

CHIPEWYAN MOBILITY  
IN THE EARLY 19TH CENTURY:  
CHIPEWYAN AND HUDSON'S BAY COMPANY  
TACTICS AND PERCEPTIONS

by

Frieda Kathleen Esau

A thesis  
presented to the University of Manitoba  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts  
in  
Faculty of Graduate Studies  
History

Winnipeg, Manitoba

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## PREFACE

One of the most striking developments in recent scholarship of the Canadian fur trade is in how the native peoples are presented. Formerly, the fur trade was commonly viewed as a process whereby a vulnerable, weaker culture necessarily became subordinate and dependent on a superior culture.<sup>1</sup> The "revisionist" literature of the last two decades, though, has recognized the trade as a process of human interaction, a partnership between groups and individuals with various goals and strategies who worked together to shape a multitude of outcomes in different periods and regions.

The writing of native history has been the domain of scholars working largely within the confines of their particular sources, methodologies and ideological frameworks. They have worked separately on facets of some of the same questions. But increased communication and debate across disciplines, that is, among historians, anthropologists, linguists, geographers, economists and political scientists, have served to challenge old interpretations and stimulate new ones.

The various disciplines have brought to the discussion different principles by which to select data and define particular problems for study. They have had their own models by which to establish logical relationships between variables. They have not always agreed about what they perceive to be the keys to understanding native motivation and behaviour in the trade. In much of the earlier literature, it was assumed that ec-

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<sup>1</sup> Jacqueline Peterson and John Anfinson trace this shift in view in their "Guide to Recent Literature," 1984. Most recently, the newer approaches are exemplified by Bruce Trigger in Natives and Newcomers, 1985.

onomics was the key factor: it was generally taken for granted that the involvement of native people in the trade was explainable by their growing desire for and dependence upon superior European commodities (Peterson and Anfinson 1984:229). But more recently scholars have linked trade behaviour to native social and cultural institutions. They are investigating such relevant factors as gift-giving traditions, territorial organization, kinship and residence patterns, religious beliefs and forms of leadership.

How native history is written affects contemporary native people. For instance, since the Athapaskan Indians of the Canadian subarctic declared themselves the Dene Nation in 1975, researchers' attempts to describe their lives before European contact and to ascertain the nature and chronology of subsequent changes have gained new significance. Far from being confined to the realm of scholarly debate, these are the details essential to current negotiations on land rights, on the definitions of political boundaries between the Dene<sup>2</sup> and their Inuit neighbours, on determining who is eligible for consideration in a claims settlement, and many other related questions.

Identifying the nature and chronology of changes in the Euro-Indian interaction is significant, both intrinsically and for its implications. Michael Asch cites one example of how a questionable historical interpretation may become a political and legal weapon in native claims cases:

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<sup>2</sup> "Dene" literally means "the people." The same natives are described by the term "Athapaskan," the difference being that it is used to describe peoples recognized by ethnographers as within the same cultural group, while "Dene" is a political term by which they define their own membership and identity.

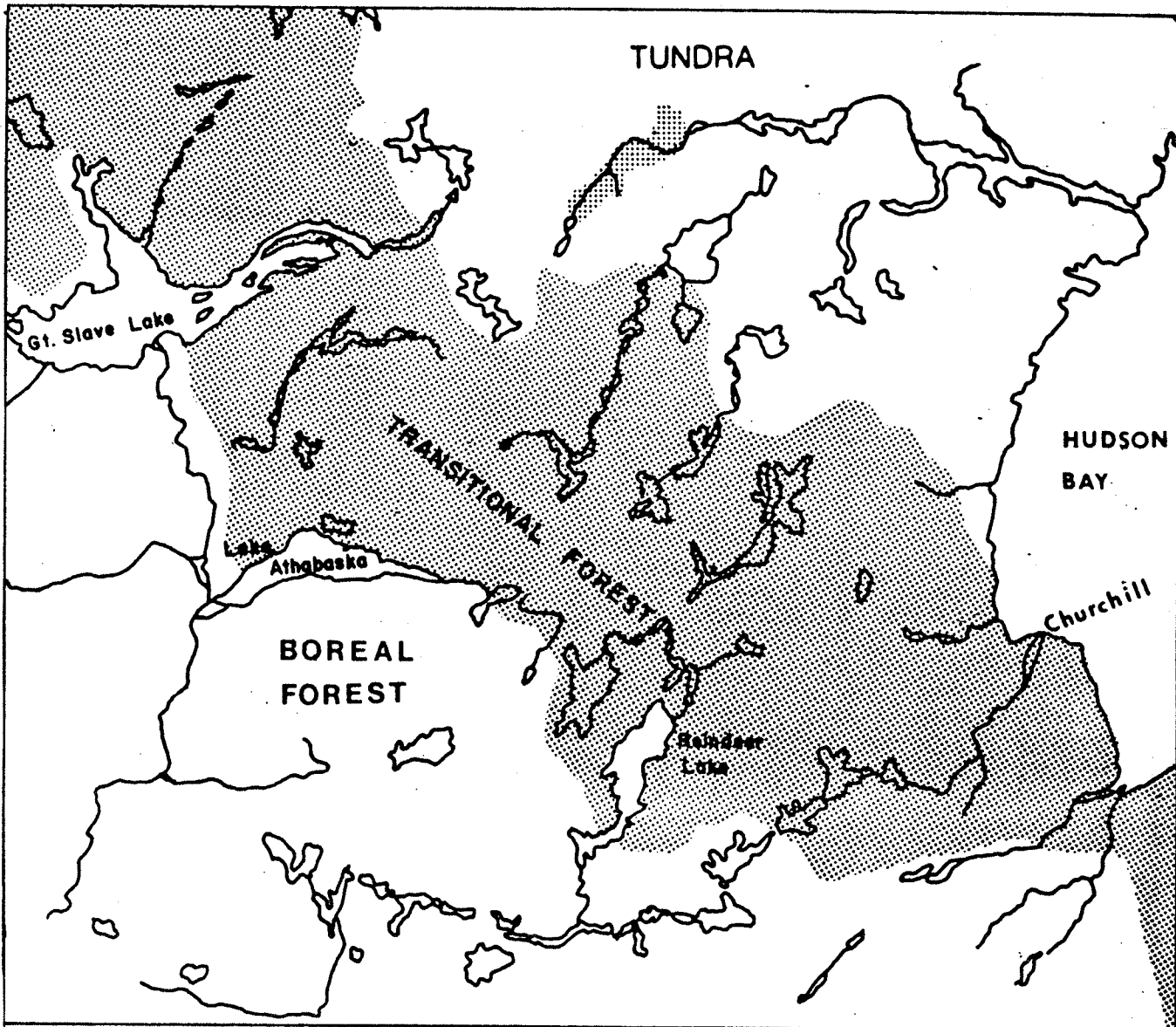
At the moment interests opposed to the Dene are arguing, among other things, that aboriginal society was so decimated by the early contact with the traders that the Dene of today are not the same as the Dene of the prehistoric period, and thus no longer possess an historically valid claim to recognition as a "national" entity [1980:50].

Asch warns that assertions made on "flimsy evidence" could come back to haunt us.

A source of information that has much to contribute to the writing of native history is the collection of first-hand accounts by the European explorers and fur traders. The specific records studied here are of those left by men employed by the Hudson's Bay Company. Their writings and the careful retention of those records by the company made possible the research for this study, which was carried out with the kind permission of the Hudson's Bay Company Archives, Provincial Archives of Manitoba, Winnipeg. I wish to thank Mrs. Shirlee A. Smith, HBC Archivist, and the Archives staff for the staff assistance essential in completing this project. All of the document references contained in this text identify sources found in the Hudson's Bay Company Archives, and are in the form of the standard numbering system used by that institution. Quotations from the documents match the original text as closely as possible. Only very minor changes in punctuation or capitalization were occasionally made for the purpose of clarification.

I am indebted to several people who supported me throughout the many stages of this project. Most of all, I am grateful to Dr. Jennifer S.H. Brown for her patience and for her valuable encouragement and advice.

MAP A  
FOREST REGIONS

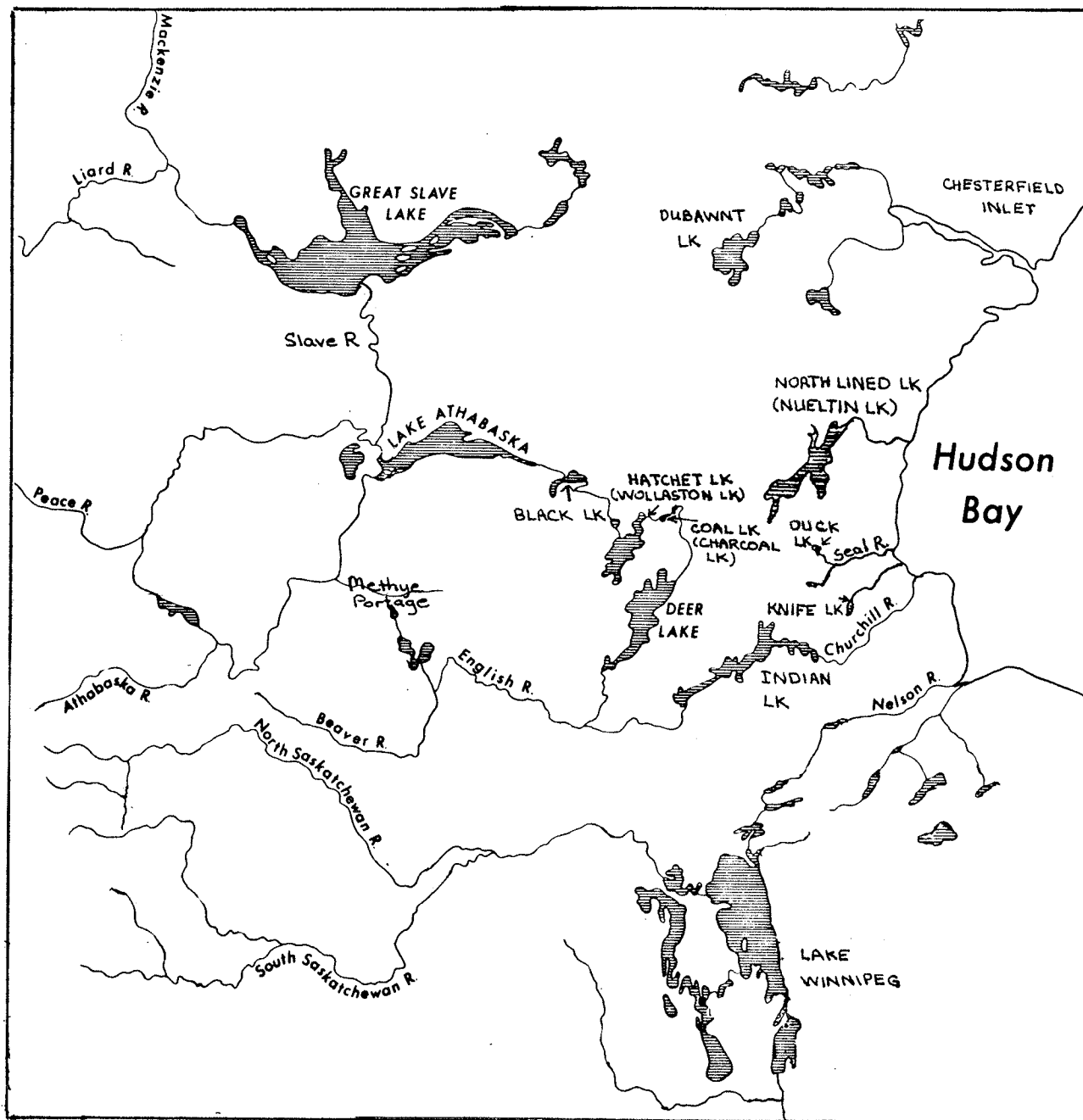


Based on: J.S. Rowe, Forest Regions of Canada, Forestry Division Bulletin 123,  
Ottawa: Department of Northern Affairs and Natural Resources, 1959.

Adapted from: Beryl C. Gillespie, "Changes in Territory and Technology of the  
Chipewyan." Arctic Anthropology 13(1):7, 1976.



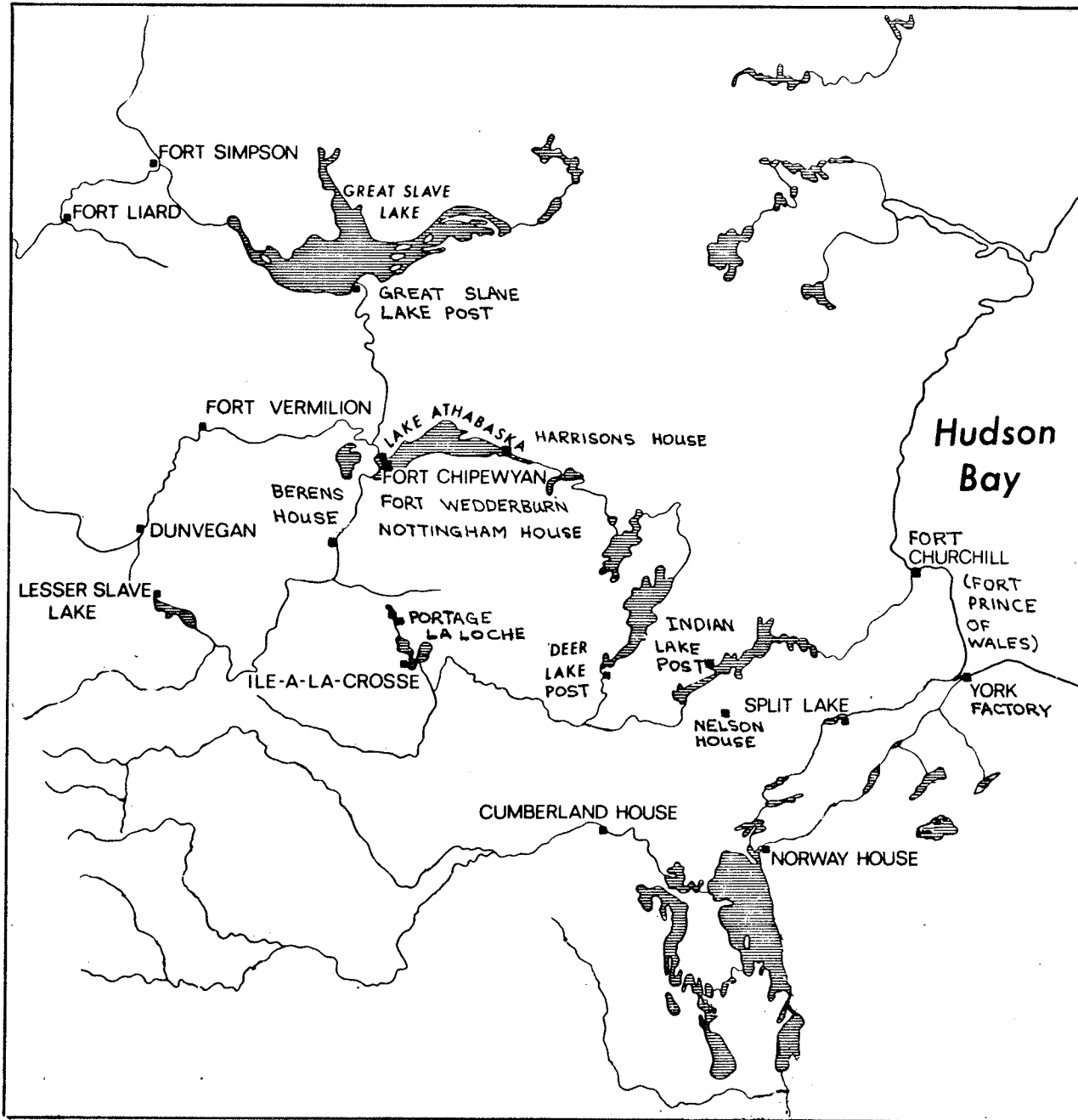
MAP B  
NORTHERN WATERWAYS



MAPC

POST LOCATIONS

EARLY 19TH CENTURY



## Chapter I

### INTERPRETING THE CHIPEWYAN: PROBLEMS AND SOURCES

Over the last fifteen years, the Athapaskan Indians have been the focus of important new historical and anthropological research. A survey of the recent literature points out that the Athapaskans most written about are the Chipewyan, the largest of approximately twenty-five Canadian subgroups in the Athapaskan language family (Krech 1980).<sup>3</sup> Most of the studies have concentrated on Chipewyan social, economic and ecological adaptations.<sup>4</sup>

Several debates regarding the Chipewyan have received much attention. One has involved the question of what lands were occupied by the Chipewyan just prior to European contact. The older view, articulated by scholars such as Emile Petitot (1883), Walter Hlady (1960), and Diamond Jenness (1932), was that the Chipewyan traditionally lived in the boreal forest areas of Lake Athabasca and the Churchill River drainage, from which they were temporarily pushed north by their Cree neighbours. Two notable challenges to this view came from Colin Yerbury (1976) who claimed that the Chipewyan originally hailed from the tundra far to the

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<sup>3</sup> The Athapaskans residing in Canada occupy a vast region from Alaska to Hudson Bay and from the mouth of the Mackenzie River to the edge of the plains. In addition to the Chipewyan, ethnographers distinguish between Beaver Indians, Yellowknives, Slavey, Dogrib, Hare and Loucheux (also known as Kutchin). This is not to mention the many smaller populations of Athapaskans such as the Carrier, Chilcotin, Sekani, Han, Kaska and Sarci (D.I.N.A.:31).

<sup>4</sup> Adaptation can be described as "ways of dealing with people and resources in order to attain goals and solve problems" (Bennett 1969:11).

north; and from James G.E. Smith (1975) and Beryl Gillespie (1975) who maintained that the Chipewyan were at home in the lands just south of this, the transitional forest. What is known for certain is that when Hudson's Bay Company traders encountered them in the early 1700's, the Chipewyan were residing at the edge of the forest and in the barren lands. During the next century, whether they were regaining lands or intruding on the territory of their Cree neighbours, they expanded west into the forests of the Lake Athabasca region, and south into the Churchill River drainage.<sup>5</sup>

Another lively debate has surrounded the question of how European contact affected Chipewyan social structure, particularly the pattern of kin relationships and the makeup of bands. Improved historical understanding of kinship structures has been considered essential to interpreting Chipewyan responses to changes in their environment (Helm 1978). Central to the debate is whether the Athapaskan Indians developed a bilateral system of kin ties in response to epidemic diseases and to the pressures of the trade (Service 1962, Yerbury 1980), or whether this system already characterized the Athapaskans before European contact (Helm 1965, Janes 1976).

The relationship of the Chipewyan to the barren ground caribou has been another topic of debate.<sup>6</sup> J.G.E. Smith maintains that the signifi-

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<sup>5</sup> See Map A for forest regions.

<sup>6</sup> The barren ground caribou are located in the northern tundra and the forest edge of the Canadian subarctic. They are gathered into large herds and dispersed according to a seasonal pattern of migration. They are not to be confused with the woodland caribou which are larger more southerly animals, and are less gregarious than the barren ground caribou (See Spiess 1979 and Parker 1972). The terms "deer," "grey deer" and "reindeer" are used interchangeably in the records.

cance of the caribou to the traditional life of the Chipewyan can hardly be overestimated. He argues that the caribou were fundamental not only to the Chipewyans' technology, religious beliefs and oral literature, but also to their seasonal cycle, distribution and social organization. The most basic social divisions of the Athapaskans matched the cycles and divisions of the caribou populations, as regional and local bands gathered and dispersed with the particular herd they exploited (1978:76). Although some writers suggest that the Chipewyan incorporated the activities of the trade quite easily into their economy (Sharp 1977a, 1977b, Sloan 1985),<sup>7</sup> Smith and others believe that the Chipewyan had an "almost complete reliance" on the caribou, so that participation in the trade required living with "conflicting attractions" to the caribou on the one hand, and to the fur trade and the fur bearers of the boreal forest on the other (Smith 1976b:2,14).

These are chapters in the more central and ongoing debate regarding the overall nature and degree of change occurring in the lives of the Chipewyan as they involved themselves in the fur trade. It has been contested whether dramatic change came about in the early years of contact, from even before direct trade began (c.1717) to the 1750's or 1760's; whether Chipewyan society remained essentially undisturbed until the late 18th century or early 19th century when intense competition between trading companies was followed by the restoration of trade monopoly; or whether it was not until the 20th century that the Chipewyan faced changes that significantly affected the patterns of their society.

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<sup>7</sup> Sloan maintains, "No Athapaskans were more adept than Chipewyans at adjusting to their changing world." Though disrupting to the Chipewyan acting as middlemen in the trade, "the shift to mainly a trapping existence came relatively easily" (1985:135).

The controversy surrounding what features of native life changed or persisted throughout the historical period is reflected in the various chronological frameworks to which ethnologists refer. Some of these frameworks suggest certain assumptions about the changing degree of native acculturation and dependency. The Helm-Damas model, for instance, delineates three eras in the European/Athapaskan contact: the "early contact era," the "contact-traditional era" and the "modern era." The contact-traditional era (1821-1945) identifies a time of "undramatic" social and technological change (Helm et.al. 1981:148). Bishop and Ray divide the century 1630 to 1730 into the "indirect trade era" and the "middleman era." The years from 1730 to 1763 are labelled the "early fur trade era," which is followed by the "competitive trade era," from 1763 to 1821, and then the "trading post dependency era," 1821-1890. The years 1890-1945 are known as the "era of early government influence," which leads to the "modern era," from 1945 to the present (1976:133-4). While these frameworks may indeed describe the pattern of changes for certain Athapaskan groups, they are less accurate in reference to others. A newer framework, advocated by Shepard Krech III, better accommodates regional variations. In it the "early fur-trade era," initiated by direct trade with Europeans, spans the century before 1821. This is followed by the "fur and mission era," characterized by overlapping fur trade and missionary contact (1821 to approximately 1900), the "welfare-commercial era," for roughly the first half of the 20th century, and the "government-industrial era," for the decades since 1950 (1984:xvi).

Questions about specific Chipewyan patterns of change can be addressed by consulting the records of individual fur trading establishments of the

Hudson's Bay Company (HBC). In the early 1800's, when the Hudson's Bay Company was formulating new strategies to meet the challenge of the Canadian traders in the northern districts, the company's governing committee in London emphasized the importance of meticulous record-keeping.<sup>8</sup> The success of the trade depended largely upon good communications between themselves and their employees in Rupert's Land. In many cases, they found the previous records inadequate or incomplete. Some of the journals, for instance, were said to be "very slovenly and defective," and marked by "most essential omissions" (A 6/18,p.211). The committee defined guidelines regarding the contents of the documents. The daily journals expected from each post were to be "distinct and full," while containing "nothing but plain & simple memorandum of facts, without any comment or observation" (A 6/18/p.211). On the other hand, the annual reports from each district and major post were to furnish in considerable detail information on such topics as climate and soil conditions, the availability of fur-bearers, the system of provisioning, and the conduct and character of the company servants. Report writers were also invited to offer opinions on possible alterations and improvements in the trade. By this means the committee hoped to gain an accurate understanding of the state of affairs of specific districts and posts, and to issue pertinent and informed directives regarding the trade.

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<sup>8</sup> From the headquarters of the Hudson's Bay Company in London a Governor, Deputy Governor and seven directors (the London Committee or "Home Board") made all the policy decisions regarding the operations of the posts in Rupert's Land. They administered the company's capital, purchased the necessary goods, disposed of the furs, arranged ocean transport, and conducted the general financial transactions (Oleson 1978:2).

This study will focus on the unusually detailed HBC records of the early nineteenth century to examine Chipewyan mobility and patterns of trade at a triangle of posts - at Fort Churchill on the bayside, at Fort Chipewyan in the Athabasca, and at Ile a la Crosse in the Churchill River basin.<sup>9</sup> Especially relevant here are the records from the years just previous to and following 1821 - the year in which the Hudson's Bay Company formed a coalition with its previous rival, the North West Company (NWC). This was a time of direct confrontations regarding the control of the fur trade. The records before this time often indicated that the Chipewyan had gained the upper hand. In 1816 Fort Churchill's master, Adam Snodie, complained that the Chipewyan were uncooperative and slow to recognize the authority of the HBC traders. After trying to prevail upon them to stay near the fort to do certain necessary chores, he remarked,

I must assure you they will do no such thing.... [They are] elated with pride and superstition at being as they say an extensive and independent nation, and look on every Kind of labour save hunting [as] nothing less than slavery [B 42/a/142/fo.13d].

The Chipewyan were known as a "wandering tribe," constantly evading the directives of the post masters on where to hunt, when to come in, and where to bring their furs. The HBC traders often attributed this "annoying" habit to the penchant of the Chipewyan for following the caribou hunt or to their "cowardly" and "timid" reaction to the heavy-handed tactics of the Canadian traders. But, towards 1821, they increasingly saw it as a cunning evasion in a quest for better prices and quality of trade goods. They saw the Chipewyan as acting out of pride and independence - a spirit detrimental to the HBC trade.

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<sup>9</sup> See Map C for post locations.



With the end of the competition between companies, the traders found themselves in a position to exert greater control over the Chipewyan and to impress upon them the concept that each hunter "belonged" to a specific post in whose service he was diligently and consistently to produce furs. They expressed confidence that their efforts to get the Chipewyan to settle into more sedentary and regular patterns would be rewarded. As Chief Factor John Charles at Indian Lake remarked in 1822, "Comparatively speaking hitherto the Natives have been Masters. [I]t is now the Traders turn" (B 42/a/147/fo.17).

Did the coalition have an effect on Chipewyan mobility? Did 1821 mark the beginning of a "trading post dependency era"? The purpose of this study is to examine what the HBC sources reveal about the "wandering disposition" and changing life patterns of the Chipewyan in the early 19th century. Following an historical overview of the early Chipewyan trade, it will focus on commentaries on the Chipewyan found in the journals, reports, and correspondence of the above-mentioned and related posts in the years just before the coalition. The traders' many explanations for Chipewyan mobility will be noted - those to which they gave much attention, as well as those they mentioned in passing. These perceptions largely governed the modes of interaction which the Hudson's Bay Company attempted to employ with the Chipewyan. The strategies by which the HBC men tried to influence Chipewyan mobility will be outlined, with particular attention to how these tactics changed after 1821.

The traders' commentaries about the Chipewyan reveal much about the writers and their visions of reality. In their journals and correspondence they created and reinforced a stereotypic image of the Chipewyan,

often describing them as both "indolent" and "avaricious," as "penurious," "proud," "beggerly," and "covetous." The stereotypes and the expressions of frustration, surprise and anger suggest that much of the Chipewyans' behaviour puzzled and confounded the HBC traders. They often perceived it as foolish or irrational. If readers uncritically accepted the traders' comments, they would probably conclude that the Chipewyan were indeed unpredictable transients, lazy and covetous in the trade. Such acceptance would exclude appreciation for some powerful social and cultural factors that influenced their actions and movements: their spiritual values and beliefs, their concept of property, their family structures, their pattern of leadership, and their relationship to the traders. One specific factor that had a significant effect on Chipewyan mobility was the change in territory required by customs following deaths in Chipewyan society. While the traders gave it relatively little attention, their references to Chipewyan death customs as well as to kinship bonds and forms of leadership give clues to the Chipewyans' own perspectives on their actions and responses.

How the Chipewyan were presented in the HBC records was a product of many influences. The nature of the information specifically called for by the London Committee was a major determinant. In 1814 the following details were requested from each district:

Of the Indians - a statement of their numbers & condition, specifying 1) The number of Families, or Hunters who inhabit the district. 2) Their general condition, as to the means of subsistence or of comfort; & their habits as to industry, attention to their families: & how far they are improved in these respects or the reverse. 3) The names of the Chiefs & the number of Hunters who adhere to each with the particular character of the most noted individuals. 4) The local situation of the hunting ground to which each band of Indian resort. 5) How far they claim any property, or exclusive right to the particular hunting grounds which each frequents. 6) The

names of the Indian Hunters who deal with the company's Posts (as far as it can be ascertained) the names of those also who trade with the North West Company [A 6/18/p.203].

The writers were not to delay in answering these questions, but were to give "all the information which they are able to collect or furnish from memory." Where there were "points upon which they cannot speak with confidence" they were asked to give the best information they could, and "explain how far they consider it as doubtful" (A 6/18/p.205). In the Minutes of Council of the Northern Department held at York Factory, July 8, 1822, the request for details on the Indian traders was reiterated. It was resolved:

That Chief Factors, Chief Traders, and Clerks in charge of Districts be directed to furnish particular reports of the general total of Indians within their jurisdiction; particularising the Tribes, Chiefs, Heads of Families and followers, with the District or Country in which they hunt, the average Debts given, and returns brought to the company, together with their general character and habits of Life [Fleming 1940:24-5].

The ability of the clerks and district masters to fulfill the committee's requests varied considerably. Few could answer all the questions. Yet, because of the drive for fact-finding, records from posts in several of the northern HBC districts contain such information as the names of Chipewyan hunters, the sizes of their families and the relationships between individuals. They show who was hunting together, where they were hunting, and how successful they were.<sup>10</sup> The Indian Account Books document when each individual or group came in to the fort, what furs or provisions they brought, what goods they purchased, and how much credit they received. These statistics can be used to check more impressionistic or general statements in the journals, reports or correspondence. Despite

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<sup>10</sup> See Appendix A for the sources of these names lists.

considerable gaps in the information, all of these details together give clues about the particular responses of the Chipewyan to the company's efforts to control their mobility.

Knowledge of the men who were writing the post records, of why they were writing, and for whom, increases understanding of the perspectives and limitations of the information. The records reflected the writers' motivations and interests. Whether their information came from first-hand experience, whether it was acquired from a second- or third-hand informant, or whether it was, in fact, "hearsay," or "common knowledge" is also an important consideration. The writers' observations were a product of their experience and perceptions of the Indians. The trade statistics may contradict them on some points, although both qualitative and quantitative knowledge was limited by the difficulty in obtaining certain information. Sometimes the writers recognized and pointed out these limitations themselves. For instance, in the annual report from Fort Chipewyan in 1821-22, Edward Smith wrote:

In compliance with your instructions enclosed I take the liberty to hand you a opinion on the subjects required - from the best information I could get - are now submitted with all their imperfections for your perusal. [I]f anything can be gathered from them which may be of future benefite to the Concern is all I aim at Knowing well that in Most Cases when information can only be got from the Natives, that to every inquirer they will have a New Story to relate, and from them often it is not easy to discern the authentic from the fictitious, as they appear equally plausible to any person unacquainted or rather imperfectly acquainted with the...Country [B 39/e/4/fo.1].

During the time of competition between trading companies, the contents of the HBC journals and reports were influenced by apprehensions that the records would fall into the hands of the opposition (Simpson 1938:228-9). This explains the existence of several copies of some of the pre-coali-

tion journals. The need to guard company records also affected the "Express" correspondence between posts.<sup>11</sup> Governor William Williams instructed that important letters be sent with the "greatest care" by "very trusty and confidential men" leaving the fort in the night with two sleds on different tracks, one to return after having gone some distance. He also suggested that secret letters be put in frozen fish, and some "sewn in duplicate in a Canadian Capot," although how much this was practiced is difficult to ascertain (Simpson 1938:4).

Another factor that should be considered when interpreting the records is the writers' use of terms. Consideration of the context suggests that certain terms were used as a form of rhetoric that probably communicated something different to the traders than it does to the present-day reader. For instance, when the writers described the Chipewyan as "wandering," they were also passing judgement on hunting and trapping patterns which the HBC traders found unpredictable or unproductive for the company. Mary Black-Rogers, who has set forth definitions for some terms commonly used by the traders, suggests that the frequent references to the Indians as "indolent" or "lazy" are not always used pejoratively as an evaluation of character, but sometimes in a more specific sense. She offers a definition of lazy, as it was used in the records, as "Not hunting furs": the writers were not necessarily denying that the Indians were expending a great deal of energy in other pursuits, only that they were not occupied in the hunt for furs (1985:27). This usage was evident in 1819, for example, when Adam Snodie, writing to Governor Williams ex-

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<sup>11</sup> "Expresses" carried important correspondence between posts in light canoes or on dog sleds, unlike regular mail which was carried by the brigades (Rich 1938:4n).

pressed hope that establishing a new post among the Chipewyan to the north might rouse a "spirit of exertion in the Natives," as they "remain in a state of inactivity," spending most of their time in killing caribou "until the last supply of European goods are expended" (B 42/a/144/fo.8).<sup>12</sup>

The Chipewyan did not consist of one static, homogeneous group. The different bands among them responded in different ways to the dynamics of the trade, complicating scholars' efforts to interpret their history. Although those Chipewyan initially appearing in the HBC records traded exclusively at the mouth of the Churchill River, statistics on the Indian hunters submitted to the London Committee between 1818 and 1838 reveal that one century after their first contact with the Europeans, Chipewyan Indians were also trading at a string of posts that ranged northwest from Churchill to Fort Liard (near Great Slave Lake), and south to Ile à la Crosse (in present northern Saskatchewan). At this time four major groups of Chipewyan were distinguished, apparently according to the territories they occupied. Two of these branches had been recognized since early contact: the "Caribou Eaters" (at first called "Northern Indians") who lived in the transitional forest north west of Hudson Bay, and the "Yellowknives" (sometimes known as "Copper Indians") in the transitional forest east of Great Slave and Great Bear Lakes. In addition, there were the "Athabascans," who moved into the full boreal forest between Great

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<sup>12</sup> The idea that spending one's time in the efforts of the caribou hunt was, in fact, a life of leisure was shared by Samuel Hearne, who in his 1771 journal wrote a detailed description of the method used by the Northern Indians to impound caribou. He maintained that this method, "while wonderfully adapted to the support of the aged and infirm...is too apt to occasion a habitual indolence in the young and active" (1958:49-53).

Slave Lake and Lake Athabasca, and the "Thilanottine," who moved south of Lake Athabasca to the lakes of upper Churchill River (Smith 1975,1981). Other designations in the documents include the "Mountainees," the "goose hunters," the "Far-Away Indians," the "home-guard," "Grey deer eaters," and "Moose hunters," terms which apparently refer to territorial, economic, or regional-band divisions.

While sweeping generalizations, then, about the degree and rate of change in the lives of the Chipewyan are clearly inappropriate, there is little question that all the Chipewyan groups underwent dramatic change in their patterns of mobility at some point. Robert Jarvenpa, one of many anthropologists and ethnologists doing field research in modern Chipewyan communities, examined the annual cycle and the "spatial organization of economic production" of the present day Chipewyan band at English River. He observed that seasonal family nomadism had broken down and was replaced by male trapping partnerships. The two major developments in spatial organization, he concluded, have been nucleation of population and reduction of mobility (1976:43).

The implications of the sedentarization of the Chipewyan have been noted by J.G.E. Smith. His interviews with various informants of the northerly Barren Lands and Hatchet Lake bands (Caribou Eaters) revealed that they knew almost nothing of the bands of Chipewyan south of Lake Athabasca, as well as those at Forts Chipewyan, Smith, Resolution, Reliance, and Snowdrift. He concluded that the lack of knowledge of the Athapaskan and Thilanottine divisions is indicative of the extent to which, by the twentieth century, the Chipewyan had dispersed and of the decrease in nomadism and interband relationships that had existed earlier (1975:436).

Some contemporary writers who have studied and lived with the Chipewyan have agreed with Smith's assessment. Father Lou Menez, for one, has suggested that the major impact of the fur trade on the Chipewyan was not on their intellectual values or beliefs, or on their material culture, but on their geographic and political structure. He maintains that the fur trade resulted in the dispersal of the Chipewyan, weakening and breaking down the links of communication, and finally dismantling and dislocating the Chipewyan nation (cited in Kunkel 1984:34).

The archival records have much to say about the Chipewyan territorial movements in the early 19th century. They are not the full accounts and certainly not the Indian version of what went on, but rather, information marked by the peculiarities, perspectives, agendas and vocabularies of the Euro-Canadian writers. Moreover, the data is incomplete. These limitations must be acknowledged in reconstructing and evaluating the responses of the Chipewyan to the fur trade. Certain information in the records that goes beyond the interpretations that its recorders offered provides alternative or additional clues to Chipewyan behaviour. The HBC traders emphasized economic incentives and the Chipewyans' character traits and unpredictability as key reasons for their "perambulations." But when the records relating to early 19th century mobility are looked at collectively, it is possible to identify a range of variables that influenced how the Chipewyan made decisions about their territorial movements. If the Chipewyans' own frames of reference are taken into account, their mobility patterns begin to emerge as an expression of informed decision-making that had its own rationality and predictability, rather than being dismissable as random wandering.



## Chapter II

### EARLY CHIPEWYAN CONTACTS AND TRADE

The Chipewyan did not come into direct contact with European traders until the early 1700's - some 200 years after the native people on Canada's eastern shore began regular trade with European fishermen, and almost fifty years after the Hudson's Bay Company founders were granted a charter proclaiming them the "true and absolute Lordes and Proprietors" over the territories drained by waters flowing into the Hudson Bay.<sup>13</sup> By this time the French challenges to the British occupation of the bay had been thwarted by provisions of the Treaty of Utrecht (1713), leaving the Hudson's Bay Company free to bring in fur profits at its bayside establishments on the Albany, Severn and Moose Rivers.<sup>14</sup> The company had also begun to explore the potential of developing trade to the northward by founding a post at the mouth of the Nelson River in 1682 (Innis 1970:120). From the Cree who traded there, its officers learned of the Chipewyan Indians, whom they referred to as the "Northern Indians."

By the time the Chipewyan entered the trade, the Hudson's Bay Company's system of record-keeping was well developed. As a result, the earliest interaction of the Chipewyan traders with the Europeans was relatively well documented. Daily journals were kept at Churchill, the first Chipewyan trading post, virtually without interruption from 1717 through

<sup>13</sup> See "The Royal Charter" (1670) in Oliver 1914:135-53.

<sup>14</sup> For details on the early history of the Hudson's Bay Company see Bryce 1900, and Rich 1958.

to the 20th century. As well, records are available from the posts that were later founded inland to bring direct trade into the Athabasca, Great Slave Lake and Mackenzie Valley regions. Some of these records and certain secondary sources will be consulted in order to establish the historical context for this study. The development of the early Chipewyan trade is presented only in outline; a full treatment of this phase would be a study in itself.

The European/Chipewyan trade developed through a process of interaction by which the Chipewyan incorporated acceptable elements of the trade into their lifestyle. The first record of an HBC attempt to establish trade with the Chipewyan was the London Committee's instruction of 1689 "That Churchill River Bee settled this yeare with a Good Shipp a Competent Cargo for Trade and Materialls for White Whale ffishings" (Kenney 1932:18). Included in the party sent to build the post were young Henry Kelsey and an Indian boy, who were to act as envoys to bringing the Northern Indians to trade. Not much came of their efforts, though, because in 1690, before it could prove its worth, the fort was accidentally destroyed by fire and abandoned (Kenney 1932:20-1). Except for a few encounters with Chipewyan at York Factory, it was not until twenty-seven years later that another attempt was made to establish a Chipewyan trade. James Knight, Governor-in-Chief on the bay, left a journal describing the rebuilding of the post at Churchill River in 1717 and the early contacts with Indians there.

Knight found the site of "Fort Prince of Wales" to be utterly inhospitable: "[T]hey that come to Live here must...be so hardy they can Live Upon a Rock, for at this time here is Nothing Else here" (1932:143). It

was located in the transitional forest or "taiga" - the region in which the forest grows thin and meets the northern tundra. Although at first it seemed that the HBC men were trying to build in an area which, as Knight described it, was "Impossible for any European to Live at," they did find building materials and fuel, and managed to work out a system of provisions by which they could survive in the harsh environment (1932:119).<sup>15</sup>

The express purpose of the new post was to encourage trade with the Chipewyan Indians.<sup>16</sup> The primary strategy was to draw them down to the post to trade (Wells 1982). The journals indicate that the Chipewyan lived so far away that it was "two or three years between their coming to the factory" (Davies 1965:139).<sup>17</sup> Besides the hazards of travel to the bay, the Chipewyan also risked potentially hostile encounters with groups of Indians whom they had previously avoided. It was clear that for a successful northern trade to be established, it was necessary for the Cree, the Chipewyan, and the Inuit in the area to settle old animosities.<sup>18</sup> The Chipewyan inhabited lands between the Cree to the south and

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<sup>15</sup> Almost a century earlier a group of Danes under Captain Jens Munck attempted to winter in the same spot. Out of a crew of more than 100 men, only Munck and two of his companions survived to return to their homeland (Munck 1897).

<sup>16</sup> Beside being interested in the trade, Knight was fascinated by the rumours of a great supply of copper at the mouth of a distant river. His explorations into the interior on this account provided the earliest details on the territories northwest of the bay. This knowledge later became vital in the Hudson's Bay Company's extension towards the Athabasca and Great Slave Lake (Rich 1967:98-9).

<sup>17</sup> Knight's map of 1719 shows a route that took the Indians twenty five days (Warkentin and Ruggles 1970:87).

<sup>18</sup> The Chipewyan name for the Inuit can be translated as "enemies of the flat area," and for the Cree simply "enemy" (Smith 1981:271).

the Inuit to the north. What could happen when these people were brought together was already evident from an incident in 1715 when William Stuart brought a group of Chipewyan to York Factory to trade: in order to keep them away from the Cree who were also trading there, he sent the Chipewyan to winter near Churchill where they were attacked and killed by a group of Inuit (A 11/114/fo.17). In 1717, writing from the newly established Fort Prince of Wales, Knight remarked: "It requires a Great Deal of Care in a Man to Govern and Manage these People Rightly" (1932:167).<sup>19</sup>

A truce was made in 1715 when Knight sent Stuart inland with a group of 150 Cree and a Chipewyan "slave woman" whose name, Thanadelthur, became legend thereafter (Van Kirk 1974). Although the peace that she helped to establish between the Cree and Chipewyan who traded at Churchill was "delicate," it was one that stabilized and lasted.<sup>20</sup> In the Hudson's Bay Company's first years at Churchill the journals refer to a number of different groups of natives who were coming there to trade. Specifically, in the first twenty years, besides the "Northern Indians" (Chipewyan), the native traders included "Southern upland Indians" (Cree), the "Missennepee Indians" (Cree on the upper Churchill River),<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> On several occasions that first year Knight wrote to his colleagues at York, "I pray Use your Endeavour to prevent any of them Indians [Cree] comeing here twill I am Settld with the Northern Indians" (1932:174).

<sup>20</sup> A journal entry of April 1721 indicates that the Northern Indians were also "making peace" with the Inuit, and were trading knives and awls with them for copper lances and arrowheads (B 42/a/1/fo.127d).

<sup>21</sup> In July 1719 the journal records that the Missennepee Indians were in with "many goods", but as they were "4 Moons on their passage," it would be the middle of winter before they could return to their own country (B 42/a/1/fo.56). In June 1721 some 62 canoes of them insisted on trading at Churchill in spite of strict directives to trade at York Factory (B 42/a/1/132d-133).

"Copper Indians" (Yellowknife),<sup>22</sup> members of the "Dogribbed tribe" (Dogrib Indians), the "Sinnepoetts" (Assiniboine),<sup>23</sup> and "Hazey River Indians" (also a group of Cree).<sup>24</sup> Old animosities were not easily forgotten, though, and the peace that had been established was no safeguard against skirmishes between groups.<sup>25</sup> Because of these dangers, the HBC men sometimes went out to meet incoming Chipewyan to protect their route to the factory (B 42/a/1/fo.43).

Exactly what initially drew the Chipewyan to the post is not known, but the HBC traders attributed it to curiosity. They expressed surprise at how groups of Chipewyan would make the arduous journey to the post without a single fur to trade.<sup>26</sup> Those who eventually did bring furs brought inadequately cured pelts that were not beaver, but less profitable furs common to the lands north of the boreal forest. The trade items that could be expected from Chipewyan coming from the "barren

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<sup>22</sup> In June 1720 a Copper or "Golden" Indian came in but brought no metal, a disappointment to the HBC men at Churchill because they were making efforts to encourage what they thought would be a profitable trade in it. Two Copper Indians came in with a group of 102 Northern Indian men in June 1721 (B 42/a/1/131d), and a few Copper Indians came in June 1722 (B 42/a/2/fo.45), but they did not become regular visitors to Churchill.

<sup>23</sup> Twenty-nine canoes of Sinnepoetts came to trade at Churchill in June 1720, and 15 canoes in June 1721 (B 42/a/1/fo.81d). They were encouraged to trade at York Factory.

<sup>24</sup> Sixteen to 18 canoes from Hazey (Hayes) River came in "with no goods" (probably meaning 'no beaver') in June 1719 (B 42/a/1/fo.51d). They too were told to trade at York Factory.

<sup>25</sup> James Napper's journal from Fort Prince of Wales describes a group coming in by land in June, 1736 as "ye Indians yt Lay bordering between ye Sothern & Nothern Natives to keep pace amongst ym" (B 42/a/16/fo.40-40d).

<sup>26</sup> For instance, on June 1719, over 130 Northern Indians came in to the fort with no furs to trade. The concept of trade for mutual benefit was explained to them (B 42/a/1/fo.49-50).

lands" were mostly arctic fox, wolves, some wolverines, and deer parchment.<sup>27</sup> From the forest areas came the beaver, martens, lynx, wolverines, colored fox, black bear and otter that the company desired. Thus, the first Chipewyan hunters at Churchill were repeatedly instructed to "go into ye Woods up on ye Countrey & not to keep by ye side & in ye barren plaines" (B 42/a/1/fo.135). They were also told not to "Come Creeping by Land" but to "Come by water in Cannous" (B 42/a/1/fo.131d).

The Chipewyan were slow, however, to involve themselves in the trade. A Northern Indian boy who wintered with the HBC men for three winters reported in June of 1722 that "the old men are very lazy" and "the young ones must be brought to trade by degrees" (B 42/a/2/fo.45d). Most sources suggest that this was because they lived in a "state of plenty" - almost all the basic material needs of the Chipewyan were provided for by the caribou: the flesh was their most important food source; the antler and bone provided the raw materials for spear points, fish hooks, and other implements; the hides were made into clothing, lodges, bags, batiche for snow shoe netting, gill nets, caribou snares, and other items (Smith 1976b:14). Moreover, caribou were so plentiful, and the pound method of the hunt so successful, that as Samuel Hearne noted, "many families subsist by it without having occasion to move their tents above once or twice during the course of a whole winter" (1958:51).

By introducing basic trade goods such as steel knives, awls, and hatchets and by teaching Cree methods of trapping fur bearers and preparing them for trade, the English initiated a relationship with the Chipew-

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<sup>27</sup> The Chipewyan were not easily persuaded to bring in wolf or wolverine pelts however, because as Hearne noted, these animals were held in special regard as "something more than common animals" (1958:135-6).

yan.<sup>28</sup> Incorporation of the patterns of trade into their lifestyle led some Chipewyan bands to make certain adjustments and changes. As far as has been ascertained, traditionally the Chipewyan were spending their summers on the tundra and their winters on the edge of the forest, hunting caribou at the confluence of streams and rivers as they migrated north in the spring, and again as they moved south in the fall. But some of them did respond to the encouragement to "draw nearer." In 1729 Anthony Beale wrote:

The few Northern Indians that came here this spring has brought but a small matter of goods and they say there is no furs in their country and they come so far that it is two or three years between their coming to the factory, whereupon we advised them to draw nearer, which they have promised; and if they do it may prove to your honours' interest much for by that means they will get goods and come to the factory once a year, and we have gave them encouragement for so doing [Davies 1965:139].

From her study of the early Fort Prince of Wales journals, Beryl Gillespie determined that some Chipewyan came to Fort Churchill every year after its establishment while other more distant groups made the trip every three years or more. Occasionally they arrived in large groups, but most often in groups of ten to fifty people. Women and children either accompanied the men to the posts, or stayed several days' journey inland. The usual time of year for trade was June, but by the 1730's some Chipewyan groups began coming in the fall, usually with musk ox or caribou meat, and others arrived in April, often staying for the goose

<sup>28</sup> The Chipewyan were tutored by the traders. Journal entries of 1818-20 mention at least five Northern Indian youths who stayed at the factory at various times, where they were taught to hunt and trap by the "Southern" or Cree method and then instructed to go on to teach their friends (B 42/a/1/131d,132;B 42/a/2/45d). At least the first youth, who remained at the post for three years was taught English for the purpose of interpreting (B 42/a/1/fo.131d). Some "Northern Indian hunters" were also taught to hunt geese near the post and in 1721 were reportedly using the gun "very well" (B 42/a/1/fo.131,134).

hunting season that lasted until the middle of May (1975:365).

Although there were never any guarantees that the Indians would return from year to year, the traders' methods of extending credit to them and recognizing "trading chiefs" amongst them apparently paid off. Arthur Dobbs reported in 1744:

As to the Trade at Churchill it is increasing, it being at too great a Distance from the French for them to interfere in the Trade. The Year 1742 it amounted to 20,000 Beavers: There were about 100 Upland Indians [Cree] came in their Canoes to trade and about 200 Northern Indians, who brought their Furs and Peltry upon Sledges; some of them came down the River of Seals, 15 Leagues Northward of Churchill, in canoes, and brought their Furs from thence by Land [1967:47].

In the early years of trade at Churchill the fur returns were erratic. Between 1760 and 1781 they continued to fluctuate, usually totalling from 8000 to 13,000 made beaver (MB), but reaching 20,000 MB in 1772 (Luczak 1978:164-6).<sup>29</sup> Because the Chipewyan had few marketable fur-bearing animals in their own lands it is clear that those who became involved in the trade were making some adjustments to their traditional cycle. The occasionally high fur returns of the Chipewyan can be explained, says Gillespie, in two ways: "Furs were obtained both by trading and/or pillaging neighbors who did have furs, and by moving further south into areas with more fur-bearing animals" (1975:368).<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Made beaver was the standard of trade utilized by the Hudson's Bay Company throughout most of the fur trade era. The value of furs and goods was compared to the standard of one prime beaver pelt.

<sup>30</sup> Apparently the Chipewyan developed trade as middlemen with the Dogrib, Copper and Athabasca Cree Indians to the west (See Cox 1983). On his journey to the Coppermine River in 1770-72, Samuel Hearne recorded: "When they [Copper Indians] barter furs with our Indians, the established rule is to give ten times the price for every thing they purchase that is given for them at the Company's Factory." He also maintained that the Northern traders prevented the Copper and Dogrib Indians from trading directly at the bay (1958:199,201).



Almost from the beginning of the trade at Fort Prince of Wales, the traders at York Factory argued that the post was cutting into their profits. But the London Committee saw Churchill's promising returns as trade won from enterprising French traders who were prospering in the interior. Plans were made to replace the small wooden fort with a massive stone fortress. It was to be a great stronghold commanding the entrance of the river to guard the interests of the company from French attack by sea or overland, and protect the Churchill River connections to the north and to the prairies.

Over the forty years in which the great walls of the new Fort Prince of Wales were slowly rising to completion (c.1733-1771), the Canadian traders continued to push into and disrupt the very trade the fort was intended to protect. Because there was no direct river connection between the mouth of the Churchill River and Lake Athabasca, some of the Indians were coming to the fort by making a long sweep down towards the south. They came from the Athabasca area, over Methy Portage, south to Ile a la Crosse, then by the Upper Churchill to Lac la Ronge, over Frog Portage, and into the Churchill River. This often brought them into contact with the Canadian traders who traded for the finest furs that were worth the trip back to Montreal, leaving the heavier, less valuable furs to continue on to the bay (Rich 1967:171-2).<sup>31</sup> E.E. Rich went so far as to argue that by the 1770's, "it was the Pedlers who commanded the Routes to Churchill" (1967:254). The HBC emphasis on the bayside posts as centres of command was derided as the "Sleep by the Frozen Sea" (Rob-

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<sup>31</sup> In 1775-76 Thomas Frobisher (a Canadian trader) travelled into the interior where he intercepted Indians from the Athabasca at Ile a la Crosse (Innis 1970:196).

son 1965).<sup>32</sup>

Then, in the early 1780's the Chipewyan/HBC trade relationship was disrupted by a devastating smallpox epidemic that swept through the Chipewyan lands, greatly reducing the Cree and Chipewyan populations. Hearne estimated that the epidemic "carried off nine-tenths of [the Chipewyan] and particularly those people who composed the trade at Churchill Factory" (1958:116). The relationship was further undermined when in 1782 the French under the Comte de la Prouse attacked the apparently formidable Fort Prince of Wales. Samuel Hearne and his men were taken aboard the French ships, cannon and fire reduced the fort to ruins, and the French continued down the bay to attack York Factory (Rich 1967:160).<sup>33</sup>

Despite this full-scale attack, Hearne returned to Churchill a year later to re-establish a post some three and a half miles upriver, where Knight had first built. The new post, called Fort Churchill, was much smaller than the stone fort and was protected only by wooden stockades. The company did not expect great fur returns from the new post, for many Chipewyan traders had died of smallpox, while others were thought to have lost faith in the company because of the treatment it received at the hands of its enemies. A reduced number of Indians continued to bring in their furs, but the new priority of Fort Churchill was its role as a base for the expansion of the HBC trade into the Athabasca.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> In an effort to protect the Saskatchewan route for the Hudson's Bay Company, Samuel Hearne founded Cumberland House on Pine Island Lake in 1774.

<sup>33</sup> See also Du Tremblier's account (B 42/z/3) translated from French to English and published in The Beaver March 1951:42-46.

The value of the Athabasca trade had long been recognized by the Hudson's Bay Company. The peace established between the Chipewyan and Cree had enabled the Churchill traders to tap some of the forest's riches in beaver and marten.<sup>35</sup> In the 1770's Hearne made special efforts to foster the Athabasca trade by calling on the help of Matonabee, an influential Northern Indian leader who was respected by both Chipewyan and Cree.<sup>36</sup> Matonabee came to Churchill in the fall of 1776 at the head of probably the largest gang of traders ever to visit the post. The 400 Northern Indians brought an outstanding trade of "considerably above 5000 made Beaver and upwards of 7000 lbs of Venison and Musk Ox." Hearne reported that he "fitted [Matonabee] out with a present of upwards 400 Beaver and sent him up to the Athapus'cow Indians" (Cree) to encourage them to trade at the bay the following summer (B 42/a/94/fo.15d-16). The importance of the Athabasca trade was commented on by Hearne when he returned to the ruins of Fort Prince of Wales in 1783 and recorded the effects of the smallpox epidemic:

[T]he famous Northern leader called Matonabee and most of the principl Northern Indians are all dead together with that valuable tribe of Southern Indians called the Athapasow Indians,

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<sup>34</sup> In the 1820's Fort Churchill was, in effect, reduced to the position of an outpost of York Factory.

<sup>35</sup> The peace between the Chipewyan and the Athabasca Cree was occasionally interrupted, as in the early 1760's when Ferdinand Jacobs complained, "Not One Canoe of ye Athuppisaw Indians Coming down to Trade [at Churchill] this Year being gone to War" (B 42/b/8/fo.5d).

<sup>36</sup> Matonabee, according to Hearne, was the son of a Northern Indian by a slave woman who was bought from some Cree Indians who came to Churchill to trade. Apparently the match was made by Mr. Richard Norton, then Governor, who detained them at the fort. Losing his father as a young boy, Matonabee was actually adopted "according to the Indian custom" by the governor. When Norton returned to England, Matonabee left the factory with some of his Northern Indian relations, and later proved himself to be a loyal friend of Hearne and of the company (Hearne 1958:222).

for tho they seldom of late, have come to any of the company's forts themselves, Yet they procured the greatest part of the furs that the Northern Indians used formerly to bring to this place, and was for more than 10 years past, at least 7/8 of the whole Trade [B 42/a/103/fo.25].

The value of the Athabasca trade was apparent to merchants and traders from Montreal as well. In 1778 Peter Pond advanced into the northwest by the Grand Portage and the Saskatchewan River to build the first Athabasca post (Rich 1967:175). Strengthened by the reorganization of the North West Company partnership in 1787, the "Canadians" also built posts at Ile a la Crosse (an important step to the Athabasca), on Great Slave Lake and at the mouth of the Yellowknife, extending deep into the territory of the Chipewyan, Beaver and Slave Indians whose furs would otherwise have made their way down to York or Churchill.

In response to the Canadian initiative, the English tried to protect their interests by establishing posts inland. Routes inland were surveyed by David Thompson, Peter Fidler and Philip Turnor as part of the search for a direct northerly route to the Athabasca. When in 1791 Philip Turnor finally reached the Athabasca, he was impressed by the Nor'Westers' Fort Chipewyan, which he called "the compleatest Inland House I have seen in the Country" (Turnor 1934:398). He wintered there and, observing the aggressive NWC methods of trading, concluded that the Indians would welcome the Hudson's Bay Company as an alternative.

The English did not reappear in the Athabasca until 1802, when Peter Fidler established Nottingham House on the northwest end of the Lake. By that time the North West Company already had eighteen posts in the Athabasca District and were concentrating nearly one fifth of its total num-

ber of employees there (Parker 1967:137). The small group of HBC traders could not begin to match the North West Company in strength or influence with the Indians. The English traders' attempt to gain a foothold in the Athabasca was ill-fated, and they were forced to withdraw in 1806.

The Hudson's Bay Company competed with the Canadians by building other inland posts: in the 1790's it built west of Churchill on Reindeer Lake and Indian Lake. As well, it established trade at Split Lake in 1790, at Ile a la Crosse in 1799, on Churchill River (Nelson House) in 1800, and at sporadically occupied posts on Great Slave Lake, Peace River and Mackenzie River. Much of this trade was annually channelled through Fort Churchill. Apparently, though, these posts were not a very profitable venture: in the spring of 1811 William Auld reported that Fort Churchill had "long been a losing Factory with regard to her establishments Inland" (B 42/a/136a/fo.30d).

In the following decade the Hudson's Bay Company, especially through the initiative of Andrew Wedderburn, William Auld, and Colin Robertson, achieved a new commitment to oppose the North West Company in the Athabasca. By what was referred to as the "Retrenching System" the company introduced a profit-sharing plan with the company servants, endorsed Lord Selkirk's plan for a settlement at Red River, divided Rupert's Land into two departments with revised districts, and made other changes to revitalize the trade.

In 1815-16 the Hudson's Bay Company tried to re-establish trade at Great Slave Lake, at Ile a la Crosse (closed since 1811), and at Lake Athabasca and Peace River (closed since 1806). In the Peace River Dis-

trict that winter at least 16 HBC men starved to death, as did men at Great Slave Lake (B 89/a/3/fo.22d). Robert Logan and his men came out of Ile a la Crosse in the spring virtually empty-handed because of the overwhelming NWC opposition (Rich 1938:416). In the Athabasca, Fort Wedderburn, located on an island directly across from Fort Chipewyan, brought in a token trade the first two winters. But the men there persevered, returning, to the surprise of the Canadians, in 1817 (B 39/a/13/fo.8).

The challenge taken up by the Hudson's Bay Company set off another round of strenuous competition between the two companies for a very valuable prize, as each sought to gain the loyalty or "attachment" of the Indians, and thus obtain the riches in furs of the northern lands.

### Chapter III

#### EXPLAINING CHIPEWYAN MOBILITY (1815-21)

From 1815 to 1821, as the northern interior became the scene of intense competition between the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company, the HBC traders' descriptions of Chipewyan mobility and trade behaviour changed dramatically, leading to recommendations for major modifications in HBC trade strategies.

At first the writers saw the Chipewyan as victims of the Canadians, and themselves as coming to the rescue. Robert Logan, at Ile a la Crosse in 1815, wrote that the Indians passed by the HBC men and "would not deign to look" at them, as they lived "in terror" of the North West Company, who "threaten them with death," and at whose hands they suffered "constant ill usage & beatings" (B 89/a/3/fo.2d). Likewise at Fort Wedderburn, Roderick McKenzie reported in the fall of 1816 that the Indians "express they want to trade with the Hudson's Bay Company but observe that the English are too weak to protect them from their oppressors" (B 39/a/8/fo.8d). The Chipewyan, he wrote, needed to be released "from that state of Slavery which they labour under by the Tyranny of the North West Company" (B 39/a/13/fo.5d).

The perception of the Chipewyan as victims of the Canadians dated back to the earlier HBC attempt to develop inland posts among the Chipewyan. When Thomas Swain and Peter Fidler tried to establish HBC posts at Lake Athabasca and Peace River in 1802, there was not only Canadian/HBC compe-

tition for furs, but the Canadians were divided into opposing trading ventures - the North West Company or "Old Company," and the XY Company or "New Company." Fidler explained that the Chipewyan were "badly used" by the Old Company and were given "a good drubbing" if they were found to have traded any skins elsewhere (B 39/a/1/fo.8,9). Those Chipewyan who were willing to trade were "very anxious" for HBC men to winter with them for protection, as the Old Company were "so numerous that few escape their grasp" (B 39/a/4/fo.4). At Ile a la Crosse, too, William Linklater wrote in 1805-6 that the Indians were expressing their good will towards the HBC men. But they could not support themselves near the Factory where they could be protected by them, and in the "more interior part of the country" there were so many Canadians that the Chipewyan were afraid to disobey them (B 89/a/1/fo.6).

Yet, the Chipewyan were not without options in the trade. During the years when the XY and North West Companies were in competition, the amount of goods expended to the Indians for furs was "extravagantly great" as the companies worked to lure hunters to their respective concerns. In 1802-3, Fidler recorded that the Old Company traders took only four packs of furs from the Peace River after expending twenty-five pieces of goods, whereas four years earlier they went in "with only 15 half loaded Canoes and the spring following went out with 648 Packs of 90 lb each of excellent furs" (B 39/a/1/fo.24). At Great Slave Lake, as well, the two Canadian companies in 1803-4 were "shewing whom can give away the most Goods & the fastest to the Indians for nothing" (B 39/a/3/fo.4d). According to Fidler, the Old Company was in effect "debauching" the Indians by giving a big keg of rum, a new gun and completely "rigging"



(dressing) the hunters and their families, though what some of them would kill in the winter would "not pay for 1/4 part of these articles forget about previous debts" (B 39/a/3/fo.7).

Despite this, the Indians were not seen by the HBC writers as benefitting from the competition but as victimized, especially by the Old or North West Company. When Fidler was on his annual trip back to the Athabasca with the fall brigades in early August, 1804, he received news at Ile a la Crosse that the Chipewyan had killed six Old Company men and had pillaged and destroyed their settlement at the east end of Lake Athabasca in retaliation for "numerous insults & bad usage." Fidler commented that if the news was true, this was an act which the Canadians well deserved (B 39/a/4/fo.4). Apparently because they feared the Canadians' revenge "for the mischief their Countrymen committed at Athabasca Lake," not a single Chipewyan was reported seen at Lake Athabasca from the time of the incident in June until a few came in the following spring (B 39/a/4/fo.3).<sup>37</sup>

In the year that followed, the two Canadian companies amalgamated, and the officers of the new North West Company informed Fidler that they would do everything in their power to force the HBC men out of the country (B 39/a/4/fo.18d). After a long winter in which it suffered great humiliation and intimidation by the Nor'Westers, the Hudson's Bay Company left the Athabasca in 1806, not to return for almost a decade.

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<sup>37</sup> All three companies were forced to abandon their posts at Great Slave Lake for the season, as they could not operate without the help of the Indians in supplying them with provisions.

The HBC men at the Ile a la Crosse post faced many of the same problems. Stationed there in 1810-11, Fidler described the tactics of the North West Company - not only were the Indians guarded day and night at the post and on their journeys to and from it, but every move of the HBC men was supervised by their opponents, so that the HBC house was like a "besieged place": "we cannot stir any distance from the House but what we are constantly followed by these Rascals" (B 89/a/2/fo.22,3).

Perhaps the HBC men sympathized and identified with the Chipewyan as "fellow victims" of their Canadian opponents. Their first-hand experience of the NWC tactics at least helped to convince them that the Chipewyan would certainly trade with the Hudson's Bay Company "had they the liberty of giving their Skins where they chose" (B 39/a/1/fo.9). When "the Great Jepowyan Chief Chi,oo,zah and 12 men with 21 sledges & their families" went to the Canadian house at Ile a la Crosse in April 1811, Fidler wrote, "I am very certain he very much wishes to see me" (B 89/a/2/fo.29). Indeed, a few of the Indians took great risks trying to reach the HBC post. On June 22, 1811 Fidler recorded the attempt of one Chipewyan who waded "thro a wide swamp arm pit deep" at dusk to inform him that they were not trading with the English because the Canadians locked them up within the stockades at night (B 89/a/2/fo.3). Fidler exclaimed, "Oh! how the Indians wishes to see us able to protect them from the Canadians that they could trade quietly with us" (B 89/a/2/fo.18).

The main strategy of the HBC men in their trade efforts after 1815-16 was to reassure the Indians of the strength of the Hudson's Bay Company. Shows of strength involved giving gratuities to the Indians and offering trade goods at competitive rates. But mostly, the company illustrated

its strength by increasing the numbers of men working in the interior districts. When John Clarke re-established trade at Ile a la Crosse in 1818-19, he noted that the Indians "rejoice at our coming in such force this year" (B 89/a/4/fo.4d). At Fort Wedderburn in 1817, as well, Robert McVicar reported that the increased number of HBC officers and men were warmly welcomed by the Indians, who were "glad to see us return once more to their Protections" (B 39/a/13/fo.5d,6d,8d).

Another key strategy of the HBC traders was to accommodate the Indians by bringing the trade as close to them as possible. This meant adopting the Nor'Westers' tactics of picking up the Indians' hunts of furs and provisions right from their tents, saving them the work of bringing the goods to the post, as well as decreasing the risk of their encountering trade competitors. It also meant building posts at sites convenient to them. In the summers of 1820 and 1821 attempts were made to settle a post at "North Lined Lake" (Nueltin Lake), which was known to be a caribou crossing and a popular gathering place for the Chipewyan. It was an area apparently "unknown by Europeans" and was deemed promising for the purpose of "obtaining some of the Athabascow frenchified Inds" to trade with the Hudson's Bay Company (B 42/a/148/fo.85).<sup>38</sup> Sometimes the Indians were consulted on the locations of new posts. For instance, when Hugh Leslie re-established the HBC post at Deers Lake in 1818, he called together his former traders, "that I might know where they would wish to have the House." Seven of them came and approved of building on a point not far from the Canadian post (B 179/a/12/fo.2d,3).

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<sup>38</sup> This particular attempt failed, though, because the rivers were too "Shoal & Stony" (B 42/a/145/pp.10-11).

The HBC traders also hoped to win over the Chipewyan by "making leaders" of certain Chipewyan hunters, a practice already common at Churchill and among the Cree to the south. Trading chiefs were not necessarily those individuals traditionally recognized as chiefs, a status that was not permanent or hereditary but one that depended upon the demonstration of certain respected skills or traits (MacNeish 1956).<sup>39</sup> The traders probably disliked the apparent instability of that leadership and wanted, rather, to deal with group representatives who had more constant and obvious authority. The HBC men distinguished trading chiefs by deferring to them and by presenting them with outward signs of superior status. They often chose as leaders men who were exceptional beaver hunters, and who seemed to have influence over others. Sometimes recognition as chief came as a reward. For instance, John Clarke at Ile a la Crosse on May 24, 1820 noted that "the Nick Chief [was]...made Grand Chief by me the other day for his very upright and good behaviour towards the English throughout" (B 89/a/14/fo.24d). At other times the honours of chief would be bestowed upon some of the "greatest Rascals," who could otherwise become very troublesome.

It was advantageous to attract "chiefs" rather than ordinary individuals to the posts, as one chief could bring many hunters with him. At Fort Wedderburn William Todd recorded a "commotion" among the Indians trading with the North West Company in early October 1819, one of the NWC men having "severely beaten" one of the chiefs: "[I]mmediately after,

<sup>39</sup> Traditional chiefs were not individuals who were set above the others in a position of authority, but were men who held a certain degree of influence because of their respected qualities such as skill or "power" in the hunt. The kind of leadership appreciated by the Chipewyan was not dictatorial, but that of a person who could consolidate and confirm consensus in the group (MacNeish 1956, Savishinsky 1970).

[he] joined us with ten of his young men. Most of the NW Indians followed him all dissatisfied and complaining of their treatment by the NWC." Todd welcomed the chief, Ayuza, by presenting him with a keg of mixed rum and some tobacco. When Ayuza with "the whole of his band" departed for the winter two days later, Todd "Hoisted the flag for him and fired a salute [and] presented him with a keg of Indian Rum & some ammunition" (B 39/a/15/fo.5d,6). The numbers of Chipewyan taking debt with the HBC men that season were later described as having exceeded Todd's "utmost expectations" (B 39/a/15/fo.15d).

All of the above-mentioned strategies were based on the assumption that, as Simpson put it, "exterior and show have a wonderful effect on the savage race." This philosophy caused Simpson to emphasize the importance of making "material alterations and improvements" to Fort Wedderburn's buildings to give it an "appearance of respectability in the eyes of the Indians" (1938:361). He was also concerned about "the appearance of the men, canoes, and cargoes" arriving in November 1820: "I was really ashamed to see the miserable slovenly figure we made alongside our Opponents" (1938:120). He was told by the Indians that the North West Company were calling the Hudson's Bay Company "pitiful (signifying poor & miserable)" and in March 1821 he wrote that "they now discover we are so by the state of our Stores" (1938:309).

Simpson noted that certain traders were more successful than others in winning the Chipewyan. For instance, he noted that the generosity of his colleague John Clarke (a former Nor'Wester) was "proverbial" and that his "fame resounds over the country" attracting Indians to Ile a la Crosse "from all quarters" (1938:122,36). Simpson found that he himself had a

certain image problem when he arrived at Fort Wedderburn. After a long interview with the Indians he found that Nor'Wester George Keith and others had told them of their intention to make Simpson and his colleagues prisoners in the winter or the following spring at Grand Rapid.<sup>40</sup> Simpson was indignant to find that they were representing him particularly "as an Imposter, who they mean to chain up in their Privy very soon" (1938:72). In November of 1820 Simpson described the pains he took to improve his image:

Upon exam'ing the books I found [the Indians] were loaded with debts which it was impossible they could ever liquidate, I therefore made a merit of necessity, and with a show of extraordinary generosity remitted one half.... I have paid them a great deal of personal attention, exhibited my finery, got the Interpreters to pass me off as a most extraordinary personage and by this time my fame has reached from one end of the Athabasca to the other [1938:121-2].

The HBC traders thought that these trade strategies would secure the loyalty of the Chipewyan and give the Hudson's Bay Company a comfortable position in the competition for the northern inland furs. But it became clear that this was not happening. The Chipewyan, for the most part, continued their distressing "wandering," and persisted in "wasting their time in useless Journeys," leaving "good Fur Country to traverse Districts" (B 42/a/147/fo.17). Great efforts were being made by the individual post masters to attract newcomers. At first these "strangers" were seen as Indians won from the Canadians. The HBC traders increasingly came to suspect, however, that they were competing among themselves for the same Indians. They perceived signs that the Indians were getting

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<sup>40</sup> Simpson attributed the source of the rumour to George Keith, in charge of the Athabasca Department for the North West Company from 1817-21, Simon McGillivray (Jr.), a clerk with the North West Company since 1813, and Joseph Soucisse, a Canadian whom Simpson described as the "Generalissimo of their Bullies" (1938:125).

the best of the situation. The Indians were no longer seen as victims of the North West Company but as managing and thriving on the competition. It was feared that they were gaining the upper hand, and that the goods offered to secure the Chipewyan trade were, in effect, "squandered."

There was considerable evidence from that time period and earlier that the Chipewyan, in fact, knew the advantages of the competition.<sup>41</sup> They had long been known as shrewd consumers. William Brown wrote in his 1820-21 report that before the Hudson's Bay Company established itself in the Athabasca, there were about ninety to one hundred families of hunters belonging to the NWC post. Most received credit in the fall and paid up in the spring, but in summer many would go to Churchill bringing some of their winter hunt which they had "concealed for that purpose" (B 39/e/3/fo.17d). The HBC traders had to satisfy the discriminating taste of their own customers or risk losing them to the competition. William Auld's journal from Fort Churchill in 1810 recorded: "The Copper kettles of the new pattern or rather quality will by no means do at Churchill... the Ochipoyeans are very particular in that article & always get capital ones from the Canadians" (B 42/a/136a/fo.20d).

It seemed the Chipewyan were reserving the right to "belong" to neither company and to trade with both. This was especially evident in the fall of 1820 at Deers Lake, when a Chipewyan chief, E,gha,thuth, and his followers brought their canoes ashore precisely half way between the two houses. When the HBC traders asked one of the hunters to which house he

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<sup>41</sup> The Chipewyan had been suspected of taking advantage of the Hudson's Bay Company before. In his journal of 1771, Hearne accused them of exploiting the traders' generosity and of avoiding payment of extended credit by "disguising their persons" and changing their names (1958:199).

belonged, he remarked that he never belonged to one house in particular. The confrontation that followed ended with a duel between the NWC clerk James Heron and Hugh Leslie in which Leslie was wounded with a bullet in the leg, where, according to the Indians, "it would kill a Moose" (B 179/a/14/fo.8). The Indians returned the next day to take debt from the Canadians, and then visited Leslie, promising that if Heron remained at Deers Lake they would trade with the Hudson's Bay Company elsewhere (B 179/a/14/fo.5-7d).

It is clear from Leslie's records of the previous two seasons that it was common for those Chipewyan to travel together, and, upon arrival, to divide themselves between the NWC and the HBC posts. They would often spend evenings together sharing the present of rum after the trade, and would sometimes send token gifts of a few furs to the house at which they did not trade (B 179/a/12/fo.10d,11d,12; B 179/a/13/p.4). At Ile a la Crosse in the spring of 1820, John Clarke, too, noted that the Indians trading at the NWC post and those at the HBC post approached the posts together, received "a friendly salute from both Forts," and spent evenings together after the trade (B 89/a/4/fo.24d).

Another indication that the Chipewyan were getting the upper hand was that sometimes the chiefs were very demanding. On March 31, 1820, William Todd wrote that an Indian arrived at Fort Wedderburn to announce the approach of Lizett, one of the Chiefs:

[H]e likewise brought a demand for a flag some rum, wine etc to sent to meet him which was complied with. [I]n a short time the whole party arrived consisting of twelve or fourteen Men besides women and children. [A] Suit of clothes and a keg of mixed rum was given the chief according to custom [B 39/a/15/fo.27d].



The brother of Lizett, two days later, was reported as having become so "extremely Troublesome and insolent" that he was "turned out of the Fort" (B 39/a/15/fo.27d). On April 4 Todd recorded the approach of two chiefs, Charlo with about twenty Indians "amongst them the one eyed Conjuror a NW Chief." This man was considered "a great acquisition from his known influence over the others." But during the few days at the post, Todd found that the group was "extremely troublesome" and its demands "impossible to comply with" (B 39/a/15/fo.28-28d). Another band of Indians came in on April 10, and they too were "extravagant in their demands altho two thirds of the debts taken last fall remain unpaid" (B 39/a/15/fo.29). At the Deers Lake post, Hugh Leslie was having the same problems with the Chipewyan. In September of 1820, when one of the Indians was "importunate in his demands of Goods," Leslie finally refused him, and the Indian returned to the NWC house (B 179/a/14/fo.4).

In contrast to Fidler's 1802 description of the "Honesty" of the Chipewyan being "in general pretty good" (B 39/a/1/fo.9), by the years 1819-21 the Chipewyan rather than the Canadians were described as "rascals." The trade strategies were not working. The Chipewyan were not displaying the expected signs of gratitude to their "rescuers." Instead of being truly "attached" to the Hudson's Bay Company, they were "merely actuated by interested motives" (1938:358). According to Simpson, no one who understood the Chipewyan would feel sorry for them:

[S]uch Wretches are only fit to inhabit the inhospitable clime they live in and no one who has had an opportunity of knowing them will commiserate their situation; had they the most remote sense of gratitude, they could not do otherways than idolize their protectors, and bliss the Day that the Honble. Hudsons Bay Compy. entered among them, but to that virtue their hearts are inaccessible [1938:376].

Simpson asserted that if the country did not still "abound with valuable Furs," it would not be dealing too harshly "to leave them to their fate under the yoke of their ruthless Tyrants," the North West Company (1938:376).

The Hudson's Bay Company suspected that the Chipewyan were in control of the trade. Simpson reported, "[S]ince the Honble Hudsons Bay Compy have extended their Trade to this Country, they have shaken off the North West Yoke, and in their turn rule the Land" (1938:356). He asserted that their "boasted gratitude, sentiments of honor and attachment are all counterfeit, and had they but courage a price would reconcile them to the blackest acts" (1938:122). No doubt with grudging admiration, he attributed to the Chipewyan the following strategy:

They know the value of Opposition and dread the termination of it, therefore in order to encourage both parties, knowing that it must very soon cease to exist, if they attached themselves altogether to either side; they settle among themselves who are to join the French and who the English: the head of a numerous Family almost invariably attaches so many to one side and so many to the other, and individuals frequently take credit at each Fort and divide their hunts...[1938:358].

Simpson concluded that because of the Chipewyans' strategies, competition between trading parties in the Athabasca would never be profitable (1938:356). In his 1820-21 report from Fort Wedderburn, William Brown strongly advised the HBC Committee not to extend the trade by establishing more trade outlets, as "in many instances the company have to pay double and treble for the furs they receive":

The Chipewyans being such a wandering set, that the more Posts settled in their country, the greater will the expences be, without adding anything to the Returns - as they would most undoubtedly go from one Post to another taking credits, to see what Master would treat them most liberally, and entirely neglect hunting Furs to pay the Debts thus contracted [B 39/e/3/fo.23,21d].

The traders' perceptions of the Chipewyan were shaped in part by the events in the Athabasca in 1820-21. The Chipewyans' "wandering" was a prominent topic in the Fort Wedderburn records of that season, as it was feared that a major relocation of Chipewyan from the Athabasca district was taking place. Not only the regular post journal and report were written by the master at Fort Wedderburn, William Brown, but detailed observations were also kept by Simpson who spent a good part of the year in the Athabasca, his first in the HBC service.<sup>42</sup> Simpson reported that "nearly all the valuable hunters" were "withdrawing" to the other side of Portage La Loche, and that, according to rumours, there would not be a Chipewyan in the district in the next season" (1938:250). Some of them were believed to be travelling to posts at Lac La Loche and Churchill, but most of them were said to be moving to Ile a la Crosse with their furs (B 39/e/3/fo.17d).

Emphasized in both reports were the negative effects of the contest for Chipewyan furs. Simpson explained that although the Chipewyan "were originally indolent and simple," those who had contact for any length of time with European traders "from their insatiable rapacity become good and industrious hunters." But, "being spoiled by opposition," they had "reverted to their wonted lethargy" (1938:376). Because Fort Wedderburn had suffered a severe shortage of trade goods that year, the traders there had no way to hold the interest of the Chipewyan or to motivate them to trap furs. While the HBC posts were being threatened by lack of

<sup>42</sup> Despite his inexperience, Simpson's personal aptitudes and managerial strengths were such that he was assigned to report and make recommendations on the trade of the whole Athabasca Department, which he did with a remarkable air of confidence and authority. Simpson's Journal (B 39/a/18) and Report (B 39/e/1,2) are quoted here from their published form (Simpson 1938).

country provisions, the district, wrote Simpson, abounded with game. It had even "increased to an extraordinary degree within the past few years," being "undisturbed" by the Indians who had been "furnished with supplies even beyond their demands without the trouble of calling forth their exertions" (1938:363).

Simpson admitted that the problems had been created by the companies' trading methods. Brown agreed with this, and added that the Indians were flaunting their importance, because they recognized how much the Companies needed them:

[T]he enormous quantity of property the contest caused to be squandered amongst them and the encouragement held out to induce them to abandon the one party and join the other, caused them to consider themselves of more consequence than they had been in the habit of doing. And being always sure of a good supply whatever way they acted they became less punctual in the payment of their debts, and many of them even gave up hunting altogether. While at the same time they set no bounds to their extravagance, and in place of being contented with a Breech-cloth and a Blanket as they formerly were, nothing would please them but to be dressed in the European fashion. So that it was not unusual to see some of their leading characters strutting about with superfine surtouts and swords at their sides (B 39/e/3/fo.18).

The most influential factor in the loss of the Chipewyan, and thus, the trade, was ascribed to the district's inability to match other offers, which were "luring" the Chipewyan away. According to Simpson, the North West Company "make a parade of generosity and juggle the Indians out of Packs originally intended for us" (1938:359). Ironically, though, according to both writers, what was threatening the district even more than the competition of the North West Company was the competition from the Hudson's Bay Company post at Ile a la Crosse. Brown and Simpson agreed that the Indians' move south was encouraged by a scheme "to induce

them to proceed there" (B 39/e/3/fo.10). Brown mentioned the treachery of people "who were paid on purpose to come amongst them to circulate reports prejudicial to the trade" of his district - gentlemen "walking about with their hands in their Pockets, stirring up mischief and disaffection amongst both men and Indians" (B 39/e/3/fo.23). Such "rivalship," he said, was "more detrimental to the trade than all the exertions of our opponants" (B 39/e/3/fo.23d).

Simpson was persistent in attributing direct if not total responsibility for what he called this "underhanded" activity to John Clarke, the Chief Factor at Ile a la Crosse (and a former Nor'Wester who seemingly maintained his old company's trading style). Allegedly Clarke "took a shameful advantage" of the fact that Fort Wedderburn was low on trade goods, by sending "emissaries thither to seduce the Indians by the promises of extravagant largesses, and so effectually succeeded, that he withdrew the greater part of them" (1938:362). Thus, the advances that the Indians owed to Fort Wedderburn were "irrecoverably lost," and "through the sheer spirit of jealousy and party feeling", the Indians were taught to become "Rogues & Vagabonds," and the company men in the Athabasca were "reduced to the greatest privations" (1938:362). Simpson accused Clarke of trying to "debauch" the Athabasca Indians, of endeavouring to incite the Canadians against him, of monopolizing property of every description intended for use in the Athabasca, and of giving that district the "refuse of Men and Goods" (1938:405-6). Clarke apparently went so far as to offer a bounty for each Athabasca hunter that could be recruited:

[H]e engaged an Indian...to recruit among our Indians; this Officer is equipped with a handsome suit of clothes, pistols, dirk, & double barreled Gun...and tells the Indians that he is

sent by Mr. Clarke for them, there is a Bounty offered for each recruit and they are told that all who join Mr. Clarke will be similarly rewarded [1938:270].

The two major reasons cited for the migration of "great numbers" of Chipewyan to Ile a la Crosse that year, then, were that the Chipewyan were "ruined" by the competition and would go to great lengths to obtain goods without working for them, and that the HBC men at Ile a la Crosse deliberately worked to spite their colleagues in the Athabasca by seducing the Indians with promises of gratuities and a life of ease. A closer look at the journals and reports, though, suggests many other less emphasized, and perhaps in some cases, less understood reasons for Chipewyan mobility. One of the factors encouraging the Chipewyans' move was the uncertainty of the system of trade and of the supply of goods in the Athabasca. References in the journals reveal why Fort Wedderburn might have been less than attractive to the Chipewyan. The post was "plagued with deficiencies of all kinds" - it was short of interpreters, of dogs for hauling, and of responsible and competent employees, having "about one third less" men and officers than needed, and some of them "not worth their Victuals" (1938:359). It also suffered the "dearth of every article suitable for the Trade," having obtained provisions and trade goods "not to one half the extent necessary and badly selected" (1938:357,309). Simpson pointed out that the "misfortunes with which it would appear the [HBC] concern has been haunted" were, in part, a result of "mismanagement and the total absence of decision and salutary arrangement." Brown, too, mentioned the the problem of mismanagement, saying that in the district the trade goods were "squandered away" in the early part of the season, so there was not enough to supply the Indians in the spring (B

39/e/3/fo.9d). There were occasions that winter when Simpson and the other officers at Wedderburn were "under the necessity of giving their own clothes" to prevent the Chipewyan from joining the North West Company (1938:309).

That the Chipewyan had no loyalty to the HBC men is contradicted by some of the comments in the journals. For instance, Brown wrote in July of 1820 that he was "obliged to carry on the whole of our business with words there being no goods to give to the Indians." Yet, it was only after the Indians had waited for months for the supply canoes from York Factory, that they finally resorted to going elsewhere. Brown noted that they would "hunt their way to Ile a la Crosse, Deers Lake and other establishments in the south," because, in fact, they were "very staunch instead of joining the opponents" (B 39/a/16/fo.22d). Some of Simpson's comments, as well, give the Chipewyan more credit. He wrote that it was "absolutely necessary to keep good faith with the Chipewyan," and admitted that the "dearth of every article suitable for the Trade" made it impossible for him to "fulfill his promises made in the fall." He also wrote, "[R]eally this Season [the Chipewyan] deserve encouragement having been very industrious," (1938:354,357). Regarding the Chipewyans' attraction to Ile a la Crosse, Simpson speculated that "such flattering prospects" were sufficient to delude "more enlightened beings than the Chipewyans" (1938:270-1).

There are other comments in the records that suggest reasons for the Chipewyans' territorial changes. Dissatisfaction with their treatment or with the trade goods was a factor. Leslie wrote from Deers Lake that some of the Indians came to him from the Athabasca in the fall of 1818

"disatisfied with their treatment there" and promised to trade with the HBC men at Deers Lake or at Indian Lake the following winter (B 179/a/12/fo.14d). Leslie conjectured in his 1819-20 district report that all of the North West Company Indians except four men had deserted the NWC post there. One of the reasons for their dissatisfaction, was, according to the Indians, that the Canadians were "quite destitute of several of the most essential articles such as Cloth and Tobacco" (B 179/e/1/p.5). The assurance of trade goods was important to the Indians. Some posts, usually the southern and bayside posts, were generally known to be better supplied with goods, no doubt because of the more secure travel to those sites.

Chipewyan territorial movements were also affected by the spread of rumours. Because the nomadic lifestyle was often rigorous and tenuous, the system of communication whereby information and messages would travel over great distances between groups of travellers was very important to the Chipewyan. The deliberate spreading of rumours was a longstanding and effective tactic of the traders in times of intense competition. William Linklater, on his way to Ile a la Crosse in the fall of 1805 met two Northern Indians along the way who wanted to know if what the Canadians had told them was true:

That the Canadians had killed the Englishmen and destroyed the Churchill Factory and that as the Canadians now had every thing in their power, if the Indians would not make their hunts for them, that they (the Indians) would in a very short time be pitifull [B 89/a/1/fo.2d].

Similarly, in 1820-21 Simpson indicated that the the Nor'Westers were misinforming the Chipewyan in order to secure their trade: "I received a Letter from Mr. Andries...intimating that in consequence of the Reports



circulated by the N.W. of our total annihilation, many of our Indians had deserted us" (1938:80-1).

The journals indicate that environmental factors were also a key consideration in the Chipewyans' decisions about mobility. The Fort Churchill journal recorded that in the spring of 1816 the weather was "as warm as is generally in the Month of June or July" (B 148/a/42d). The Chipewyan had great difficulty in getting to and from the post because of the early spring and "the present state of the rivers which is (neither) open or shut" (B 42/a/142/fo.18).<sup>43</sup> Some of the Indians crossed the rivers by raft, while others were obliged to walk on the ice in the bay where there were no animals to subsist on. Two Indians who came that way reportedly travelled seven days with only rockweed for food (B 42/a/142/fo.17). In late May some of the Indians were coming on a "rout from Indian Lake" walking in the woods, their feet and legs "very much torn and swelled with the underwood" as they carried children and furs on their backs (B 42/a/142/fo.18d). At one point that spring, Adam Snodie had at the house "upwards of one hundred and forty" Indians, "many of them existing skeletons," requiring post provisions (B 42/a/142/fo.19). Again in the spring of 1819, William Ross expressed his fears about the mild weather at Churchill: "Indians belonging to this place will not be able to reach this place from their hunting ground, as the small Rivers will soon be open & there being no snow to haul their sleds on" (B 42/a/144/fo.11d). In 1822, as well, an early spring was a problem. According to Hugh Leslie, many of the Indians were arriving later than expected: "[H]aving

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<sup>43</sup> Too much snow was also detrimental to the trade. Not only did it make travelling more difficult, but it interfered with the beaver hunt, as the beaver lodges were then impossible to find (B 89/a/1/fo.10d).

weighty Sledges and a great deal of the ground being bare they are often obliged to carry their Sledges on their Backs" (B 42/a/147/fo.25).

Unusual weather patterns directly affected the herd movements of the caribou, so that the Chipewyans' travel problems were compounded by difficulties obtaining food (Smith 1976b:14). During the years in which spring came early, the Chipewyan, Cree and Inuit of Fort Churchill complained of the shortage of caribou. During the winter of 1815-16, the caribou were said to have taken a northern route in the summer "to avoid the torment of the mosquitoes in the woods, and have not returned in the first of winter as usual" (B 42/a/142/fo.6). In July of 1818, as well, at a time when they were usually in the barren grounds, families of Chipewyan were coming to the post "starving...owing to the general scarcity of deer in the Chipoyan country" (B 42/a/144/fo.1d).<sup>44</sup>

The locations of the trading posts also affected Chipewyan mobility. During the competitive period, the companies chose their sites according to some key considerations: whether they were advantageous in relation to other HBC and NWC posts, whether building materials were available, whether they were accessible to the supply brigades, and whether adequate food provisions could be obtained. Most important, though, was whether the location was a favorable one for access to the Indians. The primary consideration for the Indians seemed to be whether they could make a good fur hunt and still be comfortably close to ranges where large game could

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<sup>44</sup> There were times when great numbers of caribou were found close to Churchill. In the fall of 1800, for instance, caribou were killed within thirty miles of the house (B 42/a/125/fo.3d). Thomas Stayner wrote that the success that year in procuring provisions was "never known before at Churchill": "the Deer were so numerous in the fall that from the exertions of Englishman and Indian I received near 10,000 lbs of Venison" (B 42/b/43/p.29).

be attained. William Brown reported from Fort Wedderburn in 1820-21 that the Ile a la Crosse District having a post at Lac La Loche was in "every way prejudicial to the trade of this District as it is much closer to the Indians Hunting grounds than this, which induces numbers of them to go there" (B 39/e/3/fo.23d). Likewise some of the Northern Indian hunters belonging to Indian Lake in 1819-20 reportedly left for Deers Lake during the summer, that place being so much better for "the essential Article of Subsistance" (caribou) and "Moose Deer" being "tenfold more plentiful...". This apparently was "a good inducement to those young Men who think themselves skilful enough to kill them," while others, "conscious of their inability in regard to killing the Moose," remained near Indian Lake, "content...with Fish, Grey Deer, and a few Beaver" (B 91/a/5/pp.4-5).

The mobility of Chipewyan bands was also affected by their relationship with other groups such as the Cree, Inuit, and Beaver Indians with whom they came into contact.<sup>45</sup> In the 1804-5 season at Great Slave Lake, Thomas Swain explained why there was "no prospect of trade" that season:

[A]s the Beaver hunting Grounds belonging to the natives of this Place is near the Beaver Indians Lands they are afraid to go to it as the latter natives made war upon them last Summer and killed 2 men at the head of McKenzies River in sight of the North West Co settlement there [B 39/a/4/fo.15].

Chipewyan clashes with neighbouring Indians increased with the depletion of fur resources.

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<sup>45</sup> See Smith and Burch (1979) on the relationship between the Chipewyan and Inuit, and Jarvenpa (1982) on the interaction between the Chipewyan and Cree.

Besides mentioning supply shortages, rumours, environmental factors, post locations and recurring hostilities between the Chipewyan and neighbouring natives, some traders took note of some more elusive influences on Chipewyan mobility. There were scattered references to the Chipewyan "superstitions" which were occasionally known to affect their movements. Some writers noted a correlation between disease and deaths among Chipewyan and the disruption of their regular cycle, most often involving a retreat northward to the barren lands. There was also some recognition that the Chipewyans' kinship structures influenced their loyalties and territorial movements. (These factors will be examined at length in Chapter Six of this study.)

Although the traders sometimes recognized that various factors besides "indolence" or a quest for better prices and more opulent generosity helped to explain Chipewyan mobility, they nevertheless seemed to look upon these reasons as secondary. The HBC writings just before the coalition reflected a certain stereotype of the Chipewyan character which had existed earlier but was perpetuated and surely elaborated by Simpson. In November 1820, after being in Rupert's Land only a very short time, he claimed to have "studied their character with some attention," and decisively declared them "a miserable abject race; covetous and selfish to an extreme, full of low cunning, and devoid of every good and generous feeling" (1938:122). In his report, Simpson went on to elaborate on the "Chipewyan character," beginning with the note that he regretted not being able to point out a solitary good trait:

[A]ll their dealings are tainted with a degree of low Cunning which one would think it difficult for an uncultivated savage to acquire; they are covetous to an extreme, false and cowardly; Treacherous and revengeful but have not the spirit to exhibit it openly, and are solely prevented from committing the

most atrocious crimes by a fear of the consequences in the event of discovery: the whole Tribe does not possess one particle of honor and to the feelings of gratitude they are total Strangers; in short I conceive the Chipewyan character disgraceful to human nature, and I am satisfied they are loaded with the imprecations of all who have had any intercourse or communication with them [1938:375-6].

The Chipewyan were presented as threatening, almost dangerous and clearly in need of being controlled. At the same time Simpson pointed out their great potential, under the proper guidance, as valuable fur hunters. He represented them as having an "avaricious" thirst for trade articles and as being willing to travel great distances to obtain them:

The Chipewyans do not consider this part of the Country to be their legitimate Soil; they come in large Bands from their own barren Lands situated to the North of this Lake, extending to the Eastern extremity of Gt. Slave Lake and embracing a large Track of Country towards Churchill. The Compys Traders at the latter Establishment, made them acquainted with the use and value of European Commodities and being naturally of a vagrant disposition and those articles becoming necessary to their Comforts, they shook off their indolent habits, became expert Beaver hunters, and now penetrate in search of that valuable animal into the Cree and Beaver Indian hunting Grounds, making a circuit easterly by Carribeau Lake; to the South by Isle a la Crosse; and Westerly to the Banks of Peace River, and so avaricious are they, that the prospect of Gain I have no doubt would lead them much farther, did not the more Warlike Tribes to the Southward and Westward intimidate them [1938:355-6]

Simpson noted, though, that the "greater proportion" of the Chipewyan remained "on their own barren Lands," where they lived "in ease and Luxury," being "much devoted to Epicurean habits" (1938:356).

It was clear to the traders of both companies that the competition between them was detrimental to the trade. When the North West Company was unchallenged in the Athabasca, it reportedly took an average of 120 packs of valuable furs annually. In contrast, the combined returns of the companies in 1820-1 totalled only 30 packs (1938:363-4). Reorganization of

the trade along principles of economy and cooperation would clearly be to the advantage of both parties.

## Chapter IV

### THE COALITION AND ITS AFTERMATH: ATTACHMENT OR DEPENDENCY?

The HBC/NWC agreement in 1821 to merge under the name of the Hudson's Bay Company brought changes, both for the reorganized company and for the Indians. For the company, the coalition ushered in a period of relative prosperity. How the coalition affected the native people is less clear.

Secondary writers have drawn varied conclusions about changes in the lives of the Chipewyan after 1821. Regarding their territorial movements, William Sloan regards the coalition as of minor importance. He maintains that the introduction of direct trade in the Athabasca and Mackenzie beginning in the 1770's had already precipitated a change in the Chipewyans' role from middlemen to trappers, and thus, a change to a more sedentary lifestyle:

In large part the location of the Indians was fixed by 1821 and for most of the larger bands their relative geographic locations would be maintained as long as the fur trade was the economic base [1985:268].

Patricia McCormack, however, believes that significant change in the lives of the Chipewyan came with the coalition - that it was a time in which they were drawn into a new relationship with the fur trade. From her ethnohistorical study of the Fort Chipewyan Indians, she concludes that it was between 1821 and 1870 that the Chipewyan and Cree of the area chose to abandon their aboriginal self-sufficiency and become dependent on and committed to a regularized participation in the trade (1983:156). This decision to become "trappers" involved permanent changes in annual

cycle and territory, as they adopted a new "fur trade mode of production" (1983:156).

Most writers emphasize the element of control involved in the new monopoly. James Parker argues that the Chipewyan were adapting to the new trade conditions out of "necessity" (1976:46). He notes that economic incentives were not enough to induce the Chipewyan to exert themselves in the trade - it took the controlled conditions of trade monopoly, whether that of the Canadians or of the Hudson's Bay Company (1967:180). Bishop and Ray see the post-coalition years as a time in which the fur traders were in a commanding position and were attempting to increase Indian dependency by introducing policies to improve the management of the trade. They refer to the period between 1821 to about 1890 as a time, for the Indians, of "intensifying dependence on the Hudson's Bay Company for many basic necessities of life under deteriorated or deteriorating resource conditions" (1976:135). Of particular importance were the Hudson's Bay Company's attempts "to geographically stabilize Indian populations in order to prevent families and groups from trading at different posts" (1976:136). Colin Yerbury, too, maintains that it was the company's policy after 1821 to create a situation in which the Indians became reliant upon the traders. He points out that trading post bands developed as groups of Chipewyan became dependent upon specific posts for European commodities (1976:255-6).

Certainly the coalition was a time of reorganization. The key watchwords "Exterior and show" were replaced by "oeconomy and efficiency." In August 1821 John Charles, master at Indian Lake, wrote to his counterpart at Deers Lake: "A Revolution in the Affairs of this Country is about to



take Place.... [T]he Season of Extravagance is at an end" (B 91/a/7/fo.3-3d). Previously in most inland areas the companies matched each other's posts, sometimes so that they stood within yards of each other's doors.<sup>46</sup> Not only were these paired posts no longer necessary, but, in the interests of economy and preservation of beaver, posts in some areas were closed altogether.

The coalition resulted in a great surplus of available personnel.<sup>47</sup> The company could be more selective of its employees, and according to the Deed Poll of March 21, 1821, a strict division of rank in the company was outlined, along with the terms of compensation.<sup>48</sup> Instead of the decision-making remaining predominantly in the hands of the overseas administrators, more responsibility was delegated to their agents in the three departments - the Northern, Southern, and Montreal Departments. In 1821 George Simpson was appointed Governor of the Northern Department, which covered the vast territory between the bay and the Rockies. In 1826 Simpson was also made Governor of the Southern Department, and in 1839 he officially received the title of Governor-in-Chief of Rupert's Land (Williams 1983:52). It was Simpson who was largely responsible for the task of converting the system of aggressive trading and wasteful methods into profits (Innis 1940:1xxvi).

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<sup>46</sup> For example, in 1810 the HBC and NWC posts at Indian Lake were only 20 yards apart (B 91/a/4/fo.2), and in 1814 they built only 15 yards apart (B 141/a/8/fo.1).

<sup>47</sup> Some of the surplus personnel were given pensions and many were encouraged to retire to Red River. See the HBC committee's letter of March 1822 to Simpson (Fleming 1940:313-7).

<sup>48</sup> A 37/6. Also published in Robertson 1939:327-44.

The Hudson's Bay Company's post-coalition strategies were based on the assumption that it was necessary to extend a firm hand to the Indians, encouraging and directing them on how to be productive in the trade "for their own good." This paternalistic attitude - which was not really new to the company - was evident in the policy directives regarding the treatment of Indians which the London Committee sent to Simpson in June of 1824:

97th Point: That the Indians be treated with lenity and forbearance and with every mild and conciliating means resorted to for to Encourage industry, repress vice, inculcate morality, and that the use of Spiritous liquors be gradually discontinued.

98th Point: That they be discouraged from hunting beaver in Summer by convincing them of the injurious effects thereof to themselves and the country at large [Glover 1958:236-7].

Simpson echoed these directives to J.G. McTavish at York Factory in July of 1827. He described "nursing the country" as "of the most vital importance." Next to that, he said, came the improvement of the Indians: "In benefiting them you benefit yourselves and the country at large" (D 4/90/fo.124). These two goals - to "improve" the Indians and to preserve the diminishing fur resources - were referred to repeatedly and seem to have formed the core of the new policy towards the Indians. Regarding specifically the Chipewyan, both goals involved strategies of controlling their "perambulations" (B 91/a/7/fo.10).

Because the company understood the Chipewyans' travels to be largely motivated by quests for a better standard of trade and for the warm welcome and gratuities usually extended to "strangers" to a post, after 1821 efforts were made to abolish these incentives. As one HBC trader expressed, "now is the time for bringing them to their Senses and making them pay fairly & not unjustly for what they get from us without indulg-

ing them in an Extravagance they have enjoyed too long" (B 91/a/7/fo.6). In order to eliminate disparities in the trade, attempts were made to standardize prices, discontinue gratuities, and improve the transportation system to ensure a more steady supply of goods to the posts.<sup>49</sup>

Central to the new trade strategy were attempts to impress upon each hunter that he "belonged" to a specific post, and to organize a system to make that clear to the masters of other posts he might be tempted to visit. Lists of Indian names and records of their outstanding debts were exchanged.<sup>50</sup> Making the system work required much organization and cooperation between post masters. Theoretically there was little reason for competition between the individual traders after the coalition: financial compensation was strictly regulated and depended upon the success of the total operation of the company (Oleson 1978:2).<sup>51</sup> Yet, the success of each commissioned officer was carefully evaluated and measured in terms of how well he managed to increase profits of his district through decreased costs and the self-sufficiency of posts. And because this largely depended on whether he could count on the steady trade of a given pop-

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<sup>49</sup> The more sturdy and economical York Boats eventually replaced birch bark canoes. Already in 1818, Colin Robertson was recommending carrying on the Athabasca trade from Churchill with boats (B 39/a/14/fo.16). The financial advantage of boats over canoes in the Athabasca was compared by James Keith in his 1824-5 report from Fort Chipewyan (B 39/e/8/fo.21d-23).

<sup>50</sup> The practice of exchanging debt lists had gone on before to some extent. On September 6, 1777, for instance, the master of York Factory wrote to Hearne at Churchill suggesting they exchange debt lists of the North River Indians of whom he said "greater cheats are not in the Bay" (B 42/a/94/fo.3).

<sup>51</sup> By the terms of the Deed Poll, the officers were granted forty per cent of the net trading profits, which were divided into 85 equal shares and distributed amongst them according to specific terms (Innis 1970:283-5).

ulation of Indians, underlying elements of competition were evident at times, as masters of posts scrambled to identify families and groups of Indians and to claim them as their own.<sup>52</sup>

How the HBC traders sorted out which Indians were whose is illustrated by the interactions of the masters at Indian Lake, Deers Lake, Fort Churchill and Ile a la Crosse. John Charles at Indian Lake was an especially enthusiastic proponent of exercising the company's new authority. He wasted no time in writing to George Keith, Chief Factor in the English River District, requesting that Indian debt lists be sent from Ile a la Crosse:

[T]hat we may if possible Secure at least Part of them in the Churchill District from some of those Rascals of Indians who have but too long Plundered both with Impunity, and will by every means in their Power endeavour to evade our Vigilance by resorting to Posts where they are but little known [B 91/a/7/fo.6d-7].

Charles also wrote to Fort Churchill urging Hugh Leslie to "exert vigilance" to discourage the "Rogues" who were taking advantage of the debt system. He insisted, "you may rest assured there is not one of them but what is deeply in arrears to both Parties previous to the Junction of the Companies" (B 42/a/147/fo.17). The method "formerly adopted of treating these remote Strangers with so much generosity holds good no longer," directed Charles. In fact he recommended that the "reception" be "cold" and the "Presents of all kinds" reduced. Charles later conceded that the Indians could not be driven away without receiving anything at all - certain goods were deemed necessary to survive the trip back. "Small ad-

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<sup>52</sup> In many cases agreements were made between posts and districts. For example, in 1823 Chipewyan were transferred from Fort Chipewyan to be supplied at Fort Vermilion (B 39/e/9/fo.6).

vances to enable them to return to their Hunting grounds will suffice," he wrote. The intention was that "When they find the presents are withheld it will prevent them from repeating the visit" (B 42/a/147/fo.25d). With the Indians belonging to the fort, Charles advised that Leslie deal carefully, to give presents "as their merits deserve," but to "curtail any triffls without its being felt" (B 42/a/147/fo.17). Leslie responded to Charles that he would withhold presents, particularly to "Strangers" and retrench as much as possible "but not to disgust them otherwise we shall lose more than gain" (B 42/a/147/fo.19d).

As compensation for these drastic measures the post masters were told to give the Indians a liberal price for their furs, specifically, "to amend the standard of trade & to make it more favorable to them by 20 or 25 per cent on the present rate" (Innis 1940:xix). How the Indians would react to the new treatment was not known. Charles wrote to Leslie:

[W]e have every reason to suspect that from the great alterations that will take place in dealing with the Indians in future at the Northern Establishments many of them from disappointment at the Loss of the Harvest they so long enjoyed from the oppositions, will retire to their Lands and from thence may visit you [B 42/a/147/fo.17].

In February 1822 he sent lists of Indian debts from the posts at Indian and Deers Lake to Fort Churchill. When in the spring a group including seventeen Indians who were indebted at Deers Lake arrived at Churchill, Leslie reported giving them only the necessaries. "But even that is much more than some of them deserves," he said, particularly referring to those who came from Deers Lake, who had "scarcely done any good for the last three years - always going from one Post to another and getting as much Debt as they could from each" (B 42/a/147/fo.24). That fall the "wandering" Deers Lake Indians were reported to have gone on to Ile a la

Crosse and the Athabasca, which was apparently "generally wished," although as Leslie complained, "they have taken a few of our Indians along with them" (B 42/a/149/p.13). These were Indians he hoped to get back, as he had also exchanged debt lists with the Athabasca posts.

Establishing where each Indian hunter belonged was not easy. For instance, when Leslie traded with some Chipewyan in the fall of 1822, Charles wrote an angry letter accusing him of great negligence, for the Indians had already received debt at his post at Indian Lake:

[N]ot one of them has made his appearance at this place. [O]n the contrary they have been at you last fall with Meat and Deer Skins and such like Rubbish which ought to have been thrown in their faces and they kicked out of the House for they are only throwing their time away in useless travelling when they might be Hunting Furs [B 42/a/149/p.26].

Leslie defended himself saying he wasn't aware that the Indians had received any "Provision Debt" at another post, and added, "it would be the last thing a Northd Indian would do to confess voluntarily that he had received such where argument his own Interest" (B 42/a/149/p.26). Apparently Leslie became more cautious, because the journals thereafter contain references to his observance of the debt lists.

The coalition involved other related strategies such as phasing out the use of liquor as part of the welcoming ritual and for trade, attempting to revise and even abolish the debt system, and, as has been mentioned, working to preserve beaver in the areas where they had been over-trapped.

The Hudson's Bay Company had not introduced the practise of preserving animals - on the contrary, it had contributed to the breakdown of traditional conservation practises by encouraging maximum returns on beaver

and the competition for furs between groups of natives before the coalition. Now the post masters had to work to curtail rather than perpetuate these trends. They did this in a number of ways. They reduced the "encouragement" usually given in powder and shot for beaver (B 42/a/147/fo.17). They discouraged summer trapping and the use of steel traps. They restricted the hunting of female and young beaver and encouraged a system of claiming and marking beaver houses. As well, the company introduced a quota system into the Northern Department in 1826, whereby York and Churchill were initially limited to 300 beaver per season, and the Athabasca to 5,000 beaver (Williams 1983:57-8).

That the Indians were more aware than the traders of the need to rest an exhausted territory is perhaps evident in the way they sometimes cited the shortage of fur bearers as their reason for being unassertive in the hunt. Such was the case at Indian Lake in 1820-1 when a group of Chipewyan insisted they go north in the summer "because they said the few beaver in the area should be left alone for a spell" (B 91/a/6/fo.12d). Mr. Charles argued with them to no avail, and explained to his superiors that when he left the post in the summer the Indians typically saw it as an opportunity to "take French Leave" to their lands where "they are always sure of Food & Cloathing and consequently do not trouble themselves much about hunting Furs" (B 91/a/6/fo.12d-13).<sup>53</sup> Ironically, after 1821 it was the traders who took credit for impressing the Indians with the need for conservation. In his 1827-8 district report, Robert Harding wrote: "The

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<sup>53</sup> There are other examples where traders evidently suspected that the Indians were using the scarcity of fur-bearers as an excuse for their lack of fur returns. Edward Smith reported from Fort Chipewyan in 1822 that the Yellowknife Indians were complaining of "an intense Want of Beaver About Fort Providence." He took this to be "more fabrication than any thing near the truth" (B 39/e/4/fo.8d).

Indians have now come to an understanding about preserving" (B 42/e/5/fo.1d). In his reports from 1828 to 1836, Harding emphasized that he was discouraging the Indians from hunting beaver. But sometimes, as in 1829-30, the Chipewyan fur returns were mostly beaver, which the Indians explained as necessary because of their shortage of provisions: they were "obliged" to hunt beaver for food, "having met with no deer" (B 42/e/7/fo.4d).

Beaver were apparently rare in the vicinity of Fort Churchill, but in 1827-28 the Cree were reporting that they were plentiful on the south side of Churchill River, and that 113 beaver houses there were untouched, "a register of which is kept stating the number belonging to each Indian" (B 42/e/5/fo.1d). The competition for the diminished number of beaver sometimes led Indians to complain about infringements by intruders on beaver lodges, suggesting the presence of concepts of territoriality in the beaver hunt.<sup>54</sup> In 1829, for instance, Robert Harding reported from Fort Churchill:

Jack [Cree] was making a sad complaint of the Indians belonging to Split Lake [Chipewyan] having trespassed on their Hunting Grounds and taken most of the Beaver Houses in that quarter which he had endeavoured to preserve according to instructions given for the last two years. [I]ts certainly very hard that this Indian with his friends after being restricted from killing Beaver and endeavouring to follow the orders given on that head as far as lay in their power should be robbed by other Indians who have no business there. [E]ven with the Natives there is a custom or law among themselves that a Beaver House found by any person is considered sacred as his property and a mark is made near the place to warn others that it has already been discovered previously which law the Split Lake Indians have infringed [B 42/a/157/fo.10d].

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<sup>54</sup> As early as 1771 Hearne commented about Chipewyan beaver hunting that a trapper had the right to all the beaver caught in a particular lodge that he had discovered and marked (1958:155).



Was it an HBC strategy specifically to encourage the Chipewyans' dependence on the posts?<sup>55</sup> It would appear so from Simpson's recommendation in 1822:

[H]owever repugnant it may be to our feelings, I am convinced [the Chipewyan] must be ruled with a rod of Iron to bring and keep them in a proper state of subordination, and the most certain way to effect this is by letting them feel their dependence upon us [Innis 1970:287].

Such explicit references to fostering dependence, though, are uncommon in the records. A paternalistic attitude was generally the advocated method to secure the cooperation of the Indian traders. Yet, it can be argued that some of the other strategies of the coalition worked to perpetrate a type of dependency on the post. When the Chipewyan came to the posts, certain "necessaries" could be bestowed upon them or withheld by the traders according to how well the Indians were following their directives.<sup>56</sup> Especially at those posts far away from food resources, ammunition, and often, foodstuffs like oatmeal or "pease" were goods with which the Indians, it was said, "cannot do without a fresh supply" or it would be "impossible for them to Hunt any furs" (B 42/a/147/fo.1d). The restriction obliging Indians to trade at one post increased the traders' ability to use the necessities for reinforcement of "good" trade behaviour or as punishment for "bad" behaviour.

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<sup>55</sup> Regarding the definition of "dependent," Krech states that "Indians were most dependent on the trade when they relied totally upon guns, ammunition, fishing equipment, and other goods (food and clothing included) necessary for their survival and obtained only through the exchange of furs, provisions, and services at the trading post" (1984:138-9).

<sup>56</sup> According to E.E. Rich, "necessaries" did not carry its normal European meaning in this context. It basically referred to goods for immediate consumption, but also to ammunition and certain other articles (1960:45).

The records suggest that ammunition was a central trade item. In February of 1822 Charles wrote to Leslie to withhold "the grand article of Ammunition So much prized by these vagrants" (B 42/a/147/fo.17). Leslie responded that he had reduced the presents to incoming Indians and that he had given not more than one third the amount of ammunition usually given, telling the Indians that they would get more "as soon as they would better themselves and remain at one Post... and if they made it appear that they were exerting themselves by bringing plenty of Furs" (B 42/a/147/fo.24).

The availability of ammunition was known to affect Chipewyan mobility. In 1820-1 William Brown wrote from Fort Wedderburn that since "the opposition" increased, the Indians were better supplied with ammunition "which has rendered them more unsettled, and caused them to wander more about" (B 39/e/3/fo.17d). At Deers Lake in 1818-19, the Indians seem to be coming a great distance specifically for ammunition. Leslie described a group of Chipewyan who came to the post in late November of 1818 "from their lands":

[They] tell me they slept 22 nights since they left their families, which if true plainly shows there Distress as also their great reliance upon our generosity to come so far for a supply without having any thing to give in return [B 179/a/12/fo.6-6d].

Leslie gave them debt and sent a supply of ammunition to others "to prevent them from coming so far for it in the very season when they might kill Martins" (B 179/a/12/fo.6d).

There is some controversy regarding whether or not the Chipewyan "depended" upon the ammunition. Both Sharp (1977a) and Townsend (1983) dispute the significance of the gun for hunting prior to the introduction in

the late 19th century of the self-primed repeating rifles. Sharp maintains that the early trade guns were important for warfare, prestige and, because of their extended range, for hunting certain game. But, he says, "it is implausible that the early muskets served as primary hunting weapons" (1977a:39). Traditional weapons of bows and arrows, spears, and snares had advantages over the muskets, which were loud, required a constant supply of ammunition, and often broke in cold weather.

At least some of the HBC writers describing Chipewyan in the forested regions, though, claimed that the Chipewyan counted on the ammunition. From Ile a la Crosse in October of 1822 George Keith wrote that he was trying to be "as sparing of advances as possible," although, he added, "to do any thing a Chipewyan must be supplied with Woolins and Ammunition etc." (B 39/a/5/fo.7d). In May 1823 Keith wrote he had been "very liberal" with ammunition that spring, "in order to enable the Natives as much as possible to liquidate their debts." He elaborated, "The Chipewyan Tribe are singularly awkward with the Bow & arrow and without ammunition can Kill nothing, excepting Rein Deer on the Barren lands which they strangle in the Snow" (B 89/a/5/fo.33). David M. Smith explains the apparent value the Chipewyan placed on ammunition and muskets as linked to the change from the traditional reliance on the barren ground caribou (most effectively hunted by the chute and pound methods)<sup>57</sup> to a reliance on moose, wood bison and woodland caribou of the forested region (1976:36).<sup>58</sup> Indeed, according to George Keith, within the Ile a la

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<sup>57</sup> The chute and pound method involved cutting trees to create a pound within which a maze would direct the caribou to be caught in snares and strangled or killed with spears (Hearne 1958:49-51).

<sup>58</sup> This is consistent with Arthur Ray's observation that the guns were less used and valued by the Parkland/Grassland Indians than by those

Crosse District "Moose Deer claims the first rank, both in point of number and of general benefit" (B 89/e/1/fo.1).

Perhaps the Hudson's Bay Company's choices of post locations are some indication of an attempt to encourage the Chipewyans' dependence on the trade. In his district report of 1825, Robert McVicar at Great Slave Lake noted that a disadvantage of the location was its proximity to the "Rein Deer or Chipewyan Lands" so that the Indians needed only axes, knives and files from the traders (B 181/e/1/fo.4d). Likewise at Deers Lake, Hugh Leslie hinted in 1819-20 that the post should be closed in the hope that the Chipewyan would then be forced to move into the deep forest where fur bearers were more abundant. The country around Deers Lake was "so much exhausted," he argued, that it was scarcely worthwhile to keep the post, as it would only prevent the Indians from going lower in the country where there were more beaver: "as long as the Post is Continued the Indians are always sure to come there to pass the winter as they still live well the Moose being very plentiful which is not the case much lower down" (B 179/e/2/fo.4d-5). Simpson's instructions to Mr. Andries at Harrisons House in September 1820 also included reference to the advantage of keeping the Chipewyan from the caribou hunt:

The proximity of your establishment to the Chipewyan lands has drawn many of the Indians from this place, and if they are trusted with heavy debts, it is to be apprehended, that instead of hunting animals valuable for their skins, they may devote their attention to the more easy mode of subsistence by following the Grey Deer; it will therefore be necessary that few debts are given either in dry goods or ammunition, and that you should persuade a great proportion of them to take their Credits from hence instead of Harrisons House [1938:49].

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hunting the more solitary game of the forest (1974:72-9).

Whether or not the traders wanted the Chipewyan to be dependent on the trade is difficult to say. The Hudson's Bay Company could not afford to have the Indians completely dependent on the posts. It had been observed during the times of intense competition that the Chipewyan had come to expect and depend upon large amounts of goods and foodstuffs from the traders gratis, so that hunting large game was secondary or discontinued altogether. The traders complained of "hangers on" who congregated around the posts. This was clearly an undesirable situation for the company, which could not import adequate goods to support a dependent population. A rather tenuous balance had to be maintained. For the company's trade to survive, it was important for the Indians to value the goods and to be willing to produce furs in order to obtain them, but not to be helpless at those times when, for whatever reason, they could not obtain furs to trade.

Clearly, though, the HBC officers wanted the Indians "attached" to the trade and to the posts. Chipewyan loyalties had long been a mystery to the HBC traders. The Chipewyan had indeed appeared surprisingly attached to the Canadians, their "oppressors." Already in 1802 Peter Fidler had noticed that the Chipewyan of the Lake Athabasca area were kept from trading with the English because they had "a kind of attachment besides a strong dread" of the Canadians (B 39/a/3/fo.6). Simpson's theory was the Hudson's Bay Company had been unable to win over and keep the loyalty and services of the Chipewyan partly because the Chipewyan had "a natural predilection to their original Masters":

[W]hile the North West Compy were in full possession of the Country, the Chipewyans were reduced to the most servile and abject state; absolute despotism was perhaps never carried to such lengths as over these poor creatures, and strange to tell they have not only an innate fear, but attachment to that association [1938:358,356].

"Attachment" was considered far more likely to develop if the Chipewyan did need the post to some degree. As well, it was notably fostered if the HBC men had some relationship with the Chipewyan, especially ties of obligation associated with kin links. Attachment was also found to be more attainable if the Chipewyan would detach themselves from the cycle associated with the caribou hunt.

## Chapter V

### CONTROLLING CHIPEWYAN MOBILITY (1821-30)

The HBC officers after 1821 portrayed themselves as the new "Masters" of the trade, with unprecedented authority over the Indians. But did the Hudson's Bay Company actually manage to keep the Chipewyan, as Simpson put it, "in a proper state of subordination"? Were the new trade conditions and strategies enough to change the Chipewyans' pattern of territorial movement and trade behaviour?

Edward Smith, in his 1821-22 report from Fort Chipewyan, said that he expected the coalition to bring about a "speedy return to industry" for the Chipewyan, although he qualified this by saying it would require time to "wean their minds from past extravagances" (B 39/e/4/fo.7d). He predicted that once the posts were finally settled, the extra men and officers dispensed with, and the gratuities "reduced to an Triffle," the Chipewyan trade would again be profitable (B 39/e/4/fo.7).

Changes to the trade did, in fact, take time. The Hudson's Bay Company found it necessary to introduce the changes gradually, because, as George Keith from Ile a la Crosse put it, the natives were "peculiarly attached to old Habits and Customs" (B 89/a/7/fo.46). It was not necessarily the Chipewyans' non-cooperation that inhibited the success of the new strategies. Perhaps the Chipewyan and other native peoples were rather confused by the sudden disappearance of posts and by the partnership between traders who had previously been mortal enemies. Surely this

must have been very hard to accept for Indians who had been loyal NWC hunters, or who were relatives of Nor'Westers and had grown up in an environment of hatred for the Hudson's Bay Company.

The restoration of the trade monopoly was no guarantee that the natives would convert into compliant trappers and traders. In the decade that followed the coalition, the records from the various posts present Chipewyan responses as ranging from direct confrontation at Fort Chipewyan, slow acquiescence at Fort Churchill and almost ready acceptance at Ile a la Crosse. While the Chipewyan exhibited varying degrees of resistance to the changes, the issues which generally arose as sources of contention were the same - the Chipewyan protested the phasing out of the debt system, the reduction of gratuities (especially liquor), and the pressures to abandon the barren grounds.

At Fort Churchill changes to the trade were introduced very slowly. In 1825 Colin Robertson reported that few alterations had been made:

Neither the extravagance naturally arising from contending Parties nor the Economical measures which followed the Coalition appears to have affected the Trade of the Place. [A]nd as to the treatment of the Indians, I find after examining the Old Journals of Churchill that our present Method of arranging with the Natives is much the same as it has been for the last twelve Years, except in English Provisions [of which they gave less after coalition] [B 42/e/4/fo.5].

Not until 1828 were serious efforts made to phase out the debt system at Churchill. In January of that year Robert Harding wrote that he had received instructions to abandon the debt system and curtail gratuities. He mused that the natives

no doubt will find it to their benefit when properly comprehended but it will take some time to explain all matters to them distinctly - especially the Chipewyan who generally consider every change of System to be against their interests [B 42/a/158/fo.7].



In his district report for 1827-8, Harding wrote that the Indians were not happy with the changes but that, on the whole, they understood, and seemed to regret the loss of rum more than anything else (B 42/e/5/fo.4d). The report of the following year stated:

The Indians have been dealt with on the new system of Trade viz nothing whatever gratis, but better payment for their furs. The Chepoveyans do not seem to like this change, but I have no doubt that after a year or two they will cease complaining on that head, however they are bold beggars in general with little or no sence of shame, and one denial of any thing will not satisfy them [B 42/e/6/fo.5].

Harding reported in 1829-30 that the Indians were getting used to the new system, but that there were still "needless complaints" and that they wouldn't acknowledge that they were being better paid for their furs (B 42/e/7/fo.4d).

In the Athabasca, where the Hudson's Bay Company moved from Fort Wedderburn into the former NWC headquarters, Fort Chipewyan, the Chipewyan reacted much more strongly to the changes in the trade. There, attempts to abolish the debt system were made immediately. As a first step, the outstanding debts were "partially abated from time to time" - they were cut in half in 1820, and in the spring of 1822 about forty percent was "deducted from the Whole then due" to make them more manageable (B 39/e/9/fo.3d). As well, in 1823 James Keith reported his efforts to eliminate the custom of giving part of the fall debt as "presents." He reduced the price of trade goods as "a full compensation for the discontinuance of petty gratuities" (B 39/e/8/p.7).<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> For example, with the new tariffs, a twist of tobacco was priced at 2 MB instead of 4 MB, a large striped blanket was reduced from 10 MB to 8 MB, shirts sold at 2 MB rather than 3 MB, and axes at 1 1/2 MB from 2 MB. Rum stayed at 1 MB a pint, "the better to discourage its use" (B 39/e/6/fo.16-17).

The Chipewyan did not accept the new system. In his 1824-5 report Keith expressed his frustration that the debt system was still in place. He called for better communication between the districts, as the Indians were evidently still successfully evading their debts (B 39/e/8/fo.7). Keith vacillated between insisting that the debt system should be abolished outright and that it should be gradually discontinued. He suggested that autumn of 1826 would be a good time to quit the granting of credit. He predicted that, while "it would drive one half, nay two thirds" of the traders to their own lands, the effects would ultimately be beneficial both for the Indians and for the company - the troublesome Indians would stop being an expense and burden, and the company would still have the returns of those Indians who would remain attached to the establishment by "habit, Connexion or taste" (B 39/e/8/fo.7d-8). These Indians would then have

a fairer, more extensive & productive field in a regenerating Country to supply their wants & ultimately to augment our Returns.... Hence Native sloth, indolence, poverty & wretchedness...would cease to annoy us. And no longer would the aged, the worthless or the infirm relying on our generosity & humanity be induced to quit their lands where they enjoy peace & plenty in the life of ease [B 39/e/8/fo.8d].

The problem of the "aged, the worthless and the infirm" depending on the traders' generosity at the posts was not a new one. In 1771 Samuel Hearne warned:

Experience has convinced me, that by keeping a Northern Indian at a distance, he may be made serviceable both to himself and to the Company; but by giving him the least indulgence at the Factory, he will grow indolent, inactive, and troublesome, and only contrive methods to tax the generosity of an European [1958:199]

In the late 1700's Andrew Graham, too, remarked, "Every Indian that forsakes his native hunting grounds to harbour at the Forts degenerates into

nothing, and his children after him, and is a great loss to the Company" (1969:280-1). At Fort Chipewyan after the coalition, the post masters faced not only the challenge of "settling down" the Chipewyan who were restless and wandering, but of remotivating those who were "loitering" at the post. In his 1823-24 district report James Keith explained that it was the late annual shipments from York Factory that caused the Indians to "lounge about in the vicinity or at the Establishments in a state of anxious expectation, languer and inaction at one of the most inclement and unwholesome seasons of the year." This was so detrimental, wrote Keith, because the Chipewyan at that time compared notes about a variety of complaints "to which having little fortitude or Philosophy to bear them, many become immediate Victims" (B 39/e/6/fo.4d).

In his 1825-6 Athabasca report, Keith unhappily noted that the Chipewyan continued to consider it his obligation to give gratuities (B 39/e/9/fo.3,2d).<sup>60</sup> The established pattern, he wrote, was very difficult to change, because the Indians were used to receiving presents of clothing in the spring, gratuities with their fall debt, and presents "during every intermediate visit" (B 39/e/9/fo.3).

One of the important presents in the trade had long been liquor. Just as it was hoped that discontinuing the debt system would foster trade and mobility patterns advantageous to the Hudson's Bay Company, a major reason for the withholding of liquor from the Chipewyan was to "improve" their pattern of movement. James Keith at Fort Chipewyan noted that liquor was "fostering indolent and irregular habits," as it was "the means

<sup>60</sup> He itemized the "Petty Gratuities" as ammunition, tobacco, knives, firesteels, flints, gunworms, thread, needles, awls, garter, rum and small pieces of cloth (B 39/e/9/fo.2d).

of causing large Crowds to collect and wait [for] each other at certain stated periods when they would otherwise be actively and usefully employed" (B 39/e/9/fo.7d). Those whom Keith indentified as the more stationary Chipewyan, he predicted would become "more and more docile and tractible and uniformly industrious once spiritous liquor ceases to be distributed among them" (B 39/e/9/fo.6d).

In practice, Keith found that withholding liquor from the Indians was not easily done. In his 1824-5 report Keith wrote that

moderation not entire privation is all we can consistently aim at, unless its importation even for the company's Servants beyond YFactory is entirely prohibited as there exists too great a similarity of habits tastes and dispositions [B 39/e/8/fo.7d].

He discovered that it was not "safe or politic to attempt weaning one part, while the other [i.e. the HBC men] is allowed free indulgence" (B 39/e/8/fo.7d).

The traders' hesitance to exert their touted "authority" is evidence that the Chipewyan were exercising their ability to take or leave the trade. James Keith wrote in 1825-6 that it had not been possible to discontinue the old trade customs immediately, because the traders "dreaded disgusting the Chipewayan & driving them to their lands." He added that they were "worried that it might endanger the Establishment & the safety of the Companys servants" (B 39/e/9/fo.2d). While the company no longer had to compete with the Nor'Westers, evidently they still competed with the attraction of the Chipewyan to their traditional economy. In 1825 Colin Robertson defended Fort Churchill's continuation of exceptionally low prices on ammunition and tobacco, saying that it drew "those Distant Tribes of Chepoweyans from their Lands to this Place," and that if they

offered the same standard of trade on these items as in the interior, "these Indians would rather resume their old Mood of snaring the Deer than traverse so extensive a Country for so triffling a Compensation" (B 42/e/4/fo.5). In frustration James Keith declared in his 1824-5 report from Fort Chipewyan that the Chipewyan

can never be rendered dependent, much less become stationary...as many of the other Indian Tribes, from the obvious circumstance of having their lands to resort to when caprice or necessity prompt them retiring thither [B 39/e/8/fo.6].

The Chipewyan apparently knew that the traders disliked their forays into the barren grounds. Writers at all three posts indicated that the Chipewyan occasionally threatened to retreat to their lands as a tactic to get what they wanted from the HBC men. At Great Slave Lake, as well, Robert McVicar wrote in 1825-7 that "the most Serious and lasting obstacle to the profitable employment of the resources of the District is the vicinity of the Rein Deer (or Chipewyan) Lands" (B 181/e/1/fo.4d). He explained that the abundance of deer on the tundra, the "facility" with which they were killed and the "excellent" clothing which their skins made "render the Chipewyans independent of European Supplies" (B 181/e/1/fo.3d). In fact, he found that "on the Slightest disgust" the Chipewyan would exclaim, "we lived well on our lands before the white people came amongst us, and we can do so again, we can support ourselves with our bows and Snares" (B 181/e/1/fo.4d). Although George Keith admitted that the Chipewyan belonging to Ile a la Crosse were mostly "upright," he too believed that the Northern Indians had a "natural propensity of resorting to other Districts and too frequently on experiencing some imaginary or trifling disgust, to the Barren Lands," which he referred to as their "Land of Canaan" (B 89/a/9/fo.48d, B 89/12a/fo.3d).

In the Athabasca, James Keith's confrontation with "80 men & youths" in the autumn of 1824 involved both the Chipewyan and Keith presenting ultimatums based on the argument that they were more needed than in need of the other. The Chipewyan threatened to leave for their lands the next day if they were not indulged with more liquor. But, according to Keith,

to their great mortification and disappointment, we very unexpectedly set them at defiance observing we could better dispense with them than they could with us, on which they immediately lowered their tone and became crest fallen quietly accepting in a two Gallon Keg what they had so lately rejected in Bottles and have not since attempted a similar experiment [B 39/e/9/fo.7].

Keith worked to "wean" the Chipewyan of "their high notions of their own consequence and our dependence on them." He wanted to impress upon them the attitude that the HBC men were "indifferent about and independent of them" (B 39/e/9/fo.9,5d). Keith's impression was that the Chipewyan were bluffing - they were "feigning an intention of visiting their lands when they actually had no desire." But he boasted that they were beginning, in fact, to exhibit "the greatest apprehension of our leaving them" (B 39/e/9/fo.9).

When in 1826 Alexander Stewart arrived at Fort Chipewyan to replace Keith, he too faced direct confrontation with the Chipewyan. In late September, when they were "nearly all collected" at the post, the Indians insisted on holding a formal meeting with Stewart. In a lengthy speech one of the chiefs expressed "their entire dissatisfaction with the Traders," who, they complained, "began by degrees since the junction of the Compy to deprive them year after year of every thing as well as changing the manner of Trade." They expressed to Stewart that in their view "it was evident their ruin was intended" (B 39/a/25/fo.4-4d). The Chipewyan

were especially unhappy about the recent deprivation of rum, and, like the others; threatened that if they could not have rum in the fall and spring, the HBC men "need not come at all as they can live upon their Lands independent of the Whites entirely, as well as many of their relatives do actually" (B 39/a/25/fo.4-4d). Stewart argued with them and stood firm, as he suspected that they were testing him to see if he would be more "yielding" than James Keith, whose system he commended and resolved to continue (B 39/a/25/fo.5d).

The confrontations between the HBC men and the Chipewyan in the decade after the coalition had to do with the Chipewyan being forced to make a choice - whether to commit themselves more firmly to the trade, or whether to return to their traditional lifestyle and economy. To involve themselves in the trade was an easier choice for some than it was for others. To a considerable degree, the Chipewyan at Ile a la Crosse were already committed to the trade before the coalition. They were skilled and dedicated beaver hunters. George Keith was often surprised at the "amazing distance" they would go in order to obtain beaver. In April of 1823 he reported that some of his hunters had wandered in quest of furs "within a short distance of Nelson House" (B 89/a/5/fo.25). Others, that same year, "penetrated within a few days march of the Rocky mountain in the Vicinity of Smoky River...a little below Dunvegan" (B 89/a/5/fo.26). In May of 1824 he noted the arrival of a group of four men and two youths who had wintered "within one short days March" of the HBC establishment at Red Deer River (B 89/a/7/fo.59). He attributed these "exertions" partly to the great scarcity of beaver but also to the Chipewyans' "avidity for European Goods" (B 89/a/5/fo.26). Keith found it necessary at

times to exhort them "not to travel so hard in search of Beaver," as in doing so they were neglecting small furs and finding themselves poor in the spring (B 89/a/7/fo.48). As well, their long trips were bringing them into unfriendly contact with plains Indians (B 89/a/12a/fo.19, B 89/a/7/fo.48d).

On the whole, the Ile a la Crosse records present a picture of the Chipewyan accepting the coalition changes with minimal resistance. This likely had much to do with the fact that these Chipewyan were already relatively alienated from the barren grounds. In his 1825-6 report, George Keith wrote that the Northern Indians in his district were "expert fishermen and during Summer live much on this kind of food" (B 89/a/9/fo.48d). It likely also had to do with what Keith called the major advantage of the Ile a la Crosse district - that the "easy transport and productive fisheries...renders the whites independant of the natives for a subsistance" (B 89/e/1/fo.1-1d).

The Ile a la Crosse Chipewyan were presented as quite compliant. In 1824-5 George Keith reported discussing with the Chipewyan whether to supply them according to the old tariff, or the new one as introduced in the Athabasca district. They were "unanimously in favor" of the new one, apparently recognizing its advantages (B 89/a/8/fo.3d-4). Keith reported similar success when in 1822 he introduced marked reductions in the amount of liquor used in the trade. He reported giving Indian traders only a "glass of rum" at arrival, and "very weak rum" when they set off from the post (B 89/a/5/fo.21,8). In 1823 he "equipped" fifty seven Chipewyan "for their Winter Peregrinations" with an unusually small gratuity of only "6 Quarts High Wines diluted with 7 Gallons Water," which, he



said, "renders it an innocent Beverage." He did this without hearing "a murmur or complaint" (although in other records he mentions needing to convince them that the reductions were for their own good) (B 89/a/7/fo.45, B 89/a/5/fo.8).

According to George Keith, the new regulations introduced after the coalition were to the benefit of the "native population and the Fur Trade," which, he said, "are certainly upon most points intimately linked together" (B 89/a/9/fo.51d). This was not necessarily the case.<sup>61</sup> At Fort Churchill, staying in the vicinity of the post was associated with hardship. Every spring certain Chipewyan were expected to stay nearby the post to hunt geese, a provision considered essential to the post. This required a substantial change in the regular mobility pattern. It meant being separated from the others who spent summers hunting caribou on the barren grounds. It was often a "hungry" time for those who stayed, as the post could not afford to support the Indians beyond emergency relief. It was never known how long it would take before the geese would fly, or whether they would follow the expected route of migration at all. The records from the spring seasons of 1816, 1817, 1819, 1820, and 1821 document the hardship suffered by the goose hunters because of the common problems of severe weather, the late migration of the geese, and shortages of ammunition and English provisions.

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<sup>61</sup> Samuel Hearne was puzzled by the enthusiastic participation of some of the Chipewyan in the trade. In 1771 he asked, "What do the more industrious gain by giving themselves all this additional trouble? The real wants of these people are few, and easily supplied; a hatchet, an ice-chissel, a file, and a knife, are all that is required to enable them, with a little industry, to procure a comfortable livelihood." Those who endeavour to possess more, he asserted, "may, in fact, be said to be only slaves and carriers to the rest" (1958:51-2).

The hardships associated with making territorial changes to accomodate the trade were also illustrated when, in the early 1820's, the Chipewyan were prevailed upon to change their wintering grounds to the border of the Churchill River, about 150 miles from the house, where the Fort Churchill's Cree hunters had made impressive hunts (B 42/a/149/p.55). On June 8, 1822 after the goose hunt Leslie wrote that it was "with great reluctance" that some of the Chipewyan agreed to refrain from going to their Lands as usual so they could hunt beaver along the river early in the fall (B 42/a/147/fo.29). This change was productive for the company. Colin Robertson reported from Churchill in 1825 that "the first Year produced Twelve Hundred Beaver, the second Seven Hundred and the last Four Hundred and Forty nine" (B 42/e/4/fo.4d). "But", said Robertson, "that Country is so bare of the larger species of Animals from which the Indian procures his living that it requires the greatest Persuasion, and frequently coercive measures are resorted to induce the Chepoweyans to make their Hunts in so hard a Country" (B 42/e/4/fo.4d).

Within the decade after the coalition the masters of all three posts presented themselves as successful in achieving better control of their Chipewyan hunters. This was in spite of the fact that there were still factors motivating the Chipewyans' territorial movements beyond the HBC traders' control. One such factor was the sometimes volatile relationship of the Chipewyan with their neighbours. In the summer of 1824, the tensions between some of the Chipewyan bands around Lake Athabasca and the Beaver Indians to the west of them led to what the traders described as the "unfortunate though much provoked murder" of four Beaver Indians. Other conflicts followed, along with reports of bad treatment of the Chi-

Chipewyan by small bands of Beaver Indians "with whom they casually fell in during their Winter rambles" (B 39/e/9/fo.1d). The dread of further trouble from the Beaver Indians apparently "caused about 1/3 of those who came in in spring to disperse during summer in different directions," though most headed towards their own lands and a few towards Great Slave Lake. The others "stationed themselves during summer purposely out of harms way from the Beaver Indians, between Athabasca and Slave Rivers where their provision hunts were very trifling" (B 39/e/9/fo.1d).

One possible way to measure the real or perceived success of the new strategies, is to discover whether there was an increase in the numbers of Chipewyan who were recognized as committed to the trade. The writers categorized the Chipewyan, often with reference to their subsistence, to their migration patterns or to their proximity to the post. These categories helped them to identify what was of central importance to the Hudson's Bay Company - how committed the Chipewyan were to the trade. They often referred to the Chipewyan as either "moose hunters" or "caribou eaters." It is clear that the traders preferred the moose hunters as they tended to remain year-round in the wooded areas where they could also hunt furs (Simpson 1938:369). In the Athabasca, the Chipewyan were sometimes divided into two categories, those "more migratory," and those "more settled," (also known as the "Mountaineers" or homeguard [Simpson 1938:369]). In his 1825-6 report, James Keith referred to the "more stationary" Chipewyan as the "better disposed of this tribe" as those who were "guarded about incurring debt" (B 39/e/9/fo.3). He also called them the "Real Chipewyan Traders" (B 39/e/8/fo.10). At Ile a la Crosse George Keith distinguished between the "industrious Chipewyan" and

the others, whom he referred to as "Knaves" and "rif-raf" (B 89/a/5/fo.32).

The exceptionally detailed records of Fort Churchill can be used to illustrate the growing commitment to the fur trade by individual Chipewyan hunters. At Churchill the Chipewyan were designated as either "far-away Chipewyan" or "homeguard." This distinction was one that originated from the very beginning of the Chipewyan trade. Already then, there was a trend to recruit those Chipewyan who were willing to serve the post as provisioners as well as interpreters, package carriers etc. At all of the bayside posts the role of homeguard was officially that of certain groups of Cree Indians who would stay near the posts year-round to do these and other duties. But at Fort Churchill the Chipewyan eventually replaced the Cree in the role of homeguard.<sup>62</sup>

In the Churchill reports of 1827-36 the homeguard Chipewyan were described as those who "come thru annually and generally remain about the place all Summer," most of them serving as goose hunters for the post (B 42/a/149/p.53), (B 42/e/9/fo.3). They made "constant" visits to Fort Churchill, and could be expected twice a year, so that they were "the

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<sup>62</sup> That process can be traced in the Fort Churchill journals. Before the 1790's some of the Chipewyan were identified as "Northern Indians" and some as "our Northern Indian Hunters" or "our Goose Hunters." But by 1795 post master Thomas Stayner was clearly identifying a group of Churchill's Northern Indians as homeguard, distinguishing between "Homeguards" (Cree) and "Northward Homeguards", and, five years later, "Northward Indian Homeguards" and "Southward Indian Homeguards". After 1810, all references to Indians as simply "homeguard" identify those Chipewyan Indians who are not included in the category of "Northern" or "Far-away" Indians. Three factors that facilitated the development of a Chipewyan homeguard at Fort Churchill were the loss of many Cree traders in the 1750's onward to the Canadians, Cree depopulation during the 1781-2 smallpox epidemic, and the destruction of Fort Prince of Wales by the French in 1782 (which also caused a decrease in the numbers of Cree attached to the post).

most beneficial to the Company" at Churchill. The far-away Indians were not as "expensive" to the company, which is to say they required less provisions and European goods as gratuities (B 42/a/149/p.54). They were described as "those of the more distant Tribe" (B 42/e/9/fo.4). They "retire to the plains during the Summer," but, as Hugh Leslie noted in 1822-3, "could they be prevailed upon to remain in the woody parts of the Country during the Summer Season they would be able to Hunt double the quantity of Skins" (B 42/a/149/p.54). Colin Robertson referred to them as "Grey Deer Eaters" - those who seldom visited the "strong Woods" and who were "chiefly residents of the Plains" (B 42/e/4).

The homeguard Indians were not completely separated from the caribou, but did not go as far north to hunt them. In 1839 Harding described the homeguard as typically proceeding to the northward after the goose hunt in search of Deer, "and if fortunate in meeting with any, which they mostly do, [they] return here again in the early part of Novr with Deerskins and Provisions" (B 42/e/9/fo.3d).

Although the life of the Chipewyan close to the posts was known to have difficulties, an examination of the Fort Churchill records reveals that, in the decade and a half after the coalition, the homeguard Chipewyan were more reliable than the far-away Indians and generally increased in number between 1822 and 1838:

TABLE 1

Chipewyan Hunters At Fort Churchill 1818-38 (\*)

<u>Date</u>	<u>Homeguard Northern</u>	<u>Far Away Northern</u>
1822-23	20	20
1827-28	37	78
1828-29	33	97
1829-30	52	63
1832-33	64	15
1835-36	68	53
1838	139	54

(\*) This information is found in the Fort Churchill district reports of 1822-36 (B 42/a/149; B 42/e/5-9), and the 1838 census (B 239/z/10).

Earlier records suggest that the homeguard were very separate from the far-away Indians. But a comparison of the detailed lists of Indian hunters at Churchill from the time of the coalition and spanning two decades indicate that many names initially on the list of far-away Indians were, over the years, drifting onto the lists of homeguard (See Table 3). Of the 76 hunters listed as homeguard on the 1838 Fort Churchill census, 24 of them, or 31.5 percent had previously been identified as far-away Indians (B 239/z/10/fo.47-48d). Moreover, a relationship can be discovered between these changes and the winter hunting ground of these individuals. The Indians on the homeguard lists were mostly spending the winters on nearby lakes close to the full forest - areas rich in furs but not traditionally places where the larger Chipewyan bands gathered in the winter. The far-away Indians were wintering in lands which were generally north of those inhabited by the homeguard and were more strategic in the caribou hunt, such as Nueltin Lake and other sites near the north forest edge.

The benefit to the company of a growing number of homeguard is clear from a comparison of the returns of the two groups:

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TABLE 2

A COMPARISON OF RETURNS FROM FAR AWAY AND HOMEGUARD  
CHIPEWYAN AT FORT CHURCHILL, 1829-30 (\*)

	FAR AWAY (63 hunters)	HOMEGUARD (52 hunters)
Beaver	176	710
Cub Beaver	36	294
Coat Beaver	59 1/2 LB	20 LB

(\*) (B 42/e/7/fo.5)

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In his 1827-8 report Harding wrote that the visits of the far away Chipewyan were becoming "very regular": "The beginning of Novr they mostly arrive with Provisions etc and in April with their winter hunts of Furs and always come in large parties" (B 42/e/5/fo.2d). In the following year he reported that there were more far away Indians, but that they still tended to trade alternatively at Athabasca, English River, or Lac la Ronge (B 42/e/6/fo.2d). He expressed hope that they were coming to prefer Churchill to the other posts as it was nearer to the plains where they were still generally passing the summer (B 42/e/6/fo.2d). He also wrote:

the Indians [are] intending to pass the summer at Grey-deer, Indian & Hatchet Lakes in place of going to the Plains, consequently they will be able to commence trapping Martins much earlier in the winter than they have hitherto been in the habit of doing [B 42/e/6/fo.5].

It seems that the traders' efforts to get the far-away Indians to behave more like the homeguard were considered successful. That the homeguard were made up of both "caribou eaters" and "moose hunters" is clear from Colin Robertson's comment in 1825 about how they responded in times of difficulty:

The Homeguards were formerly in the habit of making a short Summer Excursion to the nearest Deer passes where they laid up a stock of Dried Provisions. [T]his being accomplished they then divided themselves into small Parties and Hunted along the fringe of Woods lying between Indian and Grey Deers Lake. [W]hen they failed in the means of subsistence, the Moose Hunters generally entered the Strong Woods, and either paid or traded their Debts at the above Establishments. The Grey Deer Eaters steered their course to the Barren Ground and in this manner has the District too frequently lost its Spring or Summers Advances [B 42/e/4/fo.4d].

While the HBC post records indicate that the Chipewyan at Forts Churchill, Chipewyan and Ile a la Crosse were adopting mobility and trade patterns that showed an increasing commitment to the fur trade, it is also noteworthy that the posts could not, as they had hoped, completely discontinue the granting of credit and of gratuities in the trade. The debt system continued, though in a more controlled way, at all three of the posts. Even at Ile a la Crosse, George Keith had not abolished the debt system, but had reduced debt and gratuities to a minimum. He wrote in May of 1828 that the Indians resisted his suggestion of changing to a system of straight purchases rather than giving spring and autumn credit (B 89/a/12a/fo.19-20d). The gratuities and debt system were curtailed enough to effectively separate those who "belonged" to the fur trade, and those who were peripheral to it. Apparently it was enough to drive away those who were seen as taking advantage of the debt system. Patricia McCormack goes so far as to maintain that the Chipewyan probably could



not have remained aloof from the fur trade and continued to live in the region: "Leaving the area was probably the only way to reject the traders' influence" (1983:170).

Perhaps the debt system that did continue worked more in the HBC traders' interests than in the Chipewyans'. Besides conferring a degree of obligation upon the trappers, gratuities such as the clothing given in spring were probably advantageous to the HBC trader as a substitute for clothing that the Chipewyan would otherwise have obtained by hunting caribou. The extent to which the traders effectively encouraged the Chipewyan to give up their travels to the barren grounds is probably the best measure of the extent and potential of control they achieved.

Table 3

FORT CHURCHILL CHIPEWYAN IDENTIFIED AS BOTH FAR AWAY INDIANS AND HOMEGUARD, 1822-38  
AND LOCATION OF WINTER HUNTING GROUNDS

	<u>1822/3</u>	<u>1827/8</u>	<u>1828/9</u>	<u>1829/30</u>	<u>1832/3</u>	<u>1835/6</u>	<u>1838</u>
Bes,ky,gee,nah		F A Nueltin Lk	F A Nueltin Lk	H G Indian Lk	H G Deers Lk	H G Border Plains	HG Not indic.
Da,in,dies,ah		F A Hatchet Lk	F A Deers Lk	F A Deers Lk	H G Deers Lk	H G Indian Lk	HG Not indic.
Din,nae,gu		F A Own Lands	F A Indian Lk	H G Not indic.	H G Indian Lk	H G Indian Lk	HG Not indic.
Eh,co,le,lew	F A Nearby	F A Nueltin Lk	F A Nueltin Lk	H G Indian Lk	H G Deers Lk	H G Border Plains	HG Not indic.
E,kag,gan		F A Own Lands	F A Indian Lk	H G Not indic.	H G Deers Lk	H G Indian Lk	
Cha,you,za		H G Indian Lk	F A Indian Lk	H G Indian Lk	H G Indian Lk		HG Not indic.
Ca,clo,el,e,az,ze		F A Nueltin Lk	F A Indian Lk	H G Indian Lk	H G Indian Lk		
Cha,lae,za			F A Not indic.	F A Rabbit Lake	H G Deers Lk	H G Indian Lk	HG Not indic.
Che,gun,ah,cho		F A Hatchet Lk	F A Deers Lk	F A Deers Lk	F A Not indic.	H G Indian Lk	HG Not indic.
Ghuz,ze,az,ze	H G Not indic.	H G Not indic.	H G Not indic.	F A Coal Lk		F A Hatchet Lk	

	<u>1822/3</u>	<u>1827/8</u>	<u>1828/9</u>	<u>1829/30</u>	<u>1832/3</u>	<u>1835/6</u>	<u>1838</u>
Ga,zo,e,az,ze		F A Own Lands	F A Nueltin Lk	H G Portland Lk	H G N.Churchill R.	H G Indian Lk	
I,youn,del,tal		H G Indian Lk	F A Indian Lk	H G Not indic.	H G Indian Lk	H G Indian Lk	HG Not indic.
I,don,nel,shee		H G Indian Lk	F A Indian Lk	H G Indian Lk	H G Deers Lk	H G Indian Lk	HG Not indic.
I,you,na,zel,la		H G Not indic.	F A Indian Lk	F A Rabbit Lk	H G Indian Lk	H G Indian Lk	HG Not indic.
It,zel,la,zo,ah		H G Border Plains	F A Indian Lk	H G Indian Lk	H G Indian Lk	H G	
I,as,cun,el,ghul		F A Own Lands	H G Indian Lk	H G Indian Lk	H G Deers Lk	H G Indian Lk	HG Not indic.
I,gid,de,dia,de		F A Nueltin Lk	F A Indian Lk	F A Rabbit Lk	H G Deers Lk	H G Indian Lk	HG Not indic.
Las,cud,dee		F A Nueltin Lk	F A Nueltin Lk	F A Rabbit Lk	H G Deers Lk	H G Border Plains	HG Not indic.
Nad,da,yous			F A Hatchet Lk	F A Deers Lk	H G Deers Lk	H G Indian Lk	HG Not indic.
Na,gay,ah		F A Nueltin Lk	F A Nueltin Lk	H G Indian Lk	H G Deers Lk	H G	
Nae,you,za	H G Deers Lk	F A Nueltin Lk	F A Indian Lk	H G Indian Lk	H G Deers Lk	H G Border Plains	HG Not indic.
Nin,nee	F A Plains	F A Nueltin Lk	F A Nueltin Lk	H G Indian Lk	H G Knife Lk	H G Border Plains	HG Not indic.
Need,lee		F A Own Lands	F A Indian Lk	H G Not indic.	H G Indian Lk	H G Indian Lk	HG Not indic.

	<u>1822/3</u>	<u>1827/8</u>	<u>1828/9</u>	<u>1829/30</u>	<u>1832/3</u>	<u>1835/6</u>	<u>1838</u>
Nad,da,bah			F A Hatchet Lk	H G Not indic.	H G Deers Lk	H G Indian Lk	HG Not indic.
Tha,u,lah		H G Not indic.	F A Indian Lk	H G Indian Lk	H G Indian Lk	H G Border Plains	HG Not indic.
Thith,ah	F A Nearby	F A Own Lands	F A Nueltin Lk	H G Indian Lk	H G Deers Lk	H G Border Plains	HG Not indic.
The,et,chee		F A Nueltin Lk	F A Indian Lk	H G Indian Lk	H G Deers Lk	H G Border Plains	HG Not indic.
The,et,che,e,az,ze		F A Nueltin Lk	F A Indian Lk	H G Indian Lk	H G Deers Lk	H G Indian Lk	HG Not indic.
The,a,bil,la		F A Nueltin Lk	F A Nueltin Lk	F A Rabbit Lk	H G Deers Lk	H G Border Plains	HG Not indic.
Thu,lae,za	F A Plains	F A Nueltin Lk	F A Nueltin Lk	H G Indian Lk	H G Deers Lk	H G Indian Lk	HG Not indic.
Yaw,gas,az,ze			F A Indian Lk	F A Rabbit Lk	H G Indian Lk		

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## Chapter VI

### CLUES TO A CHIPEWYAN PERSPECTIVE:

#### THE IMPORTANCE OF DEATH CUSTOMS AND THE KINSHIP NETWORK

The Chipewyans' own motives for their trade behaviour are not easily identified. The HBC records suggest that from the time of their earliest interactions with Europeans the Chipewyan had certain options regarding the trade. They could choose not to involve themselves in the trade at all. They could choose to do some trapping and send their furs down to the post with someone else. They could alter their regular pattern more radically by becoming one of the "carriers," or middlemen. They could trade at the post and leave the next day, or stay in the vicinity for weeks or for months to hunt geese for the post in the spring and fall, to bring in caribou meat and skins in November or ptarmigan in mid-winter. Before the pre-coalition rivalry, they could choose to trade with the Hudson's Bay Company at the bayside, or with its competitors in the interior.

Several scholars have emphasized forces of motivation other than those highlighted by the HBC writers. E.E. Rich argues that the Indians did not react to the "ordinary European notions of property nor to the normal European economic motives" (1960:46). Arthur Ray's explanation is that aside from the acquisition of trade goods, the Indians involved themselves in the trade "to satisfy their love of adventure and ceremony, and to gain status amongst their fellows" (1978:223). Henry Sharp explains

Chipewyan motivation to trade in this way: "Access to Western goods was added to hunting, healing and sorcery as a means of validating the magical power that underlies all positions of influence in traditional Chipewyan society" (1977a:37).

Although some aspects of Chipewyan behaviour were clearly a mystery to the HBC traders, in their writings they offered certain insights and, at times inadvertently, clues to Chipewyan points of view. For instance, following deaths within Chipewyan family units, observations of reciprocities and geographical movements occur with sufficient frequency to reveal a pattern of response. Related to these observations are noteworthy comments on Chipewyan kinship and band structure and references to "superstition" as a mysterious influence on their movements. Collectively these writings suggest that death and the customs, obligations and implications of death in Chipewyan society were probably more significant causes of relocation than was recognized even by the writers.

In their journals the traders typically commented on the general health and condition of those Indians supplying them with furs and provisions. The records usually noted only the deaths that were somehow relevant to the trade, namely the deaths of hunters and their family members, or the deaths caused by contagious diseases. Often a disease was described rather than named. Peter Fidler, on his way to Nottingham House in the fall of 1803, met some Indians from the Athabasca who reported that "a great number of Jepowyans had died already this summer" of a sickness described as "a stomach complaint...generally carrying the afflicted off in less than 14 Days" (B 39/a/3/fo.2d,3d). Apparently "very few women & not one Child" suffered from the disease, but a reported 36 hunters died that summer in the Lake area (B 39/a/3/fo.6a,4d).

Usually the numbers of deaths were unstated, making it difficult to know how widespread epidemics actually were. The Churchill journals of 1817 and 1818 mentioned many deaths among the Chipewyan because of "the venereal complaint," which according to post master Adam Snodie "have the last 2 years raged amongst the Chipoyan Nation (at least the traders at this place)" (B 42/a/148/fo.50d). The extent of deaths on this account was noted in early April 1817, when from two tents of Indians five months earlier there were only three families alive (B 42/a/148/fo.50d). In the spring of 1819, Snodie recorded that the Churchill Indians were still fighting the disease. He noted the "extremely distressing" news brought by a Chipewyan that

Several of his associates had died during winter of the venereal complaint, and others from the same cause had been incapacitated to hunt furs & were still unfit to perform any duty either to support themselves or families [B 42/a/144/fo.11d].

When they affected the trade, cases of non-fatal diseases were also reported. John Charles at Indian Lake in mid-April of 1820 recorded news of instances of whooping cough in the Nelson House and Cumberland areas (B 91/a/5/fo.25). By late October 1819 the illness was reported to have "made its appearance" at Fort Wedderburn. There William Todd described it as a disease "particularly distressing" to the Indians, "as well for its long continuance as its depriving them of the means of subsistence the whole of their caution in approaching an animal being rendered abortive by a single cough" (B 39/a/15/fo.8).

The most noted and probably most far-reaching contagious disease affecting the Chipewyan in the early 1800's was measles. In October of 1819 at Ile a la Crosse, John Clarke recorded that "most of the women and

Children in the Fort have fallen a victim to that unusual Malady the Measles" (B 89/a/4/fo.11). During the winter Clarke noted the deaths of one of his employees, the wife and the the 12-month-old child of HBC men, an "old Indian woman," and 13 Indian women and children associated with the NWC post at Green Lake (B 89/a/4/fo.16,12,12d,17,13d). Cases of measles were also reported at Nelson House and Cumberland House in the winter of 1819-20 (B 91/a/5/fo.25). At the same time, farther north in the Athabasca, measles was said to be responsible for the deaths of "great numbers" of Indians (B 39/e/3/fo.22). At the Fort Wedderburn outpost, Berens House, on December 20, 1819, Todd remarked that the HBC men were starving as "the greatest part of the Indians belonging to that place having died of the Measles a disease which now appears to prevail throughout the Indian Territory" (B 39/a/15/fo.16).<sup>63</sup> At Fort Wedderburn in mid-January, Todd mentioned a Chipewyan band which "Used to be upwards of 10 men," but measles had "carried off eight out of the band principally women and children" (B 39/a/15/fo.20).

Other causes of death were noted in the journals. At Fort Wedderburn in 1819 and 1820, dysentery and the respiratory disease "consumption" were mentioned. Also, significantly, the death was reported in March of 1820 of the Chipewyan leader, Ayuza, whom Todd had won from the North West Company that fall.<sup>64</sup> His death was attributed to his having eaten a

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<sup>63</sup> In his Athabasca Report of 1820-21 Simpson indicated that these deaths at Berens House were mostly of Cree Indians: "Some years ago," he said, the area had been "numerously inhabited by Crees, but the Small Pox, Measles and other contagious diseases have made ravages among them nearly tantamount to extermination." He estimated that only 20 to 30 families remained there (1938:362).

<sup>64</sup> Ayuza was described as "a principal Chief", the "first hunter in the Athabasca", and "of great influence amongst the rest of the Indians" (B 39/a/15/fo.25).



poisonous root "after which he became insensible and in the course of a few hours was no more" (B 39/a/15/fo.25).

Certain customs surrounding the deaths of Chipewyan family members drew the attention of the HBC traders because they so directly affected the trade and because the writers found them puzzling or disturbing. Samuel Hearne commented that after the death of "a father, mother, husband, wife, son, or brother," the Chipewyan would "mourn" for a whole year "which they measure by the moons and seasons." During this period, they would "make an odd howling noise, often repeating the relationship of the deceased" (1958:216), although the "perpetual crying" would eventually turn into "very doleful plaintive & melancholy songs" (Fidler 1934:543).

The "death customs" included destruction of the property of the deceased and of the closest relatives. "The death of a near relation affects them so sensibly", wrote Hearne, "that they rend all their clothes from their backs, and go naked, till some persons less afflicted relieve them" (1958:216). Not only clothing, but any furs collected that season were destroyed. In the spring of 1819, for instance, Adam Snodie at Fort Churchill described with dismay some Northern Indian men who arrived at the post "in considerable distress" because a relative had recently been shot in a deer-hunting accident:

The friends of the deceased conformable to the pernicious custom of their Nation had destroyed every part of their clothing with whatever property they were possessed of. But what is still worse I am sorry to learn they had burnt the furs of the deceased, altho' he was considerably indebted to the Company [B 42/a/148/fo.71].

Simpson described the Chipewyan observing this custom as "giving way to the extravagancies of Grief" (1938:312-3).

The writers tended to interpret the Chipewyans' behaviour as a sign of respect or an expression of mourning. But some of the references suggest it was something more, that it involved a sense of urgency or obligation. For instance, in the spring of 1833, when he received news of the recent death of one of Fort Churchill's best hunters, Chief Factor Robert Harding observed: "The deceased Indian had procured upwards of 60 MB all of which furs have been since destroyed by his family, a custom which altho bad is considered absolutely necessary by this tribe of Indians" (B 42/a/160/fo.24d). The necessity of the custom was demonstrated by the fact that the disposal of clothing was carried on even in the most severe weather. In early January of 1821, the Churchill master was informed that the chief Indians' wife died, and that he and her brother were mourning. Even at that time of year, "in their frantic state [they had] thrown away their Clothes as well as goods and wished it now replaced" (B 42/a/148/fo.91d).

Peter Fidler suggested that the custom involved a type of social sanction. During his travels with Chipewyan in 1791-2 he recorded the "horrid lamentations" of relatives of a middle-aged man and boy who had "fallen victims to hunger." He described that not to "make themselves totally destitute is looked upon by their countrymen as having an unfeeling heart" (1934:541-3). That it could also have been a matter of conscience is implied by the further observation by Fidler that, some days after the death, some of the Chipewyan were found cutting a "good fine deer Skin (fishing) Nett all to pieces altho 2 or 3 of them had nothing to net Snow Shoes with." The explanation he received was that

[A]t first they had intended to have kept it for Snow Shoes but that ever since they could not sleep while any thing of the dead mans property was not destroyed which was the very last article that had formerly belonged to him [1934:541-3].

The death customs involved other characteristic behaviour. Following a death, the family would temporarily discontinue hunting fur-bearing animals.<sup>65</sup> In April of 1823, when some of the Ile a la Crosse Chipewyan experienced a death in their family, George Keith explained that their subsequent "state of perfect inactivity" in the fur hunt was because they "could not reconcile themselves to worldly affairs" (B 89/a/5/fo.24,25d). Some of the writers attribute the neglect of the fur hunt to the way news of a death demoralized and depressed the family. Fidler, for example, described the Chipewyans' response to the "great mortality" in the Athabasca in 1803 as having effected "a melancholy gloom on nearly all the rest," and "damaged their spirits so much" that he expected little hunt from them (B 39/a/3/fo.4d,5). James Keith, from Fort Chipewyan in 1823-4, too, wrote that the Chipewyan "are so much damped and depressed either by their own complaints [or] the sickness or mortality of their comrades & relatives" that half the hunt was often lost before they would "recruit their spirits" and resume their activities (B 39/e/6/fo.4d).

Significantly, after a Chipewyan death it was also customary for the relatives of the deceased to relocate. Most often the family would insist on retreating to the barren lands northeast of Athabasca and Great

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<sup>65</sup> There are some indications that it also affected other hunting. For instance at Churchill in May of 1821 William Ross wrote that one of his "Chief hunters" sent in his hunting gun from the goose hunt because his son was dying (B 42/a/148/fo.95d). Also at Churchill, in May 1829, Robert Harding recorded the gruesome death of a child mauled by dogs, on account of which many Indians refused to hunt geese (B 42/a/156/fo.30d).

Slave Lakes, the lands "destitute of beaver abounding only in deer" (B 39/a/3/fo.14d). Hugh Leslie at Deers Lake in 1820 wrote that he tried every means in his power to get the Chipewyan not to retreat to "their own lands" after some deaths in the winter, but to stay instead in the wooded areas and hunt for furs. When he found it was impossible to stop them, he delayed giving them the expected supply of necessities, hoping they would continue hunting martin for a while before heading north. They went, nevertheless, "to those deserts," which prompted Leslie's response:

It would be just as well for me to give them liberty to go when they asked it for now they are gone without it and I suppose all the rest who were wishing will follow their example but I cannot help it [B 179/a/13/p.22].

Because the interruption of the fur hunt usually coincided with the journey northward, it is unclear whether the Chipewyan were being governed by a prohibition against hunting fur bearers, by a custom of leaving the area where the death occurred (in which case it was logical for them to choose the familiar surroundings of the barren grounds, where beaver and martin were scarce), or by simple necessity requiring families to concentrate on the caribou hunt in order to replace the goods and clothing they had destroyed in mourning. Most of the accounts suggest that the Chipewyan were avoiding the area of a death. Hugh Leslie, who complained of the drop in trade at Fort Churchill in 1819-20 because of the death of his "leading Indian" Thu,thy,ah, wrote that the family would "do nothing for some time and indeed its a chance if ever they return to this quarter as they always strive to keep away from where a relation died" (B 179/e/1/fo.2d-3).

The Chipewyan desertion of an area of death apparently had to do with their realization that the forces causing some diseases (however they may have defined these forces) made certain localities dangerous. On his way to Nottingham House where some 36 hunters had died in the summer of 1803, Fidler heard that "all the Indians are leaving the Athapiscow to escape from that bad disorder that many has fallen victims to already this summer there" (B 39/a/3/fo.3d). In early May of 1804, Fidler recorded the news that many of the Indians had gone towards Ile a la Crosse "afraid to come here as such a number of their Countrymen died hereabout last Summer" (B 39/a/3/fo.19d). Likewise, in October of 1820, George Simpson described the Chipewyan as fleeing from the territories where diseases had been prevalent:

A most destructive malady such as that of last year [smallpox] has broke out in the Chipewyan lands, and carried away whole bands, and they are now dispersing in all directions, hoping that a change of residence may arrest the progress of the contagion [1938:81].

When in the spring of 1820 news of problems with whooping cough and measles at Nelson House and Cumberland reached Indian Lake, Charles noted that the Indians expressed fear, something which he reminded them of in order to keep them in the vicinity of the house (B 91/a/5/fo.25,29). This fear, though, could also work to the traders' disadvantage. Hugh Leslie recorded that in the summer of 1819 when a group of Deers Lake Indians went towards "the Southward Indian country," they heard of the illness rampant there, and "altho none of them caught the infection it frightened them so much that they went in the winter too great a distance to the Northward to kill any thing but Deer" (B 179/e/1/fo.2d).

The fatal effects of the diseases and the mystery of their source must have made them very ominous indeed, both to the Indian and the traders. At Ile a la Crosse in the winter of 1810-11 Fidler noted that some of the Indians were ill, and he speculated that it was the "disorder brot now in by the Canadians," which he believed was the "same as 1808 when numbers of the Natives Died" (B 89/a/2/fo.12d). In late October 1819 when the first instance of measles was noted at Fort Wedderburn, William Todd speculated, "the disease appears to have been brought in by the families belonging to the North West Company" (B 39/a/5/fo.8).<sup>66</sup> At the same time, farther south at Ile a la Crosse, the North West Company were apparently spreading the rumour that the English were the source of the smallpox which was circulating there: John Clarke in September of 1819 wrote that the Nor'Westers were telling the Indians that the English rum was "tinctured with that evil malady," and were thus "inflaming their minds" against the Hudson's Bay Company (B 89/a/4/fo.5d,8).

Apparently, from the perspective of the Chipewyan, all deaths whether following disease, food shortages, a hunting accident etc., were caused by bad spirits. According to Hearne:

When any of the principal Northern Indians die, it is generally believed that they are conjured to death, either by some of their own countrymen, by some of the Southern Indians, or by some of the Esquimaux: too frequently the suspicion falls on the latter tribe, which is the grand reason of their never being at peace with those poor and distressed people... [1958:216].

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<sup>66</sup> According to W.F. Wentzel, the contagious diseases made their appearance with German settlers in 1819 at Red River. He said that one fifth of the Indian population died as a result (Masson 1960:130).

Specific references to Chipewyan religion or spiritual beliefs are extremely rare in the records. One of the few comments is that of John Clarke who wrote from in 1820, "Nothing is so dreadful to a Chipoweyan as Apparitions Spirits Hobgoblins etc." (B 91/a/5/p.11). This dread was known to be responsible for relocation. Thomas Topping at Fort Churchill wrote in early August of 1811 that a Northern Indian family who had earlier left the fort returned "owing to their superstitious notions of having seen ghosts etc." (B 42/a/136b/fo.9d). Also at Fort Chipewyan in late April of 1833, Robert Harding wrote that fear of an evil spirit was the reason for a group of Chipewyan not travelling to the barren ground that spring:

The Indians tenting near the House are rather alarmed, they have it that there is Innab Honnee as they call them, haunting their movements, that is Bad People who are always in search of mischief but can never be seen...and to give it credit they give out that a Chipewyan who left this last Sunday week is missing [B 39/a/2/fo.29].

George Simpson, in his 1821 report from the Athabasca region, asserted, "Some years nearly the whole of them retire thither ["their own barren Lands"] at times influenced by superstitious feelings..." (1938:355). Perhaps leaving behind the area of the misfortune was also seen as an escape from the power that caused the death.

Several writers noted that fear of spirits and the concept of death were also related to the dread of failure in the hunt. Simpson elaborated in 1820-21:

This Indian ["The English Chief"] has for some years past been considered one of the best hunters of the Tribe, but I fear will be no good this season; it is an unfortunate characteristic of the Chipewyans, that if unsuccessful for any length of time in the early part of the season, their superstitions gain such an ascendancy over them, and they become so fully impressed with the idea that some evil genius haunts them, that they give themselves up entirely to despair; they become care-

less, neglect their hunts, lay dormant in their encampments for weeks together, while a morsel of Leather or Babiche remains to keep them in existence, at length to escape the miseries of famine, they murder their Families and perish without a single exertion. Whole bands of these poor wretches are annually consigned to oblivion in this melancholy way; when in this situation they are deaf to all argument and entreaty [1938:197].<sup>67</sup>

When the ice opened in the Ile a la Crosse area in May of 1823, George Keith recorded the arrival from various directions of Chipewyan "amounting collectively to about 80 Boys." They brought what he called a "shabby hunt," as some of them had been sick, "and almost all of them...impressed with the idea that their Tents were haunted by enemies" (B 89/a/5/fo.34). John Clarke, in the Indian Lake journal in January 1820, took credit for successfully appealing to the Chipewyans' fear of spirits to encourage a family of them to adopt rather than take revenge on the son of a man they thought was a murderer. Clarke apparently warned that if they killed the boy, "he will rise from the dead and prevent your killing either Moose, Beaver or anything else and thus you will finish Miserably" (B 91/a/5/pp.10-11).

The death customs were extremely detrimental to the trade. When poor seasons in the caribou hunt resulted in deaths by starvation among the Chipewyan traders, or when contagious diseases thinned their population

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<sup>67</sup> It is unlikely that the Chipewyan actually "murdered" their own family members. Hearne noted that the Chipewyan were "by no means a bold or warlike people" and were never known to kill their own members: "As for murder...it is seldom heard of among them. A murderer is shunned and detested by all the tribe, and is obliged to wander up and down, forlorn and forsaken even by his own relatives and former friends" (1958:217-8,69). Simpson's statement likely reveals his attitude towards the "barbarous" practices he commented on elsewhere - that the elderly who were "too infirm to travel" were sometimes left behind to perish, and that, as he noted in regards to a Chipewyan woman on March 30, 1821, "a termination was put to her sufferings as she was actually buried before the vital spark was extinguished" (1938:74,311).



as smallpox did in 1782, fur trade losses from these deaths were compounded by the ensuing destruction of property and relocation of kin. There are some indications of the number of Indians that could be affected by a death. Peter Fidler writing from Nottingham House ventured an estimation of how much the trade would drop after the loss of seven or eight Chipewyan hunters who had died in the area during the winter of 1810-11. He predicted that his NWC opponents would not collect half the number of packs that year as the previous one, which he understood to be 85 packs (B 89/a/2/fo.28d). Considering that a pack was generally made up of 90 pounds of furs, and that a very commendable seasonal return for an individual hunter was 30-50 MB, it is evident that Fidler was expecting those deaths to affect quite a considerable number of people.

The extent of the losses could be forecast by evaluating the status of the deceased. The deaths of a "key" or "principal" hunter or of a "chief" evoked most reaction from both the HBC men and the Chipewyan. This was because the leaders in Chipewyan society were usually individuals with exceptional strength and recognized success and power in the hunt. This would generally enable them to have more wives and children, and also more daughters-in-law and sons-in-law. A leader, then, was usually a person with an impressive and widespread network of kin relations. Such was the case, for instance, with Hugh Leslie's "best Indian" Thu,thy,ah, at Deers Lake. When, in March of 1820, Leslie heard of Thu,thy,ah's death, he remarked: "this & some other less important Deaths have completely ruined our trade" (B 179/a/13/p.17).<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> One of these "less important deaths" was probably the death that same fall of "an old woman," the mother of two of Leslie's hunters. The relatives, unlike those of Thu,thy,ah, promised to hunt as usual, although, in fact, their returns were extremely low after the subsequent

Many efforts have been made to distinguish patterns of Chipewyan group membership. Such factors as their rules of descent and residence, forms of marriage, role definition and leadership patterns have been considered relevant. J.G.E. Smith and others maintain that individuals within Athapaskan groups were generally linked with "consanguineal" and "affinal" ties, that is, individuals were related through birth and through marriage (1976b:14). In the early 19th century the social system of the Chipewyan was based on "bilateral kinship," by which individuals calculated their ancestry through both their male and female relatives (Oswalt 1966, Helm and Leacock 1971, Bishop and Krech 1980). When a marriage occurred, all of the two spouses' kin became relatives. Death or disruption of marriage did not break these links, and remarriage further extended the individual's relations (Oswalt 1966:48). Smith maintains that because of this the Chipewyan nation consisted, for the most part, of individuals who could directly or indirectly trace some kind of relationship to one another (1976a:85). This was advantageous because within Chipewyan society it was considered an obligation for someone to provide hospitality and cooperation to a relative. Bilaterality, then, maximized the range (both social and geographical) in which individuals could anticipate these acts (Smith 1976a:85).

The importance of the kinship ties was recognized by some of the European traders. Although on one level, Simpson maintained that that the way to secure the loyalty of the Chipewyan was to impress and reassure them with displays of strength and generosity, he recognized that something besides "exterior and show" was necessary. In his report to his

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death of a child from the group (B 179/a/13/pp.5,6).

superiors in 1820-21 he commented on the significance of "Connubial alliances" with the Indians, which he said, "are the best security we can have of the goodwill of the Natives:"

The North West Coy. chiefly depend on the exertions of their half breed Hunters.... We have not been a sufficient length of time in the Country to raise up auxiliaries of the former description and the restrictions which the Honble. Committee have put on Matrimonial alliances and which I consider most baneful to the interests of the company are tantamount to a prohibition of forming a most important chain of connection with the Natives, so that we have solely to depend on the Indians who have no other feelings than those which interest and mercenary views create towards us [1938:396].

On this basis Simpson encouraged the HBC gentlemen "to form connections with the principal Families immediately on their arrival," which, he said, was no difficult matter as "the offer of their Wives & Daughters is the first token of their Friendship & hospitality" (1938:392). Many years earlier, Hearne too had recognized that such connections were regarded by the Chipewyan to mark "the strongest ties of friendship between two families." Apparently the Chipewyan understanding was that exchanging a nights lodging with another man's wife brought with it the obligation of supporting the husband's children if he should die (Hearne 1958:83).

The Chipewyan lived and travelled together in groups that seasonally changed in size and membership. The identified "band divisions" include "regional bands" of 200 to 400 people, which came together for great communal hunts during the caribou migrations. Within them were smaller "local bands," or "winter hunting bands," varying in size from about 6 to 28 hunters, or 30 to 140 persons (Smith 1976a:76,83). The "gangs" coming to the posts to trade were likely equivalent to these local bands. Even smaller groups, identified as special "task groups," were made up of 3 to

8 nuclear families who were together for a short period of time seasonally (Helm 1965, Smith 1976a:79).

The cycle of the local bands gathering and dispersing was described by some of the HBC writers. George Keith, for one, wrote from Ile a la Crosse in 1823 that during the winter the Chipewyan would separate into parties of two or three families (B 89/e/1/fo.2). Samuel Hearne described the meeting of the smaller groups:

When two parties of those Indians meet, the ceremonies which pass between them are quite different from those made use of in Europe on similar occasions; for when they advance within twenty or thirty yards of each other, they make a full halt, and in general sit or lie down on the ground, and do not speak for some minutes. At length one of them, generally an elderly man, if any be in company, breaks silence, by acquainting the other party with every misfortune that has befallen him and his companions from the last time they had seen or heard of each other; and also of all the deaths and other calamities that have befallen any other Indians during the same period, at least as many particulars as have come to his knowledge. When the first has finished his oration, another aged orator, (if there be any) belonging to the other party relates, in like manner, all the bad news that has come to his knowledge [1958:231-4].

Hearne maintained that at these times both parties never failed to plead poverty and famine. When the "orations" contained any news affecting the other party, they provoked what he described as sighs and sobs which grew into loud cries and finally "one universal howl" like a "crying match." When the grief subsided, said Hearne, it was time for the exchange of gifts, specifically tobacco, provisions, ammunition and other articles (1958:213-4). Death was associated with reciprocities. Its announcement activated the responses of redistribution and condolence in a manner that had a ritualized or ceremonial air.

From these and other passages it becomes evident that while the traders interpreted the Chipewyan expectation for gratuities as evidence of

laziness and deviousness in their character, and their tendency to relocate after deaths in their families as a ploy to escape having to exert themselves in the fur hunt, the Chipewyan were exhibiting what they accepted as socially appropriate behaviour. After a relative's death, proper Chipewyan manners dictated that bereaved family members "reduce themselves to a state of perfect inactivity & to become a burthen to others for the necessities of life" (B 89/a/5/fo.24). Scattered comments in the records indicate that Chipewyan values of reciprocity and sharing required that the "burden" of supplying relatives of a deceased person fell on individuals who were both capable of it and who had a certain connection to the deceased. They also indicate that people (such as the European traders) who clearly had a surplus of goods and who also claimed a certain status were expected to redistribute their goods.

Although to the HBC writers the death customs of the Chipewyan seemed destructive and unnecessary and their wandering appeared unproductive and defiant, it can be argued that the Chipewyans' behavior was good strategy on their part. In many ways it was reasonable and functional. The destruction of property, for instance, was likely very effective in inhibiting the spread of diseases such as smallpox. It also must have served as a very striking illustration of the necessity of retaining the cultural values of generosity and reciprocity and of the interdependence of kin - values which were keys to survival. After Thu,thy,ah's death, for example, it was his brother who was noted to have taken on the responsibility of providing for his relatives and dependents.<sup>69</sup> When Thu,thy,ah's

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<sup>69</sup> Perhaps this is an example of the levirate, whereby a widow marries her deceased husband's brother. James VanStone writes that this was characteristic of many Northern Athapaskan groups (1974:53).

brother returned to Deer's Lake in March of 1821, he was described by Leslie as not having had "sought furs at all." His only objective had been "to maintain and Cloath his own larger family as well as that of his deseased Brother's and for that reason is gone towards his Lands where he can do it with more ease" (B 179/e/1/fo.3).

Besides satisfying the need to escape the source of death, whether bad spirits or otherwise, mobility served a positive ecological function. It helped them to maintain a link to the caribou hunt. Leslie at Deers Lake in 1820 commented on the typical behaviour of Chipewyan returning from the barren lands: "[I]ndeed they are somewhat careless about furs being then very well cloathed in Deer Skins so that they consider themselves somewhat independent" (B 179/e/1/fo.3). When Thu,thy,ah's group returned from their lands well dressed, Leslie noted that they considered the dressed deer skins preferable to HBC cloth and blankets for the winter season (B 179/e/2/fo.4d).

Mobility had other positive functions. George Keith wrote from Ile a la Crosse in 1823 that when the Chipewyan dispersed in the winter they generally observe "a link of communication with the whole Tribe" for the purpose of "self preservation... precariousness of Subsistence and the desire to make Successful Hunts" (B 89/e/1/fo.2). Perhaps mobility also served a positive psychological function. Joel Savishinsky, from his field research among northern Athapaskan Indians in the small, isolated village of Colville Lake in the 1960's described contemporary population mobility as a major factor in the control and release of stress - that, besides serving ecological needs, successive periods of population distribution was resorted to as a way of coping with socio-ecological stress

(1971:614). It served as a conflict-avoiding mechanism, a mechanism facilitating the opportunities to exhibit generosity and to receive help from each other, and as a way of coping with tensions of isolation, alcohol, boredom, and interpersonal friction (1971:604). Although Savishinsky was referring to an Athapaskan group a century and a half after the Chipewyan studied here, possibly his observations about mobility are also applicable to the 19th century Chipewyan.

Efforts to manage the trade more economically after 1821 influenced the death customs, as traders tried to control the movements of the Chipewyan and get them to relate only to one post. Becoming less sympathetic to or tolerant of these practices, they even found ways to prohibit some of them. John Charles at Indian Lake in 1821-2 wrote of the arrival of three Indians who had been away from Indian Lake since the previous spring. During that time, he said, they had been at Churchill in November and Deers Lake in January, where they had been recognized and rejected as belonging to the post at Indian Lake. Therefore, wrote Charles, "they were of Necessity obliged to return to this Place covered with Ragged Deer Skins." He dismissed their wandering as arising from their disappointment that the coalition had brought to an end "their life of ease," although "One of their Relatives having died was the Excuse for their having retired to their Lands" (B 91/a/7/fo.13,15-15d).

After the coalition George Keith particularly boasted of his success in getting the Ile a la Crosse Chipewyan to change their ways. Following the death of a Chipewyan "allied to some of the best Hunters," Keith described "their almost invariable practice" of putting off hunting, but added, "We have always discouraged and repressed this unhappy propensi-

ty." Although it had "taken too deep a root in their minds to be easily eradicated," he submitted, "a few instances occurring now & then shew...that our efforts are not altogether unregarded" (B 89/a/5/fo.24).<sup>70</sup>

For the Chipewyan there were both practical and spiritual reasons to relocate after a death. With gifts of clothing, verbal prohibitions and various sanctions, the death customs, especially after 1821, were successfully discouraged in many instances. This contributed to the weakening of the traditional interdependence of Chipewyan kin, and the weakening of their link with the caribou and the barren grounds.

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<sup>70</sup> Some examples of his success are recorded in the 1827-28 journal (B 89/a/12a/fo.3d, 17d, 20d).



## Chapter VII

### CONCLUSIONS

The HBC records support the idea that after the coalition of 1821 many of the Chipewyan became more committed hunters and trappers, a change which affected their territorial movements. Although it was not without confrontation, the writers submitted that they achieved their goal of "stabilizing" the Chipewyan. In some cases this meant they "reanimated" them from their "lounging" about the posts. But mostly it meant they got the Chipewyan to reduce their travel to patterns more conducive to hunting furs and to put off their summer forays into the tundra.

The rate of the Chipewyans' "conversion" to the trapper's lifestyle may have appeared to be more rapid than it actually was, because of the traders' perception and presentation of it. The pre-coalition territorial movements were sometimes seen by the traders as erratic and as evidence of self-interest, defiance and independence. But the Chipewyan they were describing were already committed to the trade to some degree, and their "wanderings" could have been their logical response to factors of uncertainty in their lives - not the least of which was the instability of the trade. It may be that the Chipewyan came to appear more settled and predictable not because the HBC men had managed to get them under control, but partly because the coalition brought more predictability to the trade, giving them less reason to wander. As well, the Chipewyan may have seemed to be rapidly converting to more stable patterns because

the company had gained the ability to successfully keep track of them and was generating more detailed records. The presentation of large groups of Chipewyan as belonging to certain posts could also have been a way for a post master to assure his superiors of his own competence and authority, and to stake a claim on the fur returns of certain natives before they came to belong to some other post. Whether or not a Chipewyan individual considered his own status to have changed was, perhaps, another matter.

The Chipewyans' own reasons for continually returning to the posts should not necessarily be assumed to be dependence on the post, a greed for property, or deference to the traders' authority.<sup>71</sup> The Chipewyans' attitude of belongingness or attachment to the trade probably had more to do with a sense of loyalty and obligation arising from the way the Europeans were accepted into their own kinship structures through intermarriage and through gift-giving and other reciprocities than with dependence, greed, or deference. The fact that the Chipewyan considered gift-giving as a necessary aspect of the trade, that they often expected aid from specific traders when provisions were scarce or after a family member's death, and that they often suffered considerable hardship themselves in order to help the traders when they were short of provisions could all be evidence of these ties.

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<sup>71</sup> Both MacNeish (1956) and Savishinsky (1970) note that the concept of leadership in Athapaskan society is shaped by the enduring values of personal autonomy, generosity, reciprocity and an "ingrained dislike of the authoritarian figure" (MacNeish 1956:255).

Did the coalition bring significant changes, then, to the mobility and trade patterns of the Chipewyan? According to Henry Sharp, significant change in the lives of the Chipewyan did not occur until well into the 20th century. This is because, says Sharp, the Chipewyan hunting unit, which he identifies as the major structural unit in Chipewyan society, remained the same, simply changing its focus from caribou to fur-bearing animals (1977a, 1977b). Certainly an argument can be made for the persistence of traditional Chipewyan characteristics. Yet, unlike the caribou hunt, fur trapping did not require the large communal gatherings of the Chipewyan local band units. Perhaps the weakened link to the caribou contributed to a weakening in the kin networks which characterized the Chipewyan nation.

Some of the observations of the HBC writers suggest that the band structure of the trading Chipewyan was undergoing simplification. Apparently the HBC traders made efforts to keep the Chipewyan in smaller groups. Hugh Leslie commented from Deers Lake in 1820-21 that he was glad the Indians were spending the winter in small groups, because "they never do much when they are together" (B 179/e/2/fo.3d). Robert McVicar wrote in the Great Slave Lake district report of 1825-7 that the trader's "duty" was:

to send [the Chipewyan] as great a distance from the rein deer lands as he can and he must divide them into small bands and distribute the more expert Moose deer hunters amongst the bands so that they may run as little risk as possible of suffering from want of provisions [B 181/e/1/fo.5].

Changes in Chipewyan leadership were noted in the records of Ile a la Crosse, where in 1822-3 George Keith maintained that "Properly speaking," there were no longer any native chiefs in the district, but instead, "A

few heads of families" with only "some Shadow of former power": "[T]his power or influence operates more by means of gentleness and persuasion than presumption or assumed claims." According to Keith, the authority of the Chiefs began to decline with the "commencement of clashing Interests" in the country, "and the more the latter prevailed, the greater temptation and facility were afforded for shaking off the yoke" (B 89/e/1/fo.1d-2). At Fort Chipewyan, too, James Keith in his 1824-25 district report wrote that "few" of the Chipewyan still "deserve the name of Chiefs" and that their influence and authority was little known beyond the circle of their own family and immediate dependents. He maintained that the status of individuals amongst themselves depended upon how they were regarded by the traders:

Their estimation & treatment by Whites which are dependant on and regulated by their general habits & exertions never fail to ensure the individual a proportionate share of attention or contempt from his own tribe. Like the coin of a Kingdom they require the stamp & impression of the Sovereign to indicate the Value & render them Current [B 39/e/8/29d].

In the 1838 census the chiefs were clearly heads of families - men in an influential role in their own sphere of family, but not exerting influence over large groups of traders as is found in the earlier records (B 239/z/10).<sup>72</sup>

A simplification of Chipewyan band structures during the fur trade era has been noted by some secondary writers as well. Patricia McCormack attributes the changes to certain conventions of the post-coalition trade. Writing specifically about the Chipewyan trading at Fort Chipewyan in the

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<sup>72</sup> This trend likely went back to the way the competing companies made so many "chiefs" of the Chipewyan hunters, that, as Thomas Stayner discovered at Fort Churchill in 1793-4, there seemed to be more chiefs than followers (B 42/a/119/fo.17).

early 19th century, she argues:

As more people saw trapping and trading as an alternative to their former economic independence, the larger social units of the aboriginal period became smaller groups more suitable for controlling restricted fur resources [1983:158].

McCormack also points out that the trading chief position was disappearing as, especially after 1821, the fur traders instituted individualized trade relationships between themselves and the trappers (1983:158). Each trapper had to deal personally with the trader in the debt relationship; he could not negotiate his credit through a trading chief. This gave the HBC trader the advantage of having more individuals under an obligation to him, and of being able to restrict individual trappers to specific posts (1983:159,164). J.G.E. Smith, too, noted that through time, as some Chipewyan families became more strongly associated with the trading posts, "traditional band affiliations tended to alter and weaken" (Smith 1981:280).

While the trade conventions likely went a long way towards encouraging simplified local band structure based largely on the nuclear family rather than extended kin relations, Chipewyan mortality from disease, combined with the dislocations in the lives of the bereaved, may have been equally powerful factors in that trend. Scholars have commented on the long-term effects of disease on native populations. Henry F. Dobyns, for instance, postulated that epidemic mortality profoundly affected the survivors in a number of ways. Of note here is his observation that epidemics influenced the mental health of the survivors, reducing the energy and effectiveness with which they continued to engage in subsistence activities (1983:10). As well, beyond a diminution of numbers, depopulation among the native peoples resulted in a simplification of social

structure and "cultural inventory" as senior leaders and specialists were lost (1983:328).

In his study of "Disease, Starvation and Northern Athapaskan Social Organization," Shepard Krech, too, claims that epidemic deaths had long term effects on the Indians. They weakened a group's ability to effectively exploit resources, and caused abrupt demographic changes and alterations in band organizational principles (1978:718,722). He cites the conclusions of Townsend (1970) and McKennan (1969) whose studies on the Tanaina and Tanana determined that after only seventy years of contact with Europeans and European diseases, profound changes in the direction of individualization and simplification occurred in band organization, and that nuclear families emerged as the most important trade and status units (Krech 1978:722).

The sharp distinction between those Chipewyan who "belonged" to the fur trade and those who were peripheral that occurred at the posts studied here after 1821 was a prelude to the emergence and solidifying of the socio-cultural groups later called trading-post bands. The years following the coalition were marked by a change from a time in which the HBC men worked to attract the Chipewyan to a time of confrontation in which both the company and the natives were declaring their independence and using this argument to present ultimatums to each other. In effect, the company gained a more powerful position than the Chipewyan, and was successful in achieving its goals. Those Chipewyan who had become most detached from their traditional lifestyle and economy cooperated most readily with the new strategies. Their involvement was not that of partners, equal in the trade, but was an involvement primarily on the HBC terms.

The traders' success in gaining these Chipewyans' commitment to the trade was not solely because of the efficiency of the new strategies, but also because of the the epidemic diseases suffered by the Chipewyan, the changes in the resource base of the Chipewyan trappers, and the weakening of their extended family units.

## EPILOGUE

In the decades following the time period studied here, many forces continued to encourage the Chipewyans' break with the traditional mobility and land use patterns. Beginning in the 1840's Ile a la Crosse became the centre of the extensive missionary efforts of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate to convert the Chipewyan to Christianity. According to J.G.E. Smith, this went a long way in encouraging the orientation of regional bands to specific trading post-mission complexes rather than to other bands (1975:442).

With the growing emphasis on fur-bearers, the Chipewyan territories continued to contract, and, from the 1860's onward, the barren ground, once the land of the Chipewyan, was even in the Chipewyans' eyes, the land of the Inuit (Smith and Burch 1979:85). Further solidification of regional band membership, a departure from the earlier fluid band structure, occurred after the Hudson's Bay Company Territories were ceded to the newly created Dominion of Canada in 1870. The federal government institutionalized the strict division of Chipewyan into regional bands in 1899 and 1907 when, by Treaties 8 and 10, it moved to extinguish Chipewyan claim to land rights (Smith 1976b:19).

Significant steps towards sedentarization occurred in the early 20th century. In the 1920's to 1940's the Chipewyan and other subarctic peoples were seriously affected by widespread outbreaks of smallpox, tuberculosis, influenza and measles. Around the same time nursing stations were established, and family allowances, old age pensions, welfare payments and other social services were made available. After 1945, an in-



creasing number of Chipewyan children were sent to residential schools to receive a Euro-Canadian education. Periodic wage labor opportunities existed. The Chipewyan settled into subarctic villages and towns, sometimes through government relocation, where government housing began to replace log structures.<sup>73</sup> This settlement increased the emphasis on the individual and nuclear family (Smith 1981:273-4,282).

The orientation increasingly came to be towards the south in the 1950's and 1960's (Smith 1975:436), although the Chipewyan were still fairly mobile. Groups of Chipewyan continued to exploit the southern margin of the barrens until the late 1950's, in the summer for caribou and in the winter for Arctic fox.

Traditionally, Chipewyan band structure was fluid - membership was constantly shifting as the groups went through annual cycles of dispersing and gathering together. The gathering of small groups into local bands, and of local bands into regional bands was central in maintaining the fabric of Chipewyan society. The traditional interconnectedness facilitated by the kinship and band structures encouraged social contact, communication, property redistribution, and the maintenance of effective leadership. Today, as the Chipewyan and the collective Dene peoples face the challenge of achieving recognition of their claim to their aboriginal lands and of their right to self-government, they are working to restore necessary communication between the scattered and sometimes isolated segments of their population and to regain that characteristic noted in the early nineteenth century of being an "extensive and independent nation."

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<sup>73</sup> Some of their communities today are Snowdrift on Great Slave Lake, Brochet on Reindeer Lake, Fort Chipewyan and Stony Rapids on Lake Athabasca, and Cold Lake in northern Alberta.

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APPENDIX A  
SOURCES OF CHIPEWYAN NAME LISTS

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<u>Post</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Number of Names Listed</u>		<u>Source</u>
Fort Chipewyan	1834-5	189		B 39/d/51a/fo.1d-8d
	1835-6	207		B 39/d/51a/fo.11d-18d
	1838	129		B 239/z/10/fo.9-11
Fort Churchill	1819-22	112+		B 42/d/109a
		(Far Away)	(Homeguard)	
	1822-23	20	20	B 42/a/149/pp.53-4
	1827-28	78	37	B 42/e/5/fo.2d-3d
	1828-29	97	33	B 42/e/6
	1829-30	63	52	B 42/e/7/fo.2-3
	1832-33	15	64	B 42/d/8/fo.3
	1835-36	53	68	B 42/e/9/fo.4-5
	1838	28	76	B 239/z/10/fo.47-48d
Deers Lake	1819-20	45		B 179/e/1
	1820-21	34		B 179/e/2
	1838	109		B 239/z/10
Harrisons House	1820-21	37		B 39/e/3/fo.19d
	1820-21	35		B 39/d/5/fo.5-6
Ile a la Crosse	1822-4	202		B 89/d/509
	1838	109		B 239/z/10/fo.52d-57
Indian Lake	1818-19	21		B 91/e/1/fo.1d-2
	1820-21	13		B 91/e/2/fo.3d-4

<u>Post</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Number of Names</u> <u>Listed</u>	<u>Source</u>
	1822-23	22	B 91/a/8/pp.31-41
Fort Resolution	1838	82 Chipeywan	B 239/z/10/fo.1d-4
		55 Copper	"
Fort Vermillion	1838	7	B 239/z/10/fo.15d
Fort Wedderburn	1816-17	32	B 39/d/1/fo.56
	1817	32	B 39/d/3/fo.2d-3
	1820-21	34	B 39/e/3/fo.19d
	1820-21	76	B 39/d/5/fo.5-6,19

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NOTE: These lists of Chipewyan names are useful because they give an indication of the numbers of hunters and families committed or "belonging" to the trade. The names can be collated in order to trace the territorial movements and trade patterns of individual hunters, as many of the same names appear on the lists of different posts in different years. The lists are also useful in the study of co-residential and kinship patterns, as several of them indicate which hunters were travelling together and what relationships existed between members of these groups.

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## MANUSCRIPT SOURCES

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B 42/e/1	1818-19	Adam Snodie
B 42/a/145	1819-20	William Ross
B 42/e/2	1820-1	William Ross
B 42/e/3	1821-2	Hugh Leslie
B 42/a/149	1822-3	Hugh Leslie
B 42/e/4	1825	Colin Robertson
B 42/e/5	1827-8	Robert Harding
B 42/e/6	1828-9	Robert Harding
B 42/e/7	1829-30	Robert Harding
B 42/e/8	1832-33	Robert Harding
B 42/e/9	1835-6	Robert Harding

Journals

B 42/a/125	1800-1	Thomas Stayner
B 42/a/131	1805-6	William Auld
B 42/a/136a	1810-11	William Auld
B 42/a/143	1815-18	(various)
B 42/a/144	1818-19	Adam Snodie
B 42/a/145	1819-20	William Ross
B 42/a/146	1820-1	William Ross
B 42/a/147	1821-2	Hugh Leslie
B 42/a/148	1813-22	(various)
B 42/a/149	1822-3	Hugh Leslie
B 42/a/150	1822-4	Hugh Leslie
B 42/a/151	1823-4	Hugh Leslie
B 42/a/152	1824-5	Hugh Leslie
B 42/a/154	1824-7	(various)
B 42/a/155	1827-8	Robert Harding
B 42/a/156	1828-9	Robert Harding
B 42/a/157	1829-30	Robert Harding
B 42/a/158	1827-30	Robert Harding

Account Books

B 42/d/105a	1817-19
B 42/d/105b	1820-21
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B 42/d/109b	1822-23
B 42/d/112	1823-24
B 42/d/114	1824-25
B 42/d/118	1826-27
B 42/d/122	1827-28
B 42/d/125	1828-29

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 B 42/b/43 1800-1  
 B 42/b/60a 1814-23  
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B 179/e/1 1819-20 Hugh Leslie  
 B 179/e/2 1820-21 Hugh Leslie

Journals

B 179/a/12 1818-19 Hugh Leslie  
 B 179/a/13 1819-20 Hugh Leslie  
 B 179/a/14 1820-21 Hugh Leslie

ILE A LA CROSSE RECORDS:

District Reports

B 89/e/1 1822-3 George Keith  
 B 89/e/2 1823 George Keith  
 B 89/e/3 1824 George Keith  
 B 89/a/8/fo.27-30 1824-25 George Keith  
 B 89/a/9/pp.48-52 1825-26 George Keith

Journals

B 89/a/1 1805-6 William Linklater  
 B 89/a/2 1810-11 Peter Fidler  
 B 89/a/3 1815-16 Robert Logan  
 B 89/a/4 1819-20 John Clarke  
 B 89/a/5,6 1822-23 George Keith  
 B 89/a/7 1823-24 George Keith  
 B 89/a/8 1824-25 George Keith  
 B 89/a/9,10 1825-26 George Keith  
 B 89/a/11,12a 1827-28 (not stated)  
 B 89/a/12b 1828-29 (not stated)

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(\*) As well, correspondence is found recopied into many of the journals of this and other posts.

## INDIAN LAKE RECORDS:

District Reports

B 91/e/1	1818-19	John Charles
B 91/e/2	1820-21	John Charles
B 91/a/8/pp.31-41	1822-23	John Charles

Journals

B 91/a/5	1819-20	John Charles
B 91/a/6	1820-21	John Charles
B 91/a/7	1821-22	John Charles
B 91/a/8	1822-23	John Charles

## NOTTINGHAM HOUSE RECORDS:

Journals

B 39/a/1	1802-3	Peter Fidler
B 39/a/3	1803-4	Peter Fidler
B 39/a/4	1804-5	Peter Fidler
B 39/a/5a	1805-6	Peter Fidler

## FORT WEDDERBURN/CHIPEWYAN RECORDS:

District Reports

B 39/e/1,2	1821	George Simpson
B 39/e/3	1820-21	William Brown
B 39/e/4	1821-22	Edward Smith
B 39/e/5	1822-23	Edward Smith
B 39/e/6	1823-24	James Keith
B 39/e/8	1824-25	James Keith
B 39/e/9	1825-26	James Keith

Journals

B 39/a/8	1816-17	Roderick McKenzie
B 39/a/13	1817-18	McVicar & Decoigne
B 39/a/14	1818-19	Robert Miles
B 39/a/15	1819-20	William Todd
B 39/a/16	1820-21	William Brown
B 39/a/17	1821	William Brown
B 39/a/18	1820-21	George Simpson
B 39/a/21a,b	1822-3	Edward Smith
B 39/a/22	1823-24	James Keith
B 39/a/23	1824-25	James Keith
B 39/a/24	1825-26	James Keith
B 39/a/25	1826-7	Alexander Stewart
B 39/a/26	1827-8	Alexander Stewart
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