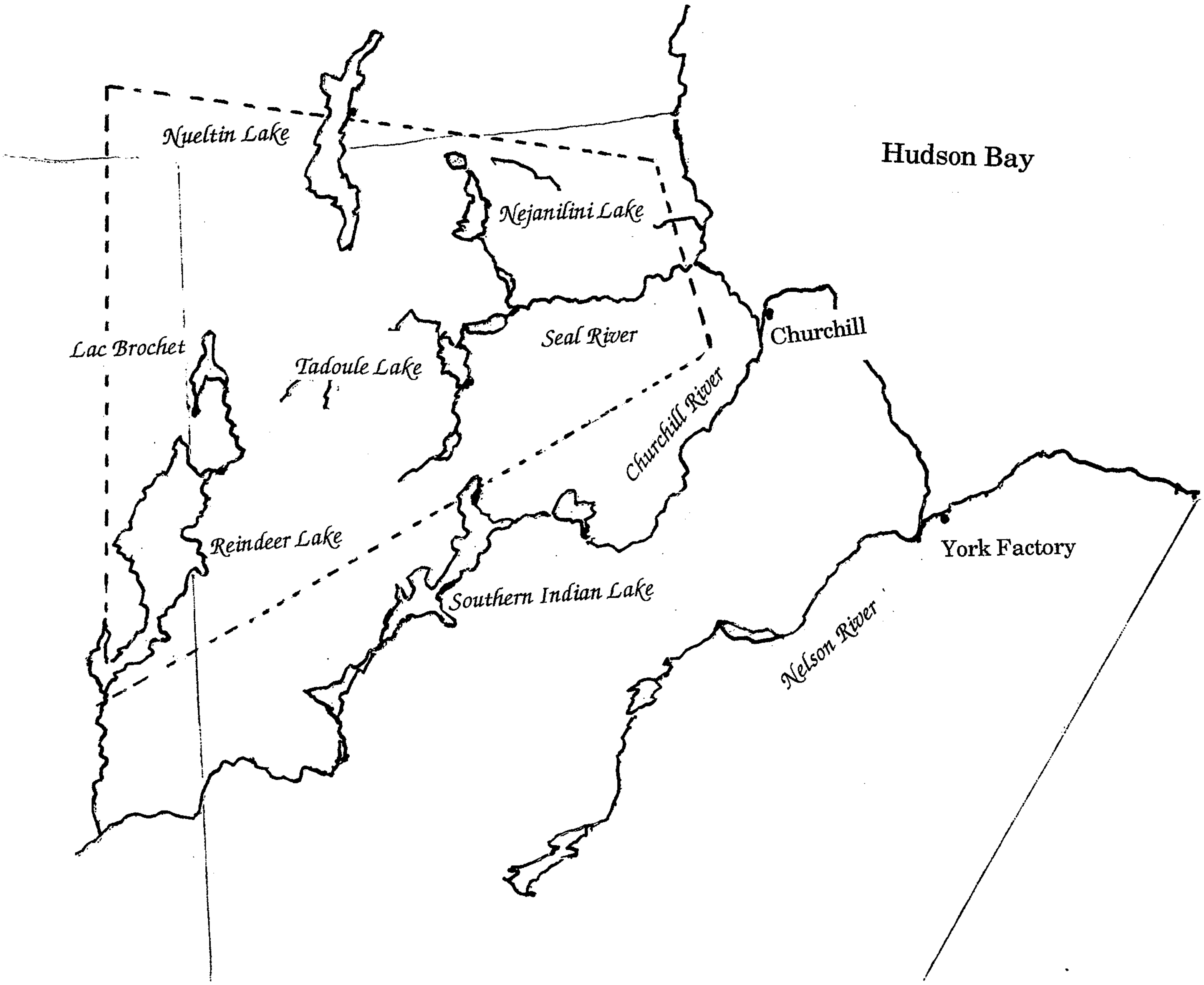
Hudson Bay
Nueltin Lake
Nejanilini Lake
Seal River
Churchill
Lac Brochet
Tadoule Lake
Churchill River
Reindeer Lake
Southern Indian Lake
York Factory
Nelson River

Figure 1. Study Area ----

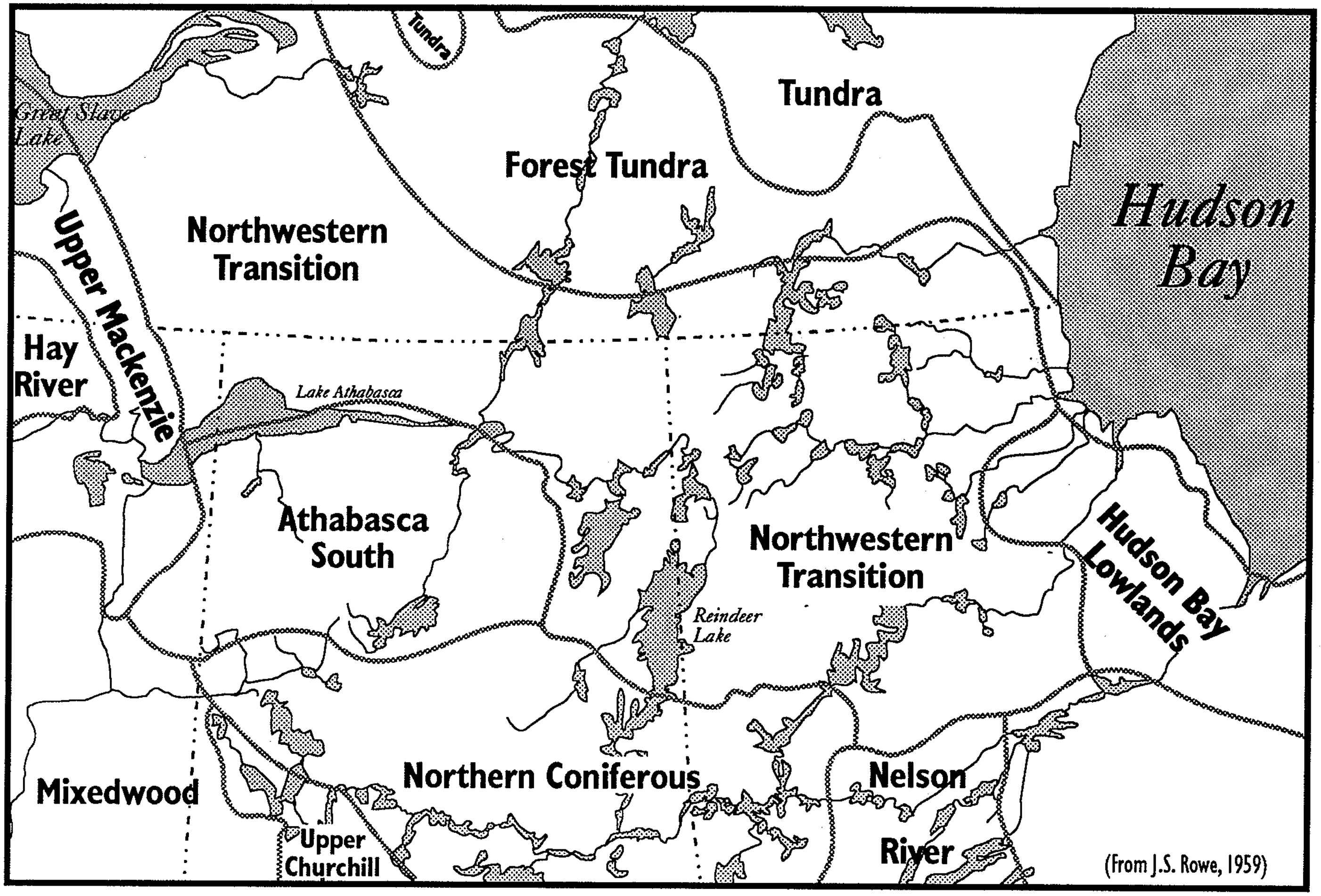
Tundra
Tundra
Forest Tundra
Great Slave Lake
Northwestern Transition
Upper Mackenzie
Hay River
Lake Athabasca
Athabasca South
Hudson Bay
Northwestern Transition
Reindeer Lake
Hudson Bay Lowlands
Mixedwood
Northern Coniferous
Nelson River
Upper Churchill
(From J.S. Rowe, 1959)

Figure 2. Vegetation Map

and barren lands are approached. The climate is dominated by the cold inland ocean of Hudson Bay and long winter storms are common. Temperatures are moderate in summer and daylight is nearly continuous.

At slightly lower latitudes, the mid-point of Reindeer Lake for example, the landscape resembles the southern woodland regions of the Canadian Shield. Forest cover is thick, rock outcrops in many locations expose the bedrock and, in places, granite cliffs rise above the shorelines. Closer examination reveals that the spruce are smaller and often have a characteristic 'crooked' trunk which indicates the presence of permafrost. Permafrost also hinders soil drainage which accounts for the large tracts of muskeg in low lying areas and the tremendous amount of surface water in general.

The prevalence of glacial features such as eskers and 'erratics' is one of the most striking features of the zone. Erratics (boulders deposited after the retreat of the glaciers) can reach immense sizes and are found on land, lake and river bottoms. Eighteenth century travelers frequently referred to the area as the 'stony region' in reference to the abundance of large rocks. These exposed boulder fields are now commonly referred to as felsenmeer. An esker is an inverted river bottom left behind after a glacier has retreated. Composed of gravel, till and sand (glacial moraine), these mounds, which are often.cing shrubs, or small stands of birch, often stretch for miles into the forest or across the taiga. Eskers can form complex systems but are generally oriented in a direction slightly east of north.

An important local food item to the inhabitants of the region is the barren-ground caribou. Other common big game animals in more forested areas are non-migratory woodland caribou, moose and bear. The main small game animals are ptarmigan, ducks, geese and spruce hens. Of the fur-bearing animals muskrat and marten (Canadian sable) are particularly abundant but mink, beaver, ermine, wolverine and varieties of foxes are also trapped. Small fur trade posts at one time operated within the taiga at Nejanilini and Nueltin Lakes.

Successful commercial fisheries have operated at Reindeer Lake, where pickerel (walleye) and whitefish have been commercially viable. The Seal River has been identified as the approximate northern boundary of pickerel and lake sturgeon populations.[5] The voracious jackfish (northern pike) are plentiful in all these northern lakes and can often exceed 40 inches in length. Lake trout are also widespread in the colder taiga waters and, unlike southern populations of trout, they tend to remain in more shallow water throughout the summer.[6] Arctic grayling are indigenous only to the higher latitudes of Canada and, in Manitoba, are generally found north of the Churchill River. Arctic char or 'Hearne's salmon' is a relative of the Pacific salmon and is known to make spawning runs a short distance up the Caribou and Seal Rivers.[7]

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[5] W. B. Scott and E. J. Crossman, Freshwater Fishes of Canada, Fisheries Research Board of Canada, Bull. 184, Ottawa, (1973), 83, 770.
[6] Ibid., 223, 226.

The abundance of fish in the Seal River system attracts harbour seals (and hence the origin of the name of the river) which can travel as far inland as Tadoule Lake. These mammals have adapted to both an ocean and freshwater environment and can often be seen foraging along the stretch of the river. Freshwater and hair seals have been documented at Nueltin and Caribou Lakes and Nejanilini Lake at one time has undoubtedly seen a small seal population.[8]

The Barren-Ground Caribou

Aptly described as a 'living symbol of the north,' the migratory caribou are a defining feature of the forest taiga and tundra which constitute the north-central Canadian mainland. The first Europeans referred to the animals according to Old World nomenclature as "reindeer" and early journals commonly shortened the name to simply "deer." Champlain and other early French explorers used a form of the term "caribou" which was probably derived from the Micmac "xalibu" which means "the pawer" in reference to the animals' foraging behavior in snow.[9] Another common French term used in the nineteenth century was "La Foule" or "The Throng" which describes the huge groups of animals which form during the spring or autumn migrations. Inuit and Indian names are highly varied and often denote the age and sex of the animal. Some non gender and age specific names for the caribou are tuktuk (Inuit), eh-tik (Cree), ek-wo-wetsi (Dogrib), no-ti (Slave), and ed-then (Dene).

---

[7] Ibid., 203, 207.

[8] Graham Dodds, "The Seal River Canadian Heritage Rivers System background study." M.N.R.M. Practicum, University of Manitoba, 1987. 20. Ronald Nash also observed seals at several inland lakes during his archeological surveys. See Archaeological Investigations in the Transitional Forest Zone, Mb. Museum of Man and Nature, 1975. 87.

Barren-ground caribou are average sized in comparison to the world-wide deer family and possess a number of efficient adaptations to their northern environment. Their broad hooves are interspersed with hair and include large functional dewclaws which create support for traversing muskeg and snow and provide good propulsion in water. In winter the hooves' sharp ridge provides a "non-skid" surface for icy lake and river crossings.[10] Skilled hunters can determine previous movements and predict future movements of the herds by closely examining the pattern of wear on the hooves.[11]

Inhabitants of the northern latitudes have long recognized the superior insulating properties of caribou and reindeer skins. These properties are the result of the unusual hollow structure of the hair. Comprised of cells filled with air, an insulating 'sheath of air' is held not only between the hairs (like most northern animals) but also within the hairs themselves.[12] Caribou clothing, sleeping robes and shelters created for people of the high latitudes "mobile microenvironments that made a mockery of most winter weather."[13]

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[9] Wright, A. H., "The word 'caribou'", Journal of Mammalogy, (1929), 10(4).
[10] Kelsall, John P., The Migratory Barren-Ground Caribou of Canada, (Ottawa: Dept. of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Canadian Wildlife Service, 1968), 32-35.
[11] Downes, Sleeping Island, (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1946), 133.

Besides providing excellent lightweight insulation, the coat makes the animals highly buoyant which is why the caribou are unequaled swimmers among the world-wide deer family. The ability to swim is important because river and lake crossings are a common part of migration and, in places, up to 60% of the land is covered with water (fig. 3).

Migrations occur twice annually and for 3 to 4 months of the year caribou are occupied in moving from calving areas in the tundra such as Beverly Lake, Bathurst Inlet and Kaminuriak Lake, to wintering areas within the northern forests. The modern range of the caribou covers about 750,000 square miles in an area from the Mackenzie River delta in the northwest along an arc bounded by the big northern lakes of Great Bear, Great Slave, Athabasca and Reindeer, to below the Churchill River in the southeast (fig. 4).[14]

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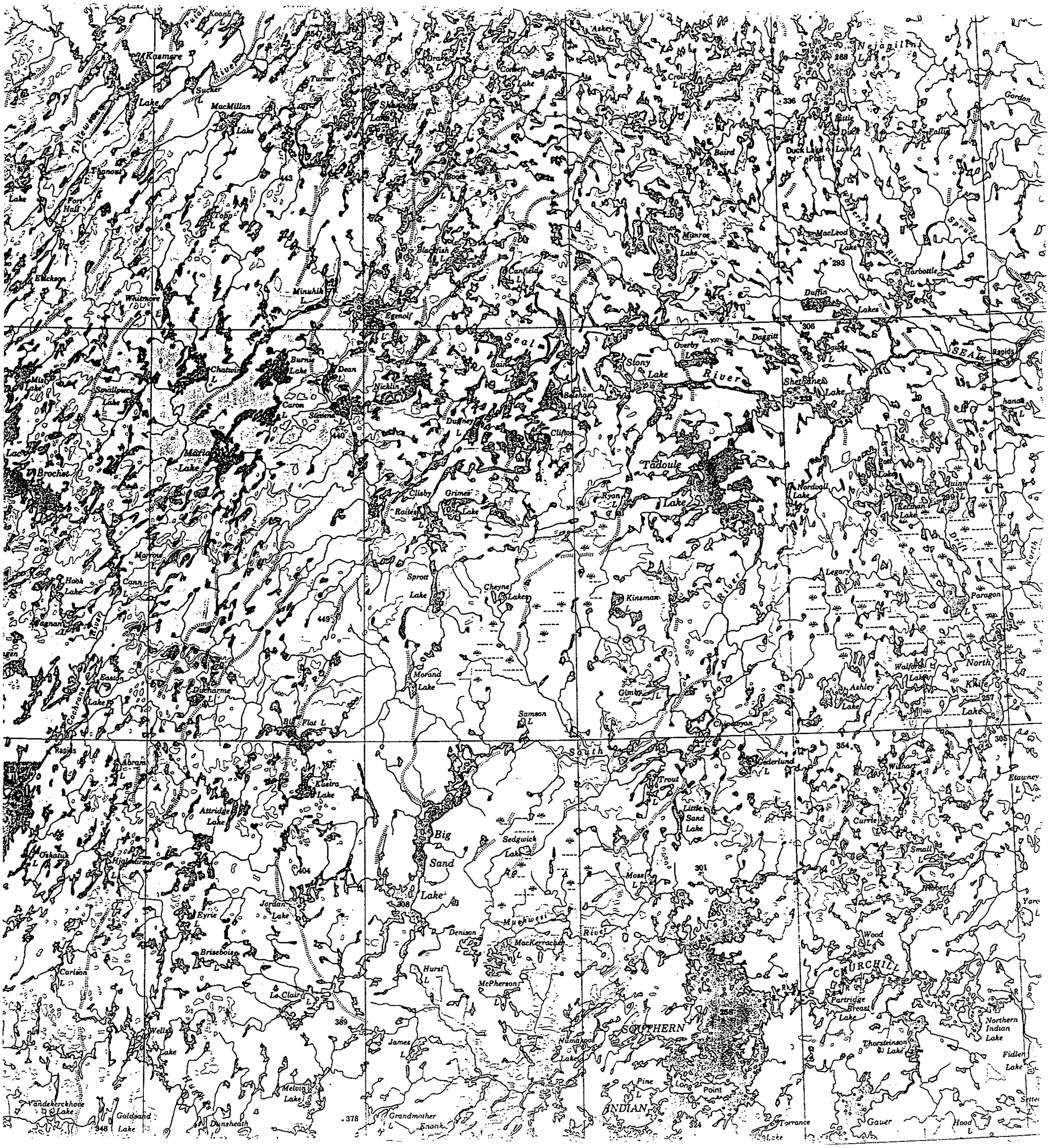
[12] Kelsall, 35.

[13] J. G. E. Smith, "Chipewyan and Fur Trader Views." In R. C. Davis, Rupert's Land: A Cultural Tapestry, (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Univ. Press, 1988). 137.

[14] Kelsall., Caribou, 47.

Figure 3.

Map of Upper-Seal River


Putahow
Koona
Kasmere
Sucker L
River
Lake
Thlewiaza
MacMillan Lake
Turner L
Drake L
Corbett
Lake
Askey
Croll L
Nejanilini Lake
268
336
Gordon
Little Duck Lake
Duck Lake Post
Baird L
Fallis
Thanout
Fort Hall
Lake
443
Boles
Topp
Blackfish L
Munroe Lake
MacLeod Lake
Big Spruce River
Spruce
293
Harbottle
Jackson
Whitmore L
Minuhik L
Canfield L
Egenolf
Duffin Lakes
306
Doggitt L
Overby
Seal
Dean
Bain L
Stony Lake
River
Daisy L
Shethanei Lake
233
SEAL
Rapids
Burnie Lake
Chatwin L
Smallpiece Lake
Caron L
Stevens L
Nicklin L
Belsham
Duffney L
440
Clifton
Lac Brochet
Maria Lake
Tadoule Lake
Nordquist Lake
Quinn L
Clisby
Grimes
Raites
Lake
Ryan L
Kasmere
Morrow L
Cann L
Sprott Lake
Cheyne Lakes
Kinsman L
River
Legary
Drift
Paragon
North
Hook Lake
Tagnan
Egan
449
Easton
Morand Lake
Walford Lake
North Knife Lake
257
Ashley Lake
Cochrane
Lake
Ducharme L
Samson L
Gimby
Seal
Chipewyan
Big Flat L
Rapids
South
Abram L
Kustra Lake
Cederlund L
354
305
Wilhart L
Etawney L
Attridge Lake
Trout L
Little Sand Lake
Currie L
Big Sand Lake
Sedgwick Lake
Oskatuk L
Higginson L
404
Moss L
301
Small L
Hobbert L
Yarc L
Eyrie L
Jordan Lake
308
Muskwesi River
Denison L
MacKerracher L
Wood L
Briseboi L
Carlson L
Hurst L
CHURCHILL
Partridge Breast Lake
Northern Indian Lake
LeClair L
McPherson L
369
Wells
Lake
James L
Numakoos Lake
SOUTHERN
Thorsteinson Lake
Fidler Lake
Melvin Lake
Pine L
Long Point
INDIAN
Vandekerckhove Lake
Goldsand Lake
348
Dunsheath
378
Grandmother Snake L
324
Torrance Lake
Gauer
Hood L
Setter

Scale 1:1,300,000 (From Dept. of Energy, Mines, and Resources, Ottawa, Canada, 1974)

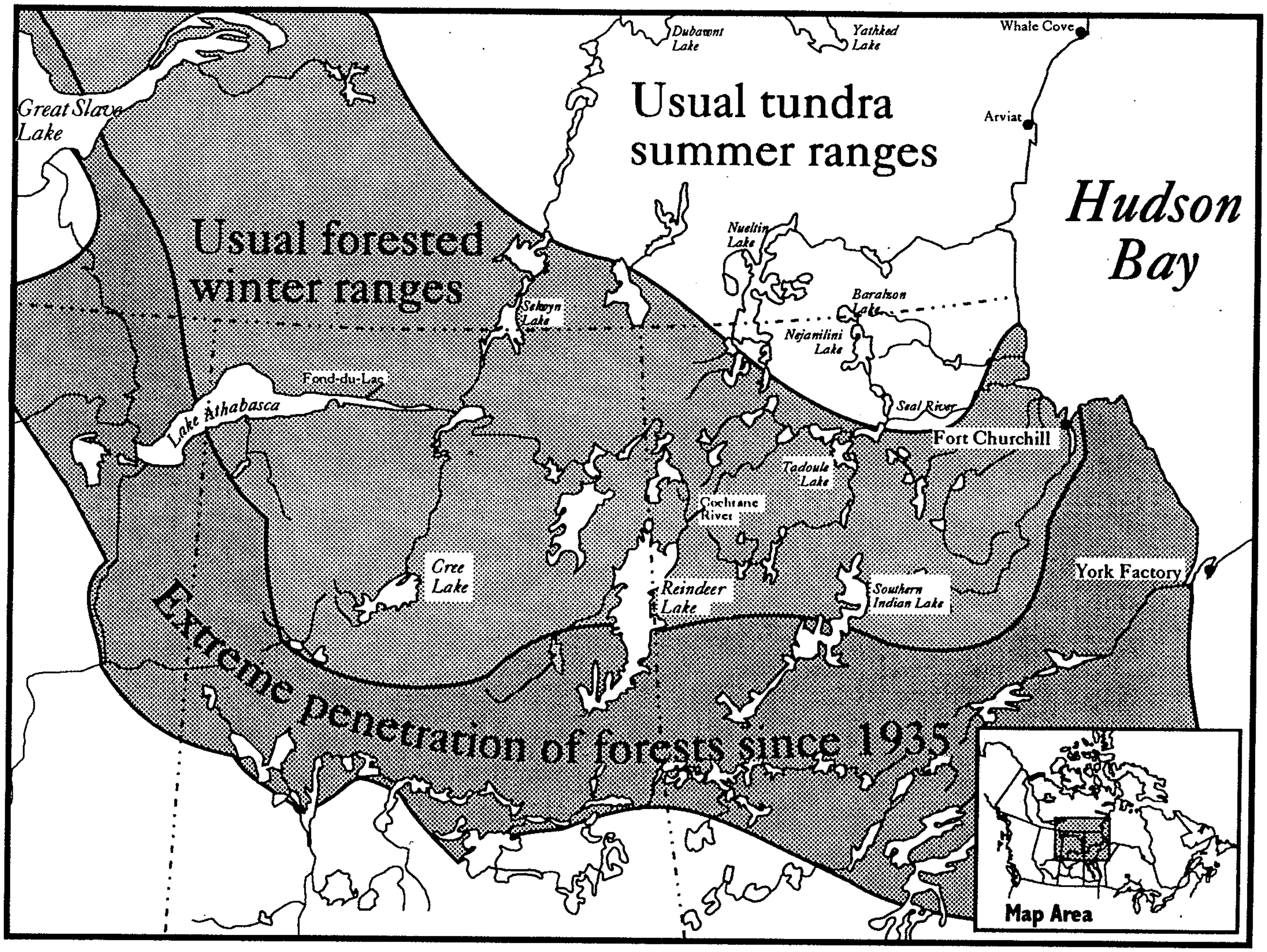

Dubawnt Lake
Yathked Lake
Whale Cove
Usual tundra summer ranges
Arviat
Hudson Bay
Great Slave Lake
Usual forested winter ranges
Nueltin Lake
Selwyn Lake
Baralzon Lake
Nejanilini Lake
Fond-du-Lac
Lake Athabasca
Seal River
Fort Churchill
Tadoule Lake
Cochrane River
Cree Lake
Reindeer Lake
Southern Indian Lake
York Factory
Extreme penetration of forests since 1935
Map Area

Figure 4. Map of Barren-Ground Caribou Range

(From Kelsall, 1968)

The fall migration begins in late July or early August when the animals drift southward and large aggregations form at water barriers. The herds are somewhat dispersed until they reach the edge of the forest in September and the rut occurs in October on or near the tree-line. After the rut the herd advances rapidly to the wintering areas in the forest. Between February and April the animals gather into large but loosely knit groups which again trend to the North. Between April and May the spring migration is in full force and the movement is direct and purposeful as the herd, led by the females, moves back toward the northern calving grounds.

Gale force winds, impassable open water and unseasonable snow conditions may temporarily delay but never halt the spring migration. Observers have noticed a kind of mass hypnosis as the herds congregate and move within 'La Foule' ('the throng'). From the air, parallel trails worn deep in the ground are clearly visible and indicate the 'deer paths' formed by generations of caribou moving along their principal migration routes.[15]

Within the esker-moraine topography, northeast of Reindeer Lake, there are thousands of caribou trails everywhere, lacing hillsides, leading to the shoreline and spreading in every direction. "God help the man who gets off the route in this country"[16] wrote Prentice Downes in 1939. In the 1740s Arthur Dobbs was researching documents regarding the zone inland of Fort Churchill and learned that the "roads" the caribou make are "well padded, and cross each other as often as the streets in Paris."[17]

---

[15] William O. Pruitt, Wild Harmony: The Cycle of Life in the Northern Forest, (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1983), 88-89.

The population of barren-ground caribou is divided into four main groupings and their names correspond to their respective calving areas. These groups are, from west to east the Bluenose, Bathhurst, Beverly and Kaminuriak. The herd most closely associated with Reindeer Lake and northern Manitoba is the Kaminuriak group (previously known as the Brochet, Duck Lake or Churchill herd). This Eastern grouping has been the least studied herd but it is known that the major calving area is near Kaminuriak Lake, east of the Kazan river and west of the Hudson Bay coastline. Caribou from Reindeer Lake reach this area by following a line of least topographical resistance along eskers and other glacial features of the taiga and tundra which are generally oriented 28 E of N. The herd moves in columns and sometimes lakes or rivers divert and channel the herds to crossing points.

Many of these major concentration points are known by the people who live in the region and many sites are traditional hunting places. Caribou can be taken relatively easily from a boat, without the use of a gun. In Manitoba, concentration points have been in the vicinity of Brochet, Nejanilini Lake, the North and South Fork Rivers some distance inland from Churchill and, in earlier times, the Nelson-Hayes river system.

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[16] Downes, Sleeping Island, 90.
[17] Arthur Dobbs, Account of the Countries Adjoining to Hudson's Bay, reprinted from 1754 edition. (Toronto: S. R. Publishers, 1967) 22.

Although a big northern lake such as Reindeer often represents an obstacle to the fall migration, these large open areas present direct and rapid travel routes for the spring migration when snow-free and ice covered in May.[18]

Historical Populations

Estimates of the ancient population of caribou have ranged as high as 30,000,000 and as low as 1,700,000 animals. More modern research techniques, aerial surveys, and a better understanding of the size and carrying capacity of the caribou range suggest the primitive population was closer to 2,400,000 animals.[19] Researchers believe that a serious decline in population did not occur until 1900 and that a population many times greater than present day size sustained itself through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Localized reductions of the caribou population did occur with the advent of trading activities and introduction of firearms to Cree, Inuit and Dene hunters. One instance of this kind of reduction occurred at the traditional crossing points along the Hayes and upper Nelson Rivers near York Factory. On his journey to Cumberland House in late August of 1775, Matthew Cocking observed Homeguard Cree and 'North River Cree' (Swampy Cree) intercepting a huge autumn migration of caribou at one of these crossing points.[20] By 1821, continuous hunting pressure associated with the provisioning of York and Severn House had reduced this caribou population to such a degree that the animals have never returned to the Nelson-Hayes in the same numbers.[21] Kelsall and A. W. F. Banfield, two researchers who have specialized in calculating caribou populations, stress that these kinds of reductions were localized and probably had a marginal effect on the total pre-1900 caribou population size.[22]

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[18] Kelsall, Caribou, 114.

[19] Ibid., 144-146. The population of caribou in this century was estimated at 200,000 (1958) and 325,000 (1967).

Numerous references to huge caribou migrations can be found in fur trade documents dating from Jeremie's late seventeenth century narrative which describes 'leagues' of tens of thousands of animals moving along the Hudson Bay coastline.[23] Most Europeans had never seen such spectacular movements of animals. David Thompson, nearly a century later, witnessed an enormous spring migration of caribou crossing the Nelson River near York in 1792. For a total duration of about ten hours, a herd 100 yards wide rushed past Thompson and his companion. Using a rough and albeit unscientific calculation, Thompson estimated that the herd was 120 miles in length and believed the total size was more than 3.5 million animals.[24]

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[20] E. E. Rich, ed., Cumberland and Hudson House Journals 1775-82, (London: The Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1951), 3-4.
[21] Lytwyn, 406-408.
[22] Kelsall, Caribou, 147.
[23] Douglas, R., Wallace, J. N., eds., Twenty Years of York Factory; Jeremie's Account of Hudson Strait and Bay, trans., (Ottawa: Thorburn and Abbot, 1926). 22.

Why did the caribou herds over the nineteenth century not suffer the same depletion as the plains buffalo? Caribou products were important articles of trade at the northern posts and serious population reductions certainly occurred in the Nelson River and James Bay districts after 1820. The central range of the caribou, however, remained out of reach and the animals did not become fur trade commodities to the same extent as buffalo. By 1830, "Buffalo became beaver, in fur-trade terms" and American hunters, supplying the growing buffalo robe trade in the 1850s added further pressure to bison populations.[25] The remoteness of the barrens and northern taiga forests and the lack of an influx of white agriculturists probably helped save the caribou, at least until the current century when industrial development and environmental degradation in the north presented new threats.

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[24] R. Glover, ed., David Thompson's Narrative 1784-1812, (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1962), 86-87.

[25] John Milloy, "'Our Country;' The Significance of the Buffalo Resource for a Plains Cree Sense of Territory." In Abel and Friesen, J. eds., Aboriginal Resource Use in Canada: Historical and Legal Aspects, (Winnipeg: Univ. of Manitoba Press, 1991.) 64.

Aboriginal People and the Land's Resources

Traditional Northern Diets

Recent studies that have focused on dietary patterns among native-Canadians of the north and subnorth have indicated that traditional foods or country produce still represent a significant proportion of total food consumption. A shift from local to non-local foods is associated with problems of economic dependency and loss of 'traditional ways.' In many northern communities, however, a strong connection between people and the animal and plant resources of the land has persisted and is reflected in continual reliance on country produce. In the case of South Indian Lake, a heavy dependency on store-bought food items was associated with hydro development in the 1970's. Thus, the 'traditional diet' had been lost only in recent times. Before the development of the Churchill-Nelson River hydro project in 1972, 87% of the Cree living at South Indian Lake said food from 'the bush' accounted for most of their diet.[26] The respondents, whether they lived in the community, at a fish camp or on a trapline, also reported a strong preference for wild produce and game meat over non-local, refined or packaged foodstuffs available from the store. A typical 'traditional diet' for the Cree living at South Indian Lake centered on a main meal of wild meat (often beaver, goose or moose) with bannock (sometimes with berries or fish eggs), and tea. Other important country produce which the Cree described as part of their customary diet included fish and flora resources such as berries, mint tea and spruce gum.[27] Supplementary items including tea, sugar, lard and flour were first available through European traders at the end of the seventeenth century and were regarded as traditional staples of the trapline. Although these items are non-local they have been in use for nearly 300 years and are viewed by many as 'traditional.' The central component of the old style diet both in terms of perception and preference was wild meat.

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[26] James B. Waldram, "Hydroelectric Development and Dietary Delocalization in Northern Manitoba, Canada," Human Organization, Vol. 44, No. 1, 1985. 43.

An investigation of the use of country foods by Cree and Chipewyan in the Lake Athabasca and Great Slave district provides some details on seasonal variations in local resource use. In this boreal and transitional forest zone Aboriginal people relied heavily on moose, caribou, fish, birds and berries. The greatest use of water fowl, upland birds, and berries (primarily cranberries) occurred in the fall season. Caribou, moose and small mammals were the major items taken and consumed in winter. The spring migration of caribou represented most of the big game for this season and provided bone marrow, fat, and organ meats including the special delicacy of caribou tongues. Fish remained an important food item in spring and consumption generally increased over the summer.[28] The general proportion of consumption was 40% large animals, 20% berries, 19% fish, 8% small animals and 10% birds. Animal foods from the land constituted one third of the total flesh food consumption and some kind of country food from the district was used an average of 6 times per week.[29]

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[27] Ibid., 45.

In recent years it has been determined that wild food plants or game are nutritionally equal or superior to cultivated plants or non-local 'modern' foods. Wild game is generally higher in protein, ascorbic acid, iron and comparatively low in fat. Bush flora resources are rich in carbohydrates and are often higher in vitamin C and A than vegetables available in northern stores. A variety of B vitamins are found in fish and consuming fish or meat raw or slightly warmed as the Dene did in the eighteenth century ensured that a limited amount of nutrient was lost.[30] Also, the practice of consuming all parts of big game such as caribou and moose supplied high amounts of iron and zinc.

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[28] Eleanor E. Wein, et. al., "Food Consumption Patterns and Use of Country Foods by Native Canadians near Wood Buffalo National Park, Canada", Arctic, Vol. 44, No. 3, 1991. 196-205.

[29] Ibid., 202-204.

[30] E. E. Wein, "Nutrition of Northern Native Canadians", Canadian Home Economics Journal, 36(1), Winter 1986. 25-29.

Table 1

Percentages of country game taken for food among several Cree and Ojibway Bands of the northern shield region.[31]

	Mistassini 1953-1954	Attawapiskat 1947-1948	Weagamow Lake 1958-1959	Fort Albany 1964-1965
Big Game	65%	18%	53%	82%
Fish	26	39	26	2
Birds	4	31	5	14
Small Game	5	12	16	1
Sea Mammals	0	0	0	1

Plant Use

The use of caribou products, particularly by the eastern Dene, has tended to overshadow the importance of flora and fish resources. Dickason,[32] in her investigation of historical plant use by Amerindians stresses that even for hunters and gatherers a detailed and extensive botanical knowledge was necessary for survival. Reports confirm that the northern Dene traditionally used a variety of flora resources from the transition forest and barrens although in modern communities the use of local plants has declined. Wein's study of the Great Slave and Lake Athabasca district showed that berries remained an important food source, yet other types of flora such as leaves, roots and birch sap were no longer used to a great degree. It is not clear precisely when a decline in plant use occurred but Bernard Ross's survey showed that plants remained important to the Chipewyan in the mid-nineteenth century. From his observations of the Chipewyan in the Mackenzie River district in 1862 Ross remarked that;

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[31] From Rogers and Smith, "Environment and Culture in the Shield and Mackenzie Borderlands." In Helm and Sturtevant, eds., Handbook of North American Indians, Vol. 6, Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1981. 137.

[32] Olive P. Dickason, "'For Every Plant There is a Use': The Botanical World of Mexica and Iroquoians", in Abel and Friesen Resource Use, 10-33.

> From the vegetable kingdom are derived fuel, canoes, sleds, paddles, snow-shoes, baskets, dyes and food, besides other articles which will be noticed hereafter. Two trees, the canoe birch and the white spruce stand out [in] their importance [in] bold relief; but the larch and willow are used also, as well as several kinds of plants, which furnish medicine, dyes, and edible berries that are useful in periods of scarcity. Indeed in summer, a considerable portion of the ordinary food, as well as the luxuries of the natives, is drawn from this source."[33]

Flora resources of the north fall within a variety of categories: common food staples, beverages, medicines, emergency foods or plants with technological value. Berries, which are common in the transition forest and tundra, represent the major plant food. Rich in vitamin C and carbohydrates, berries were an important supplement other foods such as fish. (Although is high in protein, fish has almost no carbohydrates.) Some berries found in the north are bearberry, cloudberry, bunchberry, blueberry, strawberry, wild raspberries and saskatoons. Cranberries stay on the bush all winter and were an important emergency food source. Cranberries were also plentiful in the Hudson Bay lowlands and highly valued by European fur traders who packaged and sent them home.[34] Some Dene commonly added gooseberries to fish and the Athapaskans of the Great Slave Lake region used blueberries for making dye. Many varieties of berries were brewed as a beverage and bearberry (Chipewyan; Kleh) was mixed with tobacco and smoked.[35]

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[33] Bernard Ross, "An Account of the Botanical and Mineral Product, Useful to the Chipewyan Tribes of Indians, Inhabiting the Mackenzie River District." Canadian Naturalist and Geologist, 7, (1862), 133-137.

One of the best known northern plants is a member of the heather family called Labrador tea. The Chipewyan bands of northern Manitoba used the leaves to brew a pale-amber orange tea (wish-a-ca-pucca) and the tiny white flowers of the plant were valued for their medicinal powers.[36] In winter the leaves of Labrador tea can also be dug out of the snow and used as an emergency food source.

In most areas of the north and subnorth a dense mat of muskeg covers the land. The spongy quality of these bogs results from the high concentration of sphagnum moss. Both the Cree and Dene gathered and dried the moss by hanging it in trees. The highly absorbent nature of the dried sphagnum material lent itself to a variety of purposes including the construction of moss bags for babies. Within the northern transition forest many bands also utilized the needles, inner bark and gum of the white and black spruce trees. Some Athapaskans used the spruce gum for treating wounds and for curing snow blindness. The sap from birch trees could also be collected to produce a thick syrup and the wood, bark and products from the trunk were also used;

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[34] Samuel Hearne, A Journey from Prince of Wales's Fort in Hudson's Bay to the Northern Ocean, 2nd. ed., (Edmonton: M. G. Hurtig, 1971), 439-40.

[35] Walker, Marilyn, Harvesting the Northern Wild (Yellowknife: Northern Publishers, 1984), 39.

[36] Pers. comm., V. Petch, 1993.

> Athapaskans traditionally have used birch in numerous ways. The bark was wrapped around fractures; rolled up into a tube for calling moose; and cut into a strip with small holes to be bound across the eyes against snow blindness. Bark containers were made in various sizes for storage, gathering or for use as drinking cups. The fungus growth on birch trees was scraped off and used as tinder or as a tobacco substitute and additive, and could be dropped into boiling water to produce a tea. The wood was used for a wider range of implements, from toboggans to snowshoe frames to spoons, bows and arrows, and canoes.[37]

The Dene who guided Hearne across Manitoba's far north utilized a black lichen called Tripe de Roche or Rock Tripe, an alternative food source used as thickener for broth and an ingredient for fish-soup;

> There is a black, hard, crumply moss, that grows on the rocks and large stones in those parts, which is of infinite service to the natives, as it sometimes furnishes them with a temporary subsistence, when no animal food can be procured. This moss, when boiled, turns to a gummy consistenc[y], and is more clammy in the mouth than sago; it may, by adding either moss or water, be made to almost any consistenc[y]. It is so

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[37] Walker, Harvesting, 41.

> palatable, that all who taste it generally grow fond of it. It is remarkably good and pleasing when used to thicken any kind of broth, but it is generally most esteemed when boiled in fish-liquor.[38]

Subsistence Fishing

When looking at modern resource use in the north it is difficult to overlook the significance of fish as an important component of diet and the fisheries as a central activity of Northern Canadians. A well developed northern fishery is probably the result of an effective response to the challenge of finding the best strategy for exploiting the resources of the environment. Regarding early native North America in general, Erhard Rostlund underlined that the amount of food produced by unit area of water was much greater than an equivalent area of land. For this reason, native groups with a tradition of fishing and access to good sites tended to lead a much more sedentary life than hunters or simple collectors.[39] The degree of skill in fishing, primarily reflected in the use of nets, was considered as a rough measure of the efficiency of resource utilization. The superior food yield from water seems to have held particular importance to the inhabitants of northern latitudes and, in fact, the ancient peoples who lived north of the Great Lakes through to the Mackenzie basin and down the Pacific coast were evaluated by Rostlund as the most proficient fishermen of all North American Indian tribes.[40]

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[38] Hearne, Journey, 328.

[39] Erhard Rostlund, Freshwater Fish and Fishing in Native North America, University of California Publications in Geography, Vol. 9, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1952), 6.

Richard Lee's study regarding resource use by the world's hunting societies also suggests that fishing emphasis is particularly strong in the mid to high latitudes (50°-59°). In the case of the Chipewyan, Lee ascribes a 60:40 ratio to hunting and fishing dependency. The proportion of fish used by the Dene, who fished the lakes and tributaries flowing to Hudson Bay, was remarkably close to west coast Indian groups such as the Bellabella and Chinook where 50% of the subsistence base was centred on fishing.[41]

Early fur trade records show ample evidence of the high productivity of food from the waters of the northern forests and taiga lands of Canada. European traders themselves were highly dependent on fish which was a particularly critical provision item for the long winter seasons. In the district of the upper-Churchill River, David Thompson noted that whitefish was the "sole subsistence of the Traders and their men in winter, and part of the summer"[42] and northern traveler George Back remarked that "no post can be considered as safe for the winter residence unless there be a good fishing station in its vicinity."[43] At the turn of the eighteenth century, the normal ration at Albany was three fish per man per day and a season's catch of 14000 fish was considered a poor year.[44] Fort Churchill's daily catch in the same period was about 100 fish per day and about 1000 gallons of arctic char were normally salted in a season.[45] In 1796, during the whitefish spawning period in late fall, the small wintering party at Reindeer Lake took about 5000 fish in a three month period.[46] The contingent of 118 people and 75 dogs at Fort Chipewyan in the year 1822-23 consumed 65,000 fish[47] and two years later, John Franklin reported that the fort at Great Bear Lake netted more that 52,000 fish.[48] Clearly, fishing represented one of the most important subsistence pursuits of the first Europeans who lived in the north.

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[40] Ibid., 43.

[41] Richard B. Lee, "What Hunters Do for a Living, or, How to Make Out on Scarce Resources." In Lee and DeVore eds., Man the Hunter, 42-48. The precise ratio between fishing and hunting probably varied between different Chipewyan bands. Jarvenpa, for example, found that fish accounted for 18% of the diet of the Chipewyan who lived in the upper-Churchill region (R. Jarvenpa, "Spatial and Ecological Factors in the Annual Economic Cycle of the English River Band of Chipewyan," Arctic Anthropology, XXX-1, (1976), 49.

[42] Thompson, Narrative, 60.

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[43] George Back, Narrative of the Arctic land expedition to the mouth of the Great Fish River, (Paris: A & W Galignani, 1836), 266.

[44] E. E. Rich, Hudson's Bay Company: 1670-1763, Vol. 1., (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1960). 494.

[45] Glyndwr Williams, ed., Andrew Graham's Observations on Hudson's Bay 1767-91. (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1969), 119.

[46] HBCA, Bedford House Journal, 1796-1795, B14/a/1. fo. 11-20.

[47] Eric Krause, "The Fisheries of the Hudson's Bay Company at Fort Chipewyan, 1791-1871," Parks Canada, Dept. of Indian and Northern Affairs, Report no. 208, 1976. 54

[48] John Franklin, Narrative of a Second Expedition to the Shores of the Polar Sea in the years 1825, 1826, and 1827, 2nd. ed. (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1971), 298.

The exceptional nutritional value of fish is generally well understood. It is an excellent source of protein, food energy and provides a variety of vitamins and minerals. Fish is deficient in carbohydrates, however, emphasizing the importance supplementing diet at some point with plant or other food source. During spawning season fish are most readily available to fishers as they approach shallow water, make river runs and generally become more active. Fish are are also in the best condition during spawning periods and provide the most calories per pound.[49]

Table 2

Calorie Levels of Common Northern Fish Species
(per pound of edible portion of fish)[50]

Species	Calories
Salmon or Char	1,000
Trout	800
Whitefish	600-700
Pike and Pickerel	350

The northern subsistence fisheries are defined as "local, non-commercial fisheries, oriented not primarily for recreation but for the procurement of fish for consumption of the fishers, their families and community."[51] Modern estimates of the size of the subsistence fisheries in Canada and in the north and sub-north in particular, underline the richness of this resource. Using data collected in a period between 1972 and 1987, a study of per capita fish harvests for 93 northern and sub-northern communities was made by Fikret Berkes. The settlements ranged from Labrador, through Fort George, James Bay; and Baker Lake, N.W.T.; South Indian Lake and Brochet, Manitoba; and Black Lake, Saskatchewan to communities in the Yukon. Some province-wide estimates of the native (excluding non-status Indians, Metis and non-natives) subsistence fish harvest in the period from 1975 to 1980 were 1.7M kg. (Mb.), 1.85M kg. (Sask.) and 2.37M kg. (B.C.).[52] The research indicated a mean consumption rate of fish of 42 kg. per capita per year which is six times higher than the average Canadian fish consumption of 7 kg. In some places consumption was even higher. At Patuanak, Saskatchewan in 1972, per capita consumption of 26 Chipewyan people was 112 kg. and an Inuit family of 10 adults and children near Parry Bay N.W.T. consistently harvested 1000 Arctic Char per year from 1974 to 1988.[53] The size of the Canadian-wide subsistence harvest of all northern people was estimated at 15M kg. per year which is roughly one-third the size of the yearly production of the Canadian commercial inland fishery.[54]

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[49] Rostlund, ix.
[50] Ibid., 4.
[51] Fikret Berkes, "Native Subsistence Fisheries: A Synthesis of Harvest Studies in Canada", *Arctic*, Vol. 43, No. 1, 1990. 35.

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[52] Ibid., 36.
[53] Ibid., 39.
[54] Ibid., 40.

Table 3

Modern per capita subsistence fish harvests by community.

Community	Population (year)	Harvest (kg/capita/yr)
Fort George	1525 (1978)	62
South Indian Lake.(Mb.)	669 (1984)	34
Pukatawagan (Mb.)	1025 "	53
Granville Lake (Mb.)	121 "	31
Oxford House (Mb.)	1018 "	51
Brochet (Mb.)	994 "	17
Black Lake (Sask.)	675 (1985)	74
Gods Lake (Mb.)	1018 (1984)	54
Lake of the Woods (Ont.)	1667 (1980-82)	33
Baker Lake (N.W.T.)	992 (1981-82)	41

From Fikret Berkes (1991).

Clearly many subsistence fisheries still operate successfully in the north and sub-north despite pressures of industrialism such as hydro development, mining and urbanization. The northern subsistence fisheries represent an activity that has persisted for generations and are based on a relatively reliable and abundant food source. A simple fact is that many native-Canadians regard fish as a staple. Based on the recent study of fish as a local resource and the quantification of the northern subsistence fish harvest, Fikret Berkes wrote that the "subsistence fishery is often the most persistent segment of the traditional wildlife-based native economy."[55]

It is possible that the subsistence fisheries in southern Canada were at one time also significant. Intense commercialization of fishing in the later nineteenth century had devastating results on the Lake Winnipeg native fishery by adding exchange value to fish that were previously part of a traditional local economy.[56] Another example of the decline in subsistence fisheries occurred in the Rainy River and Lake of the Woods districts where the lake sturgeon, by 1920, were almost completely wiped out by commercial fishing.[57]

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[55] Ibid., 39.

Writers investigating the fur trade era have recently uncovered the prevalence of fishing among several big game hunting groups in the Canadian west. Brian Smith stressed that the northern plains Cree regularly relied on fish as a dietary staple during their seasonal round and he identified two subgroups of Blood and Blackfoot groups as "Fish Eaters." Smith reasons that the under reporting of fishing was the result of the male-oriented view of early explorers and ethnologists which was reinforced by male hunter/informants. In this kind of reporting the perspectives of women, children or the elderly -- those most likely to be involved in fishing -- were overshadowed. Archaeological evidence from the Qu'Appelle River suggests that for hundreds of years Northern Plains bands were returning annually to good fishing locations along the river. In sum, fish were an important alternative food resource for these plains hunters.[58]

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[56] Frank Tough, "The Establishment of a Commercial Fishing Industry and the Demise of Native Fisheries in Northern Manitoba", Canadian Journal of Native Studies, IV, 2(1984). 314.

[57] Holzman et. al., "Rainy River Sturgeon: An Ojibway Resource in the Fur Trade Economy." In Abel and Friesen, Resource Use, 121.

The Ojibway have often been viewed as woodland game hunters but a study of sturgeon fishing in the Lake of the Woods district underlines fish as an important food resource and an integral part of Ojibway commerce, society and religion. Gatherings at fishing points during spring spawning along the Rainy River numbered over a thousand people and surplus stock was traded with neighbouring bands and Euro-Canadians. Abundant stocks lent a certain degree of independence to the Ojibway who were often 'content to subsist on sturgeon and other foods rather than engage in trade.' Between 1888 and 1914, however, 7,000 tons of flesh were taken by intensive commercial fishing and the slow-growing lake sturgeon, which can live to 150 years, has never recovered in the Lake of the Woods area.[59]

There is much evidence that active fisheries operated in Manitoba's subnorth some 3000 years ago and archaeologists believe that fishing was equal to or more important than any other resource gathering strategy. Like Manitoba's northern transition zone lakes, the archaeological sites at South Indian Lake were found clustered around good fishing sites. These areas include stream mouths, rapids and narrow channels. It was at these places people assembled and exploited the spring spawning runs of pickerel, northern pike and other species using nets. Remnants of these ancient nets have long since disintegrated in the acidic northern soil but stone net sinkers can still be found. The impressions of woven fabric appear on ancient Algonkian pottery jars which indicates that these ancient people probably knew how to make nets for fishing. A clear impression of a mesh net on a pottery jar found at South Indian Lake and the presence of stone net-sinkers in the vicinity strongly suggest that gill-netting was the main fishing technique in use at the time. Traditional sources for thread, string and rope for fishing nets and other woven items were the long and strong fibers from the stems and leaves of cattail, tule and waterlily.[60] The specific knowledge of the manufacture of plant fiber fishing nets was still retained by Minnesota and Wisconsin Ojibway into this century.[61]

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[58] Brian J. Smith, "The Historical and Archaeological Evidence for the use of Fish as an Alternate Subsistence Resource among Northern Plains Bison Hunters." In Abel and Friesen, Resource Use, 43-47.

[59] Holzman, et. al., "Rainy River Sturgeon," 119-127.

Fishing Nets

The development and use of gill nets was an extremely important advance for early cultures that were dependent on resources from the environment. The amount of fish that can be taken from a net set at a river mouth, rapid or simply perpendicular to the shore near a spawning area is much greater than can be taken by using a single line or by spearing. When nets are used in conjunction with weirs or other diversion devices, the harvests can be even larger. Net fishing, compared to spearing or angling, is also passive rather than active -- once set, fishers are free to pursue other activities. Nets are the most efficient and least labour intensive means of fishing, and as Rostund adds, "the distinguishing mark of a specialized or professional fisherfolk."[62]

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[60] Dickson in Manitoba Dept. of Cultural Affairs and Historical Resources, Manitoba Prehistory, Mb. Archaeology Popular Series No.4. 175-183.

[61] Holzman et. al., "Rainy River Sturgeon," 125.

As a study of the subarctic fishery at James Bay has shown, the simplicity of this kind of fishing technology also allowed a highly mobile fishery; nets could be set, checked, cleaned, relocated or removed quickly. Nets also facilitated a certain degree of selectivity because mesh size and site location gave the fishers control of the species, size and age of the fish caught.[63] It was found, for example, that the Cree at Fort George had a simple form of resource management based on regulating fishing intensity, net locations and minimum mesh sizes of the nets.[64]

It is difficult to know if the ancient Dene fashioned their nets from plant material since the Athapaskans never developed a pottery tradition. Willow dip nets were used at Lake Athabasca for sturgeon fishing at the turn of the nineteenth century (willow mesh was stronger than regular net materials). Dene at Churchill also reported that at one time the inner bark of the willow was knotted into nets.[65] It seems likely however that the babiche nets (cut from caribou skin) which Europeans observed in use in the eighteenth century, were the mainstay of the Athapaskan subarctic fishery.

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[62] Rostlund, 81.

[63] Fikret Berkes, "Fishery Resource Use in a Subarctic Indian Community", Human Ecology, Vol. 5, No. 4, 1977. 303.

[64] The Cree viewed their nets and fishing technique as 'traditional'. Mesh size varied between 2.5 and 3 inches. Smaller mesh sizes catch more fish but also trap more immature fish and the fishers strongly discouraged anyone using small mesh nets.

Net-making, as the traveler John Macdonell noted, was a normal social activity or pastime of Chipewyan women. The women gathered, chatted and sometimes smoked as theyprocessed the caribou skins by cutting and scraping thin strips of caribou hide. The 'lines' were then woven into either fishing nets or snowshoes. Macdonell commented that these nets were somewhat thicker than European cotton nets but that the weave and construction were similar.[66] Hearne thought that the babiche lines comprising the nets were as 'fine as English twine' and presumably the mesh size of some of the nets he saw was quite small because they were occasionally reused as heel or toe pads for snowshoes.[67]

Hearne, who has provided scholars with a wealth of information regarding early Dene culture, provides details of

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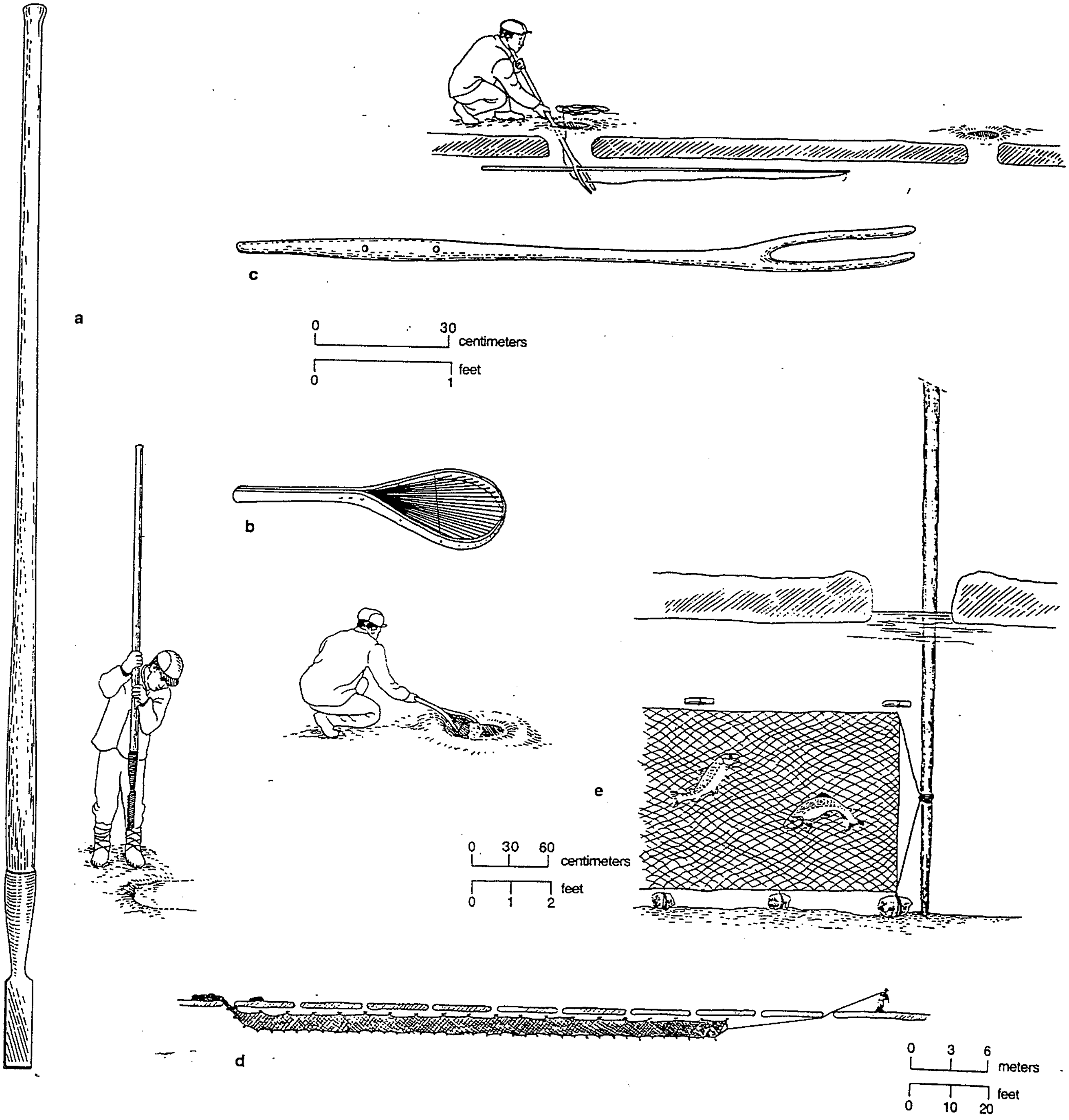
[65] Kaj Birket-Smith, Contributions to Chipewyan Ethnology: Report of the Fifth Thule Expedition, Copenhagen: 1930, 28.
[66] Diamond Jenness, ed., "The Chipewyan Indians: An Account by an Early Explorer." Anthropologica, Vol. 3 (1), (1956), 29.
[67] Hearne, Journey, 329.


c
a
0
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centimeters
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1
b
e
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30
60
centimeters
feet
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1
2
d
0
3
6
meters
feet
0
10
20

Figure 5. Dene Technique of Net-Fishing Under Ice.
a) Iron ice chisel fitted to pole. b)Ice scoop. c)pusher for extending net between holes. Traditional materials except for substitution of iron chisel, for one of horn, and twine for babiche or willow netting. (From Rogers and Smith, 1981)

fishing using caribou skin gill-nets. It is clear that great ritual and ceremony attended the preparing and setting of the nets. "Charms" of the loon, goose or gull bills and feet were fastened to the head and foot rope of the net while the toes and jaws of a small mammal such as the otter were attached to the four corners of the net. By custom, the nets were never fastened together and stretched across the entire breadth of a channel but set individually at some distance apart. The first fish was always broiled on the fire (never boiled) and eaten carefully so as not to disrupt the bones. Failure to observe these rules would render the net useless. Nets that were unsuccessful were retired quickly and either sold or reused for other purposes. The use of charms was equally important when angling with a single line and hook and the application of beaver grease to the lure was common.[68] The variety of baits, lures, charms and concoctions would perhaps rival any modern tackle box.

The technique of fishing using gill nets changed slightly with the arrival of skeins of cotton thread around 1700. Nets consisting of woven plant material were probably abandoned by many native groups in favour of cotton nets but the babiche net, as witnessed by Hearne, was clearly still in use by the Dene in the later eighteenth century. Around the mid 1950's, cotton nets gave way to nylon but it is not clear that European technology in general greatly changed northern subsistence fisheries. The arrival of the iron ice chisel made winter fishing less labour intensive but successful fishing remained largely dependent on the traditional fisher's experience, knowledge of good fishing sites, and ability to compensate for year-to-year variations in the catch.

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[68] Ibid.

The Chipewyan and Fishing

In addition to the archaeological evidence of the prevalence of fishing in the northern transition forest, the observation of the first Europeans in the Bay region identified the Chipewyan as both fishers and Caribou hunters. Nicolas Jeremie (b. 1669) the French trader who was at York as early as 1694 provided one of the first accounts of the territory and activities of the Chipewyan. He made a fairly accurate description of the length of the Churchill river through South Indian Lake to the mouth of the Reindeer River and knew that an inland connection existed between Lake Winnipeg and the northern Chipewyan territories (through the Sturgeon-Weir River) near the Churchill.[69] Jeremie was awed by the huge caribou migrations he witnessed along the coastline between York and Churchill but it is noteworthy that in this early account Jeremie described fish as the Chipewyans' main resource besides the caribou.[70] A century later York's chief factor John William, reflecting on the local produce of the transition forest, remarked that "the whole dependence of Europeans and Indians in this line of Country, is Fish."[71]

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[69] Jeremie's, Account, 19. Although much of this information probably came from informants.

[70] Ibid., 20.

Macdonell later noted Chipewyan fishers at Lake Athabasca and remarked on how reliant on fish was this group as compared to the Cree and Beaver Indians in the region:

> The Chipweans...make this place their chief resort, which from its natural situation, being a never failing resource at all times for living on account of the fish that may be taken at any season of the year, for which cause it seems to be the most eligible place for them as they would be unable to live were they necessitated to depend entirely on the Moose or Red Deer for sustenance, the generality of them not knowing the method of killing them as is practiced by the other nations. But to compensate for this deficiency in hunting they surpass all their neighbors in the art of fishing at which they become very expert by their constant practice as frequently they are compelled to leave the woods and mountains either by natural causes or indolence and fly to this grand magazine of nature.[72]

While making his travels through Reindeer Lake and northward through the transition forest, David Thompson also described the richness of the fish resources and the intricacies of Chipewyan fishing techniques. Thompson's account conveys the sense of self-esteem of the Chipewyan fishermen, particularly as anglers for white fish and lake trout. Secrecy surrounded their fishing practices and

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[71] HBCA, Letter from William to John Franklin, 1819, D.1/1, p. 74.

[72] Jenness "Account of...", 15-16.

Thompson certainly thought fish was an important alternative resource to the caribou:

> Unlike some southern Tribes who looked on fish as an inferior food, and the catching of them beneath a Hunter, the Chips prided themselves on being expert anglers, and have made it their study; the great Lakes of their country yield the finest fish, and when the Deer fail they readily take to angling, altho' it affords them no clothing. They are in possession of many secrets of making baits for taking the different kinds of fish; which they would not impart to me; but being in their company was something to be seen. The bait for Trout, the largest fish of the lakes, was the head half of a White Fish, well rubbed with Eagles fat, for want of it, other raw fat; but not greese that had been melted by the fire: The Pike and Pickeral take almost anything, even a red rag; but the pride of these people is to angle the White Fish, an art known to only a few of the men; they would not inform me of its composition, the few baits I examined appeared to be all the same, and the castorum of the Beaver worked into a thick paste, was the principal item; around were the fine red feather of the Woodpecker, a grain of Eagles fat was on the top of the bait, and the hook was well hid in it; the bait had a neat appearance. The art of Angling White Fish is to them of importance, a young man offered a gun for the secret and was refused.[73]

Oral traditions and ancient history relating to the origins of the Dene people are also closely tied with fish resources. A recent study suggests that early Dene migrated from the Yukon District and then spread east as far as Hudson

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[73] Thompson, Narrative, 166-167.

Bay as a result of environmental forces.[74] The initial movement was possibly the result of the eruption of the White River Volcano (circa. 720 A.D.) and the discovery of the rich fisheries of the Mackenzie District. An account entitled "The Change of Ground" describes this movement:

> In the beginning we were living on the borders of the western ocean, and to the east of the Mackenzie there were as yet no inhabitants, because we were living in the plateaus and high mountains. We did not yet know the Nkotsia-Kotcho (the Mackenzie), and we were living in the midst of the Rocky Mountains.
>
> Then an old man went as far as the river and lived there from the fish swimming in it. He spread a net in an eddy and took a great deal of fish. he then returned to bring us this good news, and the Dene came to live along the length of the Nakotsia-Kotcho, because before that time we were living to the west of the mountains.[75]

The authors suggest that the "discovery of fish may well reflect their movement from an environmentally devastated area to one rich in food resources, especially fish."[76]

The pre-1940 communal fishing camps of the Chipewyan not only supplied food resources, but were also social events that reinforced the Dene sense of community. Jarvenpa, who witnessed a form of the old-style gathering (women and children were absent) in 1972, described the social atmosphere as exhilarating and in sharp contrast to other solitary activities.[77] Gambling with cards, and various formalized barter games were some of the favourite activities. These diversions, which probably included udzi, a famous hand game played by eastern bands, effected a redistribution of material wealth in the larger community. In traditional times, these large extended family camps helped extend networks of communication far beyond the limits of a single family. It was clear to Jarvenpa that the communal fish camps of the past, which he had heard about from older informants, and even the 'men only' gathering he observed, were important social settings that reinforced band unity.

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[74] D. W. Moodie, A. J. W. Catchpole, and Kerry Abel, "Northern Athapaskan Traditions and the White River Volcano." Ethnohistory, 39:2 (Spring 1992). 149-171.

[75] Ibid., 159.

[76] Ibid., 160.

Caribou

The abundance of caribou and the wealth of the resource in providing most of the material needs afforded the Dene a high degree of relative luxury and independence. James Knight's journal (1715-16) from Churchill stated that "those Northern Indians very rarely know what want is for provisions although they never want for cold Enough in the Winter for all the Deer and Buffalo (musk-ox)". Also Hearne noted in his travels that the "real wants of these people are few and easily supplied; a hatchet, an ice chisel, a file and a knife, are all that is required to enable them, with a little industry, to procure a comfortable livelyhood". Furthermore he reported that the Chipewyan "live in a state of plenty, without trouble or risk; and consequently must be the most happy, and, in truth, the most independent also."[78]

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[77] Jarvenpa, "Spatial and Ecological Factors. . .," 60.

The caribou not only supplied many of the material needs[79] of the Chipewyan including food, clothing, tools, weapons and shelter but was a resource that shaped the social structure and world-view of the Dene. Band divisions, based on linguistic and social differences, were associated with specific caribou herds, (the Bathhurst, Beverly and Kaminuriak), rather than clearly demarcated territories (fig. 6). Dene social organization was based on bilateral descent and these loose and far ranging kinship alliances facilitated joint exploitation of caribou herds.[80] Local ranges did not have boundaries, people went where the caribou were abundant and "membership was based on common utilization of the range, and open to any person with a primary kin tie within the group."[81] The caribou supported unusually large regional bands -- as many as 1000 individuals during the time of William Stuart (1715-1716). The gatherings, at either traditional spearing points or around the large spruce-fenced

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[78] Hearne, Journey, 82-84.

[79] For a detailed examination of caribou and the material culture of the Caribou-eater Chipewyan see J. G. E. Smith in Helm's Handbook, and Birket-Smith, Contributions to Chipewyan Ethnology.

[80] Although Yerbury argued in The Subarctic Indians that at one time, Chipewyan society was based on matriorganization.

[81] Smith, James G. E., "Economic Uncertainty in an 'Original Affluent Society': Caribou and Caribou Eater Chipewyan Adaptive Strategies", Arctic Anthropology, Vol. XV-I, 1978, 77.

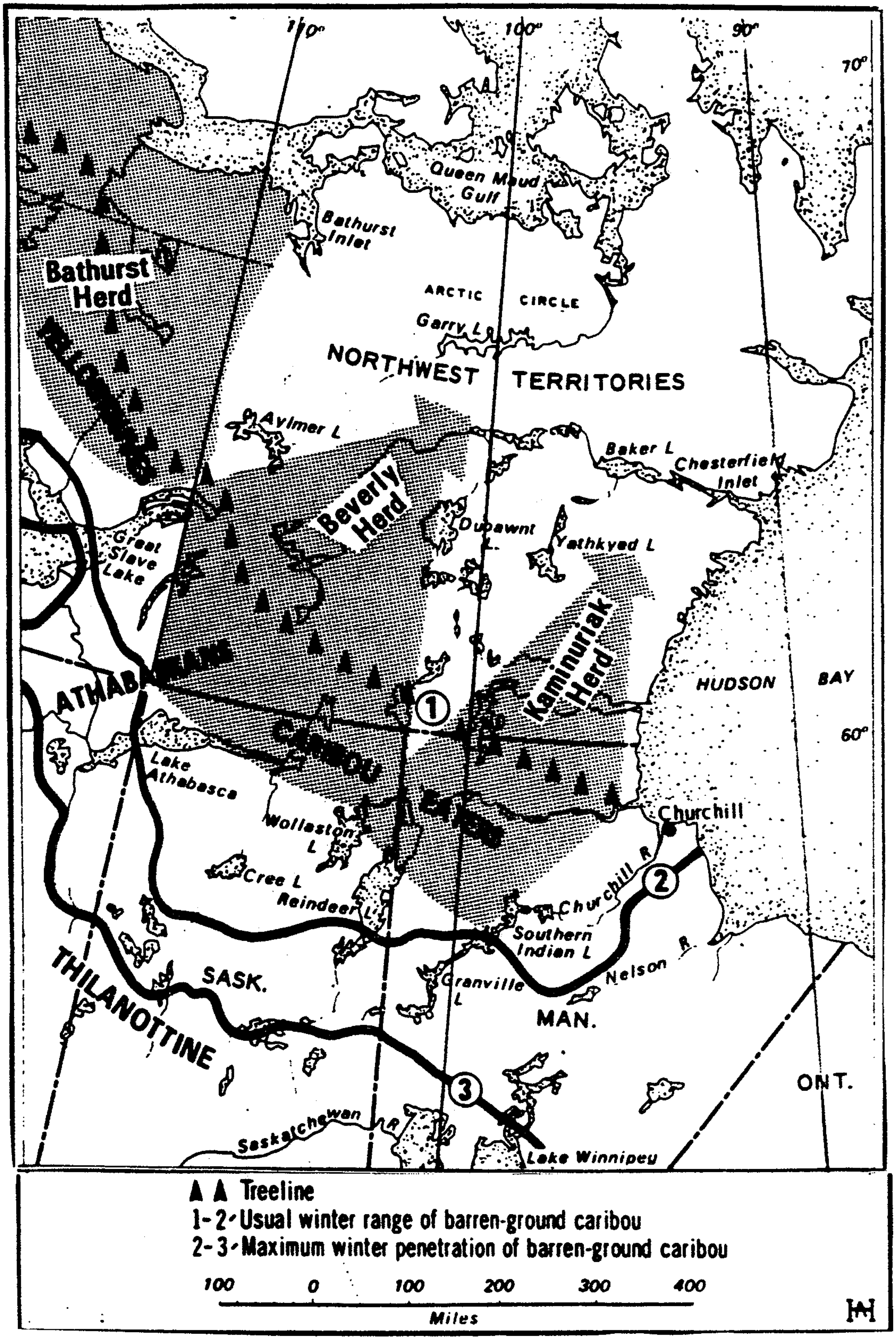
110°
100°
90°
70°
60°
Queen Maud Gulf
Bathurst Inlet
Bathurst Herd
YELLOWKNIVES
ARCTIC CIRCLE
Garry L
NORTHWEST TERRITORIES
Aylmer L
Beverly Herd
Baker L
Chesterfield Inlet
Dubawnt L
Yathkyed L
Great Slave Lake
Kaminuriak Herd
HUDSON BAY
ATHABASKANS
CARIBOU EATERS
①
②
③
Lake Athabasca
Wollaston L
Churchill
Churchill R
Cree L
Reindeer L
Southern Indian L
Nelson R
SASK.
Granville L
MAN.
THILANOTTINE
ONT.
Saskatchewan R
Lake Winnipeg
Treeline
1-2 Usual winter range of barren-ground caribou
2-3 Maximum winter penetration of barren-ground caribou
100
0
100
200
300
400
Miles

Figure 6. Chipewyan Socio-Territorial Divisions and the Barren-Ground Caribou Herds (From Rogers and Smith, 1981)

pounds during the great communal hunts, no doubt strengthened the cohesion and identity of Chipewyan groups.

Some parallels exist between the eastern Dene or 'Caribou Eaters' and the Plains Cree 'Buffalo People.' Both cultures were deeply centered on a single big game resource which provided most physical requirements -- food, skins for shelter and clothing, bones and sinews for tools. John Milloy, in his study of buffalo as a resource for plains hunters, remarks that beyond these necessities or 'hardware,' the buffalo were also instrumental in forming the 'cultural software' of the Plains Cree. An element of this software is social formation which shows how the richness of the buffalo as a resource led to broad kinship networks and a community that was larger than a typical woodland band. Milloy remarks that "the resource supported band gathering, tribal meetings, for the summer Thirst Dance, for example, that were the site of exogamous family formation and of unifying ritual that served to stretch identity past family and band."[82] A second element of this cultural blueprint involves the spirituality connected with the hunt and with the resource itself. To this degree, hunting was a 'holy occupation,' controlled by spiritual rules to safeguard the stable supply of food, and all that was attendant upon the buffalo: the horse, gun and open plains became intertwined with the culture of the Plains Cree.

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[82] Milloy, John, "'Our Country.'" In Abel and Friesen eds., Aboriginal Resource Use., 58.

The spirituality connected with the hunt and the caribou are also clearly evident within Chipewyan culture: as late as 1971, hunting caribou was regarded as neither a heavy burden nor a labour activity.[83] Spirituality, as in many hunting cultures, took the form of beliefs to ensure success in future hunts. One such belief was that caribou never die unless killed by a Dene hunter or a wolf. The spirit of an animal must never be captured or ill-treated or the animal would visit other caribou and the herds would never return to the barrens again.[84] Also a caribou carcass must never be dragged by the neck, which could choke the spirit, and the muzzle (regarded as the seat of the soul) must be removed ceremoniously.[85]

The traditional explanation of the Northern Lights also provides a glimpse of the caribou within the Chipewyan world-view. In Hearne's time, the Dene called the Aurora Borealis Ed-then (Deer) and when the lights were particularly bright the caribou were thought to be especially active in that part of the sky. The source of this belief, Hearne believed, was that when caribou hair is rubbed briskly it emits sparks of static electricity.[86] A better understanding of this belief can be found in the writings of the Oblate missionaries who, in the mid-nineteenth century, were reconciling aspects of Dene views with Catholicism. The Chipewyan believed that after death the soul went to the 'spirit country' of their ancestors, the entrance to which was in the southwest, above the sky. In this celestial place there were hunting-grounds where the souls lived as they did on earth.[87]

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[83] Koolage, William, "Adaptation of Chipewyan Indians and other persons of Native Background in Churchill Manitoba." Univ. of North Carolina, Ph.D. thesis, 1971.

[84] Muller-Willie, Ludger, "Caribou Never Die!", Musk Ox, No.14, 1974, 7.

[85] Leechman, Douglas, "The Pointed Skins" Beaver, (Mar. 1948) 18.

[86] Hearne, Journey, 346.

Another more naturalistic view held that a moon spirit could change their enemies into caribou which the Dene could kill and eat and is tied to the idea that caribou were former men. If the hunts were poor, a common evil in the Athabaskan world, a kind of medicine man or sorcerer named by the Oblates a Jongleur was called upon to bring the caribou through incantations.[88] A strong spirituality was also connected with the wolf because the packs also followed and hunted the caribou.

When the American traveler Prentice Downes was making a journey north of Reindeer Lake in 1940 he learned from his guide that the 'old Chipewyan' cut up and ate the heavy cord or sinew which runs through the leg of the caribou in the belief that it made them tough and strong. Strict meanings for the word 'hello' and 'goodbye' are not present in the Chipewyan language, and at the time of Downes' travels the traditional Chipewyan greeting was still simply "Idthen-Tu" (Where are the deer?).[89]

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[87] McCarthy, Martha C. , "The Missions of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate to the Athapaskans 1846-1870", Ph.d. Thesis, University of Manitoba, Dept. of History, 1981, 301.

[88] Ibid., 299-305.

The abundance of caribou and the relative ease in hunting the animals can support the classification of the early Dene as an 'original affluent society.' Within these kinds of hunting/gathering societies a relatively small amount of time was devoted to basic subsistence pursuits and there was usually a limited demand for outside 'necessities.' Further, people belonging to such societies show "a confidence in the capacity of the environment to support them, and in their own ability to extract their livelihood from it."[90] Smith underlines that Chipewyan life histories, historical legends and mythology do not stress death by starvation and he reasons that this feature of Chipewyan oral history is related to the abundance of caribou and their adaptive strategies toward the sometimes unpredictable migration.[91]

Comparisons might be drawn with other 'affluent societies' such as the Iroquois horticulturists, Peace River wood-bison/moose hunters or Ojibway sturgeon fishermen. The advent of the gun and the horse on the western prairies helped the Plains Cree acquire Buffalo in such numbers that they too might be considered 'affluent.' The Cree began adopting the

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[89] R. H. Cockburn ed., "North of Reindeer: The 1940 Trip Journal of Prentice G. Downes", Beaver, Spring 1983, 36-43.
[90] Needham in Marshall Sahlin's "Notes on the Original Affluent Society." In Lee and DeVore, eds., Man the Hunter, (Chicago: Aldine 1968) 89.
[91] Smith, "Economic Uncertainties. . ." 68.

Buffalo hunt as a way of life around 1790 and they flourished as 'Buffalo People' for about 100 years. As whites and metis began moving into some of the Cree's best hunting grounds around the 1850s, the pressure on the buffalo population threatened the heart of Cree society. A similar process ended a way of life based on the sturgeon fishery in the Rainy Lake district. A critical difference between the Dene and these other primitive affluent societies concerns the depletion of their central resource as a result of external commercial pressures. Thus, the maintenance of the caribou herds through the historic period of the Canadian northwest is somewhat unique and an important issue in understanding the cultural identity and independence of the eastern Dene or 'Caribou Eaters' as they were called by fur traders.

CHAPTER 2

Dene, Cree and Trade with Europeans

This chapter focuses on the eastern Dene and their occupation and movements within the Reindeer and Nejanilini Lake district. Attention is also given to the immense range of the Dene people in earlier times, their characteristic mobility, and their ancient interaction with the Cree along the Churchill River. The examination of the Dene and their relationship with their lands sets the groundwork for the last section of this chapter which explores the engagement of the eastern Dene with the fur trade in the 1790-1820 period and demonstrates that traditional ways were largely maintained.

Modern and Ancient Occupation

Classifications identify the Chipewyan of the Hudson Bay drainage system as the Sayise-Dene,[92] east (rising sun) people or people of the rising sun,[93] or The-ye-Ottine, in reference to the people who traded within the protection of the stone walls at Fort Churchill. A wider designation, now out of common usage, is 'Caribou Eaters' or Ethen-eldeli which include the bands who lived along the forest edge west of Hudson Bay.[94] 'Caribeau Eaters' was first used in print by George Simpson to differentiate the group from the western Athapaskan groups of 'Mountainees' and 'Yellow Knives.' The Caribou Eaters told Simpson that they inhabited the large tract of country towards Churchill and did not consider Lake Athabasca part of their 'legitimate soil.'[95]

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[92] Smith, "Local Band Organization," 15.

[93] Smith associates the Churchill band with this group and indicates they were originally centered at Nejanilini Lake. This settlement however was created by the Hudson's Bay Company for the Dene after the arrival of the rail line and free traders in Churchill in 1934. (R. Lal, "From Duck Lake to Camp 10: Old Fashioned Relocation." Musk-Ox, No. 6. (1968), 6.)

Chipewyan habitation of the transition forest zone west of Hudson Bay began around 500 A.D. Two areas that show intense occupation, according to Ronald Nash's archeological surveys, are Nejanilini (previously called Duck Lake) and Nueltin Lake. Nejanilini Lake is situated approximately midway between Reindeer Lake and Churchill, Manitoba, and, because of the fish and caribou resources of the area, has been an important focus for Indian populations for centuries. The fishing is particularly good at the narrows at the south end of the lake and the region itself was located along a principal migration route of the Kaminuriak caribou herd. In the early 1970s, there were six places where the herd crossed the lake and many of the animals are directed to an area of hills and eskers where they could be spotted and ambushed easily.[96]

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[94] Smith, "Chipewyan." In June Helm's Handbook...,271.

[95] E. E. Rich, ed., Journal of Occurrences in the Athabasca Department by George Simpson, 1820 and 1821, and Report (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1938) 355.

A combination of physiographic factors made the western part of Nueltin Lake a high concentration area for the Chipewyan. This area is also along a major caribou migration route and is located directly at the tree-line. High hills in the area provided look-out points for spotting caribou on the barrens. The two rivers in the region presumably offered good fishing potential and because the site is at the edge of two biotic zones, a variety of resources from both the transitional forest and tundra could be exploited.[97]

The size and number of archaeological sites at Nueltin Lake suggest large aggregations of Dene comparable to the band gatherings Europeans witnessed in the early eighteenth century. In the winter of 1715-1716 Stewart encountered a band of 400 but Thanadelthur, James Knight's Chipewyan interpreter and guide, reported a gathering of 100 tents or 800 to 1000 persons.[98] Later in the century, Hearne was at a settlement of 70 tents or 600 persons and remarked that the encampment "had the appearance of a small town." This band gathering apparently was encountering elements of the fall caribou migration which easily supplied sufficient venison and skins for the entire group.[99]

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[96] Nash, 67.
[97] Ibid., 169.
[98] James Knight, HBCA York Journal 1716, B.239/a/1, Fo 28.
[99] Hearne, Journey, (July 30, 1770.) 40.

Within the general settlement pattern of the northern lakes, the prevalence of archaeological sites on or near eskers underlines the importance of these land features. The esker system served as a 'prehistoric highway' for north-south travel and the sites along the particularly well-defined esker system around Engenolf Lake indicate that the region was used as a traveling station or ancient wintering area. Besides serving as quick transportation routes, eskers were elevated areas for spotting game and escaping insect harassment. In addition to the aesthetic qualities of sandy hills and fine beaches, eskers form a microenvironment for birch trees, various kinds of berries and certain birds.[100]

Another common location of settlement sites was near lake narrows or river mouths and it is clear that fishing considerations were the most important factor in the selection of these lake-edge sites.[101] Exceptions can be found at the Nejanilini Lake narrows and Nueltin Lake sites which, in addition to being good fishing locales, were conveniently situated near caribou concentration points. At these two sites, fishing and caribou hunting complemented each other and accounts, to some degree, for the higher population of Dene who frequented the areas.

From Nash's research it can be summarized that the majority of sites in the region were used by smaller groups for special purposes such as exploitation of specific fish or caribou resources. Site categories include fishing spots, traveling stations or temporary occupations at places where caribou herds could be intercepted. Nash thought the selection of sites was "a complex process of reflecting, at the highest level, the shifting emphasis within a caribou-fish subsistence economy, and at a lower level a concern for the location of eskers."[102]

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[100] Nash, 176-177.
[101] Ibid., 177.

This site categorization fits the larger scheme of cyclical movements of the eastern Chipewyan bands as they were observed in the early twentieth century. The Barren Lands Band of Chipewyan normally gathered at Nueltin Lake to fish and hunt caribou in early winter and spring, then dispersed to local band camps at Lac Brochet, Misty Lake, Maria Lake, Fort Hall Lake and along the Lueaza and Cochrane Rivers. These local bands were comprised of 30 to 100 people living in tents (after 1920, log cabins). Men often split off to look for caribou or make an advance to a local post while families remained to fish or perform other functions.[103] The base camps were often rendezvous points with other regional bands and situated in locations well suited for fishing or close to winter foraging areas of caribou.[104]

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[102] Ibid.

[103] This was the normal manner of approach to Fort Churchill in Hearne's time, and remained a standard practice when bands advanced to Brochet in the 1940s.

[104] Smith, James G. E., "Chipewyan," 281.

In 1930, Birket-Smith observed that Nejanilini Lake was a traditional meeting place and wintering area for the Barren Land band from Reindeer Lake, the Churchill band, and other hunting groups of Caribou-eater Chipewyan: "When in the late summer, the Chipewyan leave Churchill, some of them make their way by canoe up Seal River to Gaylin-tse or further west to Nejanilini Lake. In this region there are one or two important caribou crossing places. There the Churchill group meets the Indians from Reindeer Lake. They spend the winter south of the timber line, fishing and snowshoe hunting."[105] From Nejanilini, some Dene proceeded overland to South Indian Lake where they met relatives from the vicinity of Split Lake.[106] Most of their time was spent inland, away from Fort Churchill. They visited the fort once in December to sell caribou meat and once in February to bring in furs. Families gathered in summer for treaty days and then departed to take advantage of the autumn migration of caribou. Bands from Reindeer Lake visited Churchill several times a year.[107]

Dene Mobility

The Chipewyan sense of territory in early times contrasted with modern perspectives on political domains and rigid boundaries Thus, Hearne described the Dene as the natives "who range over, rather than inhabit, the large trac[t] of Land which lies to the North of Churchill river."[108] Although the Dene were nomadic and divided into highly mobile hunting groups, they did not roam aimlessly from place to place but toured predictable ecological regions based on the season and resource requirements of the group. June Helm alludes to these sites when she suggests that the eighteenth century Indian maps were patterned on major water routes and 'markers' followed by the Athapaskans.[109] These markers were probably caribou hunting places, rich fishing sites, ceremonial gathering places or perhaps areas where particular berries could be found or different types of wood could be acquired. Since the value of a site is fixed at a particular time of year, the land would hold little interest for them after they had moved on. In general, the Chipewyan territory might be considered as the paths linking these sites and the idea of settlement within a fixed boundary would likely be regarded by them as an irrelevance, if not a form of insanity.

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[105] Birket-Smith, 1930, 30.
[106] Ibid.
[107] Ibid., 31.

From the time of first contact, the Chipewyan were regarded as wanderers who were driven by a strong desire to be continually on the move. When they made their early visits to Churchill they rarely stayed for more than a day or two and seemed anxious to return to their families left behind at the fishing lakes of the northern interior. The two Dene guides who accompanied Middleton on his search for the northwest passage in 1742 grew so anxious that the captain gave them a small boat near Marble Island so that the two could reach the coastline and return to their lands.[110] George Simpson also found it impossible to employ Chipewyan post hunters because searching the same local range was nearly intolerable to them, particularly when game was scarce.[111]

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[108] Hearne, Journey, xxxv.

[109] June Helm, " Matonabbee's Map", Arctic Anthropology, Vol. 26, No. 2, (1989), 28.

The high degree of mobility of the eastern Dene tended to blur the boundaries of their territories. Their occupation of areas around the Churchill River in the 1790s was very transitory as William McGillivray noted; "It is not so easy to ascertain the number of this tribe who reside on the banks of the Missinippi as they are continually changing their ground between this and their own country."[112] Later, at Reindeer Lake, it was apparent that the Chipewyan were constantly altering their range and that the "Northern Indians being such a wandering Sett" they never remained "at one place above a year or two at the utmost."[113] In 1862, the factor at Ile-a-la-Crosse was hesitant about giving debts to an eastern band of Chipewyan because it was impossible to know where they would appear the following year: "they trade sometimes at [Reindeer Lake] and sometimes go to Churchill on Hudson's Bay, whichever Post may be nearest when hunting."[114]

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[110] Dobbs, Account, 78.

[111] E. E. Rich, ed., Journal of Occurrences, 223.

[112] McGillivray, 1809. Cited in Heber 118.

[113] Reindeer Lake District Report, 1819-1820, HBCA, B.179/e/1., fo 3.

The urgency to be on the move was particularly strong when the caribou were running and locating the moving herds was critical. Prentice Downes, who was an experienced northern traveler, preferred using Chipewyan guides because of their intimate knowledge of the land and the speed with which they covered territory. In 1939, Downes was making a journey from Reindeer Lake to Nueltin Lake when the fall caribou run was expected to begin shortly. Restlessness, in play with a strong sense of purpose, characterized the demeanor of his guide Zah-bah-deese:

> Within him seemed to burn a constant feverish flame of impatience, restlessness, and search. Whenever we landed, and particularly when we camped, he was immediately and incessantly on the go. He would leave us with no word or comment and begin to range over the country like a wolf looking for a fresh track. He would disappear almost instantly, and then we would see him silently silhouetted on top of some hill, his head turning this way and that as he loped along. As he paddled in the bow . . . it was he who set the fastest pace. . .while his eyes perpetually searched the shores and islands.[115]

The Dene strategy of locating and exploiting the caribou herds, which Henry Sharp has discussed, partly explains the early fur traders' perception of the Chipewyan as wanderers. A problem facing the Dene was that the caribou, their primary food source, was absent from the transition zone for many months of the year and migrations occurred over long distances and vast areas. Finding the unpredictable herds was addressed through the wide dispersal of small hunting groups (comprised, in the modern period, of 11-15 persons) over large areas. In this manner, the Caribou Eaters increased their 'frontal area' perpendicular to the advance of the migrating caribou. Regardless of where the animals penetrated the transition zone, they were likely to encounter one or more hunting units in their path. The wide pattern of placement of social groups on the ground, the capability of the hunting unit to exist independently in the bush, and the distribution of surplus caribou, based on reciprocity and kinship systems, supported the entire operation of the Chipewyan social system.[116]

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[114] Ile-a-la-Crosse District Report, 1862, HBCA, B89/e/1, fo. 2.

[115] Downes, Sleeping Island, 128-129.

Sistene

Related to the high degree of mobility of the Dene and the independent hunting unit, was the formation of the small task group, often comprised of only two men. These partnerships have been evident since the time first European contact was made -- a pair of Dene post hunters were first employed at Churchill in 1721, Middleton used two guides in his search for the Northwest Passage, and the Chipewyan guides Paddy and Kozdaw accompanied David Thompson on his journey through Reindeer Lake in 1796. Even in 1939, Downes found it impossible to secure a Dene guide willing to work alone. Important leaders also worked in close partnerships as is the case with Matonabbee and Idotlyazzee, and their twentieth century counterparts Kasmere and Edzanni.

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[116] Henry S. Sharp, "The Caribou-Eater Chipewyan: Bilaterality, Strategies of Caribou Hunting, and the Fur Trade." Arctic Anthropology, XIV-2, (1977), 36-37.

These partnerships are illustrative of a common social affiliation of the Chipewyan. Using fur trade documents from the later 1820's, J.G.E. Smith has observed that the basis of Dene associations at Reindeer Lake was the sibling bond; "especially that of brothers; fathers and sons; fathers-in-law and sons-in-law; and brothers-in-law."[117] Male partnerships or sistene occurred most often between related persons but was also seen between non-kinsmen and was described as an "enduring relationship that provides for reciprocal obligations and privileges; it is similar to brotherhood."[118] Stories regarding the adventures of two brothers form a common theme in the oral traditions of the Dene; the legend of "The Two Brothers who visited the Land of the Giants"[119] is one example. Brothers in partnership are also popular in Athapaskan mythology relating to the origins of the Chipewyan.[120] Koolage noted that, in the mid-twentieth century, the Chipewyan trappers at Nejanilini Lake always worked in pairs: "A man worked the trap line with a 'partner,' usually a kinsman, for company, safety and assistance."[121]

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[117] Smith, "Local Band Organization," 19.
[118] Ibid., 21-2.
[119] Birket-Smith, 92-95.
[120] D. W. Moodie, et. al., "Northern Athapaskan Oral Traditions. . ." 153.

Northern Range to 1770

The range of the Chipewyan in the first half of the eighteenth century was remarkable. Hearne described its extent in 1772 as

> "...reaching from the fifty-ninth to the sixty-eighth degree of North latitude; and from East to west is upward of five hundred miles wide. It is bounded by Churchill River on the South; the Athapascow (Cree) Indians' Country on the West; the Dog-ribbed and Copper Indians Country on the North; and by Hudson Bay on the East "[122]

Some Dene mythologies indicate that the eastern Chipewyan considered themselves 'edge of the forest people,' but their knowledge during this period extended to at least three rivers flowing to the Arctic Ocean. For this reason, Dene guides were hired in Churchill by Englishmen in search of the northwest passage. Middleton recruited two guides "from some hundreds [of their nation] for their universal knowledge of those parts."[123] Arthur Dobbs later accused Middleton of marooning the guides on Marble Island to keep secret their knowledge of the location of the passage and the site of the rumoured copper mine in the area.[124] Captain Christopher in his 1763 attempt to find the route to the

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[121] Koolage, "Adaptations of Chipewyan Indians," 47.
[122] Hearne's Journey, 326.
[123] Ibid., 301.
[124] Dobbs, Account, 97.

Pacific was also "furnished with the most intelligent and experienced Northern Indians that could be found." All of these guides knew the Hudson Bay coastline as far north as Whale Cove but were baffled when the shoreline of the Wager Peninsula was reached.[125]

In the mid-eighteenth century, regular sloop trade from Churchill was established with the Dene and Inuit along the northern coastline. Sloopmaster John Bean in 1755 first encountered a band of Chipewyan near 'Cape Eskemaux' (Arviat, Nunavut) who smoke signaled the ship to trade.[126] Intense hostilities existed between the Inuit and Chipewyan and in 1756, 40 Inuit were killed by a band of Dene at Knapp's Bay.[127] A kind of truce was arranged between the two groups and throughout the 1760's the Dene and Inuit tented peaceably together and traded with the sloops at Knapp's Bay, Nevill Bay, Whale Cove and Eskimo Point (although Hearne believed atrocities were still being committed farther north).[128] Groups of Dene ranging in size from 50 to 200 persons traveled to the northern coastline to trade caribou, venison and tongues, and some martin and beaver. The Inuit specialized in whale oil, blubber and bone, white fox, wolfskin and caribou venison but also traded caribou products with the sloop captains.[129]

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[125] Hearne, _Journey_, 301.

[126] Orysia J. Luchak, "Prince of Wales's Fort in the 18th Century: An Analysis of Trade, Construction, and Sloop Voyages Northward" Manuscript Report, Ottawa: Environment Canada, Parks (1978). No. 243.243.

[127] Hearne, _Journey_, 338-339.

[128] Ibid.

The significance of Whale Cove as the 'cut off' point of Chipewyan knowledge northward can be understood in light of Knight's 1716 map which indicates that in summer, the Chipewyan followed the coastline in a seventeen day journey to the inland 'risort', in an area marked 'Dear planty' (Fig. 7). For the Dene who followed the coastline northward, Knapp's Bay or Eskimo Point are logical points at which to head inland to reach Dubawnt and Yathkyed Lakes for the summer fishing season and caribou hunts. Every step northward from Rankin Inlet increased the distance from their caribou hunting area. It is also clear why the sloop voyages were extremely convenient for the Chipewyan: the products of the summer caribou hunts weighed up to 2000 pounds,[130] and could be hauled the shorter distance from Yathkyed Lake to Whale Cove rather than making the overland journey to Churchill which was more than twice the distance.

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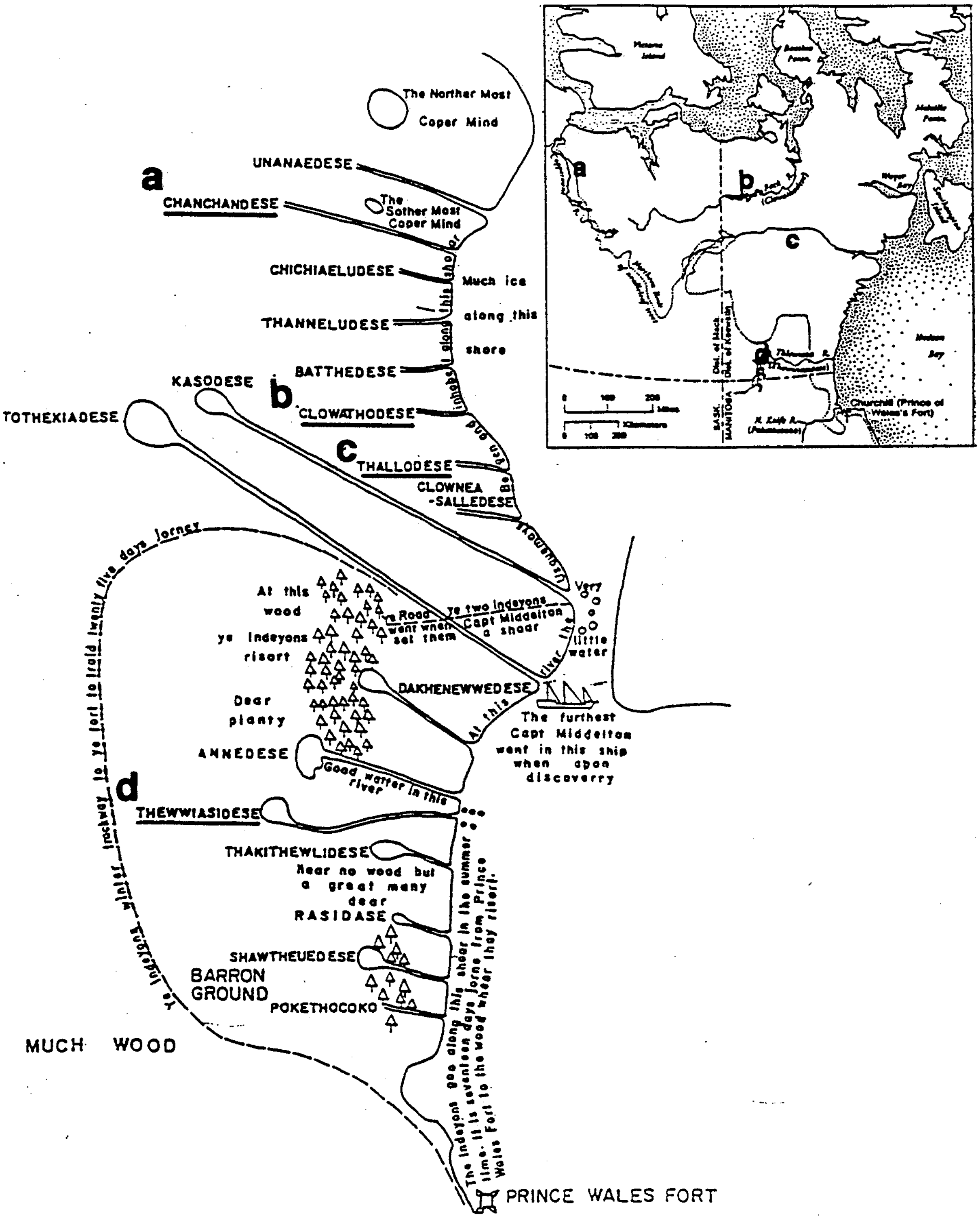
[129] Luchak, Appendix. The northern sloop trade with the Dene was never entirely satisfactory for the Company since the Athapaskans were expected to bring their goods directly to Churchill and some groups tended to take debts from both Churchill and the trading ships. Northern trade declined after the smallpox outbreak and after the capture of Churchill by Jean Francois Galaup and three French war vessels, both of which occurred in 1782. In 1785 new hostilities had also broken out between the Inuit and Dene and by 1788 both groups had abandoned Eskimo Point and Knapp's Bay altogether. Ibid., 124.

[130] Luchak, appendix.


The Norther Most Coper Mind
UNANAEDESE
a
CHANCHANDESE
The Sother Most Coper Mind
CHICHIAELUDESE
Much ice along this shore
THANNELUDESE
BATTHEDESE
inhabeted along this shoar
KASODESE
b
CLOWATHODESE
TOTHEKIADESE
and Between Usqumoys
c
THALLODESE
CLOWNEA -SALLEDESE
ye Indeyons winter trackway to ye fort to trald twenty five days jorney
At this wood ye Indeyons risort
ye Road went when set them
ye two Indeyons Capt Middelton a shoar
Very little water
At this river the
DAKHENEWWEDESE
Dear planty
The furthest Capt Middelton went in this ship when apon discoverry
ANNEDESE
Good watter in this river
d
THEWWIASIDESE
THAKITHEWLIDESE
Rear no wood but a great many dear
RASIDASE
SHAWTHEUEDESE
BARRON GROUND
POKETHOCOKO
MUCH WOOD
The Indeyons goe along this shoar in the summer time. It is seventeen days jorne from Prince Wales Fort to the wood wheer they risort.
PRINCE WALES FORT
Victoria Island
Boothia Penn.
Melville Penn.
Wager Bay
Southampton Island
Hudson Bay
a
b
c
d
Thlewiaza R.
Dist. of Mack.
Dist. of Keewatin
SASK.
MANITOBA
0 100 200 Miles
0 100 200 Kilometers
Churchill (Prince of Wales's Fort)
N. Knife R.

HBCA G.1/19

Figure 7. Knight's 1716-1717 Map Based on Dene Information Redrawing of HBCA G.1/9 by R. I. Ruggles, (Helm , 1989).

The Indian map drawn by Matonabbee and Idotlyazzee for Moses Norton in 1767,[131] also provides some insight into the Northern sector of the Chipewyan range. This document contrasts with Knight's earlier map in that the northern coastline route is not indicated -- possibly because the regular sloop trade had made transporting trade goods down the coast unnecessary for the Dene. Both maps, however, share a similar north-south orientation and do not differentiate between Hudson Bay and the Arctic sea. The east-west Arctic Sea coastline is indicated as a continuous northern extension of the Hudson Bay coastline. Within these representations, the entire Wager peninsula is omitted and the area between the Back River and Chesterfield Inlet is shown as a simple coastline.

This kind of omission and 'compression' is a common feature of early North American aboriginal maps which were strongly utilitarian and without 'stylization' of areas known only from legends or second hand knowledge. Areas that are unknown or irrelevant in terms of cultural importance are generally omitted, regardless of the size of the geographic feature.[132] Two areas that do appear to have some importance to the Dene were the Back (Sturgeon) and Thelon Rivers. As June Helm notes, the 'Sturgeon River' and the 'Grand Fish River' are, on Matonabbee's map, a duplication of the same river, a mistake that apparently arose out of interpretations of Chipewyan -- a language that is notoriously difficult.[133] The name clearly implies that the river was known by the Chipewyan as a good site for fisheries and the representation of Indian tents along the Thelon suggests that this area was a site of communal gathering for the summer caribou hunt. The most extreme northern range of the Chipewyan, according to Matonabbee's map, was defined by the two important resource sites of the Thelon (which drains into Chesterfield Inlet) and the Back River. The huge tract of land to the northeast, occupied by ancestors of the Caribou Eskimo,apparently held little significance for the group and was completely omitted.

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[131] HBCA G.2/27

[132] Pentland, 53.

Helm suggests that the reason these first maps of the area show a continuous north-south coastline was Norton's conviction that the Coppermine River was in Baffin Bay.[134] The unusual orientation can also be attributed to the practicality of aboriginal maps and the distinctive world view of the Athapaskans. As overland travelers who followed the caribou migrations and fished along the interior lakes and rivers, the Dene connection to the ocean was not particularly strong. Sea coasts 'marked the end of the Indian's world' and Indian maps in general are not known for precise renditions of coastlines.[135] Chipewyan knowledge of

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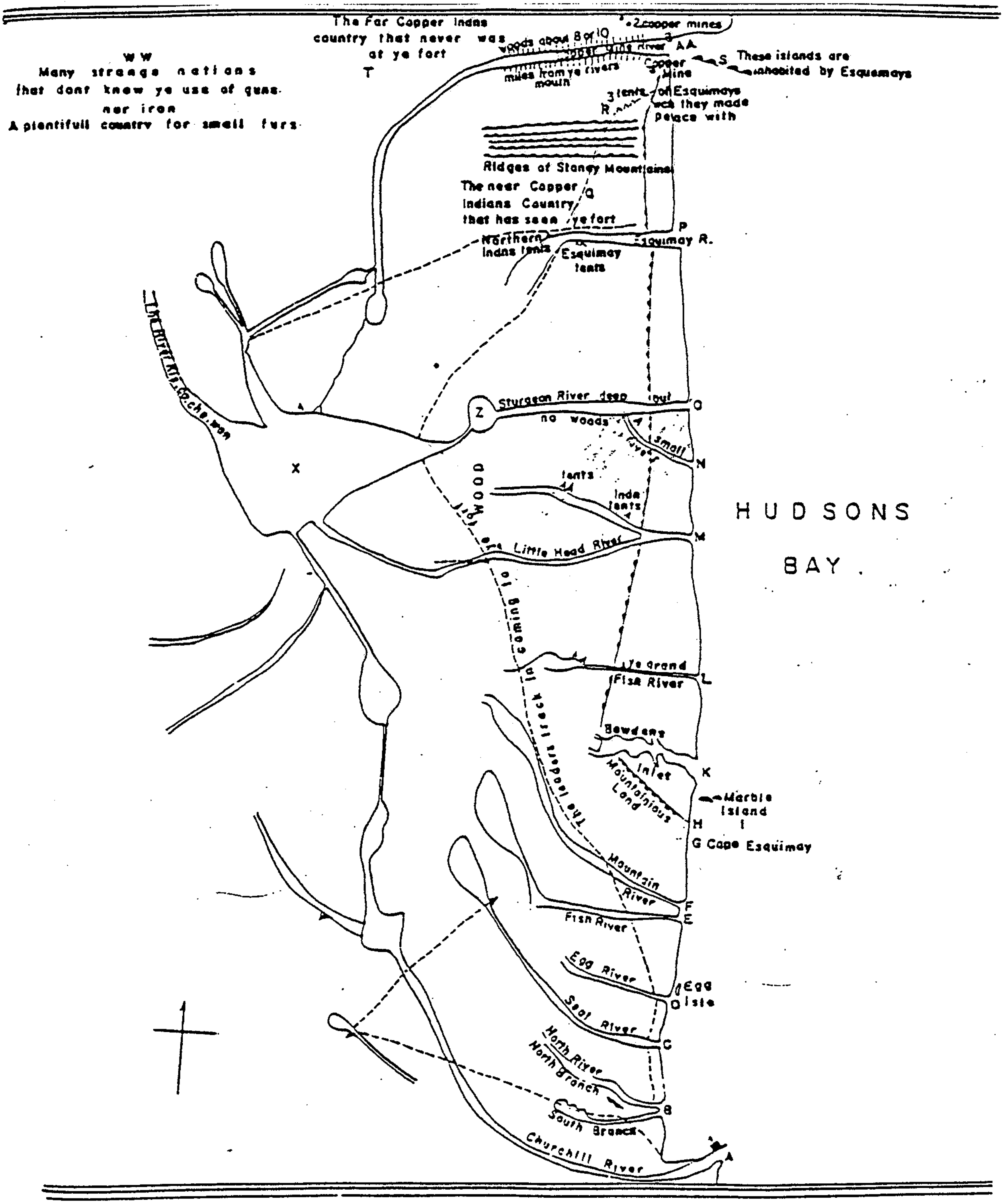
[133] Helm, "Matonabbee's Map," Arctic Anthropology, (1989) Vol. 26, No. 2, 42.

[134] Ibid.

[135] Malcolm Lewis, "Indian Maps" in Judd and Ray, eds., Old Trails and New Directions, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), 19.


The Far Copper Indns
country that never was
at ye fort
T
W W
Many strange nations
that dont know ye use of guns
nor iron
A plentifull country for small furs
2 copper mines
3
woods about 8 or 10
miles from ye rivers
mouth
AA
Copper
Mine
S
These islands are
inhabited by Esquemays
3 tents of Esquimays
wch they made
peace with
R
Ridges of Stoney Mountains
The near Copper
Indians Country
that has seen ye fort
Q
P
Northern
Indns tents
Esquimay R.
Esquimay
tents
Sturgeon River deep
Z
O
no woods
Small
River
N
X
tents
Indn
tents
HUDSONS
BAY.
M
Little Head River
Ye Grand
Fish River
L
Bowdens
Inlet
K
Mountainous
Land
Marble
Island
H
I
G Cape Esquimay
Mountain
River
F
E
Fish River
Egg River
Egg
Isle
D
Seal River
C
North River
North Branch
B
South Branch
Churchill River
A

HBCA G.2/27

Figure 8. Matonabbee's Map

Redrawn by R. I. Ruggles. (From Helm, 1989) coastal areas was probably based on their long-distance raids against the Inuit and their observations that the big fishing rivers eventually flowed into a large body of saltwater. The differentiation between Hudson Bay and the Arctic Ocean may have been critical to Europeans searching for the Northwest Passage in the eighteenth century but was irrelevant to the Chipewyan who were likely much more concerned with land features such as the boundary line between forest and tundra.[136]

Further complicating the picture is the fact that the Arctic coastline is complex and almost continually ice packed. The Back River throughout its length flows in an easterly direction, turning north only as it approaches the Arctic coastline. The Coppermine and Burnside rivers flow north but trend to the east before entering the Arctic Ocean at Bathhurst Inlet and Coronation Gulf. Thus, Matonabbee's representations of the general directions of these rivers were correct except that the Back, Burnside and Coppermine rivers were placed on different latitudes flowing into a single ocean.

The Churchill River and Cree Relations to 1670

Researchers generally agree that, in the eighteenth century, some groups of eastern Athapaskans moved south into the boreal forest along the Churchill River and the south end of Reindeer Lake. Smith, for example, places the early southern boundary of the Chipewyan range at the Seal River and excludes Reindeer and most of Wollaston Lake.[137] Gillespie argues that the Chipewyan gradually penetrated southward to the Churchill River where they occupied new areas in peaceful coexistence with the Cree.[138] This shift in the southern territory is strongly associated with the proliferation of inland trading posts, the small pox epidemic of 1782, and the fur traders' encouragement of the Chipewyan to trap fur-bearers which were more abundant in the boreal forest region. The inland posts built after the 1780s at Ile-a-la-Crosse (1776), Athabasca (1783), Reindeer Lake (1796) and South Indian Lake (1798) attracted both Cree and Chipewyan as trappers and provisioners.

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[136] Ibid., 16.

Thus, a prevalent view links the southward immigration of the Dene with their involvement in the fur trade. Some evidence shows, however, that interaction between the Dene and Cree was occurring in the Churchill River region many decades before the Frobisher brothers had penetrated the Churchill at Frog Portage in 1776. Heber, in his recent study, underlined that the impact of European contact was only one element and asserts that the "migration by Chipewyan Indians over the past several hundred years may best be understood by considering such interacting issues as resource population cycles, climatic change, disease, conflict between groups, or the opening and closing of ecozones within a region."[139]

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[137] Smith, J. G. E., "Chipewyan", 272.
[138] Beryl C. Gillespie, "Changes in Territory and Technology of the Chipewyan" Arctic Anthropology, XIII-1, 1976. 6-11.

Archaeological evidence shows that the southern boundary of the traditional lands of the Dene has shifted widely over the past 2000 years, according to climatic change and the varying location of the treeline in northern Manitoba. Traditional Dene lands, at times, included the northern transition lakes of Manitoba as well as areas of boreal forest where they were in contact with Algonkians in the vicinity of Reindeer Lake and South Indian Lake.[140] The lack of pottery fragments associated with Algonkian culture north of the Churchill River has led archaeologists to believe that the Churchill was the ancient boundary between the two cultures.

Early written records referring to the Chipewyan, made at the close of the seventeenth century by the French trader Jeremie, described the Dene in terms of the state of war[141] that was said to exist between them and the Cree who were trading at the Nelson River. According to Dene stories told today, this conflict extended as far west as Lake Athabasca. One famous warrior was Datsanthi who was the son of a Cree mother and Chipewyan father and lived in the vicinity of Reindeer Lake, an area described as the 'border country' between the two warring nations.[142] (Datsanthi, who fought for both the Dene and Cree, was a bold combatant who seemed to be feared by everyone.) Although Jeremie never journeyed a significant distance inland from York, he had learned of a portage a great distance inland between the Nelson and Churchill water systems to 'Dog-ribbed' (Dene) lands.[143] This likely was a reference to Frog Portage, which was a major access point to Reindeer Lake from the south.

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[139] Heber, R. W. "Chipewyan Ethno-Adaptations: Identity Expression for Chipewyan Indians of Northern Saskatchewan." Ph.D., University of Manitoba, 1989, 75.

[140] Dickson, 43-45.

[141] There was no 'front' associated with this war between the Dene and Cree because the conflict was characterized by these long-distance raids between the two groups. Cree raiding parties numbered from a few to several dozen male warriors traveling in small canoes and these raiding parties often traveled hundreds of kilometers to their objective. Cree from the Nelson River area followed the Hudson Bay coastline as far north as Whale Cove to make attacks against Inuit camps. (Lytwyn, 157-159) The Chipewyan likely carried out similar long-distance raids against the Cree in the Nelson

Evidence suggests that this site was a pre-1770 contact point between the two peoples. The naming of Frog Portage relates to a trail marker placed at the location and is illustrative of the enmity that existed between the Cree and Dene. Old Cree sometimes dismissed the Chipewyan as less than men and hunters and considered them fish eaters who "talk with a voice like frogs."[144] (In reference to the guttural sounds which are incorporated in the Dene language.) The portage

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River area. In the same fashion they attacked a distant group of Inuit at the Coppermine River in 1772.

[142] Kerry Abel, Drum Songs: Glimpses of Dene History, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993), 47.

[143] Jeremie, 31. Wallace and Douglas also believed that Jeremie correctly identified the Reindeer River. 19.

[144] Downes, Sleeping Island, 142.

itself is a three hundred yard path from a stagnant lagoon at the head of the Sturgeon-Weir to the waters of the Churchill at Trade lake. This connection was part of an ancient route used by local Cree who called it 'Athiquisipichigan Ounigam' or 'Portage of the Stretched Frog-Skin.' According to an old story, the Cree hung a dried frog skin at the portage as a sign of derision towards the Chipewyan who were unacquainted with hunting beaver or dressing pelts.[145] The native woman who showed Frobisher the portage and guided his party through the complicated series of chain lakes of the upper Churchill River in 1776[146] was probably a member of the Grass River band, a group that apparently used the route often for making raids towards the north, and are frequently mentioned in Matthew Cocking's Cumberland House Journals.

A combination of unusual geographic factors brought groups of Chipewyan to Snake Lake, slightly east of Frog Portage on the upper Churchill River. In early times, the Dene probably made the journey following the caribou migrations and taking advantage of the rich whitefish fishery located at the lake. When Alexander Mackenzie passed the area on one of his first trips to Lake Athabasca, he noted "a high bank of clay and sand clothed with cypress trees a circumstance which is not observable on any lakes hitherto mentioned" and observed that the Chipewyan used the unusual gravel ridge to "go north west from hence to the barren grounds, which are their own country, without the assistance of canoes."[147] Fidler, who by 1792, had mastered Chipewyan, also remarked that groups traveled the north-south oriented esker system from Snake Lake "into their own lands without ever having the business to use a canoe -- no rivers or lakes of any magnitude intersecting in that direction."[148] Henry in 1776 noted a variety of resources around the lake including caribou and bear. At a nearby rapids thousands of whitefish were visible with their "backs above water" which his men were able to kill easily with their paddles.[149]

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[145] W. Lamb, ed., The Journals and Letters of Sir Alexander Mackenzie. (Cambridge: Univ. of Cambridge Press, 1970), 120-121.

[146] James, Bain, ed., Travels and Adventures In Canada and the Indian Territories by Alexander Henry. 2nd ed., (Edmonton: M. G. Hurtig, 1969), 327.

David Thompson's survey of the Reindeer Lake area in 1796-97 clearly indicates that the region was an ancient margin between the Dene and Cree. The shortcut from Lake Athabasca through Reindeer Lake which Thompson was examining was apparently an old canoe route used by the Cree. References to 'Manito' Lake (Wollaston) suggest an earlier Cree presence and Thompson certainly believed that at one time the area was possessed by the 'Nahathaways' (the Cree) who had since retired to milder climates. The territory was incorporated in the larger range of the Chipewyan and their point of origin, according to his Narrative, lay in the east:

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[147] Mackenzie, Journal, lxxix.

[148] J. B. Tyrrell, ed., Journals of Hearne and Turnor, (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1934) 478.

[149] Henry, Travels, 327-328.

> Their lands, which they claim as their own country; and to which no other people have a right, are those eastward of the Rein Deer's and Manito Lakes to Churchill Factory and northward along the interior of the sea coast; all other lands they hunt on belonged to the Nahathaways, who have returned to the South-westward.[150]

Cree penetration of the zone may have at one time actually extended north of Reindeer Lake and a few old Chipewyan accounts and place names suggest a Cree presence up to the edge of the barrens. On the Cochrane River there was a place with the meaning "many Crees used to camp here," and at Ennadai Lake there is a point the Dene called "the place we speared the Crees when crossing."[151]

There were probably a host of interrelated factors for inter-tribal population shifts in the Reindeer Lake area including changes in animal resources and caribou herd movements. The land itself was prone to large scale changes as a result of forest fires which spread for hundreds of square miles. The devastation of forest fires in the vicinity of Reindeer Lake was clear to Thompson and the native response to such events is telling:

> The Natives are frequently very careless in putting out the fires they make, and a high wind kindles it among the Pines always ready to catch fire; and [they] burn until stopped by some large swamp or lake; which makes many miles of the country appear very unsightly, and destroys many animals and birds . . . but

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[150] Thompson, Narrative, 126.

[151] Downes, Sleeping Island, 142

> all this devastation is nothing to the Indian, his country is large.[152]

Other factors affecting territorial shifts, by Thompson's time, were probably the small-pox epidemic of 1782 which seriously reduced the Cree population and the procurement of guns by the Chipewyan as a result of the development of their trade relationship with Fort Churchill.

Trade at Churchill after 1717

The introduction of metal implements and firearms to the Cree had a significant effect on their state of conflict with the Chipewyan. For more than twenty years up to 1698, the Nelson Cree (the 'Maskegons' Jeremie was trading with) had been acquiring muskets and a variety of ironware including knives, chisels and hatchets. The Dene had fewer metal implements and almost no guns. They used raw copper to make inferior quality spearpoints and arrowheads and some tools were made from iron salvaged from Munk's 1619 wintering place at Churchill.[153] The limitations of early firearms in Indian warfare have been discussed by writers such as Townsend.[154] Nevertheless the Chipewyan, according to

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[152] Thompson, Narrative, 110.

[153] R. Douglas, J. Wallace, eds., Twenty Years of York Factory 1694-1714: Jeremie's Account of Hudson Strait and Bay, (Ottawa: Thorburn and Abbott, 1926.) 21. In 1898, the Chipewyan still referred to the Churchill River as the Tzan-deze or Metal River. (Tyrrell in Thompson's Narrative, 105n.)

[154] Townsend, Joan B. "Firearms against Native Arms: A Study in Comparative Efficiencies with an Alaskan Example." Arctic Anthropology, (1983) 20(2); 1-33.

Jeremie and other traders, were intimidated by the European weapons and kept their distance from the Cree.[155] Dene stories relating to the period still recall Cree attacks and describe the flying lead and death these encounters brought. It was said to be a time when wits, stealth and guile were their only weapons against a well-armed enemy.[156]

Although Fort Prince of Wales was established in 1717 as a trading centre for the Chipewyan, many Cree gravitated towards the Fort. Home Guard Cree were transplanted from York as provisioners and the native population swelled during the spring goose hunts. For the Cree who lived along the Churchill River the new fort was also a logical locus of trade. Three Cree groups were identified with the Churchill River: the Missinipee from the upper reaches of the river, the Wenunnetowuck in the vicinity of South Indian Lake and the Mantua-Seppee at the lower reaches of the Churchill.[157] The Missinipee were actually the first trading Indians to arrive at Fort Churchill and they were encouraged to trade at York in order not to interfere with the Chipewyan visits to the more northerly post.[158] In 1721 a large group of Missinipee from the 'great water' at the 'head of the river' arrived at Churchill and were exasperated with chief factor Richard Staunton's refusal to trade -- they explained that they were now friends of the 'Northern Indians' and impressed upon the factor the extra distance of travel to York.[159] The company policy of trading only with the Chipewyan was soon abandoned and a significant amount of furs came from the Cree who arrived via the Churchill River. By 1733, as many as 65 canoes were arriving from 'up the river' during the trading season.[160] Another report indicated that 100 'Upland Indians' (Cree) and 200 Chipewyan arrived for trade in 1742.[161]

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[155] Jeremie, 20.

[156] Abel, Drum Songs, 47.

[157] Andrew Graham, Observations, 206. See also Lytwyn, 53.

[158] Kenny, James F., ed., The Founding of Churchill, Journal of Captain James Knight (Toronto: Dent and Sons, 1932), 163.

The Dene were just beginning to adapt to the fur trade in the 1715-1720 period. Their arrival at Churchill in June of 1718 was the direct result of Thanadelthur's peace-making efforts between the Cree and Chipewyan several years before. At this time direct contact was still viewed as a rare event. The group that arrived on June 7, 1718 with a few martin and beaver 'not strecht' and 'not drest rightly' were given a lecture by factor Staunton. He reported that he found it necessary to review the principles of exchange: "I expostulated with 'em to gett goods, where by they might gett such goods as they want; that this place was settled on purpose for a mutuale conference with them, and for their benefitt."[162]

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[159] HBCA, Churchill Journal, B.42/a/1, fo. 133.
[160] HBCA, B.42/a/13 fo. 31
[161] Dobbs, Account, 47.
[162] HBCA, B.42/a/1, fo. 49.

The situation at Churchill did not easily facilitate contact and the Chipewyan had reason to be tentative. Their approach to the Fort was down the Seal River and thus they descended from the north. This route passed through the marshy goose hunting area north of the post which, in spring, was likely to be filled with heavily armed Cree. To stabilize the situation between the Cree and Chipewyan and to reinforce trade relations, two Chipewyan were retained as post hunters. Besides their being 'not much used to guns' the two did not appear particularly enthusiastic about hunting for the post. Eventually the factor wanted them sent away quickly "because they eat more grain than they have killed."[163] A more pertinent solution was outlined by Knight in 1714: for the new fort to be successful, the Chipewyan had to be properly armed to defend themselves against the Cree.[164]

Although open warfare was rare, tension between the two groups continued throughout the period when inland posts were established after the 1780s. The Chipewyan traded peacefully alongside the Cree on the upper Churchill but inter-tribal friction between the Chipewyan and their hereditary enemies was a factor that encouraged William McGillivray to dispatch the first North West Company wintering party to Reindeer Lake. At the English River posts, most of the North West Company's exchange was with various Algonkian groups including Beaver Indians, Athabaskan Cree and "Rat River Pous" (Swampy Cree). The Chipewyan were outnumbered and many were hesitant about trading at these posts, preferring to remain closer to their ancestral lands in the transition forest and barrens. The Dene at Reindeer Lake, the Cree informant Shiqhiqish told McGillivray, kept to the northward because of their fear of the Rat River Cree.[165]

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[163] HBCA, B.42/a/3, fo.5 .
[164] Knight, Journal, 166.

Conversely, some Cree guides refused to enter the Reindeer River. As a result, Canadian and Hudson's Bay Company expeditions to the area were delayed on several occasions. Malcolm Ross and Magnus Tate, for example, on one of the Hudson's Bay Company's first excursions to the lake in 1796, were lost for several days in the Burntwood River system after their Cree pilot abandoned them "Being affrighted of the Northern Indians very much."[166]

The Eastern Dene and the Fur Trade 1790-1820

William McGillivray referred to the Dene at Reindeer Lake in 1790 as simply the 'English Indians' because of their trading relationship with Fort Churchill. David Thompson, like most fur traders of his era, did not distinguish the local identities of bands, and in the vicinity of Reindeer Lake all families of Dene are referred to only as 'Chipewyan.' Thompson was never able to survey the region east of Reindeer Lake in 1796 but he did determine from his Dene informants that the Chipewyan hunted on the north east parts of the lake and that further towards Hudson Bay was a land of numerous caribou where all was "Rock and Moss."[167] (Dene within the Mackenzie drainage at Black Lake still referred to their eastern neighbours as the Ne!eyl-ina which means literally "muskeg people" or "a dry moss muskeg people.")[168] The movements of these people, Thompson learned, were seasonal and based roughly on the migrations of the caribou: "as soon as they have eaten plentifully and procured as much as they can carry, they leave these lands of Moss, for those of the Woods where they can have a comfortable fire, and get poles of pine wood to pitch their Tents for shelter."[169]

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[165] William McGillivray's Lac la Ronge Journal, 1789-90. NAC, MG 19, C1, Vol.4, fo. 22.

[166] HBCA, Bedford House Journal, 1796-1795, B14/a/1, fo. 4.

A clearer picture of the eastern Dene emerges from the fur trade documents kept at Reindeer Lake and South Indian Lake at the turn of the nineteenth century. The Chipewyan arrived at these posts from the edge of the northern barrens or what Hudson's Bay Company trader Joe Spence, at Reindeer Lake, termed "Ancient Northern Indian Country."[170] Migrations of people to and from the north were highly variable and most bands kept an association with all three posts in the district: Churchill, South Indian Lake and

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[167] Thompson, Narrative, 113.
[168] Henry Sharp, "The Kinship System of the Black Lake Chipewyan." Duke University, Ph.D., 1973, 16.
[169] Thompson, Narrative, 113.
[170] HBCA Reindeer Lake Journal, B.179/a/2, Feb. 16, 1807.

Reindeer Lake. Debts were taken at one locality and repaid at another and, on a yearly basis, bands might appear at any one of the above locations. Loo-zin-ah, for example, was an important leader with a large following. He traded at Reindeer Lake but it was not unusual for him to occasionally move 'his whole hunt' to Churchill.[171] Chi-you-zi-as-zi, like other Dene, trapped and hunted in the vicinity of South Indian Lake, but traveled to Reindeer Lake before departing for his 'own lands.' Likewise, a family of 'Churchill Factory Indians' picked up a few supplies at Reindeer Lake and intended to return to the coast the following winter after the caribou hunt.[172]

The impulse for these movements was tied to the caribou hunt and probably to variations in herd movements. Other factors however were in play. Sickness, probably influenza or tuberculosis,[173] among the Cree near the Churchill River so frightened the Dene at Reindeer Lake that they went a "great distance to the northward to kill [nothing] but Deer.[174] In another case, a Dene man found himself caring for his own large family and as well that of his brother's (who had recently died). Because "his only object was to maintain and Cloath his own family" he had "left for his lands, where he can do it with more ease."[175] By custom, the Dene normally relocated after the death of a family member and this abandonment of a region was grounded in the belief that forces causing illness or other misfortune made certain areas dangerous.[176]

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[171] HBCA Reindeer Lake District Report, 1819-1820, B.179/e/1. fo. 4.
[172] Ibid., fo. 5.
[173] Ewart, William, "Causes of Mortality in a Subarctic Settlement (York Factory, Mb; 1714-1946)" Canadian Medical Association Journal, Vol. 129, 571-574.
[174] HBCA B.179/e/1 fo. 3.

The pathways linking the northern hunting and fishing areas, the posts at Reindeer Lake and Churchill, and gathering places in between were probably similar to those Birket-Smith heard about in 1930. Key areas noted in his study were the Seal River, Nejanilini and Reindeer Lakes. Nejanilini lake was a point of congregation between Reindeer Lake and Churchill bands and the North Fork and Seal Rivers were common approaches to Churchill. The high degree of interchangability between the Churchill band and Reindeer Lake band was clearly evident to Birket-Smith at the time he was at Churchill.

Much earlier reports also seem to indicate that Nejanilini was an important destination. In fact, Jeremie's 1720 publication associated the general area of the Chipewyan nation with the upper-Seal River.[177] According to another account from about 1740, the Dene approached Fort Prince of Wales via the Seal River from a rocky area of scrub woods which was filled with caribou.[178] On two of Samuel Hearne's inland journeys to search for the Coppermine River, the Dene took him through the territory of Nejanilini, Beralzon and Nueltin Lakes. In the spring of 1770, the Dene with Hearne followed the course of the Seal River to the forks of the South Seal River where they were joined by the wives and families of the men who were goose hunting at Fort Churchill. The large party turned north and arrived at the area of Nejanilini and 'Beralzone' (Beralzon) Lakes where "Game of all kinds was exceedingly plentiful."[179] The following winter Hearne and Matonabbee spent Christmas tracking caribou and fishing in the vicinity of Nejanilini Lake. Traveling at a moderate pace with sledges, they were 18 days from Fort Prince of Wales and five days from "Island Lake" (Nueltin Lake).[180]

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[175] Ibid.

[176] Frieda Esau, "Chipewyan Mobility in the early 19th Century: Chipewyan and Hudson's Bay Company Tactics and Perceptions." M.A. thesis, University of Manitoba, 1986, 96-97.

[177] Jeremie, 20.

Nueltin Lake is another lake that was traditionally known for its rich local resources. From this area the Dene probably migrated through the series of 'esker lakes' to the Cochrane River and thence to Reindeer Lake.[181] In 1798, the southern circuit included posts at Reindeer Lake and South Indian Lake which were linked to Churchill by the upper branches of the South Seal River. From district reports, it is clear that the region between Reindeer and South Indian

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[178] Frost, in Dobbs, Account, 47.

[179] Hearne, Journey, 27-28.

[180] Ibid., 65-69.

[181] Downes witnessed such a movement in 1939. He was one of the few white men who saw a Dene migration out of the north actually in progress.

Lake was an important wintering site where some trapping was occurring.

The Chipewyan seasonal cycle meshed well with fur trade operations. Their occupation of more heavily wooded areas, after the fall caribou migration, coincided with the trapping season and gave the groups an opportunity to acquire trade items. Involvement in the spring goose hunts at Churchill, while families fished and scouted animal movements further inland, was not a serious disruption of their seasonal mobility. Dene goose hunters stayed at Churchill for only a short period and, supplied with exotic foods such as raisins and biscuits, rejoined their families in time for the big caribou hunts in late spring and early fall.[182] On the occasions when caribou migrations occurred nearer the fort, in the vicinity of the North Knife or Caribou Rivers, a visit to Churchill was likely very easy.

From the perspective of fur traders, Dene caribou hunting activities did present problems. When variations in herd movements occurred or delays in migrations upset the timing for fur harvesting, the caribou hunt always took precedence. For example, at Reindeer Lake Hugh Leslie noted:

> "It will appear strange to a person looking at the number of Indians at this place that no more Furs had been obtained but it must be considered that the above Indians. . . remained at the[ir] Lands

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[182] Martha McCarthy, "Churchill: A Land Use History. 1782-1930," Parks Canada Micro Report Series, No. 219, 1985. 75-76, 81-82.

> untill late in the Fall and the[ir] mode of traveling with their Families and Luggish in winter is so very slow that the first part of the trapping season was over before they arrived. . ."[183]

Leslie tried extending more credit to the Chipewyans to encourage them to trap more pelts but he was resigned to the fact that "they would go away and live among the Deer and Buffalo and be the middle of next winter before they come back perhaps have a few martins and perhaps none."[184] In the same period, George Simpson's report on the Chipewyan living between Hudson Bay and Lake Athabasca commented that the main reason the Indians were visiting the northern posts was to take stock of European items "to indulge in ease and Luxury" and that, of the Indians he encountered, "none are so much devoted to Epicurian habits as the Chipewyan."[185]

Clearly, the yearly return of the Chipewyan to the transition zone conflicted with the interests of fur trade efficiency and profits. By 1820, many traders believed the Chipewyan used the caribou hunt to avoid their directions of where and when to hunt furs and which posts to go to. The Chipewyan reminded traders that they could always live easily in their own lands (the "land of Canaan" as one factor remarked, with frustration).[186] The caribou hunts gave the

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[183] District Report, Reindeer Lake 1820-21, HBCA, B.179/e/2., fo. 5.

[184] Reindeer Lake Post Journal, HBCA, B.179/a/13, March 27, 1820.

[185] Rich, E. E., ed., Journal of Occurrences, 356.

[186] Esau, 77-78.

Chipewyan a higher degree of autonomy which forced Fort Churchill to keep prices low and necessitated the extension of a cumbersome debt system which the traders thought was very unsatisfactory.[187] Also, employing Chipewyan permanently at the fur trade posts was nearly impossible because most refused manual labour and regarded any labour except hunting as slavery. As the chief trader at Churchill explained, the Dene were "elated with pride [as] an independent nation."[188]

The contradictory pulls of caribou hunting and fur trapping is part of the larger scholarly debate regarding the northern Athapaskans. The success of the early nineteenth century fur traders in reducing the importance of the caribou must be measured against how the modern Dene viewed their primary resource. Dr. VanStone's 1963 study of the Snowdrift Chipewyan and their trapping patterns indicates that the exploitation of caribou strongly overshadowed trapping. Vanstone observed that "looking for caribou is the most important thing they do on the trap line and always takes precedence over trapping" and furthermore that, even when fur prices were high, few men would even go to the trap lines unless caribou were sighted in the area. In summary "trapping seems, to some extent, to have been incidental to hunting even as late as 1925 or 1930. The same is true today even though caribou meat is no longer quite as essential as a food item as it was 30 years ago."[189] A similar observation was made by Sharp of the Mission Chipewyan, who live east of Reindeer Lake; "the northern Chipewyan trap only after they have met their subsistence requirements and then only sporadically."[190]

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[187] Ibid., 74.

[188] Cited in McCarthy, "Churchill. . ." 82.

The pathways followed by the Dene at the close of the eighteenth century were not simply oriented in an east-west direction between Athabasca and Churchill but formed an exceedingly complex network, based on exploitation of fish and caribou resources, extending both north and south between Reindeer Lake and Fort Churchill. Trapping, trading and attending the spring goose hunts at Churchill were integrated into summer/winter movements of the Chipewyan. Their special connection with the northern transition lakes was reflected in the preeminence of the caribou hunt and the fact that the territory was regarded as their "own ancient lands."[191]

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[189] VanStone, James W., "Changing Patterns of Indian Trapping in the Canadian Subarctic", Arctic, Vol. 16, No. 3, 1963. 162-163.

[190] Sharp, "The Chipewyan Hunting Unit," 382.

[191] Joe Spence, HBCA B.179/a/2., Mar. 27, 1807.

CHAPTER 3

The European History of the Reindeer Lake District to 1820

Introduction

The following section discusses the 'opening' of the Reindeer Lake district to Europeans and the penetration, for the first time, of inland trade to the territory north of the Churchill River in the 1790-1820 period. This era was one of competing commercial interests between the Hudson's Bay Company and the independent traders from Montreal and is associated with the rapid spread of many inland trading centres across the subarctic. This chapter examines the development of the major trade routes to the Reindeer Lake district, some chronology of the expanding inland trade network in the vicinity, and some aspects of the competitive struggle between the Nor'Westers and the Hudson's Bay Company. This period also saw the introduction of the bateaux which, for the next hundred years, linked Reindeer Lake and the transition forest lands to the outside 'commercial world.'

The foundation of commercial development in the northern interior of Canada is related to the efforts of seventeenth century navigators such as Henry Hudson (1610-12), Thomas Button (1612-13) and Jens Munck (1619-20). Their search for the Northwest Passage and the discovery of the

'Bay of the North' had important implications for the development of North American fur trade. Radisson and Groseilliers in 1668 initiated a more efficient means of shipping furs to Europe by dealing directly with the Cree at Hudson Bay, thus by-passing the St. Lawrence route and Indian middlemen who brought furs from the more distant interior forests. In 1717, Hudson's Bay Company Governor James Knight, partly under the advice of Chipewyan spokeswoman Thanadelthur, selected the mouth of the Churchill River as a site for developing trade with the 'Northern Indians.'[192] The strategy of the coastal trade system at Fort Churchill was to encourage Indians to bring furs to the Bay coast where they could be supplied with trade goods delivered directly and more cheaply from ocean going vessels. Chipewyan trading bands, led by representatives such as Oul-ly and Matonabbee, extended trade to more distant native groups of the Mackenzie district. In the northern fur trade sector, this system of indirect trade remained in operation until the last decades of the eighteenth century and direct commercial activities remained on the margins of the Reindeer Lake district.

Development of Inland Trade

Throughout the 1760's, competition from independent traders along the interior trade routes leading to the Hudson's Bay Company's seaside forts began seriously affecting the Company's fur returns. Ferdinand Jacobs at York Factory estimated that trade in 1768 had declined over 18,000 MB and that the "Canada pedlars are got in the very heart of the trading Indians' that comes to this place."[193] Andrew Graham, who was not a particularly strong supporter of expanding the company's inland settlements to counter the new fur traders from Montreal, could not ignore similar losses and the interception of pelts and 'pilfering of furs' along the rivers that led to Moose Fort, Albany and Severn.

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[192] Sylvia Van Kirk, "Thanadelthur." Beaver, Spring, 1974. 40-45.

The new traders, backed with English capital, built upon the successful trading post network La Verendrye and his sons had developed in the period from 1730 to 1750. This network reached the heart of an intertribal trade zone which supplied furs to the Hudson's Bay Company's Moose Factory, Fort Albany, and York Factory. The posts, which skirted the eastern edge of the Canadian Shield, allowed the French to intercept furs from Cree and Assiniboine middlemen who maintained their traditional contacts with Indians who were unable or unwilling to make the long journey to the Bay. A wide variety of tribal groups gathered in this zone, including Mandan, Blood, Blackfoot and Gros Ventre Indians and the activities of the new independent traders in the region seriously threatened the Hudson's Bay Company's coastal trade system.[194]

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[193] Letter to London Committee, Aug. 20, 1768, cited in Graham's Observations, 268-269

[194] Ray, A. J. "History and Archaeology of the Northern Fur Trade." American Antiquities, Vol. 43, No. 1 (1978) 29.

Trade at Fort Churchill was less affected[195] because, before 1774, no European trader had penetrated the Churchill River and more northerly trade routes, which crossed Dene lands, were not easily exposed to outsiders. When La Verendrye and his sons were taking furs along the Saskatchewan River and profits at York were plummeting, Fort Churchill traded a record number of pelts.[196] The independent traders initially entered the same key areas of Cedar Lake and La Verendrye's old 'Paskoyac' region between 1764 and 1771 and trade at Churchill actually doubled in the same period.[197]

The situation however was rapidly changing in the early 1770s, as the Frobisher brothers were poised to extend their trade to the Churchill River by traveling north from Cumberland Lake through the Sturgeon-Weir to Frog Portage. Moses Norton, chief factor at Churchill, was aware of the activities of the Canadians and was concerned that "the Pedlars [were] extending themselves more & more to the

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[195] It should be noted that the total amount of pelts traded yearly at Churchill fluctuated widely and these fur returns should be used with some caution. Total trade at Churchill was also a fraction than that of York's which is related to the special characteristics of the fort as a military installation and base for mineral exploration and other endeavours such as the search for the North West Passage.

[196] Trade at Churchill doubled in 1737 and in 1739 23,696 MB were exchanged -- a record never equaled in the eighteenth century (Luchak, 52-53). The Cree from middle and upper Churchill River, who dominated much of the trade at Fort Churchill, largely maintained their middleman position in the fur trade of the Churchill drainage basin during this period. (Ray and Freeman, Give us Good Measure, 47-48.)

[197] Graham's Observations, n269.

NW'ard."[198] In 1773, Hudson's Bay Company servant Joseph Hansom was sent inland to learn more about the Churchill River Basin and to assess the influence of the independent traders in the region.

The extent of the free traders' activities in the vicinity of Cumberland Lake surprised Hansom. At least one hundred Canadians had gathered and twenty canoe brigades were preparing to depart for the season's trade. After traveling north through the Sturgeon-Weir River, Hansom had found Joseph Frobisher with six men settled at Frog Portage, a point on the Churchill river where "Indians passes from all parts of the Country." While Hansom was at the site, Frobisher traded with fifty canoes and a further hundred canoes were expected to arrive shortly.[199] Frobisher had promptly renamed the site Portage du Traite.

Once Frobisher had established a foothold on the Churchill, the Canadians rapidly extended their trade westward. Louis Primeau spent the winter of 1775-1776 near Dipper Lake and the following summer Frobisher had established the important post of Ile-a-la-Crosse, which originally was a famous site where Indian groups gathered to play this favourite game.[200] This series of posts between Methy Portage (the height of land separating the Mackenzie and Churchill River Basins) and Frog Portage serviced the local trade area of the upper Churchill (the 'English River District' to the Nor'westers). The posts, most of which were occupied on a semi-continual basis, also formed a chain of supply depots and storage facilities for Peter Pond, Cuthbert Grant and Alexander Mackenzie who penetrated the Athabasca and Peace River district over the next the decade.

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[198] Cited in Luchak, 114.
[199] Turnor, Journal, 240.
[200] Lamb, Journals and Letters, 124.

Although the Canadians had made serious inroads into the rich fur zone of the Athabasca district, the association between the Chipewyan and Fort Churchill was not easily broken. Hearne estimated that every male Chipewyan had visited Churchill at least once in his life[201] and Mackenzie at Athabasca remarked:

> A great number of Chipeweans who went to Hudson Bay last Summer came this winter to our new Establishment at the Lake. They traded largely at the Bay and were highly satisfied with their reception, and say that they were Seven Months absent on their journey, yet seem inclined to return.[202]

Mackenzie's general impression was that "the Chipeweans cannot at all be relyed upon for they will always be apt to carry a great part of their furs to Hudson's Bay."[203] G. C. Davidson's early account of the North West Company underlined that the Chipewyans 'clung to their habit' of going to Hudson Bay. Fort Chipewyan, although originally conceived as a trading headquarters for the Athapaskans, became more of a base of operations for further exploration of the Mackenzie River and an extension of trade to Indians of the Peace River district.[204]

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[201] Hearne, Journey, 52-53.
[202] Mackenzie Letter from Athabasca to NWCo. Agents, February, 1789, Journals and Letters, 436.
[203] Journals and Letters, 436-437.

When the Hudson's Bay Company surveyor Philip Turnor encountered a band of 300 Chipewyan at Athabasca they reiterated that they were "well used at Churchill and get plenty for their Furs" and Turnor further noted that the group thought it was "not worth troubling themselves with hunting furs for they cannot buy Cloth[205] with them unless they go to Churchill."[206]

William McGillivray

Under the direction of William McGillivray, in his early years as a fur trader (1785-94), two new fur trade zones extending north and east of Frog Portage were developed. The Rat River district or 'Les Rats' to the voyageurs was a region of dense forest east of the Sturgeon-Weir bounded by the Churchill River on the north and the Grass and Burntwood Rivers on the south. It was known that the Reindeer Lake area extended northward into the territory of the Chipewyan and was approximately midway between Lake Athabasca and Fort Churchill.

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[204] G. C. Davidson, The North West Company, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1918) 52-53.

[205] Many Chipewyan by this period preferred manufactured textiles to caribou skins for summer clothing.

[206] Turnor, Journal, 450-451.

From about 1784, canoes were sent from Kississing Lake and present Pukatawagan into the Rat region to trade muskrat pelts with the Swampy Cree who inhabited the area.[207] By 1794 the English River trade had expanded as far east as Maskegon Country (Nelson River) and under 'the very noses' of the Hudson's Bay people at the old seaside forts.[208] Trade in the upper Churchill district in 1794 equalled about 17 tons[209] of fine, northern pelts and according to McGillivray's biographer, the greatest satisfaction of the period was the bold advance into the districts of Les Rats and Reindeer Lake.

While at Lac la Ronge on the upper Churchill, William McGillivray was assessing the problem of competing with the Hudson's Bay Company and considering ways of extending the North West Company's trade northward to the Chipewyan. Trade with the Chipewyan was relatively new and there were few experienced traders; fewer than one hundred Canadians worked in the English River department in 1792[210] and McGillivray was thus highly dependent on native interpreters, informants and guides.

In the summer of 1789, the Indians who had arrived at McGillivray's Lac la Ronge post were mostly Cree, half of whom had taken credits at Hudson Bay and intended to repay those debts the following spring.[211] McGillivray's plan was to stop them returning by enticing them with goods or, if that failed, by the use of "promises Ominous,"[212] indicating that some less scrupulous means of increasing trade may have been envisioned. That season McGillivray encountered thirty seven Cree and three Chipewyan representatives, at least one of whom was from Reindeer Lake. The Dene, he learned, 'never troubled themselves' with strict annual repayment schedules with the Hudson's Bay Company and that long absences from Fort Churchill were not unusual.

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[207] Harry S. Duckworth, ed., The English River Book. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Univ. Press, 1990), 173.
[208] Campbell, McGillivray: Lord of the Northwest, (Toronto: Clark, Irwin, 1962), 69.
[209] Using the standard of a 90 lb. pack of approximately 70 skins, the total number of pelts was 27,400.
[210] Eighteen freighter canoes with 4-5 men each were in operation. See Table 3 page 99.

During their stay at Lac La Ronge McGillivray found the Chipewyan polite and unassuming but their demands high. Their behavior in the trading room also surprised McGillivray:

> I found them very trouble some during [the]ir stay; not that they're mischievous: on the contrary, I never saw such quiet Indians, but they have a custom of asking for every thing they see & tho' I gave them a great deal indeed, some of them were not altogether contented -- I gave the first Rate chief 10 measure of Powder -- (5 handfuls) 80 Balls 3 fathom Tobacco 3 or 4 knives a[nd] [ ] flints [and] [ ]awls[213]

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[211] William McGillivray's Lac la Ronge Journal, 1789-90. NAC, MG 19, C1, Vol. 4, [ex Masson Collection]. (Notes and partial transcription kindly supplied by Dr. Harry Duckworth.), fo. 1.

[212] Ibid., fo. 2.

[213] Ibid., Fo. 3-4. Hearne had also encountered similar customs when he was traveling across the barrens in the early 1770's. The Chipewyan he met requested every kind of item from him "as if I had brought the Company's Warehouse with me." Journey, 43.

In addition to the close connection between the Chipewyan and Fort Churchill, the problem for McGillivray was one of economics; he knew the prices of his trade goods were high in comparison to the Hudson's Bay Company's rates, and it would be impossible to outfit Dene fur suppliers whom he might not see again for years.

McGillivray had been considering sending canoes to Reindeer Lake or 'Lac du Caribou' since the spring of 1789, at which time he had encountered one of the same Dene leaders near the Sturgeon-Weir who encouraged the Nor'westers to build in the area.[214] Since then McGillivray had been gathering information about the Chipewyan trade with the Hudson's Bay Company and attempting to cement relationships with important Chipewyan representatives. He met for example Agaz-aze, one of the "Greatest Chiefs of the H[udson] B[ay]" who had visited the English District a few years previously and clearly left an impression on the Canadians. McGillivray described Agaz-aze as a "middle aged man, [who] looks more like a Chief than any Chipewyan I have seen . . ."[215]

A significant amount of information regarding the Reindeer Lake region came from a Cree Indian named Shiqhiqish who was employed by the Canadians as a guide, interpreter and part-time fur trader. Shiqhiqish had established a good relationship with the Dene at Reindeer Lake and was probably carrying a few trade items into the region. In February of 1790, McGillivray had a long discussion with the Cree man "about the dispositions of the Indians of and about Lac de Carribou -- he's sure that 3 Canoes could be traded there [and] he's perfectly well acquainted with that Country & has made me a kind of Chart of it & where the Fort should be built."[216] According to Shiqhiqish there were no beaver lodges on the west and north sides of the lake, but a vast number of martin and caribou could be found in the area.

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[214] Lac La Ronge Journal, 1789-90, Fo. 2.
[215] Ibid., Fo. 34.

Two groups of Chipewyan were identified with the zone. The first were the "English Indians" who were Chipewyan attached to Fort Churchill and were utilizing the resources of the area to "kill their Credits" for the Hudson's Bay Company. The second group were Dene who carried furs from the Athabasca district who "pass great way behind Lac de Carribou on [the] Road to the Stone Fort of [Churchill]. . ."[217] The site Shiqhiqish suggested for the fort on his chart was intended to maximize the Canadians' contact with the first group of Chipewyan, who apparently had a more regular association with Fort Churchill.

Provisioning the Reindeer Lake post did not seem a serious issue -- in addition to reports of a vast number of caribou, Shiqhiqish underlined that the fisheries at the lake were plentiful, and remained stable even through the winter season. This reference is to the tickamegg or whitefish spawning season in the fall which lasted into late November. In addition to net fishing, Shiqhiqish mentions that the Indians at Reindeer Lake caught lake trout by simply tying a line to their canoes and paddling.[218]

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[216] Ibid., Fo. 21.
[217] Ibid., Fo. 22.

When McGillivray decided to build at Reindeer Lake, Shiqhiqish, who had done much of the pioneering work in the area, was instructed to return to the area and inform the Dene that the Canadians were arriving:

> I have already adventured all those that have come here that they may depend on having a Fort next year & I intend sending Seqhiqiss in the Spring to Lac des Carribou for the same purpose, & to come back to meet the Canoes at Fort de Traite -- he is the most intelligent Indian I have seen of [his] Nation & I am sure [he] will advance the paroles this Summer as far as possible. . .[219]

By the winter of 1792-93 a house was built at the south end of Reindeer Lake by Simon (the elder) and Alexander Fraser. In February, McGillivray reported that he was waiting for the "Express from Lac des Carribou" which carried news and instructions between the eastern region of the English River and the district headquarters.[220] After a several week journey on snowshoes (or perhaps using a dog train), the

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[218] Ibid.

[219] Ibid.

[220] William McGillivray's Ile-a-la-Crosse Journal, 1793. NAC, MG 19, C1, Vol. 5. p. 7. (Notes and partial transcription kindly supplied by Dr. Harry Duckworth.)

'express' with Alexander Fraser, his guide and an assistant, arrived at Ile-a-la-Crosse.

The Canadians at Reindeer Lake had encountered a large group of Chipewyan ("tho' not so many as suppos'd") with whom they had never before traded and McGillivray questioned whether the three canoes sent to the lake would be sufficient to carry out the season's furs.[221] The fishing was not quite as outstanding as Shiqhiqish had indicated and seemed to be about equal to other good fishing sites in the district; "with a Fall fishery & some they daily take they make shift to live."[222] Arrangements were made to have pemmican from the prairie posts collected in the spring at Cedar Lake, near Cumberland House. Other provisions and trade goods were to be brought up through the Sturgeon-Weir and divided at Frog Portage -- half going to Lac La Ronge and half to Reindeer Lake.[223]

By spring, it was clear that the Lac des Caribou project had been a success; 79 packs of furs and 8 kegs of beaver castorum were brought out by the Frasers, who had loaded their three canoes to capacity.[224] The Reindeer Lake trade was unique within the English River district since it focused almost entirely on the Dene. The Rat River zone encompassed Swampy Cree and even Homeguards from the Nelson or

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[221] Ibid., 8.
[222] Ibid., 7.
[223] Ibid., 12.
[224] Ibid., 45.

Maskegon area. In McGillivray's time at Lac la Ronge only a handful of Chipewyan leaders had brought their families to trade and at Ile-a-la-Crosse in 1793, only 25% of the exchange was with Chipewyan.[225]

Table 4

English River Posts (1793)[226]

Post	Packs	Canoes
Lac D'Orignal(Moose Lake)	64	4
Ile-a-la-Crosse, Poule d'Eau (Waterhen Lake)	89	5
Lac La Ronge	52	1
Lac des Carribou (Reindeer Lake)	79	3
Rat River	79	3
Maskigons (Nelson River)	29	2
TOTAL	392	18

It is unlikely that the Reindeer Lake area could have supported this level of intensive trapping -- 79 packs were the equivalent of approximately 5500 adult beaver skins -- for a long period. Presumably, the Dene were by now trapping the area for both the Hudson's Bay Company at Fort Churchill and the Canadians in the English River Department. At some point, McGillivray had apparently directed more Chipewyan trappers to harvest furs in the region. He met such a group of Chipewyan returning to the Athabasca district at Methy Portage who had wintered at Reindeer lake in 1792-93 and this group had experienced a dismal time in the area and were "quite displeas'd with that place & say that none of them will return

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[225] Ibid., 42.

[226] Ibid., 48

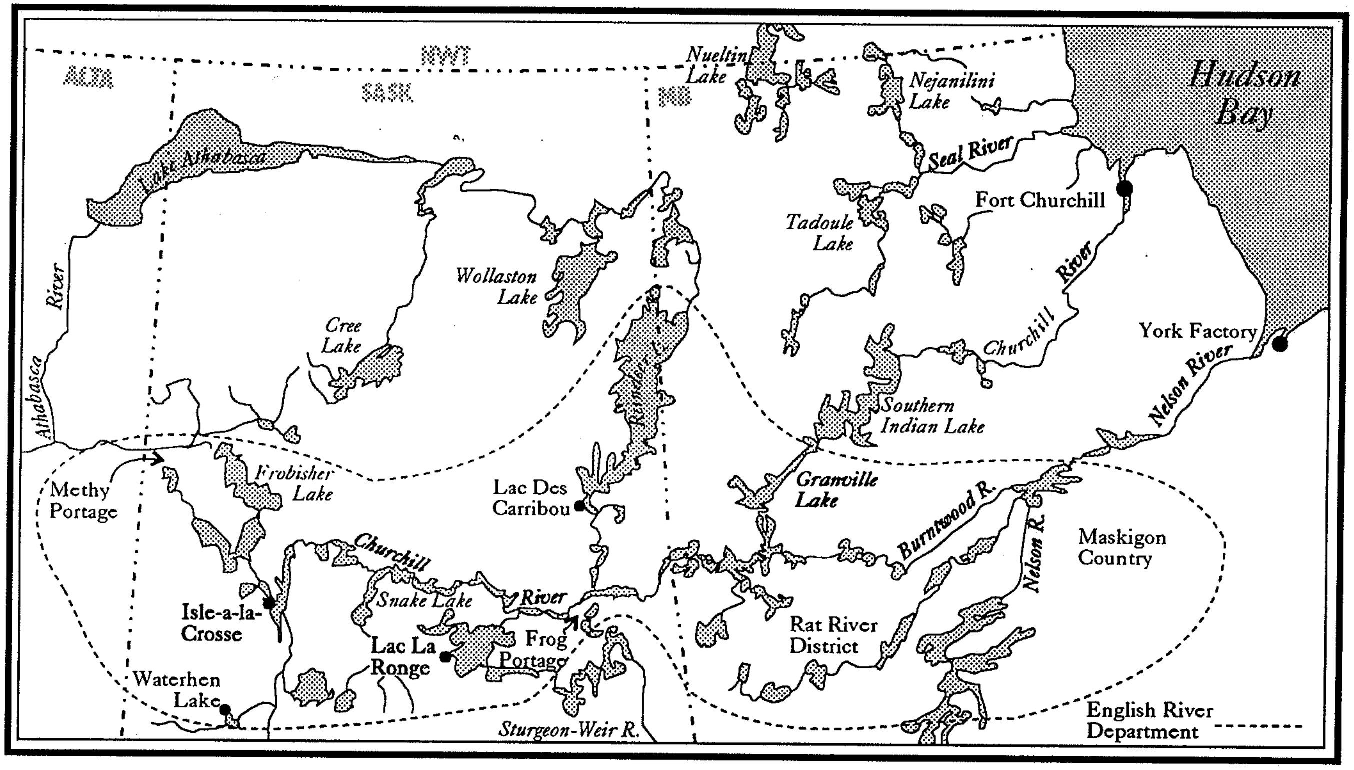
NWT
ALTA
SASK
MB
Nueltin Lake
Nejanilini Lake
Hudson Bay
Lake Athabasca
Seal River
Fort Churchill
Tadoule Lake
Wollaston Lake
Cree Lake
Athabasca River
Reindeer L.
Churchill River
York Factory
Nelson River
Southern Indian Lake
Frobisher Lake
Methy Portage
Lac Des Carribou
Granville Lake
Burntwood R.
Maskigon Country
Nelson R.
Churchill River
Snake Lake
Isle-a-la-Crosse
Lac La Ronge
Frog Portage
Rat River District
Waterhen Lake
Sturgeon-Weir R.
English River Department

Figure 9. English River District 1793

to it again."[227] McGillivray was considering new areas for trapping and endeavoring "to find out some place for them where they could kill Beaver as their old lands were ruin'd."[228]

Despite the possible depletion of valuable pelts in the immediate vicinity, the Canadians retained a presence at Reindeer Lake which lasted until the amalgamation of North West Company with the Hudson's Bay Company in 1821. In these early years, McGillivray had established a strategic position for intercepting furs from Athabasca and for dealing with the Chipewyan who were still wary about approaching Cree Territory along the Churchill River. The Canadians had also positioned themselves on the 'back door' of the Athabasca District, which the Hudson's Bay Company was seriously considering as a new and shorter fur trade route to the more distant northwest.

The Hudson Bay Company's Advance to Lake Athabasca

While at the eastern end of Lake Athabasca at the Fond du Lac River in 1791, Phillip Turnor and his party including Peter Fidler and Malcom Ross, all employees of the Hudson's Bay Company, were informed of the presence of the Canadians at 'Deer Lake' and that the Churchill could be reached by passing that area:

> . . .The Indians say there is a near way to the Churchill water by proceeding up

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[227] Ibid., 43.
[228] Ibid., 44.

> this river and through a chain of small lakes to the Deer Lake and the Canadians have been at that Lake and wintered in it some years back and mean to Winter there again next year. When they (the Canadians) get into the Churchill water at A-thake-a-sake-a-pitch-e-con they proceed down the river to the mouth of a River called the Deer River which runs out of the deer Lake I have been informed the navigation of that River is not bad.[229]

Turnor had been hearing for weeks about a shorter route from Lake Athabasca to Churchill and his determination of the correct latitude of Lake Athabasca confirmed that the lake was closer to Fort Churchill than was previously believed by the London Committee. The Committee's information until this time was based on Hearne's map which wrongly identified Great Slave Lake as Lake Athabasca and consequently there was a general belief that Chesterfield Inlet lay directly east of the district. It now seemed feasible to open a new and shorter fur trade route towards Athabasca and the logical place to start this expansion was Fort Churchill.

As early as 1790, plans had been put in motion by the Hudson's Bay Company to extend chains of posts from both York and Churchill Factories with an eye towards penetrating the Athabasca district. The first stage of this process was building more posts within the Rat River district. However, because both York and Churchill sent traders inland, friction developed between the two departments.[230] For a time, a three-way competition developed between York, Churchill, and the North West Company traders who were by now active in the Rat and Maskegon districts. In 1790, York's new Split Lake outpost attracted Chipewyan who normally never traded south of the Churchill River. Fort Churchill's first inland post at Pelican Lake, built in 1793, was completely outside of the Churchill River basin and deep in Rat country, only thirty miles from York's new Wekusko post.[231] In London, committee members warned the factors at York and Churchill to avoid such intra-company rivalry and shortly after, Fort Churchill withdrew its traders from the Rat district and concentrated on the problem of improving transportation through the difficult lower stretches of the Churchill River. Solving the puzzle of transport on the last 200 miles of the river was crucial to extending Churchill's attempts to be competitive with the Canadians in the inland trade of the English River district.

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[229] Turnor, Journal, 433, Aug. 20, 1791.

Joseph Colen, chief at York, had focused on countering the Canadians in the immediate vicinity of his fort and in the 'southern department' including Lake Winnipeg, Cumberland House, and at posts along both branches of the Saskatchewan River. While extending the chain of outposts between the Sturgeon-Weir and York, he discovered that the Churchill River could be easily reached by following the Burtwood River to

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[230] Alwin, John. "Mode, Pattern and Pulse; Hudson's Bay Company Transport, 1670-1821." Ph.D. dissertation, University of Manitoba, 1978. p. 320.
[231] Ibid.

Kississing Lake and thence to the site of present-day Pukatawagan. Much of this early survey work was done by David Thompson, who had already explored the Nelson River and spent a season in the Rat district trading furs. In 1793, Thompson departed York and, using the new Nelson-Burntwood route, reached the Churchill River. One objective of the journey was to reach Reindeer Lake to confirm Turnor's report that a short-cut existed through the area to Athabasca. At the Churchill River, Thompson was unable to find a guide willing to take him further north however, and eventually he withdrew to York.[232]

The following year, the London directors were insistent that an Athabasca expedition be completed. Malcolm Ross was formally appointed "Master of the Northward" under the authority of Joseph Colen. Ross was a thirty-nine year old Orkneyman who had joined the company as a labourer in 1774 and had already been to the Athabasca district with Turnor in 1792.[233] Ross and the younger Thompson left Cumberland House in an attempt to reach Reindeer Lake but, again, guides could not be found and lack of provisions forced them to spend the winter trading furs in the vicinity of Reed Lake. Finally, in the spring of 1796, Thompson found two Chipewyan guides and began his survey of Reindeer Lake and the lands northwestward towards Lake Athabasca. Ross was expected to arrive from York later that summer.

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[232] Narrative, Glover intro, lxxiv.
[233] J.S. Brown, DCB, 684-685.

David Thompson's Account of Reindeer Lake

The contributions of Thompson in surveying and mapping new territories were impressive and the life and personality of the famous 'Grey School' graduate have been extensively examined by many fur trade historians. J. B. Tyrrell retraced many of Thompson's routes a century later and edited his journals for the Champlain Society who published the Narrative in 1918. Tyrrell was responsible for much of the twentieth century recognition of Thompson as an eminent Canadian explorer and also for the early characterization of Thompson as a 'Sunday school hero.'

More critical examinations of Thompson's life have since been made by Morton,[234] Richard Glover,[235] and E. E. Rich,[236] who have discussed some of the famous geographer's foibles and questionable judgments. The main issues in contention include whether the surveyor actually crossed the Rockies in 1801 and the propriety of his 'defection' from the Hudson's Bay Company to the North West Company at Reindeer Lake on May 21, 1797. Regarding his joining the North West Company, it was true that Thompson's contract had expired at this time, but the customary one-year notice was never given, thus upsetting the Company's Athabasca project. Morton suggested that Thompson's actions did not constitute appropriate treatment of the people who had trained him, paid him well and provided him with his surveying equipment at no charge.[237]

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[234] Canadian West, 448-449.
[235] Narrative, 2nd. ed., introduction.
[236] Hudson's Bay Company, vol. 2, 152-155.

A more complete picture of the figure of Thompson has emerged since Tyrrell's first investigation but less attention has been given to the Narrative as a contribution to the history of the Reindeer Lake district and of the Chipewyan who occupied the region west of Hudson Bay. A notable feature of Thompson's writings was his attention to environment and wildlife but the author also recorded detailed impressions of the people who occupied the areas through which he traveled. Comparable sources regarding Dene history are Alexander Mackenzie's Journal and Hearne's Journey. Mackenzie spent several full seasons at Ile-a-la-Crosse but his efforts and focus were primarily directed towards the northwest and the Athabasca region. Consequently, much of his information with regard to the eastern Dene and the fur trade near Hudson Bay is second-hand and somewhat fragmentary. In contrast, Thompson's first assignment for the Hudson's Bay Company, at age 15, was at Fort Churchill and his career with the company tied him to the lakes and tributaries closer to the Bay.

The scope of Hearne's book and sustained focus on various aspects of Chipewyan culture and trade made it a standard reference for anthropologists, ethnographers and historians. Hearne traveled with Matonabbee, who led a large band who were involved in middleman activities, carrying furs and trade goods between Hudson Bay and the Mackenzie district. An incautious reader might be left with the impression that the book represents a strict interpretation of the entire Chipewyan population in the period. Hearne's account also dates from a period thirty years earlier than the Narrative and focuses on a previous generation of Chipewyan.

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[237] Morton, 448-449.

Another unique feature of Thompson's Narrative in relation to the works of Mackenzie and Hearne, as Glover notes, is its broader perspective upon the northern fur trade. Thompson drew upon an quarter century of experience in a variety of territories and offered reflections on at least three Amerindian groups, the Cree, Peigan and Chipewyan.[238] Thompson also prepared the manuscript for publication in 1849 and thus was able to view his experiences of some fifty years earlier within the context of the very different era of advancing settlers and missionary activities in the mid-nineteenth century. Thompson thought the arrival of European agriculturists and the surrender of land by plains Indians was far more serious than the impact of the fur trade on the northern Chipewyan.[239]

Thompson's account of the Reindeer Lake region begins in the spring of 1796, at the Hudson's Bay Company's Fairford

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[238] Narrative, introduction, xliv, lxv.
[239] Ibid., 114. See also below page 117.

House on the Churchill River near the mouth of the Reindeer River. He had finally secured two Chipewyan guides to accompany him to the "unknown country to the North-westward."[240] The two guides were young unmarried men who had been hunting at Reindeer Lake for several years. They were not experienced with the large Cree-style canoe Thompson used and were more accustomed to traveling overland on foot. They customarily used their smaller Chipewyan canoe on calm days for spotting caribou, waterfowl and otter. As Thompson later discovered, their perspective on the river system between Lake Athabasca and Reindeer Lake was based on their knowledge of areas where they crossed the streams while hunting. Consequently, they were unfamiliar with the problems of falls and rapids along the route.[241]

The first guide named Kozdaw was of "powerful, active, make; gay, thoughtless, and ready for every kind of service: would climb the trees, and brave the Eagles in their nest: yet under all this wildness was a kind a faithful heart."[242] Thompson could not pronounce the Chipewyan name of the second man and referred to the quiet assistant simply as 'Paddy'. Thompson, Kozdaw and Paddy traveled up the Reindeer River, passed the Frasers' house at the south end of the lake and continued over 100 miles north to the present Pink River. At this point the guides pointed east and, following an exceedingly intricate system of shallow streams, the party arrived at 'Manito (supernatural) Lake' (Wollaston Lake). According to Thompson, Manito Lake was so named for its sending out two rivers; the Cochrane in an easterly direction towards Reindeer Lake and the Fond du Lac flowing west towards Lake Athabasca.

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[240] Ibid., 108.
[241] Ibid., 117.
[242] Ibid., 109.

At this point, in fact, Thompson had crossed the geographical boundary or height of land separating the Churchill River and the Mackenzie River drainage basins and was officially outside of the territory defined by the Hudson's Bay Company's 1670 charter. The southern equivalent of this boundary was Methy Portage between the Churchill River and the Clearwater River which flows towards Athabasca.

Thompson believed the system of rivulets connecting Wollaston and Reindeer Lakes through the Fond du Lac river to Athabasca was used by natives to avoid dangerous crossings of large expanses of open water on the two big lakes. The 'natives' Thompson was referring to were probably Cree who occupied the area at some earlier time. On a windy day in the canoe, Thompson was reminded of his experiences on the Great Lakes; " the deep, long rolling waves in a gale of wind, equal to any I have seen in Lake Superior, showed a very deep Lake, and that the roll of the Waves came from a great distance."[243] Thompson thought the size of Wollaston and Reindeer Lakes represented a serious obstacle to the Chipewyan who were still using their traditional watercraft -- "their canoes are small and when loaded with their Wives, Children, and Baggage, are only fit for calm water, which is seldom seen on these lakes."[244] He was thinking in terms of goods transport over long distance, of course, rather than the different travel priorities of families who sought food sources as a first priority. For Chipewyan hunters, the seven month winter freeze over of the large lakes presented thousands of square miles of unimpeded travel for hunting the migratory barren ground caribou which also tended to travel through open spaces created by frozen lakes.

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[243] Ibid., 112.

Thompson had a good deal of respect for his Chipewyan guides and Kozdaw in particular, who was apparently the older and wiser of the two. Returning from the Fond du Lac River, the canoe had overturned and in the commotion Thompson's ammunition, some of his surveying equipment and other items such as their shoes were lost. The group subsisted on berries and a few gulls they somehow managed to capture. After they ate several young 'fishing eagles' (baldheaded), Thompson and Paddy were afflicted with a violent case of dysentery which lasted for days. Combined with the effects of hunger, the two became 'so weak, that we thought it useless to go any further but die where we were."[245] Kozdaw, who had cooked his portion of eagle meat before eating it (and mischievously failed to inform the others to do the same), took charge of the expedition and led the party back to a point near Reindeer Lake where they received aid from a group of several families of Dene.

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[244] Ibid., 113. The Dene of the region, and particularly the women, have long considered canoe travel on the lakes as the least preferred and most dangerous means of transportation. High winds and large waves, often lasting for days, meant capsized canoes, lost supplies and risk to their lives and the lives of their children. Drowning was the most frequent cause of accidental death among members of the Black Lake Band in the late 1960's. Countless near fatalities occurred among fishing guides in the summer and the most common causes of drowning were extremely cold water and entanglement in fishnets. (Sharp, "The Kinship System of the Black Lake Chipewyan." 120.)

This group, probably kin or some other relation to Kozdaw and Paddy, gave the bedraggled trio a friendly welcome, offering both sympathy and food. The party was also re-outfitted before they departed;

> . . . we came to two tents of Chepawyans, who pitied our wretched condition; they gave us broth, but would allow us no meat until the next day: I procured some provisions, a flint and nine rounds of ammunition, and a pair of shoes for each of us on credit, to be paid for when they came to trade, also an old kettle; we now proceeded on our journey with thanks to God, and cheerful hearts.[246]

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[245] Narrative, 119. At this point of his narrative, it is possible that Thompson was attempting to increase the dramatic element of his story. He leaves the impression that the group was also on the verge of starvation and indicates "they were like skeletons." Only 19 days earlier they had feasted on woodland caribou with a group of Chipewyan at Black Lake. Kozdaw, according to Thompson, thought his partner and Thompson might die and believed people might think he killed them. He feared retribution from both his own family for the death of Paddy and from the 'white men' for the death of Thompson. Thompson wrote a note using charcoal on piece of birch bark explaining their situation and gave it to Kozdaw. This last detail seems to lend some authenticity to the event and, although the two may not have been actually starving, they were probably very seriously ill.

[246] Narrative, 120.

By this time Thompson was accustomed to these kinds of receptions at Chipewyan campsites. Previously, on June 25 at Black Lake, he remarked that "we came to three tents of Chepawyan Indians of five families; they were clean, comfortable, and everything in good order" and "as usual, they received us in a hospitable manner, we put up for the night, and staid next day until past Noon to refresh ourselves." Thompson makes several dubious generalizations about the Dene such as "they are strictly honest" and "exact chastity from their wives" but a main theme in his discussion regarding the cultural traits of the Chipewyan, based on direct experience, was that they "never allow[ed] distress to come on their families" and were "charitable and humane to those in want."[247]

Ross, who added a very different perspective of the Chipewyan and the Reindeer Lake area in general, joined Thompson at the newly built 'Bedford House' on September 2. The winter of 1796-1797 was spent making presents of brandy and tobacco to Chipewyan hunters to encourage them to bring caribou venison to the post and trading knives and ammunition for pelts. The entire party consisted of 15 Englishmen, two women and three children and their wintering quarters included a 20 by 26 foot house, which was built at a point about halfway up the lake near the track Thompson had taken to Athabasca Lake.[248]

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[247] Ibid., 106-107.

A few small herds of caribou wandered near the post but the Englishmen had little success in hunting. The largest proportion of time was spent tending the fishery which involved setting and maintaining the twine nets and cleaning and storing the catches. Most of the fish production was from 11 gillnets, set under ice, but the Chipewyan method of deepwater angling for lake trout was also adopted. This method of fishing did not require a metal hook but rather incorporated a set line with a slip knot fastened to a specially hardened piece of birch.[249] The lake trout, according to Thompson, ranged in size to about 45 pounds and described as "very rich fish, make a nutritious broth, and pound for pound are equal to good beef."[250]

The best fishing at Reindeer Lake coincided with the height of the whitefish spawning period, several weeks after freeze over in mid-November when about 1,500 were netted.[251] The worst fishing occurred in later December and January and this was clearly the most difficult period for the wintering party; Thompson recorded temperatures in December that were as low as -50 C. and the nets were by now under four to six feet of ice.[252] The staff was apparently growing 'refractory' under short rations of one pound of fish, 1/2 pound of beat meat and 3 oz. of fat per day.[253] Six men with nets were finally sent off to various locations about 11 miles away but these 'far off' nets were probably only successful in that they reduced the number of mouths to feed at the post.[254]

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[248] Bedford House Journal, Malcolm Ross, 1796-1797, B.14/a/1, fos. 8-24.
[249] Narrative, 123.
[250] Ibid., 123-124. The fatty flesh of the whitefish also made this species a closer approximation of game meat. Whitefish was a welcome relief to a steady diet of Jack and other fish species and considered "the most sustaining" type of northern fish (Downes, Sleeping Island, 69.). The importance of the fisheries to the Hudson's Bay Company's most northerly posts is reflected in the fact that the settlements within the northern Pre-Cambrian shield at Reindeer Lake, Indian Lake and Nelson House -- comprising the 'New Churchill Department' in 1818 -- eventually became referred to as "fish posts." (HBCA, New Churchill Department Report, 1818-1819, B.91/e/1, fo. 1.)

The group at Reindeer Lake saw some relief in March, about the time the caribou began congregating for the spring migration northward. Between February 28 and March 27 about 2,000 pounds of dried and fresh meat were traded.[255] During this period, the Chipewyan also began bringing in the furs from their winter trapping season. A 'great many'[256] of the Dene had gone to the Canadians but the season's return eventually equaled 1,330 MB.[257]

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[251] Ross, Fo. 8-24.

[252] Narrative, 121-122. Tyrrell commented that the winter of 1796-97 was one of the coldest winters known in western Canada. 120n.

[253] Ross, Fo. 21.

[254] Ibid., Fo. 21-23.

[255] Ibid., Fo. 25-29.

[256] Ibid., Fo. 29.

[257] Ibid., Fo. 35.

It is clear from Ross' journal that whatever achievement he had accomplished during his stay at Reindeer Lake was far outweighed by his general sense of dread and disgust of the area. To his credit, he had wanted to use the conventional Methy portage route to Lake Athabasca and as 'Master of the Northward' he felt duty bound to develop, as quickly as he could, the Hudson's Bay Company's trade further west. Most of his impressions of Reindeer Lake, however, seem to have been formed before he arrived and to have remain unchanged during his entire stay. At first landing at Bedford House he remarked that "the prospect of this I [can] say little in favour of"[258] and when the first Chipewyans arrived he called into question their hunting ability, noting with disdain that ten male hunters had produced one goose. Thompson's route to Lake Athabasca, which Ross had not yet seen, was characterized as a rivulet supplied by swamps.[259]

In general, Ross held the Dene in extremely low regard and blamed provisioning problems at the Reindeer Lake post on their unreliability. In January, when the nets were at low production, he saw "very little likelihood of a speedy relief from those cursed useless natives."[260] When the Chipewyan arrived with a few furs in February they began their negotiations in the customary way by asking for every article in the trading room. A more experienced trader might have recognized the tactic yet Ross was simply disgusted; "such is the Greedy disposition of those worthless Tribe of Natives."[261] Ross' dislike of the Chipewyan could not have helped his trading relationship with the group, particularly when the Frasers were on the lake competing for attention.

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[258] Ibid., Fo. 8.
[259] Ibid., Fo. 10.
[260] Ibid.

Remarkably, Ross' loathing went beyond the Dene and focused on the Reindeer Lake region itself. The location of the post, to Ross, was ridiculously impractical: the late break-up of the ice immobilized the traders for weeks and a quick get away with the season's furs to meet the supply ship at the Bay was out of the question. It was also a place where "neither furs or provisions is to be got." He wrote "Such is the cursed part of the country, I am now in . . ." Moreover, Thompson had gone to the Canadians in May of 1797. Ross added; "Such is the Country I was led blindfold into last fall and Deserted by the person Who led me and left to get out well as I could. . ."[262] Angry and disgusted, Ross could hardly wait for the ice breakup to depart. In fact he departed on July 7, while solid ice remained on the lake and "Narrowly Escaped being crushed to pieces and all of us would have parished but by a timely Retreate we got into a bay." As he was halted in this out of the way cove, naturally it started to thunder and rain.[263]

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[261] Ibid., Fo. 35.
[262] Ibid., Fo. 37.
[263] Ibid., Fo. 38.

Thompson's account of that winter, and his general perspective on the land and people in the vicinity of Reindeer Lake, are strikingly different from that of Ross. Thompson also characterized the area, in particular the 'stony region' or taiga towards the north, as a 'country of poverty' with 'few furs and provisions' but he also described with admiration many of the unusual and striking features of the region and saw great potential in the 'northern wilds.' His view of an esker of glacial moraine as it meets a lake for example was appealing: "fine sandy beaches, the banks with small aspens and Birch in full leaf; the ground firm and dry, covered with Bear's Berries (which) formed a pleasing landscape to us."[264] In one instance he was 'Tormented with myriads of musketoes' but in another he and his guides were overwhelmed by the sight and sound of Manito Falls, the effect of which was 'grand and awful.' As an amateur naturalist, many aspects of the Northern transition forests interested Thompson and he was fascinated by the illusion of grand forests, which upon closer inspection were dwarf pines which "we walked through with our heads clear above the trees."[265] "These wild northern countries produce questions, difficult to answer" Thompson wrote. He further asserted that "It is a pity the HBC do not have these countries explored; by their charter they hold these extensive countries to the exclusion of all other persons."[266]

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[264] _Narrative_, 116.
[265] Ibid., 112.
[266] Ibid., 114.

When Thompson discusses the 'poverty of the country' he is mainly referring to the low agricultural potential of the transition forest, a situation he thought would protect the Dene and other native groups from the fate of the Indians who once lived within the American plains. Thompson, who prepared the manuscript for the Narrative in 1849, was disturbed by the consequences of the arrival of European settlers and the disruption of tribes, particularly in the United States. Thus Thompson's statements are not a "sweeping indictment of the North West"[267] as Douglas Francis has suggested, but a statement of his own belief that God created these lands specifically for the 'Red Man':

> . . .the White Man has thought it worth his while to seize by fraud or force [Indian lands]; but the Stony Region is an immense tract of country which the Supreme Being, the Lord of the whole Earth, has given to the Deer, and other wild animals; and to the Red Man forever, here, as his fathers of many centuries past have done, he may roam, free as the wind; [and] this wandering life, and the poverty of the country, prevents the labors of the Missionary to teach them the sacred truths of Christianity.[268]

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[267] R. Douglas Francis, "The ideal and the Real: The Image of the Canadian West in the Settlement Period." In Davis' Rupert's Land, 255.

[268] Thompson's, Narrative, 114. The words of Kasmere, the 'grandaddy' of the Barrens Land Band who traded at Reindeer Lake a century later, were remarkably similar. According to Downes he said; "Who is this white man who presumes to talk about what is ours. . .the caribou are ours, they have been given [to] our forefathers and to us forever." (Downes, 168).

The Churchill River Brigades

The fact that two York Factory employees, Malcolm Ross and David Thompson, had reached Reindeer Lake in 1796 and were examining prospective routes to Athabasca frustrated Churchill's chief factor John Stayner. The two employees were officially under the authority of Joseph Colen, York's factor, and Stayner believed York Factory was interfering in Churchill's trade zone. He complained bitterly within a brief entitled "Reasons for preferring Churchill River, to York River, for conducting the Northward Trade."[269] His argument was that development in the new Athabasca district rightly belonged within the purview of Churchill. The main point of his argument, presented in person to the committee in London, was that Fort Churchill was much closer to Athabasca than York and that a new kind of efficient flat-bottomed boat had been successfully experimented with along the Churchill River.

The design for these large capacity 'bateaux' was based on similar craft on the Albany river. In 1794, two prototypes had been tried on the Churchill and Seal Rivers using European and Dene boatmen.[270] In 1795, two improved versions of the craft succeeded in reaching the junction of the Kississing and Churchill Rivers where Carlton House was erected.[271] Using the bateaux, Stayner had envisioned reaching the Athabasca either through Reindeer Lake or Methy portage. Initial reports indicated that the boats, which could incorporate a large sail, outpaced the birchbark canoes. Once launching sites and 'roller portages' were prepared, the transport system was made even more efficient. In 1797, George Charles with two bateaux extended the Churchill track to Lac La Ronge. The following year Charles brought his craft to the south end of Reindeer Lake where the 'Deers Lake post' was built near the Frasers' old buildings.[272]

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[269] Alwin, 323.
[270] Ibid., 312-313.
[271] Ibid., 315.

Although the ultimate goal of the Churchill traders was to reach the Athabasca district using the bateaux, the practicality of using the craft to reach the far northwest was never tested. Methy portage (twelve miles in length) and the shallow stream system connecting Reindeer Lake to Athabasca were undoubtedly serious obstacles for the heavy boats. Also, Churchill's poor fur returns from the distant northwest, in comparison to those of York Factory, and the successful penetration of the entire Athabasca district by York-based traders at the turn of the century, did not generate strong support among members of the London committee for Churchill as headquarters of the Athabasca operation. The bateaux however, remained the standard craft of the Churchill River basin, and brigades regularly serviced Ile-a-la-Crosse, Reindeer Lake, South Indian Lake and other points along the river.[273]

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[272] Ibid., 325-327.
[273] Ibid., 331.

Working the bateaux or York boats as they came to be called, was physically demanding and described by some as brutal slave labour. Many hunters and trappers however welcomed the opportunity to earn a seasonal wage from the Hudson's Bay Company.[274] By the later nineteenth century, the boats were manned entirely by Cree and Metis crews. Although the Chipewyan were involved in the first experiments with the boats, they did not play a large role in the later operation of the brigades. The factor at Cumberland House noted that "the Chipewyan Indians cannot be depended upon for any kind of manual Labour" and the Dene apparently declined work on the relatively short run between Brochet and Cumberland House.[275] The few Chipewyan who did join the brigade often fell ill and some deaths were also reported. For the Chipewyan, whose options included an independent life of hunting caribou and fishing, the strain of York boat work was apparently looked upon as an alarming prospect.

In the later nineteenth century, the brigades were supplied with surplus amounts of dried caribou from Reindeer Lake[276] and 'Brochet Bananas' (dried caribou tongues), shipped in ninety-pound bales, was a common export staple distributed throughout the Hudson's Bay Company's northern fur trade district.[277] The crews developed a reputation as highly skilled specialists and were described by Governor J. C. Patterson, after his tour of northern Manitoba in 1898, as "the finest boatmen of their kind in the world."[278]

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[274] Tough, Frank, "Native People and the Regional Economy of Northern Manitoba: 1870-1930s" Ph.d. thesis, York University, 1987. 151.

[275] Cumberland House Report, 1886, cited in ibid. 155.

[276] HBCA, Ile-a-la-Crosse District Report, 1862, B89/e/1, fo. 2.

On his journey through Reindeer Lake to Nueltin Lake[279] in 1912, the American traveler and journalist Ernest Oberholtzer witnessed a Churchill brigade in operation. (These were the last years of the brigades -- the manufactured Peterborough freight canoe and the introduction of the portable outboard motor by industrialist Ole Evinrude would shortly spell the end of the York boat era.) The crew was entirely Cree and Metis: most spoke no English. At Pelican Narrows, near Frog Portage, the brigade was departing in the morning and Oberholtzer was awakened by a voice shouting

> 'Wee-chow'-- 'Get up!;' When I came out, I found the York boatmen straggling down to the boat with their personal packs, usually in flour sacks. Some were washing their faces. The cook hastily distributed tea and the bannocks which he had been cooking all night, and then carried his whole kitchen pantry off in a box to the boat. The squaw took her seat in the stern; the steersman manned his oar; two men shoved off with poles; a third on shore put his shoulder to the prow and crawled aboard just as the boat moved off, like a Greek argosy. A man at each oar and one over, for this boat had

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[277] J. A. Rodgers, "Lac du Brochet." Beaver, (March 1945), 11-13.

[278] Cited in Tough, 155.

[279] Oberholtzer was the second white man to see Nueltin Lake after Samuel Hearne who was there in 1770-71. (Cockburn, 281.)

> two crews returning to Cumberland House. The usual crew consists of eight oarsmen (sometimes nine, four on one side, five on the other), a steersman, a bowman, a guide, and lately (to save waste) a cook. As the boat moved out upon the calm lake, her great oars washing like the slow beat of a funeral drum, she was magnificent. We heard the rub of her oars for a half an hour afterwards.[280]

By this period, the commercial centre of the fur trade had shifted from Hudson Bay south to Winnipeg. Frobisher's old 'Portage du Traite' or Frog Portage however remained a key through way and access to the more distant north followed the length of Reindeer Lake. In 1904 Victor Revillon's 'Prince Albert' fur trade district, for example, stretched northward from The Pas, Cumberland Lake, Pelican Narrows (Sturgeon-Weir), South Deer Lake (Reindeer Lake), to the transition forest at Lac du Brochet.[281]

The commercial forces related to the development of trade in the Reindeer Lake district in the 1790-1820 period emanated from two sources: a southern thrust by the Canadians from the vicinity of Cumberland Lake and an advance from Hudson Bay Company from the east, first from York and then Fort Churchill. A special characteristic of the development of the zone, in comparison to the southern fur district, was the lack of a French presence in the first part of the eighteenth century. William McGillivray and David Thompson were the first Europeans who analyzed and tested the commercial prospects of the Reindeer Lake district. The Frasers, who made fishing excursions to various parts of Reindeer Lake, may have been the first outsiders to see the transition forest at the north end. It is also noteworthy that in this period the transition forest between Reindeer Lake and Churchill was crossed regularly by Chipewyan yet the zone was completely unknown to fur traders.

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[280] Cited in R. H. Cockburn's "After-images of Rupert's Land" in Davis' Rupert's Land, 278.

[281] H. A. Innis, The Fur Trade in Canada, (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1970), 373-374.

The 1798 inland trading post network that included Lac La Ronge, Reindeer Lake and South Indian Lake remained, to a certain degree, on the periphery of the taiga lands occupied by the Caribou Eater Chipewyan. The establishment of Brochet in 1860, which was much closer to the traditional hunting and fishing areas of the Dene, occurred fifty years after the spreading of inland settlements along the Churchill River and a century after similar development in the Nelson-Hayes system. Direct trade and the development of trade posts directly within the taiga from Churchill and Reindeer Lake was a process that began in the first part of the twentieth century under the direction of Victor Revillon and the Hudson's Bay Company respectively. This pattern of inland commercial development suggests that Bishop and Ray's chronological model for the subarctic, which defines 1820 as the close of the competitive fur trade and the spreading of inland posts, may need some modification when applied to the more northern fur trade district. The slower and more gradual process of commercial expansion of the Churchill fur trade department, in comparison to the Nelson-Hayes district, should be taken into account. Ray's statement that the Indian bands who lived closest to Hudson's Bay were the most "acculturated," written with the Home Guard in mind but subject to misinterpretation if it is extended to the entire region of northern Manitoba, will also have to be revised slightly. The Dene of the Reindeer-Nejanilini Lake district, though closer to the Bay than many of the North's aboriginal people, actually adjusted very slowly to European economic and cultural conventions. Thus, the assertion of Toby Morantz[282] appears particularly relevant in this case: the fur trade extending from Hudson Bay was not 'monolithic' but comprised many different kinds of trades and different dimensions of native involvement depending on which region and specific aboriginal group is under consideration.

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[282] Toby Morantz and Daniel Francis, Partners in Furs: A History of the Fur Trade in Eastern James Bay 1600-1870, (Montreal: Mcill-Queen's University Press, 1983), 167 and "The Cree of James Bay" in Judd and Ray, eds., Old Trails, 56-57.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has attempted to revise the prevailing view of the transition forest zone between Reindeer Lake and Churchill as empty and sterile and to illustrate some features of the relationship between the land's resources and the people who lived in this area. This relationship is important when considering issues such as dependency, resource depletion and alterations of 'traditional ways' as a result of contact with the fur trade.

Anthropological research concerning the Chipewyan and fur trade studies of the north have, in general, not given great attention to the importance of the subsistence fisheries. Archeological evidence from northern Manitoba indicates that, since ancient times, fish have represented a relatively stable, year-round food source to native societies. The first Europeans identified the Chipewyan as both fishers and hunters and Thompson characterized the Dene as expert anglers who employed elaborate ritual and technique in fishing. As the fur traders built inland posts within the northern Canadian Shield, they themselves became dependent on fish harvesting.

The dominant focus in the scholarly literature on big game hunting may, as Brian Smith suggests, be associated with male perspectives or may be rooted in a scientific rationale that presumes big game yielded the most food with the least labour input. The latter assumption may underestimate the yield potential of net fishing and tends to overlook the portability and technological simplicity of the fishing net. If Fikret Berkes' modern findings about the size of the northern subsistence harvest and the consumption rates of most northerners are an accurate gauge, the historical importance of fishing must be placed in a different perspective. This research considered fishing as one of the most persistent segments of traditional aboriginal culture and an important factor in reducing the pressure of external commercial agencies and high-priced imported staples. The wider symbolic importance of fishing is reflected in the fact that, in 1968, the Chipewyan embarked upon family fishing trips for the express purpose of escaping social disorder in Churchill.

The northern subsistence fish harvest, as well as flora resource use, has some bearing on the discussion of resource depletion during the competitive fur trade era. The introduction of the gun and a general reduction of big game animals was the main point of the discussion about resource depletion in the subarctic in the 1763-1821 period. This view overlooks entirely the importance of the northern fisheries. The iron ice chisel and cotton fishing net saved labour but, overall, the impact on aboriginal fish harvesting practices was slight. In Hearne's time, willow and babiche nets were actually considered to be superior for many applications to the net of European manufacture.

The issue of resource depletion, as it is applied to the lands west of Hudson Bay, may need refining for other reasons as well. Kelsall and other biologists believe that the total historical population of caribou probably remained stable throughout the fur trade period, despite the introduction of guns to Inuit, Dene and Cree hunters and the commercial demand for caribou products at York. To understand the impact of the Kaminuriak herd, it might be considered that Cree living south of the Hayes River in the later eighteenth century often lived easily on caribou products and, east of Arviat, an entire culture of inland Inuit developed around the caribou.

In sum, the Kanimuriak herd was probably enormous and serious resource depletion of either fish or caribou in Manitoba's far north, during the fur trade era, has yet to be clearly proven. Therefore, suggestions about the alleged deprivation and food scarcity among the eastern Chipewyan should be approached cautiously, and explanations of Dene history that utilize trading post dependency as a factor in the eighteenth century history of this particular Dene group are almost certainly wrong.

There are also reasons to suggest that a drastic displacement of people into the region did not occur. Nash's archeological investigations led him to believe that the

Chipewyan had occupied the zone since ancient times and Dene oral histories indicate that Reindeer Lake was an old boundary with the Cree. Hearne, in 1772, remarked that every male Chipewyan had visited Churchill at least once in his life which suggests that a large proportion of the entire Dene nation was at least familiar with the Nejanilini Lake and Seal River district. Finally, fur trade documents from 1807 at Reindeer Lake show that the Chipewyan clearly regarded the transition lakes as part of their own ancient lands.

Sudden changes in Chipewyan social organization and strong differentiation between regional bands as a result of contact with a European commercial system are issues that have been discussed recently by Kerry Abel. Her study suggested that the alleged connection between the emergence of strong band divisions and the development of the fur exchange was a result of a misinterpretation of fur trade documents. Abel believed that the Chipewyan always had a strong local identity, as well as a larger regional identity, and that distinct bands only became evident as fur traders gradually became more sophisticated and precise in their designations. Put simply, fur trade documents at the end of the eighteenth century describe, for the first time, the Reindeer Lake and Churchill bands but the dates of the documents do not necessarily prove when these people 'emerged.'

The Chipewyan, like many of the world's older societies, were a nomadic people. There are also reasons to believe that they were exploratory people. Over centuries before the arrival of Europeans they had surveyed a range that extended from the mouth of the Churchill River to Bathhurst Inlet and from the upper Churchill River to the Arctic Ocean. Evidently, the process of investigating new territories (which may have been partly based on the highly mobile task group or the Sis-tene) was ongoing and different areas were incorporated, or perhaps discarded, depending on the people's own requirements. The Dene were heavily involved in the Churchill River region, utilizing resources and scouting prospective resource locales, making raids against Cree encampments and probably using their own informants to determine what was happening in the district. Once the Canadian fur traders arrived, they investigated these sites as well. One aim of this thesis has been to show that many factors were in play in addition to the impact of the fur trade. Further, J. G. E. Smith's characterization of the Chipewyan as culturally and economically isolated might not be altogether accurate. The importance of the caribou did not necessarily negate interaction with other native groups and a marginal economic relationship with the fur trade did not mean that the Dene were entirely uninterested in the new possibilities that the fur trade brought.

The eastern Chipewyan in the later fur trade period rejected permanent settlement and maintained a high degree of seasonal mobility, based roughly on the movements of the caribou. Their relationship with Fort Churchill was much different than the association between the Lowland Cree and York. Instead of 'Homeguards,' the Chipewyan might better be described as 'Churchill regulars' who drifted as far east as South Indian and Reindeer Lake. Likewise, bands associated with Reindeer Lake, for a variety of reasons, made regular journeys to Fort Churchill. These bands, tied through kinship, formed a large communication network which was admirably suited to locating the migrating caribou herds. Seasonal trapping and the spring goose hunts at the coast were integrated within their movements, but it is clear that in the period from 1800-1820, the migration for the summer caribou hunt took precedence over any other activity. Therefore, the Europeans did not precipitate a drastic overturning of basic aboriginal ecological strategies.

Resource depletion and a large scale displacement and disruption of people might not be relevant to the eastern Chipewyan in the fur trade period to 1820. However, a third issue raised by Ray regarding changes to the Dene's traditional cooperative orientation towards resources does have important implications. This hypothetical change involves a shift from use value of resources to exchange value and a decline of the common property system. The development, by 1820, of a formal commercial fishery at Lake Athabasca, and decades later at Reindeer Lake, are examples of how fish acquired exchange value thus seriously altering the previous open access system. Moreover, the discussion of the development of the inland fur trade at Reindeer Lake and the York boat freighting system has attempted to explain how the zone was first integrated into a larger commercial system. In later decades, as Frank Tough has demonstrated, the regional economy of northern Manitoba in the later nineteenth century was further linked to a broader economy. Thus, the creation of the balance between commercial and subsistence efforts is an important avenue for future research.

It is significant that, up until the 1930s, the Barrens Land Band from Reindeer Lake continued their traditional migrations to the transition lakes and that Nejanilini remained an important meeting place for various groups of eastern Dene. Despite many external pressures, the flexible and autonomous way of life of the earlier Chipewyan persisted well after 1820. This exceptional cultural adaptability has enabled the Dene to maintain a strong sense of historical continuity both in their cultural expression and in their sense of place.

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