

CONTACT AND ENLIGHTENED CO-OPERATION
A HISTORY OF THE FUR TRADE IN THE ARCTIC DRAINAGE
LOWLANDS 1717-1821

BY

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ABSTRACT

This manuscript re-examines the history of the fur trade in the Arctic drainage lowlands from 1717 when the first post was established to serve the Chipewyans of the region to the confirmation of the monopoly of the Hudson's Bay Company in 1821. Throughout the period under study the Indians were active participants and at the very least, partners in the fur trade. Policies of the trading companies in the Mackenzie region were assessed and accommodated or rejected according to the advantage of the Indians. They were a vital agent in influencing the policies, practices, and the eventual shape of trade organization which evolved in the Arctic drainage lowlands after 1821.

Participation in the fur trade led to shifts in adaptive emphasis. As these changes accumulated and as customs which had been adapted to a migratory existence were discarded some Athapaskan bands began to follow new seasonal cyclical patterns which were concerned primarily with the fur trade. Changes were hurried by epidemics, by population dislocation, and by pressure of the fur companies. The North West Company attempted deployment of bands, turned to intimidation of recalcitrant Indians and bullied

opposition traders. Indians resisted the pressure by seeking out the opposition, by retaliating, and by returning to traditional hunting pursuits. By 1820 the combination of Indian resistance to their methods and the need for conservative resource policy led the North West Company to seek union with a receptive Hudson's Bay Company.

To develop these ideas focus has been placed on a range of themes. The disciplines of history, archaeology, ethnography and linguistics have been studied and supplemented by nutritional and wildlife studies of the region to seek out native relationships with their environment, changing behavioural and cyclical movements, policies and manner of operation of the fur companies, and social change within the band.

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ABBREVIATIONS

HBC Archives	Hudson's Bay Co. Archives
PWF	Prince of Wales' Fort
PAC	Public Archives of Canada
CHJ	Cumberland House Journals
FCPJ	Fort Churchill Post Journal
PWFPJ	Prince of Wales' Fort Post Journal
McGill Mss	McGill Univ. Manuscript Collection
BHPJ	Buckingham House Post Journal
NHPJ	Nottingham House Post Journal
MHPJ	Mansfield House Post Journal
GBLJ	Great Bear Lake Journal
FSPJ	Fort Simpson Post Journal

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Although the Arctic drainage lowland region was considered by the North West Company by the 1790's to be the richest in all of the fur trade, and became the location for a protracted and vital struggle between the fur trading giants in the nineteenth century, little detailed study and certainly little serious consideration has been undertaken by historians of the role of the Indians in that struggle until recently. The classic study of the fur trade has been that of Harold Innis. His interest was in the "effects of a vast new land on European civilization,"¹ and not so much in the details of Indian response to the trade. His work touches on the Athabasca and provides a central idea for this thesis when he argues that "the North West Company [was] adapted to expanding trade over wider areas" but that this same organizational approach became a handicap when new territories were unavailable.² It was during the latter stages of the period under study when untapped fur producing areas were no more that North West Company policies were challenged by the natives of the region.

The few early histories which address the European-Indian relationship in the region have concluded in general that amicable relations existed between the peoples. A.S. Morton's early and detailed history of the fur trade written one-half century ago asserted about white impact on the Indians in the North that the most marked effects of the fur trade occurred as "a great displacement...at the beginning of the eighteenth century when the Crees...[became] the happy possessors of guns."³ Change was seen as limited to population relocations. Morton summarized his work with the assertion that "the relations of the Northwesters high and low, with the Indians were of the best," although he did concede the negative effects of excessive liquor trade.⁴ The earliest History of the North West Company maintains that the partnership of Northwesters and Indians was favourable to both. Gordon Davidson argued that destruction of animals and overuse of liquor occurred in times of competition although again he provided little detail about the Indians.⁵ W.L. Morton pointed out that North West Company trade before 1821 was an extraordinarily successful union of European and "primitive."⁶ "It was this ability of the North West Company to use the manpower and skills of primitive culture that made it at its height the greatest of all Canadian--perhaps of all--fur trading companies."⁷

Other more recent thematic studies, indicate an active involvement by natives in accommodating new practices though these changes were not considered to be disruptive. These suggest that the fur trade was primarily an institutional extension of the Indian alliance; Karl Polanyi established the parameters when he proposed the theory that forms of exchange in trade among early contact cultures in Africa evolved from precontact social systems.⁸ Abraham Rotstein continued this theme, asserting that in the Canadian fur trade the Indians followed socially embedded practices by bartering for European commodities to satisfy their immediate needs.⁹ Competition "centered on gift-giving, free dispensation of liquor, violence and strong-arm tactics and the manipulation of the alliance system."¹⁰ Arthur Ray and Donald Freeman have taken issue with this idea of treaty, or administered trade. They suggest that "the consciously political aspects of the trade, both on the European and Indian sides, diminished in importance at an early point in the development of the exchange."¹¹ The 'socially embedded' exchanges of traditional Indian society "were modified to reflect increasing dominance of economic considerations."¹² Ray and Freeman found that by "redistribution" the Indian middlemen were able to disperse the surplus goods for which they had bargained in a profit conscious manner.¹³ They call for a return by social scien-

tists to the concept of market trade, but by reassessing nonmarketing concepts of the gift trade, and administered or treaty trade. They suggest the link for understanding how Indians used market principles for traditional social purposes lies in the concept of "reciprocity," and "redistribution."¹⁴ The former usually "involve[d] virtually simultaneous giving and receiving of goods whose values are equivalent."¹⁵ Redistribution

can be interpreted as a means of gaining status and approbation in a basically egalitarian society in which no political or social hierarchy existed to confer such status, where leaders were obeyed voluntarily or as a result of inducements rather than by command, and where wealth accumulation (hoarding) was almost impossible and was considered anti-social behaviour.¹⁶

Yet during the period of the middleman trade in the Athabasca a few leaders gained in power and material wealth; redistribution of their wealth did not always occur upon their return to the band.

General histories of the fur trade imply that some change occurred to Indians in the eighteenth century. E.E. Rich has demonstrated how much the trading middlemen influenced the pattern of European expansion across North America.¹⁷ Their control upset greatly the traders who worked so hard to displace them.¹⁸ It was this constant urge of Europeans to cut costs by reaching past the middlemen that caused "the trading Indians...to dictate....the pattern of trade.... Reaction against the monopoly of the

trading Indians had dictated the expansion of the trade from the earliest days."¹⁹ Yet Rich found "that much that was formal and social rather than primarily economic found a proper place in such interchanges, and trade at the Bay-side posts soon developed the formal and public character of a great social occasion;"²⁰ very much a marriage of European and native ways.

The ideas of E.E. Rich have also indicated how Indians adapted traditional social practices as they adjusted to changes brought by the Europeans. Rich asserted that, "in trade with Indians the price mechanism did not work."²¹ He drew on the experience of Andrew Graham, a trader who reflected that the annual needs of the Indian were satisfied by trading approximately 70-100 MB.²² In the 1760's when Graham wrote, an Indian could easily obtain 100 MB. Thirty MB were then left to spend on "waste and dissipation."²³ Rich concluded that those furs held in excess of what was considered optimum needs were traded for liquor. It was pointed out that "there was only one commodity of which they wanted unlimited quantities, spirits."²⁴ He also provided a penetrating analysis showing how invigorated and lengthened transportation routes led to specialization, lessened mobility and resource depletion.

The invigoration of the transport system led to emphasis on pemmican and on canoe building by both North Westers and the Hudson's Bay Company, and when goods and liquor could be got by these

means Indians hunted less for furs. Those who kept to the hunt did so more ruthlessly, however.²⁵

He also suggested that as the trade became more complex with specialized transport the beaver were given no respite and their numbers rapidly declined. This analysis hinges on the idea that liquor was used to obtain these beaver and transport necessities, but in the Athabasca many of the Indian provisioners prior to 1821 were not heavy consumers of liquor. With the exception of the Beaver Indians of the Peace River, acknowledged by fur traders to be addicted to alcohol, the Yellowknife food hunters around Great Slave Lake, and the Caribou-eater Chipewyan trading into Fort Resolution were not excessively regaled with liquor. Other means appear to have been used with some native groups to extract furs.

There is little doubt about the ability of the Northwesters to accommodate native lifeways beneficial to their trade. But whether their relationship with the Indians was always amiable is questionable. A recent study by Cornelius Jaenen addresses varying relationships of English and French with the Indians in the St. Lawrence region. He concluded that "French attitudes towards native society were generally more positive than were [Anglo-American] English attitudes of the same period."²⁶ Although Jaenen's research was based on the St. Lawrence during an earlier

period his ideas have application because many of the North West Company servants in the Athabasca were of French origin. It was against many of these francophones who had taken Athapaskan women as partners, that native hostility was directed between 1805 and 1815.²⁷

Until very recently few analysts argue that the fur trade led to vital change to Athapaskans before 1870. Traditional patterns were seen to persist well into the twentieth century. This is reflected in the chronological framework recently published in Handbook of North American Indians, Volume 6 which demarcated the eras of contact between Europeans and Athapaskans: The early contact era, the contact traditional era, and the modern era. This periodization implies that the people of the Mackenzie lowland and subarctic were living in intermediate stages when "social and technological change...was generally incremental and undramatic."²⁸

This chronological framework proposed for Athapaskan history derived from literature which concluded that despite disease, commercial demands and preoccupation with the fur trade with its pressures to specialize, basic aboriginal patterns persisted until the twentieth century. Demographic, economic and cultural changes were insignificant. Michael Asch, writing on the basis of informants, ethnographies, and limited documentary materials, has as-

serted that little change occurred to the Slavey economic base before 1870.²⁹ René Fumoleau also uses oral tradition and historical documentation to argue that little occurred to people of the Mackenzie Valley until the transportation innovations in the period 1869-94.³⁰ D.M. Smith cites native informants, and though aided by the extensive knowledge of the region of Father Lou Menez, long-time resident of Fort Resolution,³¹ does not see great change occurring until the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first quarter of the twentieth.

June Helm is the best known proponent of the position that conditions in the environment of the Arctic drainage lowlands environment were associated with bilateral social organization, that there was little change in basic economic strategies and social organization between precontact and fur trade periods.³² J.G.E. Smith also argues that dependence on the caribou, migratory though not always predictable in its behaviour, led to fluid band composition, bilateral kinship, the absence of territorial ownership, characteristics which were still in evidence in the twentieth century.³³ Although he cites few nineteenth century documentary sources are used, J.S. Savishinsky believes that traditional kinship and social organization, bilateral in nature, persisted to as recently as the 1970's.³⁴ Henry S. Sharp takes the position that "since bilaterality is the

kinship type now in use, it is simplest to regard bilaterality as the past means of structuring groups until conclusive evidence to the contrary is presented.³⁵

Other observers see nineteenth century settlement changes as either insignificant, or when evident, easily absorbed within the existing framework thus controlled by the native hosts. Cornelius Osgood has inferred that only very limited change had occurred to Northern Athapaskans by the late nineteenth century, maintaining that "there has been a tremendous upheaval, but at the same time there remains a whole psychological outlook which is intensely native."³⁶ Honigmann relied mainly on native informants and limited documentary sources to claim that changes to the Slave Indians occurring earlier than the mid-twentieth century "were not abrupt and appear to have been accompanied by little catastrophic disorganization."³⁷ Similarly changes noted by Slobodin among the Peel River Kutchin, were not disruptive.³⁸ As well, the Athapaskans of the Snowdrift region according to J. VanStone were "not... affected by rapid or drastic change." Their "residence patterns...[had shifted] to a more centralized and settled type, a process that...[had] been going on more or less steadily since the time of initial contact."³⁹ Helm and Leacock too suggested that in the period 1820-1940 cultural contact in the Mackenzie Basin was not disruptive and

"lack[ed] the dramatic upheavals that characterize the preceding and following eras."⁴⁰ Robert Janes in his study developed the thesis from archaeological work in the Mackenzie Valley and from documentary and ethnological sources that Athapaskan Indians did not congregate around fur trading posts in the nineteenth century. The demands of trapping and the need to supply foods on a regular basis to posts led to wider dispersal of native groups. "In essence the modifications introduced by Euro-Canadians in the nineteenth century added some new dimensions to established native settlement and subsistence activities, but not qualitative change per se."⁴¹

Studies done in the rush of work before the proposed Mackenzie Valley pipeline have tended to see a low level of disruption to native lifeways until as late as the early nineteenth century. The fur trade was seen as reducing migratory ways among the Beaver Indians and encouraging winter settlements.⁴² M.W. Morris in 1973 in historical, ecological and demographic study of the Great Bear Lake Indians in the nineteenth century, saw the fur trade as effecting the depletion of animals by causing large groups of Indians to congregate around the posts.⁴³ Jacques Cinq-Mars, an archaeologist, suggested that there was a shift from inland settlements and the seasonal migration cycle of the nineteenth century to a more settled riverine

existence near established trading posts in winter.⁴⁴ However, the concurrent study by J.F.V. Millar and G.J. Fedirchuk does suggest that earliest significant changes may have "occurred with the trading posts from 1790 to 1810 when Euro-Canadian foods became available, initiating a change in basic adaptation as well as economics."⁴⁵

Other surveys of Athapaskan history suggest with qualifications that change began with the earliest fur trade. Van Stone has established the fact that the Athapaskan spiritual world was disrupted by the shift of emphasis; the total environment was now of greater importance than similar knowledge of large game animals and fish.⁴⁶ Yet Van Stone qualifies these remarks when he suggests that until well into the twentieth century Europeans "to a large extent, [were involved in] sharing their [the Athapaskans'] way of life."⁴⁷ "Only in the past few decades have Canadian and American economic activities intruded."⁴⁸ Implicit in all of these interpretations was that marked or continuous changes did not occur in the eighteenth century.

In very recent years a few analysts have argued that vital changes to the Athapaskans of the Arctic drainage lowlands began to occur before 1870. Beryl Gillespie, arguing from documentary and ethnographic sources, has shown that by 1810 epidemic diseases and fur trade induced

relationships led to mortality, territorial changes and loss of group identities.⁴⁹ J.C. Yerbury has proposed that fur trade induced wars led to large-scale displacements of indigenous Athapaskans and that this led to a restructuring of their matrilineal organization to accommodate to population losses.⁵⁰ These dislocations were believed to be pronounced in the period 1694-1715, in the mid 1720's and again in the 1760's. There is disagreement about the degree to which these conflicts led to permanent dislocation though it is certain that traditional patterns were disturbed.⁵¹

Shepard Krech III in a detailed study of Fort Simpson in the 1820's suggests that while dependence was not great, the adaptations of natives must be considered in relation to the fur trade context which included diseases brought by traders, and increased interethnic tensions caused by middlemen.⁵² Krech argues that epidemic diseases led to an eighty percent reduction in Kutchin population which had repercussions on the nature of regional bands.

Charles Bishop recently has sensibly and practically suggested that the longer term and dynamic qualities of the trade should be examined. We should not expect to see either radical departures or simplistic persistence of native cultures. Shifts in adaptive emphasis in Indian societies which result in part from their own decisions

eventually become cumulative and do lead to discontinuities with the past.⁵³ Following this line of thinking Arthur Ray's recent study concludes that the origins of modern native welfare societies have a long history of development; early reduction of game animals, scarce fur resources, posts established in marginal areas, low-paying seasonal employment, and the extension of credit combined to produce dependency by the late nineteenth century. Many of these elements of the trade were evident very early.⁵⁴

Reassessments of the pattern of changes in the subarctic has led Shepard Krech III to propose a new chronological framework. The "protohistoric era" brought the first knowledge of Europeans and lasted until establishment of a post to directly serve the Athapaskans; the "early fur trade era" of 1717 to 1821, the period of the first direct trade; the "fur and mission" era from 1821 to approx. 1900; the "welfare-commercial" period from 1900 to 1950; and the government-industrial period, 1950 to date.⁵⁵

Some examples which provide models for historical research in the Arctic drainage lowlands are based on a regional approach. Robin Fisher in a history of Indian European relations on the Northwest Coast found that in the early contact period Indians were active participants, and at the very least, partners in the fur trade.⁵⁶ Arthur Ray demonstrated that the Cree and Assiniboine Indians early

in the contact period made a series of "adaptive responses" to the changing demands of the fur trade in the region to the southwest of Hudson Bay.⁵⁷ Charles Bishop's study of the Northern Ojibwa and the fur trade identifies the decline of large mammal populations and the switch to fish and hare subsistence as the cause of a basic dislocation in Ojibway life.⁵⁸ Another recent study by Bishop of the region inhabited by western James Bay Cree indicates that among the homeguard especially, trade goods were used to increase prestige which led to social inequality,⁵⁹ the production of fur for French and English markets altered labour patterns,⁶⁰ and that resource depletion led to altered seasonal cycles.⁶¹ The region of the eastern James Bay Cree was examined by Toby Morantz and Daniel Francis who question that the Indians were "utterly dependent"⁶² on European supplies. Although they note the decline of animal resources and changes in reorientation and they acknowledge that "events in the nineteenth century altered the Crees relationships to the traders", Morantz and Francis believe "they did not radically change or destroy their relationship to the land."⁶³ They found in this regional study that "there were a number of fur trades, differing over time depending on geography, ecology, and relationships with the Indian people."⁶⁴ Their views that the fur trader and Indians operated in a "partnership"⁶⁵ are

shared by Arthur Ray,⁶⁶ Bishop,⁶⁷ and Fisher.⁶⁸

The idea that there are a number of "fur trades", but that these must be assessed from the point of view of the respective commercial companies and their differing policies has been proposed by Jennifer Brown. She added insight to the relationship between Company and native which is confirmed in the fur trade history of the Mackenzie region. The fur trade is viewed as a "semi-autonomous social field"⁶⁹ rather than a society per se and this model carried further by establishing that the "Hudson's Bay Company and North West Company constitute[d] two major sub-fields."⁷⁰ Brown posits that Hudson's Bay Company servants commonly ignored directives forbidding liaisons with Indian women; permanent relationships increasingly occurred. The greater mobility of the North West Company men meant that their domestic unions were often more tenuous than those of the Hudson's Bay Company. Sylvia Van Kirk has examined the role of women, Indian and mixed blood, in the development of fur trade society. Like Jennifer Brown, Van Kirk saw the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company as two distinct entities with different social practices. She also contended that "the Indians themselves played an important role in ensuring that the usual patterns for sexual relations between their women and the white traders took the form of sanctioned marital unions."⁷¹ Conflicts often

resulted from the whites' failure to respect their arrangements. Changing concerns on the part of both Indian and white such as rising expenses, the availability of white and mixed descent wives, fading NWC/HBC needs for Indian alliances in many areas, and rising racial sentiments were the broader causes of a decline in marriages to Indian women.⁷²

A number of studies have recently been undertaken of climate conditions in the Hudson's Bay lowlands region by Tim Ball. In the period from approximately 1780 to 1820 extreme weather conditions--excessive hot, cold, wet and dry years occurred due initially in the first 20 years to the 100 year sunspot cycle (Gleissberg cycle) while the latter years appear directly related to the eruption of Tambora in 1815. These weather conditions may have intensified the effects of fur trade depletion of resources by further reducing wildlife and therefore the food supply.⁷³

The focus of this thesis will be on the region of the Arctic drainage lowlands.⁷⁴ The time period examined will be from the first contact with Europeans to the union of the fur trading companies in 1821. The Athapaskan groups who inhabited this physiographic-ecological zone included the Beaver, Chipewyan, Dogrib, Hare, Slavey and some Kutchin.⁷⁵

During the period under study some Athapaskan groups moved away from a primary concern with subsistence. Marshall Sahlins has suggested that when the primary concern with production for use is replaced by the concern with production for exchange a major step is marked in the transition to entrepreneurial values.⁷⁶ By this measure some Chipewyans departed early from subsistence concerns. Chipewyan middlemen removed themselves for much of the year from the traditional round of activities in order to carry furs and goods to and from Hudson Bay. Chipewyan trappers relocated in the 1780's and 1790's permanently in the boreal forest region vacated by the Cree who had been devastated by smallpox. The Beaver Indians became separated from some of their traditional activities as they became specialized hunters for the fur trade in the 1790's, adopted the heavy drinking practices of some Cree and whites, and were forced to relocate from their depleted lands by 1820. The involvement of some Yellowknife bands in specialized trapping, middleman traffic, and provisioning between approximately 1790 and 1810 separated them in occupational interest, seasonal patterns, social forms, and quite likely led to their dispersal by the Dogribs in the 1820's.

The same dynamic qualities which led some Athapaskan groups early to acquire a fur trade orientation led also to

the rejection of practices which were not perceived to be in their interests. The North West Company, "adapted to expanding trade over wider areas"⁷⁷, was an expansive organization with high overhead costs which demanded that only the most valuable furs be transported at maximum efficiency. These demands were not always perceived to be in the interests of the Indians. When the Company turned to intimidation of those Indians who were reluctant to trade or traded with competitors, when pressure was applied to prevent Indians from returning to traditional hunting techniques, or when deployment to unfamiliar areas was attempted, the Athapaskans sometimes resisted. Some of the Indians sought out the opposition, others retaliated, and some returned to traditional hunting pursuits. By 1820 the combination of Indian resistance to their methods and the need for conservative resource policies led the North West Company to seek union with a receptive Hudson's Bay Company.

To develop these ideas a reassessment of some traditional sources will be undertaken. A baseline picture of the Athapaskan groups at the time of contact with Europeans will be established from ethnographic, documentary, archaeological and linguistic sources. Nutritional and wildlife studies of the region will be examined to review native seasonal patterns of movement. Hudson's Bay Company jour-

nals, published and manuscript, will be the principal sources between 1717 to 1775 when the predecessors of the North West Company traders began arriving on the Upper Churchill. North West Company sources, published and manuscript, will be intensively scrutinized to attempt a reassessment of the company's critical role as the sole Euro-Canadian trading concern operating continuously among the Athapaskans between 1775 and 1821.

Journals kept by North West Company servants though scattered, are more comprehensive than often assumed and provide an insight to the company policy. Peter Pond's comments on the earliest trade between 1778 and 1780 are found in the published version by Innis⁷⁸ and in the Henry Memorandum published by L.J. Burpee.⁷⁹ The account of the Frobishers' trade on the upper Churchill River is found in the Cumberland House Journals published by the Hudson's Bay Company Record Society,⁸⁰ and in the published journal of Alexander Henry the elder.⁸¹ The letters of Roderic McKenzie⁸² from Lake Athabasca, both published and manuscript, are excellent sources of the North West Company perspective and are a particularly valuable resource on lifeways and activities of the natives of the region⁸³. It was the collection of Roderic McKenzie that became the basis for the book of his son-in-law, L.F.R. Masson, Les Bourgeois de la Compagnie du Nord-Ouest:⁸⁴ this collection

is housed at McGill University Special Collection with copies at the P.A.C.⁸⁵ The letters of Sir Alexander Mackenzie to his cousin Roderic are located at McGill and in Kaye Lambe ed. The Journals and Letters of Sir Alexander Mackenzie.⁸⁶ The letters of William McGillivray were written from the Churchill River between 1780 and 1809.⁸⁷ The ethnographic comments under the signature of John Macdonell dated 1793 and 1795,⁸⁸ were written as a response to the call by Roderic McKenzie in 1806⁸⁹ for ethnographic data, and natural history of the various regions of the fur trade. Since Macdonell did not visit the Athabasca until 1804⁹⁰ it is likely he compiled the bulk of these comments from earlier visitors, possibly from the collection of Roderic McKenzie.⁹¹

A view of the proceedings on the Peace River in the late 1790's are provided in John Thompson's Journal, in the journal of Simon Fraser for 1805 to 1806, and in the journal of an unknown correspondent at Pine River Post in 1807 and 1808. Journals were kept at Hay River Post in 1807 and at the forks of the Liard by Wentzel 1805 to 1811,⁹² and in the same region by George Keith in 1812.⁹³ A picture of proceedings on the Lower Mackenzie was kept by Alexander McKenzie, nephew of Sir Alexander MacKenzie in 1805-06,⁹⁴ and intermittently by George Keith between the years 1807 and 1815.⁹⁵

Some Hudson's Bay Company traders kept firsthand accounts of their brief sorties into the region. These were the journals of Greenwich, Chiswick, Mansfield, and Nottingham Houses, and Ft. Wedderburn in the years 1800 to 1804.⁹⁶ Philip Turnor and Malchom Ross provide interesting insights of a trip to the Athabasca in 1791-92.⁹⁷ The most revealing journals kept by a Hudson's Bay Company servant were those of Peter Fidler, particularly his sojourn with Chipewyan groups in the winter of 1791 to 1792,⁹⁸ but also his account of the North West Company trade at Lake Athabasca in 1802 to 1804.⁹⁹

I
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¹⁴Ibid., p. 243.

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¹⁶Ibid., pp. 244-45.

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²¹Rich, "Indian Traders," p. 17.

²²Made Beaver, the value of a prime beaver skin.

²³Rich, "Indian Traders," p. 17.

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²⁶Cornelius Jaenen, "French Attitudes toward Native Society," in Old Trails and New Directions: Papers of the Third North American Fur Trade Conference, eds. Carol M. Judd and Arthur J. Ray (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto, 1980), p. 70.

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CHAPTER II

ATHAPASKAN LIFEWAYS

The Athapaskan people of the Arctic lowlands occupied a region dominated by the basin of the Mackenzie River, lived in a climate where winters were long and severe and summers were short and hot. Vegetation was predominantly wooded; conifers were found throughout the Mackenzie Basin, while in the northeastern borders of the region, trees were limited to sheltered valleys and glacial eskers projecting into the barrens. Berries were plentiful in summer and a variety of fauna were of economic significance to the Indians.¹

The vast region inhabited by the people of the Athapaskan languages stretched from Alaska to Hudson Bay and from the mouth of the Mackenzie River to the edge of the plains with a fragment of Athapaskan-speaking people along the southern Rocky Mountain states. The divergence into two or more segments of the main Northern Athapaskan linguistic body, consisting today of a grouping of 23 languages, occurred approximately six hundred to one thousand years ago.² Salmon was the natural resource most vitally associated with the Western Athapaskans of interior Alaska, parts of the Yukon, and northern British Columbia.

The Athapaskans of the eastern subarctic, boreal forest, and Mackenzie River lowlands were distinguished by their migratory hunting existence following the large mammals, - importantly the barren-ground caribou.³

Northeastern Athapaskans of the barrens and Mackenzie lowlands have been accepted by ethnographers as being divided into seven groups: Chipewyan, Yellowknives, Beaver, Slavey, Dogrib, Hare, and the Loucheux or Kutchin. June Helm defines Athapaskan bands as:

a set of peoples [sic] living in physical contiguity (but not together) speaking a mutually intelligible tongue (though often with regional dialectical variations), sharing a common culture (though not necessarily one distinct in essentials from neighbouring tribes), and having at least a vague sense of common identity which may be based in whole or in part on the foregoing conditions.⁴

From this definition and the opinions of some Athapaskan specialists a sense of Eastern Athapaskan cultural continuity is discernable. VanStone saw that "many aspects of Athapaskan social life...extended across the entire range of environmental zones....The same is also true for virtually all subsistence techniques."⁵ His major work, Athapaskan Adaptations "emphasizes the essential cultural homogeneity throughout the area."⁶ Cycles of abundance and scarcity in this relatively simple ecosystem have been seen as leading to a high degree of mobility and hence fluidity of culture.⁷ Catharine McClellan has suggested that the

Eastern Athapaskans may be considered analogous to the Eskimo in that dialect and culture in the prehistoric period were more fluid and uniform than unique.⁸

Some Eastern Athapaskans had more affinity to neighbouring groups than others. Dialects differ considerably although the Chipewyan, Beaver, Kutchin and Slave are not so linguistically dissimilar as once thought.⁹ Hare and Dogrib comprise part of another group which reflects "ancient" though "loose groupings."¹⁰ Even the Kutchin whom Osgood and others suggested "stood out"¹¹ from normal alignment have been found in recent studies to have a high percentage of shared cognates with Beaver, Slave and Chipewyan languages.¹²

The common quest for the major and most bountiful big game resource, the caribou, led to the sharing of traits between Northeastern Athapaskans and also led to trade links between Kutchins, Yellowknives, Hare, Dogribs and Eskimos who met at the west end of Great Bear Lake.¹³ Chipewyans met Yellowknives and sometimes Eskimos in the summer on the Thelon and Dubawnt Rivers.¹⁴ In winter Chipewyans, Beavers, and Slaveys met at Lake Athabasca.¹⁵ Kutchins alternatively fought and traded with the Eskimos.¹⁶ Other logical meeting places were the confluences of major rivers: the confluence of the Athabasca-Peace, the outlet of the Slave, and the juncture of the Liard, Keele, and

Great Bear Rivers with the Mackenzie.¹⁷ Caribou migration constrictions such as those at the east end of Great Slave Lake, at each end of Lake Athabasca, near the headwaters of the Coppermine River and around Point Lake provided favourite places for fall meetings.¹⁸ Thomas Simpson related in 1836:

From some of the Chipewyans I learned that they had, in the course of the preceding summer ...met with a party of Esquimaux at the confluence of the noble Thelew or Thelon River with the Doobawnt of Hearne...This meeting was of the most amicable character, and they spent the great part of the summer together....They also informed me that, in 1832, some of the Athabasca Chipewyans accompanied the Churchill branch of their tribe on their annual meeting with other Esquimaux at Yath Kyed, or White Snow Lake of Hearne.¹⁹

Birket-Smith relates that the Chipewyans bartered dogs and soapstone with the Eskimo in return for moccasins and snowshoes.²⁰ Osgood suggests that canoe routes were "good" and saw regular use between the north arm of Great Slave Lake and McTavish Bay.²¹

The barren-ground caribou dictated the Athapaskan seasonal cycle, "determined the hunting and territorial organization of the group, was central to their material culture and became the focus of their religious belief and oral literature."²² Many Athapaskans came in contact with other hunting bands as they congregated at seasonal hunting locations in wait for the caribou migration. The Bathurst and Bluenose Herds regularly wintered near each other on the

north and east shores of Great Bear Lake and between the latter and Great Slave Lake. The Yellowknife and Hare Indians, and possibly also the Loucheux regularly hunted those herds. The eastern range of the Beverly Herd lay close to the western range of the Kaminuriak Herd leading them to winter close to each other. Calving grounds of the Beverly Herd were not far removed from the wintering grounds of the Bathurst Herd and bands of hunters conceivably exploited both herds without following the full migratory range of either.²³

The caribou usually migrated in late winter or early spring from winter ranges on the edge of the forest to the tundra where calving occurred in early to mid-June. Travelling in large groups on the barrens in July and August, foraging on their main source of food, the lichens, the caribou reversed direction by late August. In early September they approached the woodlands. By early fall their winter coat was replenished and free from warble holes, and thus suitable for making winter clothing.²⁴

The fat of the large mammals was essential to northern survival.²⁵ Caribou, very high in protein but low in fat, would leave those who had feasted on their lean frame starving from a lack of calories for much of the year. "The grease of the back fat," later called "depouillez" by the Canadians which was found between the ribs and the skin

was prized for its flavour and especially for its fat content.²⁶ It was collected and rendered in the fall, becoming vital to the diet in times of want. An important use was to preserve meat; it was poured over the dried pounded meat thus keeping it through damp periods. "In times of scarcity they lose nothing of the animal, even the blood is brought home and is boiled with grease."²⁷ Fat, a vital trade item in the pre-contact and early contact periods, was traded from the Beaver and Cree Indians. They often had a surplus of depouillez from the many buffalo and elk who fattened in the upper Athabasca and Peace River areas.²⁸

Caribou meat was sun dried or suspended over a "cold" or "slow" flame, especially in winter. Fresh meat and in particular marrow and fish were eaten raw.²⁹ Meat and fish were sometimes roasted fresh over an open fire although most often were boiled using hot stones placed in bark receptacles or in a tied-off animal stomach.³⁰ Some Athapaskans depended on large mammals other than caribou: Beaver Indians in the southwest on bison, elk and moose, and the Slave and Hare on moose.³¹ But all turned to fish as a secondary food staple.³²

Meat supplies were normally supplemented in the early winter and spring by fish. The Athapaskans preferred to make their fishing nets of woven willow bark, but sometimes

used rawhide. Nets were dyed various colours: red, yellow and bronze.³³ Those made "of the fine bark of the willow, [were] twisted and plaited about the size [of] Holland twine; it is stronger and preferable to net thread, particularly when prepared in winter."³⁴ Hooks were made from a "knot of the pine tree inverted,"³⁵ "bones...and sometimes birds claws." Set under the ice and baited with red carp, they were visited each morning. In winter "the stomach of the whitefish [was used] for bait which must be kept very clean."³⁶ An unknown North West Company partner observed that

the great Lakes of their country yield the finest fish, and when the Deer fail they readily take to angling, altho' it affords them no clothing. They are in possession of many secrets of making baits for taking the different kinds of fish; which they would not impart to me; but being in their company something was seen. The bait for the Trout, the largest fish of the Lakes, was the head half of the White Fish, well rubbed with Eagles fat, for want of it, other raw fat; but not grease that had been melted by the fire: The Pike and Pickerel take almost anything, even a red rag; but the pride of these people is to angle the White Fish, an art known to only a few of the men; they would not inform me of its composition, the few baits I examined appeared to be all the same, and the castoreum of the Beaver, worked into a thick paste, was the principal item; around were the fine red feathers of the Woodpecker, a grain of Eagles fat was on top of the bait, and the hook was well hid in it; the bait had a neat appearance. The art of angling White Fish is to them of such importance, a young man offered a gun for the secret and was refused.³⁷

Prepared in "wattap kettles"³⁸ or roasted over the fire for

immediate use, the fish were also dried and stored for winter consumption. "Whether fish or meat, whatever is not required is carefully put by for the next meal."³⁹ "They are in general very industrious and excellent economists."⁴⁰

Those peoples who had fish as their main protein source were poor in neither their nutritional state nor in their food supply. Their general health was observed in later years as being better than that of the meat eaters.⁴¹ In most seasons fish were available and for the many proficient Athapaskans fishing was seasonally bountiful. In late fall to late spring the lakes were prolific and through the summer months streams were successfully fished.

Fowl also was a protein source and was available for short periods from spring to fall. Ducks, loons, swans, and geese were hunted in the spring when fish were fewer; "ducks...[were] by far the most important."⁴² Minor birds included snipes, semi-palmated plovers, spruce hens, prairie chickens, ptarmigan and owls. Gulls were "said to be thrown to the old women."⁴³ Birds' eggs were much sought and eaten in spring.

Fruits and berries were also available for short periods.

The fruits of this solitary region are the poire [service berry, *Amelanchier canadensis*], gooseberry, raspberry [sic], strawberry, moose berry, rose buttons, red and black currants, thimbleberry, huckleberry, bearberry, choakberry and

another berry, the name of which I do not know except in the Indian language, which they call ouh-kachwa. They bud about the latter end of May, flower about the 15th of June and ripen near the 20th August, when they are deemed wholesome to the body and delicious to the taste.⁴⁴

Berries and fruits were consumed fresh in season and large amounts were dried and added to the dry meat.

The shape and manner of construction of their shelters were dictated by the availability of food. Most Northern Athapaskans lived in temporary shelters. For those who had access to plentiful supplies of large mammals for hides, shelters consisted of "circular lodges or tents, covered around about with dressed animal skins to screen them from the inclemencies of the weather....The fire...[was situated] in the middle."⁴⁵ Other peoples, often more sedentary and unable to obtain hides since they subsisted on fish or small mammals lived in brush shelters, or, in the one case of the Loucheux, semi-subterranean pit houses which were probably copied from the Inuit.⁴⁶

A so-called cabin lodge was common along the Mackenzie River, among the Mackenzie Mountain people as well as south and west on the Liard. It was rectangular in shape like a cabin with the sides sloped slightly inward, and a roof constructed of poles covered with sod. A square hole was left in the roof as a chimney.⁴⁷ These cabins apparently were seldom used by people who were dependent on caribou. They were situated near reliable fall fishing places.⁴⁸

Hunting methods demonstrated the considerable manual dexterity and inventiveness of the Athapaskans. Early Northwest Company observers were particularly observant of their sophisticated methods of taking beaver:

by setting nets under the ice made of line cut from the skin of the caribou [sic] in its green state about the thickness of Sturgeon twine: it extends quite across the river: one man attends while the others proceed to beat through its house, vaults etc., so as to drive him out where- by he may run [swim] and entangle himself in the net which is immediately drawn out otherwise he would soon cut his way with his teeth. Another method is by cutting a hole in the ice of 4-1/2 feet long by 3-1/2 broad; when this [is] done they proceed to drive stakes of dry wood around the hole in an oval form excepting a place for the door which slides up and down it being finely smoothed so that the Beaver cannot get-hold of it with his teeth; it is drawn up for some days to let him go out and a large weight is put above the door which fixes it down as soon as he... [triggers it]. A piece of poplar branch which is put through at a little distance from the door which no sooner falls down than he is almost dead by the shock and is shortly drowned as the ice is too thick above him whereby he might force his way through.⁴⁹

Large mammal hunting techniques were similarly ingenious. The months of greatest success

for the chase are those of April, August and the beginning of September, the former on account of the quantity of snow upon the ground which enables the Natives to fatigue them by pursuit; the latter being the month in which the horsefly is most prevalent, droves of reindeer are forced to take shelter in the lakes in order to avoid that annoying insect.⁵⁰

In other seasons in the wooded parts of the country, game was chased into enclosures with openings⁵¹ in which snares were placed.⁵²

In summer and winter, they pursue them with dogs into snares; these are ropes about three fathoms long made of large babiche well twisted with a spring knot at each end. These they tie upon a small tree on the tracks of the animals which, when taken, carry off the sling until the little tree to which it is fastened happens to catch against or between two large trees. The animal finding itself stopped, makes such efforts as to put an end to its life. The flesh is then very bad being overheated and full of blood.

Fall hunting also required care in taking the animals without tainting the meat. In the rutting season, which always happens in autumn, the natives rub the shoulder blade of an elk against a tree, at the same time imitating the cry of an elk; this brings the animal quite close, when they are easily killed with bows and arrows; The chase [sic] of the caribou in rutting season is quite different. When a man kills a female, he raises the skin off the head from the thickest part of the neck to the extremity of the nose, this is stuffed with straw or rather with hay and put to dry. When perfectly dry they fix the horns, which had [sic] been severed from the head, in their proper place and then go hunting. They run their arm in this skin which is so well arranged that it perfectly imitates the animal itself. When they see a drove of caribous in the distance they wave this skin and imitate the cries and tricks of the animal and bring males close to them.⁵³

Tools were simple though expertly used. "The men... [were] possessed of great patience" and perseverance. Principal "tools...[were] the axe, the file, and the crooked knife. With these they...[made items so neatly fabricated] as might make one believe that they had been made by the hands of a professed mechanic."⁵⁴ Tools and utensils were "varnish[ed] with a substance composed of castoreum and grease which...[gave] them a deep, glossy colour."⁵⁵ The same observer asserted that "the whole bent

of their genius seemed to be centered in that art...of mechanical powers and causes."⁵⁶ After contact "their anvil...[was] a stone and the hammer of the same substance; with these alone they...reduce[d] both old axes and chisels into thin plates of iron which they convert[ed] into various uses."⁵⁷ Other weapons included axes, daggers, spears, bows and arrows.

Their axes were of stone shaped in the form of a pickaxe, the middle of which was scalloped in order to fit to the end of a stick, which when well fastened answered the purpose of a handle; thus arranged they could hew or rather hack down the largest tree. A pole of about nine feet long with a bone blade at one end, furnished with a row of barbs, composed their spears; these bones are arranged and polished with beaver teeth, of which they also make use in making their bows and arrows. Their bows are made of dried willow at the end of which is fixed a small pointed bone furnished also with a barb on each side, as also at the extremity of their arrows, which inflict a mortal wound, being something similar to chewed ball. With these they are dextrous, being able to shoot an elk almost as far as with a gun.⁵⁸

Stone tips were obtained in numerous locations, but a favourite was about a day's travel west of Fort Liard on "the Bis-Kag-ha river or Sharp Edge River,...so called from the flint stones very common in that place, and which the inhabitants the Na ha ne tribe, made use of as knives and axes."⁵⁹

Tools were adapted to the forest or tundra conditions in which they were to be used. Chipewyan snowshoes were straight down one side, long, with an upturned end;⁶⁰ "the

design shows a greater dexterity than the Crees or Beaver Indians and the women also perform the part of matting them in a neat manner."⁶¹ Sleds were "about eight feet long, one in breadth, made of birch or pine boards of half an inch in thickness made with the axe and crooked [sic] knife." Very sturdy in construction, "they...[could] bring good loads as it...[slid] pretty well over the snow."⁶² Chipewyans had a unique manner of using the bow. "All the Natives of North America...hold the Bow in a vertical, or upright position, ...but the 'Dinnae', or Chipewyans,...[hold] the Bow in a contrary, or horizontal position...."⁶³

The material culture of the Northeastern Athapaskans had developed in sensitive response to their environment. Comments that they were poverty stricken centered upon their lack of material possessions. Little or no consideration was given to the great range of travel necessary to obtain food supplies and the fact that consequently material possessions were confined to those indispensable items which were light, easily packed, and thus transportable.

In their band society the Eastern Athapaskans possessed a loose social organization. Lines of authority were not rigidly defined outside the family of the fundamental unit.⁶⁴ Hunting and trapping relationships were generally based on affinal, and consanguineal relationships, though larger congregations gathered, particularly

during the caribou hunt.⁶⁵

Athapaskans were concerned that the spirits of the hunted animals were not offended. The bones of the caribou were never allowed to lie where dogs could devour them.⁶⁶ The remains of other animals, in particular the wolf and the bear, were treated with a special kind of reverence. Informants related to Richard King that in precontact times wolves were not hunted. Although bears were hunted they were accorded great respect not only because of their ferocity but because their spirit was considered to have close affinity with the Dene.⁶⁷ After the kill certain parts of the animal were eaten first, some because of their gourmet appeal, and others to satisfy religious spirits. Athapaskans believed that the "man and animal world are linked together in some mysterious way, and that animals possess special powers which they may grant to man if he seeks them in the proper manner."⁶⁸ The supernatural relationship of men and animals, but apparently not for women was usually sought in boyhood when the animal realm sent power or medicine in the form of dreams⁶⁹ and was maintained through observance of certain eating taboos which could not be revealed.⁷⁰ "Every man stood in special relationship to some animal."⁷¹ Emile Petitot found the medicine-animal relationship among the Mackenzie lowland tribes had three characteristics:

first a relic animal which has been revealed in a

dream, is carried on the person; secondly the man performs some secret practice that is meant to please the medicine animal which has shown in a dream that it wishes to possess the individual; thirdly, there is a taboo against injuring, killing, and particularly eating, the medicine animal.⁷²

Fish-eaters received medicine from that source while those who lived by the chase received hunting medicine.⁷³ "To reveal the details of the 'hunting medicine', or to use it often, destroyed the force."⁷⁴

Though formal lines of authority were not rigidly defined among the Athapaskans, major discussions relating to hunting, trade, and war were resolved in lengthy council sessions usually dominated by the male elders. "They have no regular government, as every man is lord in his own family, they are influenced more or less, by certain principles which conduce to their general benefit."⁷⁵ These general principles involved a loosely constructed process of governing which did include all members of the camp. When crises or "affairs of consequence" presented themselves, "the Old Men of the whole camp [would] assemble, and deliberate on the subjects which...[had] caused their meeting."⁷⁶ When consensus was imminent after hours and sometimes days of deliberation, a ceremonial pipe was brought out and passed around. A general discussion to which the young men, women and children were party then took place. The decision was made in a fashion which "resembles that of

the Patriarchs of old, each family making a distinct community, and their Elders have only the right of advising but not dictating."⁷⁷ In these final discussions

the Sage Councils of these old Patriarchs would act as a Counterpoise to the impetuosity of youth. Some of them are great Orators...particularly [when] they apply their speeches more to the passions than to the understanding....they make a fixed point of never interrupting one another while speaking.⁷⁸

Respect for rules of conduct outlined by the male elders was the norm. "In general [the] young respect the aged."⁷⁹

Deference came to those who had acquired the respect of others. "The leader was not elected but assumed leadership by virtue of general ability and knowledge plus strength of character and supernatural power."⁸⁰ The two categories of leaders were known as the "bekabanthdeli," and the "inkonze."⁸¹ In secular matters leadership was provided by the "bekabanthdeli," the bossman or best hunter.⁸² It has been suggested that refractory men were kept in order by the latter chief claiming the wife of a miscreant who usually came to the conclusion that submission was the best policy.⁸³

The elders of the Athapaskan bands who filled the primary role in their people's religious life, and in the spiritual education of the young were referred to by Chipe-wyans as "inkonze".⁸⁴ "Inkonze" dispensed spiritual solace,

and were the guardians of both religious life and physical well being. "Ornamented with loon necks, stripes of mink and otter skins, and claws of the Eagle, and a variety of rare and elegant birds Feathers..." the shaman undertook "singing, sucking...and performing mystical gestures, mixing a little reprimand in song at the conclusion of each avowed offence against moral rectitude."⁸⁵

A respected Chipewyan chief who was also a shaman explained to Roderic McKenzie, who lived seventeen years among them at Fort Chipewyan, the common view held by Athapaskans in the region of creation. In the process he gave an impression of the integral role of the shaman in education. For him first animals and then man emerged from the ocean: "from Dogs came Chipeweans [sic]." This, he asserted, was "the reason we never eat the flesh of that animal."⁸⁶ The creator was "a great bird" who came from the sky "all on fire, eyes like lightning, its wings sounded like thunder, -- it touched the ocean and the earth [as it] emerged from the deep, it touched the earth and [thus] appeared animals."⁸⁷ The great bird then made an arrow, which was not to be used. The Chipewyans disobeyed and the great bird was lost as the eternal friend. The old man explained the belief that prior to their migration to their northern homeland the Athapaskans had troubled times. "In ancient times their ancestors lived until their feet were

worn out with walking and their throats with eating."⁸⁸

They speak of the Deluge, by which they saved themselves by ascending to the summits of the highest Mountains and add that they originally came from another continent which was inhabited by wicked people-that they traversed the great Lake the same as the Rein Deer, where it was narrow and shallow, full of [rocks] and Islands--.⁸⁹

They underwent great hardships, experienced "no summer, and the snow which was perpetual, overtopped the tallest trees," and "when they first came to the Copper Mine Country they found the Copper on rocks above the surface -- but now through length of time, it has sunk a man's length into the ground."⁹⁰ To guard against evil

each man has a small leather bag in which he deposits some things for which he has regard, and ever afterwards it is looked upon as sacred.... The women must not touch it; for were they to touch it, they think that it would immediately lose all its virtue.⁹¹

Although the Inkonze were a source of information in spiritual matters and the afterlife, all of the Athapaskan people believed in the concept of social good and evil, at the center of which was concern with the importance of an egalitarian ethic.

After death...there is a state of rewards and punishments....The ideas they annex to good are activity and dexterity at hunting, a charitable disposition in regard to worldly effects, and not destroying of any of their nation. Those that possess those qualifications are accounted righteous, and after death they believe them conveyed across a River in a Canoe made of stone into a fine country.⁹²

If possessed by good, the individual stayed on this island

of happiness; if by evil, the stone canoe sank with its occupant and eternal struggling took place. Exaggerated displays of emotion and self-mutilation by Athapaskans were a means to "recommend the deceased to the Otter and Loon, huard [osprey], to conduct him over the Great Lake that leads to the other world."⁹³ When a death occurred, close relatives, particularly

the female sex related to the deceased will bewail and howl [for] him for more than a year every morning at dawn, and again as the sun goes down. The Relations cut, bite and scarify the flesh of the body in a shocking manner, and destroy all the occasional, [sic] property [in a] ...parade of sorrow.⁹⁴

All personal property accompanied the deceased to the grave. The dead were placed on scaffolding, or were buried in shallow graves.

Laws and social controls were not formally set down though patterns of conduct indicated a means of resolving conflict and ability to maintain a form of stability. Though seldom known to steal from fellow bands, they would readily steal anything from the Europeans and would pillage from other bands.⁹⁵ Moral stricture against the spillage of the blood of a tribesman checked murder and aided in resolving differences. Yet the Athapaskans would cruelly kill those from outside their social circle.⁹⁶ When murder did occur vengeance was sometimes staved off by wrestling or by buying off the victim's relatives. Pride and

saving-of-face dictated that some form of penalty be exacted. Wrestling served as an effective means of resolving potential conflict. The Athapaskan was observed as "always preferring to have his body beaten black and blue, rather than have his face marked."⁹⁷

Individual bands varied in the degree to which they were concerned with their physical appearance. Factors at Churchill considered the distinctive mark of all Athapaskan tribes as three black or blue bands tattooed on each cheek, more often occurring on the men than on the women or children. "They are tattooed when young as a lasting mark to distinguish and recognize them among strangers, should they by accident go astray."⁹⁸ Some "pluck their beards" for the sake of appearance; others "cut their hair" not for appearance but "to hear better when they hunt."⁹⁹ The following description of a Beaver Indian by W.F. Wentzel gives a European perception in 1807.

The men are commonly of the middle size, have well proportioned limbs, regular features and are fairer in complexion than any other Indian nation I have seen. They wear their hair long behind, and short before like the Canadians; those who desire to appear greater bucks than the rest; tie their hair, wear ornaments such as feathers, beads in their ears, and paint or tattoo their faces....Around their head they wear a piece of beaver, otter or martin skin decorated with a bunch of feathers before and behind. The rest of their dress consists of a beaver robe, a capot, a brayet, and leggings of dressed moose deer skin. Their robes and capots are ornamented with several bunches of leather strings garnished with

porcupine quills of different colours, the ends of which are hung with beaver claws. About their neck they have a well polished piece of caribou [sic] horn, which is white and bent around the neck; on their arms and wrists they tie bracelets and arm bands made also of porcupine quills; around their waist they have also a porcupine quill belt curiously wrought and variegated with quills of different colours.¹⁰⁰

A common item of clothing among Northeastern Athapaskans was a traditional one-piece lower garment with footwear attached and was "characteristic of the Alaska-Yukon Athapaskan area."¹⁰¹ Usually the summer shirt was made of caribou skin, sometimes tanned "beautifully white," secured to a waistband around the middle.¹⁰² The Kutchin shirts were pointed in front.¹⁰³ Shirts worn by women were longer, and their skirts, reaching from waist almost to the knee, often were decorated.¹⁰⁴ In winter hooded caribou skin coats tanned with the hair inside were worn.¹⁰⁵ Wolverine fur may have been used as trim on the hood.¹⁰⁶ Winter moccasins were similar to summer ones, but "larger, to permit the insertion of the duffel, which was commonly the whole skin of the rabbit turned inside out."¹⁰⁷ Mitts were made of tanned moose hide, without the hair and trimmed with beaver or other furs.¹⁰⁸

The women are in general of a lower stature than the men, wear their hair and ornaments like them, and are reckoned handsome. Their dress in winter is a cotillon, woven like a mat, of thongs of hare skin and a robe of the same...; on their heads they have a cap shaped...of the same stuff. Their leggings are long and made like trousers except in the front where an aperture [sic] is left to attend the calls of nature. Their summer dress consists of a leather cotil-

lon, leather robe, leggings, & c, as in winter.¹⁰⁹

Beaver Indians were not unlike other Athapaskans in general appearance.¹¹⁰ Their use of the beaver for clothing distinguished them from other Athapaskans and indicated their southerly and westerly range. When in relatively dire straits the Hares used the skin of that animal for clothing.¹¹¹ But the Chipewyans, Yellowknives, Dogribs and Loucheux dressed primarily in caribou skins.¹¹² The Slaveys, more distant from the barren-ground caribou, dressed in moose or woodland caribou skin.¹¹³ Dressing skins and making and decorating clothing were the domains of the women.

The skin they scrape and dress into leather; they take the brains of the animal and rub it upon the skin to make it pliable and soft; afterwards they smoke it well and then soak it in warm water for a night in order to render it easy to work with a piece of iron made for that purpose. This laborious process is done usually by the women.¹¹⁴

Some of the Athapaskan women had developed decorative work to a high level. Because of these decorative skills the Dogrib,¹¹⁵ Loucheux,¹¹⁶ and to a lesser extent, the Slavey and Beaver¹¹⁷ women were considered by early European observers to appear very attractive. The designs which the people of Liard River worked into the clothing were intricate and colourful.

The dyes made use of by the Indians to stain porcupine quills and feathers, which are the only things they stain, are the roots of a plant which the Canadians call Savoyan; its colour is of an

orange cast. This root, boiled with cranberry, dyes a beautiful light red; the dyes for yellow are another small root which they gather in marshy plains.¹¹⁸

Life of Athapaskan women varied with the manner of subsistence and extent of band nomadism. Especially difficult was the life of a Chipewyan woman who did all of the campwork, packing and preparation of food and clothing. David Thompson, a moralizing fur trade observer, related after his trip to Athabasca in 1796-97:

The women are very heavily loaded; the men with little else than their gun and their fishing tackle, even a girl of eight years will have her share to carry; while the Boys have some trifle, or only their Bows and Arrows....By the time a girl is twelve years of age, she is given as a Wife to a man of twice her age.¹¹⁹

This division of labour arose from a life of continuous migratory pursuit of the barren-ground caribou. Men ranged alongside the route while women proceeded directly to the next campsite.¹²⁰ Women of the more sedentary Kutchin, Dogrib, Beaver, and Slavey bands had an easier lot.¹²¹ Other aspects of Athapaskan culture showed a clear tendency to male supremacy as George Keith related in 1812.

The women...are very often upon lean and short allowance. Bear's flesh is scarce and consequently reckoned delicate. The women dare not touch this, otherwise as they are told they would die. Other kinds of meat such as the nose of a moose Deer & c. are forbidden.¹²²

Women in many Athapaskan communities were considered a burden in difficult times as Samuel Hearne observed; "in times

of scarcity it is frequently their lot to be left without a single morsel."¹²³ They were the first to starve and the last to eat in times of plenty.¹²⁴ A number of taboos about menstruation and parturition made life extremely difficult for women when they were not allowed to break new trails or tread on paths in camp for fear of offending the animal spirits.¹²⁵ They lived apart in specially built huts during these periods.¹²⁶

Marriage for the Northeastern Athapaskans was based on very practical grounds. "The Northern Indian considered in marriage only the material characteristics of the woman, her aptitude for work and potentiality for bearing children, competence, and endurance."¹²⁷ Wives were dragged away after being won¹²⁸ by the stronger males in wrestling contests.¹²⁹ Polygyny was readily accepted, and possession of many wives was considered a measure of a man's success as a hunter.¹³⁰ Polyandry was rare though a few instances were noted among the Beaver,¹³¹ Kutchin,¹³² and Slave¹³³ where brothers were known to share a wife.

Marvin Harris argues that the practice of infanticide was a favourite means of birth control among hunting peoples;¹³⁴ the custom was widespread among the Northeastern Athapaskans¹³⁵ and mainly concerned female children. This was an effective means of population control and of ensuring the requisite number of males for warfare and hunt-

ing.¹³⁶ Accordingly, the Beaver Indians

often destroyed the female children when just born. The only reason they give is that it is a great deal of trouble to bring up girls, and that women are only an encumbrance, useless in time of war and exceedingly voracious in time of want.¹³⁷

Among the Hare and Dogrib, children were not given nourishment for the first four days, a practice designed to make them hardy. No doubt the weak died in this interval¹³⁸, thus ensuring a more hardy populace as well as helping to check overpopulation.

Northeastern Athapaskan social life at the time of contact was based in the family. They lived in small groups for much of the year which were composed of a man, one or more wives depending upon his hunting ability, and perhaps some of his other immediate relatives. Larger groups of families would congregate at key hunting places in the autumn or sometimes bands would gather at fishing spots in the spring. At these times different bands sometimes met to share resources, trade and intermarry. Leadership was loose although usually responsibility fell on the best hunter or the male elder who possessed religious knowledge or "powers." Population was controlled mainly by female infanticide and to a lesser extent, senilicide. Warring also worked to limit population. Labour of male and female was sharply divided and reflected the imperatives of a band society.

In summary, Northeastern Athapaskan life at the time of early contact was rooted in migratory hunting existence and heavily influenced by family based social organization. They lived in small groups much of the year, performing their hunting and gathering tasks. At selected times of the year they would expand their primary groups in response to certain external needs such as sharing of resources, trade, and intermarriage.

The seasonal cycle of activities of the prehistoric Athapaskans of the eastern subarctic and Mackenzie lowlands was dictated by the requirement of the hunt. Activities were closely regulated by the migratory patterns of game and fish. Variations in these patterns occurred because of weather irregularities and other natural conditions such as animal migrations, and cycles of scarcity and abundance. Subsistence on caribou, bison, moose, elk, migratory fish, birds, and other game in some years was unpredictable due to these seasonal, annual, or geographic changes.

Spring was the season of considerable mobility among Athapaskans. As days grew longer the family or groups of families packed their gear on toboggans and left the sites near to the winter hunt or the late winter caribou migration. After the beginning of the fur trade this phase involved the widespread practice of the killing and skinning of muskrats. In prehistoric times only a few were taken.

The meat was boiled or roasted and eaten and the sinew from the tail was used for making clothing.¹³⁹ Bark was collected from the birch tree in the Peace, Athabasca, Slave, and Liard Rivers. Used in canoes, baskets, house construction or fish drying sheds, it was also produced for trading with people living along the edge of the barrens, beyond available birch trees. Spruce and cottonwood bark were collected by the Slave Indians.

Spring fishing camps were next attended where assembly of temporary shelters, fish traps and ongoing activities such as preparation of caribou hides for clothing took place. Whitefish were available in abundance at this time of year. Fish were filleted leaving the heads and tails attached, hung on drying racks, then either bundled for moving, stored in birch bark containers or placed in raised caches for the lean months. It was also in this season that men and women, particularly in regions along the Mackenzie, and probably the Peace and Liard Rivers built canoes from spruce, cottonwood or birch bark. At this time the canoes were used along leads in the ice and open lake shore for hunting the migratory water fowl on their return flights. Bears were taken at this time soon after hibernation when sluggish and the meat was particularly palatable.

The summer seasonal round of activity began about mid-June when camps were moved to the vicinity of larger lakes

or rivers. Several households were likely to meet at commonly frequented junctures to exchange gossip, trade goods, and feasting. Summer fishing camps were either established at these congregation points or at favourite rivers, lakes or streams. These were the sites of the more permanent Eastern Athapaskan habitations, particularly those of the Kutchin, Slavey, Dogrib, and some Beaver people. Chipewyan, Yellowknife and some Beaver people tended to prefer more mobile skin dwellings for flexibility of movement after large mammal populations. Fish storage caches were refilled or built, willow bark or rawhide gill nets were made, and fish traps were manufactured and set in preferred locations. Sinew nets were assembled and used to obtain water fowl during their moult and employed in late summer rabbit drives. Men not employed in these tasks hunted locally or made a variety of new weapons or implements. Women aided in drying and storing fish and were employed throughout the summer in the preparation and decoration of clothing for both sexes, making babiche for snares, and utilitarian objects such as quivers, game bags, dog packs, tumplines and baby carriers. Near the end of summer and with the first frosts, the sweetened and ripened berries were picked and eaten or dried for storage.

In autumn the Eastern Athapaskans moved to hunting or fishing sites close to large mammal passageways. Women

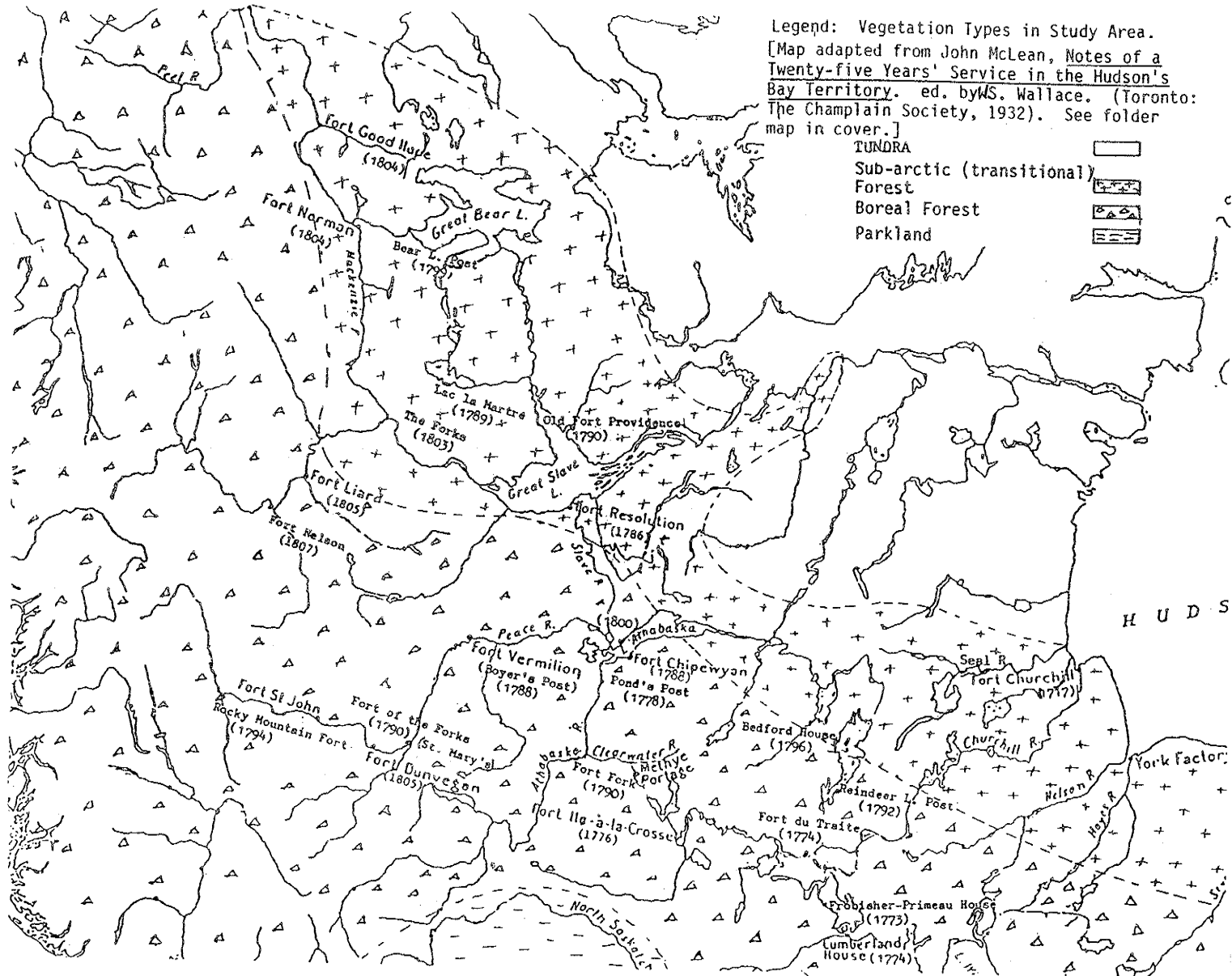
often tended fish traps or nets while the men hunted. Caribou were hunted while on their autumn migration at or near fording areas, at geographic constrictions, or along dry, drained upland ridges or eskers. Most often caribou and also moose were caught in special fences or surrounds. In late autumn as the caribou began their southward migration families moved to fences or good hunting locations and filled their meat and hide requirements. This pattern was repeated just before spring. In some areas west of the Mackenzie and southwest of Great Slave Lake, Eastern Athapaskans exploited small herds of the less gregarious woodland caribou, or moose, elk and bison.

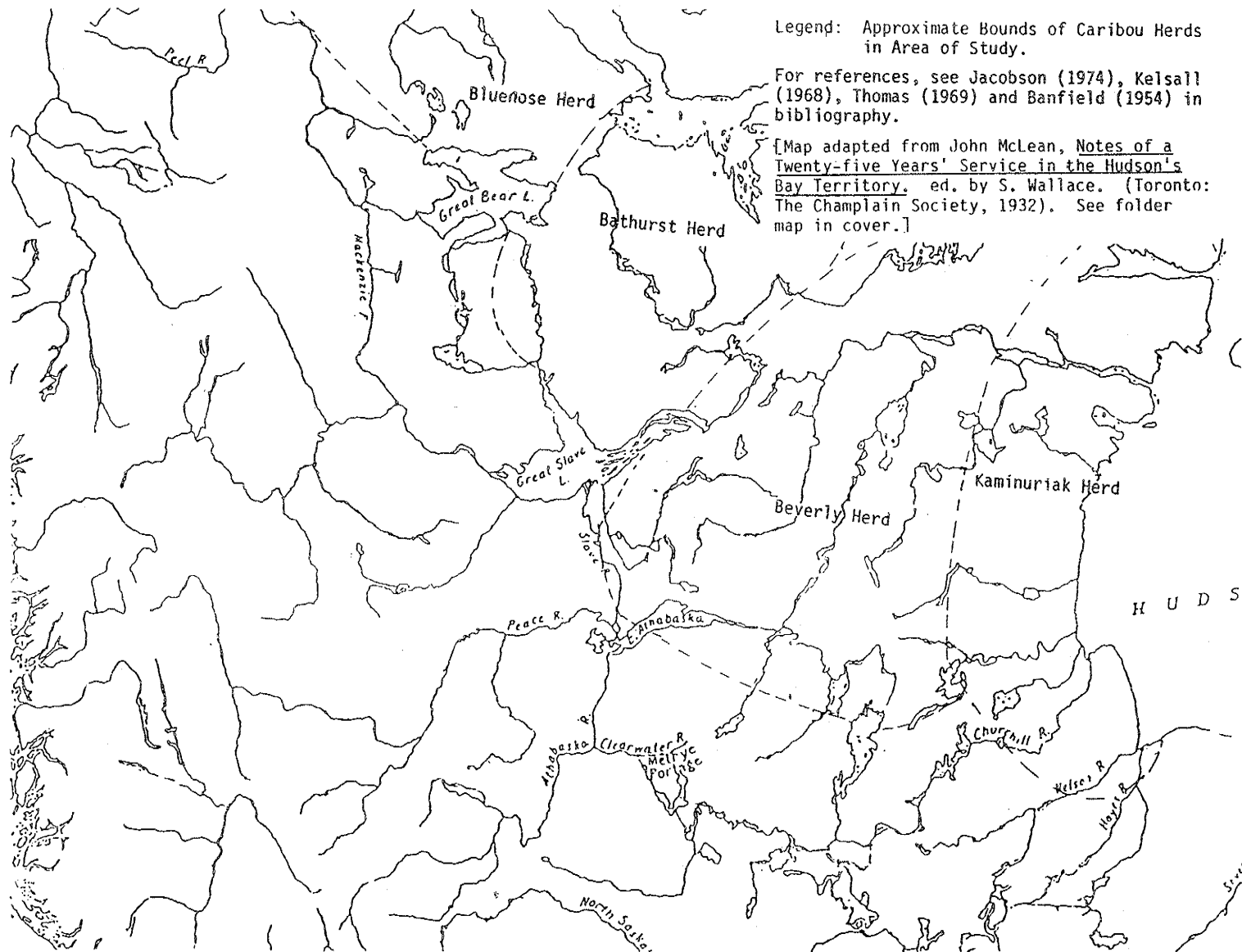
The winter season began with the end of the fall migratory hunt. Men continued to hunt large game: moose, caribou, and bears which were killed while in hibernation. Smaller mammals and ptarmigans were taken by all family members in snares, deadfalls and nets. Fishing was undertaken through the ice using spears, lures, traps, and when the ice grew thick an ingenious jig was used which linked a net through two holes under the ice. Semi-permanent habitations including log-pole lodges and brush and skin shelters were employed near good fishing or hunting sites. Those people who were driven by necessity to be more mobile used double walled tents.¹⁴⁰

Athapaskans of the barrens and Mackenzie lowlands were

exclusively hunters and gatherers, although there were differences in the emphasis placed on various natural resources by people in different regions. Basically these natural resources involved hunting or fishing. The caribou was the chief resource for Chipewyans, Yellowknives, Dogribs and possibly the Hares. Moose, bison or elk were of primary importance to the Slave, Beaver and Loucheux or Kutchin, although the latter also took many woodland and barren-ground caribou. Fishing and hunting small game were always important to the Athapaskans and provided support especially in periods of scarcity when principal food supplies declined.

In the Mackenzie Basin and Arctic lowlands success in hunting and fishing depended on detailed specialized knowledge of the land and its resources. This range of ecological adaptations was achieved through familiarity with a complex of variations in topography, season, animal habits and climate. These adaptations involved a high degree of community mobility so material culture was therefore simple and highly portable. The yearly cycle in quest of food emphasizes how dependent the location and concentration of population was upon its availability.





II NOTES

¹W.E.D. Halliday, "A Forest Classification for Canada," Forest Service Bulletin No. 89 (Ottawa: Canada Department of Mines and Resources, 1937), p. 13 gives a summary of the region's flora. See also Eleanor B. Leacock and Nancy O. Lurie, eds., North American Indians in Historical Perspective (New York: Random House, 1971), pp. 343-44.

²It has been variously estimated by linguists and archaeologists that the Athapaskans split fifteen hundred to two thousand years ago. A.M. Clark "Northern Athapaskan Prehistory," The Athapaskans: Strangers of the North (Ottawa: National Museum of Man, 1974), p. 18. Michael E. Kraus and Victor K. Golla "Northern Athapaskan Languages" in Helm Handbook..Vol. 6., Subarctic, p. 67 for breakdown of Northern Athapaskan languages into North East, North West, Pacific and Apachean from the South West. Southern Athapaskans diverged from Northern Athapaskans less than one thousand years ago and as recently as six hundred years ago. Ibid., p. 18. See also D.W. Clark, "Summary of Northern Athapaskan Prehistory," ibid., pp. 19-20. See also J. Van Stone, Athapaskan Adaptations, Hunters and Fishermen on the Subarctic Forests (Chicago: Aldine Publishing, 1974), pp. 5, 7, 40, 133.

Cornelius Osgood, one of the few ethnographers to study both Eastern and Western Athapaskans provided the two-fold cultural division: western people of the Pacific drainage culture, and eastern ones of the Arctic drainage culture. He went on to say: "There is generally among the groups of the Pacific drainage a dependence on salmon, which is entirely lacking among those of the Arctic drainage. With salmon fishing goes an elaborate complex of traits connected with the catching and use of this fish." The same attachment to large game could be said of the culture of the Arctic drainage. See The Distribution of the Northern Athapaskan Indians, Yale University Publications in Anthropology, No. 7 (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1936), p. 31.

³Caribou "the staff of life of the region" was vitally important in aboriginal times for food and just as important as a source of clothing and shelter. See J. Alden Mason, Notes on the Indians of the Great Slave Lake Area, Yale University Publications in Anthropology, No. 34 (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1946), pp. 11-12, 15 and Kaj Birket-Smith, Contributions to Chipewyan Ethnology (Copenhagen: Glydendal, 1930), pp. 14, 17-19, 26-29. See also Cornelius Osgood, Contributions to the Ethnography of the Kutchin, Yale University Publications in Anthropology, No. 14 (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1970), pp. 33-34 and "Ethnography of the Great Bear Lake Indians," Annual Report of the National Museums of Canada, 1931, Bulletin No. 70 (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1932), pp. 38, 40, 41, 44, 47. Also Beryl C. Gillespie, "An Ethnohistory of the Yellowknives," Contributions to Chipewyan Ethnology, ed. D.B. Carlisle, Mercury Series, Canadian Ethnology Service Paper No. 31 (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1975), p. 193, J.G.E. Smith, "The Ecological Basis of Chipewyan Socio-territorial Organization," Proceedings, Northern Athapaskan Conference, ed. A.M. Clark, Mercury Series, Canadian Ethnology Service Paper No. 27 (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1971), p. 589 and D.W. Clark, "Northern Athapaskan Prehistory," pp. 20. Shiela J. Minni, The Prehistoric Occupations of Black Lake, Northern Saskatchewan, Mercury Series, Canadian Ethnology Service Paper No. 53 (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1977) shows Black Lake was occupied discontinuously since 6000 B.C. by a series of cultures dependent on the barren-ground caribou herds. Extensive study of the barren-ground caribou has led to the naming of four populations after areas traditionally used for calving. Banfield identified sixteen mainland populations in 1954, many of which were found to be segments of four populations: the Bluenose, Bathurst, Beverly and Kaminuriak. See A.W.F. Banfield, Preliminary Investigation of the Barren-Ground Caribou, Canadian Wildlife Service Wildlife Management Bulletin, Series 1, No. 10A (Ottawa: Information Canada, 1954), and G.C. Thomas, Population Estimates of the Barren-Ground Caribou March to May, 1967, Canadian Wildlife Service Report Series No. 9 (Ottawa: Information Canada, 1969).

⁴See June Helm, "Leadership among the North-eastern Athapaskans," Anthropologica, 2 (1956), 133. See also June Helm and Eleanor Leacock, "The Hunting Tribes of Subarctic Canada," in Leacock and Lurie, pp. 343-44.

⁵VanStone, Athapaskan Adaptations, p. 123.

⁶Ibid.

⁷For a picture of the linkages between a simple ecosystem, cycles of abundance and scarcity of various subarctic animals, and cultural mobility, see Eugene P. Odum, Fundamentals of Ecology (Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders, 1971), p. 194. See also Helm and Leacock, "Hunting Tribes of Subarctic Canada," p. 347.

⁸"The linguistic and tribal classifications of the northern Athapaskans are due for a new look....If widespread continuity of dialects is distinctive of Northern Athapaskans, their situation becomes in some respects more analogous to that of the Eskimos." Catharine McClellan, "Culture Contacts in the Early Historic Period in Northwestern North America," Arctic Anthropology, 12, No. 2 (1964), 6. Osgood also points out that "the Athapaskans do not consider themselves as composing neat political or cultural units." Northern Athapaskan Distribution, p. 3 and pp. 221-22. A recent article reiterates "boundaries among Northern Athapaskan groups are indistinct in many ways, and cultural differences are not nearly as marked as Osgood's map of group territories might suggest (1936b). Differences in status of women, then, cannot be attributed to underlying differences in traditional culture and must instead have arisen from most recent conditions associated with the historic experiences of the groups involved." Richard J. Perry, "The Fur Trade and the Status of Women," Ethnohistory, 26, No. 4 (Fall 1979), 365. Joel S. Savishinsky points out that prior to European contact Indian groups lacked the kind of unity that is implied by the tribal names such as "Hare". See Trail of the Hares: Life and Stress in an Arctic Community (New York: Gordon and Breach, 1974), pp. 46-47.

⁹W.R. Fowler Jr., "Linguistic Evidence for Athapaskan Prehistory," The Athapaskan Question, eds. J.W. Helmer, S. Van Dyke and F.J. Kense (Calgary: Univ. of Calgary Press, 1977), pp. 103-04 draws on Harry Hoijer's "The Chronology of the Athapaskan Languages," International Journal of American Linguistics, 221 (1956), 219-32; his "Linguistic Sub-groupings by Glottochronology and the Comparative Method," Lingua, 22 (1962), 192-98 and "The Athapaskan Languages," Studies in the Athapaskan Languages, eds. Hoijer et al., University of California Publications in Linguistics, No. 29 (Berkeley: Univ. of California, 1963), pp. 1-29 as well as I. Dyen and D.F. Aberle, Lexical Construction: The Case of the Proto-Athapaskan Kinship System (London: Cambridge Univ.

Press, 1974), p. 12. For an up to date summary see Krauss and Golla, in Helm, Subarctic, p. 67.

¹⁰Fowler, "Linguistic Evidence," p. 103.

¹¹Osgood, "Northern Athapaskan Distributions," pp. 21-22 and Kutchin Ethnography, p. 13. See also Edwin S. Hall, "Speculations on the late Prehistory of the Kutchin Athapaskans," Ethnohistory, 16, No. 4 (1969), 318.

¹²Fowler, pp. 103-04.

¹³Osgood, Kutchin Ethnography, pp. 47-48, 60-61 and A.M. Clark, "Traditional Northern Athapaskan Lifeways," in Strangers of the North, p. 26. "Large game animals of primary importance to the Indians of the Subarctic are the barren-ground caribou..., woodland caribou, and moose. For the Indians living in the Northwestern Transition section of the boreal forest [Rowe 1972: 55] of Canada and in the plateau of Alaska the Barren-Ground caribou are the subsistence core, with moose an important subsidiary resource", Beryl C. Gillespie, "Major Fauna in the Traditional Economy" in Helm, Handbook...p.15-18. J.S. Rowe Forest Regions of Canada, Canadian Forestry Service Publications No. 1300 (Ottawa: Department of Environment, 1972), p. 55.

¹⁴K. Birket-Smith, p. 36. See R.R. Janes, "Indian and Eskimo Contact in Southern Keewatin: an Ethnohistorical Approach," Ethnohistory, 20 (Winter 1973), 39, 48-9, 50, 53.

¹⁵Richard Glover, ed., Samuel Hearne: Journey to the Northern Ocean...(Toronto: Macmillan, 1958), pp. 58, 85, 91, 121, 201.

¹⁶Diamond Jenness, "The Indians of Canada," Bulletin No. 65 (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1932), p. 399.

¹⁷R.R. Janes, "The Athapaskans and the Fur Trade," Western Canadian Journal of Anthropology, 5, No. 3-4 (1975), 179.

¹⁸On the way to the Coppermine Hearne and Matonabbee "followed a route directly west following a well beaten path through the 'stony Hills'." This was not as Hearne thought a route to the "mines" but a route followed by Indians around Great Bear Lake to and from hunting and trade. Glover, Hearne, p. 126, see also p. 85. For another example of how the caribou hunt led diverse peoples see Birket-Smith, p. 30. He also suggests that collective hunts at caribou crossings were of greater importance than individual hunting. Glover, Hearne, p. 3.

¹⁹Thomas Simpson, Narrative of the Discoveries on the North Coast of America (London: R. Bentley, 1843), p. 71.

²⁰Birket-Smith, p. 36.

²¹Osgood, "Great Bear Lake Indians," p. 33.

²²Douglas Leonard, "A Bibliography on Bilaterality in Band Society for the Northeastern Sub-arctic Region of Canada, North America, The Chipewyan," Section II (Ottawa: National Museum of Man, Xerox, n.d.), p. 2. For an excellent description of Eastern Athapaskan band groups and their links with seasonal caribou movements see A.M. Clark, pp. 20-29. See also Birket Smith, p. 29.

²³Ernest Burch Jr. asserts that because of erratic caribou migration and movement of up to 800 kilometers in six weeks the hunters were unable to keep up, thus caribou were unreliable sources of food and were intercepted only at the most dependable crossing places. "The Caribou/Wild Reindeer as a Human Resource," American Antiquity, No. 3 (1972), 339-68. A recent study illustrates how close the winter range and summer calving of Bathurst and Beverly herds were. See Roy Jacobson, Wildlife and Wildlife Habitat in the Great Slave and Great Bear Lake Regions 1974-77, Environmental Studies No. 10 (Ottawa: Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, 1979), Figures 7-10, 11-14.

²⁴Kaj Birket-Smith, p. 29 and J.P. Kelsall. The Migratory Barren-Ground Caribou of Canada, Monograph No. 3 (Ottawa: Canadian Wildlife Service, 1968), pp. 106-07.

25 "When the Deer fail they readily take to angling, altho' it affords them no clothing." Richard Glover, ed., David Thompson's Narrative (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1962), p. 128.

26 "An entirely protein diet is nutritionally inadequate. This the eskimo recognizes and the rule of a mouthful of fat for a mouthful of lean meat prevails...." A.H. Lawrie, "A Barren-Ground Caribou Survey," Canadian Wildlife Service Report, C8'73 (1948), cited in Kelsall, p. 209. See also Birket-Smith, p. 32 and C.A. Heller and E.M. Scott, The Alaska Dietary Survey, 1956-61, Public Health Service Publication, No. 999-AH-Z (Anchorage, Alaska: Alaska Public Health Service, 1967), pp. 2, 182-83 and Otto Schaefer and Jean Steckle, Dietary Habits and Nutritional Base of Native populations of the Northwest Territories (Yellowknife, N.W.T.: Science Advisory Board of the Northwest Territories, 1980), pp. 15-16.

27 An Account of the Athabasca Indians by a Partner of the Northwest Company, 1795, attributed to John Macdonnell but probably from collections of Roderic McKenzie, Ottawa, PAC, MG19, C1, Vol. 55, p. 22. John Macdonnell is recorded as the author of two manuscripts on the Athabasca Indians (see also f.n. 35). Macdonnell did not arrive in the West until 1793. He arrived at his post on the upper Assiniboine River "For at least eight years after his arrival in the West his post remained in the general locality of his first station. By 1804 he was in the Athabasca country." [G.L.N.] One can only conclude that Macdonnell's 1795 mss was compiled from the Roderic McKenzie collection. Charles M. Gates and Grace LeeNute, eds., Five Fur Traders of the Northwest, being the narrative of Peter Pond and the diaries of John Macdonnell, Archibald N. McLeod, Hugh Furies and Thomas Connor (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1965), p. 63. Roderic McKenzie, partner in charge of Fort Chipewyan requested that all clerks and wintering partners describe the natural history and natives of their respective territories in a circular letter in 1806. These became a part of a very extensive library which he had collected at Fort Chipewyan, it was hoped they would provide the basis for his planned history of the fur trade, and did become the basis of Masson, Bourgeois.... See Gates and Lee Nute, eds., Five Fur Traders..., p. 63, 63n, 199n.

28 "The Peace River Indians are as fond of liquor as any tribe and part with their provision as freely, it consists

of Buffalo fresh and cured such as beat meat and rendered fatt." Philip Turnor in J.B. Tyrrell, ed., Journals of Samuel Hearne and Philip Turnor (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1934), p. 451.

²⁹Birket-Smith, p. 31. See also Richard Glover, David Thompson, p. 113.

³⁰David Merrill Smith, "Fort Resolution People: An Historical Study of Ecological Change," Diss., Univ. of Minnesota, 1975, p. 47. Hearne called the dish "beeatee", "certainly the most delicious...that can be prepared from a deer only." See Glover, Hearne, p. 92.

³¹John J. Honigmann, Ethnography and Acculturation of the Fort Nelson Slave, Yale University Publications in Anthropology, No. 33 (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1946), p. 38. See also J.V. Wright, The Prehistory of Lake Athabasca: An Initial Statement, Mercury Series, Archaeological Survey of Canada Paper No. 29 (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1975), p. 137.

³²Some suggest that due to decline of the caribou numbers, fish had become the most important staple protein source by the 20th century. See Osgood, "Great Bear Lake Indians," p. 39 and E.S. Rogers, "Subsistence Areas of the Cree-Ojibwa, the Eastern Subarctic: A Preliminary Study," Contributions to Anthropology 1963-64, Bulletin 204, Part 2 (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1967), p. 87.

³³Lake Athabasca, An Account of the Chipewyans...in 1793, attributed to John Macdonnell. Ottawa, PAC, MG19, C1, Vol. 52, p. 38.

³⁴George Keith, Letter to Roderic McKenzie, The Forks of the Mackenzie River, 7 Jan. 1807, ed. L.R. Masson, Les Bourgeois de la Compagnie du Nord-Ouest, II (New York: Antiquarian Press, 1960), p. 67.

³⁵Macdonnell, Origin, Manners and Customs of the Athabasca Indians, Montreal, McGill Mss., CH22, S58. See also Willard-Ferdinand Wentzel, Letter to R. McKenzie, The Forks

of the Mackenzie River, 27 Mar. 1807 in Masson, I, p. 84.

36J. Macdonnell, Chipewyan Indians, Ottawa, PAC, MG19, C1, Vol. 52, pp. 38-39.

37See f.n. #27 for comments on the author of this mss. Macdonnell, *ibid.*, Montreal, McGill Mss, CH22, S58, 2352, p. 1.

38"Wattap" were the roots of the young white spruce trees. See Alexander Mackenzie, Voyages from Montreal through the Continent of North America (1801; rpt. Edmonton, Alta.: Hurtig, 1971), p. 313.

39Glover, David Thompson, p. 106.

40Macdonnell, Chipewyan Indians, Montreal, McGill Mss, CH23, S59, 2414, p. 77. Fish taken at the Forks of Mackenzie River were "the large and the salmon trout, inconnu, white fish, white and red carp, pickerel, pike, bluefish, tolliby, and Loche." W.F. Wentzel, Letter to R. McKenzie, The Forks of the Mackenzie River, 27 Mar. 1807, in Masson, I, p. 84.

41"It is remarkable...that the Canadians who...live altogether on venison, have a less healthy appearance than those whose sustenance is obtained from the waters. At the same time scurvy is wholly unknown among them." W. Kaye Lamb, ed., The Journals and Letters of Sir Alexander Mackenzie (Cambridge: Hakluyt Society, 1970), p. 131.

42Osgood, "Great Bear Lake Indians," p. 42.

43Ibid.

44W.F. Wentzel, Letter to R. McKenzie, The Forks of the Mackenzie River, 27 Mar. 1807, Masson, I, p. 80. See also *ibid.*, p. 43 and Sir John Richardson, Arctic Searching Expedition... (1852; rpt. London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1951), p. 135; Sir John Franklin, Narrative of a

Second Expedition to the Shores of the Polar Sea...(1828; rpt. Edmonton, Alta.: Hurtig, 1970), p. 19.

45G. Keith, Letter to R. McKenzie, Bear Lake Post, 19 Nov. 1812, Montreal, McGill Mss, CH23, S59, 2414, p. 78. Also see Birket-Smith, p. 45.

46Osgood, "Great Bear Lake Indians," p. 47.

47W.F. Wentzel, The Forks of the Mackenzie River, 27 Mar. 1807, Masson, I. p. 90. See also G. Keith, Bear Lake, 19 Nov. 1812, *ibid.*, II, pp. 116 & 121.

48Osgood, "Great Bear Lake Indians," p. 48.

49Macdonnell, Chipewyan Indians, Ottawa, PAC, MG19, C1, Vol. 52, p. 51-52.

50G. Keith, Letter to R. McKenzie, Bear Lake Post, 22 Nov. 1812, Masson, II, p. 117-18.

51Ibid.

52Birket-Smith, p. 21; Glover, Hearne, pp. 49-50; Osgood, "Great Bear Lake Indians," p. 41.

53W.F. Wentzel, Letter to R. McKenzie, The Forks of the Mackenzie River, 27 Mar. 1807, Masson, I, pp. 81-82. See also Osgood, "Great Bear Lake Indians," p. 41, Simpson, p. 208, Emile Petitot, Exploration de la Region du Grand Lac des Ours (Paris: Tequi, Libraire Editeur, 1893), p. 283 and John Richardson in Franklin, Second Expedition, p. 275.

54Macdonnell, Chipewyan Indians, Ottawa, PAC, MG19, C1, Vol. 52, p. 15.

55Ibid., p. 16.

- ⁵⁶Macdonnell, Athabasca Indians, Montréal, McGill Mss, CH22, S58, No. 4.
- ⁵⁷Ibid.
- ⁵⁸W.F. Wentzel, Letter to R. McKenzie, The Forks of the Mackenzie River, 27 Mar. 1807, Masson, I, p. 91.
- ⁵⁹G. Keith, Letter to R. McKenzie, 7 Jan. 1807, Masson, II, p. 66.
- ⁶⁰Birket-Smith, p 36-38. See also eds. E.E. Rich and A.M. Johnson, James Isham's Observations and Notes, 1743-49 (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1949), pp. 311-12.
- ⁶¹Macdonnell, Chipewyan Indians, Ottawa, PAC, MG19, C1, Vol. 52, p. 17. See also ed. W. Kaye Lamb, Mackenzie, p. 154; see also Birket Smith, pp. 36-37, and Sir John Franklin, Narrative of a Journey to the Shores of the Polar Sea (1823; rpt. New York: Greenwood Press, 1964), p. 134.
- ⁶²Macdonnell, Chipewyan Indians, Ottawa, PAC, MG19, C1, Vol. 52, p. 22. Also see Samuel Hearne, A Journey from Prince of Wales' Fort in Hudson's Bay to the Northern Great Bear Lake Indians (1795; rpt. New York: De Capo Press, 1968), p. 324, Birket-Smith, p. 38 and Osgood, "Great Bear Lake Indians," p. 54.
- ⁶³Glover, Thompson, p. 129.
- ⁶⁴Osgood, "Great Bear Lake Indians," p. 70.
- ⁶⁵Ibid.
- ⁶⁶Athapaskans believed man was descended from a dog. Others that man originated from beaver, otter or muskrat. Petitot, Grand Lac des Ours, p. 405. Osgood, "Great Bear Lake Indians," pp. 83 and 88. French voyageurs who later came among the Chipewyans were feared and despised for their liking of dog meat, Lamb, Mackenzie, p. 27. Birds and ani-

mals of prey, e.g., foxes, wolves, ravens were not eaten because they scavenged on the dead. Osgood, "Great Bear Lake Indians," pp. 79-80.

67Great Bear Lake people would not eat wolf. Ibid., p. 82. Dogribs would not eat the bear. See Richard King, Narrative of a Journey to the Shores of the Arctic Ocean ... (London: Richard Bentley, 1836), p. 168. Also see Osgood, "Great Bear Lake Indians," p. 83.

68Jenness, The Sekani Indians of British Columbia, Bulletin No. 84 (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1937), pp. 67-68; see also Honigmann, pp. 76-77, Osgood, Kutchin Ethnography, p. 158 and "Great Bear Lake Indians," pp. 82-85 as well as Petitot, Grand Lac des Ours, p. 353 and Warburton Pike, The Barren-Ground of Northern Canada (London: Macmillan, 1892), p. 104.

69Jenness, Sekani Indians, p. 68, and Honigmann, p. 77.

70Honigmann, p. 77.

71Osgood, "Great Bear Lake Indians," pp. 83-84.

72E. Petitot, Monographie des Dene - Dindjie (Paris: E. Leroux, 1876), p. 36 cited in Osgood, "Great Bear Lake Indians," p. 84.

73Jenness, Sekani Indians, p. 68.

74Ibid.

75Lamb, Mackenzie, p. 154.

76Macdonnell, Athabasca Indians, Montreal, McGill Mss, CH22, S58, No.7, n. pag. Osgood was informed at Good Hope of 2 types of chiefs among the Hare. "The first was the 'Oldest Man' and it was unlucky not to obey him. The second was the 'Best Hunter' of moose and caribou. When the 'Oldest Man' gave inadequate advice, then the 'Best Hunter' was

turned to, but the latter never equalled the first chief in power." "Great Bear Lake Indians," p. 74. Wentzel describes the chiefs of the Beaver or Slave similarly. Wentzel, in Masson, I, p. 92.

⁷⁷Macdonnell, Athabaska Indians, Montreal, McGill Mss, CH22, S58, No. 7, n. pag.

⁷⁸Ibid.

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰Honigmann, p. 65.

⁸¹D.M. Smith, p. 73.

⁸²Osgood, "Great Bear Lake Indians," pp. 40 & 74.

⁸³D.M. Smith, p. 75 and Franklin, Second Expedition, p. 258.

⁸⁴Honigmann, p. 77, Petitot, Etude, 1868, p. 168 and Smith, pp. 73-74.

⁸⁵G. Keith, Letter to R. McKenzie, The Forks of the Mackenzie River, 15 Jan. 1814, Montreal, McGill Mss, CH23, S59, 2431, No. 29, p. 114.

⁸⁶Roderic McKenzie, An Account of the Athabasca Indians by a Partner of the North West Company, 1795, Montreal, McGill Mss, CH23, S59, 2352, p. 8.

⁸⁷Ibid.

⁸⁸Ibid., CH23, S59, 2355, No. 4, p. 13.

⁸⁹Ibid.

90Ibid.

91Macdonnell, Athabasca Indians, Montreal, McGill Mss, CH22, S58, No. 2.

92Ibid.

93G. Keith, Letter to R. McKenzie, The Forks of the Mackenzie River, 28 Feb. 1810 in Masson, II, p. 89.

94G. Keith, Letter to R. McKenzie, Bear Lake Post, 19 Nov. 1812, Montreal, McGill Mss, CH23, S59, 2415, p. 80. See also Glover, Hearne, p. 213.

95Macdonnell, Chipewyan Indians, Montreal, McGill Mss, CH22, S58, No. 8.

96Glover, Hearne, pp. 98-108 and Vital Thomas, June Helm, "Tales from the Dogribs," The Beaver, Outfit 297 (Autumn 1966), p. 19. Also see ed. W. Kaye Lamb, Journals and Letters of Sir Alexander Mackenzie (Toronto: Macmillan, 1970), p. 153.

97Macdonnell, Chipewyan Indians, Montreal, McGill Mss, CH22, S58, No. 8. Hearne remarked that "murder is seldom heard of among Chipewyans." Glover, Hearne, p. 69.

98R. Glover, ed., Andrew Graham's Observations on Hudson's Bay, 1767-91 (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1969), p. 195. Also see Rich and Johnson, Isham's Observations, p. 312.

99R. McKenzie, Athabasca Indians, Montreal, McGill Mss, CH23, S59, 2355, No. 4, p. 13.

100W.F. Wentzel, The Forks of the Mackenzie River, 27 Mar. 1807, Masson, I, p. 86.

101Osgood, "Great Bear Lake Indians," p. 43. See G.

Keith in Masson, II, pp. 109 and 121.

1020sgood, "Great Bear Lake Indians," p. 44 and Richardson, p. 248.

1030sgood, "Great Bear Lake Indians," p. 44.

104Ibid., Richardson, p. 249 and Keith in Masson, II, pp. 109 and 121.

1050sgood, "Great Bear Lake Indians," p. 44.

106Ibid.

107Ibid., p. 45.

108Ibid.

109W.F. Wentzel, in Masson, I, p. 87.

110See R. McKenzie, Athabasca Indians, Montreal, McGill Mss, CH23, S59, 2352, p. 7.

1110sgood, "Great Bear Lake Indians," pp. 43-45 and A. Mackenzie, Great Bear Lake Journal, 16 June 1806, Montreal, McGill Mss, CH180, S162, No. no.

1120sgood, "Great Bear Lake Indians," pp. 43-44, Richardson, pp. 211 and 248 and Keith, in Masson, I, pp. 109 and 121.

113W.F. Wentzel, in Masson, I, p. 87.

114Macdonnell, Chipewyan Indians, Montreal, McGill Mss, CH22, S58, No. 5.

- 115 Osgood, "Great Bear Lake Indians," p. 64 and Frank Russell, Explorations in the Far North, Being a Report of an Expedition under the Auspices of the University of Iowa during the Years 1892, '93 and '94 (Iowa City: The University, 1898), p. 168.
- 116 Osgood, Kutchin Ethnography, pp. 40-41.
- 117 W.F. Wentzel in Masson, I, p. 79.
- 118 W.F. Wentzel, Letter to R. McKenzie, The Forks of the Mackenzie River, 27 Mar. 1807, in *ibid.*, p. 80.
- 119 Glover, Thompson's Narrative, pp. 105-06.
- 120 Osgood found among the Great Bear Lake Indians that while women bore the camp, men had seldom more than a rifle. "Great Bear Lake Indians," p. 49.
- 121 See Osgood, Kutchin Ethnography, p. 132, Richardson, p. 226 and Michael H. Mason, The Arctic Forests (London: Potter and Stoughton, 1924), p. 66.
- 122 G. Keith, Letter to R. McKenzie, Bear Lake Post, 19 Nov. 1812, in Masson, II, p. 106.
- 123 Glover, Hearne, p. 57.
- 124 *Ibid.*, p. 35.
- 125 Osgood, "Great Bear Lake Indians," p. 77 and Smith, pp. 38-39, 69-70.
- 126 Osgood, "Great Bear Lake Indians," p. 77. See also Sir George Back, Narrative of the Arctic Land Expedition to the mouth of the Great Fish River and along the Shores of the Arctic Ocean... (1836; rpt. Edmonton: Hurtig, 1970), p. 214; Petitot, Grand Lac des Ours, p. 378 and Russell, p. 163.

127 Osgood, "Great Bear Lake Indians," p. 78 and Petitot, Dene-Dinje, p. 32.

128 See Matonabee's comments to Hearne in Glover, Hearne, pp. 35 and 57.

129 Osgood, "Great Bear Lake Indians," p. 78; Keith in Masson, II, p. 107 and Richardson, p. 256.

130 "Polygamy is permitted amongst them, and is intended as a means of satiating their passions, and to serve convenience more than to propagate the species." G. Keith, Letter to R. McKenzie, Bear Lake Post, 19 Nov. 1812 in Masson, II, p. 107. See also Osgood, "Great Bear Lake Indians," p. 79, Kutchin Ethnography, p. 143 and Macdonnell, Athabasca Indians, Ottawa, PAC, MG19, C1, Vol. 52, p. 24.

131 W.F. Wentzel, Letter to R. McKenzie, The Forks of the Mackenzie River, 27 Mar. 1807, in Masson, I, p. 86.

132 Osgood, Kutchin Ethnography, p. 143.

133 W.F. Wentzel, in Masson, I, p. 86; G. Keith, *ibid.*, II, p. 69 and Osgood, "Great Bear Lake Indians," p. 79.

134 Marvin Harris, Cannibals and Kings (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), pp. 18-23, 59-60.

135 See Osgood, "Great Bear Lake Indians," p. 76; Keith in Masson, II, pp. 107, 119; Franklin, p. 64; Simpson, pp. 187, 202, 323; Lt. W.H. Hooper, Ten Months in the Tents of the Tuski, Etc (London: n.p., 1853), p. 319; Petitot; Grand Lac des Ours, p. 110; W.F. Wentzel in Masson, I, p. 86 and William L. Hardisty, "Notes on the Tinneh," p. 312.

136 Harris, pp. 55, 58, 59-60. "Both infanticide and warfare, as well as the sexual hierarchy that went with these scourges, were caused by the need to disperse populations and depress their rates of growth." *Ibid.*, p. 64.

137W.F. Wentzel, Letter to R. McKenzie, The Forks of the Mackenzie River, 27 Mar. 1807, in Masson, I, p. 86.

138B.R. Ross, "The Eastern Tinneh," in Hardisty, p. 305 as cited in Osgood, "Great Bear Lake Indians," p. 75.

139A.M. Clark, "Northern Athapaskan Prehistory" in Strangers of the North, p. 25.

140See Ibid., pp. 25-27, and J.F.V. Millar and G.J. Fedirchuk, Report on Investigations: Mackenzie River Archaeological Survey, Report of the Environmental-Social Committee, Northern Pipelines, Task Force on Northern Oil Development No. 74-77 (Ottawa: Information Canada, 1975), p. 33 for a review of the seasonal cycle of the eastern Athapaskans.

CHAPTER III

ADAPTATIONS TO EARLIEST FUR TRADE

The first Athapaskans to come into extended contact with the Europeans were those people commonly referred to by their Cree neighbours as Chipewyans.¹ Their territory encompassed an area from the mouth of the Churchill and followed a great arc around the treeline to the valley of the Coppermine. Chipewyan influence extended as far west as a line drawn south from the headwaters of the Thelon past the east end of Great Slave Lake to the northwest end of Lake Athabasca.² The culturally related but geographically distinct Yellowknives occupied the area from the east end of Great Slave Lake west to the mouth of the Yellowknife River and north to the eastern tip of Great Bear Lake.³ Chipewyan influence predominated over lands as far south as the northern tip of Reindeer Lake, east through Sandspit and the Seal River to the Coast. Access to the Coast for Chipewyans had been opened with the establishment of Prince of Wales' Fort in 1717. By 1721 the Eskimos had relocated north of the mouth of the Churchill. Chipewyans increasingly were acquiring European trade goods.⁴ The Cree, who historically occupied the middle and upper

Churchill⁵ were persuaded by Hudson's Bay Company men to allow the Chipewyans access to the mouth of the Churchill.⁶

By the 1720's the Chipewyans were making regular trading expeditions to Churchill,⁷ overcoming with extraordinary effort the distance and the resistance of the Cree to their admission to the post. By the mid 1720's several Chipewyans had taken wives from among the Cree in order to cement relationships.⁸ There was grudging acceptance by the Cree of the Chipewyan presence at the mouth of the Churchill yet war raged on against the Athapaskans inland.⁹ By 1760 the Athapaskans, very likely the Beaver bands¹⁰, had been driven from the height of land between the Churchill and the Athabasca Rivers. They were pressed over into the Athabasca drainage, in turn pushing back the Slavey, and possibly the Sekani and Dogrib peoples. Sometime in the early 1760's, due in part to counterattack by the Beaver Indians a shaky truce was made between Cree and Athapaskans at Peace Point on the Peace River.¹¹

The Chipewyan people at that time were oriented toward the patterns of the barren-ground caribou herds. The only exceptions were a few bands of Chipewyans who lived close to the Bayside post, ranging along the edge of the barren lands trapping areas northwest of the mouth of the Churchill River. Inland from the Coast more traditional patterns were followed. "Specific links between Chipewyan

territorial and band groupings and the migratory and nomadic habits of the caribou" can be made.¹² The Chipewyan Indians who later became known as Caribou-eaters had occupied the region between Hudson's Bay, west to the headwaters of Seal River, and north to the valleys of the Dubawnt, Kazan and the Thlew-a-dezza or Thelon Rivers. Archaeological surveys at Little, Shethanei, Egenwolf and Nueltin Lakes possibly indicate a related cultural occupation reaching back to A.D. 1000¹³. At the time of the first visit by a European, Samuel Hearne, as many as six hundred Indians were living seasonally on or near the Dubawnt Lakes, and another two hundred on the Kazan River.¹⁴ These people lived in the center of the range of the Kaminuriak Herd, and were close to the calving grounds of the Beverly Herd at Beverly Lake. Hearne also encountered a small band of Indians further west on the eastern edge of Great Slave Lake¹⁵ and another southeast of the lake. They probably hunted the Beverly Herd as it passed by a short distance to the east on its yearly migration.¹⁶

At the time of Hearne, several bands were encountered near or among the large herds of caribou at the east end of Lake Athabaska.¹⁷ These Chipewyans, who eventually were labelled by the North West Company men as "Les Montagnais" because they spent their winters in the hills north and east of Lake Athabasca, hunted caribou seasonally at pass-

ageways near the north end of Wollaston and Reindeer Lakes.¹⁸ They were excellent fishermen, particularly adept at taking the whitefish from Lake Athabasca and a variety of fish from the other waters in the area.¹⁹ This trait was important in the early years of the fur trade as these Chipewyans supplied fish in winter to the Europeans.

In the taiga tundra lands between Great Slave and Great Bear Lakes lived the Tatsanottine or Yellowknife bands. Though similar in dialect, appearance and customs, they were distinguishable from Chipewyans mainly by their separate territory. Their center of population was on the Yellowknife River, which was an excellent fishing place, close to the caribou hunting that seasonally took place near Point Lake. Other Yellowknife people congregated seasonally to hunt the caribou that moved past the east side of the Lockhart River. Caribou hunting in the passageway near Point Lake and Contwoyto Lake was shared with the Dogribs.²⁰ The Yellowknives, much more adept at living and travelling on the barrens than the Dogribs or the Bear Lake Indians to the north, ranged north across the barrens to the headwaters of the Bear Lake River - Copper-mine divide. Some of them hunted the Bluenose Herd which ranged into this region for calving²¹.

Seasonal congregations of Chipewyan people at caribou crossing places were an important means of social contact

and of facilitating trade with other peoples. For those immediately to the west of Hudson Bay, the upper Seal River, Nejanilini, Nueltin and Dubawnt lakes areas were favourite places.²² An excellent fishing place and caribou hunting ground made Dubawnt Lake especially attractive for Chipewyans.²³ Occasionally they "met with a party of Esquimaux at the confluence of the noble Thelew or Thelon River with Dubawnt."²⁴ At other times they met "with other Esquimaux at Yathkyed or White Snow Lake."²⁵ Dogs and sometimes soapstone were bartered in exchange for moccasins and snowshoes.²⁶ Considerable contact with the Eskimo occurred in prehistoric times in this region. "More than half of the culture elements of the Chipewyan (about 54%) are common to the Caribou Eskimo."²⁷ At a small unidentified lake near the northeast end of Lake Athabasca a permanent pound and canoe building place was located. As many as two hundred families congregated there.²⁸ "Depouillez" or back fat was traded, likely from the Peace and Athabasca Rivers, possibly moose hide and snowshoes as well.²⁹ Trade was conducted between Yellowknives, Chipewyans, Bear Lake Indians and occasionally the Eskimos on the headwaters of the Coppermine. Copper was the principal item of barter in exchange for flint from the Liard River area.³⁰ Another center for hunting and trade was on the Burnside River, east of the Coppermine.³¹ A major congregation point for

the fall caribou hunt was between Point and Contwoyto Lakes. Copper, moose hides and tools of various kinds were potential items of trade.³²

Chipewyan people were able to maintain familiarity with expansive areas, and contact with diverse and wide ranging band groups. This "can be explained in terms of the winter and summer ranges of the major herds of barren-ground caribou."³³ This contact resulted in far-reaching exogamous relationships which bound the disparate groups with affinal ties. By 1750 the majority of Chipewyan people were still living mainly along the edge of the barrens following the caribou. They hunted the migrating animals as they moved through the transitional zone about mid-June when winter range in the boreal forest was abandoned for the tundra where lichens flourished and spring calving occurred away from the flies of the forest.³⁴ Again in late August the caribou were intercepted as they moved back to the forest shelter. Thus centers of population were located within easy access of major caribou passageways.³⁵

Techniques for hunting and preservation of caribou meat were critical to Chipewyan survival. First mention of a process for making a specially prepared dry meat, a vital element in nineteenth century wilderness travel in north-west Canada, appeared to come from contact with Chipewyans.

Prepared by cutting into long thin strips, the "pemmican", was dried by the sun over a "cold" fire and pounded in mortars to a powder. Rendered fat was then poured over the powdered dry meat in a paunch and berries were often added for taste. In this form the meat would last a year or more. Pemmican was made in the northern regions during periods of low humidity. Rendered fat or depouillez, was a rare commodity in caribou country and thus in high demand.³⁶

Chipewyans made the principal part of their clothing from the caribou. The hides were taken in the early fall when nature was restoring the winter coat and there were no warble fly holes which riddle the skins in spring and early summer.³⁷

The Chipewyans were excellent fishermen and used their skills to augment their protein rations. David Thompson, writing of the late 1790's, observed that, "these people though subject to great vicissitudes yet suffer less from extreme hunger"³⁸ than their Cree neighbours. Thompson also noted that unlike the Cree who looked down upon fish as inferior the Chipewyans "prided themselves on being excellent anglers, and have made it their study; the great lakes of their country yield the finest fish, and when the Deer fail they readily take to angling, altho' it affords them no clothing."³⁹ Survival was dependent on access to

caribou for primary supplies of food and clothing, and to fish as a supplementary food source.

Ease of travel was also vital to Chipewyan survival. Arctic travel, as some Europeans were slow to recognize, could only be undertaken with relative ease in certain seasons of the year.⁴⁰ The most efficient way to move heavy packs over long distances by land was by sledge on the snow. But the severe cold, long periods of darkness and departure of the caribou into the forests reduced considerably the prime time for travel. The optimum period is from late March when the days begin to lengthen and warm, until early May, after which the warm sun turns what had been firmly packed snow into a sea of slush. It was in this spring period that the Chipewyans would undertake their lengthy treks with loaded sledges.⁴¹

After the establishment of Fort Churchill some of the Chipewyans began making regular trading expeditions down to the post. Those who came farthest began their journeys between Great Slave Lake and Lake Athabasca, passed along the height of land between the Black and Taltson Rivers, treked by the north end of Reindeer Lake, and then paralleled the Seal River system down to the Coast.⁴² This route roughly paralleled the migratory path of two major herds of barren-ground caribou - the Beverly Herd which wintered to the east of Lake Athabasca, and the Kaminuriak Herd which once

extended as far south as York Fort in winter and summered in the Dubawnt-Kazan-Baker Lake triangle.⁴³ This region also corresponded with the homeland of the Chipewyan peoples who came to be known as Caribou-eaters and Les Montagnais. When en route to trade, these Indians travelled almost entirely by land, synchronizing their east-west trips with seasonal migrations of the caribou and favourable snow conditions. These expeditions would continue and gradually increase until the late 1770's when European trading posts were established in the Athabasca and Mackenzie drainages.

The geography of the land through which the trading band ranged made it possible for them to travel east to west, rather than pursue their traditional pattern of following the north-south migrations of the caribou. To the north of a rough line drawn from the headwaters of the Taltson River to the height of land just north of the North Seal River, huge bodies of water blocked land travel. To the south of that line a passage east and west is apparent along the Churchill River. However, it was dominated by the Cree in the prehistoric and early contact periods,⁴⁴ as well as being blocked by many rapids, particularly on its lower reaches.⁴⁵ Even the Cree avoided it when possible for the Hayes-Nelson, or Burntwood route, which also lay in Cree-dominated territory.⁴⁶

In between the great northern water bodies and the

Churchill River is a height of land formed by a series of glacial moraines and glacial river deposits called eskers. These eskers angle to the northeast while forming an east to west height of land providing easy routes of travel, natural game trails, and viewpoints to reconnoitre the country. They are banded by clumps of birch, larch, black spruce and a few pines which are used for shelter, toolmaking and fuel.⁴⁷

The usual route for Chipewyans to come down to the coast was by land. Canoes were of little or no use. They were used in a few instances to cross a stream in freshet, or in cases where caribou were followed into a landlocked area. James Isham noted in the 1740's that "These Natives has not the conveniency of canoes, coming chiefly by land and making floats to cross the Creeks and Rivers."⁴⁸ Chipewyans were not only uneasy in a canoe but lived in a land poorly adapted to providing materials for canoe building. When the Cree appeared by canoe with their women and children "you depend upon their having few goods;"⁴⁹ whereas on Chipewyan land expeditions the women packed the great proportion of the furs which freed the men to provide food.

Women played a vital role in the trading journeys of the Chipewyan. Camp was broken and sledges with loads "weighing more than 150 lbs. [were hauled] through [the] ...snows."⁵⁰ The men and older boys ranged along the route

in search of food. Since the sledges were loaded with furs for trade, along with tent and poles they brought provisions only "sufficient to serve them a day or two."⁵¹ This contributed to the hardships of the journey when food was unavailable.

The life of women was much more arduous among the Chipewyans who traded with the Bay post than in other Athapaskan groups. Women, "well shap'd when young," were "for the most part short and thick" at maturity, and were chosen by the trading "captains" for their size and strength.⁵² The custom of trading or dealing in women became more pronounced among trading Chipewyans than among other Athapaskans. "To the strongest [went] the lovely prize."⁵³ Polygyny was deemed an honourable state for the Indian for only a great hunter was seen as able to provide such support; it was also a service "to the traders since it enables the Indian to prepare and bring greater quantity of provision, leather Etc. to the houses when he has only one it is all she can do to carry where with to supply himself and family".⁵⁴ The elevated value of women for the fur trade of the Chipewyan traders may have led to a decline in the practice of female infanticide. Women took on considerable importance as preparers of provisions, leather and as packers, and were desirable mates for the above mentioned skills and other traits which were sought by the

often inept traders.

Dogs, which were venerated by most Athapaskans,⁵⁵ and not generally used as beasts of burden were used in the carrying trade by the 1760's. With the growing importance of the carrying trade, dogs were employed to pull loaded travois made of tent poles, or were fitted out with packs. The traditional Indian dog, rather emaciated and physically resembling the coyote, was bred whenever possible with the Eskimo sled dogs.⁵⁶ It is presumed that with the growing exploitation of the dog by the trading bands increased breeding of Indian dogs with the wolf was experimented with. This more utilitarian use of the dog would last until establishment of European posts in the Athabasca Mackenzie region. Only the Chipewyans adopted dogs as carrying animals in this period.⁵⁷

For the Northern Indians who traded at Churchill many of the traditional means of livelihood were at least temporarily discarded. Flint, stone and antler were sometimes abandoned for iron tools. Trade muskets became auxiliary to the bow. European clothing replaced skins. These changes were in fact the cosmetic reflections of vital practices which were to affect their ability to survive.⁵⁸ The caribou hunt traditionally undertaken as a primary activity in season was reduced to secondary importance because of the imperatives of the lengthy trek.⁵⁹

Prehistoric movements had been timed in rhythm with the caribou migration, usually on a north to south basis; yearly excursions east and west rendered the hunts less successful. If weather was favourable and the caribou accurately located, food supplies were assured and a rapid trip realized. But the caribou were not always predictable. The Beverly or Kaminuriak Herds were sometimes missed.⁶⁰ Hundreds of miles then had to be traversed with nothing but ptarmigan or hare for food.

The post traders also were a factor in the changes affecting the trading band. The rewards at the end of the long journey were especially important for the leaders. Outfitted in European-style clothing and allowed access inside the fort, they were treated royally. "Trade at the Bayside posts soon developed the formal and public character of a great social occasion."⁶¹ First encounters involved an exchange of presents which included a dram and a ceremonial pipe.

The political organization of the Chipewyans was changed in accordance with the demands of European trade. In 1770 Hearne realized that the Indians were bestowing rank very astutely on one of their numbers in order to obtain an impressive reaction among the Europeans, thus obtaining greater remuneration. Fidler noticed at Lake Athabasca in 1791-92 that the North West Company was doling out

copious quantities of liquor to "chiefs" in order to lure in their "followers."⁶² Thomas Stayner stopped treating many of the Chipewyans as chiefs at Fort Churchill when he found there were more "chiefs" than "followers."⁶³ The trading people became particularly adept at exploiting the European predilection for rank. Upon returning to the wilderness it would appear that the Chipewyans reverted to indigenous practice. Leadership devolved to the elderly who were eloquent and had achieved widespread respect. In times of war or on the hunt individuals of competence arose to take leadership roles.⁶⁴ The strongest men, those who were good wrestlers, obtained the most sought-after women, those being the strong packers, talented clothes-makers, and camp providers.⁶⁵ Good hunters and warriors were respected and gained a following.

But only among the trading Indians did there develop a relatively consistent and respected leadership.⁶⁶ Matonabee was the most famous trading leader. Other Chipewyans who surfaced as a result of the trade in the period were Captain Keelshies, Oule-eye, Thlew-sa-nellie⁶⁷ the English Chief, or "Ageenah," Captain Mist-a-poose,⁶⁸ Black Meat, and Captain Too-Toose, a trading leader who was also known as a war chief of some reknown. Akaitcho was a Yellowknife trading chief well known at the North West Company posts.

In many other ways the Hudson's Bay Company was bent

to the ways of the Indian. Rules designed to protect the monopoly over trade and to inhibit relationships between Indian women and white traders were ineffective at best.⁶⁹ The ultimate compliment for Northern Indian peoples was to cement a partnership or bond by offering the favours of their wives, thus implying affinal ties. When the compliment was offered and rejected, it was interpreted as a gross insult.⁷⁰ Attempts to eliminate liquor from the trade also had little impact on the Chipewyans. They drank little though participated in the regale as an expression of friendship, a demonstration not only of a trade bond, but of a lasting alliance and commitment.⁷¹

Between 1717 and 1781 in the period of the northern middleman trade the Hudson's Bay Company was able to convince the Chipewyans to carry only a bare minimum of trade items. In the interior the "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."⁷² Distances were great for the trading band and items of marginal utility had no place in treks of up to seven hundred miles. Interior Chipewyans obtained all of their clothes from the caribou. Their main desire was for iron-edged tools. Liquor had little attraction for them,⁷³ again because of the requirements of such lengthy treks. For the

same reason decorative beads and trifles were not a major part of the trade:

always drest in Dee'r Skins, drink no manner of Spiritous Liquors, and barter their skin only for necessaries such as Ammunition, Iron and Cutlery wares, never purchasing much Cloth, Bead, or any other superfluous Articles.⁷⁴

Environmental limitation was the critical factor in shaping Chipewyan trading practice which "seldom traded any finery for such uses, but what they traffic for is chiefly necessary's for life, such as powder [and] shot guns."⁷⁵

The musket was not an essential tool for food hunting among the interior Indians. Of the many methods of obtaining their food supplies the caribou "surround" or pound was most important. Firearms were seldom used to dispatch the caribou trapped within the enclosure.⁷⁶ Bow and arrow, spears, and snares were more silent and less likely to stampede the caribou into breaking the pound, or excite them and ruin the meat by engorgement with blood.⁷⁷

Although iron was an important item of trade from the 1720's and was much sought after by interior people, it by itself did not give the trading "captain" a lever for gaining pre-eminence. The item which did was the musket. Traditional lack of deference accorded the Chipewyan trading leaders evolved into an attitude of grudging respect as power, in the form of the musket, became available to trade captains.⁷⁸

Muskets were used by both Cree and Chipewyan trading middlemen to extend their influence throughout the region of Western Athapaskans. Cree middlemen had prevented the Chipewyans from coming in to York Fort to trade throughout most of 1680-1717.⁷⁹ The Chipewyans in turn had ended trading journeys by the Dogribs and Yellowknives to Prince of Wales' Fort by 1725. The few Yellowknife Indians who did manage to gain access to the Bay fort to trade were plundered by the Chipewyans "soon after they left."⁸⁰ Others were killed en masse by those with arms.

Control over the trade in firearms gave the tribes first contacted and particularly those who arose to dominate it, unprecedented power in "general bullying of their defenceless Athapaskan neighbours."⁸¹ In addition to his own guide Matonabbee, Hearne mentions those Indians who were obviously happy to trade and act in the arduous role of carriers to the rest. It has been suggested that "a strong motive prompting Indian leaders to make these trading journeys between the forts on the coast and their fellow natives up country was vanity."⁸² By the early 1760's, after an agreement was made by the Chipewyan to transport furs and arms to the Athabasca Cree, the basis for treks became substantial as the trading band of Matonabbee assumed unprecedented influence among the Athapaskans.

Matonabbee was the most influential of the Chipewyan

leaders because of his unique relationship with the post traders, and of his domination of the carrying trade. Seen by Hearne and observed by later writers as a "remarkable Indian"⁸³ who had the capacity for "benevolence and universal humanity to all the human race,"⁸⁴ Matonabee was able to impress favourably Europeans and Indians alike because of the unparalleled power he commanded in the interior. Impressions of this powerful trader are mainly dependent on the not always balanced perception of Hearne. These compliments were in part a result of comparison to the personal treatment accorded him by his previous guides and in part as a result of the high level of respect Matonabee was able to command from the Athapaskan Indians. He was referred to as "the greatest man in the country."⁸⁵ It is significant that this most "humane" Indian in Hearne's eyes was also responsible for beating one of his "wives," or female packers, to death after she questioned his ability to provide for more than seven women.⁸⁶ He also attempted to murder the husband of a woman he wanted as one of his packers.⁸⁷ This behaviour occurred in a community which traditionally had disapproved of murder within one's own band.⁸⁸ He was able to silence demands of visiting Indians for the customary dram or tobacco regale in return for passage through their country.⁸⁹ In previous attempts to cross the barrens Hearne had been fortunate to escape with his

life, in great part due to the relative lack of influence of his guide. Matonabee was able to "dictate the course of the expedition, even to dictate [to Hearne] its conduct in some matters which were repugnant" to the trader.⁹⁰

The only people who were not intimidated by Matonabee were the Athabasca Cree. From their location on the south shore of Lake Athabasca and the Athabasca, Lesser Slave, Lac la Biche and Pembina River areas they travelled the lengthy journey to the coast either by the Churchill or by the Hayes River.⁹¹ With arms from the Hudson's Bay Company they had driven the Beaver Indians from the headwaters of the Athabasca, and had plundered and pressed the Slavey Indians from the Slave River to the south shore of Great Slave Lake onto the Mackenzie River.⁹² Through the efforts of the Hudson's Bay Company and the initiative of Matonabee, an agreement was reached whereby the Chipewyan traders would carry the Cree peltry overland to Churchill. In return the Cree would not wage war against the Chipewyans.⁹³ Crucial for the Cree in any such peace treaty or trade arrangement, and unique to the Chipewyan middlemen practice, was the continued access to arms. Because of fierce resistance Cree warring against the Beaver Indians ended at this time.⁹⁴ It may have also been at this time that the more passive Slavey and Sekani were separated from the closely affiliated Beaver. The Cree, however, would

continue to plunder the Slaveys on the Mackenzie River and the Sekani Indians whom they would reach via their "lake Indian road" from Lesser Slave Lake to the Peace River.⁹⁵

It was within this short period beginning with their treaty around 1763 and ending with Pond's arrival on the Athabasca in 1779 that the influence of the trading bands was greatest. Thus Hearne's observations while he was with Matonabee's trading band take on special significance regarding their routes and methods of travel, peoples contacted, means of food support and changes in their traditional practices.

For the Indians who regularly visited the Bayside posts, access to European goods led to the delusion of a higher standard of living. The exigencies of travelling vast distances increased the risks of missing the cyclical caribou migration and could lead to starvation.⁹⁶ Even when caribou were found, time was at a premium which could lead to increased difficulty to prepare adequate amounts of dry meat or pemmican. Trading Indians thus became more dependent on upcountry Indians and the Bay posts for food. Hearne described in the early 1770's how the Indians who remained inland lived much better than the trading middlemen.⁹⁷

During the period of the increasing influence over the lives of Chipewyans by middlemen, the harvest of saleable

fur animals was encouraged. The traditional Chipewyan land along the edge of the tundra was limited in its ability to support fur-bearing animals.⁹⁸ As the trade goods took on more importance, interior Chipewyans moved south and west into the full boreal forest where beaver, marten and lynx were common.⁹⁹ Somewhat later, after the smallpox epidemic of 1781-83 decimated the Athabasca Cree population, this movement for some took the form of a migration.¹⁰⁰ In the earlier period "what furs the Northern Natives brought was bears, cubs, wolves, wolverines, and about 150 martens with some cats and a small quantity of beaver."¹⁰¹ By 1774 trade at Churchill "amounted to 15,846 beaver pelts mainly the result of visits by large parties of 'Northern Indians' who came down to the post every two or three years."¹⁰² In 1776 when three hundred Chipewyans arrived from the Athabasca at Prince of Wales' Fort the reorientation of their trade was complete and had shifted to woodland animals.¹⁰³ An even greater return in beaver pelts was realized in 1777.

While Matonabbee was extending Chipewyan influence into the Athabasca beaver country, the wintering partners who would later join together to form the North West Company, opened trade with the Indians of the Athabasca on the portage between the Churchill and the Saskatchewan Rivers.¹⁰⁴ In 1770, William Pink, a Hudson's Bay Company trader, met some Beaver Indians who were going down the

Churchill to trade with the "pedlars" at Pine Island Lake portage.¹⁰⁵ By 1775 Moses Norton was aware that "our trade is also intercepted by the inland pedlars, who is making their encroachment more and more at the back of this place."¹⁰⁶ In order to prevent the Athabasca Cree from trading with the Hudson's Bay Company in 1774, Louis Primeau "and 17 others...were sent to intercept the... Athapus-cow Indians on their way to Prince of Wales' Fort which by account they did with success, so that few of that valuable tribe of Indians are gone down to Churchill this year."¹⁰⁷ Joseph Hansom, sent out to confirm the unnavigability of the lower Churchill, found that "it is surprising to think that any of the upland Indians comes down through such troubles when they are supplied in their own hunting grounds by the Canada Traders."¹⁰⁸ In 1775 Hearne reported to the Governor and Committee that "30 or 40" of the sixty canoes sent inland from Grand Portage were poised at Pine Island Lake portage "to intercept [sic] great part of the Inland Trade which would otherwise go to...that Valuable Tribe of Natives called the Athapus-cow Indians."¹⁰⁹ In 1776 the Assiniboine Indians, allies of the plains Cree were at war with the Beaver Indians, presumably to prevent direct trade with the pedlars, thus attempting to safeguard the role of the middlemen.¹¹⁰ Robert Longmoor was informed in 1776 that the greater part of the Athabasca

Cree would be trading with the pedlars at Pine Island.¹¹¹

Arrival of the pedlars on the portage between the Saskatchewan and the Churchill Rivers provoked a rapid decline in the trade of the middlemen to Prince of Wales' Fort just when it appeared to be reaching a zenith. By 1777 the trade had peaked at 12,682 made beaver¹¹² at Prince of Wales' Fort. In 1779 only thirty Indians accompanied Matonabee,¹¹³ and in 1780 there were fewer.¹¹⁴ As the Chipewyans moved south to hunt fur bearers and to trade with the pedlars at Cumberland House which had been established in 1774, the returns in "venison [caribou meat] is the scarcest...[Hearne] ever knew at Churchill only 250 lb. traded this winter."¹¹⁵ Overall trade at Prince of Wales' Fort was "much worse than last year."¹¹⁶ Matonabee's gang brought in a sizeable return in 1779, but Hearne suggested that "the pedlars have already intercepted and traded many of our Northern Indians." He added that "I now fear that Churchill will very shortly be reduced."¹¹⁷ Peter Pond had returned from wintering on the Athabasca River in 1779 and reported to William Walker at Cumberland House that he had traded "with the Northward Indians that Mr. Samuel Hearne was [with,] along with Mit'tee'na pew and his gang." Pond had traded "upwards of 8400 made Beaver. He had traded the Cloaths on his back the Indians are so distressed and eager for European Goods."¹¹⁸ Arrival of Pond on the Athabasca

hastened the decline of the carrying trade to Prince of Wales' Fort. By 1781 smallpox had finished the process.

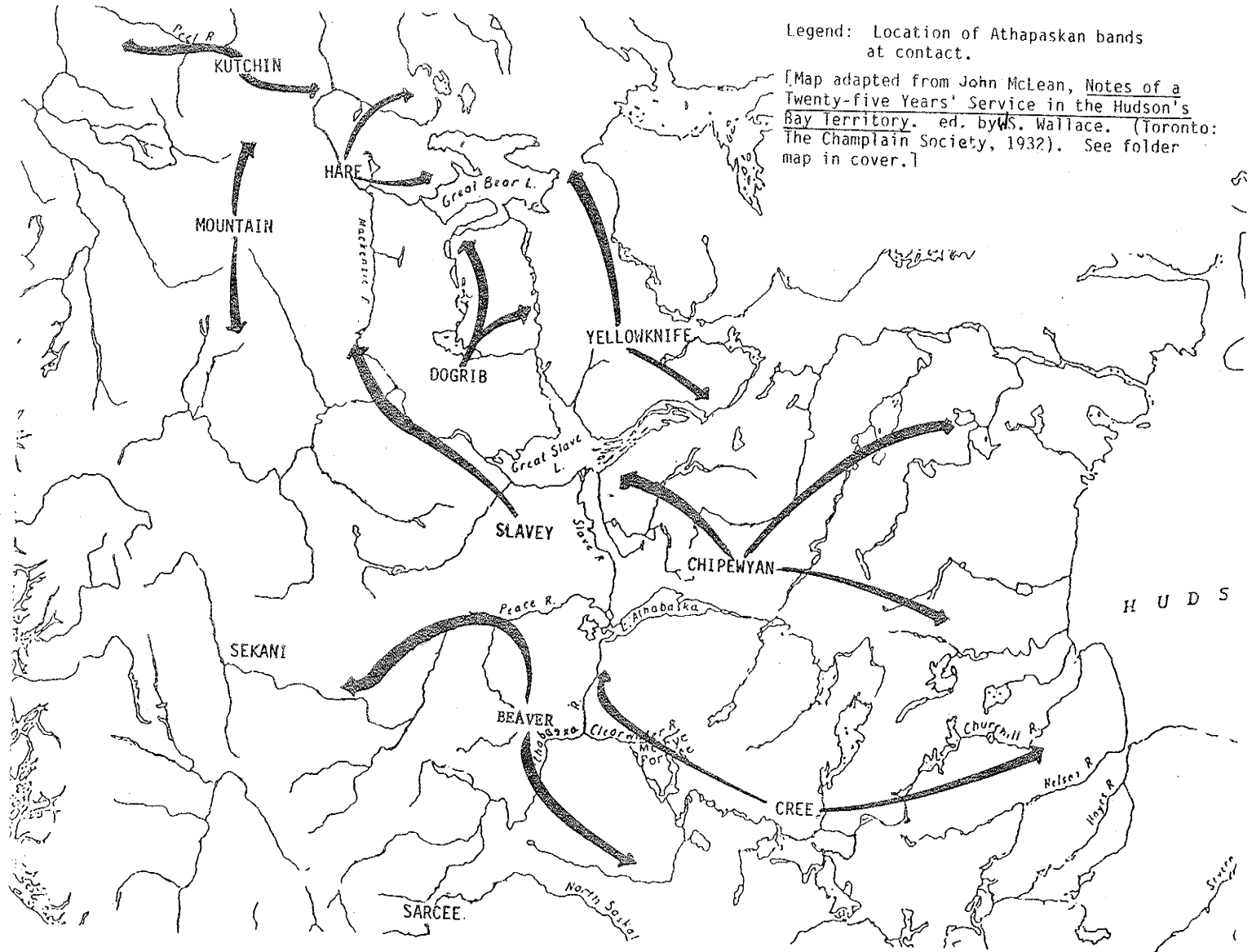
Matonabbee and most of the principle [sic] Northern Indians are all dead, together with that valuable tribe of Southern Indians [Cree] called the Athapascow Indians, for though they seldom of late have come to any of the company's forts themselves yet they procured the greatest part of the furs that the Northern Indians used formerly to bring to this place and for more than 10 years past, at least 7/8 of the whole trade.¹¹⁹

Traditionally Chipewyans had lived in a sensitive relationship with their environment; the central sustaining factor had been the barren-ground caribou. Seasonal movements of population were planned to coincide with the migratory patterns of the animals and the fish stocks which were a secondary food source for the Chipewyans. Aboriginal life was not one of unremitting toil and those people who lived on the barrens and followed a subsistence pattern of existence were relatively well off when compared to the people who trapped or traded for a living.¹²⁰

Chipewyans who traded to Churchill attempted to adapt their lengthy traverse across the barrens to their traditional caribou dependency. Sleds which were loaded with furs left little room for reserve food supplies. Lengthy east to west forays to the Coast reduced the likelihood of contacting the caribou. Metal-edged tools and European clothing tended to replace traditional ones. Traditional

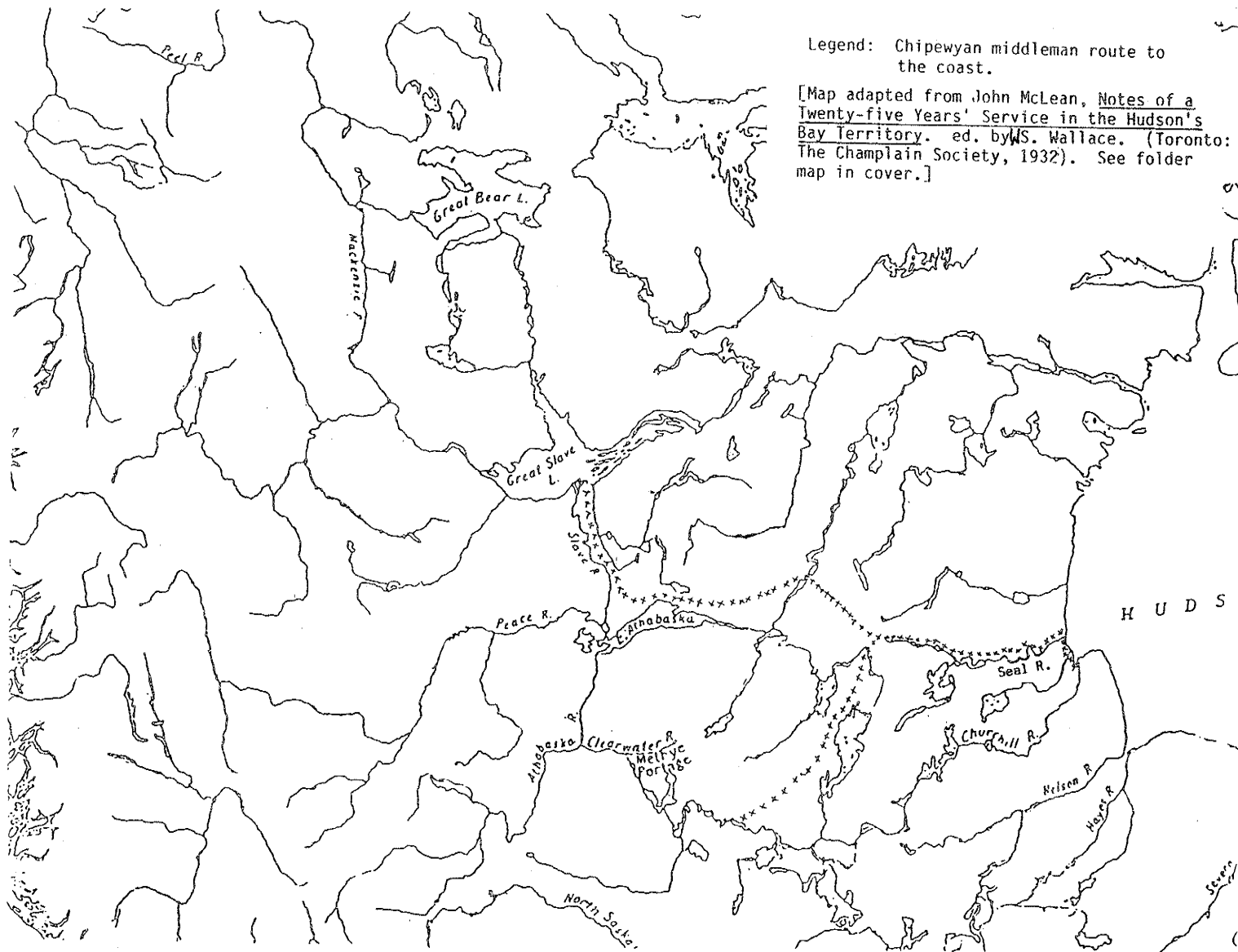
roles of women were expanded and trading captains employed a number of "wives" as packers which led to weakened family and social relationships. Traditional veneration for dogs was ignored and they were used for packing. Trading captains who had been only figureheads while at the Bay post were attracted by the powers to be realized by monopolizing and dominating interior Indians with their trade markets.¹²¹ Trading captains influenced changes in intertribal politics. This led to pressure exerted by interior Indians to restore the imbalance of power by seeking muskets.

The traditional Chipewyan lands along the edge of the tundra although bountiful in a subsistence economy¹²², were deficient in furs valued by that trade and some Chipewyans began a movement to the south and west toward the boreal forest where beaver, martin and lynx were common. After the arrival of the Montreal based pedlars on the middle Churchill in 1770, the establishment of Cumberland House by the Hudson's Bay Company in 1774, and the smallpox epidemic of 1781 and 1782 which obliterated the Athabasca Cree population, this movement became a migration. The eighteenth century Chipewyans, both trading bands and later the interior Indians had moved a considerable distance from the environment which they traditionally inhabited.¹²³ The move from a lifestyle in which their primary concern was following the food supply to one where the primary concern was trading in furs had begun.¹²⁴



Legend: Location of Athapaskan bands at contact.

[Map adapted from John McLean, *Notes of a Twenty-five Years' Service in the Hudson's Bay Territory*, ed. by W.S. Wallace. (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1932). See folder map in cover.]



Legend: Chipewyan middleman route to the coast.

[Map adapted from John McLean, Notes of a Twenty-five Years' Service in the Hudson's Bay Territory. ed. by S. Wallace. (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1932). See folder map in cover.]

III NOTES

¹"Chipewyan" was a Cree word meaning "pointed skins." See Diamond Jenness, The Indians of Canada (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1977), p. 385.

²One summary of archaeological investigations indicates that the western end of Lake Athabasca was a transitional zone, "with influences from the plains, the boreal forest, and the north." J.G.E. Smith, "The Ecological Basis of Chipewyan Socio-territorial Organization," Proceedings: Northern Athapaskan Conference, ed. A.M. Clark, Mercury Series, Canadian Ethnology Service Paper No. 27 (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1971), p. 396. J.C. Yerbury, "The Post-Contact Chipewyan: Trade Rivalries and Changing Territorial Boundaries," Ethnohistory, 23, No. 3 (Summer 1976), 251, asserts that "the area adjacent to Fort Chipewyan, including Lesser Slave Lake, Lake Athabasca, Slave River, Peace River, and the shores of Great Slave Lake, was originally the habitat of the Slave, Dogrib, and Hare." J.V. Wright's recent archaeological investigations of the Lake Athabasca area would seem to support Yerbury's contention that northern cultural influences predominated on the western end of the lake. See The Pre-History of Lake Athabasca, Mercury Series, Archaeological Survey of Canada Paper No. 29 (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1975).

³Beryl C. Gillespie, "An Ethnohistory of the Yellowknives," Contributions to Chipewyan Ethnology, ed. D.B. Carlisle, Mercury Series, Canadian Ethnology Service Paper No. 31 (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1975), p. 195.

⁴"So that a tract of land of more than three hundred miles extent from north to south was cleared." Joseph Robson, An Account of Six Years Residence in Hudson's Bay (1752; rpt. New York: Johnson Reprint Corp., 1965), pp.175-76. Eskimo had lived on the coast as far south as Churchill. R. Nash, "The Prehistory of Northern Manitoba," ed.

W. Hlady, *Ten Thousand Years* (Altona, Man.: Manitoba Historical Society, 1970), p. 90. The mouth of the Churchill River was known to the Chipewyans as Tzan-deze or Metal River, on account of the iron left there by the Munck expedition, 1619-20. R. Glover ed., David Thompson as Narrative (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1962), pp. 105 and 105n.

⁵"The Churchill drainage in late prehistoric times must be viewed as an area of Cree occupation, rather than as Chipecwan." J.G.E. Smith, "Preliminary Notes on the Rocky Cree of Reindeer Lake," Migration and Anthropology, American Ethnological Society (Ottawa: Univ. of Ottawa, 1970), p. 175. See also J.V. Wright, "Cree Culture History in the Southern Indian Lake Region," Contributions to Anthropology VII: Archaeology, Bulletin No. 232 (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1968).

⁶Approximately six thousand Indians were estimated to have been killed along the border between Cree and Chipecwan. The excessive killing prompted the Hudson's Bay Company to make several efforts to establish peaceful relations between the parties. York Factory, Winnipeg, Man., HBC Archives, B239/a/2, fo. 28 and B239/a/3, fo. 16d. See also J.B. Tyrrell, ed., Documents Relating to the Early History of Hudson Bay (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1934), pp. 265-66.

⁷The more distant Chipewyans came down to Prince of Wales' Fort to trade every two, or sometimes three years. The trip took "3 months" to go to Lake Athabasca under good circumstances. See John Macdonnell, *An Account of the Chipewyan Indians...*, Ottawa, PAC, MG19, C1, Vol. 52, p. 17. See n. 33, chap. II for note re authorship.

⁸Thomas McCliesh, Letter to Governor and Committee, Albany Fort, 16 July 1716, Letters from Hudson's Bay, 1703-40, ed. K.G. Davies (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1965), p. 75.

⁹Periodic plunder and murder of the Chipewyans occurred inland. In 1725 while at the Coast to trade, the families of the Chipewyans were killed. Richard Norton, Letter to Governor, PWF, 1725, in Davies, pp. 111-12. See also Anthony Beale, Letter to Governor, Churchill River, 26

July 1729, *ibid.*, p.139. War again occurred in 1738 which inhibited the Chipewyans. E.E. Rich and A.M. Johnson, eds., *James Isham's Observations and Notes, 1743-49* (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1949), p.5_n, and Arthur Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1974), pp.3-23.

¹⁰In 1770 the Beaver Indians were travelling from the Upper Churchill to Pine Island Lake on the portage to the Saskatchewan to trade. J.B. Tyrrell, ed., *Journals of Hearne and Turnor* (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1934), p. 11. Joseph Hanson saw a "House in the Great River [Churchill] where Indians passes from all parts of the Country." This fort on the Churchill River was frequented by Beavers, Crees, and Chipewyans, as well as Blackfeet. Joseph Hanson, Letter to Governor and Committee, PWF, 23 Aug. 1774, *ibid.*, pp.240_n-41_n. Beaver Indians were bordering the Piegan Blackfoot and arrived with them in 1776. Mathew Cocking, Letter to Governor, 13 May 1776, E.E. Rich and A.M. Johnson, eds., *Cumberland House Journal and Inland Journal, 1775-79*, I (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1951), p.45. War had occurred in that year between the Beaver and Cree/Assiniboine. *Ibid.*, p.46. They would not be mentioned as trading in either the post of the pedlars or the Bay men until after the establishment of a post in Athabasca River in 1779. W. Kaye Lamb, ed., *The Journals and Letters of Sir Alexander Mackenzie* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1970), p.125. See also Alexander Mackenzie, *Voyages from Montreal...to the Frozen and Pacific Oceans* (1801; rpt. Edmonton, Alta.: Hurtig, 1971), pp.lxxxii-lxxxiii, A.S. Morton, *A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71* (1939; rpt. Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1973), pp.11-12, and Yerbury, "Post-Contact Chipewyan," pp.251-52.

¹¹Richard Glover, ed., *Samuel Hearne: A Journey to the Northern Ocean...* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1958), pp.225-27. Also Morton, pp.294-95.

¹²J.G.E. Smith, *Ecological Basis*, p.396.

¹³"Numbers of them [Northern Indians] from all quarters used every summer to resort to these hills in search of copper of which they made hatchets, ice chissels, bayonets, knives, awls, arrowheads & c. The many paths that had been beaten by the Indians on these occasions, and which are yet, in many places, very perfect, especially on

dry ridges and hills is surprising..." Glover, Hearne, p. 113. W. Noble, "Archaeological Survey and Sequences in Central District of Mackenzie, N.W.T.," *Arctic Anthropology*, 8, No. 1 (1971), 102-35. Also Ronald Nash, "Archaeology in Northern Manitoba," *Hlady*, *passim*.

¹⁴Glover, Hearne, p. 23, and E.E. Rich, *The History of the Hudson's Bay Company, 1670-1870*, II (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1959), p. 51.

¹⁵Since the trading band of Matonabee did not know them (i.e., they were not linked by consanguineal ties), they were plundered. Glover, Hearne, pp. 176-78.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 175.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 177.

¹⁸See L.A. Prud'homme, Les Montagnais ou Tchippewayan (Montreal: *Revue Canadienne*, 1909), *passim*.

¹⁹Macdonnell, *Chipewyan Indians, Lake Athabasca*, Ottawa, PAC, MG19, C1, Vol. 52, p. 38. See also Glover, pp. 123-24, 128.

²⁰Gillespie, "Ethnohistory of the Yellowknives," pp. 201-02.

²¹Glover, Hearne, pp. 76-77. The characteristic ability of the Chipewyans and Yellowknives to live and roam on the barrens for extended periods distinguished them from the other Eastern Athapaskan bands.

Dialect was also an important distinguishing factor. Slavey-Dogribs-Hare spoke a similar dialect; Beaver; Sekani; and Sarcee spoke separate languages. The aforementioned also differed from the Chipewyan and Yellowknife. See Helm, Subarctic, pp. 79-81.

²²J.G.E. Smith, "Ecological Basis," p. 424.

²³J.G.E. Smith suggested Hearne spent the winter with six hundred Indians hunting near Nueltin. Since they had just moved northwest of Yathkyed Lake they were probably at or near Dubawnt Lake. Ibid.

²⁴Thomas Simpson's comments as cited in Kaj Birket-Smith, Contributions to Chipewyan Ethnology (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1930), pp. 35-36.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Ibid., p. 108. See also pp. 102-03.

²⁸Glover, Hearne, pp. 54, 62-63, 180.

²⁹J.G.E. Smith, "Ecological Basis," p. 425.

³⁰George Keith related that about a day's travel west of Fort Liard was "the Bis-kag-ha River or Sharp Edge River, not far distant from the Fort, and so called from the flint stones very common in that place, and which the inhabitants, the Na ha ne tribe, made use of as knives and axes." George Keith, Letter to Roderic McKenzie, Liard River, 7 Jan. 1807, L.F.R. Masson, Les Bourgeois de la Compagnie du Nord-Ouest, II (1889-90; rpt. New York: Antiquarian Press, 1960), p. 66.

³¹Glover, Hearne, pp. 85, 91.

³²Ibid., pp. 104, 113, 114, 131.

³³J.G.E. Smith, "Ecological Basis," p. 416.

³⁴John P. Kelsall, The Migratory Barren-Ground Caribou of Canada, Monograph No. 3 (Ottawa: Canadian Wildlife Service, 1968), p. 177. "During the second week of June,

the births in that week making up approximately three quarters of the entire calf crop." Ibid.

³⁵Caribou used well recognized migration routes. "Concentration points, mostly well known to natives and used in hunting, occur where unfrozen rivers or lakes divert the animals and funnel them to crossing points." Ibid., p. 114. Favourite areas for regular caribou travel are "high and lightly forested country" and "along tops of eskers and glacial ridges." Ibid., also pp. 106-07. See Birket-Smith, p. 29.

³⁶Peter Pond was the first European to make reference to this special form of dry meat; cited by Alexander Henry in "Memorandum on an Overland Route to the Pacific," to Joseph Banks, Montreal, 18 Oct. 1781, in L.J. Burpee, The Search for the Western Sea (Toronto: Macmillan, 1935), p. 592. See also A. Mackenzie, Voyages from Montreal through the Continent of North America (1801; rpt. Edmonton, Alta.: Hurtig, 1971), pp. cxxxi_n-cxxii_n, and Lamb, Mackenzie, p. 152_n.

³⁷It was estimated that 250 caribou per year were needed to feed a family of four and their dogs. See A.H. Lawrie, "Barren-Ground Caribou Survey," Canadian Wildlife Service Report, C873, 1948, cited in Kelsall, pp. 207-09, 211.

³⁸Glover, Thompson, p. 128. Also Lawrie in Kelsall, p. 209, and Birket-Smith, pp. 19-23, 26-28.

³⁹Glover, Thompson, p. 128.

⁴⁰McClintock is considered to be the first European to recognize and exploit in a systematic manner native knowledge of arctic travel. He developed a relay system which allowed his men to cover hundreds of miles on early spring snows, solve the riddle of the lost Franklin party, and travel to the north pole. See Francis McClintock, A Narrative of the Discovery of the Fate of Sir John Franklin and His Companions (1859; rpt. Edmonton: Hurtig, 1972), pp. 217-34, 278, 282-83.

⁴¹Glover suggests that the Chipewyans came in to trade at any time. Upon examination, this does not appear to be the case. Between 1725 and 1738, of the nine bands recorded as arriving at Churchill from the interior, seven arrived in spring or early summer and two in August. Since the journey from Lake Athabasca took a minimum of three months, this would place the major part of their journey in the early spring. See Glover in Davies, p. xxxvi. See also pp. 111, 117, 119, 155, 186, 201 and 249.

⁴²Thomas Stayner, FCPJ, 1 May 1794, Winnipeg, Man., HBC Archives, B42/a/119, fo. 19. "Those from the Athapiscow or thereabouts never can visit York for they are obliged for the sake of subsistence to keep to the North Side of Seal River and do not cross it until they come near the mouth of the River, from thence they have other two Rivers to cross and then walk along the bayside to this Factory." On 9 July 1794, Thomas Stayner while exploring the Seal River records: "Seal River was formerly known to the Sⁿ Indians and Athapescow Indians but the introduction of Canadians to their Country, the great havock made by the smallpox among the natives 12 years ago and the destruction of the old Factory occasioned the track to be forgotten." Ibid., 9 July 1794, fos. 27-28. Fidler also mentions meeting some Athapaskans who remembered passing above Lake Wollaston and down the Seal River to the mouth of the Churchill. Peter Fidler, Miscellaneous Papers Journal, 19 June 1807, Winnipeg, Man., HBC Archives, E3/5, fo. 16.

⁴³Kelsall, Map No. 22.

⁴⁴See n. 5.

⁴⁵"The Rivers & c. to and from Churchill are excessive and particularly this River occasioned by the number of Falls which is in it; which greatly obstructs the passage for Canoes: and are obliged to carry their Canoes over twenty carrying places and track them past the edges of several other Falls in this river." J. Hansom, Letter to Governor and Committee, PWF, 23 Aug. 1774, in Tyrrell, Hearne and Turnor, pp. 240_n-41_n.

⁴⁶Rich, Hudson's Bay Company II, pp. 418-19.

⁴⁷Mackenzie, Voyages through North America, p. lxxix and P. Turnor in Tyrrell, Hearne and Turner, pp. 477-78.

⁴⁸Rich and Johnson, Isham's Observations, p. 319.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 208.

⁵⁰John Macdonnell, An Account of the Athabasca Indians; Origin, Manners, & Customs, Montreal, McGill Mss., CH22, S58, No. 9. See n. 33, chap. II re authorship.

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Rich and Johnson, Isham's Observations, pp. 79-80.

⁵³Macdonnell, Athabasca Indians, Montreal, McGill Mss., CH22, S58, No. 7.

⁵⁴Macdonnell, Lake Athabasca, An Account of the Chipewyans in 1793. Ottawa, Public Archives of Canada, MG19, C1, Vol. 52, p. 24.

C. Osgood, "Ethnography of the Great Bear Lake Indians," Annual Report of National Museums of Canada, 1931, Bulletin No. 70 (Ottawa: Department of Mines, 1932), p. 83. See also E. Petitot, Exploration de la Region du Grand Lac des Ours (Paris: Tequi, Libraire Editeur, 1893), p. 405, and Glover, Hearne, pp. 219-20.

⁵⁵"The tents made use of by those Indians, both in Summer and Winter, are generally composed of deer-skins in the hair; and for convenience of carriage, are always made in small pieces, seldom exceeding five buckskins in one piece. These tents, as also their kettles, are always carried by dogs, which are trained to that service, and are very docile and tractable. Those dogs are of various sizes and colours, but all of the fox or wolf breed, with sharp noses, full brushy tails and sharp ears standing erect... These dogs are equally willing to haul in a sledge, but as few of the men will be at the trouble of making sledges for them, the poor women are obliged to content themselves with

lessening the bulk of their load, more than the weight by making the dogs carry these articles only, which are always lashed on their backs, much after the same manner as packs are, or used formerly to be, on pack horses." Samuel Hearne, A Journey from Prince of Wales' Fort in Hudson's Bay to the Northern Ocean (1795; rpt. New York: De Capo Press, 1968), pp. 322-23.

⁵⁶Birket-Smith noted that "very often the Chipewyan buy Eskimo dogs," p. 90.

⁵⁷In 1819 Franklin wrote that five years previously a "superstitious fanatic [among the Chipewyans] so strongly pressed upon their minds the impropriety of employing these animals, to which they were related, for purposes of labour, that they universally resolved against using them anymore, and, strange as it may seem destroyed them." Sir John Franklin, Narrative of a Journey to the Shores of the Polar Sea (1823; rpt. New York: Greenwood Press, 1969), p. 160. Anomalies still exist in the Athapaskan attitude to dogs. See June Helm, "The Lynx Point People," Bulletin No. 176 (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1961), p. 119. See also Joel Savishinsky, The Trail of the Hare (New York: Gordon and Breach, 1974), pp. 188-89.

⁵⁸Glover in Davies, pp. xxvi-xxvii.

⁵⁹Some Chipewyans became increasingly dependent on the posts for food supplies. See Malchom Ross, Lake Athabasca Journal, Winnipeg, Man., HBC Archives, B9/a/1, fos. 16 and 36. In 1738 the trading band brought food three hundred miles to feed the traders at Churchill. George Spurrell and Others, Letter to the Governor and Committee, PWF, 1 Aug. 1738, Davies, p. 248. By the time of Hearne the trading band regularly experienced hunger. Glover, Hearne, p. 190. Marshall Sahlins has demonstrated that in many instances hunters and gatherers worked less, with more leisure than those in more abundant and highly organized societies. See Stone Age Economics (Chicago: Aldine/Atherton, 1972), p. 14.

⁶⁰Ernest Burch Jr. suggests that the high level of mobility of the caribou made it humanly impossible to keep pace with the herds. While it was not impossible, the concern with carrying trade made it so. "The Caribou Wild

Reindeer as a Human Resource," American Antiquity, 37, No. 3 (1972), 339-68.

⁶¹E.E. Rich, "The Indian Traders," The Beaver, Outfit 301 (Winter 1970), 4-20. See also Rich, "Trade Habits, and Economic Motivation among the Indians of North America," Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science, 26 (1960), 50-51, and Abraham Rotstein, "Fur Trade and Empire," Diss., Univ. of Toronto, 1967, p. 2.

⁶²Fidler in Tyrrell, Hearne and Turnor, 3 May 1792, p. 453.

⁶³T. Stayner, FCPJ, 27 Apr. 1794, Winnipeg, Man., HBC Archives, B42/a/119, fo. 17.

⁶⁴The glamorized leadership of the individual trading captains was temporary at first. See Glover in Davies, pp. xxix-xxx and Fidler in Tyrrell, Hearne and Turnor, 1 Mar. 1792, p. 543. Morantz and Francis see the trading captains in Eastern James Bay as "a task oriented group which was grafted onto the existing and more traditional social system." Francis and Morantz, Partners in Furs, p. 45.

⁶⁵Osgood, "Great Bear Lake Indians," p. 78 and É. Petitot, Monographie des Diné-Dindjie (Paris: E. Leroux, 1876), p. 32, as cited in Osgood, "Great Bear Lake Indians," p.77-79. Also see Matonabee's comments to Hearne in Glover, Hearne, pp. 35 and 57.

⁶⁶Tyrrell, 2 Mar. 1792, Hearne and Turnor, p. 499.

⁶⁷See Glover, Hearne, pp.23, 76-7, 91-2, 175 and Tyrrell, 3 Feb. 1792, Hearne and Turner, p. 541.

⁶⁸Mar. 1792, *ibid.*, p. 449.

⁶⁹Rich, "Trade Habits," pp. 42-43, and Sylvia Van Kirk, Many Tender Ties (Winnipeg: Watson and Dwyer, 1980), pp. 37-73.

⁷⁰Van Kirk, pp. 78-79. Philip Turnor wrote in 1779 "the Masters of most of your Honors Inland settlements particularly those belonging to York Fort would labour under many difficulties was they not to keep a Woman as above half the Indians that came to the House would offer the Master their Wife the refusal of which would give great offence to both the man and his Wife though he was to make the Indian a present for his offer the Women would think her self slighted and if the Master was to accept the offer he would be expected to Cloath her and by keeping a Woman it makes one short ready answer (that he has a Woman of his own and she would be offe[nd]ed) and very few Indians make that offer when they know the Master keeps a Woman and those Women are useful as men upon the Journeys." Tyrrell, Hearne and Turnor, p. 593.

⁷¹Rotstein asserts that the trade was not a distant impersonal function as in Europe, but "a highly personal activity." Rotstein, "Fur Trade," p. 47. See also *ibid.*, pp. 2, 33.

⁷²Glover, Hearne, p. 51.

⁷³*Ibid.*, p. 75.

⁷⁴Andrew Graham, "Observations on Hudson's Bay," 1775, cited by Rich and Johnson, Isham's Observations, Appendix B, p. 312.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, p. 177.

⁷⁶Hunting within a surround mainly involved use of bows and arrows "if any gun-men attended on those occasions, they are always placed behind the other Indians, in order to pick up the deer that escape the bow-men." Glover, Hearne, p. 207. Hearne suggested that the trading Chipewyans were already losing their independence by a decline in their hunting skills. "They have so far lost the art of shooting with bows and arrows, that I never knew any of them who could take those weapons only, and kill either deer [caribou], moose, or buffalo, in the common, wandering, and promiscuous method of hunting." *Ibid.*

⁷⁷See Cornelius Osgood, Contributions to the Ethnography of the Kutchin, Yale University Publications in Anthropology, No. 14 (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1970), pp. 24-25, 36. A ready supply of arms did not immediately lead to an "orgy of destruction" as postulated by Peter Farb, Man's Rise to Civilization (New York: Dutton, 1968), pp. 82-83. Chipewyan technology and more importantly, sensitive proximity to their major food supply was the reason for greater success at the hunt in aboriginal times.

⁷⁸Hearne's journal reflects the unmatched power attained by Matonabbee who as a trading Indian, plundered several parties en route to the Copper Mine. At no time was he seriously challenged by either interior Indians or other trading "captains". Glover, Hearne, pp. 74, 79, 176.

⁷⁹See Davies, p. 1.

⁸⁰Hearne cites the incident of "Captain" Keelshies' plunder and abandonment of several Yellowknife Indians on an island where they were left to die. Glover, Hearne, pp. 116-18. See also R. Norton, Letter to Governor and Committee, PWF, 1725, in Davies, pp. 111-12. "Several attempts to induce Copper and Dogrib Indians to visit the Company's Fort...yet the Northern Indians have always plundered them of the whole soon after they left the Fort." Rich and Johnson, Isham's Observations, p. 115.

⁸¹June Helm et al, "The Contact History of the Subarctic Athapaskans," Proceedings: Northern Athapaskan Conference, ed. A.M. Clark, Mercury Series, Canadian Ethnology Service Paper No. 27 (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1971), p. 303.

⁸²Glover in Davies, p. xxviii.

⁸³Rich, Hudson's Bay Company, II, p. 53.

⁸⁴Ibid.

⁸⁵Glover, Hearne, p. 66

⁸⁶Ibid., p. 170 and Rich, Hudson's Bay Company, II, p. 53.

⁸⁷Glover, Hearne, p. 66.

⁸⁸See Lamb, Mackenzie, p. 154 and Macdonnell, Chipewyan Indians, Ottawa, PAC, MG19, C1, Vol. 52, fos. 35-36.

⁸⁹Glover, Hearne, p. 64.

⁹⁰Rich, Hudson's Bay Company, II, p. 53. Andrew Graham "honoured Matannappee the great Northern leader with a farewell salute of three-pounders, and Mr. Wills and myself conveyed him a little distance from the Fort." FCPJ, 29 June 1774, Winnipeg, Man., HBC Archives, B42/a/88, fo. 22d. In a few instances Matonabbee was challenged. These affronts were tolerated only in the light of traditional Chipewyan practice of wrestling competitions for possession of additional women. See Glover, Hearne, p. 71.

⁹¹R. Norton, Letter to Hearne, 5 May 1770, *ibid.*, p. 72.

⁹²Yerbury, "Post-Contact Chipewyan," p. 3. See also Lamb, Mackenzie, p. 174.

⁹³Glover, Hearne, pp. 225-27. To see the extent of influence by Matonabbee at Prince of Wales' Fort see Arthur Ray and Donald Freeman, Give Us Good Measure (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1978), pp. 199-200. Chipewyan trading leaders were apparently gaining a measure of respect in relation to the previously formidable Cree. Alexander Henry (the older) mentions that the "Rapid" Chief and the "Marten's" band ganged together to repel any threat from the Cree at Isle a la Crosse in the early 1770's. See Alexander Henry, Travels and Adventures in Canada and the Indian Territories between the years 1760 and 1766...ed. James Bain (1901; rpt. Edmonton: Hurtig, 1969, pp. 334-35.

⁹⁴Lamb, Mackenzie, pp. 249-53.

⁹⁵Ibid., pp. 249 and 279. Also see n. 10.

⁹⁶In 1738 Richard Norton commented on the trading people: "The whole trade is brought in by two or three bodies of Indians, and those are obliged to get their trade and be gone as soon as possible they can in order to provide food for themselves, they never bringing with them provisions than is sufficient to serve them a day or two." The caribou were few on the coast and particularly scarce in close proximity to the post. R. Norton, Letter to Governor and Committee, PWF, 17 Aug. 1738, in Davies, p. 255.

⁹⁷Glover, Hearne, p. 51.

⁹⁸Hearne observed however that marten, fox, otter, wolverine, and wolf could be had in Chipewyan country. Glover, Hearne, pp. 135-36.

⁹⁹Hearne met the Chipewyan leader Thlew-sa-nell-ie returning from a trading trip south and west of Lake Athabasca. Ibid., p. 175.

¹⁰⁰Beryl C. Gillespie, "Territorial Expansion of the Chipewyan in the 18th Century," Proceedings: Northern Athapaskan Conference, ed. A.M. Clark, Mercury Series, Canadian Ethnology Service Paper No. 27 (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1971), pp. 368-75.

¹⁰¹R. Norton, Letters to Governor and Committee, PWF, 6 Aug. 1728 [1727], in Davies, p. 120. Similar returns were obtained in 1733; see pp. 184 and 201.

¹⁰²Glyndwr Williams, ed., Andrew Graham's Observations on Hudson's Bay, 1767-91 (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1969), p. 348.

¹⁰³S. Hearne, Letter to Humphrey Marten, PWF, 30 Nov. 1776, Winnipeg, Man., HBC Archives, B42/a/94 and 26 Jan. 1777, *ibid.*

¹⁰⁴26 Jan. 1777, and 2 Aug. 1777, *ibid.*

- 105 Tyrrell, Hearne and Turnor, 28 May 1770, p. 11.
- 106 Moses Norton, Letter to A. Graham, Fort Churchill 1773 in Williams, p. 249_n and Winnipeg, Man., HBC Archives, A11/15, fo. 1.
- 107 Tyrrell, 5 Aug. 1774, Hearne and Turnor, p. 106.
- 108 S. Hearne, Letter to Governor and Committee, PWF, 23 Aug. 1774, *ibid.*, pp. 240_n-41_n.
- 109 23 June 1775, *ibid.*, p. 158.
- 110 M. Cocking in Rich and Johnson, CHJ, I, pp. 36 & 45.
- 111 R. Longmoor quoted by Cocking in *ibid.*, 2 July 1776, pp. 66-67.
- 112 S. Hearne, Letter to H. Marten, PWF, 2 Aug. 1777, Winnipeg, Man., HBC Archives, B42/a/94, n. fo.
- 113 10 July 1779, *ibid.*, B42/a/96, n. fo.
- 114 26 June 1780, *ibid.*, B42/a/97, n. fo.
- 115 S. Hearne, Letter to Governor, PWF, 18 Jan. 1778, Winnipeg, Man., HBC Archives, B42/a/23, fo. 4.
- 116 15 Aug. 1778, *ibid.*, fo. 11.
- 117 S. Hearne, Letter to H. Marten, 16 July 1779, *ibid.*, B42/b/23, fo. 4.
- 118 Rich and Johnson, CHJ, I, pp. 5-6. See Williams, p. 1.

119H. Marten, Remarks and Observations on the Inland Journals, York Factory, 4 Aug. 1780, Winnipeg, Man., HBC Archives, B239/a/78, n. fo.

120S. Hearne, Letter to H. Marten, PWF, 10 July 1779, Winnipeg, Man., HBC Archives, B42/a/96 and B42/a/97, n. fo.

121FCPJ, 2 May 1784, Winnipeg, Man., HBC Archives, B42/a/103, fo. 25.

122Calvin Martin, following up on the ideas of Marshall Sahlins (see n. 59), suggests that the idea of "primitive aboriginal technology" needs reassessment. He uses examples from E.S. Rogers' work The Quest for Food and Furs: The Mistassini Cree, 1953-54, Publications in Ethnology No. 5 (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1973), p. 80, to illustrate his point that traditional big game hunters were successful, hence had considerable leisure time. See Martin, Keepers of the Game (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1978), p. 13.

123Ray and Freeman show in their economic analysis of the fur trade of Hudson's Bay before 1763, how "the Company was seen as a valuable trading partner from the point of view of power politics because the Company was a reliable source of firearms and ammunition." See p. 41.

124Glover, Hearne, pp. 135-36.

CHAPTER IV

CONTACT AND DISLOCATION

Changes in the living patterns of the Indians in the Mackenzie Basin continued in the late 1770's with the arrival of the Europeans. As early as 1773 Joseph Frobisher, a trader from Montreal, had been intercepting Indians bound for Prince of Wales' Fort, near Frog Portage on the Churchill River. By the mid 1770's, other "pedlars" arrived to intercept the Indians of the Athabasca region "which by account they did with great success, so that few of that valuable tribe of Indians are gone down to Churchill this year".¹ In 1778, Peter Pond passed over the height of land from the Churchill River into Athabasca basin and cut further into the Hudson's Bay Company trade. The trading band of Chipewyans continued their treks to the Bay, but with reduced packs obtained mostly from the poorer fur-producing regions further down the river.

The arrival of Pond in 1778 and the Montreal traders who followed him into the Athabasca and Mackenzie Rivers brought about the most dramatic changes in the fur trade with the Indians of that region since the ar-

rival of the Chipewyans at Fort Churchill after 1717. Disease arrived with the Europeans and within three years smallpox devastated the Cree and Chipewyans, and led to the destruction of whole segments of their society, especially those in closest contact with the Europeans. As a result European traders were forced to pull back and reorganize their food supply and transportation systems, which led some Indian bands to relocate. Previously restricted European trade goods, particularly arms and ammunition, were made available to the Indians throughout the region which led to changes in tribal relations and hunting patterns. The yearly treks of the Chipewyan trading bands to the Bay were virtually ended. As the number of trading posts expanded, some bands adopted a more sedentary lifestyle in proximity to the posts both to control the trade to more distant peoples and to gain employment as provisioners.

As the North West Company expanded their trade northwest into the boreal forest the problem of food supply had become crucial. Previously in 1775, Pond and Alexander Henry the Elder with one hundred men and twenty canoes, forced to fish en route, took twenty-eight days to travel up Lake Winnipeg and just reached their wintering place before freeze-up.² In the next two years Thomas Frobisher, depending mainly on fish, was able to reach Ile-à-la-

Crosse but no further. Pond reached the Athabasca River only by working in concert with the Frobishers who gave him their extra winter supplies of food and equipment so that he would not have to return to Grand Portage.³ Thus freed to winter among the Indians of the Athabasca River, he discovered a key to the problem of food supply from the Athabasca Cree, who had probably acquired the method of making pemmican from the Beaver or Chipewyan. By the time Pond was able to arrive in Athabasca

the season...[was] advanced, it will be necessary to prepare for winter,...employ the natives to hunt, for the subsistence of the men which is mostly flesh, dry'd buffaloe meat, and mousedeer, it is not only the provisions for the winter season, but, for the course of next summer, must be provided which is dry'ed meat, pounded to a powder and mixed up with buffaloes grease, which, preserves it in the warm seasons here every information must be procured from the savages.⁴

From the time of the first arrival of the traders the Athabasca Cree were heavily involved in the provisioning trade.⁵ These Cree apparently did little trapping and when not provisioning reverted to a middleman role of charging tariffs on what other Indians brought to the fort. "The few Crees that are here have done little or nothing these three years. They are always in the same place close by the fort and they have ruined it."⁶

Some of the Cree had moved west from York Fort as middlemen in the trade since its establishment in the 1680's. By 1715-20 they had expanded from the muskrat

country into the boreal forest and had moved along the edge of the barrens in the northwest to the edge of the plains in the southwest. Between 1715 and the establishment of Prince of Wales' Fort the Cree plundered the furs and warred with the Chipewyans and other Athapaskans. After 1720 the Cree continued to move into the upper Churchill and by the 1750's were pressing on the edge of the Athabasca River. The Beaver Indians and possibly the Slave, prehistoric residents of the Athabasca area, were eventually driven north or were pillaged of their furs, women and children.⁷

By 1760 the Cree were also being pressed by the Chipewyan who moved slowly into the boreal forest region to trap and to gain access to the pedlars' posts. This would further displace the traditional inhabitants of the upper Churchill, the Beaver Indians, who had traded regularly with the Europeans as recently as the mid 1770's. After that time the Assiniboine and Cree periodically blocked their way over the Methye Portage to traders at Pine Island Lake. As late as May of 1770 a party of Beaver had left William Pink to go down the Churchill presumably to Prince of Wales' Fort.⁸ Robert Longmoor and Charles Isham wintered with Beaver and Piegan Indians at the headwaters of the Beaver River in Alberta in 1775-76.⁹

In the winter of 1776 the Beaver Indians were blocked from going to Cumberland House, probably as a result of war with the Assiniboine and possibly their allies, the Cree.¹⁰ It was in the decade of the 1770's that the Cree completed the displacement of the Beaver Indians and probably their close kin, the Slaves from the Athabasca River region. Cree expansion in the region had been partially checked by the peace treaty negotiated between the Chipewyan trading leader, Matonabee and the Cree. This freed the Cree from the lengthy journey via the Churchill and the Saskatchewan Rivers to Prince of Wales' Fort. It is apparent that the Beaver Indians were not allowed the liberty of crossing Cree land to the pedlars' post on the Churchill.¹¹

At the same time the Chipewyans desired access to the rich furs of the boreal region; after approximately 1766 they were able to infiltrate peacefully the land newly acquired from the Beaver Indians by the Cree. In turn the Cree had hesitated to venture beyond the Peace River probably as much due to the fierce actions of the Beaver Indians, with their newly acquired arms as to the peace established. Although the Chipewyan would later succeed the Cree and their prehistoric occupants, the Beaver, in many areas of the upper Churchill and the Athabasca after the smallpox epidemic of the early 1780's,¹² it would appear

that the precedent for Chipewyan movement south and west began earlier and gathered momentum with the equilibrium established in the mid 1760's to early 1770's.

From the time of the Peace, the Chipewyans regularly frequented the Cree camps where they obtained furs in return for a full complement of trade goods. Guns and ammunition which the Chipewyans denied to other Athapaskans were available to the Cree as part of the agreement. Light prime furs were traded since the distance overland dictated that only those of high value in relation to bulk be considered.

Some of the Cree continued to engage in frequent marauding and looting expeditions on their frontiers.¹³ The Cree of the Saskatchewan and upper Churchill Rivers moved over their trail from Lesser Slave Lake to the Peace River where the Sekani and Beaver were pillaged.¹⁴ Only where the trading partner was of sufficient strength was anything bordering on fair trade undertaken. This route was referred to as their "war road". Expeditions down the Slave River, over Great Slave Lake and down the Mackenzie River as far as Fort Norman were undertaken.¹⁵ These parties engaged and most often pillaged the Slave Indians, Dogribs, and possibly a few Yellowknives or Beaver Indians of the Liard River.

The nature of the fur trade in the Athabasca Macken-

zie region had been greatly altered by a series of events in the first two years of the 1780's. A post on the Saskatchewan-Churchill River portage built in 1770 by the pedlars, several of whom were soon to form the North West Company, established a beachhead in the area. Incursion by the pedlars from Montreal seriously reduced the numbers and quality of furs available from the northern trading bands to the middleman Chipewyans. This induced the Hudson's Bay Company to counter the pedlars by establishing their own post at Cumberland House in 1774 on the Rat River near Pine Island Lake, which drew the Chipewyans from the upper Churchill around Ile-à-la-Crosse and from the Reindeer Lake area.¹⁶ The presence of these posts as well as one on Maligne River south of the outlet of Reindeer Lake precipitated the change in the Chipewyan role from middleman to trapper which in turn secured their dependence upon European trade goods.

No Athapaskans were more adept than Chipewyans¹⁷ at adjusting to their changing world. For a very few, the end of their role as trading middlemen was disruptive and they were unable to adapt to the new tools and techniques. But for others, the shift to mainly a trapping existence came relatively easily. Some of them moved south and west,¹⁸ increasingly occupying the boreal forest lands near the newly built posts and spent less time following

their prehistoric and major provider, the caribou.

The Chipewyans trapped on the tributaries of the upper Churchill as far south as the Beaver River draining present-day northern Alberta, which drew them miles away from the caribou. Only lengthy trips to the caribou wintering grounds around Reindeer Lake allowed them to obtain supplies of meat. This resulted in caribou being replaced as a source of clothing by European duffle. Tools which were fashioned from caribou horn or bone were also gradually supplanted. In the early years after this migration began the supplies of woodland caribou, moose, elk, and buffalo encountered in the parkland country were bountiful. But the Chipewyans were not traditional hunters of these large mammals. They were not able to adapt their expertise in the use of the snare and caribou pound to these animals. They possessed guns but in general the Chipewyans were not effective in their use.¹⁹ Animals of the newly adopted regions when procured did provide for nutritional wants. As the stocks of large mammals declined, fish were obtained in quantity.

Another in the series of events altering the shape of the fur trade and the nature of the Indians' living patterns occurred between 1781 and 1784. Along with guns, ammunition, and small trinkets came an unseen passenger - the European communicable disease. The most devastating

one was smallpox but others such as measles took their toll. Most of the Cree were killed by smallpox and although Chipewyans in contact with the posts were severely reduced, many more from the Athabasca-Black Lake area were unaffected and moved south to trap in Cree lands.

A few traders witnessed the smallpox epidemic but the main accounts are provided by the Indians²⁰ and almost all are secondhand. The smallpox apparently passed north to the Cree and then was contacted by the Chipewyans.²¹ Hearne's estimate of ninety percent of the population being struck down has been assessed as too high.²² No Athapaskan groups are believed to have disappeared as a result, and considering that the Chipewyan population was conspicuous and dynamic in the ensuing period, it would seem that Hearne's estimates were based on observation of its effects on particular groups. One such group²³ had lived north and east of Lake Athabasca and had moved south in 1778-81. Since the disease would strike them first and next be spread to the Indians of the Lake Athabasca region, the effect on these people was relatively severe. The estimate by David Thompson that one-half of the Cree population died in the epidemic, may be a fair judgement of its effects on the trading band of Chipewyan, though it is unlikely that more than one third of all Chipewyans died in the epidemic.²⁴

It has been pointed out by Beryl Gillespie that the disease as it extended to the Mackenzie region was largely contained within the Cree and Chipewyan population.²⁵ The "obvious, primary reason is that the Cree and Chipewyan were in far greater contact with traders and trading posts and, therefore, their losses were reported and visible."²⁶ She further points out "trading posts were localization spots [congregation points] for Indians which increased the likelihood of their acquiring contagious diseases."²⁷ By 1780, due to the power politics of the fur trade no other Athapaskan group came to the posts to trade. News of the disease would heighten that avoidance. In fact the Yellowknives harried often by the Chipewyans to this time, begin to gain ground after the smallpox epidemic, eventually to become important middlemen in the fur trade.

The North West Company attempted to slow the spread of the disease by isolating the infected and provided food for the starving survivors. This may have been successful. After the disease had first swept by Cumberland House an HBC servant noted that

five men and three women arrived from the northland with furs and provisions to trade, these inform that they have heard nothing of the disorder that is raging in this quarter for which reason. I had a tent pitched in the yard to keep them from six invalids. Women and children that has got over the smallpox now laying on the plantation Starving.²⁸

Despite precautions, the smallpox apparently victimized the older male population much more than the younger men

or the women and children. David Thompson observed that "more men died in proportion than women and children."²⁹ William Walker remarked of the northern plains that, "the most part that has recovered is women and children these are still more wretched, they being all women but one, and he is very bad,"³⁰ William Tomison replied that at Cumberland House there was "hardly an Indian man alive."³¹ Because of the division of labour in the native society women were ill-equipped to take over the role of hunters. As a result, in extreme instances at Fort Churchill "6 or 7 men were left to provide for upwards of 30 women and children."³² It was also at Churchill that "some of the Indian women came to the house for a little oatmeal and ammunition for the support of themselves and families."³³ One result of the additional burden on the male hunters³⁴ was that in ensuing years the fur companies were unwilling to hire them.

Though they were formerly employed as Goose Hunters but there [sic] families at present are so great that it will be impossible for me to employ many of them on that service tho they came here on that view.³⁵

The natives on the northern plains had exacerbated the problems of food supply by burning the plains in the fall to drive the buffalo from the trading posts. This increased their value as hunters but had, ironically, lessened their chances of survival.³⁶ Weakened by illness,

others were unable to travel the extra distance to hunt the game.

The low morale also contributed to widespread starvation. William Walker suggested that this was true of the Assiniboines, but it was equally true of the Chipewyans: "they fancy themselves ailing and so have no heart to hunt anything."³⁷ Mitchell Oman in a back-handed compliment to the Indians' dexterity at the hunt documents the poor success. "They say there is no beasts about, but that's false, for I know when us Englishmen can murder a Chance One, if they was to hunt with dexterity, they might keep themselves and us too."³⁸

Some fur traders who observed widespread starvation in this period attributed it to a decline in the game resources. David Thompson comments on how the wolves became diseased by feeding on human remains. He also remarks on the extent of the decline in animals of all species including the caribou, a condition which appeared to last for a number of years.³⁹ But the Europeans with only a few exceptions were not noted for their hunting abilities. Neither did they have the experience nor inclination to accurately measure the game resources. With the exception of the example of the wolves which were obviously diseased, there appears to be no biological reason for passage of the disease to large game. Far more likely an ex-

planation for the starvation was that most of the male population including many excellent hunters had died. The dearth of hunters placed great responsibility on the few remaining able men to reconnoitre as well as to supply food for the many.

The smallpox epidemic of 1781-84 drastically affected the Cree Indians of the Athabasca country which opened the way for Chipewyan penetration of Cree land in following years⁴⁰ as William McGillivray observed in 1809.

The countries thro which it [Churchill] runs from the head of the Beaver River and including all its other head branches to its mouth, are inhabited by the Knisteneaux [Cree]...Within these thirty years however, the Chipewyan tribes have immigrated in considerable numbers from Athabasca and the barren land...to the banks of the Missinippi [Churchill River], finding the country more suited to their purposes....It is not so easy to ascertain the number of this tribe who reside on the banks of the Missinippi as they are continually changing their ground between this and their own country.⁴¹

Pond's map of 1785 based on his experiences at Pond's Post 1778-84 indicates that the Chipewyan were well north of Lake Athabasca.⁴² His map shows Chipewyans north and east of Lake Athabasca while Philip Turnor's map of 1790 shows them having moved to the south and east of that lake. A map by David Thompson which Arrowsmith incorporated into the map of 1795 shows the Chipewyan as having extended to the west of Lake Athabasca on the Peace River, and south to the Ile-à-la-Crosse area.⁴³ Gillespie contends that

"the depopulation of this area probably made Chipewyan movement southward easier and faster."⁴⁴

The Cree of the upper Churchill and the Athabasca River region had been regular visitors to the trading posts. Consequently almost all had been exposed to the disease. The most extreme estimates of mortality would thus apply mainly to the Cree who were reduced to a shadow of their former strength. The remaining few congregated around Pond's Old Establishment on the south edge of the Athabasca delta exacted a middleman price from any Indians who ventured to that post. This eventually forced the North West Company to relocate,⁴⁵ first onto the south shore of Lake Athabasca, and then to the north shore in a strategic spot close to the extant tribal boundaries between Chipewyan, Beaver, Slave and Cree Indians. After 1784, the few Cree remaining were mainly employed as trappers or provisioners. The Athabasca River and particularly the Peace River areas dominated mainly by Beaver Indians were the main sources of dry meat and pemmican which was used to fuel the fur brigades and supply the posts. This food trade was carried on at Ile-à-la-Crosse and increasingly towards the end of the 1780's at Fort Chipewyan on the north shore of Lake Athabasca.⁴⁶

There is little doubt that those people in sustained contact with Europeans had been highly dependent on that

relationship and therefore suffered tremendous hardship when contact was disrupted. The French, by capturing Prince of Wales' Fort contributed to this trauma and were informed by the captives Hearne and Marten and by the Indians themselves that the latter "were utterly dependent on their annual trade with the Europeans. It had become an absolute necessity to them, they had lost the art of hunting with bow and arrow."⁴⁷ This may have been in part rhetorical and designed to spur aid for the Indians but the French leaders Lapérouse and the Marquis de la Jaille appreciated and were concerned about the negative impact their raid would have. "At York Fort the French left a cache of lead and of powder just outside the post to help the Indians through their troubles."⁴⁸ An English captain en route to Churchill was informed by Hearne with permission of the French, that he should give powder and shot to the Churchill Indians, thus allowing them to hunt their way.⁴⁹

The Indians who had frequented Churchill and York Factory as well as the upper Churchill River posts and who were dependent on Europeans for most necessities, were drastically affected by the smallpox epidemic. Arrival of the Europeans with trade goods in more variety and volume than ever before had given sustained access to a number of new bands. The advantage of this contact had mixed bless-

ings as the Europeans appeared to be the vehicle for the transport of the virulent smallpox into the region. Smallpox struck and reduced with unrelenting severity the natives who traded at European posts. Reduction of the older population, consequently the decline of certain ceremonial practices, as well as disruption of affairs of state and trade have been mentioned elsewhere as due in part to smallpox epidemics.⁵⁰

The suggestion by Calvin Martin that the ravages of devastating epidemics such as that of 1781-83 was responsible for a re-evaluation of their relationship with nature does not appear to be a factor with the Indians of the Athabasca.⁵¹ By the mid 1700's many Cree were primarily involved with trading concerns either as middlemen or provisioners.⁵² Many Chipewyans between 1717 and 1750 were also drawn into fur trading, directly as in the case of the trading band, or indirectly, by an increased concern with hunting fur bearers in order to obtain the new tools made available by trade. No epidemics of significance are on record as having occurred in this late pre-historic or early historic period. At the same time both the Cree and Chipewyan displayed little reserve in plundering their own or associated bands, or in stripping marketable fur resources from the Bayside. The Cree and their allies the Assiniboine shortly moved into the plains

away from the Bay, and into the Athabasca River country.⁵³ Chipewyans moved south and west into fur country to trade, sometimes to plunder and generally to exploit the richer fur lands.⁵⁴ The extent and intensity of their quest for furs changed little after the subsidence of the vicious epidemics.

It is apparent that the epidemic devastated the male population of the hunting Indians close to the forts and also the older males of the trading band. But since these people were by then in closest contact, the epidemic may have temporarily slowed the process of change. More conservative Indians, often subjugated by those who had access to trade and especially to a supply of guns, may have surfaced once again in positions of influence. With the exception of movement to the south and west which accelerated after the epidemic,⁵⁵ the disease, rather than devastating traditional beliefs and thus speeding change, may, at least in the short term, have had the opposite effect.

Much has been said, deservedly so, of the drastic impact of the smallpox epidemic of 1781, but it is apparent that at least the Northern Athapaskans in direct contact with Europeans periodically were ill from shortly before this time through the period under study. A Chipewyan trading leader, Idosliazer, and twenty-five of his people died in October 1768.⁵⁶ By January, of 1768, thirty were

dead and many more were sick.⁵⁷ In the spring of 1769 Churchill post was supporting some ninety-one Chipewyans⁵⁸ and a year later many were still sickly.⁵⁹ In 1792 the Chipewyans were found destroying their property in lamentation of the many dead among them.⁶⁰ Influenza broke out in 1798⁶¹ and again in 1800 disease struck.⁶² In 1807 at the Forks of the Liard, "disease rage[d] with astonishing fury among them - of which several die[d]." ⁶³ A year later many Beaver hunters died.⁶⁴ In 1810 "not less than 8 of...[the] best hunters" died during the winter of disease.⁶⁵ Another smallpox epidemic struck the Beaver and Chipewyan in 1820.⁶⁶

The disruption which the smallpox caused to Indians in the early 1780's had unsettling effects on the fur traders as well. The pedlars led by Pond into the Athabasca region at Old Establishment had moved little beyond there by 1785. Indeed through most of that seven year period they barely averted starvation. Implementation of the knowledge that Pond had accumulated about overcoming the problems of provisioning had to be postponed because of the smallpox epidemic and the dislocation in its aftermath. The Cree Indians, who prior to the epidemic had been dominant over all neighbouring Indian people except possibly Matonabee's trading band congregated around Old Establishment and extracted a middle man share from all

Indian trade. The Beaver of the Peace and Liard drainages, the Yellowknives, the Slaves and the Dogribs of the lower Mackenzie all avoided the trek to the Old Establishment and avoided the risk of being pillaged.

The English at the mouth of the Churchill were also in difficulty in the early 1780's. The increased share of fur returns taken by the pedlars in the previous ten years was suddenly rendered insignificant when the French captured Prince of Wales' Fort in 1782.⁶⁷ The smallpox finished what the French had begun and the returns from the Athabasca were virtually nonexistent until 1785.⁶⁸ By that time the Canadians had returned to the Athabasca and the Indians traditionally tied to Churchill were trading many of their prime furs to the pedlars.⁶⁹ Provisioning was also a problem,⁷⁰ in considerable part due to the scarcity of good hunters, but also due to the apparent scarcity of caribou in proximity to the trading post.⁷¹ The Indians were still experiencing hardships in 1787.

Several of the Northern Indian goose hunters came to the Factory with their guns and feather bags as no geese are to be got and their wives and children half starving.⁷²

But by that summer the northern trading Indians in considerable numbers began to renew contact with Churchill.

Four Northern Indian men and their wives came to the Factory with a few furs. Traded with them and give them some presents to carry to some principal leaders of the Northern Indians who are now begining [sic] to dran [drain] out

from the Athapuscow Country in order to renew their trade with this Factory.⁷³

The spring of 1788 saw the beginning of a return to the "prosperity" that had not been evident since the late 1770's.⁷⁴ It was observed at Fort Churchill that the Chipewyans were very prompt at paying the accumulated debts when beaver were available.⁷⁵ Some of the Indians who arrived had not been in to Churchill for five years.⁷⁶ At Fort Chipewyan however, the "English Chief" was attempting to endear himself to the North West Company by promising that he would "stop all his people from going to Churchill."⁷⁷

Peter Pond enroute from the Athabasca in 1786 communicated to the young Alexander Mackenzie the principal message he intended to relay to the partners. He believed the posts should be placed away from any particular band influence, within access to adequate food supplies. He informed Mackenzie that at a post on the Peace River established by Charles Boyer in 1786 an abundance of bison in spring and fall had been followed by scarcity as the animals moved into the woodlands during extremes of weather. By mid-winter the Canadians who were unwilling to eat fish except in emergencies faced starvation when the fish proved impossible to catch. Pond then ordered the post temporarily closed and sent Boyer and A.N. McLeod up the Peace River to locate meat and organize food supplies

for winter reserve and summer brigades. He then attempted to encourage as provisioners⁷⁸ some strategically located Indian people particularly the Cree on the Athabasca⁷⁹ and the Beaver Indians on the Peace River. Buffalo and moose were particularly plentiful in both areas as well as considerable numbers of elk in the Peace area. Pond recommended that meat be dried and pounded into pemmican in the fall, both to serve as a winter food supply and for the summer voyage to Grand Portage.

Despite heeding his advice the brigade of 1787 was unable to reach the Athabasca.⁸⁰ The post established in 1786 by Laurent Leroux was abandoned temporarily.⁸¹ Pond also recommended that the Old Establishment be abandoned and a new post be established on the south shore of Lake Athabasca near to Cree, Chipewyan and Beaver Indian lands to prevent domination of the trade by any one band.⁸² The Cree were preventing Beaver, Slavey and Chipewyans from coming into the post and trading directly with Pond's men. Similar problems were encountered at Great Slave Lake where the Chipewyans were dominating all Indians who came to trade.⁸³

As Pond began to succeed in solving the problem of food supply and attempted to reduce the middleman restriction on trade, trapping activity expanded once more. Reports indicated Chipewyans were moving from their tradi-

tional lands along the edge of the barrens and had surrounded Ile-à-la-Crosse so that other bands were discouraged from trading.⁸⁴ The post at Big Island near the outlet of the Mackenzie River from Great Slave Lake was attracting Chipewyans. Beaver Indians brought in much fur - as much as two thirds of all the goods at the Athabasca post.⁸⁵ Chipewyans were also still going down to the Bay, probably from the region between Reindeer Lake and the Seal River drainage. The North West Company was disappointed that it was unable to attract these people to Fort Chipewyan.⁸⁶ In an attempt to entice their trade the North West Company built the Rat River post up the Maligne River at the south end of Reindeer Lake. This post was expected to draw the Chipewyans (Caribou-eaters) south and wean them away from their treks to the Hudson's Bay Company post at Churchill, but it was unsuccessful. William McGillivray related in 1789 that

About one half had been to Hudsons Bay in the summer and took credits there which, I am afraid they will wish to go and pay in the spring. However if they do, it will [not be] because I could not help it, as I shall use promises and menaces if first fail to deter them from their purpose. I have seen 40 men of different ages including 3 Chipewyans/one of whom is the Chief who wanted the canoes to Lac du Caribou last spring at the Riviere Maligne.⁸⁷

In all of the foregoing attempts to garner the bulk of the trade the essential Indians were the Chipewyans.

In the aftermath of the smallpox epidemic's devastation of their trading partners, the Cree, the pedlars appeared to be establishing posts to reflect the reality of a new Chipewyan predominance. The Old Establishment was abandoned in favour of Slave Lake Fort and Fort Chipewyan on the south shore of Lake Athabasca; Fort Resolution was established on the mouth of the Slave River at the northern edge of Chipewyan lands. Another move of Fort Chipewyan to the north shore of Lake Athabasca further into Chipewyan influence was contemplated. A Chipewyan, the "English Chief," was cultivated to lead the Yellowknives since they indicated a considerable inclination to act as carriers.⁸⁸ He was also sent to the north arm of Great Slave Lake to take trade from the Yellowknives, and the Dogribs.

Powerfully seated after reorganization of their Athabasca operation and not yet faced with opposition, the pedlars were still suffering in their relations with the Indians from the precedents established by Pond, his partners and the Canadians in their first contacts with the Athapaskans. As the trade began to improve towards the end of the 1780's some Chipewyans revived their treks to the Bay. The North West Company responded by use of threats. When the treks continued, some Nor'Westers began the practice of hostage taking. Their example was a

source of concern to their own leaders.⁸⁹ Even one of the responsible partners resorted to "promises and menaces if [I] first fail to deter them from their purpose."⁹⁰ With the increased pressure and use of threats from the North West Company Chipewyan middlemen journeyed in greater numbers to Churchill. As William Jefferson noted there in 1789, "None of the above Indians have been here for many year past. Three are old leaders that used to come with Mittanappy [Matonabbee]."⁹¹ Of the Indians who traded with William McGillivray at Rat River Fort south of Reindeer Lake in the same year, "about one half had been to Hudson's Bay in the summer."⁹² To offset the limited success of their endeavours among the Chipewyans, the pedlars expanded their influence across the lake to the Yellowknives and Dogribs. The "English Chief" had been established as a trading leader among the Yellowknives and a rendezvous was established near the site of what would become old Fort Providence on the Yellowknife River.⁹³

Peter Pond's organizational genius had succeeded in solving the problem of food supply but his manner of treating the Indians did not bear fruit. In 1786, an early example of the pedlar's arrogance was his remarks after reprimanding an Indian by striking him with the flat of his sword. "Pond told him that the Country and the Indians belonged to him and he could do with them as he

pleased and no other person should meddle with them."⁹⁴ Canadians began to take Indian wives, some of them by force. Forced seizure of Chipewyan women began a pattern which led further to resentment and distrust of the North West Company in this first decade of contact and would become increasingly important as a cause of conflict between Europeans and Indians of the Athabasca country.

Native traders in the Mackenzie Basin made extraordinary efforts to swing the policies of the Company to their interests. When the Montreal traders dropped prices, offered to take only the most valuable prime furs, then used intimidation to obtain them, the Athapaskans revived their lengthy treks to Churchill. Had the natives of the Mackenzie region been governed by a desire to satisfy immediate needs, it would have been most easy to trade in the Mackenzie Basin. At the same time, had they been governed by the desire to preserve desirable political alliances, the treks to Churchill would have been annual rather than intermittent. Indian traders had a clear sense of their own interest and deflected the trade to correspond to it.⁹⁴

Yet the decade of the 1780's was a period of disruption and adjustment for the Indians of the Athabasca and upper Mackenzie River regions. Arrival of the Montrealers on the Athabasca in 1778 had confirmed to the

Chipewyan middlemen and especially to their partners, the Hudson's Bay Company, that their trade was in jeopardy. Chipewyan Indians of the Lake Athabasca and Reindeer Lake regions moved south into forest lands to trap and trade. The smallpox epidemic of late 1781 afflicted and killed a great proportion, at least one half of these trading Indians, and possibly close to Hearne's figure of ninety percent of adult males. Most of the Cree and Chipewyan middlemen and trappers were among those who died. The epidemic left the Europeans with few hunters and any plans for further expansion were postponed. Indian women and children experienced widespread starvation since most of the good hunters had died. Some of the Indians were so demoralized that they lost their initiatives to seek food. A modicum of stability would eventually return by 1788 and a few Indians returned to trapping. Many Chipewyans uninvolved in the fur trade prior to the epidemic replaced those killed by smallpox, and began to congregate around the posts south of Reindeer Lake, the Ile-à-la-Crosse and Lake Athabasca regions. By the late 1780's the pedlars had returned, relocated posts, organized a food supply, and moved to serve the newly involved Chipewyans by expanding north to Great Slave Lake. They also moved to involve the Yellowknives and to a lesser extent the Dogribs in the trade.

For some Chipewyans at least the European arrival had temporarily ended the trading middlemen role. For others, treks to Churchill were revived to obtain better terms for their furs.

IV
NOTES

¹Samuel Hearne, 5 Aug. 1774, in J.B. Tyrrell Journals of Samuel Hearne and Philip Turnor (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1934), p. 106.

²A.S. Morton, A History of the Canadian West to 1870-1871 (1939; rpt. Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1973), pp. 310-11.

³Ibid., p. 328.

⁴Alexander Henry recounted Pond's observations in a letter to Joseph Banks, Montreal, 18 Oct. 1781, in H.A. Innis, ed., Peter Pond (Toronto: Irwin and Gordon, 1930), p. 87n.

⁵Cuthbert Grant was quoted on 22 Apr. 1786: "One of the Crees arrived with a train load of Caribou meat which he traded." Old Establishment Journal, Winnipeg, Man., HBC Archives, F2/1, fo. 5.

⁶A. Mackenzie, Letter to Agents of the North West Company, Athabasca, 22 May 1789, in W. Kaye Lamb, ed., The Journals and Letters of Sir Alexander Mackenzie (Toronto: Macmillan, 1970), p. 438.

⁷See chapter III, n. 91.

⁸See entry for 28 May 1770 in Tyrrell, Hearne and Turnor, p. 11.

⁹M. Cocking, Letter to Cumberland House, Oct.-May 1775-76, *ibid.*, p. 36. Piegans, northern most of the Blackfoot, inhabited plains as far north at N. Saskatchewan River, a very short distance from the Beaver River.

¹⁰M. Cocking, Letter to Cumberland House, 22 Jan. 1776, *ibid.*

¹¹See Richard Glover, ed., Samuel Hearne, A Journey to the Northern Ocean... (Toronto: Macmillan, 1958), pp. 226-27. See also Alexander Mackenzie, Voyages from Montreal through the Continent of North America (1801; rpt. Edmonton: Hurtig, 1971), p. 123.

¹²Arthur Ray, Indians in the Fur Trade (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto, 1974), p. 98.

¹³Alexander Mackenzie found evidence of Cree marauding far down the Mackenzie River. See entries for 7-9 June 1789, in Lamb, Mackenzie, p. 174, 1 July 1789, p. 179 and 3 July 1789, *ibid.*, p. 181.

¹⁴1 Jan. 1793, *ibid.*, p. 249; see also 5 Apr. 1793, p. 253. Mackenzie warily passed by a recent Cree encampment near Rocky Mountain Portage. 18 May 1793, *ibid.*, p. 26, 1 June 1793, *ibid.*, p. 279.

¹⁵3 July 1789, *ibid.*, p. 181.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, pp. xxxi - xxxii.

¹⁷James VanStone shows the ability of the Athapaskans to adapt to change. Athapaskan Adaptations: Hunters and Fishermen of the Subarctic Forests (Chicago: Aldine, 1974), Chap. 8, *passim*.

¹⁸Beryl Gillespie, "Territorial Expansion of the Chipewyan in the 18th Century," Proceedings: Northern Athapaskan Conference, ed. A.M. Clark, Mercury Series, Canadian Ethnology Service Paper No. 27 (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1971), pp. 350-78.

¹⁹See Chapter V, note 82. See also G. Simpson, in E.E. Rich, ed., Simpson's Athabasca Journal (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1938), p. 75.

²⁰Ibid., p. 374.

²¹David Thompson was informed by Mitchell Oman that it was contacted from the Sioux and Ojibwa. See Richard Glover, ed., David Thompson: Narrative (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1962), pp. 49, 92, 236-38.

²²Gillespie, "Expansion of the Chipewyan," p. 374. Also see J.C. Yerbury, "The Post-contact Chipewyan: Trade Rivalries and Changing Territorial Boundaries," Ethnohistory, 23, No. 3 (Summer 1976), p. 250 and E. Petitot's comment: "There were as many as 1200 Redskins settled on the lake. But the white man brought with him the horrible disease of smallpox, till then unknown to the Americans, which made great ravages among the Tinney, and more than decimated the Crees, driven to the southern part of the lake by the warlike attitude of the Chipewyans. Influenza, the epidemic catarrhal infection attacking the tribes at regular intervals of about seven years, completed the work of the smallpox. Reduced to a very small number, the Crees ceased all hostile action against the Chipewyan...." "On the Athabasca District of the Canadian North West Territory," Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society, XL (Nov. 1883), 651.

²³Known to the Canadien servants of the North West Company by the term "Montagners" which referred to the hilly areas to the north of Lake Athabasca.

²⁴J.B. Tyrrell, ed., David Thompson's Narrative of his Exploration in North America (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1916), p. 109. Macdonnell estimated that "owing to their wars with their neighbours, the smallpox of 1780-81 and other misfortunes, the third of the nation does not now remain." John Macdonnell, "Some Account of Red River about 1797," in L.F.R. Masson, Les Bourgeois de la Compagnie du Nord-Ouest, I (1889-90; rpt. New York: Antiquarian Press, 1960), p. 277.

Heidenrich arrives at a similar estimate of population loss due to smallpox among Huron agriculturalists. C.E. Heidenrich, Hurononia: A History and Geography of the Huron Indians 1600-50 (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1971), pp. 98-99, and pp. 100-06.

²⁵Beryl Gillespie, "An Ethnohistory of the Yellowknives," Contributions to Chipewyan Ethnology, ed. D.B. Carlisle, Mercury Series, Canadian Ethnology Service Paper No. 31 (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1975), p. 208.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸William Tomison, 1 Mar. 1782 in E.E. Rich and A.M. Johnson, eds., Cumberland House Journals and Inland Journal, 1775-79, II (1779-82; rpt. London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1952), p. 240.

²⁹David Thompson in Glover, Thompson, p. 236.

³⁰William Walker, Letter to W. Tomison, Hudson House, 14 May 1782, in *ibid.*, p. 254.

³¹W. Tomison, in Rich and Johnson, CHJ, II, 24 Jan. 1782, p. 239.

³²Samuel Hearne? Fort Churchill, 27 Aug. 1783, Winnipeg, Man., HBC Archives, B42/a/103 fo. 23.

³³Hearne? F.C.P.J., 14 Apr. 1784, B42/a/103 fo. 25.

³⁴Hearne noted: "Sickness and famine has made such havock amongst my home Indians during my absence that out of 69 that I left all well only 32 is around here safe, amongst whom there is but 6 men and boys that can lift a gun, the Remainder being all women and Children." Dec. 1783, *ibid.*, B42/b/26, n. fo.

³⁵28 Apr. 1785, *ibid.*, B42/a/104, fo. 19.

³⁶W. Walker, Hudson House, 17 Oct. 1781 in CHJ, II, p. 262. Walker said, "the Barren Ground is all burnt nigh hand so that there is no beasts resting."

³⁷W. Walker, 10 Jan. 1782, *ibid.*, p. 275. See also entries for 29 Oct. 1781, *ibid.*, p. 264 and 23 Oct. 1781, p. 263.

³⁸Mitchell Oman, 10 Jan. 1782 in *ibid.*, p. 275.

³⁹Glover, Thompson, p. 237. "About 70 half Starved Northern Indians came in for trust but had Nothing for Trade. Except 50 hares a few lbs. of Venison." S. Hearne, FCPJ, 14 Oct. 1785, Winnipeg, Man., HBC Archives, B42/a/106, fo. 7.

⁴⁰"The surrounding country abounds with Buffaloe and Deer Beaver and other Animals valuable for their furs are also numerous in its vicinity. Some years ago it was numerously inhabited by Crees, but the Small Pox, Measles and other contagious diseases have made ravages among them nearly tantament [sic] to extermination." George Simpson, 18 May 1821, in Rich, Simpson's Journal, p. 362.

⁴¹William McGillivray, Trading Expedition to the English River, 22 Jan.-14 June 1809, Ottawa, PAC, MG19, C1, No. 5, pp. 5-16.

⁴²See Pond's map in Gillespie, "Territorial Expansion of Chipewyan," fig. 2, p. 376.

⁴³*Ibid.*, pp. 378-80.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, p. 375.

⁴⁵Despite being good provisioners the Cree were avoided in the placement of the post because they tended to dominate the Athapaskans in the area; their predominant role as middlemen was near an end due to increased strength of Athapaskan groups, and to Cree weakness due to the ravages of the smallpox.

⁴⁶See Alexander Henry, Letter to J. Banks, Montreal, 18 Oct. 1781 in L.J. Burpee, Search for the Western Sea (Toronto: Musson, 1908), pp. 578-87. See R. McKenzie,

Letter to A. Mackenzie, Athabasca, 2 Dec. 1787, Ottawa, PAC, MG19, C1, Vol. 32, No. 15, n. pag.

⁴⁷E.E. Rich, The History of the Hudson's Bay Company, 1670-1870, II (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1959), p. 87.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 88.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 87.

⁵⁰Bruce Trigger asserted that smallpox swept away 50 percent of the Huron population in six years. The Children of Aataentsic: a History of the Huron People to 1660 (Montreal: McGill-Queens, 1976), Chap. 8.

⁵¹Epidemic disease is asserted to be the cause of a dramatic reversal in native belief structures leading hunters to deliberate destruction of game resources. Calvin Martin, Keepers of the Game (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1978), pp. 19-21. In Krech (ed.) ("The Trade of the Slavey and Dogribs at Fort Simpson in the Early Nineteenth Century"), Subarctic Fur Trade, pp. 134-136, disease is also a destructive factor.

⁵²Ray, pp. 3-23.

⁵³Ibid., p. 19.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 23.

⁵⁵Gillespie, "Territorial Expansion of Chipewyan," *passim*.

⁵⁶PWFPJ, Oct. 1768, Winnipeg, Man., HBC Archives, B42/a/74, fo. 13.

⁵⁷Ibid., B42/b/15, fo. 3; see also, fo. 10 and B42/a/74, fo. 36.

⁵⁸13 Apr. 1769, *ibid.*

⁵⁹In part, an attempt to revive the trade (interrupted by the sickness) was a motive for Hearne's journey to the Coppermine. *Ibid.*, B42/a/77, fo. 7.

⁶⁰p. Fidler, in Tyrrell, Hearne and Turnor, 1 Feb. 1792, p. 541.

⁶¹See FCPJ, 2 Mar. 1798, Winnipeg, Man., HBC Archives, B42/a/124, fo. 11d.

⁶²James McKenzie, Fort Chipewyan Journal, 17 Jan. 1800, Montreal, McGill Mss., CH175, S157, n. no.

⁶³W.F. Wentzel, Journal, The Forks of the Mackenzie River, 9 Feb. 1807, Ottawa, PAC, MG19, C1, Vol. 24, p. 9301.

⁶⁴G. Keith, Letter to R. McKenzie, Biskaga River Post, 1 Dec. 1808, *ibid.*, Vol. 51, p. 18.

⁶⁵FCPJ, 8 Mar. 1810, Winnipeg, Man., HBC Archives, B42/a/135, fo. 6d.

⁶⁶For a view of the 1820 epidemic see George Simpson's account in Rich, Simpson's Journal, 13 Oct. 1820, pp. 80-81.

⁶⁷The French capture of Prince of Wales' Fort corresponds exactly with the smallpox epidemic.

⁶⁸The pedlars pulled back to Fort Chipewyan and closed the Fort Resolution and Peace River Posts.

⁶⁹"Traded with the Remainder of the Northern Indians found them to be very poorly Gooded, owing as some of them say to not having the necessary iron work for taking Beaver 8c." Fort Churchill Journal, 29 Apr. 1785, Winnipeg, Man., HBC Archives, B42/a/104, fo. 19.

70"17 Canoes of Nelson Indians came to the factory with some Furs, but like the others seem to be very poor, having before traded all the prime of their Furs with the Canadians." Ibid., 3 July 1785, fo. 28.

71Hearne, 30 Oct. 1785, *ibid.*, B42/a/106, fo. 9. See also a comment of significance: "I have not received 20 Skins as yet nor do I expect any more till the Northern Indians can hear of our arrival which must be the next summer at least." S. Hearne, Letter to H. Marten, PWF PJ, 19 Jan. 1784, Winnipeg, Man., HBC Archives, B42/b/26, fo. 10.

72See FCPJ, 26 May 1787, Winnipeg, Man., HBC Archives, B42/a/108, fo. 9.

73Hearne, *ibid.*, 14 July 1787, fo. 25.

74"Six Northern Indians brought 601 Beaver - another small group brought 400." *Ibid.*, 3-4 May 1788, B42/a/110, fo. 22. "On May 7, 2 more bring 701 Beaver." *Ibid.*, fo. 22; "14 brought 700 beaver," *ibid.*, 10 June 1788, fo. 25.

75*Ibid.*, 5 June 1788, fo. 25.

76"Twenty Northern Indians that has been here before, since we last arrived [1783] brought an account that a leader and his followers will be here in a few months." *Ibid.*, 6 July 1788, fo. 28. "The Wechepowack [Chipewyan] Indians...arrived at the head of whom where [sic] two Old Leaders who said they came with a view to reinstate the former friendship between your Chief and them" and brought 614 beaver. *Ibid.*, 24 July 1788, and 31 July 1788, fo. 31. "An old Northern Indian leader and his tribe that has not been here before since we last arrived brought 219 in Beaver." *Ibid.*

77See A. Mackenzie, Letter to R. McKenzie, Athabasca Fort, 8 Oct. 1788 in Lamb, Mackenzie, p. 435. The English Chief was apparently successful. "There came a number of Indians to the Lake who say they were at Hudson's Bay and from what I could learn there went upwards of twenty five packs there last Summer from this country - these Indians were seven months in their journey - they were well re-

ceived and seem to think that they were well rewarded for their extra trouble - which I am afraid will entice many others to try their fortune that way next summer." A. Mackenzie, Letter to Agents of the North West Company, Athabasca Fort, 15 Feb. 1789, Ottawa, PAC, MG19, C1, Vol. 32, No. 1, n. pag.

⁷⁸A. Mackenzie, Letter to R. McKenzie, Lac des Serpents, June 1787, in Masson, I, p. 19.

⁷⁹Fort of the Forks, or Pond's Post, was built close to the Cree provisioners. Lamb, Mackenzie, p. 129. In 1786 Cuthbert Grant commented that "one of the Crees arrived with a train load of Caribeanu meat which he traded." Athabasca Journal, 8 Apr. 1786, Winnipeg, Man., HBC Archives, Miscellaneous papers, F2/1, fo. 3.

⁸⁰Pond's ideas are written up in a letter from Alexander Henry to Joseph Banks, Montreal, 18 Oct. 1781 in Burpee, pp. 578-87. See also A. Mackenzie, Letter to R. McKenzie, Ile-a-la-Crosse, 1 Feb. 1788 in Masson, I, pp. 19-20.

⁸¹A. Mackenzie, Letter to R. McKenzie, Athabasca, 2 Dec. 1787, *ibid.*, p. 21.

⁸²Roderic McKenzie chose the site of Fort Chipewyan on the south shore where "we were to make a new establishment and depend on our industry in fishing for a living." *Ibid.*, p. 27. Masson suggested that it "was so called because it was intended more particularly for the trade of that nation." *Ibid.*, p. 27n. But Pond's assertion, restated by Alexander Mackenzie, that the Cree were exacting tribute from all who came into the Old Establishment, and his desire for a less partisan positioning of the post were the key reasons for its removal. See *ibid.*, p. 22.

⁸³On Great Slave Lake "as far as can be judged from present appearances, there will be no possibility of establishing a fort there to advantage, nor could the produce come out the same year. I am certain if the Chipewyans could be drawn away from there, the other nations would draw near, and if a rendez-vous could be established, an advantageous trade would be carried on every summer." A.

Mackenzie, Letter to the Agents of the North West Company, Grand Portage, 1 Feb. 1788, *Ile-a-la-Crosse*, *ibid.*, p. 24.

⁸⁴*Ibid.*

^{85A.} Mackenzie, Letter to R. McKenzie, Athabasca, 18 Mar. 1788, Ottawa, PAC, MG19, C1, Vol. 32, No. 2, n. pag.

⁸⁶See A. Mackenzie, Letter to R. McKenzie, Athabasca, 22 May 1789 in Masson, I, p. 30, where he makes the comment "The Chippewans are in the habit of trading in Hudson's Bay."

⁸⁷W. McGillivray, Rat River Fort Journal, near Riviere Maligne, 9 Sept. 1789, Ottawa, PAC, MG19, C1, Vol. 5, p. 1. See also A. Mackenzie, Letter to R. McKenzie, the Forks of the Peace River, 8 May 1793, Masson, I, p. 42.

^{88A.} Mackenzie, Letter to R. McKenzie, Fort Chipewyan, 2 Mar. 1791, *ibid.*, p. 36.

⁸⁹"The men who had remained with the Indians last Summer were and still are of great injury to the interest, by their bad example and influence." A. Mackenzie, Letter to the Agents at Grand Portage, Athabasca Fort, 15 Feb. 1789, in Lamb, Mackenzie, p. 437.

⁹⁰W. McGillivray, Rat River Fort Journal, near Riviere Maligne, 9 Sept. 1789, Ottawa, PAC, MG19, C1, Vol. 5, p. 1.

⁹¹William Jefferson, Letter to Governor and Committee, FCPJ, 18 July 1789, Winnipeg, Man., HBC Archives, B42/a/112, fo. 25.

⁹²W. McGillivray, Rat River Portage Journal, near Riviere Maligne, 9 Sept. 1789, Ottawa, PAC, MG19, C1, Vol. 5, p. 1.

^{93A.} Mackenzie, Letter to Agents of the North West Company, Athabasca, 22 May 1789, *ibid.*, Vol. 32, No. 6, n. pag.

⁹⁴C. Grant, Athabasca Journal, 5 Apr. 1786, Misc. Papers, Winnipeg, Man., HBC Archives, F2/1, fo. 3.

Arthur Ray shows how this was especially true during the period of middlemen trade. See Indians in the Fur Trade, p. 70. Indians were not particularly concerned about political alliances, and often exploited their own people. See *ibid.*, p. 200, fig. 42-45, for increases in gift giving expenses during periods of competition. Also see E.E. Rich, "The Indian Traders," The Beaver, Outfit 301 (Winter 1970), 15.

CHAPTER V

COMPETITION AND TURMOIL

Trade goods which had been actively sought by middlemen to the east at the Hudson's Bay coast during the period 1717-1792 should have been favourably received by Indians at newly established trade centers in the Athabasca region.¹ However circumstances developed in the fur trade of the region which raised apprehensions among the Indians. The most critical time was between 1799 and 1804 when competition exacerbated problems which had earlier begun to form. Increasing use of alcohol among the Beaver Indians, intimidation of the Chipewyans and abduction of their women and children by traders, as well as the tendency of Indians from many bands to congregate around posts to obtain trade goods became issues of concern to Indians and Europeans alike.

After the smallpox epidemic of 1781-83 and the capture of Prince of Wales' Fort by the French in 1782, the Indians of the Athabasca-Mackenzie region made few efforts to journey to Churchill. Proximity of the North West Company posts on Lake Athabasca, and after 1786, at Fort Resolution and on the Peace River, had made access to European trade

goods easier. By the end of the decade however, the prices of those goods and especially the manner of the pedlars' treatment led a few Indians to consider returning to the Hudson's Bay Company post at the Bay.

For some this meant passing over Methye Portage and down the Churchill River to Cumberland House. Others headed east on the long trek to Fort Churchill. The increasing tendency of the Indians to seek out the Bay traders in the early 1790's led the Hudson's Bay Company to consider developing an inland post up the Chipewyans' favourite route, the Seal River.² Exploration of the Seal River route to Reindeer Lake into the east end of Athabasca Lake³ was undertaken. The North West Company responded by attempting to attract the Chipewyans south via Reindeer Lake; Alexander Mackenzie related in May, 1793 that he instructed a servant "to undertake the discovery of the Route by Lac des Carriboufs - It will be of more advantage."⁴ Much of the energy of Hudson's Bay Company in the 1790's was directed toward defying the geography of the lengthy trek to the Bay trading centers. Efforts to explore a direct route into the Athabasca country were thus undertaken by Philip Turnor, Peter Fidler and Malcolm Ross in 1790-92.

The Chipewyans met by Fidler, Turnor and Ross were hard bargainers who brought forth derogatory comments from the Europeans; "what they Brings is always in scrapes and

handfuls and if they are not Paid as much for that as if it were twice the value they call him immediately ungenerous and say other Traders are much more charretable [sic]."⁵ The usual fare traded for provisions was rum,⁶ but liquor was not an effective exchange for food from the Chipewyans.⁷ Turnor observed that "the Chepawyan tribe will not trade Liquor consequently are not fond of parting with their provision, but powder and shot will draw it from them."⁸

Chipewyans and Yellowknives both had some perspective on the prices since they had travelled to Fort Churchill where furs received higher prices. At Slave Lake Peter Fidler observed that "The red Knife Indians did not come to our House but I heard [what] they receive from the Canadians for their skins is not worth their notice."⁹ The Chipewyans consented to trade but they were never satisfied and "ha[d] a custom of asking for everything, they see and tho'...[they were given] a great deal indeed, some of them were not altogether contented."¹⁰ Fidler remarked on the Chipewyan acumen. "The Indians burnt the greater part of their Canoes as they said no person should receive any benefit from them & that they would not be here next year to use them."¹¹ While Fidler and the other Hudson's Bay Company people were in competition with the pedlars the Chipewyans withheld furs to capitalize on future high

prices. A Chipewyan in speaking to Fidler "said he had not brought all his furs but had laid part of them up as does most of their tribe in hopes of a better market in their own country or to carry them to Churchill when they can form a party."¹² With their knowledge of the Churchill market some of the Chipewyans felt they were not able to obtain the commodities they desired: "they say it is not worth troubling themselves with hunting furs for they cannot buy Cloth with them unless they go to Churchill."¹³

The Hudson's Bay Company decided not to contest the trade in the Athabasca area which led in 1792 to a request for a post for the Chipewyans on the Seal River. "Northern Indians [have]...represented it [Seal River] as a proper place to build a house at, saying many of their countrymen would resort their [sic] rather than trade with Canadians."¹⁴ This historic path was passable down to the Coast. "Indians...importuned me to have a House at Seal River by the Bayside, they told me that great Numbers of their Countrymen would come from Athapiscow Lake and trade there...." But from the mouth of the Seal south to Fort Churchill the Chipewyans experienced great difficulty from late spring to fall.

They acknowledged that the distance was not great but that the road was excessive bad and no provision to be got on the way exclusive of three pretty large rivers. They had [to] cross in Canoes which often endangered the Lives of their Families and many times they lost their goods after trading them at this Factory.¹⁵

The Hudson's Bay Company proceeded to set up a post, Seal River Post, near the mouth of Seal River in 1793. The Canadians countered by adding to their already existing posts around Reindeer Lake near to the Chipewyan overland route to the Bay.¹⁷ To counter the pedlars' efforts another attempt was made by the Hudson's Bay Company in 1794 to reach Reindeer Lake via the Churchill River with boats but it was found to be too hazardous.¹⁸ Later that summer on Chipewyan advice, Thomas Stayner went up the Seal and the South Seal Rivers and arrived at Big Sand Lake just to the east of Reindeer Lake.¹⁹ From this point he returned by portaging over to South Indian Lake and then through its outlet and back via the Churchill.²⁰ A later journey in the fall was less successful.²¹ Competition with York Factory²² over the allegiance of the Indians, the geographic advantage of competing pedlars from Reindeer Lake²³ and the difficulty of navigation to the region led to marginal trade with the Bay.²⁴ Pedlars from the Rat River post south of Reindeer Lake boasted that they got their furs "from the door of Churchill."²⁵ Hudson's Bay Company factors then returned to a policy of increased credit in an attempt to draw the natives to the Bayside posts.

North West Company methods for obtaining furs from the Chipewyans though usually successful had been resented.

The Indians were incensed at the use of intimidation to obtain furs. The share of the fur trade in North West Company hands which had been increasing early in the decade began to decline. Hard bargaining by the Indians infuriated the North West Company and since liquor was not an inducement to ply furs from the sober Chipewyans their women were held as hostages. William McGillivray had early realized that threats alone would not work to prevent trade with the Hudson's Bay Company.

About one half had been to Hudsons Bay in the summer and took credits there which, I am afraid they will wish to go and pay in the spring. However if they do, it will be...because I could not help it, as I shall use promises and menaces if first I fail to deter them from their purpose.²⁶

Force had become a key part of North West Company attempts to shape trade relations with the Chipewyans.

The Canadians' practice of treating Chipewyan women as chattels was no doubt borrowed from historic Athapaskan practice.

It has ever been the custom among those people for the men to wrestle for any woman to whom they are attached; and of course the strongest party always carries off the prize. A weak man, unless he be a good hunter and well beloved, is seldom permitted to keep a wife that a stronger man thinks worth his notice: for at any time when the wives of those strong wrestlers are heavy-laden either with furs or provisions, they make no scruple of tearing any other man's wife from his bosom, and making her bear a part of his luggage. This custom prevails throughout all their tribes, and causes a great deal of emulation among their youth, who are upon all occasions, from their childhood, trying their strength and

skill in wrestling. This enables them to protect their property, and particularly their wives, from the hands of those powerful ravishers.²⁷

To be taken as partner of a fur trader offered some advantages to Indian women. Certainly their lot was made easier by the amenities of the trading posts and the greater assistance provided by the European males. In return the Indian women provided their many indigenous skills and kinship links with the Indian trappers and traders. Since the arrival of the Europeans in the Athabasca, conjugal ties with key Indian people had been used to cement trading networks. Post women often went out to trap with their Indian relatives and were expected to guarantee loyalty and ensure that credits would be repaid.²⁸

Philip Turnor had been informed in 1792 of the pedlars' methods of obtaining Chipewyan women:

The method by which they get most of the Chipewyan Women is by the Masters seizin them for their Husbands or Fathers debts and then selling them to their men from five hundred to two thousand Livres and if the father or Husband or any of them resist the only satisfaction they get is a beating and they [are] frequently not satisfied with taking the woman but their Gun and Tent likewise.²⁹

Malchom Ross, another Hudson's Bay Company trader, recorded that "The Chipewyan Indians complains very much of the injustice done them by the Canadians in taking their women from them by force; some of the Canadians keeps no less than 3 women and several 2."³⁰

Chipewyans were less compliant when competition was

present in the Athabasca. Turnor in 1792 noted that "The Che-pa-wy-ans never behaved so insolent to them [the Nor'-Westers] before."³¹ As early as 1792 trading leaders "threaten[ed] vengeance against the Canadians."

Their [sic] seems a settled dislike to the Canadians amongst the whole of them which would most likely manifest it self in once the Hon'ble Company had good settlements amongst them. Some few of the Chepawyans begin to love liquor.³²

Turnor, though less than objective, felt that the Hudson's Bay Company represented more than an alternative market.

Increased interest in Hudson's Bay Company trade led to greater efforts to intimidate the Indians. Philip Turnor wrote of the Chipewyans: "they said [that] Mr. [Duncan] McGilvery [sic] had informed them that Mr. [Patrick] Small was gone to England for a Medicine to kill all the Englishmen and that we were all lost." North West Company traders told them that "the Medicine is likewise to kill all the Chepawyans that go to the English."³³ Another Indian who contacted smallpox was told by John Thomson, trading in Peace River, that it was because he went from one company to another.³⁴

The use of alcohol as an inducement to obtain furs from the Indians also had mixed benefits in the Athabasca. Arthur S. Morton used the famous quote of Duncan McGillivray to illustrate the value of liquor in the trade:

The love of Rum is their first inducement to industry. They undergo every hardship and fatigue

to procure a Skinful of this delicious beverage, and when a Nation becomes addicted to drinking, it affords a strong presumption that they will soon become excellent hunters.³⁵

Morton concluded that "rum was the cornerstone on which the fortunes of the fur magnates were built."³⁶ But use of rum to trade with the Chipewyans did not result in immediate returns. They would trade mainly for shot and powder in return for provisions. Long inured to lengthy journeys to Churchill and to treks in search of the caribou, the Chipewyan had little room for nonessentials such as liquor. However, in the Peace River region where European traders focused efforts to obtain provisions, liquor flowed increasingly.

The Beaver Indians of the Peace River country in contrast with the Chipewyans would trade for liquor. "The Peace River Indians are as fond of liquor as any tribe and part with their provisions as freely."³⁷ The Beaver and Cree around Lake Athabasca had not journeyed the long distances to trade at the Bay since the Chipewyan middlemen began acting as carriers in the 1760's and the arrival in their locale of the North West Company traders after 1778. The Beavers had adopted many practices from the Cree, including imbibing. In contrast to the Chipewyans who at that time acted as middlemen or trappers, the Beaver Indians were mainly employed as provisioners. North West Company policy then was to trade rum for provisions.

The Beaver Indians were the buffer between the aggressive Cree and other Athapaskan bands in the period of the middleman trade. By the peace established between the Beaver Indians and the Cree in the late 1760's the Peace River became a Beaver Indian preserve.³⁸ But the Cree were apparently accorded the privilege of passing over their "war-road", a trail from Lesser Slave Lake to the junction of the Peace and Smoky Rivers, whence they raided the Indians of the Rocky Mountains for furs. This trail was apparently an historic Beaver Indian linkage between the Peace River and their pre-contact lands on Lesser Slave Lake.³⁹ Alexander Mackenzie believed that the Cree of the Saskatchewan and Churchill Rivers were not part of the peace treaty and ranged freely through the area.⁴⁰ It is likely that the Cree retained considerable influence over the Beaver Indians until after the smallpox epidemic devastated them in 1781-83, and possibly as late as 1790. It was also the belief of Peter Fidler that the Beaver had absorbed more Euro-Canadian traits than other Athapaskans.⁴¹

The Beaver Indians of Peace River and the people known as Slave Indians by their neighbours were considered by some informants to have been separated in relatively recent times.⁴² Émile Petitot, sometimes cited as the first modern anthropologist to live among the Athapaskans, believed

that the three linguistic groups, the Beaver, the Slave and the Sarsi should be classed together on the basis of linguistic similarity.⁴³ Diamond Jenness believed that the Sarcees drifted to the Saskatchewan from the north "towards the end of the seventeenth century" probably separating from the Beaver since "their speech differs very little from that of the Beaver Indians."⁴⁴ He also noted that both bands recounted the same legend for their common origin.⁴⁵ Early explorers encouraged confusion. Mackenzie referred to the western Beavers as Rocky Mountain Indians, a name usually reserved for the Sekani. Daniel Harmon who was in contact with the Rocky Mountain Indians commented:

They call themselves Sicannies [Sekani] but it is supposed that formerly they belonged and were a part of the Beaver Indian Tribe - who on some quarrel separated themselves from their Countrymen by leaving their lands to come higher up the [Peace] River.⁴⁶

But Mackenzie also placed the Slave Indians as occupants of the Lesser Slave Lake area along with the Beaver prior to Cree expansion.⁴⁷ The name Slave was a designation obtained from the Cree.⁴⁸ Petitot refers to at least two groups of Slave, the "Etcha-Ottiné" who lived between the Liard River on the north and the drainages of the Black and Beaver Rivers on the southwest and east. He also situated a band of Slaves west of the Mackenzie, the "Ettchériedie-Gotti-né," who lived in the upper reaches of the Liard.⁴⁹ Honigmann believed that these were the Beaver Indians of

Wentzel⁵⁰ and Keith.⁵¹ He concludes that the Fort Nelson-Liard was a transitional area⁵² and the Fort Nelson Slave were a transitional people. Jenness also saw the Beaver and Slave as having affinity and has dealt with the distribution and subdivisions of the Beaver Indians.⁵³ The linguist Hoijer has recently lent credence to the idea by classifying the Chipewyan, Beaver, Slave, Sarsi and Sekani as dialects of the same language.⁵⁴ Krauss and Golla state that "Beaver is one of the most poorly demarcated languages in Northern Athapaskan."⁵⁵

Yet the natives at Liard River in the early 1800's according to Nor'Wester W.F. Wentzel "pretend[ed] to be a branch of the tribe of the Beaver Indians of Peace River, from whom they had been formerly separated and the[n] driven this way by their inveterate enemies the Crees." The natives' own testimony had been discarded because of Wentzel's further comment that the customs of the Liard people were different; "for these Indians are very effeminate and never wage war."⁵⁶ It is not unlikely that such minor differences were a part of a self-selecting process which separated the meek from the more aggressive during the long period of war with the Cree. During that conflict it may have been that those most accessible to their attackers who became known as Beaver Indians fiercely resisted and adopted traits of the Cree in order to survive.

By the 1790's the Beaver Indians of the Peace River had become to observers an amalgam of traits. Many of the traits which have come to be recognized as Beaver may have been the result of direct or indirect contact with European culture in the earliest period of trade in the region. By 1792 the Beaver Indians of the Peace River spoke Cree as well as Beaver; "they speak their language, as well as cut their hair, paint, and dress like them, and possess their immoderate fondness for liquor and tobacco."⁵⁷ The Beaver Indians by the 1790's were also known for their fierce pride and nasty disposition when abused and on liquor.⁵⁸ These were all traits assumed to have been acquired as a result of contact. Protectiveness toward their women, considered unique in the region, may also have been acquired.⁵⁹ "They differ very much from the Chepawyans and Knisteneaux, in the abhorrence they profess of any carnal communication between their women and the white people."⁶⁰

The Beaver Indians were affected most by the events of the late 1780's and early 1790's in the Athabasca country. Well-organized proposals by Peter Pond to use the Peace River region as the principal trapping and provisioning ground were in operation by 1790. The Beaver Indians were the key people in supplying the labour for hunting and drying meat in summer and trapping in winter.⁶¹ Food supplied from Peace River was transported to Fort Chipewyan from the

"two settlements which...[were] the support of this country[.] its there they get all their dried provisions for their journeys and without a settlement in this river they would not be able to get their furs out."⁶² Almost all essentials were available from the Indians of the Peace River, much of it in trade for liquor. As Philip Turnor wrote in 1792,

The Peace River Indians are as fond of liquor as any tribe and part with their provisions as freely it consists of Buffalo flesh both fresh and cured such as beat [sic] meat and rendered fat its from that River that the Canadians procure all dried provisions for their different purposes [sic] its at the first settlement up the Peace River where they procure the provision. I am informed that they go to it in fourteen days from the Athapescou Settlement and from that Settlement to the next in twelve days at which place Buffalo is full as at the other....the Slave Lake, Peace River and Athapescou River Canoes are supplied [with provision from the Athabasca Settlement] in the fall of the year and reserve a stock of provision for the Spring and they have a two years stock of the most material trading Goods, Birch rind fitt for building large Canoes is very plentiful both in the Athapiscow and Peace Rivers and the finest Pine that I have seen in the Country grows near the Lower part of the Athapiscow River. Nothing is wanting in these parts but Cedar for building Canoes/the Canadians build of the largest size used in the North out of Pine but they never bring them in again.... they always have occasion for more Canoes to come down that River [Peace] than what they take up.⁶³

The Peace River was the source of essential food and wood for the fur trade in the Athabasca and Beaver Indians were vital to its supply.

The Hudson's Bay Company and particularly the North

West Company record of Indian involvement in the fur trade of the Peace River in the 1790's does not indicate "a secondary commitment to the trade."⁶⁴ For the Beaver Indians of the Peace River who were spending much of the year congregating around the posts in order to partake in the supply of liquor dispensed by the European traders, subsistence hunting was not of primary importance although hunting to provide dry meat for the fur trade in exchange for liquor did take up much of the Beaver Indians' time. The tendency to cluster around the fur trade posts in the Peace River in the 1790's led to depletion of game resources in those areas, forced relocation of the posts and led eventually to reallocation of Indian hunters.

Inter-tribal relations became more hostile as an accelerated trade in arms encouraged the Beavers, Dogribs, and Yellowknives to exploit more remote tribes with their new-found power. In 1797 the Beaver Indians moved up the Peace River and attacked and looted the Sekani.⁶⁵ Two years later the Beaver Indians attacked and killed a small band of Ojibways near Lesser Slave Lake in retaliation for their being pillaged of goods the year before.⁶⁶ The Beaver Indians of the Forks were also blamed by Nor'Wester James Porter for killing his colleague Duncan Livingston in 1799: "the Red Knives who Past [sic] the Last winter and summer among the Beaver Indians of Mckenzie's River had seen

the Place where the deceased Mr. Livingston and his People had been killed and they found a great deal of Powder Shot & Ball."⁶⁷

Toward the end of the decade some of the reticence developing in the Beaver Indians to enter freely into a role the fur trade determined for them was exacerbated by conflict with other Indians moving into the Peace River to trap. In 1798 "a war party...kill'd and wounded several of the Beaver Indians."⁶⁸ The Beavers were in conflict with the advancing Chipewyans.⁶⁹ As competition increased the use of alcohol increased. "A North West Company servant is going...for rum As there is no possibility of keeping the B[eaver] Indians without it."⁷⁰ Conflict resulted. The "Peace River Indians were at war and killed some of the people of the Rocky Mountain which has shortened the summer return of that Country in Furs and Provisions."⁷¹

North West Company and Hudson's Bay Company observers are in agreement that force was used regularly to extract furs from the Indians, Athapaskans and others, in Athabasca region.⁷² When the Indians refused to trade provisions for reasons of scarcity or concern for the future, the goods were taken.⁷³ A native who sent word that he would not be bringing furs into trade was threatened by a North West Company trader, James McKenzie who offered to "send a Canadian to take away his woman who was said to have been

taken away from another Chipewyan the previous year."⁷⁴
The only people who apparently still did not respond to threats were the Beaver. Like the Cree from whom they had absorbed many traits the Beaver were much more protective of their women, and when the Canadian Labrie attempted to use force against one of them he was killed. Thomas Swain reflected in 1804 on the traits evident among the Beaver Indians:

The Beaver Indians do not imitate the mountainers or Chipewyans in the least, as the former is a brave bold Nation, although not above two hundred men in number from the age of 15 years to 70 - which scattered from the entrance of Peace River to the Rocky Mountains in which space the North West Company has 5 settlements they are very troublesome at the Houses when in liquor and wish to have everything they ask given to them for nothing if denied they are affronted, and wish to take things wright or wrong, they are always armed Drunk or sober as it is a Custom among them to go with a large Bayonet in there [sic] hand, a knife hid under there Stockings and sometimes two - but when they are sober they are very quiet and behave very well to the white people, but will not allow any white man to take there furs or Provisions from them by force, but will give it to any one they please.⁷⁵

By 1800 the effects of competition were being felt throughout the Athabasca country. The Chipewyans found their needs for European goods easily met. "Last year they worked worse than the preceding one and this year it is visible already that they will work less than last year - It will soon be beyond the power of any Man either reason or compel them into any good."⁷⁶ Many Chipewyans were in-

clined to return to their lands immediately to hunt caribou.⁷⁷ European traders were exasperated but were compelled to give credits to attempt to hold onto their allegiance.⁷⁸

Gave Pouces the value of 164 skins not consideration of his past behaviour which deserves no reward but on condition of his behaviour w[h]ile here this summer in every respect becoming a broken chief who wished to be restored to his former Dignities.⁷⁹

Others "wintered w[h]ere there is a great deal of Beaver - but did not work through fear of the Crees."⁸⁰ To the few Chipewyans coming from the land east of Athabasca and known to frequent Churchill, enticements were given to attract them south to the pedlars' posts.⁸¹

Although trade goods were available in abundance the more sedentary existence around the fur trading post had brought the Chipewyans close to starvation. The process of Chipewyan movement to lands suitable for trapping had developed over two decades and observers noted that they were not as adept at hunting in the boreal forest as they had been on the barrens.⁸² Concentration of population in a more limited area further complicated their subsistence.⁸³

Fur returns also declined as basic needs were met by the competing companies proffering goods to the Indians. Ojibways, Ottawas,⁸⁴ and Iroquois were brought into the Athabasca and Peace River areas to trap. The Ojibways were

reputed to be better trappers and were able to secure furs on land abandoned by other bands.⁸⁵ But the Beaver Indians of Peace River responded in 1799 by attacking them: "2 men, 2 women and 3 children (Bungees) were killed."⁸⁶ At the height of competition between the XY and North West Companies the Beaver refused to allow the "New Company" access to the Peace River. They were concerned lest any more trappers invade their lands where Iroquois had previously been brought in by the North West Company.⁸⁷

An abundance of trade goods, especially arms had encouraged some bands to take on the new role of middlemen. The Beaver Indians had begun to pressure the Indians of the Upper Liard for furs.⁸⁸ The Yellowknives and Dogribs around Lac la Martre and Fort Providence with their newly acquired supplies of arms were travelling down the Mackenzie to obtain furs from the Slaveys and Hares.⁸⁹ Some passed overland the short distance from Lac la Martre to a trading rendez-vous with the Hare and Loucheux on the southwest shore of Great Bear Lake. The North West Company moved to maximize their advantage by building Bear Lake Post near this rendezvous in 1799. The Yellowknives new power of the middlemen trade dominated the Slaveys and Dogribs.

The Red Knives, ...very generally make free booty of any little property collected for the purpose of traffic, in order to procure a few necessaries. If the aggressors are resisted, they will force or carry off their women, and it is natural to conclude that, the first being the least of

the two evils, the property is sacrificed with the best grace possible. In consequence of this vexation, those most exposed generally sequester themselves in less danger ...Exiled in a way from their country, they often seek refuge in barren recesses, where the want of necessaries, combined with other causes exposes them to much hardship.⁹⁰

These latter comments reflect the often mistaken attitude taken by European observers that natives always suffered when removed from proximity to the posts.

Entry of new faces in the middleman trade was taking place. The Slaves and Dogribs when able to obtain arms "caught a slight tincture of the same propensities, for it is certain that they act upon the same principles in their dealings with the Big or Long Arrowed Indians."⁹¹ The Beaver Indians were moved to kill Duncan Livingston near the present site of Fort Norman when he was preparing to establish a post for the Slave, Loucheux and Hare Indians.⁹²

Attempts were made by the North West Company to disperse the Indians who had clustered around the posts in the time of intense competition. James McKenzie instructed in 1800 that "everything which any of the young Men kill while near the fort belonged to the trader but that whatever they would kill inland was his Due."⁹³ By this means the traders induced the Indians to spread out to new trapping areas and to deploy the Indians more effectively. Trading chiefs were also actively involved in rationalizing the placement

of bands:

Our lately created Chief Marlin, has undertaken not only the reformation of the Chipewyan grievances at his own post but also that of the Grievances of Chipiweans [sic] at other posts - The present Complaint is that the Montagners of Slave Lake are too numerous for the quantity of Goods sent there every Fall Then Marlin's question was whether it would not be better to bring all the Montagnards to winter between this post and Grand Marrais [on the Peace River] and to leave the Slave Lake for the Red Knives.⁹⁴

Native leaders also recognized the problems which resulted from overhunting and had a comprehensive knowledge of the region.

In the period of the greatest competition from 1799 to 1804 apparently some of the natives, particularly of the Chipewyan tribe, quit trapping and trading with the North West Company. When asked to exploit fur bearing lands, many Chipewyans apparently refused. They

arrive here two months before they should and the very best season for working Beaver....I have been haranguing them all this day not to return any more to their lands....⁹⁵

As fur returns diminished the traders increased pressure to trap.⁹⁶ Conflict often resulted.⁹⁷ James McKenzie at Fort Chipewyan "explained" in unrestrained terms the reasons for the increased trade in women and the response of the Indians to that trade.⁹⁸ Traffic in women, also no doubt a source of tension between Nor'West partners and servants, was deeply resented by the Indians. McKenzie asserted:

"It will assist to discharge the debts of a man

unable to do it by any other means...the second is that it may be the means of thickling some lecherous miser to part with some of his hoard. I therefore kept the woman to be disposed of in the season when the Peace River bucks look out for women, in the month of May...They desired that we should trade no more women on any account. I told them that we would do as we thought proper, for it was not their business to prescribe rules to us...."99

When Indians resisted the will of the traders or hesitated to trade their furs they were beaten¹⁰⁰ and their women were seized.¹⁰¹ In retaliation the Chipewyan killed a 'Canadien'. Relations were exceedingly tense;

The Montagners, being much afraid, come all into the house to enquire whether we intended to revenge Lafrance's death upon them, or not. In order to keep them hereabout all summer. I thought it necessary to assure them that none of those who were here now should suffer the least injury on that account while they behave themselves as they ought, but that if any d__nd rascal of them deserted this summer with any of the Frenchmen's women he and she would both lose their heads.¹⁰²

Attempts to hold the native allegiance had led to excesses which were to have deep seated consequences.

The effect of the intense competition was soon felt by the trading companies. Their returns fell off,¹⁰³ their expenses mounted¹⁰⁴ and the Indians refused or were unable to bring in provisions.¹⁰⁵ The North West Company increased their incentives. Peter Fidler remarked on his opponent's new approach in 1803:

Several Indians went to the Old Company - and they rigged 7 Chiefs, from whom it is said they did not get 15 MB each - What a contrast betwixt

now and 4 years ago when they made the Indians pay a beaver for 1 Gun flint, or 5 ball and 2 Beaver for a Knife - and the greatest Chief of the Chipewyans used only to get 10 1/2 pints of mixed rum for nothing...they preferred such before they would undertake the long & hazardous journey to Churchill, altho they got at least 10 times more for their skins; now every one that gets a Chiefs Coat gets an 8 Galoon Keg also of him for nothing - they will not be able to go this way 3 years, to a moral certainty as the things the Indians gets for nothing is extravagantly great.¹⁰⁶

Despite the wealth of incentives thrust on the Indians few provisions were forthcoming. By 1802 "all our men came from Peace River starving."¹⁰⁷ This not only applied to Hudson's Bay Company men; "both old and new Company are near starving up Peace River, & that the Beaver Indians are doing very little, so that they as well as ourselves will go out with little in the canoes next Spring."¹⁰⁸ In 1803 the Peace River was abandoned by the Hudson's Bay Company "as the Indians there is such very great drinkers and they are so liberally supplied by both old and new Company that they will kill few furs."¹⁰⁹ Fidler observed that "the profits of each share of the Old Co. which was generally 1000 P. year before this New Co. [XY Company] came in was for these 2 years decreased to only 150 which was not so much as many of their clerks has p. year."¹¹⁰

An outbreak of infectious disease afflicted hunters in the Athabasca region in 1803. The Chipewyans from across Lake Athabasca were ill; "the great mortality amongst them this Summer has damaged their spirits so much, that little

may be expected from the survivors this winter."¹¹¹ This "great mortality" which killed thirty-seven was not, at least not directly, connected with the trade competition, although "some Jepawyans have fallen victims thro' hunger."¹¹² It would appear that idleness, caused by an abundance of goods temporarily proffered in the period of acute competition, led to some deaths.¹¹³ Many hunters on the upper Athabasca were not ill, but neither were they trapping. By the summer many more would die of influenza.¹¹⁴ "Indeed all the Indians both Northern and Southern as well as the Beaver Indians are killing few furs this winter - that all sides will go out lightly loaded in the spring."¹¹⁵

Many more of the Chipewyans returned to the barrens. They "did not kill one Beaver." Their attitude was one of despair "as a great number of their Relations Died in the fall, and the rest is doing nothing."¹¹⁶ Most of their necessities were available from the competing companies yet many had returned to the barrens.

Eight Chipewyans came to the old Co's last night, they have come from their lands, and brought nothing with them, they never bring furs from that quarter. They go there in Summer and very seldom return before this Month to supply there wants in Cloathing which they make from the Deer Skins.¹¹⁷

Their return was governed in part by the failure of the hunt but also by the ease of obtaining goods in a period of

competition. "They have very little occasion to work as they are liberally supplied."¹¹⁸

The one exception was on the upper Peace River where, according to Peter Fidler, the 110 Iroquois brought by the North West Company packed in over one-third of all furs for the Athabasca department. Another band of Iroquois were responsible for trading forty-six of a total eighty-four packs received out of the region by the XY Company.¹¹⁹

As the Indians returned to the barren lands their North West Company partners attempted to influence the yearly pattern of movement at the very least encouraging a few to take credit and proceed to the trapping grounds. "The usual excuse of those people who went to their lands was that there was no Beaver on [sic] their lands that therefore there is no use giving Credits...." But James McKenzie was frustrated when the Indians desired to move as a group to the barrens: "...that if any...would Content himself with going to his Lands with only one of his sons he would get a few Credits but that one Old Fool was worse than ten young ones for each of them has no less than 4 or 5 Sons, 5 or 6 Guides - 9 or 10 nephews who must all follow him."¹²⁰ At Slave Lake "the most of them [Chipewyans] goes to the Carribou Country but they have all promised to return in Canoes & to be here at our arrival in the Fall in order to return to the Beaver Country."¹²¹ James Porter,

bourgeois at Slave Lake, went on to bemoan that, "the Cariboeuf is so numbrous [sic] this year [1800] that it will no doubt induce a great many of them to Stay there all winter."¹²²

This pattern would continue. Rather than follow their adopted routine of waiting until summer and partaking in the fall hunt, Chipewyans left for the barren lands in the early spring of 1804. They went "directly for their Lands to the Eastward and will not be in before next November."¹²³ They were apparently returning to the more reliable pattern¹²⁴ of intersecting the seasonal path of the caribou in both spring and fall.

Some were not content with mere passive withdrawal. On Lake Athabasca, where hard drinking, unpredictable James McKenzie was in charge, the usually quiet Northern Indians attacked the seasonal post at the east end of the lake in the summer of 1804, killing four of the Canadians and destroying the settlement.¹²⁵ Peter Fidler, posted by the Hudson's Bay Company at Lake Athabasca noted that

Not a single Jepawyan has been here since the beginning of June, and I doubt whether or not any will come of that notion this winter - they killed 4 of the Old Co. Man & all the Goods, they burnt it down. This they are doing in retaliation for the numerous insults and very bad useage they receive from the Old Co. who pillage everything from them either furs or Provisions when ever they happen to meet them - and as they are so numerous very few escape their grasp. This usuage the Old Co. has well merited ever since we have been here, & perhaps before. They will not suffer a single Indian to go and trade at any

other House - should they do that privately and afterwards be known - They was always sure of getting a very severe drubbing at least. This kind of conduct of the Old Co. has drove these Indians to the above mentioned autrocities [sic] in vindication of their own rights.¹²⁶

Fidler's view that the problem was caused by bullying explained in part renewed treks to Churchill in 1804.

But some Chipewyans immediately renewed the historic trek to Churchill.¹²⁷ "The Nⁿ Indians of the 23d arrived with a considerable quantity of fine furs. They are chiefly strangers...from the vicinity of Athapuscaow Lake."¹²⁸ The Chipewyans were met by Fidler on his last trip out from the Athabasca in 1807; they promised "to lay up their winters hunts for us next summer,"¹²⁹ which would probably have been at Reindeer Lake. An unusually large trading party arrived at Fort Churchill in August of the same year where William Auld realized "far better trade here this Year than has ever been since the place was settled in 1783."¹³⁰ Another large party arrived in the spring of 1808, and Auld clearly stated why they went to such sacrifice: "irritated against the Canadians they promise me I shall never be ashamed at the smallness of my trade."¹³¹

Others began to withdraw from the southwest regions: "Part of them belong to the Country about Isle à la Crosse, but said they had flung that part away on account of the ill usage they received from the Canadians."¹³² When Pouce Coupé, an excellent hunter, quit W.F. Wentzel in 1805 after

having his wife taken, the trader offered his analysis of the problem:

This is the consequence of letting men have their will with Indians...such men ought to be punished severely for their disobedience - for it not only breeds quarrels with the Indians - but Peoples lives are in danger of falling a sacrifice to the rascallity of one single man...an example of which...the misfortune that befel 4 men at Athabasca last summer all through the means of two discontented Indians & for the same thing with this difference those above had their women pillaged & were Scoundrels.¹³³

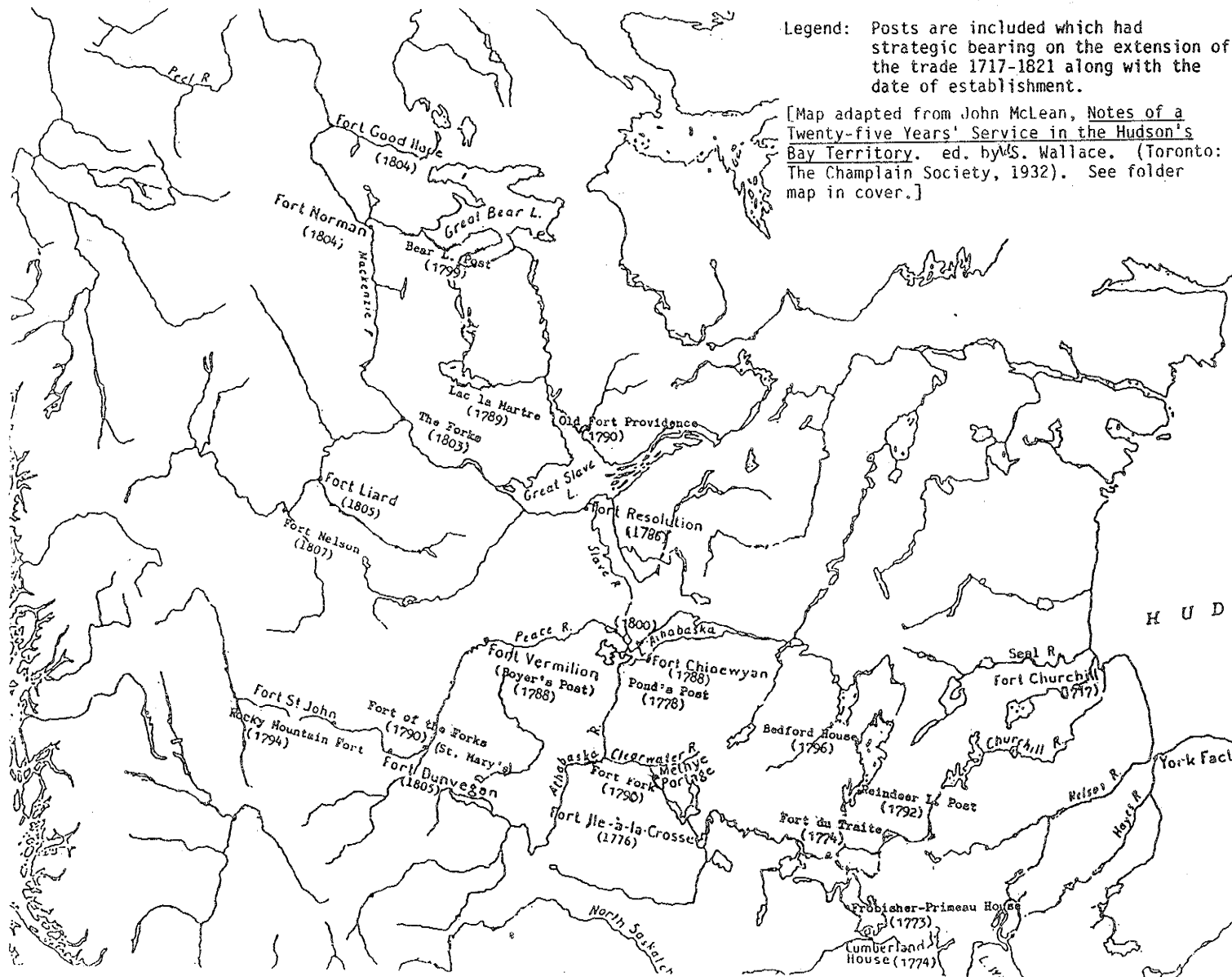
In an earlier chapter, the inelasticity of Indian demand for European trade goods was seen to be a result of limited transport capability. By the first decade of the 1800's other factors also kept demand for European goods from rising. Most significant was the excessive number of European traders in the Athabasca and Peace River contesting limited fur supply. This "trade war" for dominion led to a glut of trade goods, an overabundance of liquor as an incentive to pry furs from the Indians, and a depletion of game supply in the Peace River. Indians continued to frequent the fur trade while depending on the continued viability of caribou as a resource along the edge of the barrens, and very low prices for European commodities in exchange for furs. Often in this period the Indians of the Athabasca-Mackenzie area were able to obtain all perceived necessities from European traders for little or no effort. A few idled but many returned to their traditional and familiar ground.

The trading system with its devices for linking the barter system of the Indians with the market-oriented economy of the Europeans was breaking down in this period of competition. The relatively fixed standard of barter, the Made Beaver, meant little in a time of intense competition. Prices were repeatedly cut. The regale or gift exchange, an accepted ceremonial and ritualized part of the meeting of the two cultures was rendered meaningless as liquor was poured out in attempts to buy the Indians' allegiance in one direction or the other.¹³⁴

Intermarriage with North West Company men in the period gave an appearance of compatibility. A closer look at the nature of these linkages however may reveal that abduction, intimidation, and force were sometimes the means of obtaining the women. Because women were vital in maintaining ties with their Indian kin, there was an air of expediency to many of the marriages.¹³⁵

Indians of the Athabasca-Mackenzie were committed to the trade connection by the time of the European arrival. Chipewyans and to a lesser extent, the Beaver and Yellowknives, having been previously exposed to European trading practice at the Hudson's Bay Company post of Fort Churchill knew the relative value of furs and had become used to the decorum of that Company. Those depended on most by the North West Company drew on past experience of Bayside trade

to compare with their treatment by the pedlars. When the pedlars adopted an approach to the Indians which assumed native passivity, acceptance of aggressive treatment, and the rule of monopoly trade, the perspectives gained by earlier experience came into play. Natives of the Athabasca-Mackenzie refused to accept trade practice, prices, or unilateral decisions by the fur trading companies with which they did not agree.



Legend: Posts are included which had strategic bearing on the extension of the trade 1717-1821 along with the date of establishment.

[Map adapted from John McLean, Notes of a Twenty-five Years' Service in the Hudson's Bay Territory. ed. by S. Wallace. (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1932). See folder map in cover.]

V
N O T E S

¹The Indians received many times the price for their goods in the Athabasca. Philip Turnor traded 317 lbs. of meat "which cost more than 6 times the quantity would have done in any part of the country I ever saw before." Turnor, 13 Apr. 1791 in J.B. Tyrrell, ed., Journals of Hearne and Turnor (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1934), p. 363n.

²Tyrrell, Hearne and Turnor, pp. 86-87.

³Europeans first learned of the Back River known to the Athapaskans as Thlew-a-dezza or Great Fish River, as a result of these inquiries. Ibid., 3 Mar. 1791, p. 362. See also the entry for 25 July 1791 on p. 418. "An old Indian informed me that he had heard that there is a passage out of the Slave Lake on the East side which leads to the Sea, that he was once at the Slave Lake to have accompanied the Chipewyan and Red Knife or Copper Indians to War against the Esquimays but did not proceed farther with them. He said they informed him that they were going down a River on the East side to the Sea but he was not certain that the River run out of the Lake." Ibid., 23 May 1791, p. 365. A man known as Pêche (reputed to have killed John Ross in 1787) also mentioned "a very large river which runs to the Eastward...I suppose to be a branch of the Wager." Ibid., 22 July 1791, p. 417.

⁴A. Mackenzie, Letter to Roderic McKenzie, The Forks of the Peace River, 8 May 1793, Ottawa, PAC, MG19, C1, Vol. 32, n. pag. See also the letter of 8 May 1793 in W. Kaye Lamb, ed., The Journals and Letters of Sir Alexander Mackenzie (Toronto: Macmillan, 1970), p. 451.

⁵James Porter, Slave Lake Post Journal, 1 July 1800, Ottawa, PAC, MG19, C1, Vol. 6, n. pag.

⁶Lamb, Mackenzie, p. 125. Malcolm Ross relates: "2 Indians accompanied the Canadians tells as the ground is all burnt upon the other side of the Theen't nelly not neth or (Methye carrying place) where any provisions was to be got, the Indians used to be there is all gone down to the Athapescow as they could [not] live upon their own ground." Lake Athabaska Journal, 2 June 1791, Winnipeg, Man., HBC Archives, B9/a/1, fos. 17-27.

⁷Lamb, Mackenzie, p. 125.

⁸Turnor, 2 May 1792 in Tyrrell, Hearne and Turnor, p. 451.

⁹P. Fidler, Slave Lake, 12 Mar. 1792, in *ibid.*, p. 447.

¹⁰W. McGillivray, Trade of the Posts on the English River, Rat River Fort Journal, Sept. 1789, Ottawa, PAC, MG 19, C1, Vol. 4, p. 3.

¹¹Fidler, 2 Oct. 1791, in Tyrrell, Hearne and Turnor, p. 514.

¹²*Ibid.*, 4 May 1792, p. 453.

¹³Turnor, *ibid.*, 2 May 1792, p. 451.

¹⁴FCPJ, 1792, Winnipeg, Man., HBC Archives, B42/a/116, n. fo.

¹⁵T. Stayner, *ibid.*, 29 July 1793, B42/a/118, fo. 23.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 18 Sept. 1793, fo. 3.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 23 May 1794, B42/a/119, fo. 15 and 22, Apr. 1794, fo. 16.

¹⁸George Charles, Journal, 8 July 1794, Winnipeg, Man., HBC Archives, B83/a/1, fo. 1d. Charles built a short-lived house at the mouth of the Mus-quo-ajun River, on Aw-pis-awaw-athi-panna-coose Lake probably Mosser Lake on the South Seal River route into Reindeer Lake. He called it Granville House. Stayner, FCPJ, 15 July 1795, Winnipeg, Man., HBC Archives, B42/a/12/a, fo. 23. Bedford House was built by David Thompson at Reindeer Lake a year later.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰T. Stayner, FCPJ, 9 July 1794, Winnipeg, Man., HBC Archives, B42/a/119, fos. 27-28.

²¹William Auld, *ibid.*, 10-13 Sept. 1794, B42/a/121a, fo. 1.

²²Stayner, *ibid.*, 30 Dec. 1794.

²³Ibid., 11 May 1795, fo. 15.

²⁴E.E. Rich, The History of the Hudson's Bay Company, 1670-1870, Vol. II (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1959), p. 171.

²⁵T. Stayner, FCPJ, 19 Aug. 1796, Winnipeg, Man., HBC Archives, B42/a/121a, fo. 15d.

²⁶W. McGillivray, English River Posts, Rat River Fort Journal, near Riviere Maligne, 9 Sept. 1789, Ottawa, PAC, MG19, C1, Vol. 5, p. 1.

²⁷Richard Glover, ed., Samuel Hearne: A Journey from Prince of Wales' Fort in Hudson's Bay to the Northern Ocean (1958; rpt. Toronto: Macmillan, 1972), p. 67.

²⁸J. McKenzie, Fort Chipewyan Journal, 20 Aug. 1800, Montreal, McGill Mss., CH175, S157, n. pag. See also entry for 13 Aug. 1800.

²⁹Turnor, 2 Mar. 1792, in Tyrrell, Hearne and Turnor, p. 449.

³⁰M. Ross, 28 Apr. 1792, *ibid.*, p. 446n.

³¹Turnor, 2 May 1792, *ibid.*, p. 449.

³²*Ibid.*, 3 May 1792, p. 479.

³³*Ibid.*, 17 June 1792, p. 479.

³⁴John Thomson, *Journal, Riviere Rouge on Peace River*, 14 Aug. 1798, Ottawa, PAC, MG19, C1, Vol. 15, p. 24.

³⁵A.S. Morton, ed., The Journal of Duncan M'Gillivray of the North West Company at Fort George on the Saskatchewan, 1794-95 (Toronto: Macmillan, 1929), p. ixxi. "Spirits, as the Hudson's Bay man had long realized, were the one known means of turning the tables on the Indian," in *Rich, Hudson's Bay Company*, II, p. 228.

³⁶A.S. Morton, pp. ix-xi.

³⁷Turnor, 29 June 1791 in Tyrrell, Hearne and Turnor, p. 398.

³⁸A. Mackenzie, 13 Oct. 1792 in Lamb, Mackenzie, p. 238.

³⁹"The high banks of the Slave Indian Lake - or more properly Beaver Indian Lake can be plainly seen...and appears about 30 miles off." James Bird, Letter to P. Fidler, 31 Aug. 1799, Winnipeg, Man., HBC Archives, B104/a/1, fo. 38d. Fidler corrected Bird by suggesting the distance was perhaps "50 to 60 miles betwixt the Northern shores of this Lake & the South Branch or Forks of the Peace River." Fidler, *Miscellaneous Papers Journal*, 27 Jan. 1800, Winnipeg, Man., HBC Archives, E3/2, fo. 59.

40 "They proceeded West by [Lesser] Slave Lake...on their war excursions which they often repeated, even till the Beaver Indians had procured arms, which was in the year 1782. If it so happened that they missed them, they proceeded Westward till they were certain of wreaking their vengeance on those of the Rocky Mountain[s], who being without arms, became an easy prey to their blind and savage fury. All the European articles they possessed, previous to the year 1780, were obtained from the Knisteneaux and Chipewyans, who brought them from Fort Churchill, and for which they were made to pay an extravagant price." A. Mackenzie, 5 Apr. 1793 in Lamb, Mackenzie, p. 253. See also *ibid.*, 1 Jan. 1793, p. 249; 24 May 1793, pp. 275-76; 1 June 1793, p. 279.

41 *Ibid.*, 5 Apr. 1793, p. 253. Peter Fidler said that the Beaver were one half civilized. "They are more ferocious than any other Indians in these parts, but half civilized." P. Fidler, NHPJ, 14 Oct. 1802, Winnipeg, Man., HBC Archives, B39/a/1, fo. 9.

— 42 "Natives of this Establishment call themselves Beaver Indians a name which they claim, on account of their origin, which they affirm to proceed from the Beaver Indians in Peace River from whom they were separated some ages ago when attacked by enemies; the terror of such a sudden attack induced them to fly for safety to the northwestward; another reason that they give for this name is that they generally were and still are clothed in winter with the fur of that animal." G. Keith, An Account of the Mackenzie's River Department to R. McKenzie, 7 Jan. 1807, Ottawa, PAC, MG19, C1, Vol. 51, p. 6. Keith mentions that though ignorant of their language he did not believe it was the same as the Beaver language of Peace River. *Ibid.*

43 É. Petitot, Étude Sur la Nation Montagnaise ou Tchippewayne (Lyon: Les Missions catholiques, 1868), Vol. I, pp. 79-80 and 136.

44 Diamond Jenness, The Sarcee Indians of Alberta, Anthropological Series No. 23, Bulletin No. 90 (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, n.d.), p. 3.

45 *Ibid.*

⁴⁶Daniel Harmon, 21 Oct. 1810 in W. Kaye Lamb, ed., Sixteen Years in the Indian Country: the Journal of Daniel Williams Harmon 1800-16 (Toronto: Macmillan, 1957), p. 131.

⁴⁷Sir Alexander Mackenzie, Voyages from Montreal ...to the Frozen and Pacific Oceans...(1801; rpt. Edmonton, Alta: Hurtig, 1971), p. 123.

⁴⁸John J. Honigmann, Ethnography and Acculturation of the Fort Nelson Slave, Yale University Publication in Anthropology No. 33 (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1946), p. 23.

⁴⁹Émile Petitot, Autour du Grand Lac des É esclaves (Paris: Savine, Editeur, 1891), pp. 318, 363, 344-58 and Exploration de la Région du Grand Lac des Ours (Paris: Tequi, Libraire-Editeur, 1893), p. 312.

⁵⁰W.F. Wentzel, Letter to R. McKenzie, The Forks of the Mackenzie River, 27 Mar. 1807 in L.R. Masson, Les Bourgeois de la Compagnie du Nord-Ouest, Vol. II (New York: Antiquarian Press, 1960), p. 85.

⁵¹G. Keith, Letter to R. McKenzie, Mackenzie's River Department, 7 Jan. 1807, *ibid.*, pp. 66-68.

⁵²Honigmann, p. 25 and pp. 129-31.

⁵³Diamond Jenness, The Indians of Canada (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1977), p. 384 and The Sekani Indians of British Columbia, Bulletin No. 84 (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1937). See also C. Osgood, The Distribution of the Northern Athapaskan Indians, Yale University Publications in Anthropology No. 7 (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1936), p. 8.

⁵⁴H. Hoijer, "The Athapaskan Languages." In Studies in the Athapaskan Languages. Eds. H. Hoijer et al.

⁵⁵Krauss and Golla, "Northern Athapaskan Languages" in Helm, ed., Handbook...Vol. 6, Subarctic, p. 81.

56W.F. Wentzel, Letter to R. McKenzie, The Forks of the Mackenzie River, 27 Mar. 1807 in Masson, II, p. 85.

Catharine McClellan is of the belief that too much is made of the differences between Eastern Athapaskans. See "Culture Contacts in the Early Historic Period in Northwestern North America," Arctic Anthropology, 12, No. 2 (1964), 3-15.

57A. Mackenzie, 19 Oct. 1792 in Lamb, Mackenzie, p. 240.

58"They are more vicious and warlike than the Chipe-wyans." Ibid., 5 Apr. 1793, p. 253.

59Ibid., pp. 252-53.

60Ibid., p. 255.

61Alexander Mackenzie informed Turnor that he obtained sixty packs of beaver from the Indians of Peace River. See Turnor, 1 June 1791 in Tyrrell, Hearne and Turnor, p. 369 and *ibid.*, 29 June 1791, p. 398n.

62Ibid., 5 July 1791, p. 401.

63Ibid., 2 May 1792, p. 451.

64Robert Janes suggests that visits were irregular until about 1900. "Dispersion and Nucleation among Nineteenth Century Mackenzie Basin Athapaskans," Diss., Univ. of Calgary, 1975, p. 182.

65"The Peace River Indians were at war and killed some of the people of the Rocky Mountain which has shortened the summer return of that Country in Furs and Provisions." A. Mackenzie, Letter to Messrs. McTavish, Frobisher & Co., Mackinac, 4 June 1799 in Lamb, Mackenzie, p. 475.

66p. Fidler, 27 Jan. 1800, Miscellaneous Papers Journal, Winnipeg, Man., HBC Archives, E3/2, fo. 57.

67J. Porter, Slave Lake Post Journal, 15 Dec. 1800, Ottawa, PAC, MG19, C1, Vol. 6, pp. 70-71.

68J. Thomson, Journal, Riviere Rouge or Grand Marais, 4 Nov. 1798, Ottawa, PAC, MG19, C1, Vol. 7, p. 17.

69Ibid., 10 Feb. 1799, p. 30.

70Ibid., 22 July, 1799, Vol. 15, p. 12.

71A. Mackenzie, Letter to Messrs. McTavish, Frobisher & Co., Mackinac, 4 June 1799 in Lamb, Mackenzie, p. 475.

72"8 Canoes of Ottaways & Bungees arrived at the French House from the Athapescow river - but as soon as they came near the shore - all the Canadians ran into the water & took everything from the Indians by force & would not let them give us a single skin or even a bit of meat.. .." P. Fidler, Journal of a Journey from Cumberland House to Red Deer's Lake, 30 Sept. 1799, Winnipeg, Man., HBC Archives, B104/a/1, fo. 14.

73"Chennèle arrive from the Indians...he Me[t] Morn-eau along the way who struck him & threw him into a fire in an Indian Lodge then Pillaged him of a Considerable Quantity of Dry-d & pounded meat[;] one of the poor fellows hands is very much burnt." P. Fidler, 4 Feb. 1803, Winnipeg, Man., HBC Archives, B39/a/1, fo. 16.

74J. McKenzie, Fort Chipewyan Journal, 23 Mar. 1800, Montreal, McGill Mss., CH175, S157, n. pag.

75Thomas Swain, 10 Jan. 1803, Winnipeg, Man., HBC Archives, B224/a/1, fo. 19.

76J. McKenzie, Fort Chipewyan Journal, 22 Feb. 1800, Montreal, McGill Mss., CH175, S157.

77 "I have been haranguing them all this day not to return any more to their Lands." Ibid.

78 Ibid.

79 Ibid., 23 Feb. 1800.

80 Ibid., 28 Feb. 1800.

81 Ibid., 31 Mar. 1800.

82 p. Fidler, 30 Oct. 1791 in Tyrrell, Hearne and Turnor, p. 517.

83 Ibid., 4 May 1792, pp. 455-56.

84 Fidler said that "5 canoes of Ottaways went away to winter in the Athapiscow river." Journal of a Journey from Cumberland House to Red Deer's Lake, 29 Jan. 1800, Winnipeg, Man., HBC Archives, B104/a/1, fo. 24d. See also ibid., 7 Oct. 1799, fo. 615d.

85 Arthur Ray, Indians in the Fur Trade (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1974), p. 104.

86 p. Fidler, Journal from Greenwich House to Lesser Slave Lake, 27 Jan. 1800, Winnipeg, Man., HBC Archives, E3/2, fo. 57.

87 T. Swain, MHPJ, 4 Oct. 1802, Winnipeg, Man., HBC Archives, B41/a/2, fo. 1. See also ibid., 6 Oct. 1802.

88 Refer to n. 65.

89 A. Mackenzie, Letter to Messrs. McTavish, Frobisher & Co., Mackinac, 4 June 1799 in Lamb, Mackenzie, p. 475.

⁹⁰G. Keith, Letter to R. McKenzie, Bear Lake Post, 19 Nov. 1812 in Masson, II, p. 112.

⁹¹Ibid.

⁹²Refer to n. 45.

⁹³J. McKenzie, Fort Chipewyan Journal, 6 Apr. 1800, Montreal, McGill Mss., CH175, S157, n. pag.

⁹⁴Ibid., 9 Apr. 1800.

⁹⁵Ibid., 22 Feb. 1800.

⁹⁶For analysis of the effects of competition in the fur trade on Europeans and on Indians, see F. Wentzel, Letter to R. McKenzie, The Forks of the Mackenzie River, 27 Mar. 1807 in Masson, II. pp. 95-96. The 648 packs carried out of the Athabasca by the North West Company in 1799 were reduced to 182 in 1803. P. Fidler, NHPJ, Winnipeg, Man., HBC Archives, B39/a/1, fo. 23.

⁹⁷In 1799 the Chipewyans killed la France when he tried to stop them from taking an Indian woman away from another Canadian. J. McKenzie, Athabasca District Journal, 17 Apr. 1800 in Masson, II, p. 387.

⁹⁸Ibid.

⁹⁹Ibid., 9 Apr. 1800, p. 385.

¹⁰⁰J. Porter, Slave Lake Post Journal, 8 Mar. 1800, Ottawa, PAC, MG19, C1, Vol. 6, p. 4.

¹⁰¹J. McKenzie, Fort Chipewyan Journal, 23 Mar. 1800, Montreal, McGill Mss., CH175, S157, n. pag. In another incident Swain relates "The Old Company took him [an Indian trapper] away, and threatens to take his wife from [him] if he hunts for us." MHPJ, 27 June 1803, Winnipeg, Man., HBC

Archives, B41/a/1, fo. 3. See also *ibid.*, 30 June 1803.

102J. McKenzie, Fort Chipewyan Journal, 17 Apr. 1800 in Masson, II, p. 387-88.

103See n. 96.

104J. McKenzie, Fort Chipewyan Journal, 13 Aug. 1800, Montreal, McGill Mss., CH175, S157, n. pag.

105Ibid.

106P. Fidler, NHPJ, 31 Mar. 1803, B39/a/1, fo. 19.

107Ibid., 23 Jan. 1803, fo. 15.

108Ibid.

109Ibid., 12 Sept. 1803, fo. 4.

110T. Swain, Chiswick House Post Journal, Slave Lake, 6 May 1805, Winnipeg, Man., HBC Archives, B39/a/4, fo. 17.

111P. Fidler, NHPJ, 22 Sept. 1803, Winnipeg, Man., HBC Archives, B39/a/3, fo. 6.

112Ibid., 24 Jan. 1803, B39/a/1, fo. 15.

113W.F. Wentzel, Letter to R. McKenzie, 27 Mar. 1807 in Masson, I, p. 95.

114Many more died of influenza in the summer. P. Fidler, NHPJ, 3 Sept. 1803, Winnipeg, Man., HBC Archives, B39/a/3, fo. 6d.

115Ibid., 28 Mar. 1804, fo. 14.

116T. Swain, MHPJ, 20 Dec. 1803, Winnipeg, Man., HBC Archives, B41/a/1, fo. 11d.

117Ibid., 11 Dec. 1803, fo. 11.

118P. Fidler, NHPJ, 23 Jan. 1804, Winnipeg, Man., HBC Archives, B39/a/3, fo. 11n and 9 Aug. 1804, B39/a/4, fo. 1.

119Ibid., 20 May 1804, fo. 21.

120J. McKenzie, Fort Chipewyan Journal, 31 Mar. 1800, Montreal, McGill Mss., CH175, S157, n. pag.

121J. Porter, Slave Lake Post Journal, 3 Apr. 1800, Ottawa, PAC, MG19, C1, Vol. 6, p. 11.

122Ibid., 30 Nov. 1800, p. 65.

123P. Fidler, NHPJ, 19 Mar. 1804, Winnipeg, Man., HBC Archives, B39/a/4, fo. 15.

124The Chipewyans of Great Slave Lake departed: "all those Indians are now set off direct for their own Lands - & speak of going to war against the Esquimaux - & that they will not return here before the middle of next winter." Ibid.

125Ibid., 22 Aug. 1804, fo. 2. The Chipewyans told Fidler "they all go to Churchill to trade there." Ibid., 7 Sept. 1804, fo. 3.

126Ibid., 11 Sept. 1804, B39/a/41, fo.4.

127Ibid.

128W. Auld, FCPJ, 25 Apr. 1807, Winnipeg, Man., HBC Archives, B42/a/132, fo. 14.

129p. Fidler, 7 July 1807, Miscellaneous Papers Journal, Winnipeg, Man., HBC Archives, E3/3, fo. 17.

130Ibid., 4 Aug. 1807, fo. 20.

131W. Auld, FCPJ, 17 Mar. 1808, Winnipeg, Man., HBC Archives, B42/a/133, fo. 4.

132p. Fidler, *ibid.*, Nov. 1804, B42/a/129, fo. 3d.

133W.F. Wentzel, Grand River Journal, 13 Jan. 1805, Ottawa, PAC, MG19, C1, Vol. 8, p. 42.

134Ray, Indians in the Fur Trade, p. 68.

135The results of this study may provide a clear example of native hostility to the practice of taking an Indian wife as outlined by Sylvia Van Kirk, Many Tender Ties, Women in Fur Trade Society 1670-1870 (Winnipeg: Watson and Dwyer Ltd., 1980) p. 93.

CHAPTER VI

HEADQUARTER POLICIES AND RESPONSES

Unopposed between 1805 and 1815, the North West Company was to lose its exclusive domination of the fur trade in the Mackenzie lowlands thereafter. Methods adapted to exploitation of untapped fur supplies revealed serious weaknesses in this period of declining resources. Fur resources were rapidly reduced without concern for conservation and with limited concern for the welfare of the Indian trappers of the region. Conditions in international trade, in Red River and in Canada combined with the depleted resources to weaken the North West Company position in Athabasca and encouraged the Hudson's Bay Company to embark on a more forceful, concerted, and ultimately successful entry into the Mackenzie lowland region.

North West Company methods in the Athabasca did not alter markedly in the first two decades of the nineteenth century. The Hudson's Bay Company warned its traders that they were opposed by men who "'proceed[ing] upon a systematic plan of violence, to prevent the In-

dians from trading with us.'"¹ Traders who may have behaved differently in conventional society were moved to rationalize their behaviour.

James McKenzie stated that

Could I have considered myself as a private man, divested of any other employment or duty than that of an independent man, then I would not do what I have done, but being a clerk in the North West Company, bound to forward their interest in every respect to the utmost of my power, I could not in consequence, think it consistent with my duty or their interest to make them lose a pack or two by ill-treating these Indians.²

Alexander Henry the Younger provides the basis for understanding the urgency to maintain profit levels in the Athabasca.

It is this vast extent of country from which the N.W. Co. may be said to draw their treasures. It is true, profits arise from the trade in other parts, eastward; but nothing in comparison to what we obtain from the Athabasca country."³

Colin Robertson, an ex-North Wester provides an explanation for the tactics resorted to in the Athabasca. It was both the strong and weak link in their trade system.

Failure there would throw the whole of their pretentious economy out of gear; the 'ostentatious display of wealth' which gave them so much consequence...was based upon a concept of dominating the whole country, and Robertson was convinced that 'the Company are far too advanced to retreat. They must push on. No other alternative is left them. As to arrangements on the basis of a line of boundary, that may be adhered to until our opponents recover their strength, but not one hour longer.'⁴

By 1810 the North West Company was extended to the furthest reaches of the Athabasca-Mackenzie region. No unexploited fur sources remained to be trapped in the Northwest.

In comparison, the Hudson's Bay Company had been retrenching and keeping overhead costs down while maintaining a frugal operation. In the first decade of the nineteenth century it was under the influence of the economy and the conservative policy of Andrew Wedderburn, Lord Selkirk's brother-in-law. Ideas of bringing in more men, or embarking on more aggressive policies were doomed to failure; "in the present state of the Company's finances it would be madness."⁵

Wedderburn's policy also involved a change in approach to the Indians; he took on responsibility for the Red River Settlement, a haven for retired servants and their country-born offspring. The education of Indian as well as company children was encouraged. "This change in approach to the Indian marked a reversal of policy, but in itself it was not so important as the care for the servant's families which plainly entailed support for settlement."⁶

These changes in policy represented a dual threat to the North West Company. Location of a major settlement close to the path of the fur brigades represented

an obvious and ominous problem. Other related changes which recognized mixed bloods were put in place between 1800 and 1810, and had sweeping effects.

The services of...Native Youths are becoming every year more and more conspicuous...they are almost our sole dependance [sic] both for supplying and supporting the Inland Stations, as well as otherwise opposing the Canadians.⁷

Increased employment of native servants strengthened the Hudson's Bay Company's influence among Athapaskans just as it did in other regions among other Indian peoples.

The old Hudson's Bay Company policy of maintaining the quality of goods had been continued. "At heart they [the H.B.C.] nursed their old conviction that the goods 'either of the Old or the New Canadian Company' were inferior to those which they supplied their traders, and even during the Napoleonic War they were as careful as ever in securing first quality trade goods."⁸ In the first decade during periods of extreme competition the combination of expensive goods and limited sales had alarming consequences for dividends; profits fell and prices for goods held or rose. The annual dividend was reduced from six to four percent in 1801 and by 1809 no dividend was paid. To counteract declining profits, a new system of incentives was introduced⁹ which would encourage more aggressive approaches to the Indians with quality English goods.

It had also been basic to Hudson's Bay Company policy to refrain from retaliating against the North West Company. It was "'not the intention or the interest of the Company to create Contentions either with the Natives or the Canadians, which may produce the most serious and mischevious consequences.'"¹⁰ In a few instances harassed servants did react against North West Company bullying, but in general the "insistence on avoiding incidents,...the wish to evade direct legal challenge, and the willingness to talk"¹¹ with the opposition was followed. Their belief, held for one and a half centuries, was that the geographic advantage of sitting on the Bay while supplying high quality goods would maintain high profits. This was coupled with their quiet and tolerant policy toward the Indians. It was not until the second decade of the nineteenth century that this policy began to pay dividends in the Athabasca country.

The last untapped supplies of furs were reached in the first decade of the nineteenth century. During the time of competition the pedlars had extended regular trade down the Mackenzie River to Fort Norman and to Great Bear Lake. Fort Norman was frequented mainly by Slave Indians although some Mountain Indians, Hare, and Loucheux ventured to it. The pedlars moved near to the

mouth of the Mackenzie River where they met a number of Loucheux to whom they offered a post if they would trap beaver. "They said they were not able to hunt for a fort[,] that they often wanted themselves."¹² However the North West Company pushed on to establish Fort Good Hope at the mouth of the Blue Fish River in 1805.

Attempts to establish trade north of Great Slave Lake had been unsuccessful until about 1805. A post at Old Fort Providence had been temporarily established in 1789 for the Dogribs and Yellowknives, only to be abandoned the following year.¹³ In 1793 a post was built at Lac la Martre by Duncan Livingston but was abandoned in three years for a more central establishment at Old Post, eighty miles below the Great Slave Lake.¹⁴ Three years later one was established on Bear Lake for Yellowknife, Hare, Slave and Loucheux Indians.¹⁵ By 1804 two major posts had been built on the Mackenzie River, one at the Forks of the Liard,¹⁶ and one on Bear Lake. In 1805 the post on Blue Fish River was followed in the same year by a post established at Fort Liard near the mouth of the Nahanni.¹⁷ Initially low, "after 1804 the returns increased rapidly"¹⁸ with the amalgamation of the North West and XY Companies. But the posts were makeshift, being located to maximize short-term returns and then were relocated as beaver supplies dropped or

middlemen closed off direct access.

The Bear Lake Post catered mostly to the trade of the Yellowknives. Not numerous, the Yellowknives had a long history of involvement in the trade, were familiar with its methods, and had become adequate trappers and excellent provisioners.¹⁹ In their knowledge of the trade mainly acquired at the hands of the Chipewyans, they were active trappers but acted also as middlemen to associated tribes.²⁰ As a result they hovered around Bear Lake Post charging a tariff to the Indians who came in. At Nahanni River, George Keith in 1807 related that "had not the Yellowknife robbed them [the Beaver Indians] of a part of their Hunt by working the Beaver Lodges it would have been much better than it is."²¹ Further up the Liard, the mere mention of the Yellowknives threw the Beaver or Slaves into a state of terror.²²

The red knives with mauvais Loup at their head had pillaged them of all the furs they had & besides had taken 3 of their women from them - This is the old Custom of the red knives they wish to revive former times - if they should unfortunately meet with my Indians above the Old Fort...Adieu all hopes of returns for next year.²³

Methods used by the Yellowknife middlemen differed little from the North West Company's manner of conducting trade.

The Yellowknives not only were dominating Bear Lake

Post but spread to the south side of Great Slave Lake, down the Mackenzie and up the Liard Rivers. In 1807 George Keith reported from Nahanni River that "the Red Knives of Slave Lake have overrun the whole of the upper department in quest of Beaver and that they have greatly hurt the Trade with [local] Natives."²⁴ They were using methods similar to those imposed on them by Chipewyan middlemen in early years of the trade and practised by the pedlars since.

It was in these recesses of the Athabasca and Mackenzie lowland region that the primary sources of rich furs were obtained in these years. Peter Fidler wrote in 1807 that the North West Company "returns in Furs from their Settlements to the North of the Methy carrying place had been this winter the greatest by far ever known amounting to 850 Packs."²⁵ These returns were deceptive since it took two years for a catch to be removed; It was also approximately two years earlier that the XY and North West returns were combined, then supplemented by the furs extracted from the Hudson's Bay Company men.

Blatant signs of a growing Indian reluctance to trade were becoming evident. A North West Company rule to forbid marriages to Indian women²⁶ and not to allow families into the posts was largely resisted and ignored

by the Canadians.²⁷ The Indian wives had served to cement trading relationships. Often they were sent alone or with their Canadian husbands to trap for the winter with the Indians. To many of the pedlars, the women were key to the trade. In 1808 at Bear Lake Post three Indian women deserted their trader husbands "with a great and valuable Booty"²⁸ and made their way up the River to the Peace de Lièvres lands. Wentzel lamented that an Indian "woman Clerk has not long ago been...extolled as one of the best Tools that could be employed in charge of a Post for the Summer,"²⁹ but that situation was changing.

In the Peace River region, which had been the key to provisioning the Athabasca fur trade, pressure on the Indians to maintain supplies of fur and provisions was great. Three Beaver Indians came into Pine River Post in 1808: "told them everything...[that] would make them ashamed of their behaviour" which was the failure to hunt successfully. The trader "threatened them of abandoning the Fort in the Spring as well as beating, and using them like dogs if they did not work better for the future."³⁰ At Beaver River Fort, A.N. McLeod gave his hunters "a very severe reprimand;...he took hold of one of them by the hair and tossed the other from one side of the room to the other."³¹ The Indians, although in-

timidated began taking exception to the treatment. In another incident at Pine River Post:

L'Homme Seul's band arrived...I began to harangue them, and told them everything I thought could make them ashamed of the scandalous hunt they have made since they were here last. After abusing them as much as I possibly could with words, I stepped to L'Homme Seul in order to pull his ears, but he rising suddenly took hold of one of my hands whilst his Son and several others surrounding me held the other, without however attempting to do me any harm or injury.³²

The post master went on to verbally abuse the L'Homme Seul's band telling them if they did not hunt, "they shall be abused, beaten and have their Ears cut."³³ These practices may have contributed to the growing animosity and eventually to the killing of traders by the Beaver Indians which occurred near Pine River Post in 1823.

In the older fur-producing areas where competition and its effects had been greatest, a few North West Company traders contemplated the problem. W.F. Wentzel underscored the effect of competition on the traders by noting the benefits which were realized but he also bemoaned the personalities who gained influence in times of competition.

From competition arises a variety of circumstances which, for a moment, promote the interest of many, in augmenting wages and unfurling capacities which, without this, would perhaps never have been demonstrated, tho' it is often prejudicial to morals and equally injurious to

the character of many. Besides this, several people who are roguish in private and dissemblers in public...are the most noticed.³⁴

He further suggested that the period of competition though bringing short-term benefits in higher prices for furs and lower costs for goods was ultimately destructive to the Indian for whom there were few long-term benefits.

With respect to the Indians, the care and attention that is paid...to them for the sake of their skins renders them much more civilized and cunning. By this, they take a footing which, with time, induces them to commit actions which otherwise they would not have dared to mention. Indolence, robbery and murder are the consequences of an opposition in trade: people would suppose it would rouse their attention to industry, having goods at a lower price, but far to the contrary; drunkenness, idleness and vice are preferred....Thus no good can be derived from the turbulent struggles of opposition in this country; it destroys trade, creates vice, and renders people crafty, ruins good morals, and almost totally abolishes every humane sentiment in both Christian and Indian breast.³⁵

Much of the violence occurred in attempts to maintain the loyalty of the Indians. The use of force though initially successful, was not tolerated in the long run.

The most telling evidence indicating dissatisfaction with the North West Company in the Athabasca were the persistent treks by Indians to the Bay. In 1807 "the Northern Indians...arrived [at Churchill] with a considerable quantity of fine furs. They...[were] chiefly strangers from the vicinity of the Athapuscow

Lake."³⁶ At the newly established post on Hay River the North West Company master, Edward Smith, was told in the same year that the Chipewyan leader Grand Blanc and many of his relations "intended to leave the River and go to there [sic] Lands."³⁷ Another leader at that post "the Three Thumbs...[and his band have] plans laid down to go to Churchill Factory next Season with his hunt."³⁸ Word of Fidler's trip to Black Lake must have filtered northwest for many of the Indians expectantly waited for the English traders to come to the Athabasca region.³⁹ At Fort Churchill, in part due to Chipewyan trade, "Mr. Auld has got a far better trade here this Year [1807] than has ever been since the place was settled in 1783."⁴⁰ The Hudson's Bay Company moved to capitalize on Indian reluctance to trade with the North West Company by travelling west to Wollaston Lake. Peter Fidler followed an old route "the tracks over the Portages being very little used....Before the Canadians settled in the Athapescow, and some Beaver and Northern Indians used annually to pass this way in great numbers on their way down to Churchill to trade."⁴¹ Fidler passed "thro' the Deer's [Reindeer] Lake & c. which leads into the Eastern part of the Athapuscow Lake."⁴² He chose to establish a post at "Black Lake [which] is the place preferred about 1 days walk from the Athapuscow Lake."⁴³

He met several Chipewyans en route who promised to "lay up there [sic] winters hunts for us next summer."⁴⁴ Fidler's pilot "after we parted" was given "a very severe Drubbing and had even broke two of his ribs"⁴⁵ at the hand of the North West Company master at Reindeer Lake. Although Fidler's efforts were not followed through, the interest shown by the Hudson's Bay Company and the contacts made with Indians en route served to entice them down to the Bay in ensuing years.

By 1808 a few Indian bands were relocating in an effort to ensure food stocks rather than good trapping grounds. Yellowknife Indians in particular were hunting in the regions of the Upper Liard⁴⁶ and west of Great Bear Lake.⁴⁷ Chipewyans were hunting in the Peace River area as far as Pine River Fort. Beaver Indians were hunting in the Liard area and had moved over to Hay River post to trade.⁴⁸ Traders were attempting to align particular bands in defined regions centering on a particular post.⁴⁹ The ability of the pedlars to deploy Indians in specific areas was successful only with a few middleman bands from the Chipewyan and the Yellowknife tribes. They had regular access to arms and ammunition and were familiar with all aspects of the trade.

Locational changes and seasonal cycles, combined with periodic extremes of climate had led to consider-

able hardship which could possibly be relieved only by attempting to retain some flexibility of movement. This occurred to the Indians around the Forks of the Liard in 1807. W.F. Wentzel recorded, "The removal of the Indians to the Great Willow and Porcupine Lakes for subsistence [recently took place] - they being unable to find food elsewhere, the[se] sad disasters it is to be feared will little contribute to [our benefit]."50 The Indians of the lower Liard region were starving51 until some "young men from Rock Mountain...or [Upper] Liard brought sixteen skins and some food."52 A favourite hunter, "Capet Rouge", arrived in the fall saying "that he feared that he would not be able to find subsistence for the Fort."53 He vowed to move off to lands more familiar. The North West Company trader disagreed with this plan:

I desired them to abandon hunting any more Animals this spring to apply themselves to the Hunt of Peltries until the Animals gets Fat....They think that I am very hard upon them for Beaver[;] great complaints are made for which I do not care a curse.54

A continuing problem of food supply on the Liard led Wentzel to attempt growing a vegetable garden.55 His efforts were of limited success as the post was apparently still in dire need of provisions. It was necessary to send a Canadian off

with orders to come as soon as possible with what Provisions he could possible make the In-

dians bring to the Fort as they may perhaps otherwise eat the whole themselves without remembering that we are equally in want of them.⁵⁶

Some Indians traded what little provisions they had in order to get ammunition. But game resources were dwindling, particularly the large mammals - buffalo, elk and moose. Time which had previously been spent in trapping beaver was spent in attempts to replenish food supplies.

There were a few skins filtering down through the middlemen. But these furs were intercepted by the Chipewyans in particular who were opting to take them out to Hudson Bay rather than receive prices and possibly abuse from the pedlars. The stresses of maintaining the level of fur returns and of obtaining a basic food supply increased and were channelled into intense pressure on the Indians.⁵⁷ By the fall of 1807 Wentzel issued a threat suggesting that traders on the Lower Mackenzie placed a prohibition on

all kinds of Peltries except Beaver - they promised to work that Animal - as soon as the Ice is taken over the Grand River they say they will go above to the Red Knife River - I also told them that if they did not stand to this pledge of their Faith - I had orders from all the Chiefs of Athabasca to shut up my shop and Trade no more but send the goods in the Spring to the Loucheux who would give us Beaver in exchange.⁵⁸

This threat was issued at a time when these same "Indians...were so poor that they Traded Moose Deer Sinews-

...for Beaver - For Making Hare Snares."59

Depleted resources pushed the Indians to the limit. On the Peace River a North West Company trader abused two Beaver Indians when they did not bring in the desired amount of provisions and furs; the trader at Dunvegan Post

ill treated them both for not having worked better than they have this winter and assured them that they will be severely punished if they do not act better for the future and that they might not doubt of the truth of what... [was] told them. I pulled their ears and gave each a few slaps.60

At Hay River in 1807 some of the Chipewyans threatened to ignore their credits and go to the barren lands.61 When three Canadians were sent out to return their Indian women who had deserted from Bear Lake Post they were killed.62 A Chipewyan trapper was killed by the Slaves and Beaver of the Liard in the same spring.63 Trouble on the Liard reached a peak a year later when the Beaver quarreled with the Mountain Indians "or Gens d'Orignal and twenty-two of the latter including men, women,[and] children were barbarously slaughtered."64

In March of 1808 some Indians from the Athabasca brought considerable amounts of furs out to Churchill. William Auld declared that "let nothing be undone to secure the approbation of these people. I strive to please them, their gratitude is clear and unequivocal."

cal."⁶⁵ He was told that the natives were "wonderfully irritated against the Canadians they promise me I shall never be ashamed at the smallness of my trade."⁶⁶ No doubt there was exaggeration in the promise to trade all with the Hudson's Bay Company in that these Chipewyans were telling Auld what he wished to hear. But there is little doubt in the accuracy of the perception of their irritation. They had just travelled seven hundred miles or more to avoid the Canadians. By 1810 Auld had received more Chipewyans from the Athabasca and welcomed

the arrival of many Northern Indians from great distances in the fall of the year and over whom I am anxious to exert my influence in fixing their regard towards at this critical time while the Canadians are by their hard dealings barely enabling the poor wretches to exist.⁶⁷

Auld decided "to give a bounty to the natives who bring the more valuable furs exclusive of the usual price for them." He believed this would act "as a new motive to draw down the Beaver hunters from the Athapuscow and Slave Lakes."⁶⁸ Apparently the Chipewyans were bringing prime beaver for "at no former year [did Auld]...remember seeing such a quantity of fine furs...so early in the Season." He gave a bonus of ammunition and tobacco for every ten beaver skins.⁶⁹

The Indians of the Mackenzie lowlands increasingly displayed behaviour which reflected their disenchantment with the fur trade as practiced by the North West Com-

pany. The not always sympathetic George Keith observed at Nahanni Forks on the Liard:

The natives of this Establishment entertain very just ideas betwixt right and wrong and decide matters of this nature as coolly and impartially as could be expected from a set of people who are much attached to the most distant relations and have no determinate principal or principal person for settling such matters.⁷⁰

Disenchantment with the trading practice of the North West Company was augmented by a downturn in trade caused by widespread starvation in 1811. This negative turn of events was experienced from the Mackenzie Mountains to the Hudson Bay Coast. At Churchill, William Auld was

completely mortified and depressed at the thoughts of the shocking situation of our affairs in almost every quarter but what is still more afflicting we hear that our Indians have one and all much less success in killing furs this year than ever known before and in the latter end of that month and the beginning of May several came in, in a state even worse than our fears had led us to expect.⁷¹

Yet Indians still trickled in⁷² from the Athabasca and Slave Lake areas⁷³ despite being "in a very starving condition [due to the] scarcity of Deer [caribou]."⁷⁴

The distress which had been periodically afflicting the Indians struck the Nor'Westers of the Athabasca in 1811. W.F. Wentzel was the only European to survive at the Forks of the Liard. "From...[Dec. 13] to the 11th of March, we lived upon nothing else but dried beaver skins....upward of three hundred...besides a few lynx

and otter skins."⁷⁵ Three men and a child died.⁷⁶ The reasons given were the failure to contact the migrating caribou combined with a "die-off of hares" and a lack of fish. In addition there were "poor returns all over the country."⁷⁷

The North West Company had been well aware of the intent of some Indians as early as 1811. In that year a tower had been built "for the purposes of watching the motions of the Indians, who intended...to destroy the house and all its inhabitants." The native leader at that time had forecast that "there would be a complete change in the face of their country."⁷⁸

Between 1812 and 1814 the fortunes of the North West Company in the Athabasca declined further. The destruction of Fort Nelson by the Indians went by without penalty. "Athabasca itself is in fact dwindling down to nothing. The Indians complain of the want of beaver, (the Iroquois having ruined the country)."⁷⁹ The pedlars' continued use of Iroquois trappers in the Athabasca had long been resented. As a result of starvation, continued abuse from the traders, and competition from the Iroquois, the natives, as Wentzel recorded,

formed a conspiracy last Spring to massacre all the whites of Fort Chipewean and Big Island, in the Peace River, as well as Moose Deer Island Establishment at Slave Lake. The Chipewean tribe appears to have been the first instigators, and altho' the affair seems to

have been laid aside and forgotten, still we are alive to the most painful apprehensions for the safety of our lives.⁸⁰

Although there were generally unsettled conditions among the natives of the region at least some of the North West Company men still believed it grew out of an immediate and temporary problem. Fort Chipewyan resident traders believed that the Indians

intended...to destroy the house and all its inhabitants. They had been instigated to this rash design by the delusive stories of one among them, who had acquired great influence over his companions by his supposed skill in necromancy. This fellow had prophesied that there would soon be a complete change in the face of their country that fertility and plenty would succeed to the present sterility; and that the present race of white inhabitants, unless they became subservient to the Indians, would be removed, and their place be filled by other traders, who would supply their wants in every possible manner....None of these menaces, however, were put in execution. They were probably deterred from the attempt by perceiving that a most vigilant guard was kept over them.⁸¹

The immediate cause for the threat may have been a local nativistic prophet movement, but there was deep underlying social unrest that gave widespread support to any call for a change in fur trade proprietorship. From a relationship of trust in the earliest years the people of the Athabasca-Mackenzie region found themselves in a relationship of great insecurity.

On the lower Mackenzie the relationship was equally unstable. In 1813 the Loucheux arrived at Bear Lake

Post with a supply of pelts to trade. When they discovered a meagre supply of trade goods, particularly decorative beads, they tried to withdraw with their furs. An attempt was made to stop them and a massacre nearly resulted. Wentzel was of the opinion that the North West Company was finished as a trading concern in the North.

One thing kept pace with another in the decline of once famed Athabasca, formerly the delight and school of the North. The Canadians, who were ever fond of the place and thought seldom or ever of their native country, are now disgusted at the treatment they receive and gather their money as fast as the squaws gather berries, in order to get rid of the 'S.....pays maudit."⁸²

George Keith was of a similar opinion and a year later he commented that "the returns these years have unfortunately sunk to such a degree that one has no pleasure in mentioning them. I hope, however, that they have now reached their lowest ebb."⁸³

In 1815, Wentzel openly stated that the plight of the North West Company was as much due to deteriorating relationships with the natives as to dwindling fur stocks.

I cannot account for it, but, by some fatality or other, the Natives have taken a dislike to the Whites, and the reductions of the returns may perhaps be as much attributed to this unfortunate circumstance as it may be to the pretended ruined state of the country.⁸⁴

Yet he went on to say that the partners believed that a lack of beaver was their justification for shutting down the Mackenzie River Department in that year. Apparently the partners were unable or unwilling to recognize the extent of hostility to their methods.

A year later the North West Company evacuated the Mackenzie River posts. All personnel left "in the summer [of] 1815 to the great hazard of...[their] lives, for the natives having obtained a knowledge of our intentions had formed the design of destroying us on our way out."⁸⁵ Wentzel did return the following year with only one large canoe and was received with "extravagant demonstrations of joy."⁸⁶ This apparent contradiction was a demonstration of the dilemma which Athapaskans found themselves. Indignant to the point of conflict with the practices of the North West Company, they were nevertheless becoming dependent on the goods which the traders offered.

The years 1812-14 had been critical years for the fur trade of the Athabasca. The end of the Napoleonic Wars was in sight and the markets of Europe were to open up to the Hudson's Bay Company. In North America the War of 1812 began and the Americans captured Detroit and disrupted North West Company transport and supply.

By 1814 the Hudson's Bay Company resolved to oppose

the North West Company in the Athabasca. In that year a study and inventory of returns had indicated that interior posts where North West Company opposition was experienced had produced better returns than posts by the Bay where opposition was negligible. This indicated to Wedderburn that lethargy was more to be feared than opposition, and a plan to extend incentives and link salaries to productivity was introduced. "Appeasement of the Northwesters should be replaced by active opposition, even in Athabasca."⁸⁷ The results of this study set the stage for the last phases of activity of the Hudson's Bay Company in the Athabasca. A more active opposition took place. Aggressive tactics would be countered. Opposition to all North West Company posts was to be encouraged.

VI
NOTES

¹E.E. Rich, The History of the Hudson's Bay Company, 1670-1870, II (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1959), p. 273.

²Ibid.

³E. Coues, ed., The Mss. Journals of Alexander Henry and David Thompson, 1799-1814, II (1897, rpt. Minneapolis: Ross and Haines, 1965), p. 474.

⁴Colin Robertson, as cited in *ibid.*, p. 340.

⁵Ibid., p. 291.

⁶Ibid., p. 295. Jennifer Brown postulates that prior to approximately 1790 the offspring of native mothers and HBC fathers were brought up as "English" or "Indian". After that date "parental and company attitudes toward them showed a new recognition of this distinctive demographic group, its problems and its potentialities." See J. Brown, Strangers in Blood, Fur Trade Families in the Indian Country (Vancouver: Univ. of British Columbia Press, 1980), pp. 158-59.

⁷John Thomas, "Moose Servants Requests and Resolves, 1803," Winnipeg, Man., HBC Archives, B135/f/1.

⁸Rich, Hudson's Bay Company, II, p. 256.

⁹Ibid., pp. 264-270.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 257.

¹¹Ibid., p. 221.

¹²A. Mackenzie, Great Bear Lake Journal, 2 July 1806, Montreal, McGill Mss, CH180, S162, n. pag. This was Sir Alexander Mackenzie's nephew.

¹³A. Mackenzie in L.F.R. Masson, Les Bourgeois de la Compagnie du Nord Ouest, I (1889; rpt. New York: Antiquarian Press, 1960), pp. 292-93. The Dogribs were not very successful as middlemen in these years.

¹⁴W.F. Wentzel to R. McKenzie, The Forks of the Mackenzie River, 23 Mar. 1807, *ibid.*, p. 95.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶W.F. Wentzel, Fort Enterprise, Winter Lake, 26 Feb. 1826, cited in H.A. Innis, The Fur Trade in Canada (1930; rpt. Toronto: Univ. of Toronto, 1964), p. 201.

¹⁷This was located near Fort Good Hope. A. Mackenzie, Great Bear Lake Post Journal, 26 Oct. 1805, Montreal, McGill Mss., CH180, S162, n. pag.

¹⁸Innis, Fur Trade, p. 202. See fragments of G. Keith's Biskaga [Nahanni] River Journal, 4 June 1807, Ottawa, PAC, MG19, E1, Vol. 24, p. 9338.

¹⁹"Mr. Rochblavé has been pleased to inform me that the Red Knives will probably possess the Beaver Country again the ensuing summer and winter." F. Wentzel, Journal, The Forks of the Mackenzie River, 1807, Montreal, McGill Mss., CH176, S158, n. pag.

²⁰(The Slave Indians) Wentzel tried to reassure that the Yellowknives would leave them alone. "This however will not be enough to satisfy the timorous minds of my Indians." *Ibid.*

²¹G. Keith, Biskaga River Journal, 13 May 1807, Ottawa, PAC, MG19, E1, Vol. 24, p. 9337.

²²W.F. Wentzel, Journal, The Forks of the Mackenzie River, 15 Mar. 1808, Montreal, McGill Mss., CH176, S158, n. pag.

²³Ibid., 19 June 1808.

²⁴Ibid., 25 Sept. 1807.

²⁵P. Fidler, 6 June 1807, Miscellaneous Papers Journal, 1807, Winnipeg, Man., HBC Archives, E3/5, fo. 2. Fidler goes on to say "whereas the other year 1799 when the greatest returns came out only [there] was then 648 packs."

²⁶Sylvia Van Kirk, Many Tender Ties (Winnipeg: Watson and Dwyer, 1980), p. 92.

²⁷Simon Fraser, Letter to James McDougall, Makasteh, 21 Dec. 1806, Ottawa, PAC, MG19, A9, Vol. 2, n. pag.

²⁸W.F. Wentzel, Journal, The Forks of the Mackenzie River, 6 Mar. 1808, Montreal, McGill Mss., CH176, S158.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Pine River Post Journal, [Fort St. John], 26 Jan. 1808, Ottawa, PAC, MG19, E1, Vol. 24, p. 9375.

³¹Archibald N. McLeod, Beaver River Fort, 1 Mar. 1807, ibid., p. 9380.

³²Ibid., 12 Apr. 1807, p. 9384.

³³Ibid., 13 Apr. 1807, p. 9385.

³⁴W.F. Wentzel to R. McKenzie, The Forks of the Mackenzie River, 27 Mar. 1807, in Masson, I, pp. 95-96.

³⁵Ibid., p. 96.

³⁶FCPJ, 25 Apr. 1807, Winnipeg, Man., HBC Archives, B42/a/132, fo. 14.

³⁷Edward Smith, Hay River Post Journal, 21 May 1807, Ottawa, PAC, MG19, E1, Vol. 24, p. 9341.

³⁸Ibid., 23 May 1807, p. 9341.

³⁹Ibid., 12 Oct. 1807, p. 9345.

⁴⁰P. Fidler, 4 Aug. 1807, Miscellaneous Papers Journal, Winnipeg, Man., HBC Archives, E3/5, fo. 20. See also *ibid.*, 29 July 1807, fo. 17.

⁴¹Ibid., 19 June 1807, fo. 6 and *ibid.*, E3/3, fo. 8.

⁴²W. Auld, FCPJ, 16 Nov. 1806, Winnipeg, Man., HBC Archives, B42/a/132, fos. 5 and 5d.

⁴³Ibid., 2 Aug. 1807, fo. 21d. Fidler commented: "This way we have come is very short in comparison by passing the Isle a la Crosse and Methy Portage - but the water is much shoaler."

⁴⁴Fidler, 7 July 1807, Miscellaneous Papers Journal, *ibid.*, E3/3, fo. 17.

⁴⁵Ibid., 15 July 1807, fo. 13.

⁴⁶G. Keith, Biskaga River Journal, 13 May 1807, Ottawa, PAC, MG19, E1, Vol. 24, p. 9337.

⁴⁷W.F. Wentzel, The Forks of the Mackenzie River, 1807, Montreal, McGill, Mss., CH176, S158, n. pag.

⁴⁸E. Smith, Hay River Post Journal, 15 Oct. 1807, Ottawa, PAC, MG19, E1, Vol. 24, p. 9346.

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰W.F. Wentzel, Journal, The Forks of the Mackenzie River, 5 Aug. 1807, Montreal, McGill Mss., CH176, S158, n. pag.

⁵¹Ibid., 16 Aug. 1807.

⁵²Ibid., 17 Aug. 1807.

⁵³Ibid., 17 Sept. 1807.

⁵⁴W.F. Wentzel, Journal, The Forks of the Mackenzie River, 6 Apr. 1806, Ottawa, PAC, MG19, E1, Vol. 24, p. 9303.

⁵⁵"Everything in the garden comes up pretty well." ibid., Sept. 1806, p. 9298.

⁵⁶W.F. Wentzel, Journal, The Forks of the Mackenzie River, 9 Sept. 1807, Montreal McGill Mss., CH176, S158, n. pag.

⁵⁷Wentzel told the Indians only to hunt beaver. "Several of the Indians had thrown away great numbers of Martin, Pichoux, and Carcajoux skins - on account of what I had told them in the Fall." Ibid., 8 Nov. 1807.

⁵⁸Ibid., 15 Oct. 1807.

⁵⁹"The scarcity of animals never appeared among these people more severely than this year. Some of them are

greatly in danger of starving this winter from want of sin-
ews to make hare snares." Ibid.

⁶⁰Dunvegan Post Journal, 5 Feb. 1808, Ottawa, PAC,
MG19, E1, Vol. 24, p. 9279.

⁶¹E. Smith, Hay River Post Journal, 17 Oct. 1807,
Ottawa, PAC, MG19, E1, Vol. 24, p. 9348.

⁶²W.F. Wentzel, *ibid.*, 19 June 1808.

⁶³*Ibid.*, 28 June 1808.

⁶⁴G. Keith, Letter to R. McKenzie, Biskaga River
Post, 1 Dec. 1808, Ottawa, PAC, MG19, C1, Vol. 51, p. 19.

⁶⁵W. Auld, FCPJ, 17 Mar. 1808, Winnipeg, Man., HBC
Archives, B42/a/133, fo. 5d.

⁶⁶*Ibid.* See also *ibid.*, B42/a/134, 26 Apr. 1809,
fo. 7d. and 22 May 1809, fo. 8d.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 16 Aug. 1810, B42/a/136a, fo. 1.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, 15 Sept. 1810, fo. 10.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, Oct. - Nov. 1810, fo. 12.

⁷⁰Keith goes on to relate two specific instances of
this sense of justice in action. G. Keith, Letter to R.
McKenzie, Biskaga River Post, 28 Feb. 1810, Ottawa, PAC,
MG19, C1, Vol. 51, pp. 3839.

⁷¹W. Auld, FCPJ, May 1811, B42/a/136a, fo. 21.

⁷²FCPJ, 25 Oct. 1811, B42/a/137, fo. 2d.

73Ibid., 29 Oct. 1811, fo. 3.

74Ibid., 19 May 1812, fo. 10.

75W.F. Wentzel, Letter to R. McKenzie, The Forks of the Mackenzie River, 30 Apr. 1811, in Masson, I, p. 106-07.

76"Poudrie, Pillon and Wm. Henry, all Canadians, and the child of Poudrie," G. Keith, Letter to R. McKenzie, Great Bear Lake Post, 5 Jan. 1812, Ottawa, PAC, MG19, C1, Vol. 51, p. 48.

77Ibid., p. 49.

78Sir John Franklin, Narrative of a Journey to the Shores of the Polar Sea (1823; rpt. New York: Greenwood Press, 1969), p. 152.

79W.F. Wentzel, Letter to R. McKenzie, Bear Lake Post, 28 Feb. 1814, in Masson, I, p. 109.

80Ibid.

81Sir John Franklin, Narrative of a Journey to the Shores of the Polar Sea (1823; rpt. New York: Greenwood Press, 1969), p. 152.

82W.F. Wentzel, Letter to R. McKenzie, Bear Lake Post, 28 Feb. 1814, in Masson, I, p. 109.

83G. Keith, Letter to R. McKenzie, Mackenzie's River, 4 Feb. 1815, Ottawa, PAC, MG19, C1, Vol. 51, n. pag.

84W.F. Wentzel, Letter to R. McKenzie, Bear Lake Post, 6 Mar. 1815, in Masson, I, p. 114.

85Ibid., pp. 114-15.

⁸⁶Ibid.

⁸⁷Rich, Hudson's Bay Company, II, p. 312.

CHAPTER VII

RESTORED MONOPOLY: REORGANIZATION, DEPLOYMENT AND CONSERVATION

Arrival of the Hudson's Bay Company after 1815 aggravated the critical problems which were plaguing the Mackenzie lowland region. The most severe problems were in the Peace River country where the consequences of the exploitation of the previous twenty-five years was most evident. This region, once the storehouse of food support for traders down the Mackenzie River and the source of pemmican to fuel fur brigades to Fort William, was in disarray. Large mammals had almost disappeared and fur returns were marginal. During the winter of 1815-16 at least sixteen employees of newly arrived Hudson's Bay Company party starved to death on the Peace River.¹

Most Indians realized from the earliest days of the fur trade the value of competition in enhancing the worth of their furs and in keeping the price of trade goods down.² Periodically furs had been marketed at Churchill to realize higher returns or escape the predatory practice of the North West Company. Competition no doubt by 1815 had led to extremes which had come to be

identified with periods when competing markets were available. A typical incident occurred upon the arrival of the Hudson's Bay Company in 1815, "One of the Indians came up to Mr. [John] Clark[e] saying the North West had armed them...and was Endeavouring To Prevail on them to destroy us all."³ At Fort Resolution in 1816, a HBC trader observed that

the North West are following up their usual custom of running after the poor Indians in all directions with armed men and drives them before them like a flock of sheep to their fort and treats them as they think proper.⁴

In the first year of revived competition after 1815 the Indians were mainly concerned that the Hudson's Bay Company had the resolve to stay and the power to protect those who traded with it. This same HBC servant at Resolution recorded: "They said it was hard to join us ..., but if we had an equal [strength] with the North West they would soon join us."⁵ As HBC strength increased between 1816 and 1819 the natives became more calculating in the event of a change of corporate direction. George Simpson observed that

all their measures are regulated by political views, 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 individ-

uals frequently take credit at each Fort and divide their hunts.⁶

But the Indians were also applying pressure by choosing to carry greater proportions of their furs to the Bay than ever before. North West Company returns were reduced to ninety packs by 1818.⁷ Some were fearful of retaliation and by 1819 were placing their stocks in hidden caches. Three Chipewyans at Isle à la Crosse Lake "desire...[their stocks] might be sent for [by HBC traders]; the Indians having declined bringing either furs or meat themselves, since the opposition between the Companies commenced."⁸ Yet by 1819 in the Peace River area "nearly 3/4 of the total" of the Indians were trading with the Hudson's Bay Company.⁹

The fur trade had been in disarray in great part due to the disillusionment of the natives with the trade. W.F. Wentzel wrote in 1820, "In fact the Natives are so much disorganized in Athabasca, that if they are in the same train of living in other parts of the North West, it will not be too much to say that the fur trade [is] ruined for some years to come."¹⁰

The state of the trade in Athabasca did not appear to provoke a change in the behaviour of the North West Company because in 1820 at Fort Wedderburn when "a North West Chief (Whiskey Jack) came over this morning with the intention of joining us [the Hudson's Bay Company]

...[George] Keith detained his wife and sent two Half-breeds after him."¹¹ W.F. Wentzel in 1812 repeated his contention that "the whites at present possess but a faint resemblance of that influence which they formerly turned so well to their own emolument and thereby also to the benefit of their country."¹² George Simpson recorded in 1821 that natives were starving who "for some years past [had] been considered...the best hunters of the[ir] tribe."¹³ With their fort hunters starving, the residents of Fort Chipewyan were reduced to the shortest provisions in years.¹⁴ Athapaskans became depressed in such circumstances¹⁵ and stopped hunting, thus contributing to the malaise.¹⁶

To further the dislocation, smallpox struck the native people of the North West in 1820. Fully "1/5 of the population between Rainy Lake and Athabasca was [estimated to be] destroyed."¹⁷ At Fort Resolution many of the survivors according to their custom "destroyed their property and stopped hunting - the consequence of which was they have not procured a single skin, and have starved ever since."¹⁸ George Simpson commented at Lake Athabasca that the disease "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."¹⁹ On the Peace River John Clarke re-

ported that many became sickly as they "are naturally of a delicate constitution, and so much addicted to spirituous liquors, that nine out of ten dies of a rapid decline."²⁰ Simpson summed up that many Beaver Indians, an Iroquois, and three North West Company servants died. "There has been a great mortality amongst the Beaver Indians [and] we have lost many valuable hunters."²¹

The decline of the Athabasca²² and Peace rivers, particularly the once formidable resources of the latter, was complete. In the early 1820's the land around Fort Vermilion was reported as "exhausted...in Large Animals"²³ [moose, woodland caribou and buffalo] and further up the Peace river the land near Dunvegan was also "truly exhausted of Beaver and large Animals."²⁴ Later in the mid 1830's it was reported that "there is no Buffalo in that Quarter now, and the Extension of the Beaver Indians for these several Years past, in their Circumscribed Grounds, with the Encouragement held out by us for Provision and Leather has I believe thinned the Moose Deer considerably."²⁵ The report was accurate in noting the disappearance of large mammals, the extent of emphasis on specialized hunting, provisioning, and leather production and why; the report was less accurate in dating when the decline had been evident.

In 1823 when the Hudson's Bay Company attempted to close the posts and withdraw its personnel they were attacked by the Beaver Indians. Four men were killed at Fort St. John. Another was killed at Dunvegan Post in 1824 when it was closed. The Iroquois freemen were convinced to leave and take up residence at Lesser Slave Lake and remnants of the Beaver bands relocated near the post at Fort Vermilion.²⁶

Further dislocation of the natives occurred when the Yellowknife dominance as middlemen was ended by the Dogribs. They had been subjugated by the Yellowknives since the 1790's. A native informant related

We suffered our Wives, our Daughters and our Brothers to be taken from us with their Children. Our Furs also, this we considered of little importance, they were only skins of Animals, but even our Nets upon which our existence depended, were likewise taken from us, and frequently our Axes, Guns and whatever was most useful or necessary to our maintenance.²⁷

Arrival of the Hudson's Bay Company with its need for provisions from the Dogrib country led to trade in arms and a much stronger and prosperous native presence. The Yellowknives, led by Akaitcho, were dispersed. They eventually abandoned their locale on the Yellowknife River and moved to the east end of Great Slave Lake or southeast of Fort Resolution.²⁸

The predominance of Dogrib over Yellowknife was the result of changed priorities in supplying food. Deple-

ted food stocks on the Peace River led the fur trade companies to turn to bountiful caribou herds on the edge of Dogrib lands. The Peace River had been depleted of large mammals and the Athabasca did not supply adequate amounts of meat. Traditional provisioners, the Cree and Beaver Indians, were periodically starving. "There is more danger to be apprehended from Starvation here than in any part of North America, and unless the greatest precaution is taken the people must inevitably perish" George Simpson wrote in 1821.²⁹ This condition persisted throughout the whole of the Mackenzie Basin. On the lower Mackenzie although the Slave, Hare, and Loucheux desired restoration of trade, there were no attempts "to penetrate further on account of the danger of famine."³⁰

In 1819 the fur traders and many native trappers switched their main dependence to caribou meat. John Franklin found in that year Old Fort Providence was mainly a provisioning depot "for the convenience of the Copper and Dogrib Indians, who generally bring such a quantity of rein-deer meat that the residents are enabled, out of their superabundance, to send annually some provision to the Fort at Moose - Deer Island."³¹ The Dogribs became vital to the reorganized trade, although at Fort Resolution on the south shore of Great Slave Lake, remnants of the Yellowknives and Chipewyans

traded in caribou meat.³²

Necessity had turned the fur traders to encouraging the hunting of large caribou herds. The Hudson's Bay Company encouraged division of labour leading the native people to adopt further specialized roles. The Company, and George Simpson in particular, was responsible for the labelling of the Chipewyan bands which we know today.³³ He was the first European to use the term "caribou eater."

The Carribeau Eaters are those who confine themselves to their own barren lands and so called from the circumstance of their devoting the whole of their attention to hunting the Carribeau or Rein Deer.³⁴

Simpson related that the caribou-eaters and Yellowknives mainly traded at Fort Resolution. "The Post at Montagne Island is the provision depot of Mckenzie River...provisions is...the main object, which they obtain on moderate terms in great abundance so that they seldom feel the miseries of Famine."³⁵ The Yellowknives also traded there after they were driven from the vicinity of the Yellowknife River by Dogribs; there they "exchange provisions and the few furs they collect."³⁶

The third group noted by Simpson were the Montagners. "The Mountainees are those who have been in the habit for many years past of Trading with the North West principal Establishments, are chiefly Fur hunters, and

previous to the opposition were tolerably industrious."³⁷ This group was termed by Simpson as "'home-guards' [and] devoted their attention exclusively to Fur Hunting except when in search of immediate sustenance."³⁸ They were "expert Beaver hunters" and had in earlier years indulged in lengthy journeys "in search of that valuable animal into the Cree and Beaver Indian hunting Grounds....[They made] a circuit easterly by Carribeau Lake; to the South by Isle à la Crosse; and Westerly to the Banks of the Peace River."³⁹ Their extensive range led to conflict with other bands since the Chipewyans were paid a higher price than any others, saving often as much as five skins for a gun. Edward Smith noted at Fort Simpson that "They can afford to barter their property with the Slaves and have handsome profits....If not timely stoped [this] may be followed up with some disagreeable consequence...it being for the benefit of the Concern in general to keep the Indians at this River distinct and separate from mixing with Chipewyans."⁴⁰ These conflicts provided an additional incentive for division of labour and organization of bands around particular posts.

In the 1820's the HBC attempted to regularize relationships with the natives. Certainly the Hudson's Bay Company led by George Simpson was firm, even sometimes

harsh; but it attempted to induce a relationship based on more fair treatment. Women and children were no longer abducted and held hostage in exchange for furs. "Simpson was emphatic that the use of spirits ranked alongside improper familiarity with Indian women as a cause of serious differences with the Indians."⁴¹ He worked to end the scenes of debauchery which had formerly marked post life and by 1825 remarked that "we are now thank God merely distressed by the recollection of such scenes, as from one end of the country there is not a single skin purchased by liquor."⁴² Simpson was speaking in reference to the Athabasca-Mackenzie region only, yet by 1821 he had succeeded in cutting "the quantity of spirits taken into the country...to less than 1/12 part of that which the two companies had taken in during opposition."⁴³ He believed that the liquor traffic was one of the critical elements of the problem of contact. "In nine out of ten where serious differences arise between the natives and the people of the Establishments I am of opinion that the cause may be traced to ourselves."⁴⁴ This was certainly an oversimplification of the problems associated with fur trade in previous years but an end to the liquor trade would lead to a reduction in tensions brought on by drunkenness, particularly in the Peace River country.

The decision to cut back on the liquor trade was in part the cause of a serious confrontation at Fort St. John in 1823. The Beaver Indians who had been under the influence of the liquor trade since contact were distressed at the cutback in supply and struck out when they also discovered their post was to be closed in favour of Rocky Mountain Portage.⁴⁵ When this post and Fort Dunvegan were later closed to allow the fur and food stocks of that section of the Peace River area to recover, the Beaver Indians were forced to move down to Fort Vermilion. The freemen from the region were removed to Lesser Slave Lake and the Peace River country quickly recuperated.⁴⁶

Native people had a long history of exposure to attempted organization of the trade. Specialization had been encouraged since the time of the earliest North West Company establishments in the Athabasca region. Cree Indians had been encouraged to be provisioners and were limited to that role after the smallpox epidemic in 1781-84.⁴⁷ Beaver Indians had been encouraged to hunt primarily the buffalo, moose, and elk in the Peace River area.⁴⁸ Yellowknife Indians took the role of middlemen in the peripheral areas and began provisioning Bear Lake Post and Fort Resolution with caribou meat.⁴⁹ The Montagner band of Chipewyans originally from the Lake Atha-

basca area were encouraged to range over the Upper Churchill, the Athabasca and Peace River drainages to trap furs.⁵⁰

Acute problems of depletion by 1821 revealed to the HBC that the earlier attempts to encourage specialized roles were haphazard and in need of revision and strict observance. By 1821 the depletion of food stocks caused Indians to consider alternative hunting regions. Specialization when it had succeeded in the early period was hampered by the speed and extent of changes occurring in the region and was due, not to a policy of long-term planning, but in no small part to the rapacious policies followed in the early fur trade period. Indians were periodically faced with major dislocation due to the rapid depletion of resources.

By 1819 the extent of disorganization of the fur trade in the region was recognized by natives and European alike. George Simpson placed in the Company record his growing awareness of the Indian problem from the fur trader's perspective: "when they have both duties to perform, it frequently happens that they are compelled to devote the whole of their attention to the support of themselves and Families and in the spring are unable to liquidate any part of their Debts."⁵¹ But European and Indian alike were aware of the need for a more conserva-

tive policy in the Athabasca. Natives had in many instances gravitated to new regions to relieve hardship. Other groups were anxious to relocate and allow areas to recover. Changes which reflected attempts to relieve hardship brought on by profligate practices were well underway by the time of the arrival of George Simpson in 1819. As the officer in charge of the Mackenzie region, Simpson was responsible for carrying out the reorganizations already underway and recorded the changing realities of the fur trade of the period.

Simpson methodically examined the potential for each of the trading regions. Some areas he preferred not to re-establish and thus they would be allowed to recover.⁵² Other areas, particularly the rivers draining into the south side of Great Slave Lake, were rich in fur and food resources and trade was encouraged by establishing posts at Hay River and on the Liard.⁵³ Simpson was aware of the potential for agriculture in the area of Fort Vermilion and recommended "extensive gardens...." "Crops of Grain, Potatoes, and other Vegetables and its contiguity to the Buffalo hunting grounds renders it the most desirable abode in this part of the Country."⁵⁴ Gardens were also recommended for Fort Dunvegan and St. Mary's Post.⁵⁵ Freeman, Iroquois and discharged servants who were "more expert in hunting the

Buffalo and Deer than the Natives"⁵⁶ were encouraged to locate in regions where returns were poor.

In areas where native confidence in the fur trade had reached a low ebb the hunters were given encouragement. "In order to regain the confidence of the Beaver Indians and Free Iroquois about Peace River and the Rocky Mountain"⁵⁷ an attempt was made to restore stability. Food supplies in the Lake Athabasca area were reassessed and reorganized; it was believed that they "ha[d] never yet been sufficiently attended to."⁵⁸ Simpson's confidence did not lead to immediate changes since in 1821 "many of the Beaver Indians...[,] one of ...[the Bay's] Iroquois, and three belonging to the North West Company"⁵⁹ starved to death. As late as 1824, he concluded the Chipewyans "can never be rendered dependant [sic] much less become stationary...."⁶⁰ Still the deployment went on. Some Chipewyans were encouraged to go down the Mackenzie River in 1825.⁶¹ Others were encouraged to move out onto the barrens to subsist by hunting 'reindeer,'⁶² especially those of Peace River. Simpson linked the problems of conservation and the need to help rehabilitate the Beaver Indians with the murders on the Peace River in 1823.⁶³ The Peace River was effectively closed and "the freemen were ordered to be removed, by compulsion if necessary, to

Canada or Red River, and the Company's servants...[to] use their influence to persuade the Chipewyans to return to the Barren Lands and live off deer."⁶⁴

Large mammal food stocks in the Mackenzie lowland region were subject to rapid depletion in the Peace and Athabasca rivers after approximately 1790. Regions in proximity to the historic path to Churchill were subjected to hunting pressures in the earlier middleman period of trade. But as the Montagner Chipewyans moved south and west into the rich trapping grounds after the 1750's, there was a decline in pressure on caribou herds, particularly the Beverly and Kaminuriak. Further easing of pressure on these herds occurred after the smallpox epidemic of 1781-84 reduced the Chipewyan population. It was after 1788 with the establishment of Fort Chipewyan as the main provisioning depot for the Athabasca on the edge of the rich Athabasca Delta near the Peace River, that hunting pressures intensified. Food reserves of the Peace River, Athabasca, and Upper Churchill Rivers, which were so plentiful at the time of European arrival, were quickly reduced. Bountiful stocks of buffalo, moose, elk and woodland caribou which were referred to as the "grand magazin" of the Athabasca in the 1790's were no longer available in sufficient

numbers to support the additional population after 1805.

Native trappers returned in considerable numbers after 1805 near bountiful food stocks. A few moved to the south shore of Great Slave Lake where fish were available. Many returned to the edge of the barren grounds where caribou were available. Since the barrens were scarce in beaver and marten the natives provided few marketable furs, the trade suffered, and the Indians obtained a minimum of goods. By 1821 the bands were willing to trust in the organization of the Hudson's Bay Company. The desire to continue obtaining the benefits of the fur trade and at the same time have some assurance of food stocks led a number of them to accommodate to specialized trapping or hunting.

VII
N O T E S

¹W.F. Wentzel, Letter to R. McKenzie, Fort Chipewyan, 28 May 1816 in Masson, I, p. 117.

²At Lake Athabasca the Indians welcomed competition in 1815. Fort Wedderburne Journal, Athabasca Lake, 18 Sept. 1815, Winnipeg, Man., HBC Archives, B39/a/6, fo. 18.

³Ibid., 28 Sept. 1815, fos. 17d-18.

⁴Fort Resolution Journal, 1 Nov. 1818, Winnipeg, Man., HBC Archives, B181/a/1, fo. 14.

⁵Ibid., 6 Oct. 1816, fo. 14d.

⁶G. Simpson, Letter to Governor and Committee, 18 May 1821 in E.E. Rich, ed., Simpson's Athabasca Journal (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1938), p. 358.

⁷W.F. Wentzel, Letter to R. McKenzie, Great Slave Lake, 15 Apr. 1819 in L.F.R. Masson, ed., Les Bourgeois de la Compagnie du Nord-Ouest, I (New York: Antiquarian Press, 1960), p. 122.

⁸Sir John Franklin, Narrative of a Journey to the Shores of the Polar Sea (1823; rpt. New York: Greenwood Press, 1969), p. 126.

⁹St. Mary's Post Journal, 1819, Winnipeg, Man., HBC Archives, B190/a/2, fos. 8 and 17.

¹⁰W.F. Wentzel, Letter to R. McKenzie, Mountain Island, 23 May 1820 in Masson, I, p. 127.

¹¹Fort Wedderburne, 5 Oct. 1820 in Rich, Simpson's Journal, p. 74.

¹²Ibid.

¹³G. Simpson, Fort Wedderburne, 9 Dec. 1820 in Rich, Simpson's Journal, p. 197.

¹⁴Ibid., 20 Dec. 1820, p. 202.

¹⁵Ibid., 11 Jan. 1821, p. 223.

¹⁶See Ibid. 9 Dec. 1820, p. 197.

¹⁷W.F. Wentzel, 23 May 1820 in Masson, I, p. 130.

¹⁸William Brown, Fort Resolution Journal, 12 Jan. 1820, Winnipeg, Man., HBC Archives, B181/a/2, fo. 61.

¹⁹G. Simpson, Fort Wedderburne, 13 Oct. 1820 in Rich, Simpson's Journal, p. 81.

²⁰John Clark, St. Mary's Post Journal, 24 Apr. 1820, Winnipeg, Man., HBC Archives, B190/a/2, fo. 92.

²¹"There has been a great mortality amongst the Beaver Indians" and "we have lost many valuable hunters." G. Simpson, Letter to Duncan Finlayson, Fort Wedderburne, Sept. 1820, *ibid.*, p. 61. See also G. Simpson, Fort Wedderburne, May 1821 in Rich, Simpson's Journal, p. 338.

²²The post, Pierre au Calumet had been abandoned in Dec. 1818 "on account of the residents not being able to procure provisions from their hunters, having been disabled by the epidemic sickness which has carried off one-third of the Indians in these parts." Franklin, p. 137. *Ibid.*, May 1821, p. 338.

²³See Fort Vermilion Post Journal, Winnipeg, Man., HBC Archives, B224/C/1 fo. 2d.

²⁴Dunvegan Post Journal, *ibid.* B39/b/2 fo. 23.

²⁵*Ibid.*, B39/b/5, fo. 29.

²⁶E.E. Rich, ed., The History of the Hudson's Bay Company 1670-1870, II (London: Hudson Bay Record Society, 1959), pp. 474-75.

²⁷Dogrib Chief Kanoohaw speaking to F. Wentzel, Letter to John McLeod, Fort Simpson Journal, 8 Apr. 1824, Winnipeg, Man., HBC Archives, B200/a/4, fos. 4-6.

²⁸See George Back, Arctic Land Expedition to the South of the Great Fish River (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1970), pp. 456-57. See also Rich, Simpson's Journal, p. 252n and 457.

²⁹G. Simpson, Fort Wedderburne, 18 May 1821 in Rich, Simpson's Journal, p. 392.

³⁰*Ibid.*, p. 395.

³¹Franklin, p. 208-09.

³²Only twelve packs of furs were traded. Rich, Simpson's Journal, p. 32.

³³G. Simpson, Fort Wedderburne, 16 May 1821, *ibid.*, p. 369.

³⁴*Ibid.*

³⁵*Ibid.*, 18 May 1821, p. 371.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Ibid., 16 May 1821, p. 369.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Ibid., 18 May 1821, p. 355.

⁴⁰Edward Smith, FSPJ, 10 Apr. 1825, Winnipeg, Man., HBC Archives, B200/a/6, fos. 3-4.

⁴¹Rich, Hudson's Bay Company, II, p. 477.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴After 1826 "no liquor of any description should be taken to any post north of Cumberland." Ibid., p. 478. George Simpson quoted in *ibid.*, p. 475.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶"The freemen were ordered to be removed, by compulsion if necessary, to Canada or Red River." Ibid., pp. 474-75.

⁴⁷See chapter IX, n. 5, n. 45, n. 46, and n. 79.

⁴⁸See chapter V, n. 63.

⁴⁹Beryl Gillespie, "An Ethnohistory of the Yellowknives," in Contributions to Chipewyan Ethnology, ed. D.B. Carlisle, Mercury Series, Canadian Ethnology Service Paper No. 27 (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1971), p. 213.

50Ibid.

51Rich, Hudson's Bay Company, II, p. 47.

52G. Simpson to Governor and Committee, 18 May 1821
in Rich, Simpson's Journal, p. 392.

53Ibid., p. 386.

54Ibid., p. 379.

55Ibid., p. 380.

56Ibid., p. 381.

57Ibid., p. 378.

58Ibid., p. 355.

59Duncan Finlayson to G. Simpson, *ibid.*, p. 338.

60Fort Chipewyan, Report on District, 1824-25, *ibid.*,
p. 356.

61Edward Smith, FSPJ, 10 Apr. 1825, Winnipeg, Man.,
HBC Archives, B200/a/6, fos. 3-4.

62G. Simpson in Rich, Hudson's Bay Company, II, p.
474.

63Ibid.

64Ibid.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

Certain Indian groups of the Arctic drainage lowlands underwent considerable change by 1821 as they adapted from traditional seasonal patterns to the fur trade. Changes which were more than merely locational began to occur early in the fur trade. This thesis argues that the first years of contact saw the rise of middlemen trading bands among the Athapaskans; individual Chipewyan chiefs experienced a rising status as they were outfitted and treated by Europeans and by virtue of their skill and influence with newly acquired guns. The specialized trading bands also experienced other changes as a culture adapted to subsistence mainly on caribou was modified to accommodate yearly trips to Hudson Bay. The Beaver Indians developed unique characteristics as a result of contact, thus becoming more distinct from the other Athapaskans. Other Athapaskan people began to devote more and more energy to trapping in this period. An emphasis on valuable furbearing animals such as beaver, marten and lynx began to take precedence over

large mammals which previously were more efficiently hunted for food or clothing. Certain Chipewyan bands who lived on the edge of the barrens distant from supplies of marketable furbearers chose to move in these years to the south and west. This process was hurried in the 1780's when smallpox devastated those in close contact with European posts and goods; many more bands moved to fill the void left by those killed in the epidemic. Population dislocation was considerable in the 1780's.

The 1790's began with a period of attempted deployment of Indian bands to resolve food supply problems and later the decade was marked by unrestrained competition. Early in the decade the Peace River became recognized as the provisioning center for the fur trade in the Athabasca. Buffalo and elk supplemented by other large mammals were killed mainly by bands of Beaver Indians and some Cree and were processed into pemmican. Canoe loads were then transported to Fort Chipewyan for use as winter food stocks, or to supply canoe brigades leaving for Grand Portage in the spring. Toward the end of the decade arrival of the competing XY Company and the Hudson's Bay Company traders as well as specialized Iroquois trappers in the Peace River, led to rapid reduction of food stocks there. By the end of competition

in 1805 some Indian bands were starving, others were giving up a specialized trapping existence, and a few were decimated by the excesses of liquor used in the attempts to extract food.

Between 1805 and 1821 the Athabasca region was the scene of considerable disruption and realignment of native and European groups in the fur trade. North West Company methods which included stripping of fur stocks from some regions, intimidation of recalcitrant Indian people and vicious threats against and bullying of the opposition traders were openly resisted by Indians. A few Indian people resisted the bullying with a violent response. Others responded by taking their furs on the long trek to the Bay. A few withdrew to regions with more reliable food supplies, mainly to the vicinity of the barren-ground caribou herds. By 1814-15 the North West Company was unable to continue trading on the lower Mackenzie River so it closed its posts and withdrew to Fort Chipewyan. The return in force of the Hudson's Bay Company to the Athabasca-Mackenzie in 1816 marked the beginning of the end for the Northwesters. Indians previously subdued and bullied began to turn to the more restrained and by 1816 more forceful Hudson's Bay traders.

The last year or two of competition and the first

years of a renewed monopoly witnessed changes brought about by concerned Indian trappers and European traders. Indian groups who were unable to ensure a stable food supply opted to move to areas where food was assured; either a stable fishery which they could exploit, or near to other caribou hunting bands, who would serve as suppliers. The Bay traders encouraged other bands to concentrate on food production which by this time was the barren-ground caribou. These bands were centered near the Beverly Herd which ranged northeast and south of Fort Resolution. Other bands emphasized caribou hunting from Old Fort Providence and hunted the Bathurst Herd which wintered to the north of Great Slave Lake. People of the Peace River were encouraged and in at least one instance pressured by the closure of posts to move away from the beleaguered upper Peace River and closer to the rich trapping grounds of the Athabasca Delta. Indians in the vicinity of Isle à La Crosse were encouraged to prepare pemmican from the buffalo of the plains for the brigades passing by.

The object of this thesis has been to place the Indian peoples of the eastern subarctic and Mackenzie lowlands region at the center stage in the history of the western fur trade between 1717 and 1821.

In that period the Eastern Athapaskans were at the

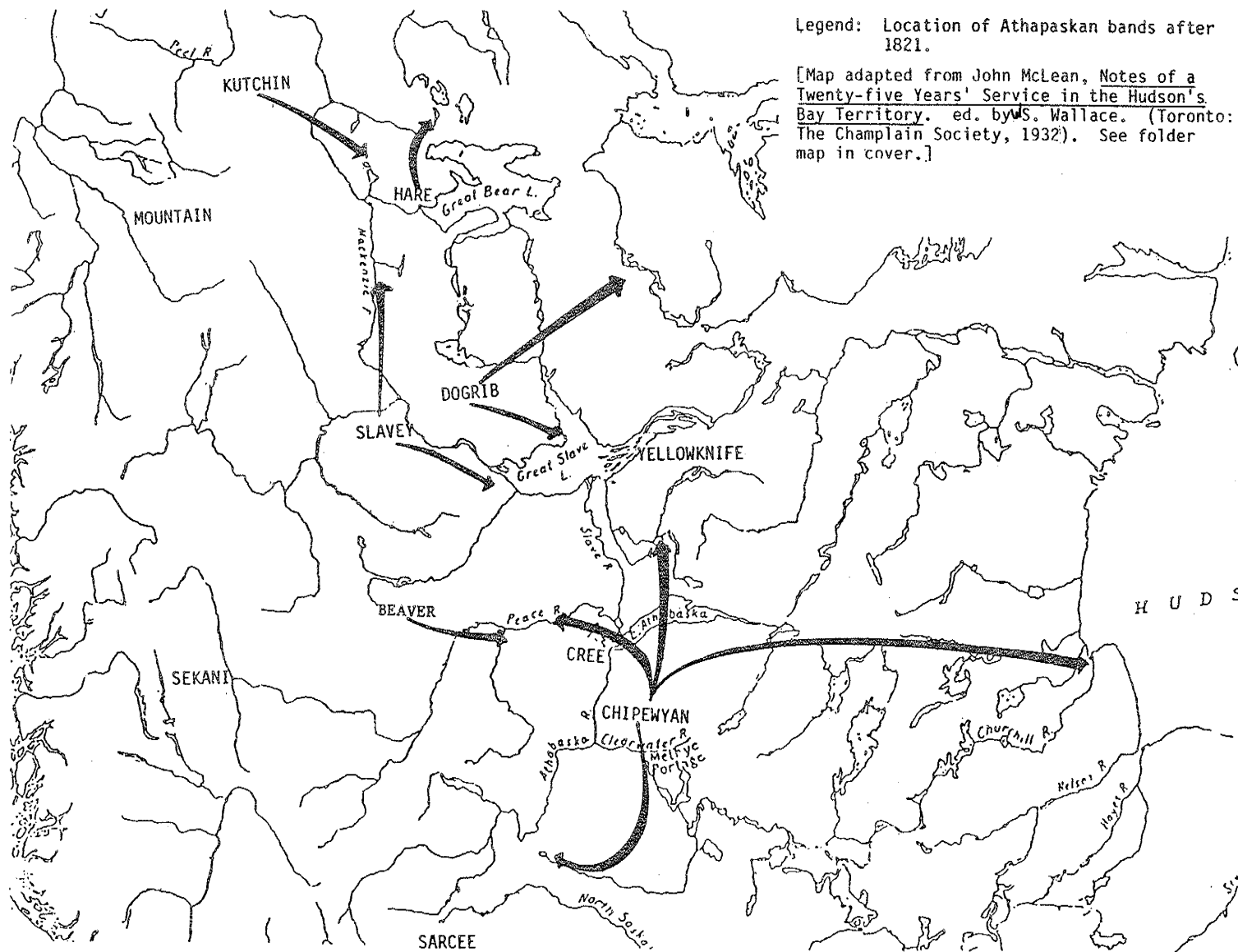
very least partners with the companies in the fur trade. Policies in the region were assessed, accommodated, or rejected according to Indian advantage. To revise the history of this region sources not consulted previously revealed Eastern Athapaskan lifeways at the time of early contact; wildlife behaviour and the nutritional needs and food habits of the peoples were linked with the observed social changes as recorded in ethnographies and the documentary record. The disciplines of history, archaeology, ethnography, and linguistics have been examined for their approaches to the problem.

This study indicates that the baselines for Athapaskan existence by 1821 were adapted to fur trade needs. The patterns of change, rapid in pace prior to 1821, were slowed by the imposition of monopoly in that year. Native bands had by 1821 deployed themselves, or were encouraged by the Hudson's Bay Company to adopt a specialized hunting or trapping existence, some of which were far removed from their prehistoric lands. Social changes adapted to fur trade needs had also been put in place. Because the eastern subarctic and Mackenzie lowland region was so important to the fortunes of the fur companies, the active involvement of the Eastern Athapaskans in trade dynamics led to influence over the policies, practices and the eventual shape of trade organi-

zation in the Athapaskan area after 1821.

This work also has implications for further revisionist history in the early contact period. The environmental base of the native people needs further examination. Appropriate histories for this form of research application would include early contact change among the Western Athapaskans of the Yukon basin; study of the same period which would focus on the people of the north central plains; and the history of changes occurring to the people of the interior plateau and Columbia River regions.

Information obtained in the study of this period also has some bearing on the ensuing patterns which developed in the region. In large part the location of the Indians was fixed by 1821 and for most of the larger bands their relative geographical locations would be maintained as long as the fur trade was the economic base. Social changes which were accelerated in the period under study may have slowed in the period of monopoly fur trade, at least until arrival of the missionaries. Apparently the large mammal populations of certain regions, in particular, parts of the Peace River valley, after being reduced by 1821, have not returned to the levels known in the early stages of the period under study.



Legend: Location of Athapaskan bands after 1821.

[Map adapted from John McLean, Notes of a Twenty-five Years' Service in the Hudson's Bay Territory, ed. by W.S. Wallace. (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1932). See folder map in cover.]

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