

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

MODE, PATTERN, AND PULSE

Hudson's Bay Company Transport, 1670 to 1821

by

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

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ABSTRACT

During the study period the Hudson's Bay Company was a dominant economic factor in the northwestern quadrant of North America. Transport was the key to the Company's economic success. This study examines the changing mode, pattern, and pulse of both the transatlantic and coastal elements of the Company's marine transport, and the Company's expansive inland transport system during this century and a half. Research was based primarily on the archives of the Hudson's Bay Company, especially post journals and correspondence.

The study period is divided into four distinctive geographical eras: 1) The HBC's First Century, 1670 to 1774, 2) Trading Posts Inland, 1774 to 1790, 3) The Grand Offensive, 1790 to 1810, and 4) The New Order, 1810 to 1821. Within this framework the dramatic spatial expansion of Company transport and trade inland from its previously established tidewater posts on the shores of Hudson and James Bay is traced in detail. The study shows that transport during each of the above developmental eras was profoundly influenced by the physical environment. A process in the sequence of transport innovation and modification inland from Bayside posts is revealed. One surprising finding is the pre-eminent role of the Albany Fort inland theatre in early transport development. The study introduces new findings on the historical geography of Company transport and trade, including the origins and early development of the York Boat, the Red River Cart, and the winter haul road inland from York Factory. It also provides new details on the importance of the Hudson's Bay Company Montreal link.

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I would like to express my appreciation to my advisor, Dr. D. W. Moodie of the Department of Geography, whose high standards of scholarly excellence were a major motivating factor throughout the course of this research. Six years ago he showed me a list of graduate research topics he felt most qualified to oversee. On the list was the general heading of Hudson's Bay Company transportation. Thanks are also extended to my other committee members, Dr. Barry Kaye, also from the Department of Geography, and Professor W. D. Smith of the Department of History. Dr. Arthur J. Ray of the Department of Geography at York University kindly agreed to serve as my external examiner.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Hudson's Bay Company and Its Transport

On 2nd May 1670, the charter granting Rupert's Land to the Governor and Company of Adventurers of England trading into Hudson's Bay, more commonly referred to as the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC or Company), received the Great Seal of England. This charter granted the Company "sole Trade and Commerce" within a vast domain of more than one million square miles (Fig. 1). During the succeeding decades Company fur trading activity expanded to most parts of Rupert's Land, and eventually reached beyond its limits to include much of the northwestern quadrant of North America.

From its late seventeenth century beginning, Company development to the present may be divided into four distinctive historical-geographical periods: 1) 1670 to 1774, 2) 1774 to 1821, 3) 1821 to 1870, and 4) post-1870. During the first period the Company restricted fur trading operations in Rupert's Land to trading posts at the mouths of several major radial rivers flowing into Hudson Bay. Interior Indians wishing to trade their furs in exchange for the Company's manufactured European trading goods were required to transport their pelts downstream to the HBC's tidewater forts. Competition by opposition traders operating within the interior eventually began siphoning trade that had previously gone to the

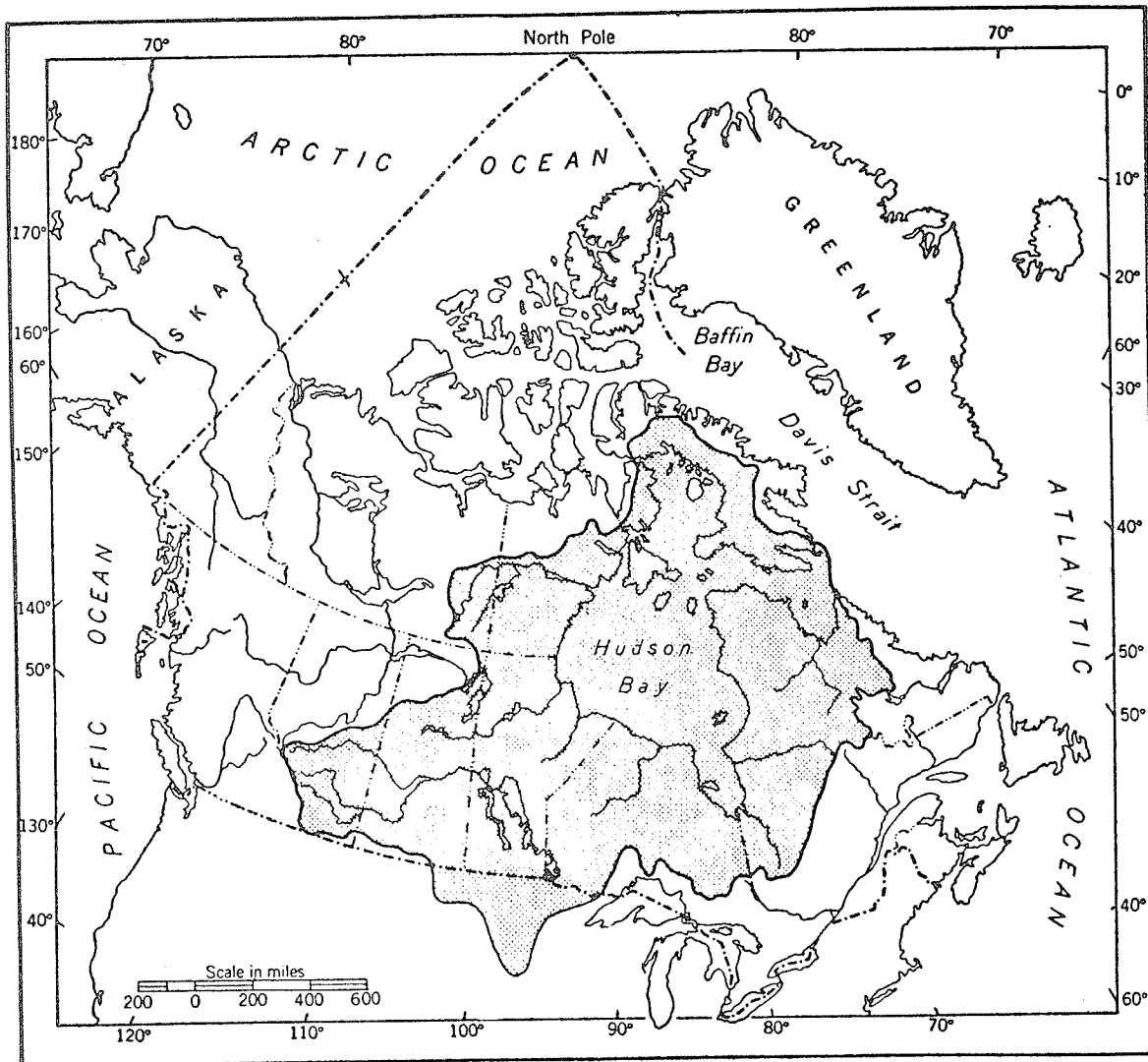


Fig. 1--Map showing the extent of Rupert's Land

Source: Modified after Norman L. Nicholson, The Boundaries of Canada, Its Provinces and Territories (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1964), p. 35.

Company's Bayside posts, forcing the HBC to establish its own inland trading system.

In 1774 the Company founded Cumberland House on the south shore of Pine Island (now Cumberland) Lake, four miles north of the main branch of the Saskatchewan River, and twenty-five miles west of the present Manitoba-Saskatchewan border. The opening of Cumberland House, the Company's first full-fledged inland trading post, initiated the second phase of Company history. During the subsequent forty-odd years (1774 to 1821), the HBC established a far-flung network of inland trading posts which resulted in increased conflict with its competitors, especially the Montreal based North West Company (NWC). The bitter rivalry between these concerns finally ended with the coalition of the NWC under the HBC in 1821. This merger closed the second phase of Company history and began the third.

Spatial expansion by the HBC after 1821, due largely to accretion of the former NWC system, carried trade beyond the limits of Rupert's Land on many fronts. Most dramatic were the extension of trade west over the Continental Divide into the area of the present-day province of British Columbia and what later became the states of Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and Montana, and the Company's advance into the northern portion of the Mackenzie River basin. Until 1870, when the HBC sold the majority of its land to the new Canadian nation, it remained the dominant economic factor in western British North America. Since then, the HBC has lost this position, yielding to other types of economies.

During each of the above periods, transport was essential to Company operation and was the key to its economic success. It permitted the organization and integration of the Company fur trading area by providing the necessary spatial interchange within the economic system that was the HBC. The transatlantic linkage component of marine transport spanned maritime space to link London, England to the Bayside posts on Hudson Bay, and coastal carriage provided the lateral interconnection between seaports. Inland transport, which completed the Company's transportation system, eventually linked coastal entrepots with the interior, and provided communication between inland establishments.

Transport permeated most aspects of fur trade history during each of the above periods. Thus, a knowledge of Company transportation is essential to any complete understanding of the operation and development of the HBC. Despite this central role, a comprehensive history of Company transport is still unwritten. Harold A. Innis' 1930 The Fur Trade in Canada¹ remains the classic study of both HBC and Canadian fur trade transportation. Although a multifaceted study not limited to transport, this seminal work not only presents a vast array of specific facts on fur trade transportation, it also successfully synthesizes these into meaningful generalizations which then constituted a fundamental reinterpretation of Canadian history. Although not cited continuously throughout this study,

¹Harold A. Innis, The Fur Trade in Canada: An Introduction to Canadian Economic History (Revised edition; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1956) (Hereinafter referred to as Innis, The Fur Trade in Canada.)

Innis' work provided the author with valuable insight and perspective on the fur trade. Another important source which helped to place the subject of fur trade transport in economic perspective was Canadian Economic History by W. T. Easterbrook and Hugh G. J. Aitken.¹

Although many fur trade historians have considered various aspects of fur trade transportation directly and indirectly in their studies, transport has not usually been the central theme of their works. In those studies where Company transportation is central, it generally involves only a specific mode or a specific route. This framgmentary approach has led to an undue emphasis of the nature and significance of such popularized modes of transport as the York Boat and the Red River Cart.

Geographers have only recently begun to study Western Canada during the fur trade era. To date, fur trade transport has not received the detailed attention of geographers, even though the appropriateness of such studies has been recognized. Although not mentioning fur trade transport specifically, Andrew H. Clark noted in 1963 that the surface of historical geography of transportation in Canada "had hardly been scratched."² In 1967, R. C. Harris suggested the yet unrealized potential of studies of the geographical implication of transportation technology and networks in the complex transport systems of the various staple trades, which would include

¹W. T. Easterbrook and Hugh G. J. Aitken, Canadian Economic History (Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada Limited, 1956), pp. 163-186.

²Andrew H. Clark, "Honing the Edge of Curiosity: The Challenge of Historical Geography in Canada," Occasional Papers, Canadian Association of Geographers, B. C. Division, no. 4 (June, 1963), p. 9.

the fur trade.¹ More recently Eric Ross commented on the "largely overlooked" geography of the fur trade, and suggested that "Much can be told about the elaborate transportation system, upon which the trade depended . . ."2

The Objectives and Limits of the Study

The primary objective of this study is the description, explanation, and determination of interrelationships between the changing mode, pattern, and pulse of the non-local and non-ephemeral inland component of the HBC's transportation system during the first two above mentioned periods, 1670 to 1774 and 1774 to 1821. Since the Company's transportation system functioned as a whole, it was impossible to study inland transport in isolation from the other components of the entire structure. Thus, a secondary objective is a detailed examination of marine transport, including transatlantic linkage and coastal carriage, throughout the 1670 to 1774 period, during which time a routine was established which remained largely unchanged during the subsequent pre-1821 period.

Writing on the subject of transportation geography more than twenty years ago, Benjamin Thomas recognized three major methods of study by transportation geographers emphasizing: 1) means of transportation, such as types of animals and vehicles; 2) goods carried; and 3) routes followed by modes of transport and the

¹R. C. Harris, "Historical Geography in Canada," Canadian Geographer, XI (Winter, 1967), p. 239.

²Eric Ross, Beyond the River and the Bay (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), p. ix.

resultant patterns.¹ He noted that transportation geography was "out of balance" because, "In developing the second and third methods . . . we have almost, if not entirely, lost sight of the values and objectives of the first."² He considered all three methods necessary for a balanced transportation geography. However, during the last twenty years geographers have not taken heed of Thomas' observation and "studies of modes have tended to be pushed into the background."³

Widespread disregard for transport modes by contemporary transportation geographers, may in part, be explained by their tendency to consider the field solely as a branch of economic geography, coupled with a devotion to quantitative techniques. Such a narrow, economic definition of transport may be essential for the prevailing positivistic/scientistic notion of the field. In their zealous search for order and regularity, many transportation geographers have routinely removed transportation from its cultural context, or from its operational milieu. All too often routeways are seen only as edges of a graph, or as cell entries in a matrix format; linkages become conduits through which move abstract, almost ethereal flows, and modes are altogether ignored.

¹Benjamin Thomas, "Methods and Objectives in Transportation Geography," Professional Geographer, VIII (July, 1956), p. 2.

²Ibid., pp. 2-3.

³Michael E. Eliot Hurst, "Transportation Geography: An Overview," in Transportation Geography - Comments and Readings, ed. by Michael E. Eliot Hurst (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974), p. 10.

In this cultural-historical study of HBC transport it would have been impossible to have ignored transport modes. For the cultural geographer studying historical transportation, a consideration of modes is essential to the understanding of how man has integrated and organized himself and his activities within an area, a principal focus of geographical inquiry. The cargoes carried, the routes followed, and timing of movement over routeways cannot be understood without an appreciation of associated modes, an integral part of the transportation system.

Also characteristically lacking in many contemporary transportation studies, but emphasized in this one, is a detailed consideration of the relationship between transportation and the physical environment. This theme was especially relevant in this study because of the dominant effect the natural environment had on the human geography of the HBC. The cultural landscape associated with the Company within Rupert's Land, everything from its transport lines and modes, to posts and their kitchen gardens, was profoundly influenced by factors of the physical environment. There is a striking continuity with, rather than modification of, natural patterns, and it is not difficult to find examples of deterministic-like relationships with the natural environment. The best transport examples are probably the accordant spatial relationship between Company transport lines and rivers, and the strongly seasonal nature of long distance transport.

Modes of HBC transport studied include transatlantic vessels, various types of canoes, bateaux, and other boats, and overland

conveyances such as pack horses, carts, and snow vehicles. All modes had unique and implicit spatial characteristics. Each channeled movement along specific routes which had explicit spatial expression. These routes, and the interconnected points, were the HBC's transportation network, the pattern of which changed through Company history. Just as the configuration, or pattern, of the network and of the modes used within it changed through time, so too did the pulse, or timing of movements and flows of the various cargoes.

While the critical role of the Indian within the overall fur trade transportation system is clearly recognized, it has only been considered here as it helps to explain Company transport. Similarly, transportation of opposition fur traders, particularly Montreal based competition, has only been examined as necessary as an aid to understanding the HBC system. Both Indian and opposition transportation are of sufficient magnitude and importance to merit separate dissertation studies of each.

The temporal bounds of the study period, the years 1670 and 1821, were chosen for several reasons. From the Company's beginning in 1670, to 1821, trading operations were clearly defined geographically. With the exceptions of Joseph Howse's 1809-10 and 1810-11 crossings of the Rocky Mountains, Company land based trading was limited to that portion of the continental interior between the Continental Divide on the west, and the eastern edge of the Hudson Bay drainage on the east. Operations reached south into the northern areas of the present American states of North Dakota and Minnesota

and, by the end of the study period, extended north to the Lake Athabaska-Great Slave Lake region. Within this vast area, most of the Company's trade and transportation were concentrated in the area immediately tributary to James Bay and within the three prairie provinces of today (Fig. 2). These regional concentrations, the relatively short forty-odd years of significant inland trading (1774 to 1821), and an emphasis on regional patterns, made manageable an otherwise unwieldy study.

The 1670 to 1774 portion of the study permits a consideration of the early development of transatlantic linkage and coastal carriage. During its early history the Company developed a routine for transatlantic provisioning and supply and for coastal transport, which was continued into the post-1774 period. The well developed and finely tuned nature of these elements was fundamental to the successful extension of the Company's transportation system inland. It was during the latter part of its first century that the Company first began experimenting with its own inland transport. The 1743 establishment of Henley House 160 water-miles upstream from the Bayside post of Albany Fort, forced the Company to develop its first inland transport line. To date, this earliest phase of inland transport has not yet received the attention it merits. Inclusion of the pre-1774 period also permits a study of this important initial phase of the Company's inland transportation.

Inland transport acquired new significance and began performing an ever increasing role in HBC operations following the 1774 establishment of Cumberland House. The subsequent dramatic spatial

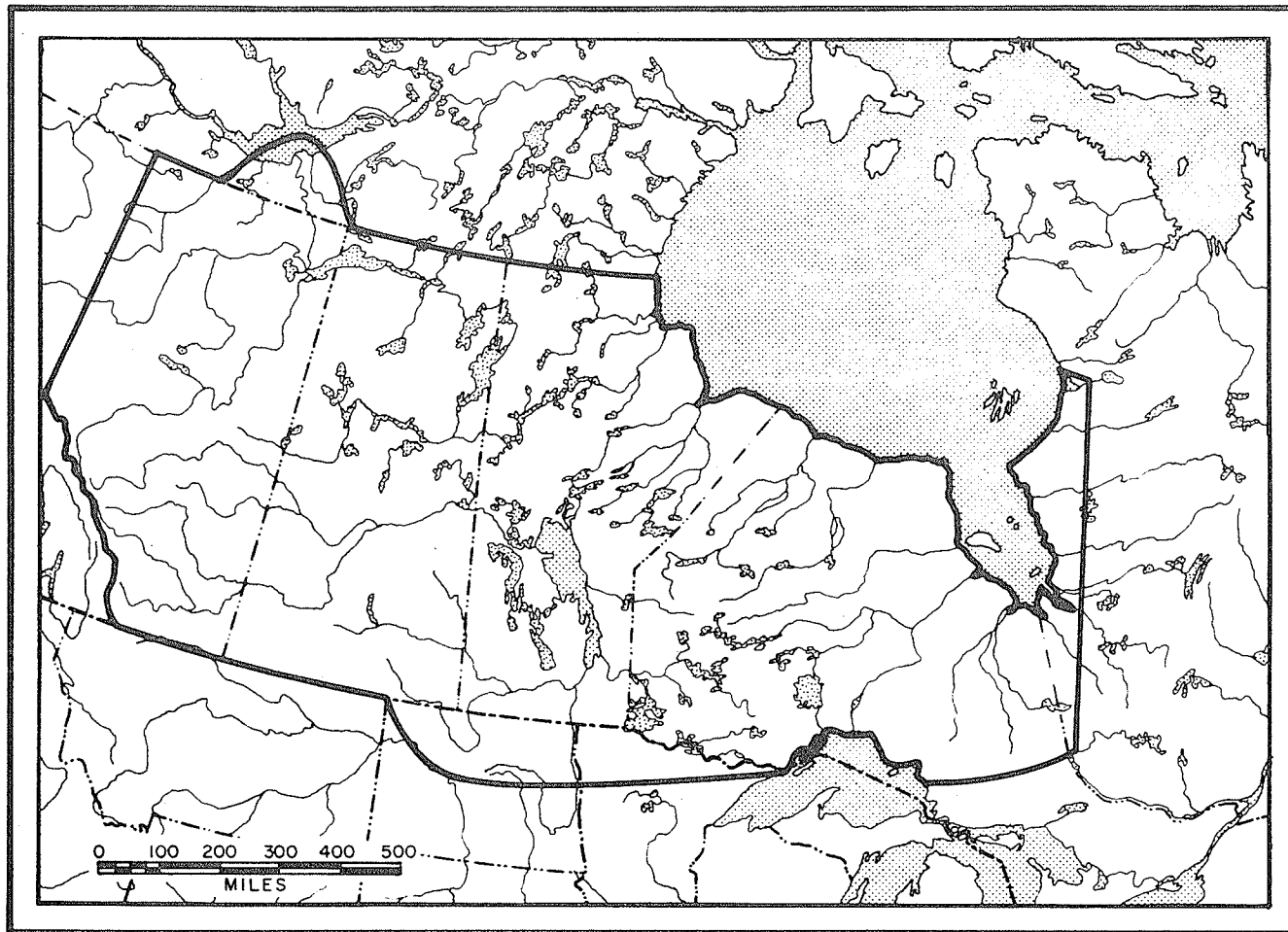


Fig. 2--Study area showing relationship to present-day province and state boundaries

expansion of the Company's trading system between 1774 and 1821 was in large part a story of the successful extension of transport.

The 1821 merger of the NWC and the HBC marked a logical, meaningful, and readily discernable termination date for the study. An additional factor favouring this closing date relates to the Hudson's Bay Company Archives, which were the most important single source of information for this dissertation. Although the amount of archival material remaining from 1670 to 1821 is massive, those sections germane to the study were manageable. After 1821, the amount of material generated, and subsequently saved, proliferated rapidly.

The Organization of the Study

The study is organized into seven chapters. In this, the first chapter, the problem is introduced and the rationale is discussed. Chapter II considers the salient aspects of the physical environment of the fur trade. Chapters III to VI trace in detail the changing mode, pattern, and pulse of HBC transport during each of the following four spatially distinctive periods:

- 1) The HBC's First Century, 1670 to 1774
- 2) Trading Posts Inland, 1774 to 1790
- 3) The Grand Offensive, 1790 to 1810
- 4) The New Order, 1810 to 1821

The seventh and final chapter contains conclusions.

CHAPTER II

TRANSPORT AND THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

The development of the fur trade and its transport cannot be understood without an appreciation of the physical environment in which it operated. Although it has been claimed that the HBC's transportation system was "an awesome triumph of man over nature,"¹ evidence in this study does not support such a conclusion. Rather than conquering nature, successful transport always depended upon a close working with nature. The resultant pattern and pulse of HBC transport were, to a large extent, the pattern and pulse of nature.

Scale of Operations

London, England was not only the HBC's corporate headquarters, it was also the supply centre and home port for the Company's transatlantic vessels servicing Rupert's Land. The distance of the one-way crossing of the North Atlantic varied with the route and Bayside post, but was approximately 3,800 miles from London to York Fort (Fig. 3). Even marine coastal communication between the Company's Hudson Bay posts was long distance by United Kingdom standards, with the 700 mile coastal passage from Moose Factory to York Fort 200 miles longer than a voyage from London to Edinburgh.

¹Alvin C. Gluek, Minnesota and the Manifest Destiny of the Canadian Northwest (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965), p. 93.

The overriding aspect of the physical environment of the HBC fur trading region was its immense size. Even though Company operations to 1821 did not occupy all of Rupert's Land's 1,490,000 square miles, they did expand into most mainland sections. By 1821 the Company had even pushed beyond its chartered territory on the northwest, where it expanded into the southern portion of the Arctic drainage basin, and on the south, where trading reached into Lake Superior and Missouri River drainage.

By the end of the study period, the HBC was conducting trade over an approximately 1,000,000 square mile region. This extensive territory spanned 2,000 miles east to west, and 750 miles in a north-south direction. The region's size and the requisite long distance nature of Company transport becomes even more apparent when the outline of the study area (Fig. 4), less the post-1815 Montreal linkage, is superimposed over a map of Western Europe drawn with the same projection and equal scale (Fig. 5). An area the same size and shape in Europe stretches from England and Wales on the west, to the Ukraine on the east, and from the Baltic Sea on the north to the Mediterranean Sea on the south.

Environment and Marine Transport

Surprisingly, great distance was one of the least troublesome aspects of voyages to and from the Bay. However, the high latitude nature of this Atlantic crossing made passage both difficult and dangerous, and imposed severe seasonal limitations on Company shipping. Despite the fact that English seamen had gained experience in high latitude navigation from the Greenland whale fisheries,

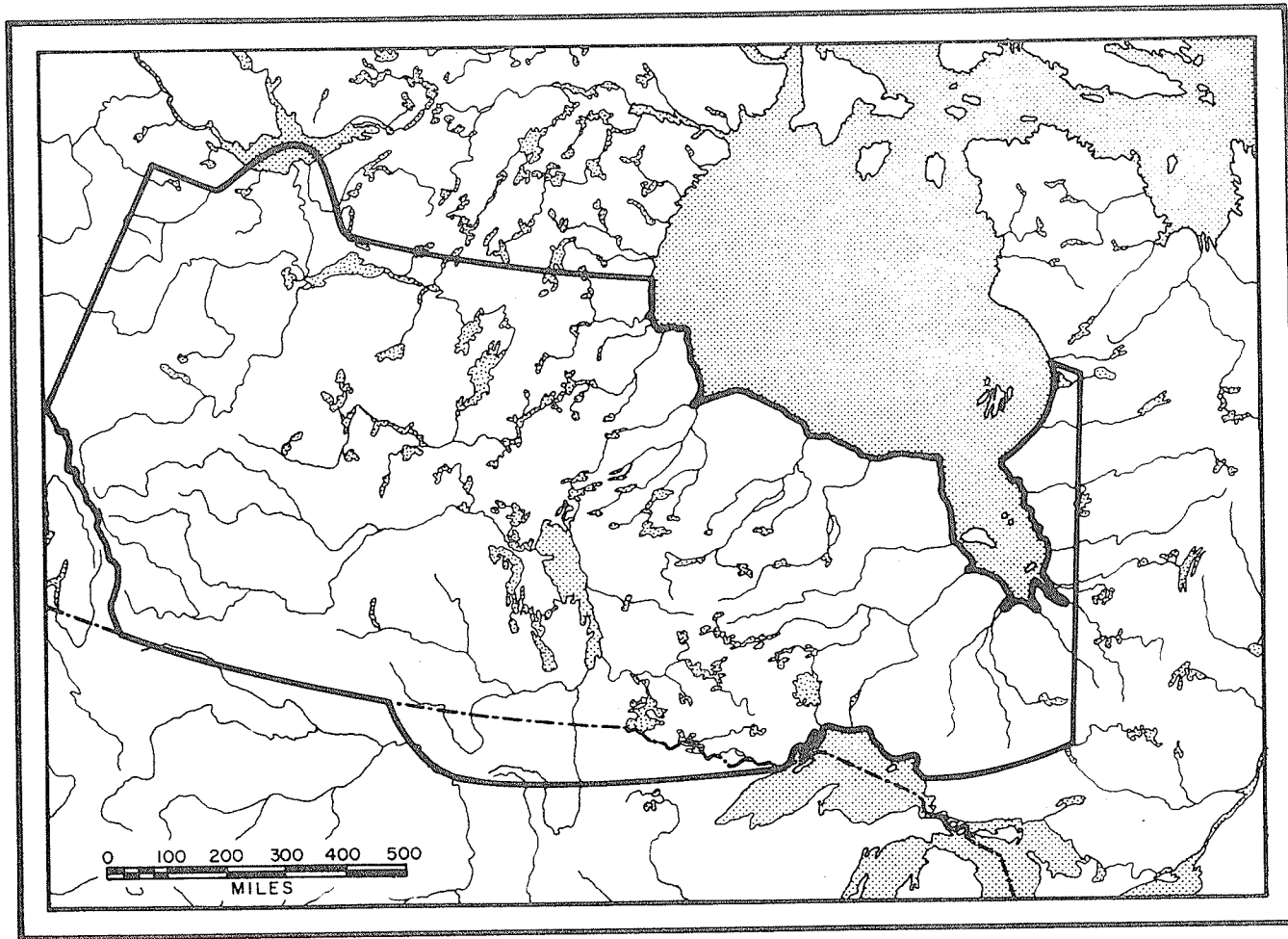


Fig. 4--Outline of study area

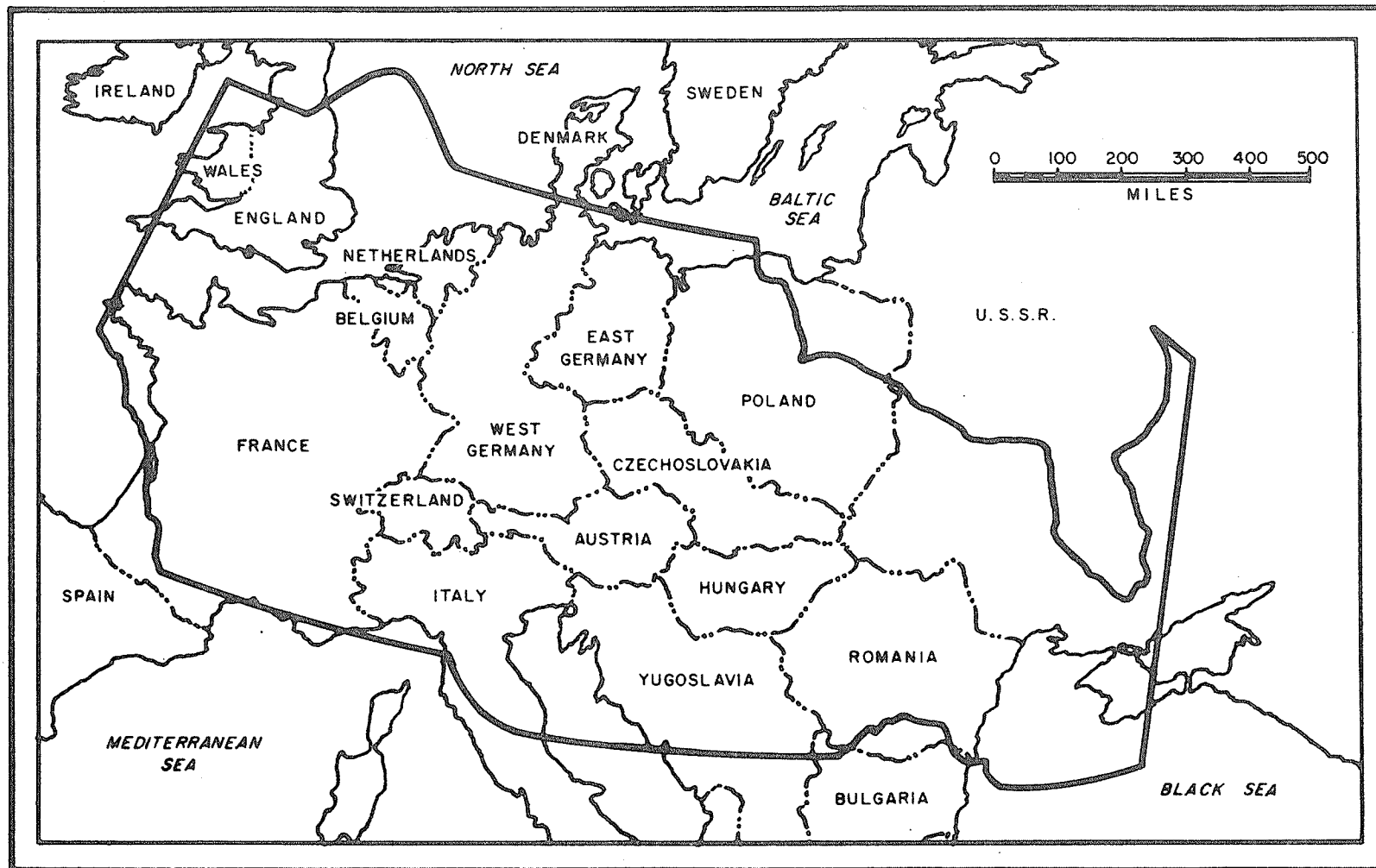


Fig. 5--Outline of the study area superimposed over a map of modern Western Europe

and have been described as "experienced in handling the gravest difficulties encountered, those arising from ice, iceberg and fog,"¹ the passage to and from the Bay still claimed ships.

Particularly menacing were the waters west from Cape Farewell. During part of the year pack ice entirely blocks passage through Davis and Hudson Strait. Even during open water season icebergs calving off the west coast of Greenland flow south through Davis Strait and pass directly across sea lanes. Some icebergs drift west into Hudson Strait, further menacing shipping through that passage.

Within Hudson Strait new ice begins to form in late October, and in several weeks attains considerable thickness. By December the Strait is full of pack ice, kept constantly in motion by winter currents and wind. In June melting begins, although ice drifting in from the west generally keeps the Strait congested until July.² During the brief summer shipping season, passage is further hampered by frequent foggy conditions.³ Within Hudson Bay coastal and transatlantic

¹E. E. Rich, ed., Copy-Book of Letters Outward & Begins 29th May, 1680 Ends 5 July, 1687 (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1948), p. xxix (Hereinafter referred to as Rich, Copy-Book of Letters.) Arthur Dobbs, an early critic of the HBC, felt the dangers of this passage were fabricated by the Company. In 1744 he wrote, "the Navigation is not so dangerous as it is apprehended to be, but appears to be more so by Insinuations and report of the Company and their Friends, who give it out in order to deter others from venturing and interfering in their Trade; . . ." Arthur Dobbs, An Account of the Countries Adjoining to Hudson's Bay, in the North-West Part of America (London: J. Robinson, 1744), p. 69.

²Moir Dunbar and Keith R. Greenaway, Arctic Canada From the Air (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1956), p. 421.

³Today during July and August a Strait weather station on Resolution Island reports fog on one of every two days. H. A. Thompson, Meteorological Branch, Air Services, Department of Transport, The Climate of the Canadian Arctic (Ottawa: The Dominion Bureau of Statistics, 1967), p. 10.

shipping were both profoundly affected by ice. Freezing begins in the north toward the end of October, and by late December almost the entire Bay is frozen. Melting usually begins in James Bay in late May, and by late July Hudson Bay is generally free of ice.¹

Environment and Inland Transport

Geology and Physiography

Structurally, Canada has been compared to a huge, irregularly shaped saucer over 3,000 miles in diameter. The waters of the 300,000 square mile Hudson Bay re-entrant fill the central depression of this dish. Along all but the southwestern shore of the Bay, where the Hudson Bay Lowland is located, the horseshoe shaped body of the Pre-Cambrian rocks of the Laurentian, or Canadian, Shield flank the Bay, and form much of the downward sloping surface of the imaginary saucer (Figs. 6 and 7). Just as the ancient igneous and metamorphic rocks of the Shield were the core around which younger sedimentary rocks accreted to build the continent, so too, was the fur trade built around this feature.

Although there is some regional variation over the Shield's surface, most of the section within the pre-1821 HBC trade area shares distinctive landform characteristics. Rising with distance inland from the Bay, the surface of the Shield is characterized by low, rounded, rocky and knobby hills, usually with less than a few hundred feet of local relief. Innumerable irregularly shaped lakes,

¹Dunbar and Greenaway, Arctic Canada From the Air, p. 418.

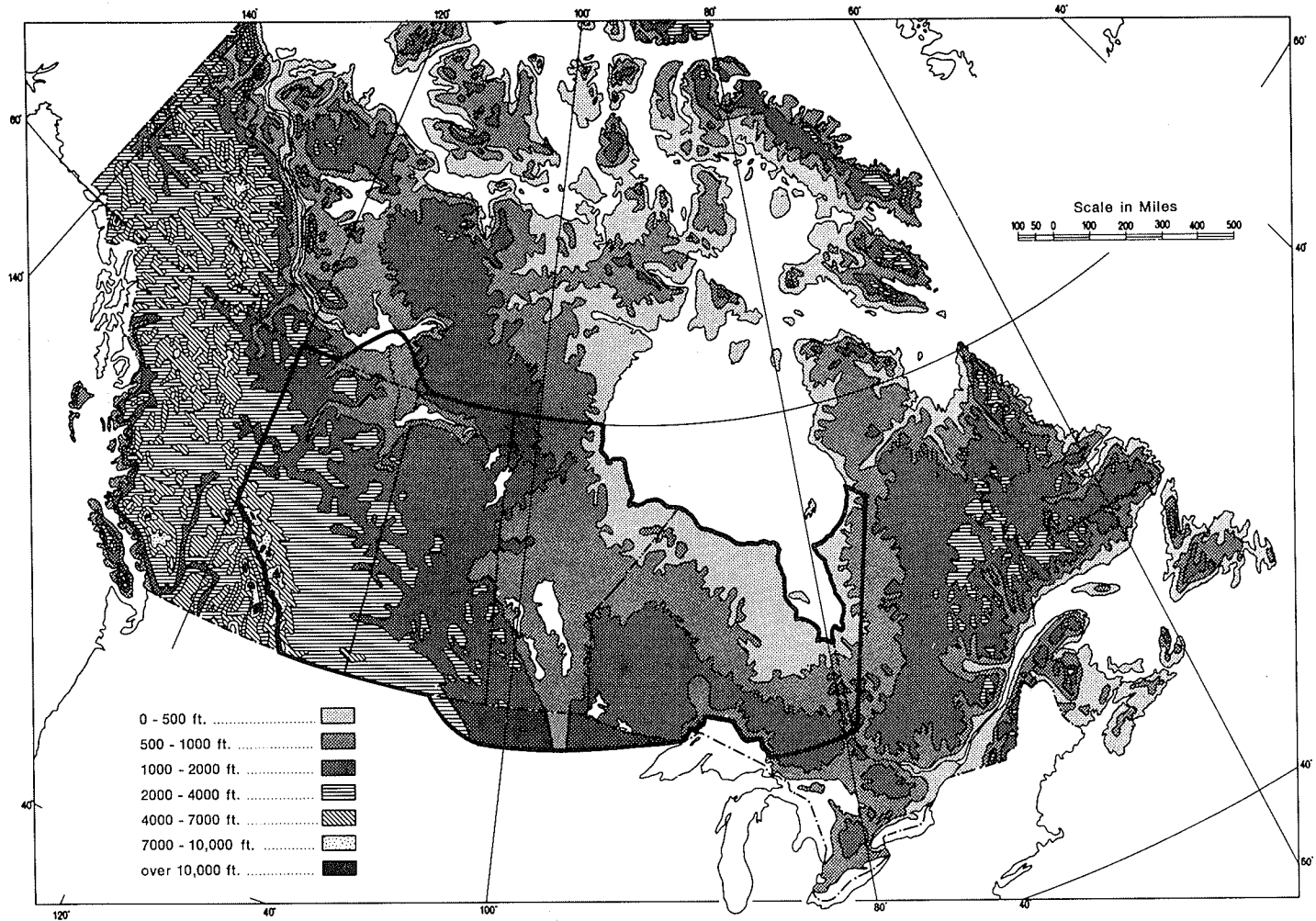


Fig. 6--Elevations

Source: Modified after J. S. Rowe, Forest Regions of Canada, Department of the Environment, Canadian Forestry Service, Publication 1300 (Ottawa: Information Canada, 1972), p. 161.

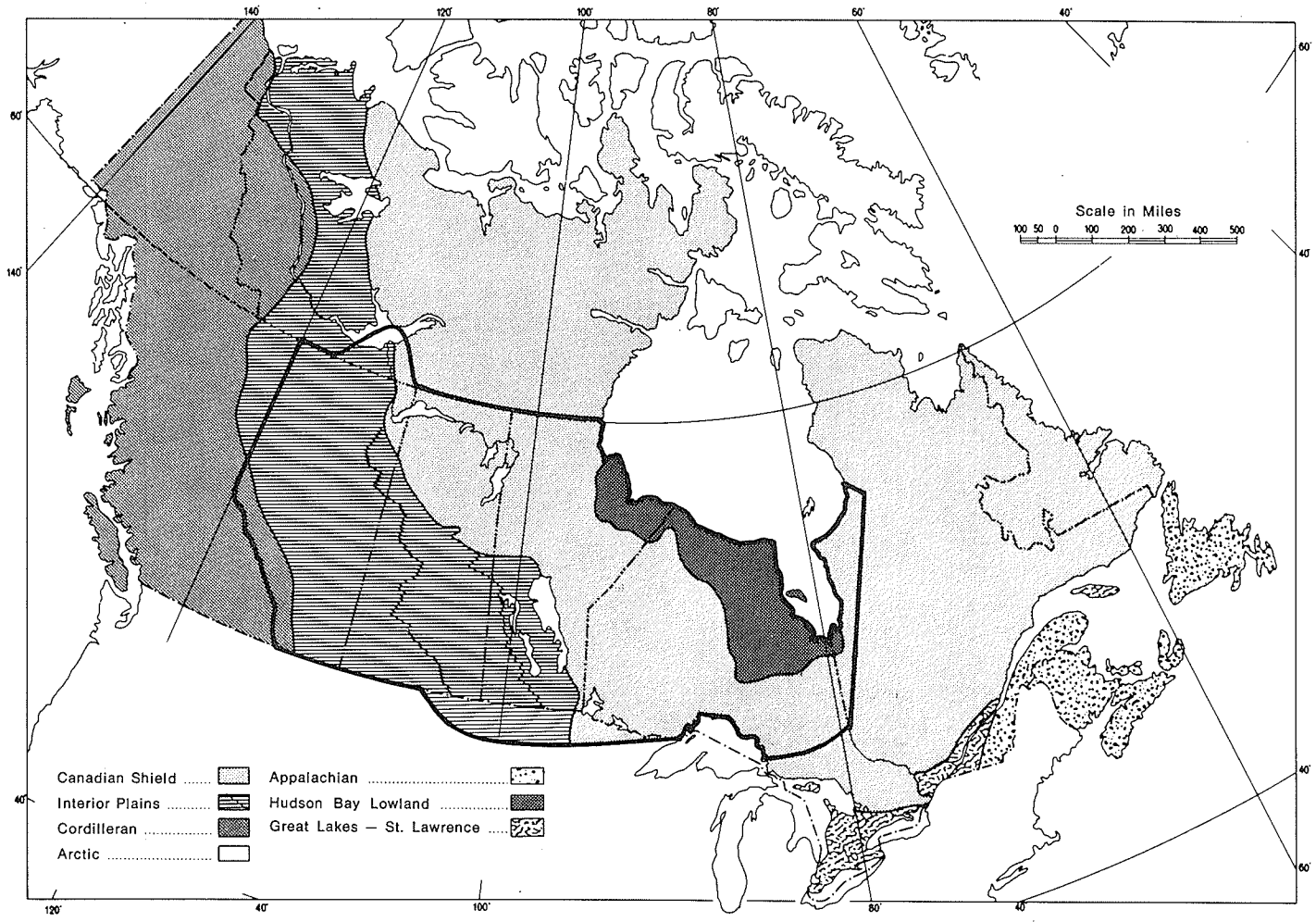


Fig. 7--Major physiographic regions

Source: Modified after J. S. Rowe, Forest Regions of Canada, Department of the Environment, Canadian Forestry Service, Publication 1300 (Ottawa: Information Canada, 1972), p. 159.

and vast areas of swamp and muskeg fill most intervening low sections (Fig. 8).¹

Even though the Shield's age is measured in terms of billions of years, most of its surface features formed during the Pleistocene Epoch. During this time, the entire surface of the Shield was subjected to multiple glaciation. Several times during the Pleistocene, continental glaciers spread outward from area(s) of accumulation north and/or east of Hudson Bay. This successive outward movement of ice scoured and eroded the Shield's already ancient and worn surface. As the last ice sheet began retreating about 13,000 years ago,² it left behind morainic and glacialfluvial deposits which further deranged pre-existing drainage patterns and produced the maze of rivers, ponds, lakes and swamps for which the Shield is famous.

Much larger proglacial lakes, fed by the abundant meltwater produced by the wasting and retreating ice, formed along the western edge of the Shield. The lakes filled glacially deepened basins along the contact zone between the resistant Shield rocks on the east, and the much less resistant sedimentary rocks of the Interior

¹The abundance of lakes over sections of the Shield is striking. An accurately mapped area of 6,094 square miles south and east of Lake Winnipeg contains 3,000 lakes, and 7,500 lakes are located within a 5,294 square mile region southwest of Reindeer Lake in northern Saskatchewan. J. Lewis Robinson, "Regional Geography of Canada," in Canada Year Book, 1972, Statistics Canada (Ottawa: Information Canada, 1972), p. 30.

²Reid A. Bryson, et al., "Radiocarbon Isochrones of the Disintegration of the Laurentide Ice Sheet," Arctic and Alpine Research, I (No. 1, 1969), pp. 1-14.

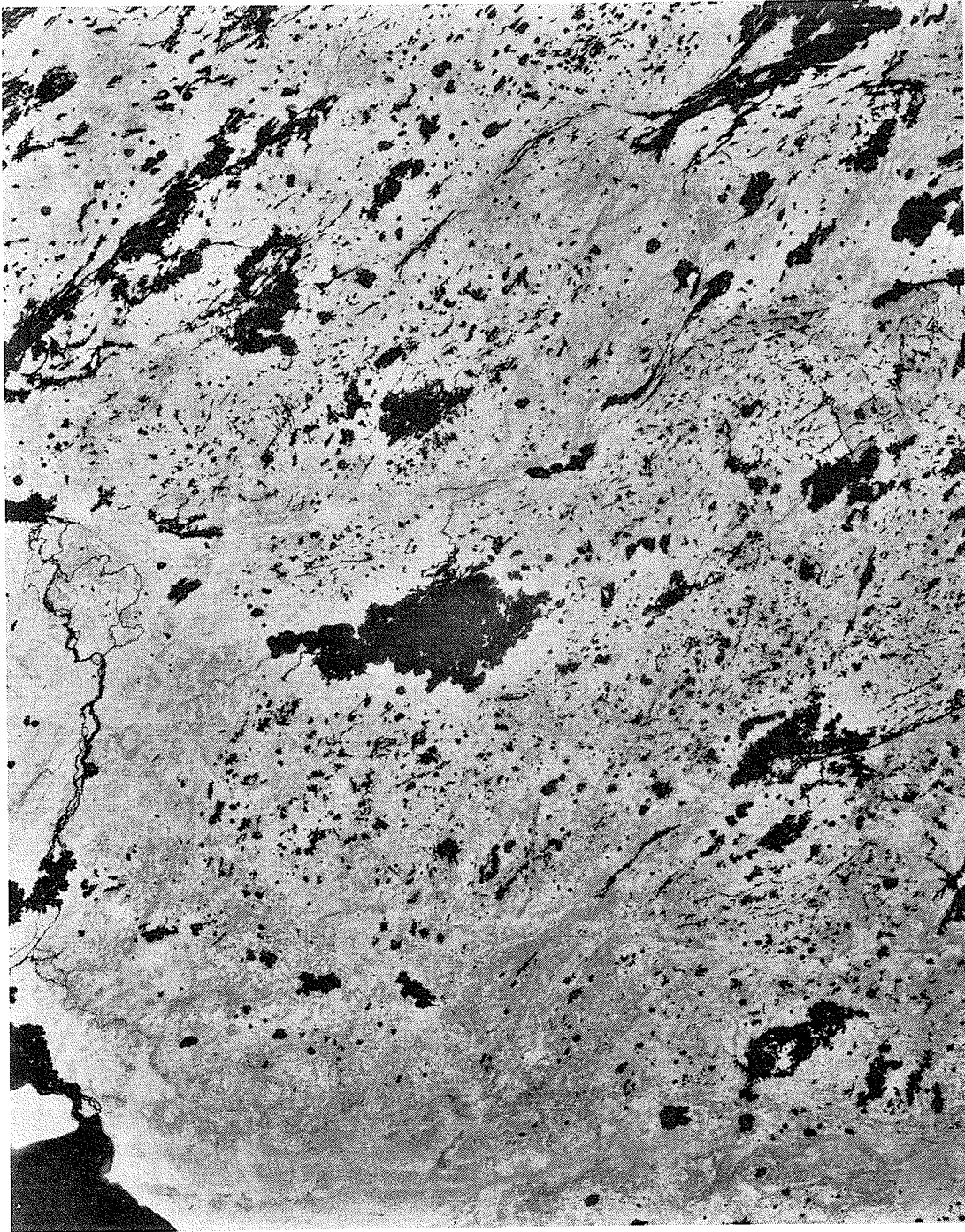


Fig. 8--Section of Earth Resources Technology Satellite image of a 100 by 75 nautical mile area northeast of Lake Winnipeg. The northeast section of Lake Winnipeg appears in the lower left corner. Note the abundance of water features which show up as dark areas.

Plain to the west. These glacial lakes were ancestors of present-day Lake Winnipeg, Lake Athabaska, and Great Slave Lake within the study area, and Great Bear Lake further north.

The Hudson Bay Lowland, surrounded on all but the Bay side by rocks of the Shield, is an irregularly shaped region with a maximum width of 300 miles, and a length of 800 miles. Its general aspect is that of a flat and swampy plain.¹ In contrast to the Pre-Cambrian age igneous and metamorphic rocks in the adjacent Shield, the Lowland is underlain by dominately carbonate and sandstone strata of Paleozoic age. The contact between these more easily eroded Lowland rocks and the resistant Shield rocks is marked by a low escarpment. Falls and rapids along this "fall-line" constituted the first major obstacle to river navigation inland from several of the Company's Bayside posts. The broad nature and gentle gradient of major rivers within the Lowland make them ideal for river travel. These rivers eventually became the proving grounds for the Company's earliest inland boats.

West of the Shield lies the Interior Plain. Its surface rises gradually to the west and is essentially flat, although river valleys, erosional remnants, and morainic deposits add to local relief. Occasional upland tracts rise from 600 to over 2,000 feet above the adjacent more level land surfaces. Despite these elevated

¹The Lowland forms the largest wetland region in Canada, with most 10,000 square mile grid-units having more than 90 percent of their surface occupied by wetlands. Canada, Department of Energy, Mines and Resources, The National Atlas of Canada (Fourth Edition, Revised; Toronto: Macmillan Company of Canada Limited, 1974), pp. 39-40.

areas, and other more subdued topographic features, the topography of the Interior Plain is significantly less rugged and better suited to land transportation than that of the Shield. Most of the region, particularly the southern portion, also lacks the ample water features so characteristic of the Shield.

The mountains and foothills of the Rockies skirt the southwestern corner of the study region, corresponding to a section of the raised lip of the saucer-like structure previously mentioned. This section of the Rockies formed a spectacular transport barrier of ice fields and jagged, glacially sharpened peaks rising to over 11,000 feet along the Continental Divide. Directly to the east is the lower and less rugged thirty mile wide transitional foothills region. Here, less intense mountain building forces have deformed the once flat lying strata of the Interior Plain into an undulatory surface which decreases in elevation to about 4,000 feet on its eastern margin.

Drainage and Waterways

Lakes, rivers, and their associated drainage basins were perhaps the most critical aspects of the physical geography of the Company's fur trading region (Fig. 9). HBC trade depended on the interior waterways to serve as highways for the dominantly water-borne commerce of the trade. Such was their importance that the

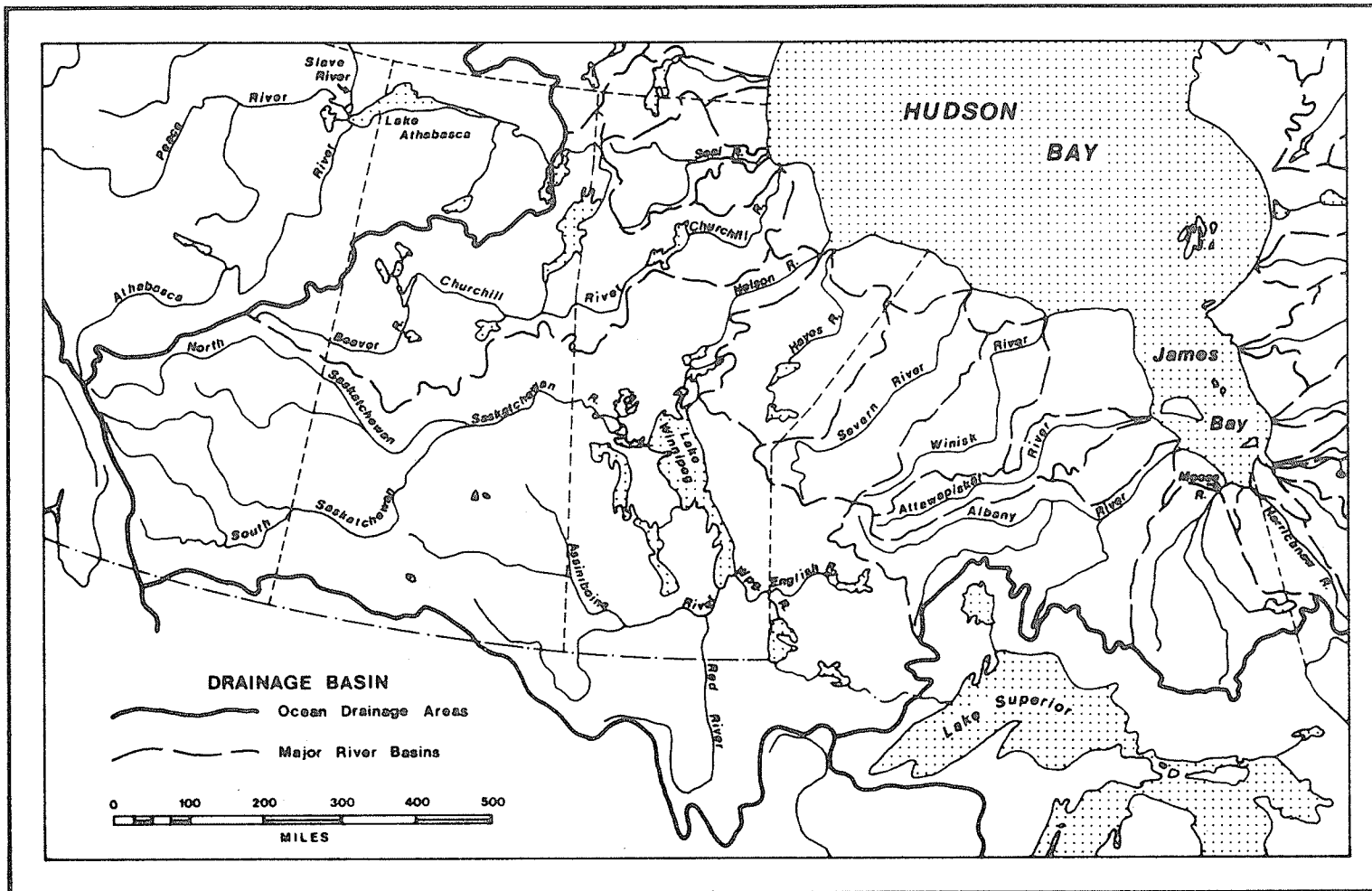


Fig. 9--Major drainage basins within part of Hudson Bay drainage

Source: Canada, Department of Energy, Mines and Resources, The National Atlas of Canada (Fourth Edition, Revised; Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada, 1974), pp. 15-16.

various drainage basins and divides have been referred to as the "coordinating framework"¹ of the entire fur trade.

To 1821, the majority of HBC inland trade was within Rupert's Land, and therefore within the limits of the Hudson Bay drainage basin. Much of this basin also corresponds with areas of the Shield. Its intricate interconnected network of lakes and rivers provided the necessary aquatic habitat for the beaver and gave first the Indian, and later both native and white man, the mobility essential for the procurement of furs over large areas. Among the rivers of the Shield, the longest flow inward toward Hudson Bay; the shorter flow outward, off its surface. These major radial rivers converging on the Bay tied areas of the Shield together, and served as water roads for Indian transport of furs to the HBC's Bayside posts. Eventually, they also served as highways for Company cartage of trade essentials inland from their tidewater portals, and for the conveyance of furs downstream to these same ports.

In the southwestern section of the Company trade area, the Hudson Bay drainage extends well beyond the limit of the Shield, west to the Continental Divide. Extension of this basin deep into the western interior ties that region to the Shield, directing its waters inward to Hudson Bay along the 1,600 mile long Nelson-Saskatchewan River system and the 1,300 mile long Churchill-Beaver

¹Richard Ruggles, "The Historical Geography and Historical Cartography of the Canadian West, 1670-1795; The Discovery, Exploration, Geographic Description and Cartographic Delineation of Western Canada to 1795" (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of London, 1958), p. 327 (Hereinafter referred to as Ruggles, "The Historical Geography.")

River system. This western appendage of the Hudson Bay drainage basin was critical to the Company's success in the interior. The Churchill-Beaver River system eventually carried HBC traders to the threshold of the Arctic drainage basin and its fur rich Athabaska area. Further to the south, the easily navigated North Saskatchewan River formed the transport spine in the Company's western theatre, providing ready access to the prairie-parkland region and its abundant supply of both provisions and furs.

Like these great rivers, the large lakes fringing the western flank of the Shield, forming what fur traders called the "Valley of the Lakes," also served as ideal highways for the trade. Within the Hudson Bay drainage, Lake Winnipeg functioned as a pivotal point in the fur trade transportation system by linking rivers of the Interior Plain to those of the Shield. To the north, in the southern section of the Arctic drainage basin, Lake Athabaska served as the focal point in that portion of the Company's transport network.

Hydrographic features were the dominant force influencing the location of individual routeways and spatial form of the Company's transport network. Such natural routeways afforded an opportunity for communication that was usually adopted, since pre-1821 transport technology did not permit high order, long distance overland travel in most parts of the study area. Even the relatively short portages used to link component drainage basins were transport bottlenecks. Thus, with few exceptions, the pattern of the HBC's pre-1821 inland transport system mirrored the pattern of the interconnected rivers and lakes within its trading territory.

Climate

Compared to the homelands of HBC employees, even those from the Orkney Islands, the climate of the Company trade area was extremely harsh and inhospitable. The generally high latitude contributes to the characteristic cold winters and cool to mild summers, and the location within the continental interior accentuates temperature extremes. Using present-day figures for average temperatures and precipitation, the climate of most of the northern two-thirds of the study region is classed Dfc (subarctic). With the exceptions of a BSk (middle latitude steppe) climate astride the southern Alberta-Saskatchewan border, and ET (tundra) and EF (ice cap) climates in the Rocky Mountains, the southern third of the trade region is characterized by a Dfb (humid continental-cool summer) climate.¹

Winters dominate the entire study region. Today's mean January temperature ranges from 10° to 15° F. in the extreme southwest, to -25° F. in the more northerly reaches. Mean annual minimum temperatures of -40° to -50° F., and even lower, are experienced over the majority of the study area. Snow season is fully six months long in all but the southern fringe, with mean annual snowfall totaling 40 to 60 inches over the western half, and 60 to 120

¹Canada, Department of Mines and Technical Surveys, Geographical Branch, Atlas of Canada (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1958), Plate No. 30.

inches in the east. Mean annual snow depth varies from 20 to 30 inches, except in the area east of James Bay where it increases to 60 inches.¹

More important than the discomfort of this severe climate, was the profound influence it had on the pulse of Company transport. Each winter, all rivers and lakes were closed to navigation. The annual freezing over and thawing of these waters controlled the rhythm of the entire fur trade, and "since mobility over long water distances was the key to economic occupation of the West, perhaps the yearly factors of most importance were freeze-up and break-up."²

Present-day ice-free seasons for rivers over most of the study area range from about five to six months (Figs. 10 and 11). With water roads closed by winter ice each year, long distance transportation had to be accomplished in the relatively short period of open water. Tying the Company's extensive trading region together in this brief period made speed and efficiency of transport essential.

More local winter transport also used many of the same waterways. Once frozen and blanketed with a deep snow cover, these lakes and rivers were traveled by various types of snow vehicles. Such frozen water courses proved especially useful in areas of dense bush.

¹Ibid., Plates 21, 22, and 28, and Morley K. Thomas, Climatological Atlas of Canada (Ottawa, 1953), p. 109.

²Richard Ruggles, "The West of Canada in 1763: Imagination and Reality," Canadian Geographer, XV (Winter, 1971), p. 249.

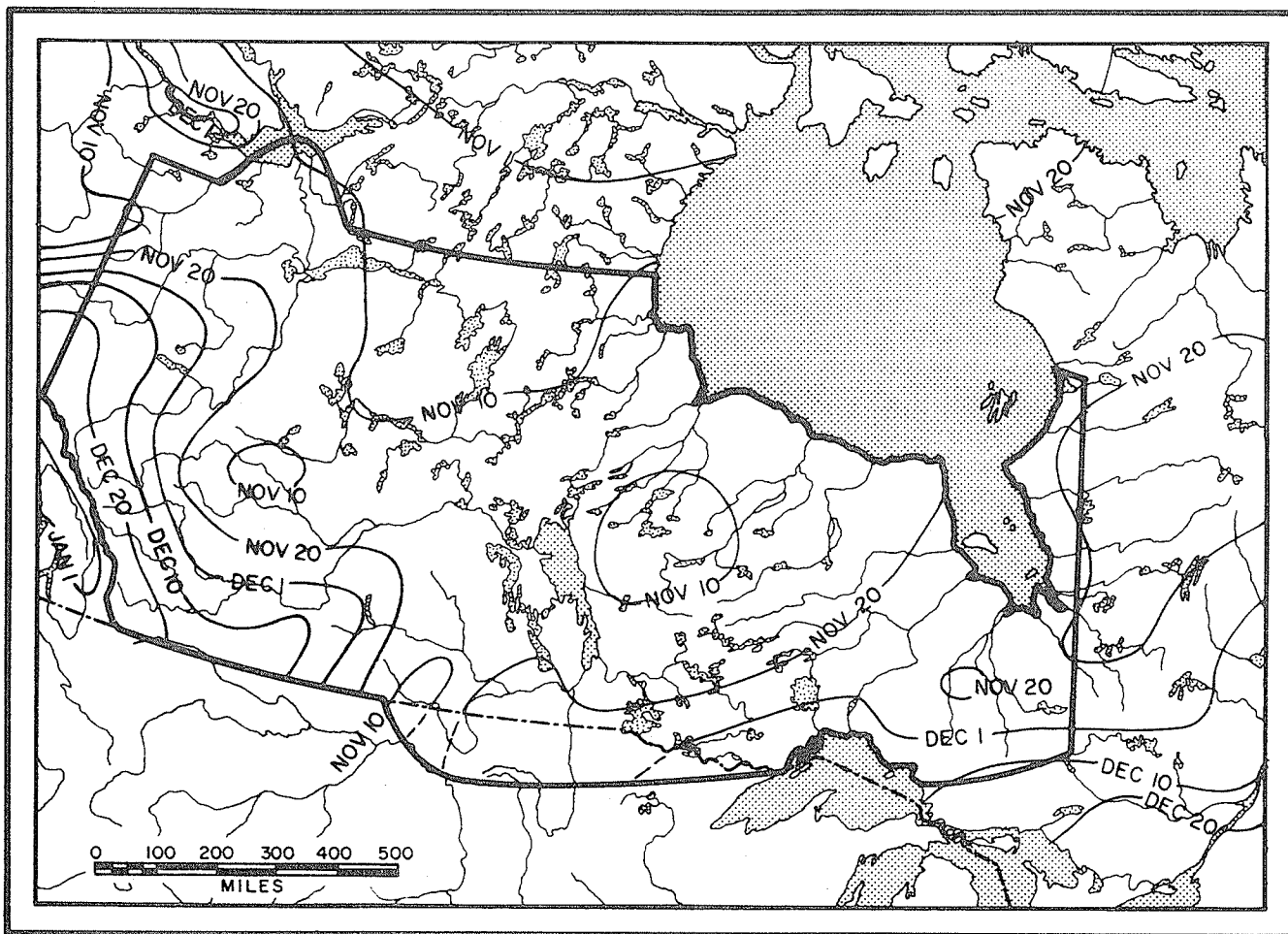


Fig. 10--Present-day average river freeze-up dates

Source: Modified after Canada, Department of Energy, Mines and Resources, The National Atlas of Canada (Fourth Edition, Revised; Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada, 1974), p. 13.

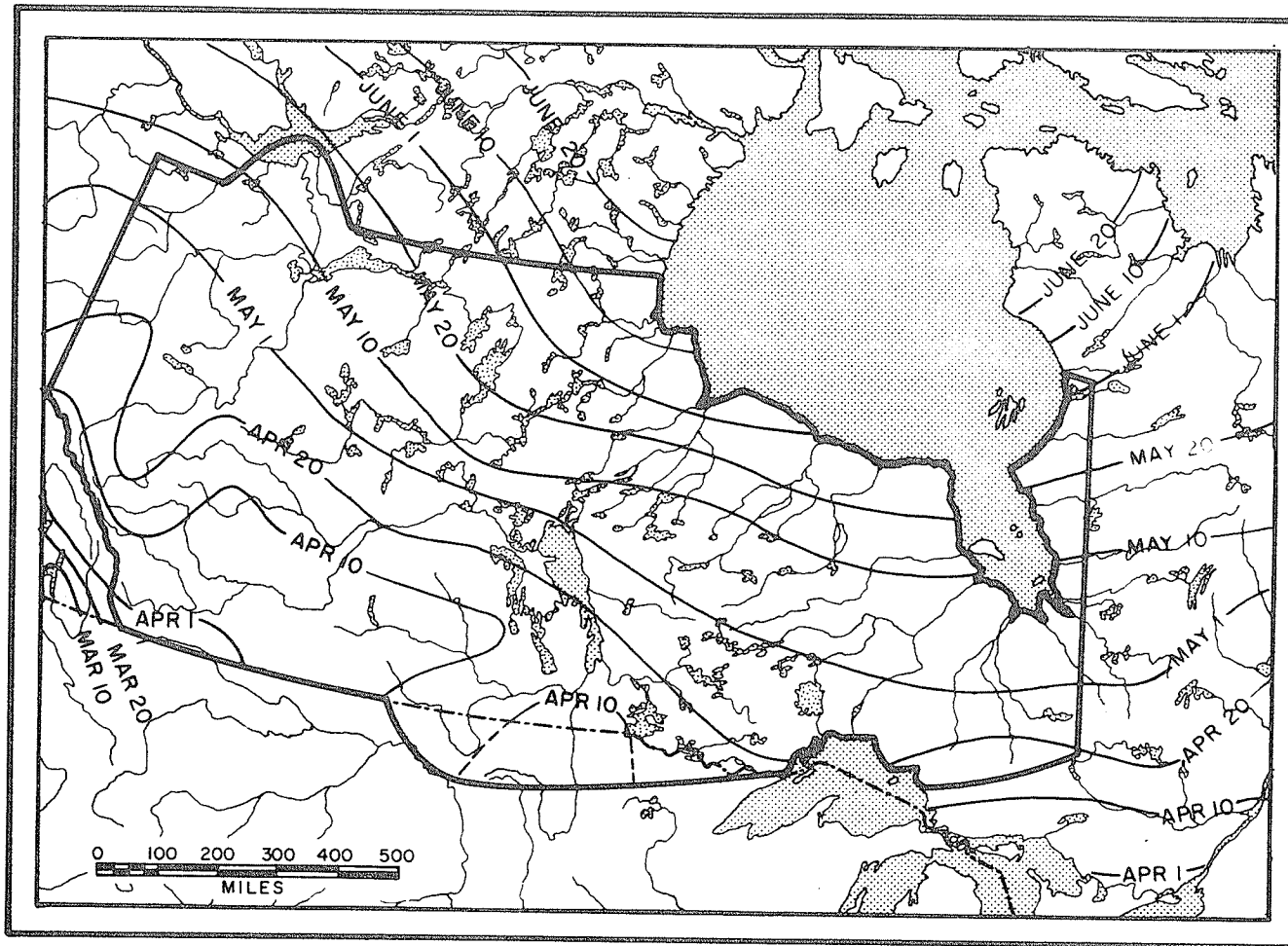


Fig. 11--Present-day average river ice break-up dates

Source: Modified after Canada, Department of Energy, Mines and Resources, The National Atlas of Canada (Fourth Edition, Revised; Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada, 1974), pp. 13-14.

Fauna and Flora

Although the pelts of many different species of fur bearing animals were sought by the fur traders, the beaver was the primary quarry. Several subspecies were eventually involved in the trade, but Castor canadensis canadensis Kuhl., the typical Canadian beaver, dominated.¹ Usually a forest dweller, the beaver's range within the study area was concentrated in the broad east-west swath of forested lands between the tundra (barren ground) vegetative zone on the north, and the grassland zone to the south (Fig. 12). The boreal heart of this forest region, the "Fur Forest," is flanked on the north by the transitional forest-tundra vegetation region, and on the south by the parkland and Great Lakes-St. Lawrence forest.²

Despite the fact that conifers such as the black and white spruce, tamarack, balsam fir, and jack pine dominate the boreal forest and are used by the beaver for building purposes, beaver seldom use such trees as a source of food. It is the much less abundant admixture of broadleaf trees including birch, willow, poplar, and especially aspen, upon which beaver depend for sustenance.

The aspen-oak and aspen grove forest sections of the parkland, or forest-grassland transition zone, provide prime beaver habitat.

¹Gerrit S. Miller, Jr. and Remington Kellogg, List of North American Recent Mammals, United States National Museum, Bulletin 205 (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1955), pp. 423-424.

²For a discussion of the Fur Forest see Chapter I of A. S. Morton, A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71 (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, [1939]), pp. 1-21 (Hereinafter referred to as Morton, Canadian West.)

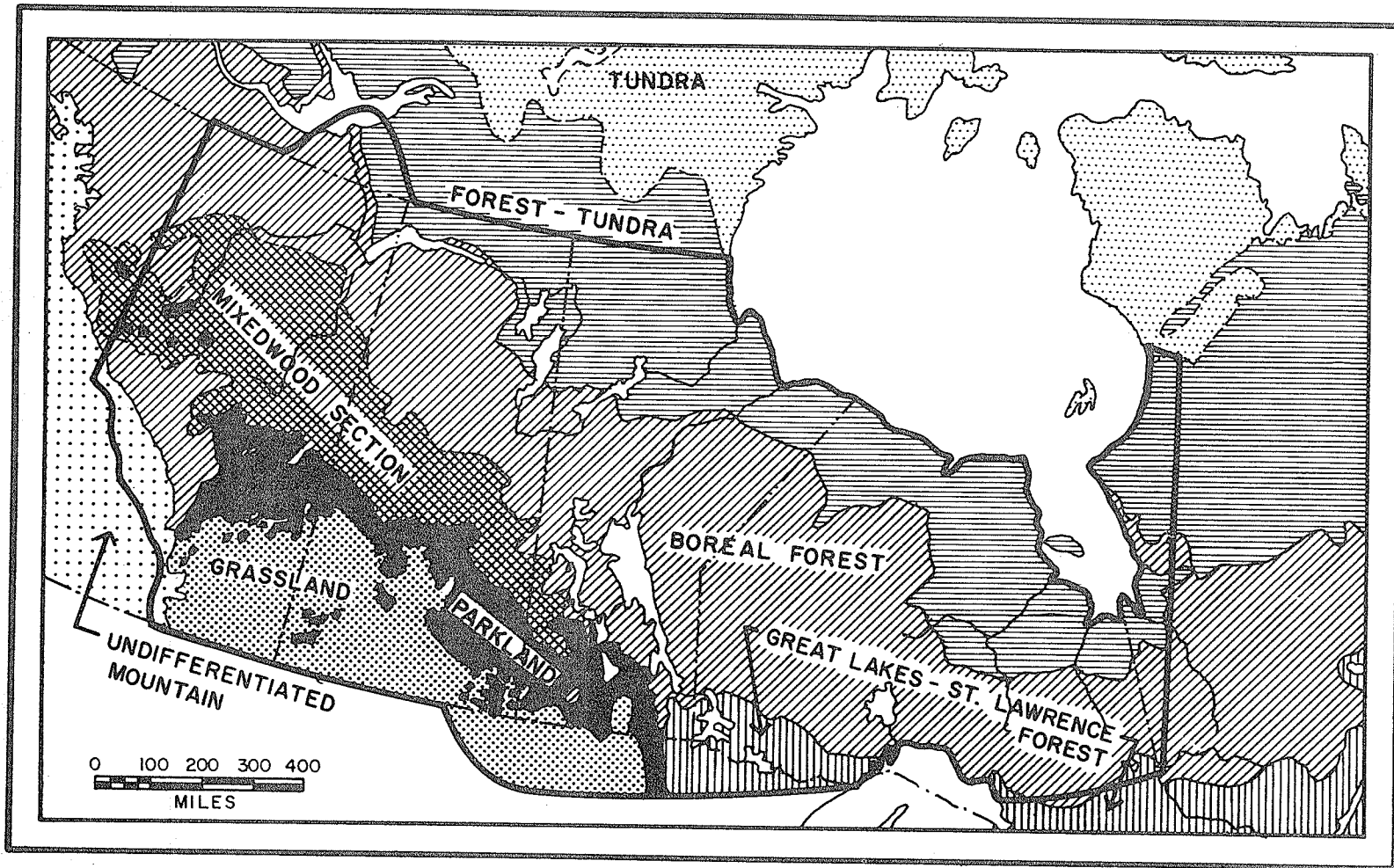


Fig. 12--Vegetation regions

Source: Modified after J. S. Rowe, Forest Regions of Canada, Department of the Environment, Canadian Forestry Service, Publication 1300 (Ottawa: Information Canada, 1972), pp. i-ii.

During the fur trading era, the area's abundant stands of trembling aspen, slow flowing streams, lakes, rivers, and marshes supported large beaver populations.¹

Another forest area important to fur traders was the large mixedwood section north of the aspen and aspen-oak woodland. Within this area the cover type with the greatest areal extent is trembling aspen.² The abundance of this preferred beaver food, coupled with ample suitable water features and prevailing cold climate, which promotes prime pelts, helped to make this area south and largely west of Lake Athabaska the Eldorado of the fur trade. It was not, however, until the end of the study period that the HBC was able to permanently move into this important Athabaska region.

As well as providing quality beaver habitat, the parkland zone was also the seasonal home of the buffalo, the Company's single most important source of meat within the western interior. With the onset of winter, increasing numbers of buffalo usually began moving off the open grasslands and into the parkland.³ Here, they could graze in open grassy sections, and seek the shelter of the adjacent tree cover during extreme winter weather. This seasonal shift

¹Ralph D. Bird, Ecology of the Aspen Parkland of Western Canada in Relation to Land Use, Research Branch, Canada Department of Agriculture, Publication 1066 (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1961), p. 69.

²J. S. Rowe, Forest Regions of Canada, Department of the Environment, Canadian Forestry Service, Publication 1300 (Ottawa: Information Canada, 1972), p. 36.

³For a discussion of the seasonal movement of buffalo see D. W. Moodie and Arthur J. Ray, "Buffalo Migrations in the Canadian Plains," Plains Anthropologist, XXI (February, 1976), pp. 45-52.

brought buffalo within easy hunting distance of the Company's posts within the parkland. Pemmican produced from buffalo eventually became the staple foodstuff used to fuel the HBC's expansive interior transportation system.

CHAPTER III

THE COMPANY'S FIRST CENTURY, 1670 TO 1774

During its first century the HBC proved the feasibility of maintaining a maritime approach to the Canadian north. Despite hardships such as long distance, ice, fog, pirates, and enemy warships, the Company's transatlantic shipping had developed a very regular and reliable routine by the end of its first hundred years. Within Hudson and James Bay, essential marine coastal communication between tidewater posts was maintained by a fleet of smaller vessels that remained "in the country."

The Company's quest for furs in the northern interior of the continent was not without competition. First the French, and later other Montreal based traders, as well as a variety of American traders, vied with the HBC within the trading hinterlands of the Company's own Bayside posts. This inland rivalry eventually forced the Company to adopt a more aggressive role in the trade. With increasing regularity, HBC officers in Rupert's Land pointed to the need for the Company to establish its own inland trading network. Consideration of inland transport figured largely in these early discussions. Although the Company's first full-fledged inland trading post was not established until 1774, the 1743 opening of Henley House, a way station for Indians and showroom for HBC trade

goods located 160 miles upriver from Albany Fort, forced the Company to develop its first transport line inland.

Transatlantic Linkage

As well as being the oldest chartered trading company in the world, the HBC also has the longest corporate history of oceanic shipping. Its maritime chronicle of more than three centuries dates back to the successful wintering voyage of the Nonsuch ketch to James Bay in 1668-69. In its first century the Company's transatlantic freighting system gradually developed from an irregular service dependent on non-Company owned vessels, to a dependable and finely tuned operation carried on by the Company's own fleet of custom built ships. Transatlantic linkage, stretching from England to the Bayside posts, formed the first section of the Company's compounded transport system. Successful large scale extension of the Company's transportation system inland after 1774 was undoubtedly, in part, made possible by the well developed, interlocking transatlantic shipping which remained largely unchanged during the remainder of the study period.

In its first century the HBC established coastal trading posts at the mouths of eight major rivers emptying into Hudson and James Bay, and one transport depot on Charlton Island in James Bay (Fig. 13). The operation of all posts depended directly or indirectly on communication with London. It was this transatlantic lifeline which permitted the remote control of the Company's exploitative system in Rupert's Land. Ships carried correspondence and trans-

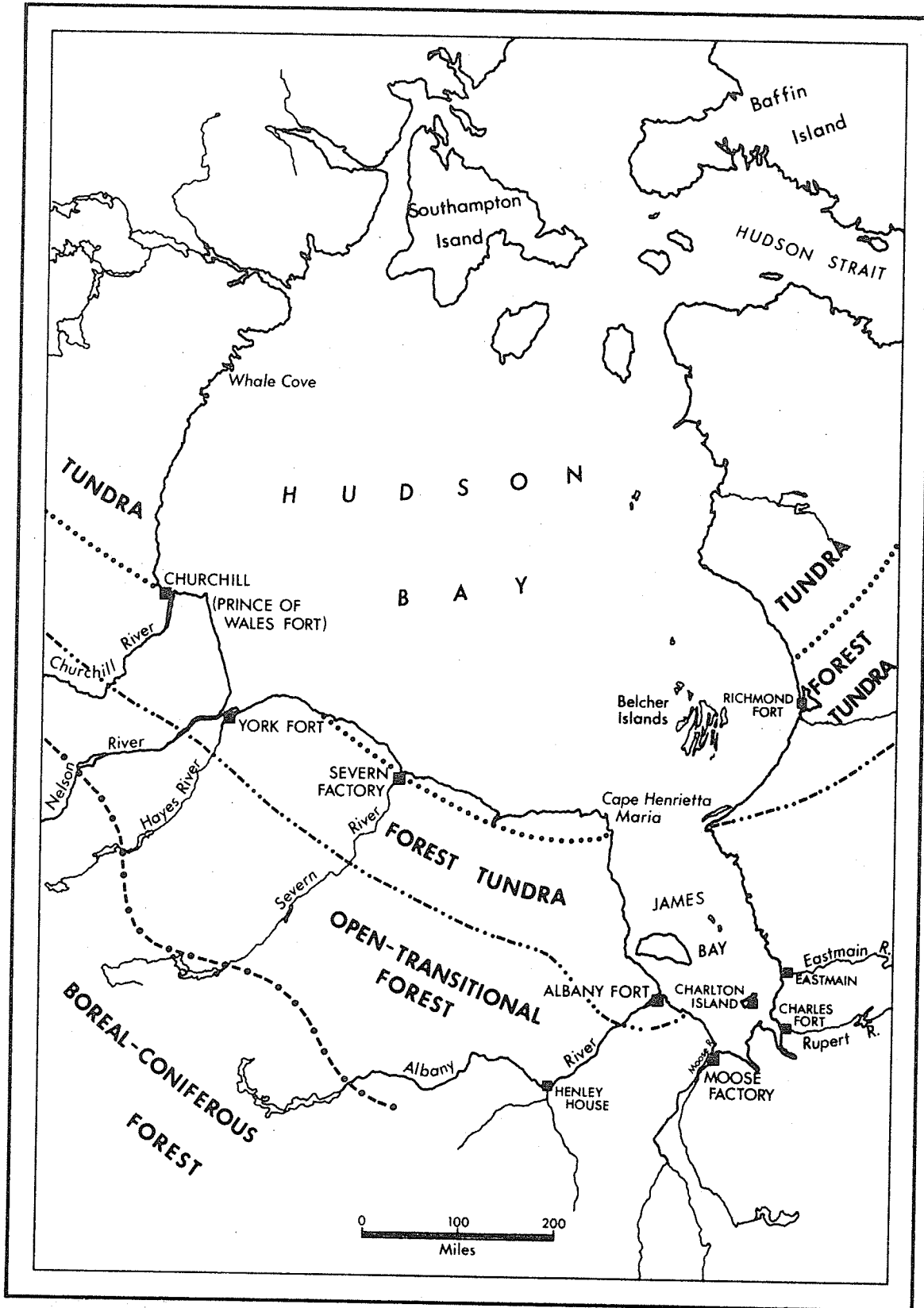


Fig. 13--Hudson's Bay Company posts, 1668-1774

ported necessary trade goods, provisions, and other essentials to the Bay, and fur returns and other commodities back to England.

Company ships sailing from London to the Bay departed from Gravesend, downstream from London on the Thames River. With more than one ship usually making the passage, they traveled in convoy, sailing north around Scotland, or south and then west through the English Channel. Once west of the British Isles, they sailed toward Cape Farewell on the southern tip of Greenland. Passing well south of the Cape, they proceeded to the distinctive head-of-land on Resolution Island at the eastern entrance to Hudson Strait. Still in convoy, the ships passed through the Strait and into the northeastern corner of Hudson Bay where they began to break convoy to sail to their respective port of call, which they normally reached in late July or August. After approximately two weeks in port, during which time cargoes were off- and on-loaded, the ships sailed back to Gravesend where they usually arrived in late October or November.

Transatlantic shipping was hampered by several factors. As mentioned previously, ice conditions not only imposed restrictions on the timing of the London-Rupert's Land linkage, they also made such communication hazardous. Declared and undeclared wars were an additional threat to the Company's transatlantic linkage during much of its first century. In the 105 years from 1670 to 1774, England was at war for more than forty years. In these years Company ships were susceptible to attacks by enemy warships and privateers of hostile nations. War years also meant embargoes which blocked

departure of ships, and shortages of available seamen who were recruited for naval service. Even during peacetime, transatlantic shipping was exposed to depredation by pirates. Company ships using the English Channel passed through the zone of most intense piratical activity. Especially menacing were the pirates of the Barbary Coast who remained a threat until the French capture of Algiers in 1830.

The Period 1670 to 1686

During the first 17 years of Company history 14 different ships made a total of 22 round trips to Hudson Bay. Eleven of the passages were by 8 different hired vessels, 5, by 2 different Company owned ships, and 6, by 4 ships lent by the Royal Navy. All ships making the voyage up to and including the year 1680 were either Company owned or lent by the Royal Navy. Between 1680 and 1686 most ships making the passage were chartered. Thus, from 1670 to 1686 transatlantic shipping was dominated by non-Company owned vessels.¹

Types of ships making the voyages included frigate, pink, dogger, and ketch, with pinks and frigates accounting for the majority of the passages. Ranging in size from about 40 to 140 tons burden, both types of vessels were well suited to Company

¹E. E. Rich, Hudson's Bay Company 1670-1870 (3 vols.; Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1960), I, pp. 66-219, passim (Hereinafter referred to as Rich, Hudson's Bay Company, I, II, or III). This tabulation considers the Messenger dogger a different ship after it was converted into the Shaftesbury pink.

service.¹ During the 17th and 18th centuries, unlike today, the type of a particular sailing vessel did not necessarily indicate a special arrangement of masts, sails, and rigging. Ship function, as well as hull roominess, size, and shape were additional factors used in determining the class of a vessel.²

Pinks were especially suited to the Company's transatlantic service. Although usually a three-masted vessel, this was not always the case. The distinctive feature of a pink was the shape of its hull, the stern of which was rounded below the waterline and very narrow above (Fig. 14). Its round, roomy hold and flattish bottom made the pink an ideal merchant ship, especially in the shallow waters off the Company's Bayside posts.

The frigate of the day was described as "a light nimble ship built for the purpose of sailing swiftly. These vessels mount from twenty to thirty-eight guns and are esteemed excellent cruisers."³ They were fully rigged with three masts and were considered well armed for their size. With threats of seaborne attack both en route and while in Hudson Bay, such lean, swift and well armed ships were almost a necessity.

¹According to Oliver Warner, "Voyaging to York Factory," The Beaver, Outfit 288 (Winter, 1957), p. 19, the burden or tonnage generally refers to "the number of tons (originally "tuns" of wine) a ship could carry when loaded to a proper sea-trim." A ship's burden was calculated using the inside dimensions of the vessel's hold, and was, therefore, a volume rather than a weight measure.

²Alan Cameron, "Ships of Three Centuries," The Beaver, Outfit 301 (Summer, 1970), p. 8.

³William Falconer, A Universal Dictionary of the Marine (London: T. Cadwell, 1780), p. 134.



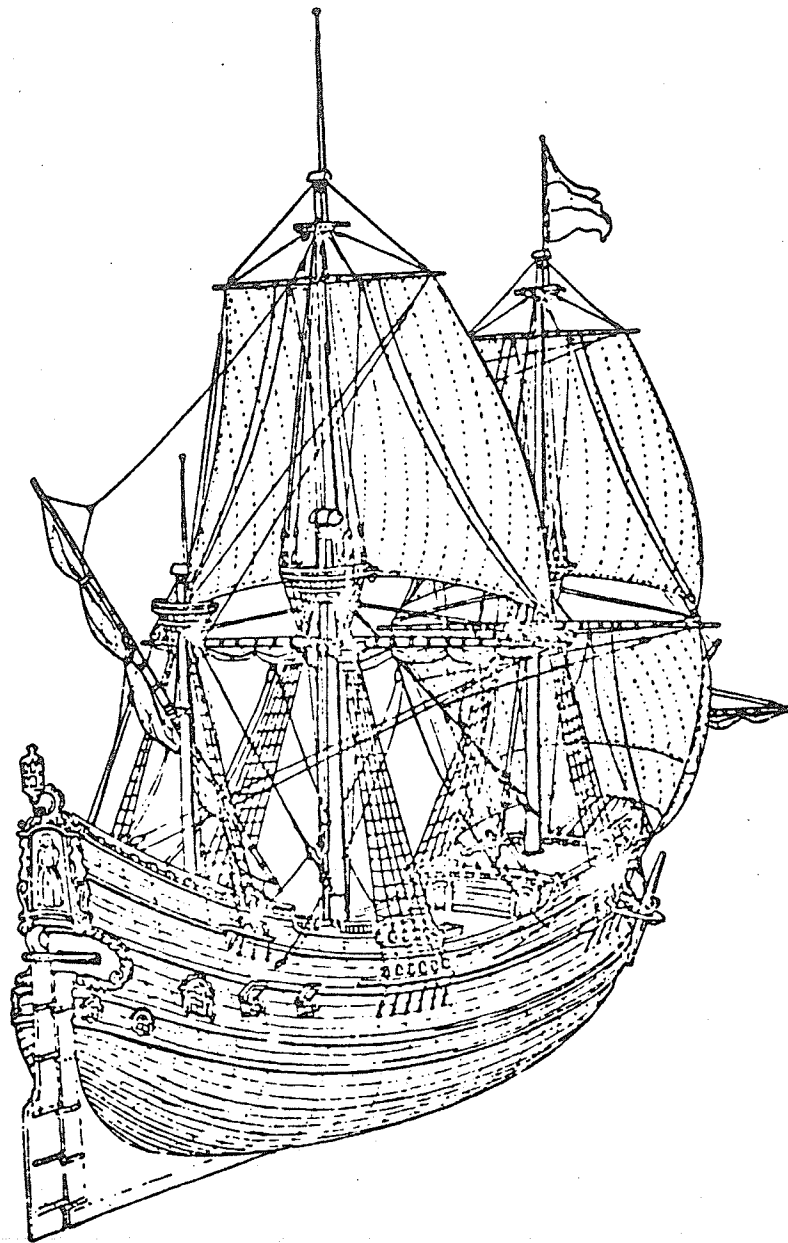


Fig. 14--A pink, showing the stern rounded below the waterline and very narrow above.

During its first year, the Hudson's Bay Company operated out of Charles Fort, located at the mouth of Rupert River in the southeastern corner of James Bay. After a successful winter trading season, the two ships which had carried the expedition from England and had wintered in the Bay, the Company's own 75-1/2 ton Prince Rupert frigate and the Wivenhoe pink lent by the Royal Navy, departed for England in the summer of 1671. Among those returning to England after wintering in the Bay was Governor Charles Bayly, who returned with definite ideas on transatlantic shipping. Speaking before the Company Committee in London in January 1672, Bayly described two possible options,

in case the Committee Shall not thinke fitt for any Settlement to bee made in the Countrey one Ship alon may Serve to bee employed, otherwise thirty men at least to bee employed for Stayeing in the Countrey in respecte to mortality: & another Ship Somewhat bigger then the Wivenho to bee added in hir Steade to the Prince Rupert, or else another Small vessell of 30: or 40 tuns to bee added to them both: & that the place of Settlement may bee at Moussebae [Moose River]:¹

Committed to the establishment of permanent posts on the Bay, the Committee evidently accepted Bayly's assessment of required shipping and arranged to borrow the seventy-three ton Messenger dogger from the Royal Navy in place of the Wivenhoe for the 1672 passage. The Messenger sailed with the Company's own Prince Rupert and the small barque, Employ, which was to remain in the Bay. All ships were loaded with a variety of trading goods, as well as material for building a post at Moose River. Continuous settlement

¹E. E. Rich, ed., Minutes of the Hudson's Bay Company 1671-1674 (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1942), p. 19 (Hereinafter referred to as Rich, Minutes 1671-1674.)

at Charles Fort began with their arrival. The next year a temporary building was erected at the mouth of Moose River on Hayes (or Factory) Island, and in 1674 continuous settlement began at that post.

Other posts were soon added. Albany Fort (called Chichewan until 1683) was built prior to 1679. The first of two temporary Company posts in the estuary of the Hayes River was established in 1682. In 1684 York Factory (I) was built on the north shore of the Hayes River estuary, and soon replaced Fort Hayes, the last of the Nelson mouth forts. The next year New Severn, or Churchill Fort, was settled at the mouth of the Severn River. Thus, within fifteen years after its founding, the HBC succeeded in establishing the basic pattern of its settlements on the western and southern shores of Hudson and James Bay which, with the 1717 addition of a post at the mouth of the Churchill River, was identical to the pattern at the close of the study period. This early emerging pattern reflects the Company's controlling strategy of occupying main Bayside estuaries as a means of tapping vast inland hinterlands, some of which had already been penetrated by opposition French traders.

The Company's expanded network of Bayside posts required changes in its transatlantic shipping. Until 1680 the HBC had been able to rely solely on its own ships and those lent by the Royal Navy. In 1680 the Company headquarters wrote to Governor Nixon at the Bottom of the Bay, "Wee have found it very chargeable and divers ways incommodious to provide ships of our own to carry out & bring home our yearly Cargoes, Wherefore wee have now hired the prudent

Mary . . ."¹ For the next seven years chartered ships dominated the Company's transatlantic linkage.

Such was the importance of oceanic shipping that a special subcommittee of the Company was made responsible for searching out and arranging for chartered vessels. Ships used by the Company were chartered for either a price per ton, or by flat rate. For example, 60 tons of the 75 ton George ketch were hired for £7.10 per ton in 1683, and the next year the Happy Return of 100 tons was chartered for a total charge of £700.²

The agreement between the ships' owners and the Company, the charter party, stipulated conditions of the rental, and specified such particulars as rental rate, the dates the ship should be available for loading and sailing, and the length of time the ship could be kept in the Bay. The cost of the charter party included seamen's wages and their provisioning, as well as the ships' stores.³

Chartering ships at this time in its history provided obvious advantages for the HBC. Still young and not yet firmly established, the Company did not have the financial reserves necessary to build its own complete fleet of transatlantic vessels. Before chartered ships sailed for the Bay it was only required that the Company pay an agreed upon portion of the rental costs. For example, before the

¹Rich, Copy-Book of Letters, p. 11.

²E. E. Rich, ed., Minutes of the Hudson's Bay Company 1679-1684, Second Part, 1682-84 (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1946), pp. 83 and 209 (Hereinafter referred to as Rich, Minutes, Second Part, 1682-84.)

³Rich, Hudson's Bay Company, I, p. 187.

120 ton John and Thomas pink sailed in 1684, the Company was required to pay only £200 of a total £675 rental "on acct. of Freight and by way of Imprest."¹ The balance of the rental charge did not come due until after the ship had returned and the furs had been sold.

This system of chartering ships for the Atlantic crossing tended to perpetuate itself. Since the remainder of the ship rental for the previous year came due just before the Company was arranging for the next year's voyage, withdrawal from the system would have meant more than double the outlay, i.e., paying the remaining debt for the previous year's voyage as well as purchasing a vessel(s).

Almost complete dependence on chartered vessels did present problems. In 1680 the 140 ton Prudent Mary, the first ship hired by the Company, was wrecked off Tetherley Island in the southern part of James Bay on the return trip to England. Its loss made the dangers of Hudson Bay shipping obvious to owners of other prospective rental ships. Two years later when the Company sent the hired ships Lucy and Friendship to Charlton Island, Governor Nixon was informed that their charter parties stipulated they were to stay no longer than twenty days.² They were to be dispatched within ten days if possible,

For the late coming away of Greenawayes Vessel [Prudent Mary], and her Being unfortunately, cast away hath Soe Affrighted and discouraged all Owners and Masters of Shippes here, that wee can hardly get any to Serve us, unless at extraordinary rates, and the Seamen Use the Same Argument (to witt) the Difficulty of the Voyage, to advance there wages . . .³

¹Rich, Minutes, Second Part, 1682-84, p. 221.

²Rich, Copy-Book of Letters, p. 40.

³Ibid., p. 43.

Two years later, Governor Sergeant was instructed to dispatch the chartered John and Thomas "wth. all expedition that hired shippes may be incorridged to serve us for what sticks most wth. them is the feare of not being dispatch out of the Bay in time."¹ Hired vessels forced to winter in the Bay cost the Company in financial penalties.

Governor Nixon was particularly averse to hiring ships, which he believed were larger than required. He felt that they were ill-suited for navigation in the ice strewn and fog shrouded waters of Hudson Strait and Bay and that they caused a "laberinth of troubles."² Captains of such vessels were not usually familiar with the Bay passage and its inherent problems of ice, fog, and shallow water, and therefore, he claimed, "prolonge their time in comeing to us, so that it being so late in the year, we have no tyme to transporte the goods, to the factories . . ."³

Larger, deep draught hired vessels were especially unsuitable for navigation in the shallow waters of James Bay. This was made patently obvious in 1681 when the Diligence, only the second ship hired by the Company, struck a shoal and lost her rudder while approaching Charlton Island. Commenting on the incident to the London headquarters, Nixon wrote, "now if this had been your oune,

¹Ibid., p. 125.

²E. E. Rich, ed., Minutes of the Hudson's Bay Company 1679-1684, First Part, 1679-82 (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1945), p. 242 (Hereinafter referred to as Rich, Minutes, First Part, 1679-82.)

³Ibid.

and had drawn but 9 foot water, it would have been more comfortable for me, more safe for the ship, mor safe for the country, and more profitable for your Honours . . ."1

Nixon proposed that the Company build its own ninety ton ship for the Bottom of the Bay to "drawe not above, 9 , foot water, and her deepest loading marke, that she may beare sail at, 8 foot . . ."2 He suggested to the London office that it was "absolutly best for yow to have ships built fit for your trade, which is the custome of all men except your selves, besyds the navigation into this place is diverse from others . . ."3 Another advantage of Company owned ships was that seamen were under the authority of the Governor, instead of under the ship's captain, while at Bayside posts. Whereas hired ships were only required to meet the obligations of their charter party, Company owned ships were better able to adapt to unexpected circumstances.⁴

Beginning in 1680 Company ships with cargoes destined for the Bottom of the Bay posts began sailing to Charlton Island in the southern part of James Bay. That year in their instructions to Governor Nixon, the London Committee wrote,

¹Ibid., p. 276.

²Ibid., p. 246.

³Ibid., p. 276.

⁴Ibid., pp. 274-275.

Wee do judge by the situation of Charlton Island, that no place is so convenient as that for the Rendezvous from our severall Factories to attend the arrivall of our Ships from hence, And wee hope before this comes to you, a good large dry substantiall Warehouse will be there erected to receive the Cargo wee send you . . .¹

In his 1682 correspondence Nixon could report he had completed a warehouse "20 foot squaire, and 2 stories, and a halfe high . . ."²

Now, ships carrying outward bound cargoes for the James Bay posts sailed directly to Charlton Island where they were off-loaded, and the inward bound fur returns on-loaded. A shuttle service of Bayside vessels provided the necessary linkage with each of the other Bottom of the Bay posts. Originally suggested by the previous Governor, Charles Bayly, it was hoped the new depot would help assure the return of ships to England the same year by lessening the danger of London bound ships being caught in early autumn ice.³

Governor Nixon was as strongly opposed to the operation of this island depot as he was to the Company's hiring of transatlantic vessels. In his 1682 report to the London office he presented several arguments against the depot's continued operation. He pointed out that its use required that men be drawn from the other Bayside posts during the busiest time of the year to attend the arrival of the ships. Likewise, he was drawn from his post and forced to "leave the cheef factory with some to governe in it, who

¹Rich, Copy-Book of Letters, p. 8.

²Rich, Minutes, First Part, 1679-82, p. 243.

³Morton, Canadian West, p. 80.

can not governe themselves during the time of my absence . . ."1
For much of the year there was at best only poor communication
between Charlton Island and the mainland, but he may have overstated
the case when he claimed that "one may as soon have intelligence
from East-india to London as from the maine to Charlton island."2

Once goods were unloaded at the island depot, Nixon reported
that it was difficult and dangerous to ferry them to the mainland
posts so late in the year. Even in the spring, transport to and
from the island was difficult. Although adjacent Danby Island
helped to protect the Charlton Island anchorage in the open water
season, in the spring of the year the channel between the islands
received ice from both ends and remained clogged with the ice driven
back and forth with the tide. This contrasts with the river mouth
posts where, "when the rivers breake up, the freshes carries the ice
directly into the sea, and in 2 dayes the rivers are cleare . . ."3
In the event of war Nixon also felt the depot was very susceptible
to surprise attack by an enemy.

Despite Nixon's opposition, Charlton Island remained the
depot for the James Bay posts for several more years. It was not
until 1686 that James Knight and Robert Sandford finally convinced
the Company to abandon the Island. At a subcommittee meeting held
in London in April 1686, they lobbied effectively against the depot,

¹Rich, Minutes, First Part, 1679-82, p. 243.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 281.

repeating some of the same arguments Nixon had raised.¹ In the interim, the aggressive actions by the French in the Bay substantiated the argument that Charlton Island, as well as the mainland posts which were left undermanned while servants were attending the ships at the island, were open to enemy attack. It was also claimed that the abandonment of the depot would lessen the number of ships and Bayside vessels required, and would put an end to the "very great Damage" to cargoes as a result of the "Lading of them at Charleton Island & relading of them againe . . ." ² In 1686 the Governor and Committee wrote John Bridgar, the Deputy Governor of the Bottom of the Bay, informing him, "we are come to this Result to desert that Island Charlton Island & Demolish the house upon it . . ." ³

That year the hired ship Happy Return, the only vessel destined for Charlton Island, departed London with the instructions that the depot was to be abandoned. The ship never arrived at its destination, but sank in ice thirty leagues inside Hudson Strait. Had the ship reached Charlton Island, it would have found it, as well as Moose, Albany, and Charles Fort taken by a French force which had traveled overland from St. Lawrence under the command of the Chevalier de Troyes.

¹Rich, Copy-Book of Letters, pp. 356-357.

²Ibid., p. 357.

³Ibid., p. 182.

The Period 1687 to 1713

The years between 1687 and 1713 were difficult ones for the Company's transatlantic linkage. Almost continuous war threatened ship passage and kept the number of the HBC Bayside posts in a state of constant flux to 1697, leaving the Company with the single Bayside post of Albany Fort for the remainder of the period. Shipping was irregular during these years, with the number of vessels sailing to the Bay varying greatly from year to year.

French hostilities in the Bay prior to 1687 had clearly shown the need for greater defensive strength at the Company's tidewater posts. One means of adding both manpower and firepower was to have ships, especially frigates, remain year round in the Bay. Dependence on chartered vessels for transatlantic shipping, however, made such a practice expensive. As early as 1687 the Company had used its own Prince Rupert, a twelve gun frigate of 75-1/2 tons, too large for Bayside communication, as a guard ship to remain in the Bay when the Company sensed the threat of a French seaborne attack. Other Company owned ships, smaller than the Prince Rupert, also functioned to strengthen post defenses, although their primary role was providing coastal communication. It was not until 1687 that the Company initiated a determined policy of purchasing its own transatlantic vessels which could be retained in the Bay

when necessary. Between 1687 and 1713 the Company hired privately owned ships for only three passages to the Bay.¹

Despite early difficulties, the Company's decision to purchase its own ships seems to have been a necessary one. The loss of the HBC posts of Moose, Albany, Charles Fort, and Charlton Island to the French in 1686, even before a declaration of war, was only a prelude of events to follow. Until 1696, when the Royal Navy lent the men-of-war Bonaventure and Seaford for the successful, though temporary, recapture of York Fort, the Company stood alone in defending and attempting to recapture its Bayside posts.

In 1689 two new custom built frigates, the (Royal) Hudson's Bay and the Northwest Fox, departed London and sailed in company west via the English Channel enroute to Hudson Bay. Off the Scilly Islands the ships were attacked by three French privateers. The Northwest Fox was taken by the attackers, but the larger Hudson's Bay managed to escape to Plymouth. Damaged, the vessel was unable to continue on to the Bay.

The next year the Company petitioned the government for one small fourth-rate frigate to convoy their fleet, but had no success. Since the trade to Hudson Bay "stood by itself," it was difficult for the Company to arrange for naval protection for its modest annual

¹E. E. Rich, ed., Hudson's Bay Copy Booke of Letters Commissions Instructions Outward 1688-1696 (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1957), pp. 328-355 (Hereinafter referred to as Rich, Hudson's Bay Copy Booke of Letters); and K. G. Davies, ed., Letters from Hudson Bay 1703-40 (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1965), pp. 335-337.

fleet of one to three ships.¹ It was not until somewhat later in King William's War (1689-97) that the first "recognizably modern convoy arrangements" were furnished by the Royal Navy.² In subsequent wars naval convoys were again provided.

A logical move during war years was to direct shipping north around Scotland, then described as "north about." This was the case during King William's War when outward bound ships were either ordered to sail to the north, or if departing late in the season, were strongly encouraged to use that route. The Committee ordinarily did not issue orders regarding the return passage, but with the waters to the north of Scotland dangerous to navigation by November, time of year usually determined the return route.

Offensive and defensive considerations greatly expanded the number of transatlantic crossings by Company ships during King William's War. The Company relied primarily on frigates and even converted one of its old pinks into a fireship. Not always successful, the Company lost three of its own small frigates to the French in 1689 when it attempted to resettle the Bottom of the Bay. Four years later a Company fleet of two larger frigates and a fireship succeeded in routing the French from Albany Fort. Two of the Company vessels, one frigate and the fireship, remained at Albany that year to serve as guard ships. Except for the short-lived

¹K. G. Davies, "Introduction" to Rich, Hudson's Bay Copy Booke of Letters, p. xxiv.

²Ibid.

recapture of York Fort in 1696, Albany remained the Company's only Bayside post to 1714.

During the War of Spanish Succession (1701-13) convoy service was again provided by the Royal Navy. As during the previous war, Company ships did not receive naval protection on the entire voyage. Departing London, the HBC's fleet sailed in company with other private shipping under Royal Navy protection. Convoys joined by the Company vessels included the Russia Convoy, Newcastle Convoy, and those taking the Scottish trade, all of which sailed through the English Channel.

Convoy service was used whenever possible since loss of ships to an enemy was not only an economic setback, but also threatened the well being of Company employees in Rupert's Land who depended on the ships for provisioning. Ships' captains were therefore sometimes authorized and empowered to redeem their ship and cargo if lost to an enemy. In 1708 Captain Joseph Davis was given authorization to buy back the thirty ton Eastmain sloop for up to £400 if taken by an enemy, and Captain Michael Grimington was instructed to pay from £1,200 to £1,400 to regain the Hudson's Bay (II) frigate.¹

¹A.6/3, f. 93d, London Correspondence Outward, Official, 1696-1715, Governor and Committee to Captain Joseph Davis, and Governor and Committee to Captain Michael Grimington, London, 26 May 1708. Subsequent classification numbers refer to Hudson's Bay Company Archives. As size of ships and their cargoes increased, so too did the amount captains were authorized to pay an enemy to regain them. Before he departed for the Bay with the Prince Rupert (III) in 1760, Captain Joseph Spurrell was given a sealed letter that was to be opened only if he were taken by an enemy. The letter authorized him to pay up to £4,000 to regain his ship and cargo. C.7/175, ff. 2 and 3d, Governor and Committee to Captain Joseph Spurrell, London, 21 May 1760.

The number of transatlantic crossings, as well as their regularity, decreased markedly while Albany was the Company's only post. In no year between 1698 and 1713 did more than one ship make the return trip from London to the Bay. No ships were sent to the Bay in 1700, 1703, 1704, 1707, or 1709, and no homeward bound ships sailed from Albany in 1702, 1704, 1705, 1709, 1710, or 1713.¹ Such irregularity caused Anthony Beale, Governor at Albany, to threaten to quit his command unless a ship was dispatched annually.²

The Period 1714 to 1774

By terms of the 1713 Treaty of Utrecht, which ended the War of Spanish Succession, English rights to Hudson Bay were formally restored. The Company repositioned itself in the trade by resettling former posts and by initiating additional trade at other estuary sites. In 1714 York Fort was returned to the HBC after having remained in French hands for eighteen years. By 1717 the Company had begun constructing a new post at Churchill. Eastmain House, an outpost of Albany Fort, was completed in 1723, and in 1730 Moose Factory was resettled. Richmond Fort was established in 1750, and nine years later the construction of Severn House was begun. Throughout the remainder of its first century the HBC continued to operate all these posts except Richmond, which was abandoned in 1759. The combined cargo demands of, and returns from, this expanded network of posts required additional and somewhat larger transatlantic

¹Davies, Letters from Hudson Bay 1703-40, pp. 335-337.

²Rich, Hudson's Bay Company, I, p. 382.

vessels. It was during the more stable years of the second half of the Company's first century that a well-established and regular routine for transatlantic shipping developed. The outstanding features of the Company's Atlantic linkage in the years following the Treaty of Utrecht were continuity and regularity. These characteristics permeated all aspects of shipping from construction and christening, to captains, departure dates, routes, and destinations.

In the post-1713 period, the Company continued the practice of retaining the names of ships as they were replaced. This practice was begun in 1690 when the Company christened a newly acquired frigate, the Dering (II), when it converted the original vessel of that name into the Prosperous fireship. Thereafter, most of the HBC's transatlantic vessels were either the first or later members of a ship series of the same name. In the first century, series groups included three Dering, four Hudson's Bay, four Mary, two King George, two Sea Horse, and four Prince Rupert. The ships had an average life of ten to fifteen years, with one, the Sea Horse (I) remaining in the Company's service for thirty years (1734 to 1763).

Throughout this period the pink and frigate remained the work horses of the Company's fleet. Size of the ships increased somewhat during the period from a range of about 100 to 150 tons in the 1720's, to an average of approximately 200 tons in the 1760's. Still, the vessels remained quite small in comparison to modern oceanic cargo ships. Even the largest of the Company ships were only sixty-odd feet long and just over twenty feet broad (Fig. 15).

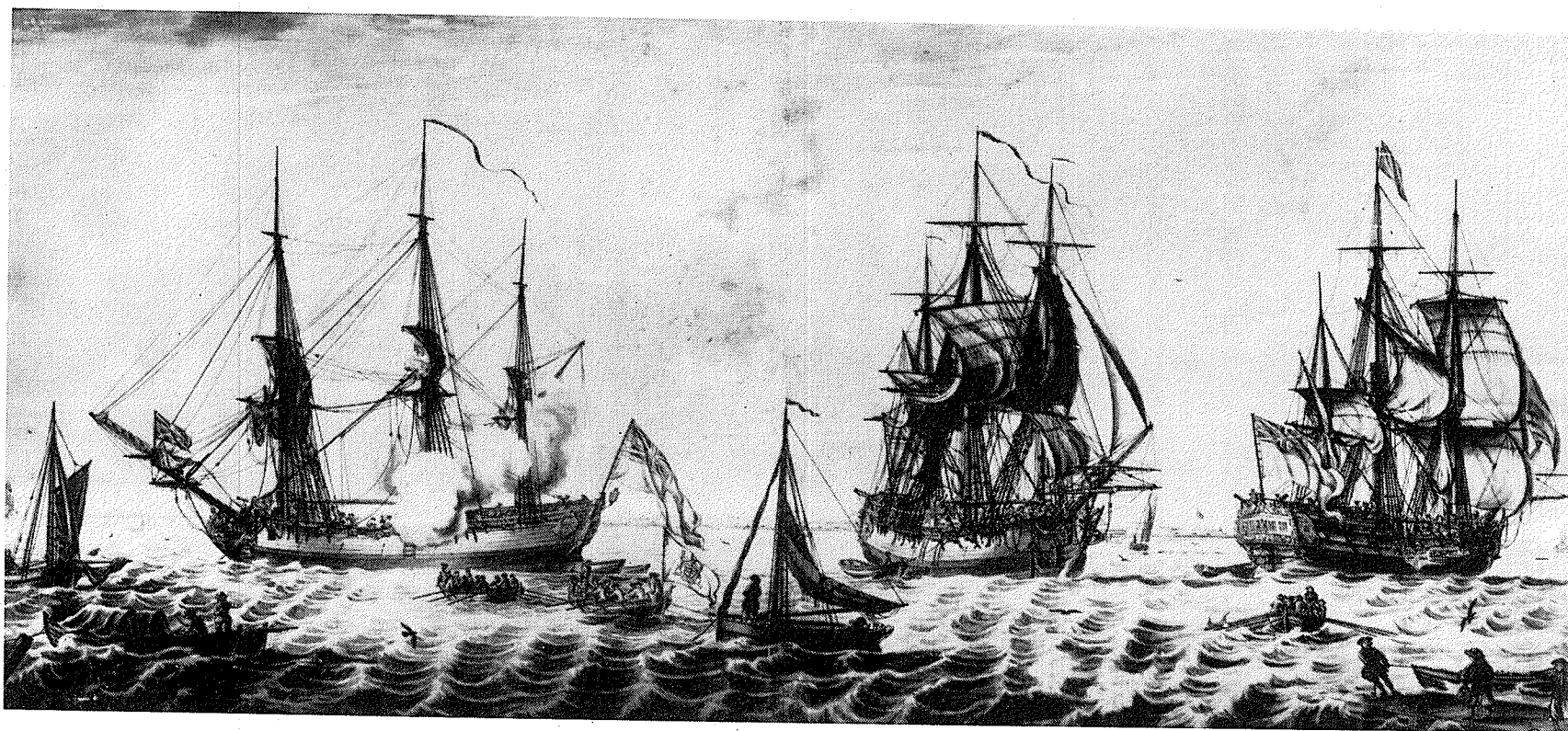


Fig. 15--Copy of a wash drawing by John Hood of Hudson's Bay Company ships (Prince Rupert, Sea Horse, and King George) leaving Gravesend for Hudson Bay, 1769. Note height of men for scale. (Illustration courtesy of the Hudson's Bay Company, Winnipeg).

Continuity in shipping extended to ship captains. A total of only sixteen different men sailed the 181 round trips to and from the Bay in Company owned ships from 1714 to 1774.¹ Ten to twenty annual voyages were not uncommon for an individual captain. The relatively trouble free nature of voyages in these later years may, in part, be attributed to the experience and expertise of ship captains. Commodores who made serious mistakes were quickly expelled from the service.²

Regularity of Company shipping in the final quarter of its first century is striking. Between 1750 and 1759 the Company dispatched four ships annually to the Bay -- one to Churchill, one to York, one to the Bottom of the Bay, and one to the new post of Richmond Fort. With the abandonment of Richmond in 1759, the number of ships dispatched annually dropped to three. During this time, it was common for a captain to sail the same ship to the same post each year, although ships and their captains were sometimes shifted.

¹Letter, enclosure No. 1 (List of Ships sailing for Hudson Bay [1668-1820]), Chadwick Brooks, Secretary, Hudson's Bay Company, to the Canadian Committee, Canadian Hydrographic Service, Department of Marine, 22 February 1932, Hudson's Bay House, Winnipeg, Library; and C.4/1, ff. 3d-12, Book of Ships' Movements [1719-1929].

²An example was Captain Joseph Davis who was "Justly discharged our Service as he deserv'd." In 1715 he sailed the Hudson Bay (II) frigate to York Fort, but turned back fifteen miles from his destination when he could not find the post. A.6/4, f. 4, London Correspondence Outward, Official, 1716-1726, Governor and Committee to Thomas Macklish and Council at Albany Fort, 18 May 1716. Bayside posts maintained high beacons to help ships locate the posts. In 1766 the officer in charge at York Fort reported a wooden beacon under construction was already 47 feet high, and scheduled to reach a height of 82 feet. A.11/115, f. 97d, London Correspondence Inward from York Factory, 1757-1775, Ferdinand Jacobs and Council to Governor and Committee, 18 August 1766.

Company ships outward bound for the Bay between 1750 and 1774 sailed "north about" each year except 1765, 1766, and 1767. Departing London, the ships traveled in convoy north to Stromness in the Orkney Islands. In times of war, Company ships were under the protection of one or two Royal Navy warships for this portion of the voyage. After a three to six day stopover in the Orkneys during which time servants were hired, water and ballast loaded, and minor repairs made, the ships departed for the Bay. If afforded Naval protection, Company ships could expect the British warship(s) to remain with them until several days west of the Orkneys.

While crossing the north Atlantic ships remained in company as they headed west toward Cape Farewell.¹ Each year, beginning in 1722, ship captains were expressly forbidden by their sailing orders to go north of Latitude 59° North until they were well west of Cape Farewell, in order "to Avoid the Ice that lyeth off that Cape."²

¹In the North Atlantic HBC ships occasionally met Danish vessels associated with the whale fishery in Davis Strait. On 19 July 1761, Captain Joseph Spurrell of the King George (II) encountered a Danish ship, the captain of which reported he was returning home after having traded with Eskimos north of 67° latitude in Davis Strait. C.1/365, f. 16, "A Journal of a Voyage from London to York Fort in the Ship King George, by Jos. Spurrell Master Anno 1761."

²A.6/4, f. 65d, London Correspondence Outward, Official, 1716-1726, Sailing Orders and Instructions to Captain James Belcher, 24 May 1722. Beginning in 1714 ships were instructed to stay south of 57°30' until well west of Cape Farewell for the same reason. A.6/3, f. 128, London Correspondence Outward, Official, 1696-1715, Sailing Orders and Instructions to Captain Richard Harle, 25 May 1714. The ice off Cape Farewell was extremely dangerous. In 1727 Thomas Macklish, Governor at York Fort, wrote the London headquarters that "a ship may with as much safety run against a rock as against such, being all of a hard blue ice . . ." Davies, Letters From Hudson Bay 1703-40, p. 127.

Once west of the Cape and well into Davis Strait, ships veered to the northwest toward Resolution Island. Ice is generally menacing in Davis Strait in early summer, and in 1764 Captain Joseph Richards of the Sea Horse (II) reported having run past "above 150 Large Isles of Ice" in the final three days' approach to Resolution Island.¹

Once inside the entrance of Hudson Strait the ships usually encountered trading Eskimos awaiting their passage. Beginning in 1719, Bay bound vessels were routinely stocked with a small quantity of goods designated for trading with Eskimos in the Strait.² Ship captains were instructed to encourage, but not force, the Eskimos to trade whole skins of any kind, sea horse (walrus) teeth, unicorn (narwhal) tusks, seal and whale oil, and whale bone. Little time was lost since Eskimos approached the ships in their own canoes and luggage boats.

Ice and fog made westward passage through Hudson Strait the most difficult section of a voyage to the Bay. One to three weeks were usually required to pass from Resolution Island to Digges

¹C.1/1034, f. 20, "1764 A Journal of a Voyage in the Sea Horse of London from hence to Prince of Wales's Fort in Hudsons Bay and back to the Port of London by Joseph Richards Master."

²On his 1718 voyage Captain George Berley encountered Eskimos in Hudson Strait. After trading whale bone, they promised to meet the ship at the same place the next year. The Company, "desireous of a Trade with the [Eskimos]," the next year placed a box of trading goods on the Mary (I) specifically for the Eskimo trade in the Strait. A.6/4, f. 37d, London Correspondence Outward, Official, 1696-1715, Sailing Orders and Instruction to Captain James Belcher, 1719. As an incentive, ship captains were eventually allowed a commission of twenty-five percent of the value of this trade.

Island at the western entrance to the Strait. A two week passage was considered average.¹

Accounts in the logs of Company ships making the passage through the Strait reveal the inherent difficulties and dangers. At this point, more than at any other time during the voyage, it was imperative that the several ships keep company. It was often necessary for vessels to literally inch their way through the ice clogged and fog shrouded waters. When a lead ship found a clear stretch, it signaled with cannon fire for its consorts to follow. At times it was even necessary to tow ships with their own small rowboats. Occasionally ships were grappled to large pieces of ice to await less dangerous conditions. Relative small size and wooden construction made forcing passage through ice strewn waters dangerous. Small size did, however, make ships more manoeuvrable, and even though wooden hulls were not ideal in heavy ice, they provided a surprising resilience under less demanding conditions.

Once through Hudson Strait ships passed southwest into Hudson Bay through the passage between Nottingham Island on the north, and Digges Island to the south. At this point the ship bound for Richmond Fort broke convoy and sailed to its destination. The other ships continued on a southwesterly course passing west of Mansel Island where the ship(s) destined for the Bottom of the Bay departed company. The Churchill and York vessels continued on a southwesterly course to about 60° North Latitude where they separated and proceeded to their respective port of call.

¹C.4/1, ff. 3d-12, Book of Ships' Movement [1719-1729].

Although the expanded network of Bayside posts required a larger fleet, it provided the Company with greater flexibility in adjusting to the loss of a transatlantic vessel. If, on the outward voyage, a ship was lost or captured while still in company with the other ships, the remaining commanders were to proceed according to a predetermined contingency plan. In the event that the ship bound for the Bottom of the Bay were lost, the ship originally bound for Churchill was then to sail to the Bottom of the Bay. If either the Churchill or York vessels were lost, the remaining one was to proceed to both posts, divide its cargo, and pick up the fur returns from both. Loss of the Fort Richmond ship did not directly affect transatlantic shipping routine. The Bottom of the Bay vessel was merely to report the loss on arrival at her destination and make arrangements to send a sloop stationed in James Bay to Richmond with goods and provisions which Albany and Moose Fort could reasonably spare.

Coastal Transport

Just as transatlantic shipping spanned maritime space to link London, England with the Company's Bayside posts, marine coastal transport provided the necessary linkage between tidewater posts on Hudson and James Bay. Vessels used in coastal transport were of two general types, small ships including sloops, yachts, and hoys of from twenty to fifty tons burden, and shallops, much smaller, open boats. Of the larger vessels, the sloop was the most popular, although the distinction between classes of these small ships was

evidently unclear even to the Company and its Bayside officers. One such vessel, the Success, was variously described as being a sloop, a yacht, and a hoy. Thirty-six feet long, and twelve feet broad, this small ship can be regarded as typical of the sloops that served the Company's coastal transport.¹

Although there was undoubtedly variety in size, type, and construction of shallops used, there is frequent reference to "Greenland Shallops" in the Company archives. These large open boats, which could be sailed and/or oared,² ranged up to at least twenty-six feet in length and had a burden approaching ten tons.³

The sloops and shallops assigned to the Company's Bayside posts have been aptly described as a "vital and integral part of their equipment."⁴ They provided many and varied essential services within the Bay. The larger and more seaworthy sloops provided intercommunication between major forts and their coastal outposts, and linked all Bayside posts together. They also served as mobile trading centres, making coastal trade possible in areas not served by permanent posts. Such ships were capable of the return trip to England and were periodically called up when the scheduled ship from

¹Davies, Letters from Hudson Bay 1703-40, p. 59n; and Cameron, "Ships of Three Centuries," p. 11.

²Although other types of boats such as punts and longboats were also employed, the term shallop seems to have been used to identify any larger, open boat that could be sailed or rowed.

³Rich, Minutes, First Part, 1679-82, p. 186n; and Rich, Minutes 1671-1674, p. 100.

⁴Rich, Hudson's Bay Company, I, p. 436.

London failed to arrive. Both sloops and shallops, as well as other smaller shallow draft vessels, also served as lighters for transatlantic vessels. Because of their small size, shallops were generally limited to such local, or other coastwise operations.

The Hudson's Bay Company realized the necessity of maintaining vessels for use in Hudson and James Bay early in its history, and some of its first ventures in ship owning involved small vessels that were to be stationed in the Bay. In 1680 Governor Nixon was sent planks from England to make repairs and build additional small vessels, "it being of great moment that wee have Small Craft enough to attend our several Factories and to run from place to place."¹ Two years later the Company headquarters reiterated its regard for coastal transport vessels when it again wrote Nixon, "Wee put a great vallue upon our Small Vessells in the Country, And therefore Expect your more than Ordinary care for their preservation."² Such was the importance of the Bayside sloops that commodores, or masters of each, were made members of the governing council at the post where the sloop was based.

Sloops and shallops were completely built in England, shipped in prefabricated kits and assembled at Bay posts, or built at the Company posts using at least some local wood. Sloops built in England were sailed to their Bayside duty post, while shallops built there were carried aboard the transatlantic vessels. Sloops and

¹Rich, Copy-Book of Letters, p. 9.

²Ibid., p. 44.

shallops built locally were usually sent "in frames," and constructed by shipwrights and carpenters stationed at the posts. The lack of suitable hardwoods near Bayside posts made it impossible to build durable craft using "country plank" alone. As well as being difficult to bend into proper shape,¹ local wood proved too soft to withstand the rigours of Bayside duty. For example, in 1717 when the twenty ton Albany was constructed at Albany Fort, it was described as a "fine floaty vessel and sails well."² Five years later this same sloop, which had been constructed of local wood, was reported as being "of no service to us, she being so leaky . . ."³

One of the most important functions of the Bayside sloops was providing linkage between major factories⁴ and their outposts. Slooping voyages from Albany to the southern part of the Eastmain (the eastern coast of Hudson and James Bay) began in the 1670's. A sloop attached to Albany usually sailed in late summer for the Eastmain where its crew wintered and traded for furs with the

¹B.3/b/1, f. 22, Albany Fort Correspondence Books, 1742-1782, James Duffield at Moose Fort to Joseph Isbister at Albany Fort, 21 May 1743; and Davies, Letters from Hudson Bay 1703-40, p. 172.

²Davies, Letters from Hudson Bay 1703-40, p. 72.

³Ibid., p. 81. Sloops built for the Company in England sometimes lasted up to three times longer than the Albany.

⁴The Company's Bayside posts were frequently referred to as factories. This usage probably stems from the Portuguese word feitoria, which was a trading settlement maintained by a factor. The term is also consistent with the large amount of secondary manufacturing and related activities carried on at these posts. Tasks included "cleaning and mending guns, making and repairing kegs and rundlets, squaring and sawing timber, making sleds and snowshoes, making suits of clothing, turning out ironworks, including hatchets and other implements." Innis, The Fur Trade in Canada, p. 156.

regional natives, returning to Albany early the following summer. Even after establishing Eastmain as a permanent post in 1724, it was still considered an outpost of Albany, linked to it by small vessels.¹ A similar relationship developed between York and Severn. Trade items destined for Severn and furs obtained there were funneled through York, shuttled between the two posts by small vessels. Sloops were also used for exploration, particularly to the north of Churchill. Beginning in 1739, the Company ordered annual slooping voyages north from Churchill to trade with the natives at Whale Cove.²

Sloops not only linked major factories with their outposts, they tied all Bayside posts together. Some linkages were more frequent than others. One of the more regular slooping ties between major posts was that between Albany and Moose. It was common for the transatlantic ship conveying cargoes destined for both these posts to call only at Moose Fort, which had the better of the two harbours. In such cases, the sloops assigned to Moose and Albany shuttled the incoming and outgoing cargoes between the two factories.

A redistribution of items between all tidewater posts was also made possible with sloops. Timber was one important commodity

¹In 1779 Eastmain and its new outpost at Rupert River were made subsidiary to Moose Factory. E. E. Rich, ed., Moose Fort Journals 1783-85 (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1954), pp. 335-336. Even after Eastmain was made an independent factory in 1786, it still depended on sloop communication with Moose. Ibid., pp. 337-338.

²Davies, Letters from Hudson Bay 1703-40, pp. 292-293. Whalebone, oil, and fur were the major items traded by the Eskimos at Whale Cove. Other exploratory and trading expeditions north of Churchill predate this order; the earliest immediately followed the 1717 establishment of the post.

frequently carried. Only the shores of the southern portion of the Bay were forested with stands of timber suitable for the lumber essential for post construction, modification, and upkeep (see Fig. 14). Moose Factory developed as the major exporter of these items, in short supply at a post like Churchill near the southern margin of the tundra. Birch rind,¹ more accessible at the Bottom of the Bay than at posts further north, was another commodity carried by the sloops. Essential for construction and maintenance of native canoes, the bark was used as an inducement to help lure trading Indians to York, and later to build and repair the Company's own canoes. The interconnection provided by sloops also permitted posts to acquire badly needed trade goods and provisions from the Company's other Bayside posts. Hardships caused by the nonarrival of a Company ship from England could be lessened with the redistribution of cargoes from the ship(s) that did complete the voyage.

At major posts served directly by transatlantic vessels, sloops filled an essential role as lighters. Ships arriving from England were generally too large to sail into all river mouths. According to Andrew Graham, large ships stopping at York usually anchored in Five Fathom Hole in Bay waters about seven miles from the Factory, and could not approach any closer than five leagues of

¹The bark of Betula papyrifera Marsh.

Albany.¹ Closer approaches to these posts by fully loaded, deep draught ships were made dangerous, if not impossible, by shoal water and numerous sand bars. Once oceanic vessels arrived in the roadsteads, sloops and other small vessels ferried cargo between ship and post. At York Factory in 1739, vessels could dock at a 190 feet long, 9 feet 3 inch wide launch, or inclined wharf, which jutted out into the water from the top of the low coastal bluff adjacent to the post.²

The relatively short season of open water in Hudson Bay and Hudson Strait made a speedy off- and on-loading of ships essential. However, critical turn-around time was often delayed by the need to provide the London bound ship with dunnage,³ and to load it with tons

¹Glyndwr Williams, ed., Andrew Graham's Observations on Hudson Bay (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1969), pp. 250-251 (Hereinafter referred to as Williams, Graham's Observations.) Five Fathom Hole actually had 18 feet of water at low tide and 30 feet at high tide. It was 200 fathoms wide and 600 fathoms long. J. B. Tyrrell, ed., Documents Relating to the Early History of Hudson Bay (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1931), p. 259 (Hereinafter referred to as Tyrrell, Documents Relating.) In the York Factory Post Journals there are numerous references to ships proceeding out of Five Fathom Hole, after being somewhat lightened, into Three Fathom Hole, and eventually anchoring off the factory. The reverse was the case when ships were loaded with the return cargo -- the ship was partly loaded adjacent to the post and proceeded out to deeper anchorage to take on additional cargo.

²B.239/a/21, f. 40, York Factory Post Journal, 1738-1739. By the 1760's there are frequent references to upper, lower, and middle launches.

³Dunnage, "Light material, as brushwood, mats, and the like, stowed among and beneath cargo of a vessel to keep it from injury by chafing or wet; any lighter or less valuable articles of the cargo used for the same purpose." The Oxford Economic Dictionary, Vol. III, 1961, p. 719. Dunnage has also been defined as a nautical term for "Loose wood, faggots, boughs, etc., laid at the bottom of a hold to raise the cargo above the bilge-water, and also to check it and keep it from rolling when stowed." Universal Dictionary of the English Language, Vol. II, 1897, p. 1779. Split poplar seems to have been the most commonly used dunnage material.

of rock ballast. Although there was an effort to have this material ready before the ship's arrival, this was not always possible.¹ The uneconomic aspect of handling and shipping tons of useless rock plagued Company shipping from its beginning.² Throughout the study period there were unsuccessful efforts by the Company to replace the tons of worthless ballast with other bulky, but more valuable commodities. Attempts were made to fill this unused capacity of the homeward bound ships with cargoes such as mica, copper, timber, products of Bayside whaling, and eventually agricultural products from the Red River Colony. The acquisition of some of these alternative cargoes depended on the services of Bayside sloops.

Indian Transport

The Company's Bayside posts were the points of contact between maritime and land space. It was here that the marine and inland transport lines met. Prior to 1774, the Company left the concerns of inland transport to the natives, with the single exception of the

¹ For example, on 29 July 1749 the factor at Albany recorded in his daily post journal that he had "above 60 Tunn of Stones" and "a great quantity of Poplar" ready and waiting for the ship's arrival. B.3/a/40, f. 28d, Albany Fort Post Journal, 1748-1749. Twenty-seven years earlier his predecessor was evidently not as well prepared; on 22 August 1722 he wrote the London Headquarters, "We must acquaint your honours that we used all the diligence imaginable for the dispatch of your ship, and had not we wanted so much ballast, we could a dispatched her much sooner, for we were obliged to get him at least 60 ton of stones for ballast." Davies, Letters from Hudson Bay 1703-40, pp. 81-82.

² This problem is discussed in a general way by H. A. Innis, "Unused Capacity as a Factor in Canadian Economic History," Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science, II (February, 1936), pp. 1-15.

transport line linking Albany Fort with its inland outpost of Henley House. Indians wishing to trade furs with the Company were required to transport them to Bayside posts. Although the sites of most of the Company's tidewater posts may not have been ideal in terms of site characteristics, the situation of these posts was strategic considering the water transport available to the indigenous trading population.

Each HBC Bay post was situated at the mouth of a major river which drained a large section of Rupert's Land (Fig. 16 and Table 1). Thus, by virtue of natural drainage, large regions of up to almost one-half million square miles, as in the case of York Factory, were tributary to the Company's posts. These major waterways and their component rivers and lakes were the routes along which the interior Indians carried their trade to the Bay. Except for the use of overland conveyances by the Chipewyans¹ who traded at Churchill, most natives who traded directly with the Company's Bayside posts used bark canoes as their carriers.

Usually built of birch bark, and less frequently, of spruce bark, these Indian canoes varied in model and method of construction.² Accounts by Company employees attest to the characteristic small

¹Lacking a suitable freighting canoe, these Indians relied on their women and dogs to carry and drag their furs to Churchill during the winter.

²For a discussion of several types of Indian canoes involved in the trade, see Edwin Tappan Adney and Howard I. Chapelle, The Bark Canoes and Skin Boats of North America, Smithsonian Institution, Bull. 230 (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1964), pp. 113-133 (Hereinafter referred to as Adney and Chapelle, Bark Canoes and Skin Boats.)

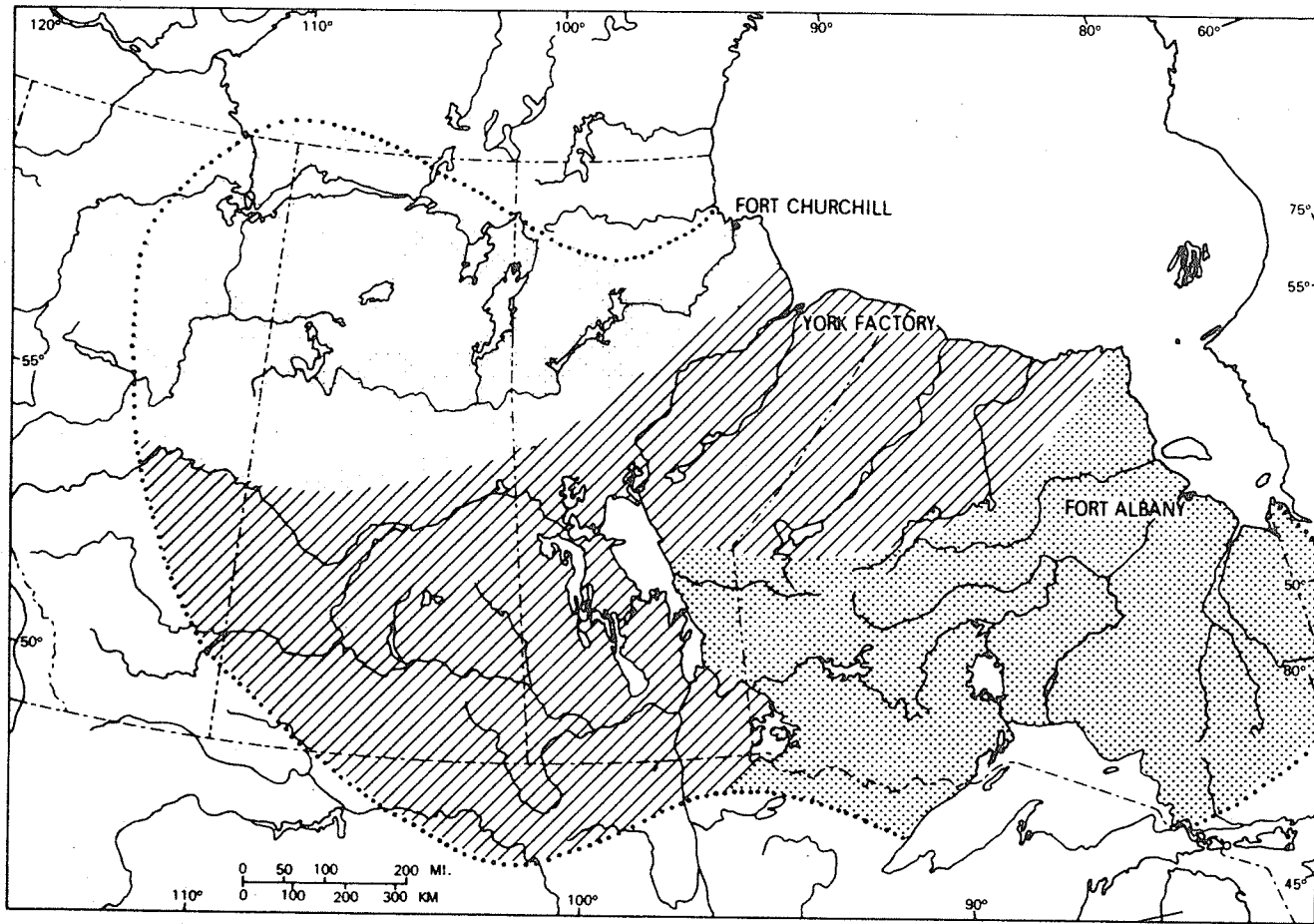


Fig. 16--HBC post hinterlands ca. 1700-1720

Source: Arthur J. Ray, Indians in the Fur Trade (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), p. 54.

TABLE 1

HUDSON'S BAY COMPANY ESTUARY POSTS AND THEIR
TRIBUTARY DRAINAGE BASIN AREAS

HBC Estuary Post	Tributary River Systems and Basins	Drainage Area in Sq. Miles
Churchill	Churchill River	108,600
York	Hayes and Nelson River Systems	479,000
Severn	Severn River	38,900
Albany	Albany River	45,400
Moose	Moose River	41,900
Eastmain	Eastmain River	18,300

Source: Canada, Department of Energy, Mines and Resources, The National Atlas of Canada (Fourth Edition, Revised; Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada, 1974), pp. 15-16.

size of the craft. In the eighteenth century, Andrew Graham described these canoes as 18 feet long, 2 feet across at their widest, and about 18 inches deep.¹ This length equals an 18 foot figure earlier reported by James Isham in the 1740's² and approximates the 18 to 25

¹Williams, Graham's Observations, p. 189.

²E. E. Rich, ed., James Isham's Observations on Hudson's Bay, 1743 (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1949), p. 66 (Hereinafter referred to as Rich, Isham's Observations.)

feet long, by 1 to 2 feet wide dimensions reported by a former HBC employee in the same decade.¹

Bark canoes were exceedingly well adapted to the geographical conditions of most of Rupert's Land. Requisite birch bark was available throughout much of the forested section of the study region. This widespread distribution not only made canoe building possible in many areas, it also meant that the bark was available when needed to repair damaged canoes. Birch bark canoes were extremely light, and may have averaged only eighty pounds.² The lightness of these two-man craft was an asset on the white water rivers of the Canadian Shield where frequent portaging was required. Besides facilitating portaging, small size and light weight meant shallow draft and increased range, as well as greater speed and manoeuvrability.

Relying on canoes, and using the network of interior rivers and lakes as routeways, some Indians from the interior traveled more than 1,000 miles to trade at the Company's Bayside posts. The accordant spatial relationship between major drainage basins and hinterlands of respective posts apparent in Fig. 16 became even more complete following the 1730 resettlement of Moose Factory at the mouth of Moose River, and after the building of Fort Severn in the

¹Testimony of Mr. Edward Thompson, in United Kingdom, Parliament, House of Commons, Report From the Committee Appointed to Enquire into the State and Conditions of the Countries Adjoining to Hudson's Bay and of the Trade Carried on There, Together with an Appendix (London, 1749), p. 223 (Hereinafter referred to as United Kingdom, Report From the Committee.)

²Williams, Graham's Observations, p. 191. Andrew Graham weighed several canoes and found the heaviest to be eighty-four pounds. Ibid., p. 17.

estuary of Severn River in 1759. Once in operation, these posts reduced the York and Albany hinterlands by drawing trading Indians from within their own watershed and immediately adjacent areas.

Just as the operational pattern of Indian transport largely mirrored the pattern of the natural drainage system, so too, did its pulse conform to the annual rhythm of the seasons. Since the long distance movement of furs depended on water-borne transport, trips had to be completed during the relatively short ice free season, which today only averages less than six months within the limits of these former hinterlands.¹

The accounts of English and opposition traders in the interior prior to 1774 reveal the transport routine of some of the Indians who traded at York Factory.² These show the annual routine began in early spring when trading Indians usually began assembling at their

¹Canada, Department of Energy, Mines and Resources, The National Atlas of Canada (Fourth Edition, Revised; Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada, 1974), pp. 13-14.

²See for example B.239/a/43, classified as York Factory Post Journal, 1756-57, Joseph Smith, "A Journal of the most remarkable Observations and Occurrences on a Journey in Land performed by Joseph Smith and Joseph Waggoner Who Departed From York Fort August the 23rd, 1756 and Returned June the 25th, 1757"; B.239/a/45 classified as York Factory Post Journal, 1757-58, Joseph Smith, "A Journal of Journey Inland Performed by Joseph Smith, 1757-59"; B.239/a/58, classified as York Factory Post Journal, 1767-68, William Pink, "Will'm Pink's Journal In Land Commencing July 3rd 1767 & Ending June 28th 1768"; B.239/a/63, classified as York Factory Post Journal, 1769-70, William Pink, "A journal of the most remarkable Transactions and Occurrences of a Journey In Land Commencing 29th June 1769 and Ending 15th June 1770"; Tyrrell, Documents Relating, pp. 265-266; and Joseph LaFrance, "Narrative," in United Kingdom, Report From the Committee, pp. 244-247.

predetermined canoe building grounds, such as at designated sites on Cedar Lake, or along the Swan or Saskatchewan Rivers.¹ Indians embarking from the North Saskatchewan River in the western portion of York's hinterland evidently set off from their canoe building grounds from late April to mid May. They were eager to begin their passage to York as early as possible, as witnessed by William Pink on the Saskatchewan River in May 1767, when he noted that the Indians, both men and women, were working as fast as they could to build their canoes.² With canoes completed on 14 May, the Indians embarked that day for the Bay. On 23 May Pink recorded in his journal, "I now find the indians are all Hurring a long Down Towardses the Fortes as fast as the[y] Can one Bodey before a nother[.]"³

Those commencing their passage in the northern Manitoba Lakes appear to have spent more time at canoe building sites hunting and trapping, and did not depart for York until early to mid May. This somewhat later departure time was apparently necessary to assure ice free conditions along the entire water road to York, where during the 1715 to 1774 period spring break-up of river ice did not usually

¹These sites were not necessarily where suitable birch for canoe building was available. It was often necessary to make a several day trip with toboggans to fetch requisite birch bark.

²B.239/a/56, f. 22, classified as York Factory Post Journal, 1766-67, William Pink, "Will^m Pink's Journal Inland 1766 a7."

³Ibid. In the journal, this passage is enclosed in red brackets. Edward Umfreville has suggested that Indians strove to be first down since they had the best chance for acquiring provisions in the game-poor stretch east of Lake Winnipeg. W. Stewart Wallace, ed., The Present State of Hudson's Bay, Containing a Full Description of that Settlement, and the Adjacent Country, and Likewise of the Fur Trade . . . by Edward Umfreville (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1943), p. 56.

begin until late May.¹ The passage to York was usually made by the men, while their families remained in the interior, camped at a suitable fishing site.²

The earliest upland trading Indians usually arrived at York in early June. After trading furs and taking a short respite, during which time their guns were repaired by the factory's gunsmith, and they were fed oatmeal, bread, and prunes, Indians returned inland.³ The upriver trip required about four weeks to The Pas and somewhat longer for points farther up the Saskatchewan. On their upward passage the canoeists picked up their families and continued en mass toward their wintering grounds in, or adjacent to, the parkland belt. As a flotilla progressed farther upcountry, bands split off to move to their winter hunting grounds. Once a band reached a point where it could no longer proceed by water, it permanently discarded its

¹D. W. Moodie and A. J. W. Catchpole, Environmental Data From Historical Documents By Content Analysis: Freeze-Up and Break-Up of Estuaries on Hudson Bay 1714-1871, Manitoba Geographical Studies, No. 5 (Winnipeg: Department of Geography, University of Manitoba, 1975), p. 118.

²Canoe travel with families was slow, even under the best of circumstances. While crossing Swan Lake with his flotilla of Indians in May 1757 enroute to York Factory, Joseph Smith commented in his journal on the slow progress owing to the presence of the families and numerous dogs. B.239/a/43, f. 15, classified as York Factory Post Journal, 1756-57, Joseph Smith, "A Journal . . . Returned June the 25th, 1757." The hardships of the passage to and from the Bay, including frequent long periods with little or no food, and the limited stowage capacity of Indian canoes also ruled out families making the trip.

³Feeding trading Indians while at the fort could be expensive, such as on 22 June 1764 when 200 canoes of natives were fed by the factory. B.239/a/51, f. 40, York Factory Post Journal, 1763-64.

canoes and struck out overland. After gathering furs, hunting, and preparing dried meat and fat for the next trip to the Bay, the Indians once again moved toward their canoe building grounds, and the annual transport cycle began anew.

The French Opposition

When the HBC began operating in Hudson Bay in 1670, the French already had a well-established fur trading system further south, and regarded the HBC as an interloper. While the Company limited its trading establishments to the shore of the Bay, requiring the Indians to transport their furs downriver to trade, the French, following the defeat of the Huron Indians in the late 1640's, pursued an expansionist policy designed to carry the trade to Indians in the interior (Fig. 17).

From their Montreal base in the St. Lawrence Lowland, French traders had several approaches which carried them deep into the Bay Company's trading hinterlands.¹ After ascending the Ottawa River to Fort Timiskaming it is only a short distance via Lac des Quinze to the Hudson Bay drainage divide and Lake Abitibi within the Moose River drainage basin. This route provided the best linkage between the St. Lawrence Basin and James Bay. An earlier, though less important, connection was located 300 miles further east where Lake Mistassini in the headwaters of the Rupert River could be reached

¹For a discussion and maps of these approaches see Eric W. Morse, Fur Trade Canoe Routes of Canada/Then and Now (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1969), pp. 51-72 (Hereinafter referred to as Morse, Fur Trade Canoe Routes.)

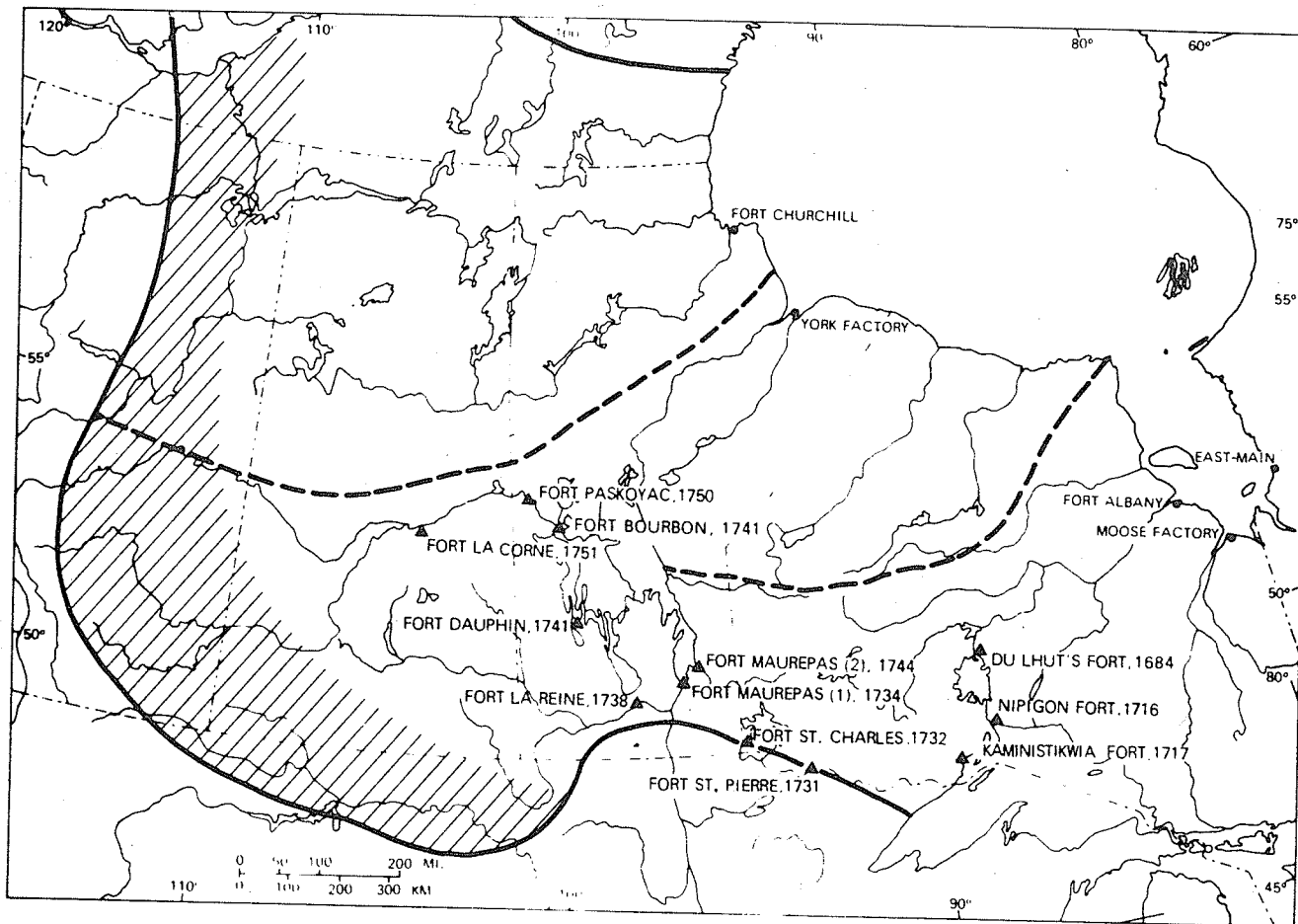


Fig. 17--Selected French and HBC posts, ca. 1750, showing approximate hinterland boundaries for HBC posts. Indirect HBC trade area shown with diagonal lines.

Source: Arthur J. Ray, Indians in the Fur Trade (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974) p. 54.

from the St. Lawrence by following the Saguenay River, Lake St. John, and Ashuapmuchuan River.

The north shore of Lake Superior afforded no less than three portals into Rupert's Land. Although not well suited for freighting, as the HBC was to later discover, the most easterly of these provided a short and direct connection. From their post at Michipicoten, the French traders ascended the river of the same name to the height of land, and then descended via the Missinaibi River, a major tributary of the Moose River. The divide could also be bridged from Nipigon River and Lake via the Ombakika River, and then down either Ogoki or Little Current, to Kenogami River and the Albany River.

With the exception of the route via the Saguenay River, the above portals, and other less important ones, were merely feeder lines to the main French trunk route which began at Montreal and reached west to the northwestern shore of Lake Superior, where it connected with the rivers and lakes draining to Hudson Bay by two routeways.¹ The earliest of these linkages was achieved via the Kaministikwia River and its headwaters, over Prairie Portage, and down the Savanne River. This track was used until the 1730's when the more direct Grand Portage route came into use. The former Indian track began at a small bay ten miles south of the mouth of

¹For a discussion and maps of these two very important routes of the fur trade see Lawrence J. Burpee, ed., Journals and Letters of Pierre Gaultier De Varennes De La Vérendrye And His Sons (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1927), pp. 52-55 (Hereinafter referred to as Burpee, Journals and Letters); and Morse, Fur Trade Canoe Routes, pp. 75-83.

the Pigeon River where a nine mile long Indian trail (the Grand Portage) struck west to join the river above the unnavigable section near its mouth. From this juncture the French ascended the Pigeon River, passing through a series of small rivers and lakes to South Lake, over Height of Land Portage, and into North Lake, which empties to the west. Via both these approaches, French traders gained access to the rich fur area tributary to Lake Winnipeg and within the York and Albany trading hinterlands.

Opposition from French traders in the interior was first noticed at the James Bay posts, where as early as 1674 the French had reportedly established a settlement eight days up the Rupert River on Lake Mistassini.¹ Faced with this early inland competition, the HBC factor at Charles Fort debated whether to move the post from the mouth of the Rupert River to avoid having the traffic in fur interrupted. That year he chose to make a new post at the mouth of Moose River his new headquarters.

Within ten years, French trader Daniel Greysolon Du Lhut (Duluth) had established a post on the northeast shore of Lake Nipigon designed to draw off trade that had previously gone to Albany Fort. According to both Innis and A. S. Morton, an outpost was established at the junction of the Albany and Kenogami Rivers in

¹Tyrrell, Documents Relating, p. 387.

1685 to further intercept the Albany bound Indians.¹ The HBC evidently gave no consideration to moving Albany to avoid this French threat from the west. The limited number of suitable estuary sites in James Bay ruled out repeated retreat in the face of inland competition. For the officers of the HBC's James Bay posts, the presence of French wood-runners in the interior became an accepted, though unwelcomed, feature of the trade.

Although the French undoubtedly caused a reduction in the volume and quality of furs traded at the James Bay posts, A. S. Morton suggested returns were not seriously disrupted prior to the 1750's.² Still, the presence and impact of the inland French opposition was frequently cited in the James Bay post journals and correspondence. In 1716, the officer at Albany referred to the French as the "treacherous next door neighbors we have to deal with," and reported they were settled seven days travel upriver from Albany.³ The next year Indian reports placed French colonies in the centre of their territory 800 miles inland from Albany.⁴

¹Innis, The Fur Trade in Canada, p. 49; and Morton, Canadian West, p. 98. Giraud suggests that it is difficult to say if this post was actually built. Marcel Giraud, Le Métis Canadien. son rôle dans l'histoire des provinces de l'Ouest (Paris: Institut D Ethnologie, University of Paris, 1945), p. 145 (Hereinafter referred to as Giraud, Le Métis Canadien.) If constructed this probably would have been a log tent, a temporary structure commonly used by French wood-runners, and by the HBC's later opponents. For a brief discussion and illustration of a log tent see Rich, Isham's Observations, pp. 90-91.

²Morton, Canadian West, p. 240.

³Davies, Letters From Hudson Bay 1703-40, pp. 48-49.

⁴Ibid., p. 71.

French presence in the headwaters of the Moose River drainage, probably on Lake Abitibi, was reported by Indians trading at Albany in 1722.¹ Three years after Moose Factory's 1730 re-establishment, the chief at the post wrote that a Frenchman who had come down to the factory had informed him that "there is two small factories of about three Frenchmen each with some slaves four day's journey or one hundred and forty miles lying to the south east from us . . ."²

The flanking movement by the French traders did not stop with their penetration into the southern hinterland of the HBC's James Bay posts. As early as 1716, French wood-runners were reported settled on Lake Winnipeg well within York's hinterland.³ On 12 June 1719, Indians reported to post commander Henry Kelsey at York,

french being settled In a certain Lake Thueummarmewan [Rainy Lake] & that he who is their Cheif the Indians call Moosoh [Monsieur] there is about 40 of them & there will come to them next Year about 100 more and after that they tell the Indians they will come here and Drive us into the Sea and take the fort from us now this lake lyes nearer this place then it does to Albany & one arm or branch of Port Nelson is feed by that Lake & other branches goes from it towards Kennedy [Canada] & other Rivers . . .⁴

This report was verified by sixty canoes of Assiniboine and Red Deer River Indians who arrived later that same day. In the fall of 1717, Sieur de La Noue,

¹Ibid., p. 82.

²Ibid., p. 183. Moose Factory was re-established in part to meet French inland competition.

³Ibid., p. 57. With the exception of the year 1696, the French occupied York (Port Nelson) from 1682 to 1714.

⁴B.239/a/5, f. 52, York Factory Post Journal, 1717-1720.

l relevait le poste de Kaministikwia. Puis, alors que l'hiver l'immobilisait au seuil de la cloison recheuse qui borde le lac Supérieur, il détachait ses compagnons de route vers le lac la Pluie, où ils s'établissaient en nombre suffisant pour entreprendre avec succès des opérations de traite avec les tribus alliées, Assiniboine et Cree.¹

Lac la Pluie was then also known by variants including Lac Tacamamiouen, Lac Tekamanigan, and Lac Takamamicuen. The Indian references were thus to this French operation on Rainy Lake, as cautiously suggested by A. S. Morton.²

Threatening Indians with an impending attack on the Company's Bayside posts, such as in the above case, was frequently done by the French to frighten the natives and thus disrupt the flow of furs to the Bay. Early French traders also interrupted York's inland trading system by encouraging the Sioux to attack other tribes who traded at York. As early as 1722 the chief at York wrote that the Poets, or Sioux, "are Encouraged by the french to warr against all cuntrey Indians that come here to trade."³ This disruption grew worse during the decade of the 1720's, and also affected Indians trading at Albany.⁴ Indians who engaged in war to avenge the deaths of their tribal members had less time to spend trapping furs.

¹Giraud, Le Métis Canadien, p. 153.

²Morton, Canadian West, p. 160. Morton did not have access to Giraud's Le Métis Canadien, which incorporated extensive French archival material.

³B.239/a/7, f. 22, York Factory Post Journal, 1721-22.

⁴Arthur J. Ray, Indians In The Fur Trade (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), pp. 14-16.

The disruption of trade within portions of the York and upper Albany hinterland prior to the late 1720's was only a prelude to the competition offered by the French in that quarter following the 1727 appointment of Pierre Gaultier de Varennes, Sieur de La Verendrye as commandant of the French Postes du Nord. When La Vérendrye assumed command there were no permanent French posts west of Lake Superior. During the next fifteen years, he pursued an aggressive policy involving both exploration and a trade in furs. He supervised the construction of strategically situated forts that completed the penetration of the western flank of Albany's hinterland and cut deep into the York Fort trading area. La Vérendrye was responsible for extending the line of permanent French posts 700 miles further to the northwest. By 1753 his successors were able to extend this line an additional 200 critical miles to the fork of the Saskatchewan River.¹

In the early 1730's reference to the French settlements, their outposts, and their interception of the trade in the interior became more commonplace in the journals and correspondence of the Bayside posts.² At least as early as 1736, even Prince of Wales Fort

¹In a 1749 memorandum probably written by the Chevalier de la Verendrye, a son of Pierre Gaultier De Varennes De La Vérendrye, the fork of the Saskatchewan was described as "the rendezvous every spring of the Cree of the Mountains, Prairies, and Rivers to deliberate as to what they shall do -- go and trade with the French or with the English." Burpee, Journals and Letters, p. 487.

²See, for example, Davies, Letters From Hudson Bay 1703-40, pp. 168-169, 180, and 311. Also B.239/a/14, ff. 31d-32, York Factory Post Journal, 1731-32; B.239/a/17, ff. 15 and 26, York Factory Post Journal 1734-35; and B.239/a/21, f. 36, York Factory Post Journal 1738-39.

(Churchill) was attributing its decline in trade to French opposition inland.¹ Following a waning of French competition in the 1740's when Indian wars cut their Montreal supply line, the French were back in force. On 31 May 1757, seven canoes of Saskatchewan River Indians arrived at York via the Nelson River. Their normal route was via the Hayes River, but they had chosen an alternate passage to avoid the French who "threatn's to kill y^e Ind^s if they know they come to y^e English fort to trade . . ."2

Even these French traders in the distant Saskatchewan River region were tied to Montreal. This city was for the French traders what both London and York were for the HBC. Montreal was the point of origin of trade goods and the collection point for furs. This focus had a profound affect on both the French and subsequent Montreal based traders. One consequence was that French competition could not be equally effective in all areas. The inward and outward cargoes of the French posts in the Saskatchewan River drainage, 2,500 miles from Montreal, were limited by the friction of distance. Heavy trade goods, such as kettles, axes, and firearms were frequently in short supply in this forward area, and in some instances actually had to be secretly secured from the English on the Bay through Indian middlemen. Furs shipped from this distant theatre generally were restricted to the lightest and most valuable types.

¹Davies, Letters From Hudson Bay 1703-40, pp. 211-212.

²B.239/a/34, f. 37, York Factory Post Journal, 1750-51.

To acquire such furs, the French intercepted the Bay bound Indians, traded for their most valuable furs, and left the bulkier and less valuable pelts for the English on the Bay.

Despite their attenuated transport system, the French acted "at most as a barrier to the Indian trade convoys, and at least as a screen through which furs were sifted before reaching the English posts."¹ Throughout the period, the French upgraded their transport and provisioning system. Canoe size was increased, and by the end of the period canoes of seven or eight men were in use on the Montreal to Lake Superior route.² When the greater distance between the new western posts and Montreal made it impossible to complete the round trip in one season, Grand Portage and Kaministikwia began functioning as intermediate rendezvous points where fur laden canoes from the interior met and exchanged cargoes with canoes sent up from Montreal with trade goods.³

The availability of agricultural products and fish in the Great Lakes area, and wild rice in the border lakes area west of Lake Superior, made provisioning on this section of the route manageable. The 1751 founding of Fort La Corne near the fork of the

¹Ruggles, "The Historical Geography," p. 680.

²Innis, The Fur Trade in Canada, p. 111. In 1684, the largest birch bark freight canoes used out of Montreal were 28 feet long, 4-1/2 feet wide, 20 inches deep, had a cargo capacity of 2,000 pounds, and were worked by 3 men. Baron Lahontan, New Voyages to North-America, Vol. I (London: for H. Bonwicke, 1703), pp. 26-27.

³This procedure was used at least as early as 1739. Burpee, Journals and Letters, p. 448.

Saskatchewan gave the French access to large buffalo herds of the prairie-parkland region, which were essential as a source for back-provisioning canoes returning from the far interior.

Prior to the arrival of the French traders in the western Fur Forest, spatial interchange between the Indians and the HBC existed because all three essentials for interchange were present -- complementarity, transferability, and no intervening opportunities.¹ The English had manufactured European commodities which the Indians initially desired, and later required, and the natives had furs that the HBC sought to acquire. Interchange was achieved using the small bark canoes previously discussed, and remained feasible because no closer or cheaper alternative source existed for either. The appearance of the French traders provided an intervening opportunity and thereby modified the interaction system. This disruption of the Company system grew with the expansion and increasing efficiency of the French trading system. In 1730 York's trade totaled 47,656 MB.²

¹Edward L. Ullman, "The Role of Transportation and the Bases for Interaction," in Man's Role in Changing the Face of the Earth, ed. by William L. Thomas (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1956), pp. 867-871.

²Made-beaver (MB) was the basic unit of exchange. Since beaver was the chief fur dealt with, it was made the standard to regulate the value of all other types of fur and trade items. For example, in the late 1760's a black fox skin was worth 1 MB, a grey fox 3 MB, and a buck deer or otter skin, 1 MB. Badgers and fishers were less valuable than beaver and were only rated at 1/2 MB each. Such a standard allowed the Indians to trade for Company wares, which were also valued in terms of made-beaver. For example, guns cost 14 MB, pistols 7 MB, a gallon of English Brandy 4 MB, hatchets 1 MB, and knives 1/3 MB. The Company frequently had different standards of trade at its several posts. Williams, Graham's Observations, pp. 272-275.

The next year it rose to 52,125 MB, but then dropped to 37,000 MB the following trading season, and averaged just under 34,000 MB during the next ten seasons.¹

In 1743 Chief James Isham at York expressed his concern that the HBC would "sitt quiet & unconcern'd while the french as an old saying, not only Beats the Bush but run's away with the Hair also . . ." ² That year he wrote,

I think great improvment might be made, in trade &c.--by making Settlements further in Land, -- Nay further I do not think itt unpracticible for the English to make a Settlement at the head of port Nelson River, & to be supply'd from the Lower parts &c. where they might send the Indians to which place they please, or traffick with them their, -- being a branch all Indians seperates Either to go to York fort, or Churchill, -- This proceeding wou'd be of great service, for by so doing they might gett double the furs, they do now, -- by Reason of the Difficultys the Indians meets with in Comming to the Lower parts, & in a few years might with god's will,-- be able to roat the French out of that small Settlement [Fort Bourbon] they have at the great Lake [Lake Winnipeg] . . . ³

Rich has suggested that given the geographical knowledge of the time, Isham was actually referring to a location on the lower Saskatchewan River when he proposed a post "at the head of port Nelson River." Isham's reference to a place where Churchill and York bound Indians separated suggests Cumberland Lake or vicinity, upstream from the "small Settlement" the French had built on Cedar Lake in 1741.⁴ He thought such a post might draw down the "Earchethinnes," or Blackfeet

¹B.239/d/21 to 32, York Factory Account Books, 1730 to 1742.

²Rich, Isham's Observations, p. 69.

³Ibid., pp. 67-68.

⁴Ibid., p. 67.

Indians, who at that time did not trade directly with the Company. He felt such an inland post would soon rival York and could be easily provisioned by the "great plenty of Indian corn in the said country."¹

Isham's ideas on the necessity and feasibility of an inland settlement evidently changed quickly. Responding to a Company critic who reproved the HBC for not establishing inland posts up Port Nelson River, Isham pointed out "thier is a Great many Difficultys wou'd attend having a Setlemt. up that River, which they [Company critics] have not a presant Idea of . . ."² He went on to point out how problems of transport imposed by shallow water, restricted channels, and falls, ruled out the use of vessels other than canoes. Even if the Company were able to get trade essentials 200 miles upriver, provisioning, he argued, would be a problem, and trade acquired there would merely be at the expense of York and Churchill. He concluded "cou'd a Settlement be made, and be of any further Service then what it's presant, certainly the Company wou'd have Erected Such before now."³

No immediate dramatic action was taken by the Company to counter the French competition inland from York, and although fur returns fluctuated between 19,424 MB and 41,013 MB between 1743 and

¹Ibid., pp. 114-115. Corn was grown at least at some of the French posts. Barry Kaye, "The Historical Geography of Agriculture and Agricultural Settlement in the Canadian Northwest, 1774-ca. 1830" (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of London, 1976), pp. 18-19. For a discussion of Indian grown corn see D. W. Moodie and Barry Kaye, "The Northern Limit of Indian Agriculture in North America," Geographical Review, LIX (October, 1969), p. 525.

²Rich, Isham's Observations, p. 207.

³Ibid., p. 209.

1753, the average annual return for this period equaled less than 30,000 MB. The next season, 1753-54, fur returns dropped to 20,752 MB, only the second time York trade fell to near or below 20,000 MB in twenty-five years.¹ James Isham, still commander at York, resolved that some action had to be taken to boost returns. In June of 1754 he sent Anthony Henday on an inland journey to winter with the Indians and encourage those not trading at the Bay to do so. Equally important, Isham had evidently not yet completely abandoned the idea of an inland post, and instructed Henday to carefully note the course and depth of rivers. From the journey he hoped to gain a better idea

whether there is any possibility of making a Settlement a considerable Distance up Nelson River, or if such a Settlement is made a considerable Distance up Nelson River, whether or no, the Indians could bring Double the Quantity of goods to the said Settlement in one Year, to what they do at present bring to the fort in one Year.²

Henday was instructed to note characteristics of the site where Churchill Indians struck out from the York track, and determine "whether plenty of woods or Likely for a house their."³ Isham also hoped to learn whether the great lake (Lake Winnipeg) was actually a lake, as he had received reports from the Indians that they had seen ships on it.

¹B.239/d/33 to 44, York Factory Account Books, 1743 to 1754.

²A.11/114, f. 173, London Correspondence Inward from York Factory, 1716 to 1756, James Isham, "A Copy of orders and Instructions to Anth^y Hendey, upon a Journey in Land, Dated at York Fort, June 26 1754."

³Ibid., f. 174.

On his one year sojourn which took him to within sight of the Rocky Mountains, Henday made numerous important observations. He discovered the Indian middleman system whereby Cree and Assiniboine acquired furs from Indians further inland which they traded at the Bay. He noted the abundance of provisions within the parkland vegetative zone, and recorded characteristics of the French trading system as the first Company servant to observe the opposition in the field.

Henday visited both French posts then in operation on the lower Saskatchewan. While at Fort Paskoyac in the spring of 1755 he was impressed by the influence the French traders had on the Indians. He felt that if the opposition had access to Brazil tobacco, they "would entirely cut off our trade."¹ As it was, they merely culled the lighter and more valuable furs. While at the post, Henday was also impressed enough with the French inland canoes to describe them in his journal,

Their Birch-rind Canoes will carry as much as an India Ships Long-boat, and draws little water; and so light that two men can carry one several miles with ease: they are made in the same form and slight materials as the small ones; only a thin board runs along their bottom; & they can sail them when before the wind, but not else.²

When Henday returned to York in June 1755, at the head of a flotilla of sixty fur laden Indian canoes, the venture was deemed a success. His trip initiated York's inland wintering programme in

¹L. J. Burpee, "York Factory to the Blackfeet Country - The Journal of Anthony Henday 1754-55." Proceedings and Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada, Series 3, Vol. I (1907), Section II, p. 352.

²Ibid., pp. 352-353.

which one or more servants were sent inland to winter with Indians, and to lead them down to York the following spring.

Isham clearly understood why Indians traded with the French, there is Certainly a Good Reason for there doing, the great distance they are of from the fortt, and no English Settlements in Land, obliges them to trade with the french, as they cannot carry a Sufficient Quantity of ammunition & c^a, such a distance from the fort to Supply them . . .¹

He felt that if the Company had a settlement 500 miles inland, the Indians would sooner travel 200 miles to the HBC post than 100 miles to the French post.² The proposed location for his post was

Up Navigable River, which opens into steel River [Hayes River], and below pine Reach, as per draught, Captⁿ Hendey observes Cannues such as the french has, might go from the fort up to the Lake, where a Settlement might be Erected, which is but a small distance from the french, and where the Ind^s told him if a Settlement there all the Ind^s would Come to the English, & not go to the french, by his draught it seems Likely being a branch or River of Deep water, free from Windings; but up port Nelson Captⁿ Hendey thinks unpracticable, being very Intircate, full of Showles, fall & c^a.³

That fall he took care to obtain a quantity of birch rind "in order to make proper Vessells for the Same grand Design."⁴

On 22 June 1756, Henday departed for Outman (Moose) Lake to "take a true and Exact acct. of the place he intemates for a Setlemt.

¹B.239/a/40, f. 42, James Isham's comments on "Cap^{ns} Hendeys Journal 1754 a 1755."

²Ibid.

³Ibid., f. 43.

⁴A.11/114, f. 187, London Correspondence Inward from York Factory, 1716 to 1756, James Isham and Council to Governor and Committee, 2 September 1755.

computed 500 miles up . . ."1 Within a week of his departure Henday was forced to return to York when he became ill.

That summer Isham received correspondence from the London headquarters which clearly stated they were not in favour of interior settlements, but viewed the inland wintering programme as "the only means of enlarging the York Fort Cargoes."2 They did not think an inland settlement would be advantageous "because only within 4 days travel from York Fort the River Ceases to be Navigable for anything but the smallest Canoes, nor even for them, without several Land Carriages."3

Although fur returns were down, the Company did not sense an imminent crisis, and could not approve experiments with unproven transport up a difficult track. Isham abandoned his hopes for an inland post, relying on the inland wintering servants to draw additional returns to the fort. This programme succeeded in marginally boosting York's returns and maintaining them at around 25,000 MB for the next five years.4

The French threat in the interior soon waned when the Seven Years' War (1756-63) made it difficult for them to secure trade goods and adequate manpower. Indians trading at York in the summer of 1761

¹Ibid., f. 194 and B.239/a/41, f. 32d, York Factory Post Journal, 1755-56.

²A.6/9, f. 33d, London Correspondence Outward, Official, 1755-1760, Governor and Committee to James Isham and Council at York Fort, 12 May 1756.

³Ibid.

⁴B.239/d/45 to 49, York Factory Account Books 1755 to 1759.

reported "that the french quitted their Hutts Last fall, but never Since has been Seen . . ." ¹ That year many Indians who formerly traded with the French arrived to trade at York for the first time.

Henley House and Albany Inland Transport

Although the presence of the French opposition at their advance posts on the Saskatchewan did not in the end precipitate Company settlements inland from York, the same was not true at the Bottom of the Bay. In the early 1740's competition from French traders within the Albany Fort hinterland prompted the officer in charge there to counter by erecting the HBC's first inland outpost. Only 160 miles upriver from Albany, the small out station of Henley House still required that the HBC develop and maintain its first inland transport line.

This earliest phase of Company inland transport has gone largely unstudied. ² In this section of the dissertation development of HBC transportation along this track is studied in detail, since as the Company's pioneer effort in the realm of interior transport and trade, it was closely scrutinized by the Governor and Committee. Responses from the Company headquarters to subsequent proposals for inland outposts from York Factory were undoubtedly influenced by experience gained from the operation of Henley House and its supportive transport.

¹B.239/a/48, f. 41d, York Factory Post Journal, 1760-61.

²The author's "The Uncelebrated Boats of the Albany," The Beaver, Outfit 305 (Spring, 1975), pp. 47-53 is the only published study that deals exclusively with this theme. This section of this study is essentially the same as pp. 47 to 51 of this article.

On 6 May 1743, Albany Chief Joseph Isbister recorded in his Albany post journal that "these french fellows is not above 60 mile up this river [Albany River]."¹ Indians arriving at Albany Fort that spring reported the French traders were operating out of temporary log tents, but planned to return in the fall "with four large lugage Cannos & build a factory house . . ."² Chief Isbister was convinced a French trading post with such proximity and at so strategic a site would be intolerable. The situation required immediate action, and Isbister decided the only way to counter was for the Company to swiftly build its own house at the location. He was certain that if the French were allowed to obtain such a footing they would intercept and force all Bay bound Indians to trade with them, and foresaw a continued decrease from the present annual trade of approximately 10,000 MB to 1,000 MB.³ Lacking sufficient time to communicate with the London based headquarters, and certain that an inland outpost was required, Isbister, on his own initiative, sent a young Company servant inland with four Indians to verify the reports of the Indian informants.

The man returned to report he had located the French site, and that the river was "Navigable for flats & Cannos fine and pleasant with no land Carring all the way up."⁴ On 3 June 1743,

¹B.3/a/34, f. 36d, Albany Fort Post Journal, 1742-43.

²B.3/6/1, f. 20d, Albany Fort Correspondence Book, 1743-44, Joseph Isbister at Albany Fort to James Duffield at Moose Fort, 9 May 1743.

³Ibid., f. 21.

⁴B.3/a/34, f. 41d, Albany Fort Post Journal, 1742-43.

only four days after receiving the report, Joseph Isbister led a flotilla of canoes upriver to establish an outpost. The group reached the site of the abandoned French log tents on 13 June, but continued on another several miles to a more favourable location at the junction of the Albany and Kenogami Rivers where they erected Henley House, the Company's first inland establishment.

The new post was not to function as a major trading centre, and did not represent a revision of the Company's long established policy of requiring Indians to travel to the shore of Hudson Bay to trade. A primary function of the outpost was, by its mere presence, to keep the French from settling there, or in the immediate vicinity. It was, as described in a 9 May 1743 letter sent by Isbister to his counterpart at Moose Factory, to serve as "a garison on ye fruntter."¹ In addition, the post was designed to function as a showroom for Company wares which could be obtained at Albany. It also served as a rest station for trading Indians traveling to and from Albany, and it soon became customary for Indians to stop and smoke a free pipe of tobacco and, on occasion, to spend the night. Trade at the outpost, carried on in large part to assist Indians enroute to and from the Bay and to help maintain them during winters, was small, ranging from about 400 MB to 1,300 MB annually until 1755. Guns, powder, shot, cloth, and tobacco were the primary items traded.

¹B.3/6/1, f. 20d, Albany Fort Correspondence Book, 1743-44, Joseph Isbister at Albany Fort to James Duffield at Moose Fort, 9 May 1743.

Henley's operation, even in its limited capacity, required that its men be adequately provisioned and supplied with goods from the Bay, and that its fur returns be carried down to Albany. Now, after having left the difficult problem of inland transportation to the Indians for seventy years, the Company, for the first time, was forced to develop a transport line inland.

Small, Indian built birch bark canoes were logically the first craft used on the water road in from Albany. But after having traveled up the Albany River with his men to establish Henley, Isbister concluded that Company servants were "intirly Unhandy in Cannoes."¹ The distance from Albany to Henley was too great for the Englishmen, considering their ineptness in handling canoes, their advanced age, and their inability to provide for themselves while inland. Despite these problems, an outpost at this site was seen as essential to preserving Albany's trade, and a regular carriage had to be established to support it.

If communication with his new outpost was to be by canoe, it was obvious to Isbister that the standard variety with its small cargo capacity would be inadequate for freighting even the limited cargoes associated with Henley. Within two weeks of the post's establishment, he had a "Great" canoe specially built by Indians in exchange for a gallon of brandy.² This canoe performed well that spring, and by fall Isbister arranged to have another built, again

¹B.3/a/34, f. 45d, Albany Fort Post Journal, 1742-43.

²Ibid., f. 50d.

for a gallon of brandy. Other canoes reported to have been twenty-four to twenty-eight feet long and four feet wide were subsequently added to the service. These could carry a heavy cargo and still draw only eight inches of water.¹

Transport problems were not solved by merely using larger canoes. Company servants were not eager to travel inland and on occasion declined such service; some men were returned to England for refusing to work on the Henley route. Despite their obvious lack of enthusiasm for inland service and their reported lack of skill in handling canoes, Company servants did as early as 1744, operate canoes for most of the Henley journey, with only occasional Indian assistance. In September of that year, seven Company men and two Indians departed for Henley in three canoes.² This would have required that at least one canoe was paddled solely by Company servants. A primary job of the two Indians was probably steering the canoes through areas of rapid water. This was the case the next summer when seven Englishmen in three canoes departed Henley accompanied by two Indians "to Steer their Cannoes and mend them if required."³

Joseph Isbister complained in his Albany post journal on 16 September 1745, of the constant need to replace the delicate birch canoes which were "Spoiled and broake" after only one trip owing to

¹United Kingdom, Report From the Committee, p. 222.

²B.3/a/36, f. 2d, Albany Fort Post Journal, 1744-45.

³B.3/a/37, f. 6d, Albany Fort Post Journal, 1745-46.

the servants' "Unskillfullness", and indicated he would attempt to build a boat "to draw as little watter as a Canno and Carie more goods so that our men may learn to manage them . . ."¹ A desire to eliminate dependence on the Indians for canoes and assistance on the Henley route was an additional factor favouring the adoption of boats.

Few specifics on the construction of this craft, the Company's first inland boat, were recorded. Work began on 20 September when men were sent to the woods adjacent to Albany to gather "Crocked timber" for the boat. The next day the carpenters and sawers were busily employed preparing timber and planing boards. The bottom was nailed together on 27 September.² Three days later additional timber was required and ten men were dispatched to the woods with a cart, which Isbister also took credit for designing.³ Work on the vessel continued into October. Half-inch board was sawed for its sides on 10 October and by 26 October the craft was finished except for caulking, which was postponed until spring.⁴ During its construction and for the next several years, the vessel was referred to as the "flatt", "flatt bottom barge", "flatt bottom boat", "flat boat", "barge", or simply, the "boat". The more revealing of these terms, and the reference during its construction to sides and bottom as distinct sections, suggest that this elementary craft lacked the

¹Ibid., f. 11.

²Ibid., f. 13.

³Ibid., f. 13d.

⁴Ibid., ff. 15 and 17.

streamlined sophistication of the later York Boat. Yet, like its illustrious successor, this earliest of inland boats proved more durable than canoes, required less manpower in proportion to amount of cargo carried, and was more readily handled by Company servants.

On 15 May 1746 the vessel, with a crew of five and a cargo of goods and provisions, left Albany on its maiden passage upriver.¹ The voyage to Henley took fifteen days and the return three days. Although undoubtedly delighted with the safe arrival of his barge back at Albany on 31 May, Isbister succinctly recorded in his post journal "ye boat did Verry well for the Voyage."² Five days later he sent the barge on a second trip to Henley and again it performed well, cutting the upriver trip to thirteen days and equaling the three-day return.

Despite the fact that canoes were ultimately used that fall when shallow water forced the abandonment of the barge, Joseph Isbister was satisfied with his new mode of conveyance and had another barge built at Albany that winter. The use of crooked timber in the building of the first barge may suggest it had some curved lines. This was definitely the case with the second barge. Noting the difficulty his men were having bending plank with an open fire, the governor instructed that a lead soaking trough be built in which boards could first be boiled. Constructed of one-inch poplar plank and painted, the second barge measured 23 feet long by

¹Ibid., f. 41.

²Ibid., f. 42.

6 feet 4 inches wide.¹ Both barges were used on the Henley route the next spring. In subsequent references the two craft were identified as the small and the large barge; the larger required a minimum crew of six, and the smaller, five. It appears that the second barge was the larger of the two. A third barge, built of both poplar and pine root timber, was constructed during the spring and fall of 1748. These same craft also began to be referred to as "Henley Boats" or "Henley Barges" when George Spence temporarily replaced Joseph Isbister as commander at Albany between 1748 and 1753.

Rudder equipped, these boats were propelled by oars and setting poles or, if necessary, were tracked. They were also outfitted with sails which were frequently used on the broad and gentle lower reach of the Albany River. Now the standard mode for supplying Henley, these boats usually made one or two round trips each spring, and one additional trip in the fall after the arrival of the ship from England. The first spring trip, usually by two boats, departed Albany in mid to late May after the river was clear of ice. If required, one or two boats made a second trip. Spring runs carried the bulk of Henley's supply of trade goods and provisions up to the outpost, and conveyed its fur returns down to Albany. With the high water levels on the Albany River at this season of the year, boat communication was possible every spring from the initial trip in 1746 to the last spring run prior to the 1755 abandonment of Henley House. These trips became routine and in four consecutive years

¹B.3/a/38, f. 21d, Albany Fort Post Journal, 1746-47.

during the early 1750's, departure and arrival dates at Albany did not vary more than four days. In the spring of 1753 the round trip travel time from Albany to Henley was cut to eleven days, including a one day layover at Henley.

As experienced in 1746 on the first attempt to reach Henley in the fall, low water levels made boat communication more uncertain. Still it became standard procedure to make at least one attempt each fall although these trips, usually made by a single boat, were not as critical to Albany's inland commerce. Their primary function was to convey the master of Henley to his winter station and to lodge a small cargo of goods at the outpost.

The main obstacle to river navigation was the Great Falls about twelve miles upriver from Albany Fort. In the spring of the year when water levels were high, it was generally possible to avoid the falls by detouring around them via a small parallel channel of the river. This passage was usually only a trickle in the fall and boats then had to pass directly up the main channel of the Albany River. On these journeys the crew was increased by several men, and extra hands were sent to assist the boat over the falls. When it proved impossible to communicate with Henley by boat, the Company was reluctantly forced to rely on the less efficient canoes.

The problems of fall communication with Henley were soon overshadowed by events at the post itself. In the spring of 1755, Indians, disgruntled with what they felt were unnecessary restrictions on their access to the post, attacked Henley, killing the men and ransacking the post. Even though Joseph Isbister was eager to

see his outpost resettled and had platforms for gun carriages mounted on the boats that summer in preparation for traveling inland, no immediate action was taken. Not until the spring of 1759, at the height of the Seven Years' War, did Company men finally reach the site to begin rebuilding the post. During the summer a structure was built, but on 17 September 1759, a combined force of Indians and French overran the post, killing the carpenter, wounding another man, and bringing work to a halt.

The need for Henley diminished with the eventual defeat of the French in this war and their withdrawal from their western trading posts. The post was not promptly resettled.

A new breed of Montreal traders, the Pedlars, soon filled the void left by the retreat of the French. With competition renewed inland, the services of Henley House once again became essential, and the post was finally re-established in the summer of 1766. The reluctance of Company servants to go inland and low water levels had thwarted earlier attempts. Although William Richards, the officer in charge of the founding mission, had been instructed to go "as high as Henley, or as much higher as Possible"¹ he chose an island site five miles downriver from old Henley House for the new outpost. An insular location, he felt, would afford a good view both up and down the river, important for a post which had been twice destroyed by the surprise attacks of enemies.

¹B.3/b/3, f. 2, Albany Fort Correspondence Book, 1766, Instructions to Master of Henley House from Humphrey Marten at Albany Fort, 20 May 1766.

With service restored on the Henley route, boats again became the standard mode of conveyance. Henley boats by this time were referred to individually by name: "Prince of Wales", "Committee", and "King George". This practice clearly suggests that these craft were now recognized as permanent features of Albany's inland service.

New Henley, like the older, was not to be a regular place of trade. This was made clear in the summer of 1766 when William Richards, then master of Henley House, wrote to Humphrey Marten, chief at Albany requesting trading goods in greater quantity and variety for his outpost. Responding to this request Marten wrote: ". . . in regard of Trading Goods, You Know it is their Honors Possitive Orders, not to Supply You with a Generall Assortment of Goods, but only to send such articles as Guns, Powder, Shot, Flints, & a small Quantity of Brandy."¹ The master at Henley was instructed to inform the Indians that the post had been resettled "out of Love to them, to keep them from Starving, and to Assist them in their Passage up and Down the river, and also in the Winter."² Indians were to be told that the difficult passage for boats made it impossible for the Company to make Henley a place of trade. At the time it was a formidable task to provision the post's small complement of eight men and to stock it with even its limited amount and variety of trading goods. Marten felt that if Henley were made a regular

¹Ibid., f. 9d, Humphrey Marten at Albany Fort to William Richards at Henley House, 1 August 1766.

²B.3/b/4, f. 1d, Albany Fort Correspondence Book, 1766-67, Instructions from Humphrey Marten at Albany Fort to William Richards at Henley House, n.d.

place of trade twelve large boats would be needed to provision it, and each one would have to make three round trips annually. With such a fleet and the required men, he still doubted that it would be possible to supply Henley with enough goods to sustain an annual 8,000 skin trade, even if Henley House were self-sufficient in foodstuffs.¹

The difficulty of the fall trip to Henley still plagued transport on the water road in from Albany by the end of this pre-1774 period. Twenty-three men, making the attempt every day for a number of days, were not able to get even an empty boat over the Great Falls on the trip up to Henley in the fall of 1768. Canoes were eventually used to deposit a small supply of essentials at the outpost. Three years later on a return fall trip from Henley, the boat was stopped 100 miles upriver from Albany where the river became so shoal that a man could cross it "dry foot."² It was not until the 1774 to 1790 period that transport innovations allowed communication along the Albany track to become more regular.

The Geography of HBC Transport to 1774

Before the end of its first century the HBC's transatlantic freighting system had developed from an irregular service based largely on hired ships, to a finely tuned operation which relied almost exclusively on its own custom built ships, especially pinks

¹Ibid., f. 21d, Humphrey Marten at Albany Fort to William Richards at Henley House, 7 July 1767.

²B.3/a/63, f. 42, Albany Fort Post Journal, 1770-71.

and frigates. These vessels spanned maritime space to link London with the Company's evolving trading network within Rupert's Land. At strategically situated estuary posts on the shores of Hudson and James Bay, oceanic transport connected with the Company's coastal communication system serviced by smaller ships, dominately sloops, which were stationed year round in the Bay. As well as providing interconnection between Bayside posts, these smaller ships also served an important role as lighters, and were occasionally called upon to make the return trip to England when normal oceanic transport failed. Between 1680 and 1686 these coastwise craft were essential to the operation of the transport depot on Charlton Island.

Within Rupert's Land the pattern of Company operation remained relatively simple to 1774. With only one notable exception HBC fur trade with natives was conducted from the Company's estuary posts. Indians, using their small bark canoes and following the natural water roads, traveled down to these tidewater posts with furs which were exchanged for manufactured European goods. Because of Indian dependence on canoes as their carriers there was a striking correlation between major drainage divides and the limits of post hinterlands, which extended deep into the continental interior.

Throughout the pre-1821 period the HBC had to contend with opposition traders. The first were the French, who already had an established trading system south of James Bay when the HBC was granted Rupert's Land in 1670. From their base in the St. Lawrence Lowland the French expanded their trading network to the north and west, and by the early 1750's their string of posts reached west to

the forks of the Saskatchewan River, overlapping with the most westerly section of the Albany Fort hinterland and splitting York's trading area into eastern and western sections. The appearance of these inland competitors modified the interaction system previously established between the trading Indians and the HBC by providing the natives with an intervening opportunity for trade. While York countered this threat in the interior by initiating its inland wintering programme, Albany broke from the massive spatial inertia developed during seventy years of Bayside occupation and built the Company's first inland post.

Although Albany's new outpost of Henley House, located 160 water-miles above its parent post, was not intended to serve as a full-fledged trading post, it required the HBC to develop its first transport line inland. The broad gentle reach of the Albany River between the two posts developed into the proving ground for the Company's earliest experiments with inland transport. In quick succession Company transport along the route progressed from small Indian bark canoes, to larger specially built Indian bark canoes, to what was evidently a flat bottom inland boat of local design.

Even with specialized craft, transport between Albany and its outpost still remained a problem, and Henley was not an unqualified success. Still, the operation of Henley House and the associated transport proved important to the Company once the geographical balance of HBC operations shifted to the interior. Albany's maintenance of Henley not only showed the feasibility of the Company maintaining a long distance inland transport system, it also provided

the technical assistance and/or officers and men experienced in inland transport to York, Churchill, and Moose Factory when these Bayside posts began establishing their own inland outposts.

CHAPTER IV

TRADING POSTS INLAND, 1774 TO 1790

The year 1774 marked a turning point in the one hundred year history of the HBC. While during its first century the Company relied on drawing trade to its Bayside estuary posts from expansive inland hinterlands, during the next fifty years there was a progressive movement inland in an attempt to occupy essentially these same tributary areas now inundated by opposition traders. In this new system, with its dramatically different pattern of operation, the role of Bayside factories shifted from trading centres to trans-shipment centres servicing a growing number of inland trading posts.

During the 1774 to 1790 period three Bayside factories established networks of inland posts. In 1774 York Factory successfully established its first out station, and by 1790 had added several others, the furthest of which reached west to the parkland region. Although alternate carriers were tried, bark canoes remained the standard mode of Company transport in York's inland theatre throughout the pre-1790 period. Albany Fort added to its inland complement of posts during these same years. During the period, Albany traders adopted bateaux as their standard mode of transport, and using them, successfully extended their inland track to the westernmost section of the Albany River basin. Personnel who served

on the Albany during these years, and who were later reassigned to other posts, were to prove critical to transport advances in several other factory's inlands during the post-1790 period. The adjacent post of Moose Factory, however, was first to benefit from Albany's inland experience, and when Moose began establishing its own complement of inland posts beginning in the late 1770's, wooden craft, in part modeled after those used inland from Albany, were employed where possible.

The York Arm

Prelude to Inland Expansion

The HBC did not immediately expand inland to fill the vacuum left by the retreat of the French. Rather, the Company "fell back on the hitherto very successful scheme of leaving the difficulties of transportation to the Indians and waiting for them at the Bay."¹ This western void soon filled with a new breed of Montreal traders referred to as the Pedlars by the HBC, because they, like the French, took the trade to the Indians. Made up in part of former French traders, the new opposition adopted some of the styles and techniques of the French, even occupying some of their abandoned posts.

British attempts to limit and control the fur trade in the West following the Seven Years' War gradually crumbled. The first rush of Pedlars into the Northwest began in 1765, and within two years no less than six posts had been established on the Assiniboine,

¹Morton, Canadian West, p. 251.

Red, and Saskatchewan Rivers.¹ A further abolition of governmental restrictions three years later allowed the number of Pedlars to swell.² As these new traders swept north and west, the HBC once again began feeling the effects of inland competition. The first signs of renewed rivalry were noticed at the Bottom of the Bay where fur returns dropped as early as 1767. The next year the full brunt of the Pedlar advance was felt at York where trade dropped from 31,000 MB in 1767 to 18,000 MB in 1768.³

On 25 May 1768, William Pink, returning from a winter inland with Indians, encountered a group of twelve Pedlars at a new poplar log house three days below the site of the former French post of Fort La Corne. The Pedlars indicated they planned to proceed even further up the Saskatchewan. With difficulty and a loss of some prime pelts, Pink led his flotilla of Indian canoes past the new opposition. Just above the site of the old lower French post on the Saskatchewan he passed a large canoe of eleven Pedlars. The next day while camped at the site of Fort Paskoyac, Indians informed him of another Pedlar post to the south in "Mith,quag,e,me, Cee.pe."⁴

¹Ruggles, "The Historical Geography," p. 749.

²W. L. Morton, Manitoba - A History (Second ed., Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967), p. 38.

³Rich, Hudson's Bay Company, II, p. 18.

⁴B.239/a/58, ff. 33d-35, classified as York Factory Post Journal, 1767-68, William Pink, "Will'm Pink's Journal . . . Ending June 28th 1768." The "Mith,quag,e,me Cee.pe." referred to the present-day Red and Assiniboine Rivers.

On 27 June when Pink and three other inland wintering servants arrived at York with their trading Indians, their reports of fresh Pedlar activity substantiated similar accounts from Indians who had been trading at the factory. Within a week another inland wintering servant arrived, and he, too, verified the presence of the opposition "in the Heart of the Country."¹

By this time York Chief Ferdinand Jacobs' returns had plummeted. Jacobs questioned the effectiveness of dispatching single servants inland and suggested instead a force of fifteen to twenty-five men be sent as a group to build an inland post in order to regain lost trade and rout the Pedlars from the Company's chartered lands. Since the large requisite canoes could not be built locally because of the lack of birch, his scheme called for light and shallow draft boats to be sent from England. In his correspondence to London, he requested "two or three longboats."² His post journal for 8 July 1768 refers to the need for

a boat or two that will draw but little water & (Sharp at both Ends Like a London whery) & Burthensome, Built as Light as Possible as there is Falls of water that the Boats must be Carried Past, it's not Possible to get Large Canoes Built at this Place[.]³

¹B.239/a/57, f. 39d, York Factory Post Journal, 1767-68.

²A.11/115, f. 116d, London Correspondence Inward from York Factory, 1757 to 1775, Ferdinand Jacobs to Governor and Committee, 20 August 1768.

³B.239/a/57, f. 41d, York Factory Post Journal, 1767-68. The part of this quote in parentheses was crossed out in the journal. It best reveals the type of craft Jacobs had in mind. A New English Dictionary on Historical Principles, 1928, defines "wherry" as, "A light towing-boat used chiefly on rivers to carry passengers and goods." Citing an 1861 edition of Chamb. Encycl. this reference describes the Thames wherry as "stoutly built and is constructed to carry about eight passengers. It is usually managed by one sculler or two oarsmen."

The London Committee granted permission to "make an Establishment on the most convenient spot . . .",¹ but stipulated certain conditions. First, they rejected the use of wooden boats in favour of canoes which were lighter and easier to repair. Secondly, they could not agree to send as many as fifteen to twenty-five men inland, "until We see the probability of success to arise from such an Inland Establishment . . ."² They proposed that six servants be sent upcountry as a group with a limited quantity of goods, preferably to return to the factory for the winter.

The Committee had thus opened the door to the possibility of York's first inland settlement, and had a suitable commander and the boats requested been available, even the limited post approved by the London headquarters probably would have been attempted.

Jacobs adjusted his plans for an inland settlement to meet the Committee directive, and in the next year's correspondence to London, he intimated the Grand Rapids of the Saskatchewan River as a suitable site for a post. But if the settlement were to be only a seasonal one at which a few men would merely "live in quietly and Encourage the Indians" there was no need to go even that far, as there were many other suitable sites closer to the factory.³ Jacobs reported he had ordered three large canoes to be delivered the next

¹A.6/11, f. 58d, London Correspondence Outward, Official, 1767 to 1773, Governor and Committee to Ferdinand Jacobs and Council at York Fort, 25 May 1769.

²Ibid.

³A.11/115, f. 124, London Correspondence Inward from York Factory, 1757 to 1775, Ferdinand Jacobs to Governor and Committee, 20 August 1769.

season, but saw little chance to send the six servants inland "for want of a Person Qualified to Conduct them."¹

As another means of countering the Pedlar incursion, the same year they accepted the idea of a limited inland settlement, the Committee liberalized the standard of trade, making it universal at all Bayside posts. Initially, this change appears to have increased the already wide disparity between Company and Canadian standards of trade. The earliest Pedlars to move into the western Fur Forest following the Conquest suffered many of the same problems that restricted the earlier French, who by the late 1750's had achieved the maximum spatial expansion possible given the prevailing capital availability and transport provisioning system. In order to cover costs resulting from great distances and lack of efficiency, these early Pedlars traded at a higher standard than the HBC. When William Tomison wintered inland from Severn in 1769-70, he observed the standard of the opposition traders of Fort Dauphin, in the Lake Dauphin area of western Manitoba, to be forty to fifty percent higher than the York standard (Table 2).²

While Chief Jacobs sensed a threat from Canadian competition within the York hinterland, he felt that the opposition could never advance far enough to affect trade at Churchill. As late as 1771 Andrew Graham, master at Severn and sometimes chief at York, agreed

¹Ibid., f. 124d.

²B.239/a/64, f. 21d, classified as York Factory Post Journal, 1769-70, William Tomison, "A Journal of the most remarkable Transactions and Occurrences of a Journey In Land Commencing 15th July 1769 and Ending 18th July 1770 kept by William Tomison."

TABLE 2

COMPARISON OF THE STANDARD OF TRADE AT THE CANADIAN POST
OF FORT DAUPHIN AND AT YORK FACTORY, 1770

Fort Dauphin Standard in beaver	Item	York Factory Standard in beaver
20	gun (size not spec.)	14
4	hatchet	1
2	ice chisel	1
1	knife	1/4 to 1/3 ea.
10 balls/beaver	shot	4 pounds/beaver
4	pound powder	1
1-1/2 yds./10 beaver	cloth	1 yd./3 beaver
10	large blanket	7 (size not spec.)
4	small blanket	
4	pound tobacco (leaf or roll)	1

Source: B.239/a/64, f. 21d, classified as York Factory Post Journal, 1769-70, William Tomison, "A Journal of the most remarkable Transactions In Land Commencing 15th July 1769 and Ending 18th July 1770 kept by William Tomison"; and B.239/d/60, ff. 6d-7, York Factory Account Book, 1769-70.

that Moose, Albany, and Severn had felt the impact of Canadian opposition, but that their influence had not yet reached York or Churchill. He did not attribute any decline in York's trade returns to the "pilfering trade" carried on by the Canadians who he thought lacked the spirit, experience, and resultant profits of their predecessors. He attributed any drop in York's returns to the trading Indians "leading an indolent life . . . , neglecting to get furs and come down as formerly,"¹ and at that time argued against

¹E.2/7, f. 39, Andrew Graham, "Observations on Hudson's-Bay Humbly presented to Robert Merry Esquire by Andrew Graham many years Factor from the Honourable Hudsons-Bay Company Anno Domini 1771."

settlements inland from York on the basis of lack of need and associated problems of transport.

Although generally against inland posts for York, Graham conceded that a trading post on the Saskatchewan River would tap new sources of furs, and considered 500 miles to be the minimum spacing between an inland post and York. This distance was thought necessary to allow trade to reach beyond the thinly populated zone east of Lake Winnipeg, and to avoid merely assuming the cartage of furs that already went from that area to York. Difficulties of transport made a post beyond this minimum distance appear out of reach. Graham pointed out in 1768-69 that

All the discovered rivers are so shoal, full of cataracts and long land carriages, that with great difficulty, expense and attended with the utmost confusion, birch-rind canoes would not be got up to Keskachewan [Saskatchewan] River with a trifle of goods in less than four months, even let us act as Canadians who are inured to such game.¹

Use of boats appeared to be out of the question as there was not a river yet discovered "that a cock-boat can be got up 40 Miles . . ."2

Graham's ideas on the need and practicality of inland posts changed dramatically while he served as temporary chief at York during the 1771-72 season. While there, he received new intelligence that forced him to re-evaluate the threat posed by the Pedlars. Much of the new information was supplied by a Pedlar who defected and offered his services to the HBC at York in July 1772. The Canadian revealed

¹Williams, Graham's Observations, p. 264.

²E.2/6, f. 43, Andrew Graham, "Observations on Hudsons Bay Book The Second By M^r. Andrew Graham 1767.8.9."

an extensive and well developed transport system in which goods were fitted out in Quebec City and conveyed to Montreal, where they were dispatched to Michilimackinac. From there

They are sent in large canoes [Montreal Canoe or canot de maître] of birch-rind and cedar, seven fathoms long, with seven men in each, along Lake Superior up to the great camping place [Grand Portage] which requires ten days to carry their goods across; and are then embarked in canoes of half the former dimensions [North Canoe or canot du nord], and proceed by rivers to Rainy Lake . . . Having passed that, they proceed to Woody Lake [Lake of the Woods], and up Winnepeg River to Winnepeg Lake which requires twenty days to pass along to a large fall (i.e.) cataract, at the entrance of the River de Pane (i.e.) Kescachewan [Saskatchewan] River . . .¹

Prior to the Pedlar's arrival that season, Graham had already seen firsthand the impact of this well organized transport. Indians arriving at the post to trade in June of 1772 brought furs that had been culled of the prime pelts, leaving only "the refuse of the Canadian Pedlars"² for York. The accompanying inland wintering servants brought shocking accounts of the inland rivals.

Graham quickly changed his opinion regarding inland settlements. He hired the Canadian, who indicated he would direct HBC canoes up the Saskatchewan River, and sent him inland to acquire those necessary craft. Graham planned an inland post that would be serviced in "the same manner of the Canadian Pedlars, in large Birch Rind Canoes . . .",³ and suggested Basquia (present-day The Pas,

¹Williams, Graham's Observations, p. 289. For a discussion of the Montreal and North canoes, see Morse, Fur Trade Canoe Routes, pp. 20-22; and Adney and Chapelle, Bark Canoes and Skin Boats, passim.

²B.239/a/66, f. 53, York Factory Post Journal, 1771-72.

³A.11/115, f. 144, London Correspondence Inward from York Factory, 1757 to 1775, Andrew Graham to Governor and Committee, 26 August 1772.

Manitoba) as the best site for his proposed new post. He thought the prospect for the success of such a settlement was good considering the HBC's shorter route with fewer falls and rapids, its more liberal trade standard, and access to Brazil tobacco.

In June 1773, Matthew Cocking returned from a one year trip in the interior where he gathered definitive information on the Pedlars. He had been sent by Graham the previous year when reports indicated dramatic Pedlar advances. On his return he, too, argued in favour of an inland post.¹ Cocking supported the Basquia site, or a point somewhat higher on the Saskatchewan, and agreed that large bark canoes were the only practical mode of transport, suggesting a route up Hayes River and through Lake Winnipeg as best for the large canoes he envisioned for the service. Company servants, he felt, would probably need an Indian or two in each canoe until they learned to manage the craft. In his view, those manning the inland post would have to survive on country provisions.

Shortly after Cocking's arrival back at York, word was received from London to proceed with the intended post. The lateness of the season postponed any move to establish the post until the next year. Meanwhile, Graham returned to his normal duty as master at Severn where he further refined his ideas on the proposed settlement. He envisioned a year round post manned by sixteen servants, sustained

¹Cocking's views on an inland settlement are contained in his "Thoughts on making a Settlement Inland," located between his journal and log in B.239/a/69, ff. 52-53, classified as York Factory Post Journal, 1772-73, Matthew Cocking, "A Journal and Log Account of a Journey Inland with Natives performed by M^r Matthew Cocking second at York Fort Commencing 27th June 1772 and ending 27th May 1773."

solely on country provisions, and linked to York with Indian assisted bark canoes. Assuming each of the three large canoes planned for the founding party had a capacity of 1,000 pounds, Graham itemized what should be included in 20 twenty-pound packs, 54 fifty-pound packs, plus five and ten gallon kegs.¹

The chief and his council at York concurred with Graham that large bark canoes were the only suitable mode of transport. However, they felt sixteen men were too many, and that

A small quantity of English Provisions we think will be necessary as a subsistence on the passage up; as to the Pedlars they pass through a Country which abounds with Indian Corn and wild Rice whereas we have no reason to Expect great supply's; but what is carried from the Factory.²

Goods for the impending expedition had already been packed at York in small parcels so they could be taken up in small Indian canoes "in case large Canoes should not be brought down as desired."³

The Earliest Moves Inland

York Factory succeeded with difficulty in establishing its first inland post of Cumberland House in 1774 on present-day Cumberland Lake, immediately adjacent to the Saskatchewan River and twenty-five miles west of the present Manitoba-Saskatchewan border (Fig. 18). Having left the problems of inland transport to the

¹A.11/115, ff. 160-163, London Correspondence Inward from York Factory, 1757 to 1775, Andrew Graham at Severn to Ferdinand Jacobs and Council at York, 4 January 1774.

²Ibid., f. 166, "The Chief & Councils Remarks on M^r Graham's proposals relative to the Inland Expedition. York Fort 1774."

³Ibid., f. 165.

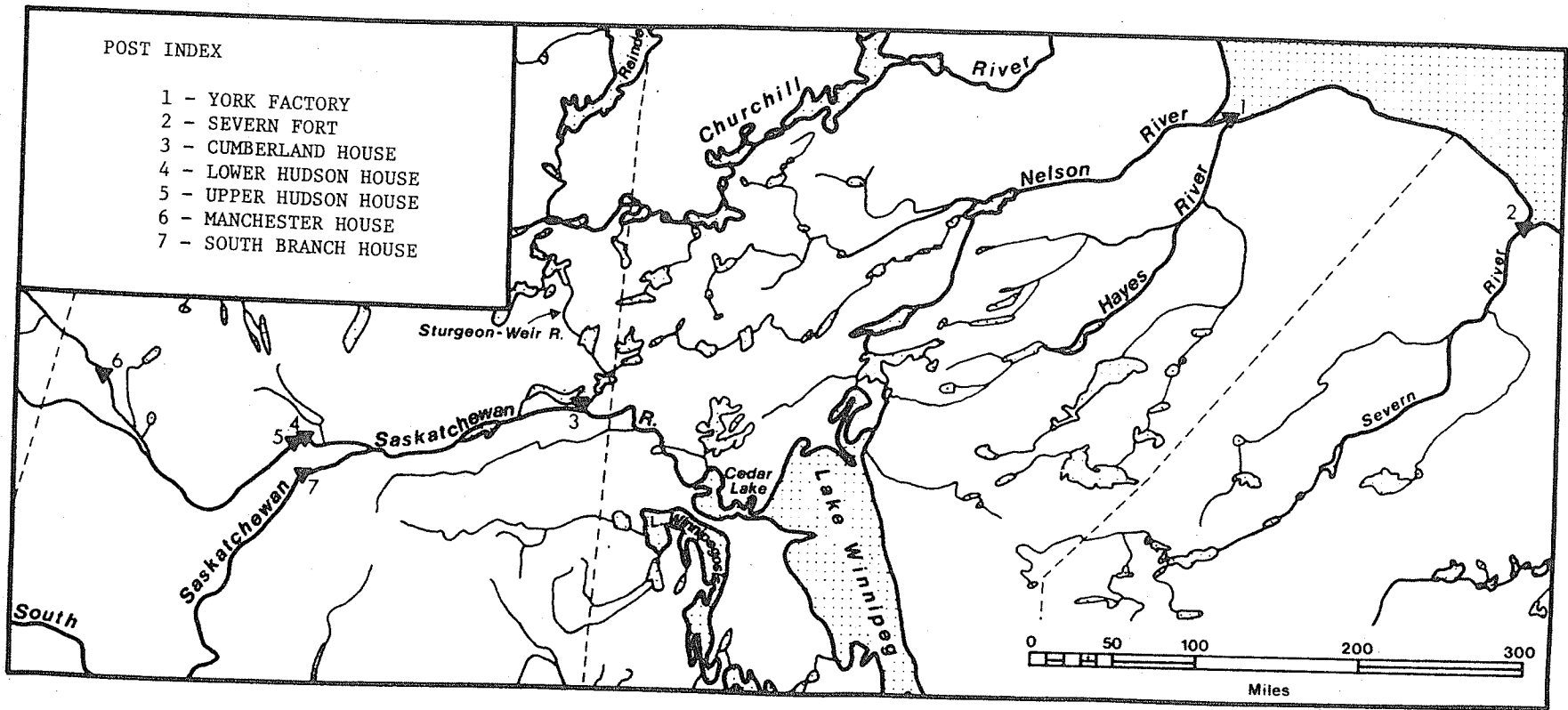


Fig. 18--York Factory and outposts, 1774 to 1790

natives trading at York for over 100 years, the Company was not yet prepared to maintain its own independent transport system between York and its new out station. At least initially this linkage relied on Indian built, and mostly Indian paddled, canoes.

With the use of boats inland from York previously ruled out by Company headquarters, and lacking canoes of their own, the founding party of servants who traveled inland in the summer of 1774 had to proceed upcountry in groups of two or three with trading Indians returning inland. The problems associated with transport so dependent on natives were obvious even before the end of the outpost's first season. Several men were abandoned en route, quantities of brandy and trading goods were stolen, and the men were literally at the mercy of the Indians. Traveling inland this first season, Matthew Cocking, one of the employees waylaid by the Indians wrote,

We have indeed been miserable Slaves to these People, being obliged to humour them in all their whims; not only carrying all our Goods at many Carrying Places, but even part of their . . .¹

Unable to reach Cumberland House that first season, Cocking and two other servants were forced to winter with Indians several hundred miles southeast of the outpost. At the end of the first season

Samuel Hearne, the post master at Cumberland House concluded,

sending any Considerable Number of Men and goods inland as Passengers with the Natives, as last Year, will answer no Purpose at all, will only be attended with great Expences and many losses without the least hopes of making a Proper Return . . .²

¹B.239/a/72, f. 6, classified as York Factory Post Journal, 1774-75, Matthew Cocking, "A Journal of A Journey Inland with the Natives Commencing 4th July and ending the 27th June 1775 by Matthew Cocking."

²J. B. Tyrrell, Journals of Samuel Hearne and Philip Turnor (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1934), p. 160.

Even if natives had proved reliable for conveying cargoes to and from Cumberland, the small size of their canoes made this mode inadequate for freighting. These small canoes with a cargo capacity of little over 200 pounds were in stark contrast to the canoes of the opposition.¹ In the fall of 1774 Samuel Hearne, master at the new HBC post, reported that the Canadians had brought sixty, two-ton capacity canoes into the Northwest that year.² Given the geographical advantage of a much shorter access route to the western interior, Hearne felt the Company could effectively compete with the Canadian opposition if it could convey an equal amount of goods inland. He saw "want of Proper Cannoes" as the "greatest obstical that is likely to Prevent the Comp^y from geting goods inland . . ."³ These initial inland Company servants, like those who followed, were largely unsuccessful in encouraging Indians to build canoes in sufficient numbers and of large enough size.

Until the 1780's natives continued to convey the majority of York's inland cargoes.⁴ Trade goods destined for inland, and furs packed there, were made into bundles and kegs of fifty to sixty pounds each, four of which were considered a full load for the

¹The standard Indian bark canoe was described by Samuel Hearne as "long and narrow, noways burthensom, and are only fit to Row wagers in, so that if we had 50 of such vessels they would not carry as much as 10 of the Pedlars Cannoes . . ." Ibid., p. 189.

²Hearne described their canoes as "24 feet Long 4 feet 8 Inches Broad and 1 foot 8 Inches deep, and are paddl'd by 4 Men . . ." Ibid., p. 122.

³Ibid., p. 157.

⁴Brandy and rum were not permitted in canoes paddled only by Indians at this time.

standard Indian canoes. Natives were paid a price per piece for carrying cargoes to and from Cumberland. In 1776 they were paid 5 MB per bundle of furs, worth about 40 MB, to convey them from Cumberland House to York, and the next year they received 3 MB for larger pieces and 2 MB for smaller fur bundles.¹ Indians were usually paid from 6 MB to 10 MB to carry pieces on the more difficult upriver passage. To limit pilfering of goods conveyed inland natives received part of their pay in trade goods at York, and the remainder when each bundle was safely delivered at Cumberland House. Each year smoking, bargaining, and speech making sessions with Indian leaders were held to determine a mutually agreeable rate per piece. There was some flexibility in the amount directly paid, as well as in quantity of departure gifts, such as tobacco and brandy. One factor that figured in this bargaining was depth of rivers that particular season and the amount of portaging required. In 1777 Chief Humphrey Marten estimated that when all payments to the Indians were calculated, each bundle cost twenty or more made-beaver to send to Cumberland.²

Indian transport expenses became significant enough by 1777 that the York chief proposed entering the value of goods paid for Indian carriage as a fourth item under expenses in the annual post

¹B.239/a/73, f. 55, York Factory Post Journal, 1775-76; and E. E. Rich, ed., Cumberland House Journals and Inland Journals 1775-82 First Series, 1775-79 (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1951), p. 155 (Hereinafter referred to as Rich, Cumberland House Journals 1775-79.)

²B.3/b/15, ff. 24-25, Albany Fort Correspondence Book, 1777-78, Humphrey Marten at York Factory to Thomas Hutchins at Albany Fort, 1 September 1777. In this letter Marten, in response to Hutchins' earlier inquiry, gives a detailed description of how cargoes were packaged for inland.

account book.¹ The York chief paid a total of 572 MB in trade goods to thirty-two canoes of Indians who conveyed cargoes to Cumberland in the 1774-75 trading year.² These expenses rose to 1,365 MB in the 1776-77 season, 1,369 MB during 1778-79, and 1,860 MB the next year.³ Additional expenses were incurred in feeding the Indians while they awaited departure from York. Unlike at Moose, most Indians working the York track were Uplanders. Like other Uplanders who came to trade, they were also provided with bread, prunes, and other provisions, and according to the York chief, "they eat not a little."⁴

Natives were quick to realize their essential role, and pressed their demands for greater compensation. In 1779 the chief at York wrote, "as to the Indians their demands for assisting in carrying of goods is wildly extravagant, and their behaviour insultingly insolent, Brandy[,] Brandy, Brandy is the constant cry . . ."⁵ Company servants returning from the interior reported that the Pedlars actually gave presents to the Indians not to assist or travel with them.⁶

¹A.11/116, f. 27d, London Correspondence Inward from York Factory, 1776 to 1787, Humphrey Marten at York Factory to Governor and Committee, 25 August 1777.

²B.239/d/65, f. 10, York Factory Account Book, 1774-75.

³B.239/d/67, 69, and 70, York Factory Account Books, 1777 to 1779.

⁴B.239/a/75, f. 54, York Factory Post Journal, 1777-78.

⁵B.239/a/76, f. 57d, York Factory Post Journal, 1778-79. Regarding his Indian transport assistants, the previous year Chief Marten wrote, "Indeed I am so fatigued with them, that my life is almost a burden to me." B.239/a/75, f. 54, York Factory Post Journal, 1777-78.

⁶B.239/a/75, f. 54, York Factory Post Journal, 1777-78.

Problems associated with dependence on the Indian and his small birch bark canoe soon motivated some officers stationed at York and inland to search for alternative inland transport modes. There was evidently little serious consideration given to the adoption of the same variety of large wooden craft then in use on the Albany River along the entire water road to Cumberland. Although these vessels were serviceable on the broad, gentle lowest reach of the Albany River between Henley and Albany Fort, they were apparently deemed unsuitable for the much longer distance York-Cumberland tracks, which became white water rivers within 150 miles of York. In June 1776 Samuel Hearne, former master of Cumberland House, suggested the Company try another variety of craft he thought would be better suited to York's inland track. He proposed the HBC try,

what can be done in light shells made of wood after the canoe form; and I am apt to believe that Expert Wherry builders could make vessels of upwards one Ton Burthen, so Portable that 2 Men may carry them one forth of a Mile at least without resting.¹

He felt that a trial should first be made in England with careful attention paid to construction. Except for two strakes of elm or oak on both sides of the keel, he proposed the craft be built of the lightest and best possible "Norway Deals," and be free of "all superfluaty^s of wood and Iron."² If the craft proved feasible in England, he suggested necessary materials be sent to York where the boats could be assembled.

¹Tyrrell, Journals of Samuel Hearne and Philip Turnor, p. 188.

²Ibid.

In June of the same year, Matthew Cocking, the new master at Cumberland House, advanced essentially the same proposal, that the Company try "vessels in Canoe form made of Fir . . ." ¹ He pointed out that such craft could carry more than Indian canoes, while still retaining a shallow draft and the lightness essential for portaging. They would also be steadier, more easily navigated, and more durable than the Indian canoe.

The London Committee evidently thought duplicate proposals by the past and present post masters of Cumberland merited at least an experiment. The next year, 1777, they shipped an 18 feet long, by 4 feet 7 inch broad, by 1 foot 8 inch deep canoe built of 3/8 inch fir, and sufficient materials to build two more such wooden canoes, or skiffs, as they were more commonly called. ²

At the end of the 1778 season Chief Marten wrote that the skiffs were not practical for several reasons,

first the want of men to manage them, for the Indians refused to go in them, the Second, supposing there had been men sufficient, yet, as they would unavoidably be broke in the shooting, the Falls as is too often the Case, there was no Shipwright to mend them, I offer'd them sheets of tin, and scupper Nails which might be nailed over the part damaged, they reply'd that very often almost the broad Side of a Canoe was ripped away, and that it was impossible to mend such damage by Sheets of tin. ³

Philip Turnor, Company surveyor then working inland from York, also found the wooden canoes unsuitable for the passage to Cumberland as

¹Rich, Cumberland House Journals, 1775-79, p. 68.

²A.24/12, p. 348, Invoice Book of Shipments to Hudson Bay, General, 1773 to 1777.

³Cited in Richard Glover, "Introduction" to Rich, Cumberland House Journals, 1775-79, p. lxxviii.

"They are much too short for their breadth and as they were made to proper dimensions they then would be much too heavy . . ."¹ He favoured the use of light bark canoes on the more difficult section of the track below Cumberland House and flat-bottom boats, which would be able to "carry more goods in proportion . . .",² on the more easily navigated Saskatchewan River. Turnor suggested that an Orkney boat builder be sent to Cumberland where, if supplied with rudder irons, nails and roves, he could construct wooden boats with locally available wood.

Humphrey Marten, chief at York, preferred two alternatives to the use of wooden canoes or skiffs,

- 1) build large birch bark canoes at the Bottom of the Bay posts, where birch bark could be obtained, and then ship the canoes to Severn in the Moose sloop,
- 2) give Company servants in the interior encouragement to learn canoe building.³

He preferred the latter approach, and had already promised one employee a gratuity of ten shillings for every usable canoe he built.

In the 1776-77 season at Cumberland House, a Company servant, Robert Longmoor, was the first to succeed in building birch bark canoes, one of which was 14 feet long, 3 feet wide, and 10 inches deep.⁴ As these were his first attempt, they were "not handy as

¹Tyrrell, Journals of Samuel Hearne and Philip Turnor, p. 256.

²Ibid., pp. 254-255.

³A.11/116, f. 5d, London Correspondence Inward from York Factory, 1776 to 1787, Humphrey Marten at York Factory to Governor and Committee, 20 August 1776.

⁴B.239/d/68, f. 10d, York Factory Account Book, 1777-78; and Rich, Cumberland House Journals, 1775-79, p. 170.

required."¹ During the next five years he built eight more canoes, and remained York's only canoe builder, despite a doubling of the premium to twenty shillings each in 1779.²

By at least 1785 other HBC employees had learned to build canoes of still larger size. In 1784 an unspecified number of servants received a total of 100 MB in goods for constructing six canoes.³ Smaller than the canot du nord of their opposition, Company built canoes at this time varied in size, but the largest ranged from 26 to 28 feet long and 4 to 5 feet wide. Smaller middle sized canoes of about 22 feet by 3 feet were also built. The largest was reported to have a cargo capacity of 1-1/2 tons when on the Saskatchewan River, although twelve to fifteen bundles was the average cargo capacity when used on the Cumberland to York track.⁴ These canoes were clearly superior to the small native variety for freighting purposes. With a crew of three, each canoe could carry more cargo than could three Indian canoes paddled by a total of six men. Equally important, construction by Company servants helped assure a more regular supply. Still, the shortage of canoes did not become

¹A.11/116, f. 23, London Correspondence Inward from York Factory, 1776 to 1787, Humphrey Marten at York Factory to Governor and Committee, 25 August 1777.

²A.5/2, f. 43, London Correspondence Outward, General, 1776 to 1788, Governor and Committee to Humphrey Marten at York Factory, 12 May 1779.

³B.239/d/75, f. 16, York Factory Account Book, 1784-85.

⁴E. E. Rich, ed., Cumberland House Journals And Inland Journals 1775-82 Second Series, 1779-82 (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1951), p. 98 (Hereinafter referred to as Rich, Cumberland House Journals, 1779-82.)

"a thing of the past" after 1780 as claimed by Glover.¹ Although the supply may have been adequate some years, there were numerous occasions over the next thirty years when shortages of canoes hampered inland transport and restricted York's trade.

Initially, even an adequate supply of their own canoes would not have solved York's inland transport problems. The Company's labouring servants, those who manned the inland craft, came almost exclusively from the Orkney Islands, and were totally unacquainted with managing canoes.² Such skill had to be acquired, and by 1776 only two of York's inland servants had gained proficiency in canoeing.³ In 1781 thirteen labourers were so described, and by 1788, forty of the seventy men in York's inland service were classified as canoe men and steersmen.⁴ Of this latter group a corps of sixteen steersmen were the most skilled and essential to inland transport. This critical group of experienced men, who averaged over ten years in the service, constituted the heart of York's inland transport system.

Orcadians were initially reluctant to serve on inland duty, just as they were inland from Albany, and in 1776 to help rectify

¹Glover, "Introduction" to Rich, Cumberland House Journals, 1775-79, p. lxix.

²Freighting heavily laden, fragile, birch bark canoes on the white water rivers of York's inland differed considerably from the pleasure canoeing of the rivers by present-day recreationists in modern fiberglass or aluminum counterparts.

³A.11/116, f. 6d, London Correspondence Inwards from York Factory, 1776 to 1787, Humphrey Marten at York Factory to Governor and Committee, 20 August 1776.

⁴A.30/2, ff. 32-34, List of Servants in Hudson Bay, 1780 to 1783; and A.30/4, ff. 13d-18d, List of Servants in Hudson Bay, 1778 to 1790.

the situation, the Company initiated a gratuity system that granted forty shillings annually to the lower paid servants who served inland from York,¹ the same granted to those working inland from Albany Fort. As a further encouragement, inland servants in 1779 were granted a premium of three pence per score of made-beaver obtained at their post.² With more experience, servants began acquiring the necessary canoeing skills and they, like the Indians before them, were quick to perceive their importance to the Company.

Servants contracted for several years at a time, and before their contract was to expire, those wishing to remain in the service sent their resolves to London for consideration. Increasing numbers held out for higher wages, refusing to serve unless their sometimes exorbitant demands were met. The Company maintained the practice of rewarding servants with experience, and tried to adhere to guidelines. In 1788, the newly liberalized terms were as follows:

First contract -- for 5 years at £6 and 40 shillings per year

Second contract -- for 3 years at £12 as canoe men or £14 if canoe builder

Third contract -- for 3 years at £16 if a steersman or £20 if canoe builder³

¹A.6/12, f. 54, London Correspondence Outward, Official, 1774 to 1780, Governor and Committee to Humphrey Marten at York Factory, 15 May 1776.

²*Ibid.*, f. 133, Governor and Committee to Humphrey Marten and Council at York Factory, 12 May 1779. Encouragement was also extended to officers, the principal one of which received one shilling per score made-beaver, and his assistant, six pence.

³A.6/14, f. 39d, London Correspondence Outward, Official, 1787 to 1791, Governor and Committee to William Tomison and Council at York Factory, 16 May 1787.

With increasing regularity in the late 1770's and 1780's, Company servants held out for wages beyond the current guidelines. Inland labourers usually started at £6 per annum plus £2 gratuity for their first contract period. After this apprenticeship there appears to have been some leeway in terms of length of contract and wages. Some servants' resolves were met, while others were rejected and the men ordered home.

The sometimes exorbitant demands of the inland labourers could partly be attributed to the apparently higher wages of the Canadian canoe men. As early as 1774 it was reported that Canadian steersmen earned £50 per annum, bowmen £40 and other crew members from £20 to £25 per year.¹ Despite the counterparts' more demanding job and high prices charged them by their employers for essentials, the Company's canoeists felt underpaid. Also, once HBC servants had become seasoned in handling the craft, they knew that if they quit the service in large numbers, the Company would not be able to replace them with equally skilled servants for several years, because of the requisite learning period. Orkneymen demands were thus given more weight when they were made en masse.

Even before solving its problem of insufficient numbers of skilled canoe men, the Company extended its transport and expanded still further inland. In 1778 it was decided that Cumberland House needed its own outpost further upstream, above the Canadians who had again been culling the more desirable furs. That year the Company

¹Tyrrell, Journals of Samuel Hearne and Philip Turnor, p. 122.

was unable to reach above the opposition because of river ice on the North Saskatchewan, and was forced to establish the new outpost of (Upper) Hudson House among a cluster of no less than four opposition posts. The next year the Company abandoned the post and withdrew fourteen miles downriver to establish (Lower) Hudson House. Two additional inland posts were established in 1786 to counter Pedlar advances. South Branch House was built south of Hudson House on the South Saskatchewan River, and the new forward post of Manchester House was erected on the North Saskatchewan 200 miles above Hudson House.

The new expansion inland from York strained that factory's abilities to service its outposts. From the late 1770's until 1790, and even later, it was not uncommon to have furs left at inland posts because of insufficient numbers of canoes and/or manpower. In 1778 600 MB were left inland, in 1780 1,248 MB were left, 1,232 MB in 1781, and 2,824 MB in 1782.¹ As late as 1790 lack of sufficient numbers of men and canoes forced the master of Manchester House to convey eighty-four bundles of his furs overland to South Branch House by horses, and meant upwards of 4,000 MB had to be left at Cumberland the same year.²

¹A.11/116, f. 49, London Correspondence Inward from York Factory, 1776 to 1787, Humphrey Marten and Council at York Factory to Governor and Committee, 3 September 1778; f. 75d, Humphrey Marten and Council at York Factory to Governor and Committee, 13 September 1780; f. 91d, Humphrey Marten and Council at York Factory to Governor and Committee, 1 September 1781; and f. 104, Humphrey Marten and Council at York Factory to Governor and Committee, August 1782.

²B.121/a/5, f. 39d, Manchester House Post Journal, 1789-90; and A.11/117, f. 58, London Correspondence Inwards from York Factory, 1787 to 1797, William Tomison and Council at York Factory to Governor and Committee, 4 September 1790.

A number of factors explain the transport manpower problem. The work of York's inland labourers was demanding, and required almost a special breed of worker. As mentioned earlier, the Company came to rely almost exclusively on Orkneymen for this service. Geographically the location of the Orkney Islands fitted well into the logistics of the Company's transatlantic linkage. More importantly, Orcadians who served proved to be well suited to the task. Joseph Colen, resident at York, wrote in 1788, "I must say few are able to bear fatague and toil equal those from the Orkney -- they entertain that Idea themselves . . ." ¹ Considerable camaraderie developed among the Orkney canoe men, who considered themselves uniquely suited to the service. It was only with great difficulty that Company officers could persuade Orkneymen to serve in a canoe alongside a Canadian or an English labourer.

A logical move on the HBC's part would seem to have been to enlist large numbers of Canadian canoe men, especially those already skilled and in the fur trade country. The London Committee's and Company officers' views on hiring Canadians inland from York changed often, and although some Canadians were enlisted, there was a general aversion to hiring them, since experience had shown they often returned to the Canadian service. Another apparent alternative to hiring Orkneymen would have been to enlist large numbers of Englishmen. With few exceptions, Englishmen proved unsuitable as inland

¹A.11/117, f. 24d, London Correspondence Inward from York Factory, 1787 to 1797, Joseph Colen at York Factory to Governor and Committee, 29 August 1788.

labourers. For example, in the summer of 1788 every English labourer was left at the factory as "unfit for Inland Duties"¹ when the canoe brigades returned inland. The next year the resident at York wrote,

Very few Englishmen but are above doing the Work required (when they are able) they object being harnessed (as they say) like Cattle to draw Sleds & Canoes and are the first to complain of hard labour.²

Restricting recruiting grounds for inland labourers almost exclusively to the Orkney Islands imposed numerical limitations on manpower that could be acquired. The population of the Islands was only 24,000 in the 1790's.³ Since the green recruits had to be young, preferably in their early twenties and in good physical condition with above average strength, the already small population from which labourers could be drawn was further reduced.⁴

The number of potential recruits in the Orkneys was restricted even more during the War of American Independence (1775-83), a critical time in the Company's push inland. Rugged Orkneymen were also much sought after by the Royal Navy press gangs, as well as by the Army, and both had precedence over the HBC.⁵

¹Ibid.

²B.239/a/89, f. 41, York Factory Post Journal, 1788-89.

³Richard Glover, "Introduction" to Rich, Cumberland House Journals, 1779-82, p. lvii.

⁴The ages of the fourteen Orkney recruits who came ashore at York Factory in August 1789 ranged from nineteen to twenty-six and averaged only twenty years of age. B.239/a/89, ff. 47d-48, York Factory Post Journal, 1788-89.

⁵Glover, "Introduction" to Rich, Cumberland House Journals, 1775-79, pp. lxxvi-lxxvii. England was at war for twenty-eight of the forty-seven years between 1774 and 1821.

After joining in the war against the British in 1778, French forces captured and destroyed both York and Prince of Wales (Churchill) in 1782. The Company's re-establishment of both these posts in the next two years was a further drain on manpower and capital that might otherwise have been directed toward the inland service.

Throughout the 1780's the HBC officers at York and its inland posts repeatedly indicated the need for additional manpower, pointing to the furs left inland, as well as the increasing numbers of opposition traders and the potential for much larger HBC returns. Humphrey Marten in 1780 coupled his plea for more men with a suggestion that boats also be adopted inland. He considered the recently established post of Hudson House well situated for trade and felt,

it would be the grandest Mart of Trade in all the Northern parts of North America, was an Orkney Boat builder sent to Cumberland House, Boats might be built to carry four, five or Six Tons burthen, but no less number than One Hundred Men would be able to perform the requisite duties; this number will certainly surprize your Honors, but by what I can learn I will venture my Neck if such a number were Inland under the direction of Mess^{rs} Tomison and Longmoor at Fifty Thousand skin Trade would in a few years be sent from York Fort.¹

That same year in his correspondence to London he summarized what he saw as a simple solution to boosting fur returns, "Men We want Sirs, Furrs you want Gentlemen, should you please to send us the former We are confident of returning the latter."²

¹B.239/a/78, f. 46, York Factory Post Journal, 1779-80, Humphrey Marten, "Remarks on Mess^{rs} Tomison and Longmoors Journals." Marten had served at Albany and was aware of the use of inland boats.

²A.11/116, f. 75d, London Correspondence Inward from York Factory, 1776 to 1787, Humphrey Marten and Council at York Factory to Governor and Committee, 13 September 1780.

The number of servants authorized for York's inland service totaled 51 in 1781, 50 in 1782, 33 in 1783 (following the loss of York Fort to the French), and 53 in 1784.¹ By 1785 war conditions had ceased, and York and Churchill were back in operation. That year the London Committee designated 65 of York's 100 man complement for inland service.² This year marked a turning point for York's inland theatre. In recognition of the increasing importance of the inland service, and in anticipation of further advances there, the chief factor who had formerly administered the inland operations from York, was now to reside inland where he could better supervise this most important component of the factory's trade. Finally, it seemed, the Company had recognized the importance of the inland element of York's trade, and had adjusted its administrative organization accordingly.

Following 1786 the complement of men authorized for York and its inland outposts was increased annually. By 1790 York had an authorized strength of 160 men, with eighteen designated for its subsidiary Bayside post of Severn, and as many of the remaining as possible to serve inland.³ The London Committee expected increased

¹A.30/2, ff. 34 and 49, List of Servants in Hudson Bay, 1780 to 1783; and A.30/3, f. 12, List of Servants in Hudson Bay, 1784 to 1787.

²A.30/3, f. 35, List of Servants in Hudson Bay, 1784 to 1787. The next year Chief Tomison reported that the opposition had about 180 men up the Saskatchewan and an equal number to the north of that river on the Churchill River and in Athabasca. A.11/116, f. 176, London Correspondence Inward from York Factory, 1776 to 1787, William Tomison at York Factory to Governor and Committee, 24 August 1786.

³A.6/14, ff. 103d-104, London Correspondence Outward, Official, 1787 to 1791, Governor and Committee to William Tomison and Council at York Factory, May 1790.

manpower would result in greater returns, and in 1787 wrote the York Council,

we have already added thirty Men for inland since the Year 1784 when We were given to understand that the more men We sent, the more Trade we should receive, but We do not find our Returns have been proportionable . . .¹

Although inland officers in the late 1780's did not have the manpower needed to pursue the trade in the manner they wished, conditions had improved significantly. Whereas in the summer of 1785 the main body of canoes arriving at York with the inland returns consisted of 29 servants and 39 Indians, the servant to Indian ratio declined to 48 to 15 in the brigade of 21 large and 2 small canoes which arrived from inland in 1787.² By 1790 when the main brigade of 23 large and 6 small canoes arrived at York, they were manned by 57 servants and what was described as "several" Indians.³

Cargoes transported to and from York's inland posts varied considerably in terms of quantity and variety during the 1774 to 1790 period. Returns from inland generally increased until 1781, when they totaled 15,698 MB of York's 25,901 MB trade.⁴ Then in 1781-82 a smallpox epidemic decimated the Company's Indian suppliers of furs, and the numbers of transport assistants and returns plummeted. York's inland returns only gradually recovered, and it was

¹A.5/2, f. 167, London Correspondence Outward, General, 1776 to 1788, Governor and Committee to William Tomison at York Factory, 23 May 1787.

²B.239/a/84, f. 84, York Factory Post Journal, 1784-85; and B.239/a/87, f. 39, York Factory Post Journal, 1786-87.

³B.239/a/90, f. 53d, York Factory Post Journal, 1789-90.

⁴B.239/d/71, f. 17d, York Factory Account Book, 1780-81.

not until the late 1780's that they again approximated the 1780-81 returns. The value and variety of trade goods sent inland followed a similar pattern of increase to 1780-81, then dropped sharply and only gradually increased (Tables 3 and 4).

Amounts of European provisions carried inland remained insignificant during the first half of this 1774 to 1790 period (Table 5). The York Fort account books list sugar, especially loaf sugar, as the only commodity that was regularly sent inland. Other provisions indicated were usually limited to very small amounts of chocolate, tea, coffee, and spices. At Cumberland and Hudson House, HBC employees relied on meat and fish traded from the natives, or obtained by themselves, and on the fresh produce of small kitchen gardens. Cumberland was located next to a productive fishery, and Hudson House was strategically situated adjacent to the parkland vegetation zone, the seasonal home of the buffalo.

Men returning inland from York were, even in the first half of the 1774 to 1790 period, supplied with some provisions. Oatmeal was evidently consumed en route, but it is not possible to determine the types or quantities of provisions, or the regularity with which they were served out to the returning men, as most, if not all, were considered under York Fort expenditures during at least the first half of this period.¹

¹For example, on 15 August 1779 when eighteen days out of York en route to the Saskatchewan, William Tomison recorded in his journal that his men "have but little to Eat except Oatmeal and that mostly Expended." Rich, Cumberland House Journals, 1779-82, p. 62. There was no oatmeal credited to the Cumberland House account that year.

TABLE 3

YORK FACTORY AND INLAND TRADE AND VALUE AND VARIETY OF TRADE GOODS
SENT INLAND DURING ALTERNATE SEASONS FROM 1774 TO 1790

Trading Year	Combined York and Subsidiary Trade (in MB)	York Fort Inland Trade (in MB)	Value of Trade Goods Sent Inland (in MB)	Varieties of Trade Goods Sent Inland
1773-74	7,652	-	2,866	43
1775-76	11,267	2,901	3,856	43
1777-78	13,4239	5,908	5,406	49
1779-80	17,320	9,830	11,391	63
1781-82	12,836	6,095	978	32
1783-84	7,859	5,027	6,934	76
1785-86	13,956	8,054(?)	10,975	85
1787-88	26,075	14,538	13,856	133
1789-90	24,335	12,353	16,810	157

Sources: Richard Glover, "Introduction", to E. E. Rich, ed., Cumberland House Journals and Inland Journals 1775-82 First Series, 1775-79 (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1951), p. xciii; A.11/116, ff. 132 and 135, London Correspondence Inward from York Factory, 1776 to 1787; A.11/117, ff. 1, 3, 35, and 58, London Correspondence Inward from York Factory, 1787 to 1797; and B.239/b/45, b. 4, York Factory Correspondence Book, 1785-86.

TABLE 4

QUANTITIES AND VALUES OF SELECTED TRADE GOODS
SENT INLAND FROM YORK FACTORY DURING ALTERNATE SEASONS
FROM 1776 TO 1790

YEAR	Brazil Tobacco		Brandy		Cloth		Guns		Powder		Shot		Blankets	
	MB	lbs.	MB	gals.	MB	yds.	MB	No.	MB	lbs.	MB	lbs.	MB	No.
1775-76	845	634	915	228	471	159	140	10	215	215	98	392	364	52
1777-78	781	586	1091	272	964	321	168	12	95	95	405	1622	357	51
1779-80	2751	2063	2101	525	2731	902	546	39	931	931	192	769	378	54
1781-82	106	80	321	80	105	31	42	3	53	53	19	76	28	4
1783-84	2054	2054	1259	314	1019	518	434	39	489	734	125	628	108	18
1785-86	1421	1421	2179	544	2046	1024	1486	128	569	854	274	1370	186	31
1787-88	1672	2508	2802	700	2741	441	1590	140	803	1205	?	?	432	104
1789-90	629	944	3656	914	3892	1946	1614	145	1159	1739	540	2703	777	157

Sources: B.239/d/66, 68, 70, 72, 73, 76, 81, and 87, York Factory Account Books, 1776, 1778, 1780, 1782, 1784, 1786, 1788, and 1790.

TABLE 5

SELECTED EUROPEAN PROVISIONS SENT INLAND FROM YORK FACTORY, 1775 TO 1790

YEAR	Total Varieties	Flour	Bacon (lbs.)	Cheese (lbs.)	Butter (lbs.)	Rice (lbs.)	Biscuits (lbs.)	Molasses (lbs.)	Peas	Sugar (lbs.)	Barley	Raisins (lbs.)	Oatmeal or Oats	Rum (gals.)
1774-75	-													
1775-76	-													
1776-77	1									88				
1777-78	11	1/2 barrel	121				125			80				
1778-79	3									120				
1779-80	2									302				
1780-81	7									130				
1781-82	13	3 barrels		20		28				232		20	10 Bu.	5 (Brandy)
1782-83	-													
1783-84	26	some	some	some		some	some	some	some			some	some	some
1784-85	31	1410 lbs.	360	400	122	89	400	224		133	400 lbs.	128	188 qts.	
1785-86	9													
1786-87	46	3340 lbs.	370	570	341	124	1112	412	362 qts.	240	149 lbs.	363	1038 qts.	15
1787-88	18						112			318				58
1788-89	36	3146 lbs.	298	135	333	202	934	355		355	654 qts.	283	1284 qts.	39
1789-90	42	4242 lbs.	480	245	375	76	830	544	79 lbs.	814	794 qts.	482	1679 qts.	142

Sources: B.239/d/66 to 73, 75, 76, 78, 81, 84, and 87, York Factory Account Books, 1775 to 1782 and 1784 to 1790.

European provisions credited to Cumberland and inland increased in 1781-82 to thirteen kinds and varieties, including three barrels of flour, ten bushels of oatmeal, as well as small amounts of cheese, rice, and raisins.¹ This boost in provisions for inland can probably be attributed to the smallpox epidemic which killed many of the Indians who had formerly supplied these outposts with provisions.

Because of the destruction and temporary abandonment of York, no provisions or trade goods were taken inland in 1782-83. The next year appears to have marked a turning point in the provisionment of York's inland theatre. That year a total of thirty-one kinds and varieties of European provisions were expended by Cumberland.² It is impossible to determine the quantity of each commodity that year as the York account merely lists "some" for each. The wide range of provisions involved suggests, however, that the amount was probably large. During the next four seasons, years during which large quantities and varieties of provisions totaling thousands of pounds, were transported inland, alternated with years in which few provisions were sent. The final year of this period the largest quantity was transported inland. Increased returns by the late 1780's suggest significant numbers of natives were again trading furs at York's inland posts. It is also likely that natives were again supplying equally large amounts of provisions. Still, European provisions

¹B.239/d/72, ff. 79d-83, York Factory Account Book, 1781-82.

²B.239/d/73, ff. 30-31, York Factory Account Book, 1783-84.

continued to be shipped inland in increasing amounts. A possible explanation may be that once inland servants had been supplied with these foodstuffs, it became difficult, if not impossible, to cut off the supply. That such large amounts of foodstuffs, as well as trade goods, could be conveyed inland is testimony to the maturation of York's inland transport system.

The routes or tracks used to link York with the interior changed during the 1774 to 1790 period. Prior to the establishment of Cumberland, Indians trading at York, and Company servants sent inland to winter with Indians, had a choice of several routes and variations of routes (Fig. 19). The most commonly used track by Saskatchewan River Indians was via the Saskatchewan to the junction with the Summerberry River. That branch was ascended to Moose Lake, which was crossed to its northeast corner, where a short portage led into the Minago River. It was followed down to Cross Lake, where this middle track forked, with both branches requiring portaging out of the Nelson River drainage. The more frequented route (2a) led through Walker Lake and over the drainage divide into the Carrot River, and downstream through Oxford Lake and the Hayes River to York Fort. The other fork of the middle track (2) left Cross Lake at its eastern end. Crossing over the divide, canoeists reached the upper Bigstone River drainage which was followed downstream to the Fox River, Hayes, and York.

The other early frequented route to York Fort from the Saskatchewan was the upper track. It ran from Cumberland Lake, through Namew Lake, up Goose River, and across Athapupuskow Lake to

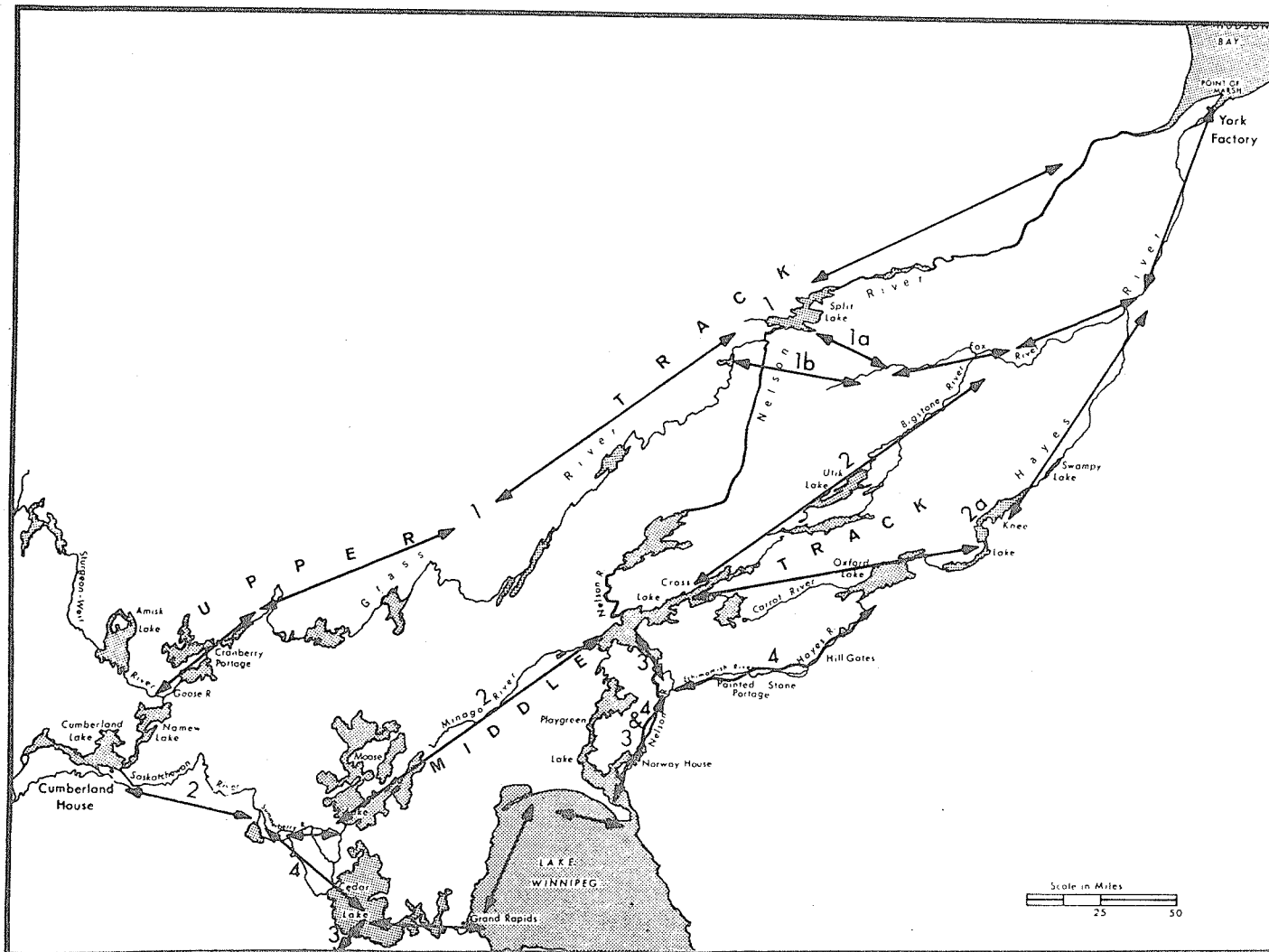


Fig. 19---Canoe routes inland from York Factory, 1774 to 1790

Source: Eric Morse, Fur Trade Canoe Routes of Canada/Then and Now (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1969), p. 39.

Cranberry Portage. Once over this divide the Grass River was descended to Split Lake. From there it was possible to follow the Nelson River downstream to the Bay (1) and pass around Point of Marsh to York, or to cut across the York Peninsula adjacent to the factory. At Split Lake an alternative track (1a) from the south shore led to a portage that crossed to the headwaters of the Fox River. It was taken downstream to the junction of the Bigstone River, from which the remaining route corresponds with a previously mentioned section of the middle track. A third alternative water road for the most easterly third of the upper track (1b) left the Grass River thirty miles south and west of its junction with the Nelson. At this point the divide was crossed into Armstrong Lake and a small river descended to the Nelson. The Nelson was merely crossed and another portage made into an upper tributary of the Fox River, which was then descended to where it met an earlier described section of the upper track (1a).

A third regularly traveled route (3) was used by natives originating in the Manitoba Lakes. From Lake Winnipeg it passed into Little Playgreen Lake. The Nelson River was then descended to Cross Lake, from which the middle track previously described (2 or 2a) could be traveled. A fourth less frequented route (4) ran from the confluence of the Nelson with the Echimamish River, up the latter, across the drainage divide to the Hayes River, which was descended to York.

Company servants and hired Indians conveying cargoes to and from inland continued to use most of these water routes during Cumberland's early history, although the upper and middle tracks were resorted to most frequently. It was common at this time for more than one track to be used in a given year. In 1776 Indians trading at York told Chief Marten of a "new" route that led up Hayes River directly to Lake Winnipeg.¹ The route described by the Indians actually passed from the headwaters of the Hayes to the small Echimamish River, through a swampy area and over Painted Stone Portage. As previously mentioned, this route was sometimes used by Indians from the Manitoba Lakes area, although it was not heavily traveled. The first Company servant passed over this route as early as 1757, but it remained unfamiliar to the HBC, and Marten thought it had potential advantages.² It was reported to be much shorter than others, have fewer falls, and more food than alternative tracks. The natives' only objection to the route was that it passed through some large lakes which were frequently too rough for their small canoes, causing delays. Marten was impressed with the possibilities of this new route by which natives reported it required only ten days to reach the "great Lakes", the Manitoba Lakes. Where the track entered Lake Winnipeg Marten thought would be "the finest situation possible, to build a new Settlement, Here probably large boats might

¹A.11/116, ff. 7-7d, London Correspondence Inward from York Factory, 1776 to 1787, Humphrey Marten at York Factory to Governor and Committee, 20 August 1776.

²Morton, Canadian West, p. 274.

[be] built to navigate those large lakes, with Expedition and safety."¹ He directed William Tomison, the ranking officer inland, to travel the new route and carefully note "the depth of water, Falls, Carrying-places, &c. . . ." ²

The next year Marten could report to the London Committee that Tomison had success in conveying the goods up the new route, and

that the road is a rownd about one, consequently the Journey becomes tedious, and if it blows hard which is frequently the case, in the sea Lake [Lake Winnipeg], it is dangerous paddling, for Canoes. To counter ballance these inconveniencys, there are but few falls and those not very dangerous; the carrying places are more level, but the grandest circumstance of all, is, there are few or Natives to intercept them, and by force or fraud, take the liquor & ea. from them, consequently you have no others to manage, then those you sett off with from the Fort . . . ³

The Company surveyor, Philip Turnor, explored this new track on his return to York Fort in 1779.⁴ During the next decade this route became the commonly used water road between the Saskatchewan and York. Larger sized Company canoes made the passage along the north shore of Lake Winnipeg less threatening than with small Indian canoes,

¹A.11/116, f. 7d, London Correspondence Inward from York Factory, 1776 to 1787, Humphrey Marten at York Factory to Governor and Committee, 20 August 1776. Here, the Company later established Jack River House, and eventually the more permanent post of Norway House, which served as a transport depot for inland boats.

²Ibid.

³Cited in Rich, Cumberland House Journals 1775-79, pp. 41n-42n.

⁴Turnor's journal of his passage from Lake Winnipeg to York over this route is in Tyrrell, Journals of Samuel Hearne and Philip Turnor, pp. 243-253. One of Turnor's jobs when hired the previous year as "Inland Surveyor" was to ascertain the shortest communication between Company posts. A.6/12, f. 106d, London Correspondence Outward, Official, 1774 to 1780, Governor and Committee to Humphrey Marten and Council at York Factory, 13 May 1778.

although even these larger canoes were frequently wind bound.¹

Tomison was able to describe this south track in 1786 as "The best on account of its being easiest for Land carriage and safety of Canoes."²

Initially the movement of cargoes to and from the Saskatchewan was irregular. It depended largely on Indians who offered their services, and those who could be convinced to serve by a Company officer. Brigades of mostly Indian paddled canoes departed for York at various times each spring from the Saskatchewan, usually in June or early July, with cargoes of Company furs. There was usually an effort to send at least one, and preferably several, servants with these brigades, but this was not always possible, and they sometimes traveled unescorted by routes of their own choice to the Bay. The trip commonly required four weeks. Servants and the Upland Indians who had contracted to convey goods inland, usually embarked about a week after their arrival at York. Most York cargoes arrived at Cumberland during September after an upriver passage of forty to fifty days.

¹Indians who used this route evidently also relied on larger than average sized canoes. In 1775 Matthew Cocking was able to acquire four twenty feet long by three feet broad canoes from natives at Red Deer River, northwest of Lake Winnipegosis. He wrote, "Indeed these Peoples Canoes are in general large upon account of Paddling in Lakes." B.239/a/72, f. 40, classified as York Factory Post Journal, 1774-75, Matthew Cocking, "A Journal of a Journey Inland with the Natives Commencing 4th July and ending the 27th June 1775 by Matthew Cocking."

²B.239/b/45, f. 9d, York Factory Correspondence Book, 1786, William Tomison, "Answers to the Several Questions proposed by M^r Humphy Marten 4th July 1786."

An increasing number of servants and a more regular supply of large canoes decreased dependence on natives, and Company transport became more routine and swift. By the late 1780's the majority of canoes left Cumberland House during the first two weeks of June, and were back at Cumberland with goods the end of August or first part of September. By this time the travel time for the York to Cumberland passage had been reduced from the previous forty to fifty day range to forty days or even less.

Above Cumberland transport also became more regimented with that post serving as a transit depot for posts further upriver. Furs were sent from these posts early enough to be at Cumberland by mid May to early June, prior to the departure of canoe brigades for York. The earlier break-up dates of river ice west of Cumberland helped make such communication possible. After returning to Cumberland where outfits were sorted and repacked, upriver brigades departed for their winter stations by early September. Later freeze-up dates further up the Saskatchewan extended the open water season, and thus, the shipping season, above Cumberland House.

Larger cargoes and lengthening transport lines led HBC officers to propose improvements in inland transport. The year after the opposition built a four ton capacity, wooden flat-bottomed boat on the Saskatchewan in 1780, the master at Hudson House renewed the call for at least the limited adoption of boats by the Company. Robert Longmoor suggested that "flatt bottom'd" boats could be used to serve both branches of the Saskatchewan River and could be managed without dependence on native assistance. It was not until five years later,

on 13 May 1786, at Hudson House that the HBC launched its first wooden boat on the Saskatchewan. The craft had a 20 foot keel and was 6-1/2 feet wide at the main thaft.¹ The next year it was used to convey twenty-three bundles of fur, plus birch rind and pemmican downstream to Cumberland House. With a crew of only three labourers and an officer, the boat could be sailed and rowed at a speed which left the accompanying canoes far behind.² The next year it appears that the same boat was again used to carry furs and provisions downstream on the Saskatchewan, this time from the Company's forward post of Manchester House. On at least the first two days of the passage it was necessary to hand it over the sand bars "owing to the boat being ill built and draws too much water."³ The craft may have only been taken as far as Hudson House that year. The ensuing fall it was used to convey trade goods from Hudson House to Manchester House with difficulty owing to shoal water and the loose sand banks which made tracking difficult.⁴ This earliest use of a boat on the the Saskatchewan was limited, and strictly supplemental to canoes. It was not until the next decade that boats began to replace canoes as the standard craft on that river.

As well as fostering the early limited use of a boat, lack of adequate water-borne transport above Hudson House also forced the

¹B.87/a/8, f. 40, Hudson House Post Journal, 1785-86.

²The journal of this passage between Hudson House and Cumberland House is in B.121/a/1, ff. 45d-46, Manchester House Post Journal, 1786-87.

³B.121/a/2, f. 36, Manchester House Post Journal, 1787-88.

⁴B.121/a/3, ff. 17d-18d, Manchester House Post Journal, 1788-89.

use of pack horses. Locally available from Plains Indians, this mode of transport was facilitated by the generally flat and open terrain within this region. Horses came into regular use by the late 1780's to carry furs and trade goods between Manchester House and Hudson or South Branch House. The nine day cross-country trip approximated upriver travel time for canoes, but was twice the downriver trip time. Their limited carrying capacity, the problem of feed, and necessity for constant tending to keep Indians from stealing them were all obvious drawbacks to use of horses.

Another transport modification, recommended from inland in 1781, entailed the adoption of a relay system. William Tomison suggested that Homeguard Indians from York be used to convey goods part way inland, where they could meet canoes from the interior, exchange cargoes, and each return. Such a scheme he felt would allow two trips annually rather than the present one.¹ His plan was not adopted at the time, but in the decade of the 1790's, revolutionary changes in York's inland transport system involved segmentation of the route and the introduction of a relay system, coupled with the adoption of boats on two segments of the route.

The Albany Arm

When Cumberland House was established on the Saskatchewan River in 1774 forcing York Factory to face the problem of inland transport for the first time, Albany Fort had a well developed inland

¹B.239/b/41, f. 14, York Factory Correspondence Book, 1780-81, William Tomison at Cumberland House to Humphrey Marten at York Factory, 7 June 1781.

transport system dating back to the 1740's. Albany's history of inland transport coupled with the relatively favourable navigational characteristics of the Albany River relative to the rivers tributary to York Factory and Churchill helps to explain the rapid development of transport in Albany's inland theatre in the 1774 to 1790 period (Fig. 20). Knowledge of this transport is necessary to understand the dramatic spatial expansion which characterized Albany's inland trade during this period and the early part of the subsequent 1790 to 1810 period. The extension of transport and trade inland from Albany has been largely overlooked by researchers in favour of York's inland developments. In 1951 Glover referred to Albany's "interesting and effective, if too little known, parallel penetration."¹ Twenty-five years later his statement is still valid.

Albany's inland operations acquired new significance in the mid and late 1770's. Consistent with the Company's new inland policy which called for the establishment of Cumberland House inland from York, the Governor and Committee, in their 1774 correspondence, instructed the chief at Albany to consider the expediency of extending trade to Henley House and still further inland (Fig. 21). The next year the London headquarters directed that Henley's role as an inland trading post be expanded. To implement its Henley initiative, the London Committee more than doubled the complement of men stationed at the outpost from eight to twenty, and assured the chief at Albany that a larger supply of trading goods and provisions would be

¹Glover, "Introduction," to Rich, Cumberland House Journals 1775-79, p. xxv.

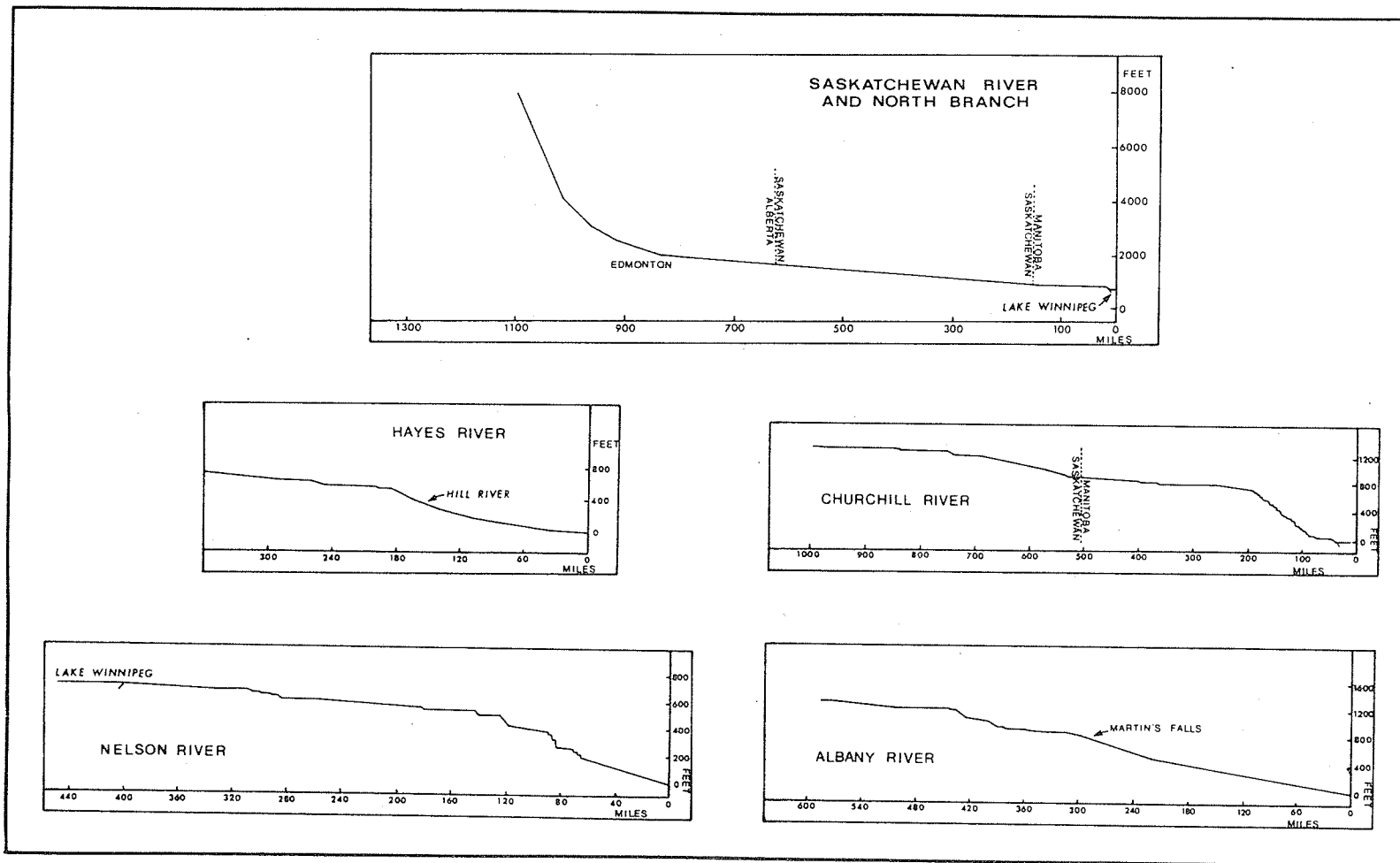


Fig. 20--River profiles

Sources: Hayes River profile compiled from topographic maps; all other profiles from Canada, Department of Mines and Technical Surveys, Geographical Branch, Atlas of Canada (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1957), Map 34.

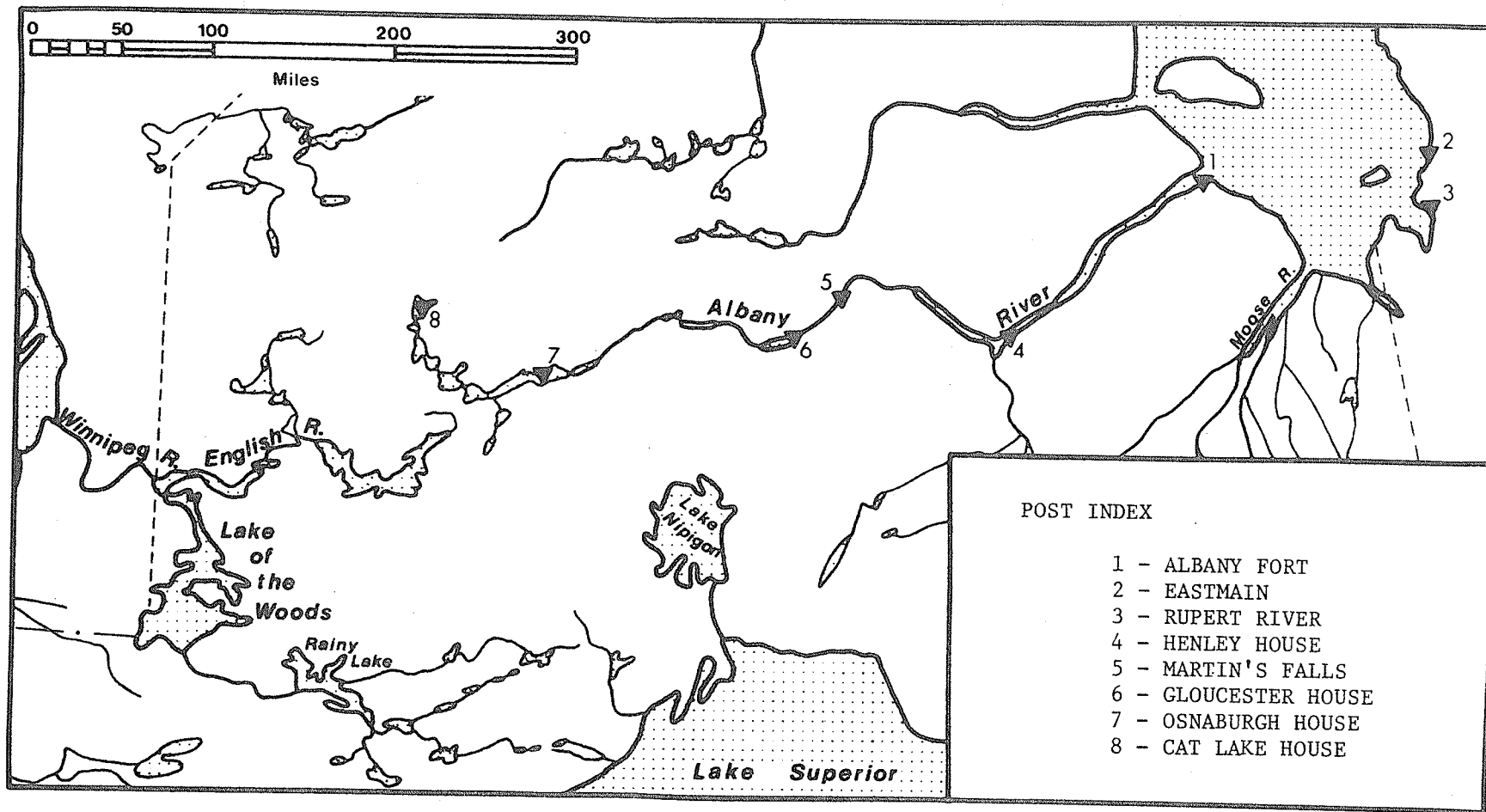


Fig. 21--Albany Fort and outposts, 1774 to 1790

provided.¹ The previous trading ceiling of ten made-beaver per Indian was lifted, but the outpost was to trade at a higher standard than its parent post of Albany to induce as many Indians as possible to continue carrying their furs down to the Bay and thereby "lessen the quantity of Trading Goods which is convey'd with so much difficulty to Henley."² Henley was also forbidden to designate and clothe its own Indian lieutenants and captains. Since designation of leaders was essential to maintaining a large and regular trade at a post, the decision to bar their use at Henley was another obvious attempt to limit the trade there and further lessen the amount of inland carriage required.

In 1775 Henley was also designated as operations centre for the further extension of exploration and trade. From this forward outpost, five or six men were to regularly travel and explore the country and persuade Indians to trade with the HBC. Lake St. Ann's (Lake Nipigon) was singled out as one place of particular interest, but men were also directed to range much more widely, to Lake Superior, Michilimackinac, and even Montreal.³ Clearly the explorative element of these excursions was preparatory to extension of

¹A.6/12, f. 25, London Correspondence Outward, Official, 1774 to 1780, Governor and Committee to Thomas Hutchins and Council at Albany Fort, 4 May 1775. The next year the general charge of trade goods at Henley was increased to 90 kinds and varieties worth 4,271 MB, from the previous year's 2,745 MB in 62 kinds and varieties. B.3/d/83 and 84, passim, Albany Fort Account Books, 1775 and 1776.

²B.3/b/13, f. 3d, Albany Fort Correspondence Book, 1775-76, Instructions to John Farell at Henley House from Thomas Hutchins at Albany Fort, 11 September 1775.

³Ibid., f. 4.

transport and trade. Men traveling in from Henley were to "Search the Rivers, & Lakes, & Observe Their Connections, Source, Dept[h], & other particulars and take a Plan of them as exact as possible."¹ Since rivers and lakes were the roadways of the trade, such ventures were to provide the highway maps necessary for a continued advance of Company trade inland.

By this time, Albany relied almost exclusively on large wooden boats to communicate with Henley. The increased interaction between the two posts, conveying up the larger indent of trading goods and provisions and carrying down the greater fur returns, required more boats. In the fall and winter of 1775 the master at Henley was instructed to send to Albany birch crooks and keels needed for the building of new boats. The expanded programme of boat building and repair at Albany Fort that winter required the construction of a kiln for steaming boards and planks.

In the spring of 1777 John Kipling led a canoe party more than 200 miles up the Albany River above Henley to establish the new forward outpost of Gloucester House. The Albany chief was particularly eager to push inland at this time. Reports indicated that the War of American Independence had caused Great Britain to cut off commerce with the colonies, and Montreal traders had therefore not sent their normal shipment of goods inland. In order to "avail themselves of this Opportunity",² servants were to immediately

¹Ibid.

²B.3/b/14, f. 9, Albany Fort Correspondence Book, 1776-77, Instructions to John Farell at Henley House from Thomas Hutchins at Albany Fort, 22 September 1776.

proceed further inland and occupy Pedlar sites. It was hoped that a number of inland posts could be established, with possible locations including Woody Lake (Lake of the Woods), Rainy Lake, and Lake Winnipeg, but at this time these favoured sites were beyond the range of Albany's inland transport system.

The same year, 1777, Henley House was raised one more notch toward the status of full-fledged trading post when permitted to trade at the more liberal Albany standard. The outpost was still barred from designating Indian leaders. The Committee in London had evidently decided that the transport line between Henley and Albany could handle an increased flow, but was not yet ready to accommodate all Bay bound Indians passing beyond Henley to Albany.

With inland transport assuming a more important role, the London Committee in 1777 introduced a gratuity system inland from Albany. Retroactive to the year ending in summer 1776, each man who traveled to Henley or further inland received a gratuity of forty shillings annually.¹ The following year the system was modified to allow each man ten shillings for every journey between Albany and Henley House, and forty shillings to travel beyond Henley.²

While Henley, which was supplied by boats, was advanced to a standard of trade on par with Albany, Gloucester House retained the older and more stringent standard. Transport above Henley was still

¹A.6/12, f. 73, London Correspondence Outward, Official, 1774 to 1780, Governor and Committee to Thomas Hutchins at Albany Fort, 14 May 1777.

²Ibid., f. 101, Governor and Committee to Thomas Hutchins at Albany Fort, 13 May 1778.

precarious at that time and could not have handled the volume of cargo which would have been associated with a more liberal standard of trade. For at least its first few years, Gloucester relied on canoes for connection with Henley, but as the Albany chief wrote,

There is no such thing as procuring the Canoes proper for such service to be built in this Country, the birch Trees are too small, and the Natives accustomed only to build small ones for their own use, are unable to construct others of such Magnitude as we require.¹

In addition, Albany's prior heavy dependence on boats to service Henley had not provided the opportunities necessary for Company servants to master canoeing. In 1778 the officer in charge at Henley doubted there was a single man at either Henley House or Albany who could manage a canoe either up or down falls without an Indian to assist him. Initially the Company depended so heavily on Indians to convey cargoes between Albany's two outposts that Chief Thomas Hutchins worried that Company employees might never be able to handle canoes if they did not take the opportunities to learn.

In an attempt to provide alternative transport above Henley, the Albany chief had a special boat built, smaller than the standard Henley Boat. Appropriately christened the "Experiment", the boat appears to have been first used on the Henley to Gloucester run in the summer of 1778. It was unable to reach Gloucester and probably got only as far as Martin's Falls, the first major obstacle to

¹A:11/4, f. 134d, London Correspondence Inward from Albany Fort, 1775 to 1783, Thomas Hutchins, Abstract of Albany Fort Journal, 1780-81.

navigation inland from Albany Fort.¹ Canoes were employed to ferry the boat's cargo the remaining distance. The next year the boat again failed to reach Gloucester.

Not yet having solved the problem of transport above Henley House, the Albany chief was receptive to the innovative ideas of a Pedlar who arrived at Albany to offer his services to the Company in the summer of 1779.² Monsieur Germain Maugenest made several suggestions regarding the Company's inland trade, but the most important was that bateaux, light, flat-bottom boats with a shallow draft, be employed in the inland service. Although Albany had a tradition of flat-bottom wooden craft, they were evidently heavier and more barge-like than the sophisticated vessels proposed by Maugenest, which were especially suited to shallow water navigation and portaging. The chief accepted his suggestion and indented that summer for two bateaux, smaller than the 32 feet long by 7 feet broad size suggested, to serve until the men learned to manage them.³

On 10 September 1780, the Prince Rupert arrived at Albany from England with the outfit for the ensuing year. Among the cargo was a single bateau, presumably built to Hutchins' specifications. The season already advanced, the chief wasted little time, and

¹Martin's Falls is actually a series of rapids with a combined drop of 12 to 15 feet. It marks the point of contact between the resistant Shield rocks and the easily eroded rocks of the Hudson Bay Lowland.

²For the story of this man and his suggestions to the HBC see A. M. Johnson, "Mons. Maugenest Suggests . . .," The Beaver, Outfit 287 (Summer, 1956), pp. 49-53.

³B.3/a/76, f. 6, Albany Fort Post Journal, 1778-79, Journal Abstract by Thomas Hutchins.

loaded the newly arrived bateau with trade goods and provisions and dispatched it with a crew of six for Gloucester on 26 September.¹

The bateau arrived back at Albany on 19 November, having ascended to within twenty-seven miles of Gloucester, where ice blocked its passage.² Impressed with the utility of his new craft, the chief collected poplar crooks to build additional bateaux at Albany the next spring. Instructions were also given to have both of the inland posts build one bateau before the next open water season. The exact dimensions of these initial bateaux were not recorded, but they reportedly each could carry about forty eight-gallon rundlets, and drew less than thirteen inches of water when fully loaded.³

The first bateaux to successfully reach Gloucester departed Albany on 29 May 1781. At Henley these two were joined by another built there, and on 16 July they arrived at Gloucester House. The passage was not made without difficulty. The men were afraid to manoeuvre the craft across Martin's Falls, and the master at Gloucester was called down to assist. At the falls almost a complete bateau load of gun powder was lost due to "the unaquaintedness of the men in this way of working."⁴ Still, the Albany chief was sufficiently

¹B.3/a/78, f. 3, Albany Fort Post Journal, 1780-81.

²Ibid., f. 8.

³A.11/4, f. 130d, London Correspondence Inward from Albany Fort, 1775 to 1783, Thomas Hutchins, Abstract of Albany Fort Journal, 1780-81.

⁴B.3/b/18, f. 41, Albany Fort Correspondence Book, 1780-81, Germain Maugenest at Gloucester House to Thomas Hutchins at Albany Fort, 21 July 1781.

impressed with the ability of bateaux to convey large cargoes, that he granted both Gloucester and Henley permission to designate Indian leaders.

Despite difficulty that year, Company servants were evidently more willing and/or able to quickly learn to handle bateaux than they were to acquire canoeing skills. The next year four bateaux were used on the Gloucester run without major mishaps. At the end of only the second season using these craft, Chief Hutchins was able to report to London that his men were becoming more expert with bateaux, although they were still quite inexperienced in conducting canoes. In 1782 Gloucester was allowed to begin trading at the Albany standard.

If bateaux had not proved successful, the Albany chief felt the prospects for establishing settlements further inland would have been abortive, since bark canoes of proper size were unobtainable. In this case, he was prepared to consider purchasing large bark canoes from an agent in Canada, where he thought canoeists might also be engaged. He even considered whether it might be cheaper to also purchase provisions there and ship them to the interior via the Canadian route.¹

In considering a Canadian approach, source of canoes, and manpower, Chief Hutchins was merely repeating ideas expressed a year earlier by George Sutherland in his inland journal. At that time Sutherland was Albany's most traveled inland servant, exclusive of Canadians then in the service. He was pessimistic regarding inland expansion beyond Gloucester House and thought there was "very little

¹A.11/4, f. 134d, London Correspondence Inward from Albany Fort, 1775 to 1783, Thomas Hutchins, Abstract of Albany Fort Journal, 1780-81.

prospect of Ever getting any farther inland."¹ He based his conclusion on the "impracticable" nature of the river and the lack of suitable craft and manpower. The requisite large canoes could not be obtained, and even if the HBC had these canoes in sufficient numbers, he felt the Company servants were as fit to manage them as he was "to be Bishop in the Church of Rome."²

The success of Maugenest's bateaux provided Albany with an alternative mode of transport which was larger and more durable than bark canoes, and more consistent with the skills of the Company servants. Despite having solved the problem of supplying his forward outpost of Gloucester, it was obvious to Hutchins that the Company was still unable to offer the Pedlars serious competition above that post.³ He reported that Indians had informed him the Canadians had a trading house only fifty to eighty miles distant from Gloucester House. In March 1782, he wrote the master at Henley,

¹B.211/a/1, f. 33, classified as Sturgeon Lake Post Journal, 1779-80, George Sutherland, "A Journal of the most remarkable Transactions and Occurrences Inland with Pedlars from 26th July 1779 to 31st May: 1780 by George Sutherland." This is one of the most distinctive and least inhibited of the early inland journals.

²Ibid., f. 32.

³As early as the winter of 1779-80, the Pedlar James Clark at Sturgeon Lake told George Sutherland of seventeen opposition houses in the area north of Lake Superior and east of Lake Winnipeg. Ibid., ff. 15d-16d.

is it not strange that those people can penetrate so many hundred Miles into the Country without provisions and we cannot go 150 Miles above Gloucester with plenty of every thing? does not y^e contrast strike you strongly, I am sure it does me with surprise and shame, and makes me y^e more anxious to show them that Brittons can and dare do as much as any Canadian among them.¹

What made this competition even worse was the liberal Canadian standard of trade in that inland region. In 1781, the Pedlar Maugenest informed the Albany chief that the Canadian merchants had formed what they called the "Great Company." They had built a settlement at the Grand Portage and there lodged three years' supply of everything necessary for inland sustenance. This forward entrepôt saved time previously spent returning to Michilimackinac or even Montreal. Maugenest reported that the new company was so eager to obstruct the HBC trade in the area inland from Albany that they were willing to take a loss in that region. Rum that cost the Indians 32 MB from the HBC could be traded with the new company for 2 MB, and guns which cost 12 MB or 14 MB from the HBC could be secured for 4 MB. He reported the company was willing to incur losses in this area since "other places enable them to bear it."²

¹B.3/b/19, f. 26, Albany Fort Correspondence Book, 1781-82, Thomas Hutchins at Albany Fort to John Kipling at Henley House, 26 March 1782.

²A.11/4, f. 134d, London Correspondence Inward from Albany Fort, 1775 to 1783, Thomas Hutchins, Abstract of Albany Fort Journal, 1780-81. Maugenest's report points to the increasing cooperation and organization among the opposition. Their "frontier policy" in the area inland from Albany was similar to the policy the HBC itself used along its southern flank later in the rivalry to protect its more valuable northern areas. The places that would cover the losses for the Pedlars Maugenest referred to were probably the Saskatchewan, and especially, the Athabaska region.

Although there was greater cooperation among the opposition inland from Albany, George Sutherland, the HBC servant who spent the winter of 1779-80 adjacent to Pedlars on Sturgeon Lake, west of Lake Nipigon, found there was still considerable intra-Pedlar competition. He reported that the Pedlars traded with two standards; one where they operated unopposed, and another where they had local competition. Still, Sutherland's observations tend to support Maugenest's report. The HBC servant observed that the Pedlars at Sturgeon Lake traded only eight kinds of goods (blankets, cloth, guns, coats, kettles, pair sleeves, stockings, and hatchets) and gave away all other items, including rum, tobacco, powder, and shot, free of charge.¹ He calculated that the Pedlar's 1,300 MB trade at Sturgeon Lake cost them at least 4,000 MB. The local economics of such trade perplexed Sutherland who wrote, "I can't believe it for all I see it Every day - how can they afoard it."²

Immediate plans for the extension of transport further inland to counter this Pedlar competition were delayed after a fire destroyed Henley in January 1782. The rebuilding of the post required time and manpower that otherwise could have been directed toward developing the interior. The rebuilding of the post, however, was geared to the continued expansion of trade. Henley was to be built "strong and

¹B.211/a/1, ff. 22-27d, classified as Sturgeon Lake Post Journal, 1779-80, George Sutherland, "A Journal of the most remarkable Transactions and Occurrences Inland with Pedlars from 26th July 1779 to 31st May: 1780 by George Sutherland."

²Ibid., f. 41d.

tight that it may receive with safety a Quantity of goods for inland service to which purpose the Cellars should be large and dry."¹

Other important changes were effected in 1783 to improve Albany's inland communication system in preparation for further expansion. Gloucester, which was intended to be the jumping-off place for more distant posts, was also to be rebuilt. Even though the two storey, thirty feet long by twenty feet broad house had just been completed in 1781, it was considered too small and insecure, and was also to be rebuilt to specifications provided.² To expedite inland shipping, a newly appointed "superintendent of Boats" was to take charge of the movement of inland cargoes. The London Committee had already freed Albany of the responsibility for Eastmain when it transferred that outpost to Moose Factory following the 1779-80 season. It was expected that Albany would consequently be able "to attend more particularly to Gloucester and Inland Service."³ The Committee expected that with these changes a regular carriage would be established inland, and advised that a shuttle service be used between Albany and Henley, and between Henley and Gloucester to expedite the conveyance of cargoes. The Albany chief further

¹B.3/b/21, f. 3d, Albany Fort Correspondence Book, 1783-84, Instructions to John McNab at Henley House from Edward Jarvis at Albany Fort, 3 October 1783.

²B.3/b/19, ff. 6-6d, Albany Fort Correspondence Book, 1781-82, James Sutherland at Gloucester House to Thomas Hutchins at Albany Fort, 22 September 1781; and B.3/b/21, f. 5, Albany Fort Correspondence Book, 1783-84, Instructions to John Kipling at Gloucester House from Edward Jarvis at Albany Fort, 3 October 1783.

³A.6/13, f. 70d, London Correspondence Outward, Official, 1781 to 1786, Governor and Committee to Edward Jarvis and Council at Albany Fort, 21 May 1783.

suggested to London that a log tent be built at Martin's Falls to protect goods from the summer heat while awaiting cartage to Gloucester, and that several men be stationed there during the shipping season.

By the fall of 1784, all was in readiness for a push further inland. Henley House was habitable, and a large log tent had been constructed at Martin's Falls to serve as a forwarding depot where men, including a cooper, would repack goods for inland. Finally, the track had been made ready for the bateaux, with all paths or launching places skidded. Heavier than canoes, bateaux had to be dragged out of the river and around major rapids and falls. To facilitate the bypass of such places, wide paths had to be cleared through the bush, and graded. Small logs or saplings were then laid parallel to each other at a close spacing to provide a surface over which the bateaux could be skidded with a minimum of friction.

Despite these elaborate preparations, it was not until 1786 that more than a seasonal post could be established above Gloucester. That year the new advance post of Osnaburgh House was built adjacent to Lake St. Joseph, further up the Albany River.

From its founding, Osnaburgh was linked to Gloucester by bateaux. Use of these craft on this new section necessitated the clearing and skidding of paths. James Sutherland's journal of his expedition to and from Lake Winnipeg provides some interesting observations on these launching paths. Returning to Gloucester House on 30 July 1786, he arrived at where only three weeks earlier the bateau party en route to establish Osnaburgh House had built a

launching place. Indians accompanying Sutherland were surprised to see the path cut by the English and said, "they are Gods."¹ Carrying over the Three Snake Falls two days later, Sutherland counted 245 rollers for launching the bateaux around the uppermost fall alone.²

Osnaburgh House functioned as a staging post in 1788 for the bateau party which established the new outpost of Cat Lake House on the lake of the same name in the headwaters of the Albany River. Both it, and Osnaburgh House built two years earlier, were constructed in the Canadian manner. They were considered temporary, stripped down posts, free of superfluous aspects which would add to their cost, require additional transport, and cause an inertia which would tend to commit the Company to specific sites. They were mobile posts that could be moved to respond to vicissitudes of the trade.

The extension of Albany's transport line into the upper Albany River brought it within easy reach of Canadian traders, a number of whom offered their services to the HBC. Unlike inland from York where there was usually a tendency to avoid hiring large numbers of Canadians, they constituted an important element in Albany's distant theatre by the late 1780's. In part to appease Canadians in the Company's service who collectively disliked working in bateaux, Albany Chief Edward Jarvis proposed using wooden canoes. They were to be the same size as the Canadian birch bark canoes, but could be worked with

¹B.78/a/15, f. 6d, classified as Gloucester House Post Journal, 1786, James Sutherland, "A Journal from Gloucester House Inland Commencing June 12th and ending Aug 3 1786 by James Sutherland."

²Ibid., f. 7.

either oars or paddles. Carefully constructed, the craft would be light, yet much more durable and long lasting than fragile bark canoes.

The first wooden canoe constructed at Albany was launched on 30 July 1788. Aptly christened the "Trial," the vessel weighed 348 pounds.¹ Jarvis thought such vessels would be especially useful above Osnaburgh, but would also be serviceable further down the river when water was low. The first craft proved effective, and others, including the "Active" and "Favourite" were soon added to the service. Although wooden canoes were used on the Albany, and were later introduced inland from other Bayside posts, their use never became widespread.

Not all of Chief Jarvis' transport innovations proved feasible. In 1784 he suggested trying to use horses to track boats between Albany and Henley, and even beyond that outpost in good years. He pointed out that a horse could be purchased cheaply at the Orkney Islands and shipped to the Bay for trial. The Company headquarters agreed that the idea merited an attempt, and had a horse sent to Albany. On 12 June 1786 Jarvis wrote in the abstract of his post journal,

The horse which I proposed to track Boats to Henley is now lame from being pricked in shoeing and besides sinks up to his Shoulder in the loom that I have little hopes he will answer my intention . . .²

Although not practical for inland, the horse did prove useful at Albany Fort.

¹B.3/a/89, f. 52, Albany Fort Post Journal, 1787-88.

²B.3/a/87, f. 6d, Albany Fort Post Journal, 1785-86, Edward Jarvis, Abstract of Albany Fort Journal, 1785-86.

Although the actual procedure and timing of transport varied from year to year, certain basic features characterized Albany's inland communication system. One outstanding feature was the disparity between upstream and downstream travel times. For example, the upriver trip by bateau from Albany Fort to Osnaburgh House required about forty-two days compared to a return trip of only fourteen days. The much swifter return can, in large part, be attributed to both the greater ease of traveling with the current, and to the fact that the returning craft were loaded with pelts, much lighter than the upriver cargoes of trade goods and provisions.

Operation of the system depended on craft based both at Albany and at the inland posts. Bateaux were the most important type of craft in terms of numbers and sections of the route traveled.¹ Larger wooden boats were used between Albany and Henley House, and when possible, to Martin's Falls. Above Martin's Falls bateaux were the dominant craft.

Boats and bateaux were used to carry outfits inland from Albany to Henley. Smaller boats and bateaux continued on to Martin's Falls. Above the falls, bateaux relayed cargoes to and from Gloucester, while simultaneously other bateaux conveyed cargoes between Gloucester and Osnaburgh. At this time no regular routine had yet developed for Cat Lake, which communicated directly with both Osnaburgh and Gloucester during this period. At the inland posts,

¹As early as 1787, eleven bateaux were used to convey the inland cargoes.

trade goods, provisions, and stores were exchanged for furs which were then conveyed downstream as bateaux and boats completed their relays.

Inland outfits were shipped from Albany in two or three flotillas which departed the factory from mid May to late June. There was usually one main body consisting of one to three boats and two to four bateaux which departed between mid May and early June and carried the majority of the cargo at least as far as Henley or Martin's Falls. The last of the Albany based craft on inland service returned to the factory with the cargo of furs by mid August, in time for the arrival of the ship. The fall season and return of inland post masters, who came down to the factory to take part in the annual council meeting held during ship time, afforded an additional opportunity to convey two or three more bateau loads of goods to the inland posts before freeze-up. In addition, as many trips as possible were made to Henley House in the fall in order to lodge inland cargoes in readiness for the next season.

The dimensions of bateaux used in the late 1780's are not known. They varied in size, with the smaller models more common on the higher section of the river. Crew size normally ranged from five to seven men for the upriver trip. The largest boats used between Albany and Henley, and sometimes Martin's Falls, were evidently larger than the earliest boats used inland from Albany. They normally required a crew of eight or nine men. The fact that these craft were given names, such as the "Industry", "Good Intent", and

"Queen Charolette" boats, and "Flying Fish", "Badger", and "Squirrel" bateaux, suggests a lifetime of at least several seasons.

Provisionment of crews for the requisite large numbers of inland vessels required large quantities of provisions. Unlike inland from York where men could be fed from both ends of the track, from the factory and from the provision rich parkland region, Albany had to supply craft passing both up and down its inland line. Its inland expansion was consequently restrained until the post-1790 period when its traders also broke into the prairie-parkland region. Even when Henley and Gloucester were Albany's only inland posts, the amount of provisions necessary for a journey was considerable. For the major spring trip to Henley and Gloucester in May 1780, the Albany chief served out a total of 1,870-1/2 pounds of flour, 27 pounds of cheese, 81 pounds of dried fish, 146 pieces of salt pork, and 521 salted geese to the 23 servants and 7 Indians who were continuing on to Gloucester.¹

Bulky provisions such as geese were obviously not well suited to inland travel. In 1781 the London Committee wrote Albany requesting particulars on what was considered the most portable provision for inland. The next year they sent a large quantity of oatmeal, having decided it was best suited for use on inland journeys. Although oatmeal became more important, it appears that flour remained the single most relied upon provision for fueling Albany's inland transport, especially in the pre-1790 period. There are

¹B.3/a/77a, f. 24, Albany Fort Post Journal, 1779-80.

innumerable references in Albany's inland post journals to bateau men baking bread soon after their arrival at a post, in preparation for their morning departure.

In the 1789-90 trade year forty Albany based labourers worked on the inland brigades. Together they logged a total of 209 trips. Each round trip between Albany and Henley, Henley and Gloucester and Osnaburgh, and Osnaburgh and Cat Lake House constituted a "trip" and earned each labourer a gratuity of ten shillings. More than half of these men made six to eight trips that year.¹ Such large numbers of men on the road for extended periods of time required enormous amounts of provisions.

As well as supplying its inland brigades, Albany also had to provide large amounts of foodstuffs to its inland posts which retained complements of men throughout the year. The volume and variety of European provisions and their importance relative to country produce are suggested in Table 6 which shows provisions consumed by a complement that usually varied from four to six at Cat Lake House during its first season (1788-89).

Variety and volume of European provisions shipped to Cat Lake for its first season were much less than what was shipped to Albany's older and larger inland posts.² Provisions weighing several tons,

¹B.3/d/100, f. 74, Albany Fort Account Book, 1789-90.

²For example, the same year Gloucester received twenty-three kinds and varieties of European provisions. These included bacon, butter, cheese, flour, molasses, oatmeal, Genoa oil, pork, raisins, rice, rum, sugar (two varieties), vinegar, wine, tea, suet, white salt, lemon juice, ham, coffee, brandy, and salt beef. B.3/d/99, f. 83d, Albany Fort Account Book, 1788-89.

comprising up to forty kinds and varieties, were conveyed to each of these posts. The total number of species and quantities of selected, important provisions shipped to these posts in 1778-79, 1783-84, and 1789-90 are shown in Table 7.

TABLE 6
PROVISIONS CONSUMED AT CAT LAKE HOUSE
DURING THE 1788-89 SEASON

European Provisions		Country Produce	
Item	Amount	Item	Amount
Flour	1493 lbs.	Beaver	444 lbs.
Beef	30 pcs.	Venison	1198 lbs.
Pork	140 pcs.	Fish	1144 lbs.
Bacon	32 lbs.	Geese	43 no.
Butter	16 lbs.		
Sugar	59 lbs.		
Chocolate	1 lb.		
Rum	7 gal.		
Rice	24 lbs.		

Source: B.30/a/1, ff. 35d-45d, Cat Lake Post Journal, 1788-89.

As the Albany transport line penetrated further west it was hoped it would soon come within reach of the Fire Country, or prairie-parkland region, and its abundant country provisions. In addition to tapping the fur resources of the Fire Country, such an inland source would significantly reduce the amount of provisions Albany would have to provide. Cat Lake and Osnaburgh were already close enough to acquire wild rice from Indians to the south and west.¹

¹For a discussion of wild rice see William G. Dore, "Wild Rice," Plant Research Publication 1393, Research Branch, Canada Department of Agriculture, Ottawa, 1969.

TABLE 7

SELECTED PROVISIONS^a SENT TO ALBANY INLAND POSTS
DURING THE 1779, 1784, AND 1790 SEASONS

	Kinds and Varieties	Bacon (pounds)	Biscuits (pounds)	Butter	Cheese (pounds)	Flour	Peas	Pork	Prunes (pounds)	Malt (Bu.)	Molasses	Oatmeal	Sugar (pounds)	Geese (number)	Raisins (pounds)	
Henley																
1778-79	42	114	336	2 firkins	147	21 barrels	26 Bu.	7 casks	310	24	3 casks	22 Bu.	336	1316	200	
1783-84	20	696	-	224 lbs.	51	9919 lbs.	936 qts.	476 pcs.	-	4	931 lbs.	384 qts.	206	1385	112	
1789-90	31	163	-	112 lbs.	64	16,354 lbs.	632 qts.	187 pcs.	-	8	659 lbs.	80 qts.	491	64	12	
Gloucester																
1778-79	19	80	-	1 firkin	44	4 barrels	-	3 casks	-	-	-	8 Bu.	100	-	-	
1783-84	32	884	-	112 lbs.	626	5726 lbs.	-	490 pcs.	-	-	350 lbs.	-	478	-	56	
1789-90	31	381	-	168 lbs.	80	7189 lbs.	-	542 pcs.	-	-	847 lbs.	192 qts.	294	204	30	
Osnaburgh																
1778-79	b															
1783-84	b															
1789-90	23	824	-	56 lbs.	137	6300 lbs.	-	501 pcs.	-	-	-	-	-	-	30	

^aAmounts rounded off to nearest whole measure

^bPost did not operate that season.

Sources: B.3/d/87, ff. 84-84d, Albany Fort Account Book, 1778-79; B.3/d/92, ff. 55d-56, Albany Fort Account Book, 1783-84; and B.3/d/100, ff. 66d-67, Albany Fort Account Book, 1789-90.

As large as shipments of provisions for posts and crew members were, they were smaller than the volume and weight of the cargoes of trade goods conveyed upstream, and furs carried down to Albany. Trade goods were not only used for trading for furs. They were used for purchasing provisions from Indians, paying Indians for assisting in transport and carrying communications between posts, presented to leading Indians as gifts, and other such expenses. The value and variety of trade goods at each inland post, and trade returns from Albany Fort, Eastmain, and inland outposts during the 1775-76, 1782-83, and 1789-90 seasons are shown in Table 8.

Inland from Moose Factory

In the same year, 1777, that Albany established its forward post of Gloucester House, Moose Factory built its first three inland posts (Fig. 22). Like previously with both York and Albany, extension of trade inland from Moose was seen as a possible means of countering inland competition. Thus, with the late 1770's addition of Moose's inland thrust, the HBC was simultaneously advancing inland from three Bayside establishments. Only Churchill, Eastmain, and Severn remained without inland trading posts, and each of these began settling their respective hinterlands during the next period, 1790 to 1810.

Of Moose Factory's first three posts, the Mesakamee (Mesakamy) Lake out station on present-day Kesagami Lake, seventy-five miles southeast of the factory, was closest to its parent post. The two other posts were located to the southwest in the Missinaibi River Valley. Brunswick House, called Wapiscogamy until 1781, was located

TABLE 8

TRADE RETURNS AT ALBANY FORT AND EASTMAIN
AND TRADE RETURNS AND VALUE AND VARIETY OF THE
GENERAL CHARGE OF TRADE GOODS AT ALBANY'S INLAND POSTS,
1776, 1783, AND 1790 SEASONS

	1775-76	1782-83	1789-90
Albany Fort Trade in MB	4690	4730	4303
Eastmain Trade in MB	3090	b	b
Henley House			
Trade in MB	625	1709	1579
Varieties Trade Goods	90	120	150
General Charge Trade Goods (MB)	4272	2007	8668
Gloucester House			
Trade in MB	a	4014	2766
Varieties Trade Goods		138	172
General Charge Trade Goods (MB)		28,186	14,481
Osnaburgh House			
Trade in MB	a	a	3701
Varieties Trade Goods			169
General Charge Trade Goods (MB)			24,422
Cat Lake House			
Trade in MB	a	a	1311
Varieties Trade Goods			95
General Charge Trade Goods (MB)			2650

^a Post did not exist that season

^b Eastmain not subsidiary to Albany Fort that season

Sources: B.3/d/74, 91, and 100, passim, Albany Fort Account Books, 1775-76, 1782-83, and 1789-90.

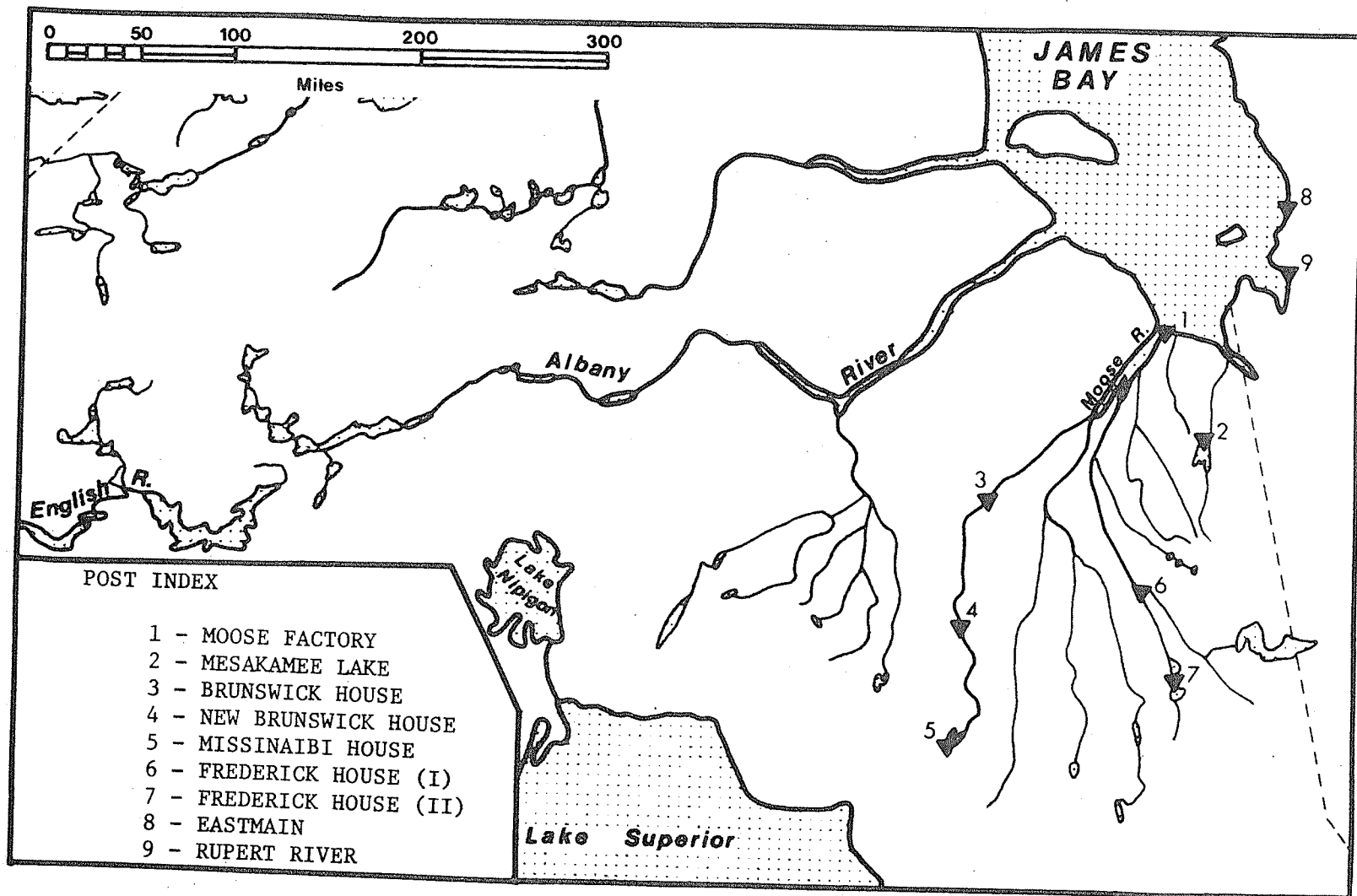


Fig. 22--Moose Factory and outposts, 1774 to 1790

130 water-miles southwest of the factory, just above the junction of Wapiscogami Creek with the Missinaibi. Another, more short-lived house was built on Missinaibi Lake at the head of the same river, only forty miles from Lake Superior.

It was the intention of the Moose chief that Brunswick, the factory's first inland post, would function as a halfway house for a post planned for the north shore of Lake Superior. The founding party had left Moose in October 1776 and completed the building of the post during that winter. Because of his close proximity and frequent communication, Chief Kitchin was aware of the use of boats on the Albany River, and in December 1776 wrote his counterpart there requesting the use of that factory's sawer to build a boat for servicing his new outpost of Brunswick House. All reports indicated that a flat-bottom boat could be navigated as far up the Missinaibi as the Great Fall,¹ near which the post was to be built. Albany's sawer arrived at Moose later in December, and that spring the new boat of unspecified size, was launched and christened the "Speedwell."

As inland from Albany Fort at this time, Moose's out stations also had to rely on their parent post for much of their sustenance. Meeting these needs meant additional transport. Provisioning the outpost of Brunswick during the winter of 1776-77 pointed to the necessity of establishing a regular water-borne carriage inland. On 7 January 1777, four servants and five Indians with two dogs departed Moose with eleven sled loads of provisions for the site

¹This is the point where the river crosses from the crystal-line rocks on the south to sedimentary rocks on the north.

where Brunswick was under construction. Such overland conveyance was inefficient, if not prohibitive, as can be gauged from the fact that 740 of the total 1,340 pounds of provisions were necessary for the sustenance of the party while en route to and from Brunswick!¹ Obviously, such a practice could not sustain a profitable long term trade.

On 23 May 1777, the newly built "Speedwell" departed Moose on its maiden passage upriver with a crew of nine. Shoal water caused difficulties, additional manpower was dispatched from Moose to assist, and the craft succeeded in reaching the new post fourteen days later. It returned to Moose on 13 June after a four day downriver trip, and embarked on a second trip to Brunswick on 16 June. The second upriver trip was cut to eleven days and the downriver return to two days.

With his halfway house ready, on 10 June 1777, Chief Kitchin dispatched a flotilla of six canoes to proceed above Brunswick and establish a trading post on Lake Superior. Forty-five days later the party reached Missinaibi Lake at the head of the river of the same name, where lack of an Indian guide delayed the expedition. It eventually crossed the Hudson Bay-Great Lakes drainage divide and proceeded down to Michipicoten where five Frenchmen had a dwelling and another storage building. Having reached his destination, John Thomas, the leader of the expedition, decided that the most suitable place for his new post was back on Missinaibi Lake. The forty mile track from that lake to Michipicoten was difficult, owing to numerous

¹B.135/a/58, f. 15, Moose Factory Post Journal, 1776-77.

falls and shoal water. Considering the transport difficulties associated with the forty mile section between Missinaibi Lake and Lake Superior, he concluded he would be equally well situated for trade at the former. Thomas returned to Missinaibi and began constructing his house, Moose Factory's second inland establishment.¹

The factory's third outpost of Mesakamee Lake was settled by George Atkinson in October 1777. After a thirteen day canoe passage that carried him up French River, the most easterly of Moose River's several large tributaries, up its Nettogami tributary and over the drainage divide, Atkinson reached the southwestern shore of the above lake, now called Kesagami Lake. At this point he built his short-lived post that continued to be linked to Moose by canoes and winter sleds during its brief three seasons of operation. Fur returns from the post were small, and during the 1779-80 season, it was abandoned in order to better enable Moose to pursue its ventures up the Missinaibi River.²

Although not an inland establishment, Eastmain became Moose Factory's next subsidiary post when it was transferred from Albany's to Moose's charge starting with the 1780-81 trading season. Eastmain's own small dependent post at the mouth of the Rupert River was simultaneously transferred. A sloop continued to tie Eastmain

¹The story of the expedition above Brunswick is summarized in B.135/b/5, ff. 40-41d, Moose Factory Correspondence Book, 1776-77, John Thomas at Wapiscogamy to Eusebius Kitchin at Moose Factory, 19 August 1777.

²Returns from the outpost totaled 74 MB in 1777-78, 239 MB in 1778-79, and 36 MB in 1779-80. B.135/d/47 to 49, passim, Moose Factory Account Books, 1778 to 1780.

with its new parent post, and boats, often the sloops' longboat, provided communication between the Rupert River outpost and Eastmain. The trade from Eastmain continued to increase following its transfer, and in the 1784-85 season, its 7,267 MB trade was more than double the 3,346 MB trade of Moose.¹ Impressed with such returns and the prospects for a still further increase in trade at Eastmain, the London Committee directed in May 1786 that Eastmain be designated a full-fledged factory to serve the area of the Nottaway and Rupert River, and north toward Richmond Gulf and the Straits.²

Subsidiary Eastmain did not present transport problems as did Moose Factory's inland posts where dependence on Indian assistance in inland transport resulted in "no termination to expences, the duty ineffectually done and the Company's Property constantly plundered & destroyed . . ." ³ Insufficient manpower forced the chief to resort to Indian labourers, since if all-European crews were used, the factory would have been left almost defenseless, a tempting target for Upland Indians. Shoal water also plagued Moose's trunk route up the Missinaibi. This was especially true in the fall of the year when there was an attempt to lodge additional supplies after the arrival of the ship from England. In the fall of 1779 the boat was unable to reach more than eight miles above the factory

¹B.135/d/54, Moose Factory Account Book, 1784-85.

²A.6/13, f. 152d, London Correspondence Outward, Official, 1781 to 1786, Governor and Committee to John Thomas and Council at Moose Factory, 24 May 1786.

³B.135/b/7, f. 5, Moose Factory Correspondence Book, 1778-79, Eusebius Kitchin at Moose Factory to Humphrey Marten at York Fort, 6 December 1778.

because of shallow water, and that winter the chief had to dispatch sixteen servants and three Indians with sleds loaded with provisions to Brunswick.¹ Shoal water proved to be a major impediment to Moose's inland transport throughout the study period. Twin arms of that factory's inland transport line eventually reached up the Missinaibi and Abitibi Rivers, each of which drained small areas compared to the Albany, Churchill, or even Hayes Rivers. The waters collected within the 9,220 square miles of the Missinaibi River drainage and 11,300 square miles of the Abitibi River basin² do not give rise to large, deep rivers, and they are not as well suited to large craft as the trunk lines of Bayside ports which reached west toward and into the Grand Nord. Any transport advantage that may have been associated with the longer open water season inland from Moose was more than offset by the problems of shallow water, rapids, and falls on the major rivers in that region.

In the spring of 1780 the boat was again unable to reach Brunswick because of shoal water, and that open water season it required a shuttle of fifteen canoe trips and greater than usual Indian assistance to convey trade goods and provisions to the outpost. Canoes used were good for only two or three trips, and

¹B.135/b/9, f. 8, Moose Factory Correspondence Book, 1779-80, John Thomas at Wapiscogamy to Edward Jarvis at Moose Factory, 13 November 1779; and B.23/a/3, f. 6d, Brunswick [Wapiscogamy] Post Journal, 1779-80.

²Canada, Department of Energy, Mines and Resources, The National Atlas of Canada (Fourth Ed., Revised; Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada, 1974), pp. 15-16.

their procurement was "amazingly expensive."¹ At least two of the largest canoes were twenty-two feet long. Until it was destroyed by fire in the spring of 1780, the Missinaibi Lake post depended entirely on these fragile and expensive canoes.

Because of close proximity and regular communication with Albany, the chief at Moose was aware of the experimental use of bateaux inland from Albany and hoped that the greater expense of the Moose inland might be made manageable with craft of this nature. Impressed with the utility of such vessels, Chief Edward Jarvis wrote Hutchins at Albany requesting the loan of a bateau "not only as a model for our Shipwright to build one but likewise to the expediting the Fall supply to Wappischohamy . . ."² Chief Hutchins was unable to loan an Albany bateau as he only had two that were usable at the time. He did, however, promptly send "The Moulds our best one was built with . . .,"³ hoping it would allow the Moose shipwright to construct another. Unfamiliar with this type of craft, the moulds alone were not sufficient to enable the shipwright to build the bateau, and he traveled to Albany that winter to personally inspect one. In the interim, before building his first bateau, he completed a new upland boat, named "Gills endeavour" after himself, to replace the aging "Speedwell."

¹B.135/b/9, f. 37d, Moose Factory Correspondence Book, 1779-80, Edward Jarvis at Moose Factory to John Thomas at Wapiscogamy, 23 June 1780.

²B.135/b/11, f. 35d, Moose Factory Correspondence Book, 1780-81, Edward Jarvis at Moose Factory to Thomas Hutchins at Albany Fort, 30 August 1781.

³Ibid., f. 36, Thomas Hutchins at Albany Fort to Edward Jarvis at Moose Factory, 12 September 1781.

Work on Moose Factory's first bateau began in the spring of 1782. On 27 July 1782 the new bateau was launched and christened the "Expedition." Other bateaux were soon added. With crews of six or seven they and upland boats worked the Brunswick track, with the bateaux proving better suited to the higher sections of the river than upland boats.

Since the late 1770's, servants stationed inland from Moose had received forty shillings per year for residence, and a gratuity of three pence per score made-beaver. These additional bounties were not paid to Moose based servants who conveyed goods back and forth to the same inland posts. The smaller and more broken nature of the rivers tributary to Moose made these men's jobs more difficult than those working inland from Albany and in 1782 Moose Factory servants petitioned the council at the post to write to Company headquarters regarding possible payment of trip money. At the time, Moose's inland labourers were not entitled to the same few shillings per trip allowed those working on the Albany River. The captain of the Company's ship the previous year had reported difficulty procuring servants for Moose at the Orkneys, and evidently this was the major reason for the reluctance of Orkneymen to contract for Moose.¹ The next year the Company granted the same ten shillings per trip to those working the track in from Moose beginning with the next season.²

¹A.11/44, ff. 152d-153, London Correspondence Inward from Moose Factory, 1774 to 1784, Edward Jarvis and Council at Moose Factory to Governor and Committee, 19 September 1782.

²A.6/13, f. 73, London Correspondence Outward, Official, 1781 to 1786, Governor and Committee to John Thomas and Council at Moose Factory, 21 May 1783.

In 1784 the focus of Moose's inland transport and trade shifted from the Missinaibi to the then unoccupied Abitibi River drainage. That year Philip Turnor established the Company's first post in the long sought after Abitibi country.¹ The founding party of 12 Company employees, 7 Indian men, and 6 of their wives left Moose on 14 June 1784 in 2 bateaux and 4 large, and 4 small canoes.

Turnor, who had traveled up the Abitibi River as far as Abitibi Lake two years earlier, had suggested that boats could be used only on the first eighty miles of the passage. But after reading the journal of his trip to Abitibi, the London Committee, in 1783, still directed that bateaux be built for conveying goods all the way. Responding to this directive, Chief Thomas at Moose repeated that Turnor thought it unlikely that bateaux would be able to reach all the way to Abitibi, but that he would nevertheless build some to serve at least part of the distance.

The two bateaux used on the trip were completed in the spring of 1784. Both were specially built for service on the shallow and white water Abitibi River, and were lighter and smaller than those used on the Brunswick run. Despite their small size, Turnor doubted they could pass the first carrying place, but took "Tackles and Ev'ry Thing necessary for getting them over if Possible."² Neither craft reached their destination and were left behind on 9 July when

¹For a brief discussion of early interest and efforts toward Abitibi see Rich, Moose Fort Journals 1783-85, pp. 338-339.

²A.11/44, f. 182, London Correspondence Inward from Moose Factory, 1774 to 1784, John Thomas at Moose Factory 1783 to Governor and Committee.

it proved "impracticable to carry them any farther."¹ Although heavier than the other "Batteaux sterner Boat," Turnor felt the "square sterner Boat or Batteaux" was "Really a pretty Boat & works well . . ." and suggested that the mould for this one be used to make others like it.² The dangerous water conditions on the Abitibi also took their toll of canoes on the passage. The party lost several, and had to acquire replacements en route.³

In 1785 the temporary log structure Turnor had built at the junction of the Abitibi and Frederick House Rivers was abandoned, and the more permanent post of Frederick House was built fifty-two miles further upstream on the southeast shore of Lake Waratowaha. That year both bateaux and canoes were used to convey cargoes on the Abitibi track. Bateaux could be used only on the lowest section of the river, as far as Plumb Pudding Island, located 140 miles from Moose, and just downstream from Coral Rapids.

Chief Thomas was in favour of "laying aside the Battaux (for Abbitibi service) wholly" since they were usable on such a "trifling" part of the route, and were "more incumbrance than help on the

¹Ibid., f. 184, Philip Turnor at temporary post at junction of Abitibi and Frederick House Rivers to Governor and Committee, 8 August 1784.

²Rich, Moose Fort Journals 1783-85, p. 215.

³The largest canoe acquired en route was 24 feet long, 4 feet 2 inches wide, and 1 foot 9 inches deep. A.11/44, f. 184d, London Correspondence Inward from Moose Factory, 1774 to 1784, Philip Turnor at temporary post at junction of Abitibi and Frederick House Rivers to Governor and Committee, 8 August 1784. Two of the new canoes even had to have new bottoms en route.

Journey."¹ Small parties of two or three canoes each, he proposed, would be the best means of supplying Frederick House. During the remainder of the 1780's, bateaux assisted in carrying cargoes to and from Plumb Pudding Island, about halfway to the post, above which point canoes were the standard craft.

Thus, bateaux played only an ancillary role in servicing Frederick House, which was served largely by canoes, manned mainly by Indians, both men and women. Canoes for the service were usually supplied by Brunswick House, although others were also acquired at Moose and Frederick House, as well as en route between these two posts. Canadians in the vicinity of Brunswick were willing to pay such high prices both for completed canoes and birch rind, that it was difficult for the HBC post master to acquire either.

Although canoes built by Indians at Brunswick were up to twenty-five feet long, most were usually too small and slightly built to withstand the rigors of the Abitibi River. Turnor described the Brunswick built canoes as "not so good in comparison as brown paper" and reported that they retarded the Abitibi trips.²

Dependence on canoes meant a continued heavy reliance on Indians since manpower requirements of such inefficient craft exceeded the number of available servants, and even these servants were not expert enough to handle canoes unaided. Unlike at York,

¹A.11/45, f. 22, London Correspondence Inward from Moose Factory, 1784 to 1796, John Thomas at Moose Factory to Governor and Committee, 17 September 1785.

²B.135/b/18, f. 8d, Moose Factory Correspondence Book, 1786-87, Philip Turnor at Frederick House to John Thomas at Moose Factory, 19 October 1786.

natives who worked the inland routes were mostly Homeguard Indians, who often agreed to serve out of fear of displeasing the chief factor. As had been done at York, they received half payment before leaving, and the remainder on their return to the factory. Besides this direct cost, there was the associated expense of maintaining the Indians and their families while preparing to embark and awaiting canoes for the service. Also, Homeguard Indians working the inland had to be drawn from the Bayside spring goose hunt, an important source of provisions.

As early as 1785 Indians essential to the Abitibi transport began refusing to work the line "pleading Aches and pains brought on (they say) by exerting themselves in this business last Year . . ." ¹ Turnor thought it unlikely that Company servants would ever acquire the skills necessary to navigate canoes on the Abitibi River without Indian assistance and felt it was unfair to compare that river with those inland from York. Chief Thomas quoted Turnor as saying, "as clever as the Inland York Men may think themselves, they would be greatly at a loss in the Abbitibi river." ² Treacherous falls and rapids required that setting poles be used even more frequently than paddles. Thomas suggested that his men might be more motivated if

¹A.11/45, f. 46, London Correspondence Inward from Moose Factory, 1784 to 1796, John Thomas' Moose Fort Private Journal, 1785.

²Ibid. In 1782 Turnor described one ten mile section of the river as almost all falls with the banks twice as high as a flagstaff and so steep that he could not stand on the face of them. He wrote, "pray God defend me from seeing worse provided I preserve my life and eye sight." B.135/b/12, f. 29, Moose Factory Correspondence Book, 1781-82, Philip Turnor on Abitibi River to Edward Jarvis at Moose Factory, 3 June 1782.

they received the same average wages paid to those working the track inland from York, and proposed that the Company introduce boys into the service who could more readily learn to handle canoes and would be more inclined to remain in the country.¹

Chief Thomas saw little prospect for an expansion of trade in the Abitibi region until "some other mode of conveyance"² could be used. The London Committee still did not accept the reports of the unnavigable nature of the Abitibi and pointed out the success of the Albany traders who used Company servants and bateaux. In 1788 Thomas again wrote London regarding the impracticability of using bateaux on the Abitibi run owing to the difficult nature of the river and length of carrying places. Any attempt to employ such craft the entire distance to Frederick House, he pointed out, would take so long that all provisions destined for the post would be consumed en route. Still, he wrote that he would again try bateaux, "for it would very much hurt out pride to suppose that your servants at Albany could do any thing that your servants at Moose could not do."³ That next spring there was another attempt to use bateaux all the way to Frederick House, and this time they were unable to even reach Plumb Pudding Island.

¹A.11/45, ff. 46-46d, London Correspondence Inward from Moose Factory, 1784 to 1796, John Thomas, Moose Fort Private Journal, 1785.

²Ibid., f. 72, John Thomas and Council at Moose Factory to Governor and Committee, 31 August 1786.

³A.11/45, f. 112d, London Correspondence Inward from Moose Factory, 1784 to 1796, John Thomas and Council at Moose Factory to Governor and Committee, 7 September 1788.

The factory's complement of inland posts once again reached three when, during the summer of 1788, the new post of Micabanish Lake was established above Brunswick House on the lake of the same name.¹ Since it was already difficult to acquire adequate numbers of canoes and Indians for servicing Frederick House, it was essential that communication with this new post be by more efficient wooden craft. Two small light boats specially built for this service reached Brunswick on 10 June and the site of the new post on 10 July. Passage above Brunswick on this initial trip was slowed by the requisite clearing and rollering of launching paths at most of the sixteen carrying places. Warping, probably with tackles, and using accompanying canoes to work cargoes through bad sections, avoided the need to launch the boats at all these sites.²

After successfully reaching Micabanish Lake with his custom built small boats, William Bolland, post master, suggested boats used to supply his new post should be larger in every way, with a crew of seven instead of five.³ It is not known what sized boats were used the next two years, but their upriver spring trip above Brunswick required twenty-two days and eighteen days respectively, and the downriver passage six days both springs.

¹The post's name was later changed to New Brunswick House. The lake on which it was built is now called Brunswick Lake.

²The journal of the founding party is in B.145/a/1, ff. 2-8d, New Brunswick [Micabanish] House Post Journal, 1788.

³B.135/b/19, f. 28d, Moose Factory Correspondence Book, 1787-88, William Bolland at Micabanish Lake to John Thomas at Moose Factory, n.d.

Cargoes were both carried directly to the new post from Moose with bateaux and canoes, and ferried up from Brunswick where large boats and bateaux lodged their cargoes. Brunswick House became little more than a transit depot as fur returns at the post dropped dramatically from 1,383 MB in 1787-88 to 196 MB in 1789-90, while those at the new upriver post increased from 728 MB to 1,200 MB between the 1788-89 and 1789-90 seasons.¹

Fur returns from Moose and its dependencies for the years 1774-75, 1780-81, and 1789-90, as well as value and variety of trade goods at each inland outpost those years are shown in Table 9. Provisions shipped inland during three selected years are shown in Table 10. Comparison of trade returns with other Bayside posts and inland operations clearly shows the lesser trade volume generated by Moose and its small complement of inland posts. The limited size of the Moose hinterland, stiff competition, and fewer fur bearing animals than in areas further north and west, contributed to the region's minor importance in the Company's overall trade picture.

Geography of HBC Transport, 1774 to 1790

Richard Glover has compared the HBC during the pre-1774 period to a modern supermarket "which does not waste time on a fleet of delivery vans and drivers while its customers are willing to come and pick up their own purchases."² Following through with this

¹B.135/d/57 to 59, passim, Moose Factory Account Books, 1788 to 1790.

²Richard Glover, "Introduction" to Davies, Letters from Hudson Bay 1703-40, p. xxxiv.

TABLE 9

TRADE RETURNS AT MOOSE FACTORY AND EASTMAIN
AND TRADE RETURNS AND VALUE AND VARIETY OF THE
GENERAL CHARGE OF TRADE GOODS AT MOOSE'S INLAND POSTS,
1775, 1781, AND 1790 SEASONS

	1774-75	1780-81	1789-90
Moose Factory Trade in MB	5652	3782	3105
Eastmain Trade in MB	a	4611	a
Brunswick House			
Trade in MB	b	1102	196
Varieties Trade Goods		85	137
General Charge Trade Goods (MB)		3782	6319
New Brunswick House			
Trade in MB	b	b	1200
Varieties Trade Goods			150
General Charge Trade Goods (MB)			6062
Frederick House			
Trade in MB	b	b	1566
Varieties Trade Goods			156
General Charge Trade Goods (MB)			6119

^aEastmain not subsidiary to Moose Factory that season.

^bPost did not exist that season.

Sources: B.135/d/44, 50, and 59, passim, Moose Factory Account Books, 1775, 1781, and 1790.

TABLE 10

SELECTED PROVISIONS^a SENT TO MOOSE INLAND POSTS
DURING THE 1781, 1785, AND 1789 SEASONS

	Kinds and Varieties	Bacon (pounds)	Beef	Pork	Cheese (pounds)	Flour	Barley (pounds)	Peas	Oatmeal or Oats	Molasses	Malt	Sugar (pounds)	Rice (pounds)	Vinegar	Raisins (pounds)	Oil
Brunswick																
1780-81	30	272	143 pcs.	143 pcs.	65	8 casks	-	16 Bu.	-	553 lbs.	6 Bu.	18	-	2 gals.	56	3 gals.
1784-85	40	71	867 lbs.	190 pcs.	62	7 casks	-	8 Bu.	8 Bu.	1 cask	7 Bu.	102	40	6 gals.	50	11 gals.
1788-89	43	48	88 gals.	251 lbs.	60	2046 lbs.	80	32 gals.	48 gals.	521 gals.	64 gals.	76	28	40 qts.	56	13 qts.
Frederick																
1780-81	b															
1784-85	27	585	2 casks	274 pcs.	-	10 casks	-	5 Bu.	7 Bu.	11 lbs.	-	22	120	5 gals.	50	2 gals.
1788-89	38	863	30 gals.	75 pcs.	18	1825 lbs.	-	18 gals.	45 gals.	24 gals.	-	77	74	28 qts.	56	13 qts.
New Brunswick																
1780-81	b															
1784-85	b															
1788-89	33	52	20 gals.	90 pcs.	23	1347 lbs.	112	18 gals.	20 gals.	36 gals.	7 gals.	91	112	20 qts.	29	17 qts.

^aAmounts rounded off to nearest whole measure

^bPost did not operate that year.

Sources: B.135/d/50, 54, and 58, passim, Moose Factory Account Books, 1781, 1785, and 1789.

analogy, it was in the post-1774 period when competing convenience stores so seriously threatened the volume of Company business that it began experimenting with delivery vans, training its own drivers, and opening its own outlet operations.

Thus the year 1774 marked the beginning of a major realignment of HBC operations within Rupert's Land (Fig. 23). By the close of period the changed spatial strategy had led to a reorganization of the pattern of Company exploitation and settlement. After having clung to the Bay for almost a century the HBC's trade reached inland from three Bayside posts -- York, Albany, and Moose.

Given the difficulty of long distance, cross country travel within adjacent sections of the Hudson Bay Lowland and Shield, each factory developed a riverine transport system into the interior, following the natives' traditional routes. In terms of drainage alone the area tributary to York afforded the most developable space, and it was from this factory that the longest arm of transport and trade, equal to the combined lengths of both the Albany and Moose tracks, penetrated deep into the continental interior. This expansive potential direct trade area inland from York and within the Hudson Bay drainage contrasts with that available to Moose Factory, situated near the southern edge of the same oceanic watershed. It was this lack of potential hinterland which caused Moose to become the first Bayside factory to develop a major branched transport system.

By the close of the 1774 to 1790 period neither York nor Albany had approached their maximum spatial expansion. For these

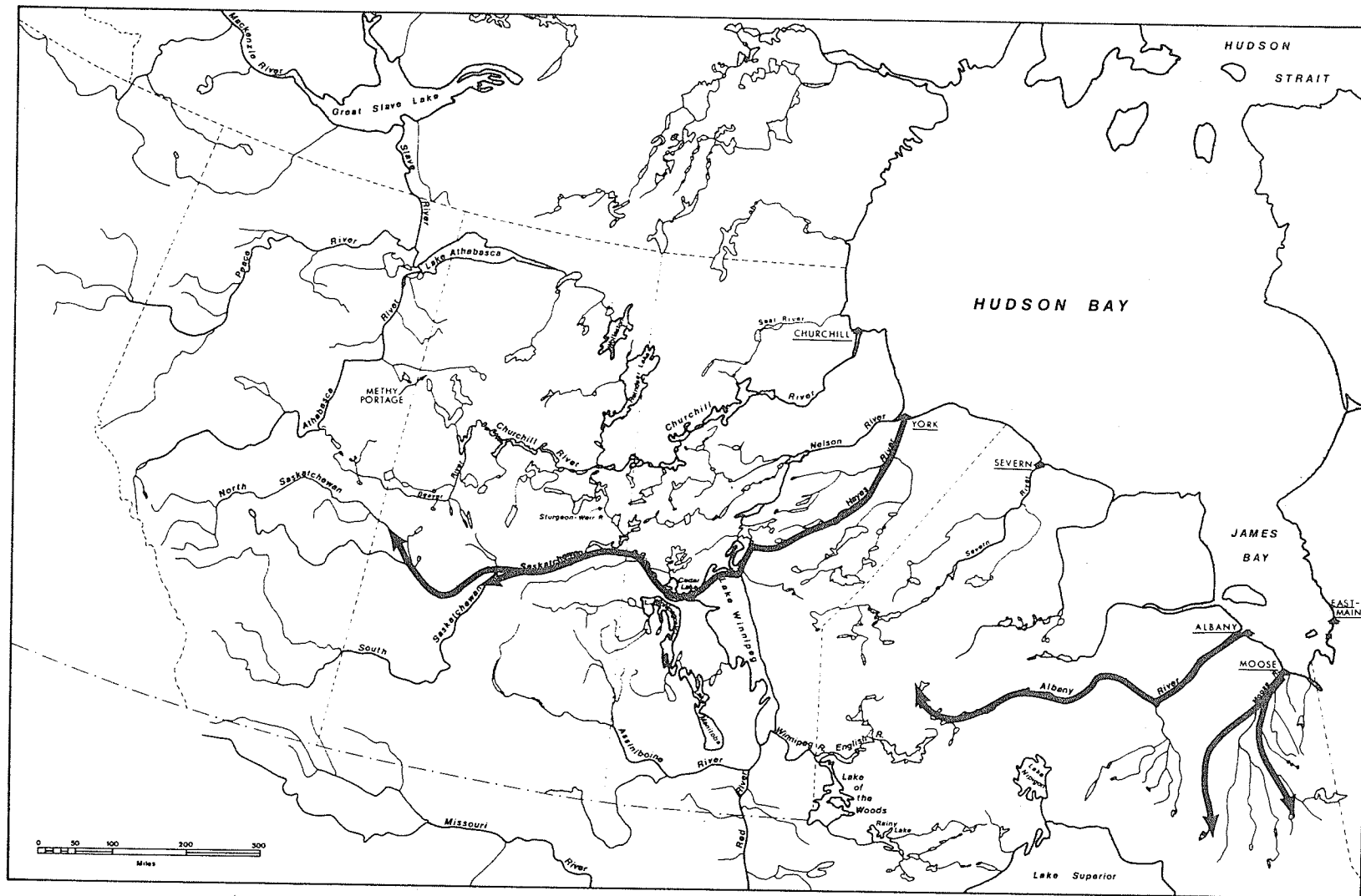


Fig. 23--Lines of HBC transport, 1774 to 1790

two Bayside factories this was an era of limited accessibility compared to subsequent inland development. Most activity was confined to a narrow zone along these lines of penetration, both of which lacked major feeder lines. Rather than building extensive inland trading networks during this period, both York and Albany adjusted to the new approach to the trade that characterized the following 1790 to 1810 period.

In the York theatre traders began acquiring necessary canoeing skills and, after having mastered the art of canoe building, developed larger varieties. York's adherence to these fragile and inefficient craft, while other factories with inland operations had shifted to wooden craft, can at least partially be attributed to York inland chief Tomison's bias for canoes. The assumed lack of navigability of rivers for wooden craft and problems associated with the experimental use of HBC boats on both the upper and lower York track in the 1770's and 1780's were additional factors in the continued use of canoes. Yet another factor in the longer retention of canoes as York's standard inland craft may relate to the access to buffalo provisions along the western end of the York mainline. Having reached the parkland belt early in its inland history, York traders were able to avail themselves of the abundant provisions of the region. Buffalo was the single most important source of meat, which not only provisioned men residing inland, but also those traveling to and from the interior. This contrasts with the traders working inland from both Albany and Moose, where lack of abundant country provisions meant proportionally larger amounts of European

provisions had to be conveyed inland, not only to victual crews traveling upcountry, but also to allow them to winter in the interior and to provision them on their return trip. While a more efficient species of craft would have improved the economics of the York inland, it may not have been as critical as inland from Albany and Moose where more efficient and larger capacity craft, necessary to accomodate the requisite large supply of European provisions, may have been essential for a profitable trade. Even with their access to the provision rich parkland zone, York traders, relying on inefficient canoes, expanded beyond their transport capabilities in the pre-1790 period, as evidenced by their repeated inability to carry all furs down to York.

In 1774 Albany already had a tradition of inland transport which dated back to the 1740's, and the factory's inland transport had progressed from small bark canoes, to larger bark canoes, to large, wooden barge-like boats. The adoption of bateaux in the early 1780's was merely a continuation of the on going process of transport innovation and modification that began in the 1740's. The adjacent post of Moose Factory benefited from Albany's previous experience and incorporated wooden craft, at least partly modeled after those at Albany, early in its inland programme. The savings in manpower and wages possible with boats explains the striving to use such craft in the Moose inland even though smaller rivers tributary to Moose were not well suited to such deeper draft vessels.

By the closing years of the 1774 to 1790 period the basic pattern of Company transport had consolidated, as if to mark the end

of the first phase of inland occupance. The pattern of Company transport became significantly more complex and expansive during the next twenty year period when Churchill and Severn began establishing their own inland outposts, and when both recently proven and new transport modes carried trade to new limits. The 1790 to 1810 period constituted the HBC's grand offensive against its Canadian opposition.

CHAPTER V

THE GRAND OFFENSIVE, 1790 TO 1810

The shift of the geographical balance of the HBC trading system into the interior gained momentum during the 1790 to 1810 period when six Bayside posts simultaneously either established or expanded existing inland trading networks. All except the move inland from Eastmain Factory are considered in this chapter.

In the first several years of the period Albany Fort more than doubled the length of its mainline track, pushing west into the southeast corner of the grasslands of the western interior. Served by bateaux except on the lowest reach of the Albany, this mainline fed several branches of trade in areas both north and south. In the far interior Brandon House served as headquarters for several of the branches including the distinctive one which carried HBC trade south to the Mandan Indians on the Missouri River. A significant adjunct to trade in the upper Assiniboine was the Company's adoption of two-wheeled carts.

York successfully extended its mainline track west to the foothills of the Rocky Mountains and thrust arms of trade into several adjacent areas, including the southern section of the Mackenzie River drainage. Significant transport innovations and modifications during the period resulted in a more standard and ordered transport system for the York interior, served by wooden

craft along most of the mainline. The success of the York traders and the resultant expansive port hinterland caused conflict with both Churchill and Albany when sections of the York trade area overlapped with areas claimed by either Albany or Churchill. During the period, even York's Bayside, subsidiary post of Severn established its own inland outposts.

To the north Churchill moved inland to establish its own series of inland posts. Relying almost from the start on bateaux, the factory quickly extended its line of posts west to the Beaver River valley in an attempt to push into the Athabaska region. Churchill remained unsuccessful in its effort to reach that region and was limited to trade mostly within the Churchill River drainage where York competition caused significant friction.

Further south in James Bay, Moose Factory maintained a near status quo in its interior. Restricted by the size of its potential hinterland, no major untapped areas remained by the 1790 to 1810 period.

Beyond the Albany River

Expansion inland from Albany Fort accelerated markedly during the initial five years of the 1790 to 1810 period (Fig. 24). From their mobile forward posts established on the upper Albany River drainage in the late 1780's, these traders, using wooden bateaux, crossed the divide separating the Albany and English River basins in 1790. Bridging of this strategic divide opened the door to a vast fur and provision rich interior region. Interconnected by virtue of drainage to the central hub of Lake Winnipeg, its abundant fur

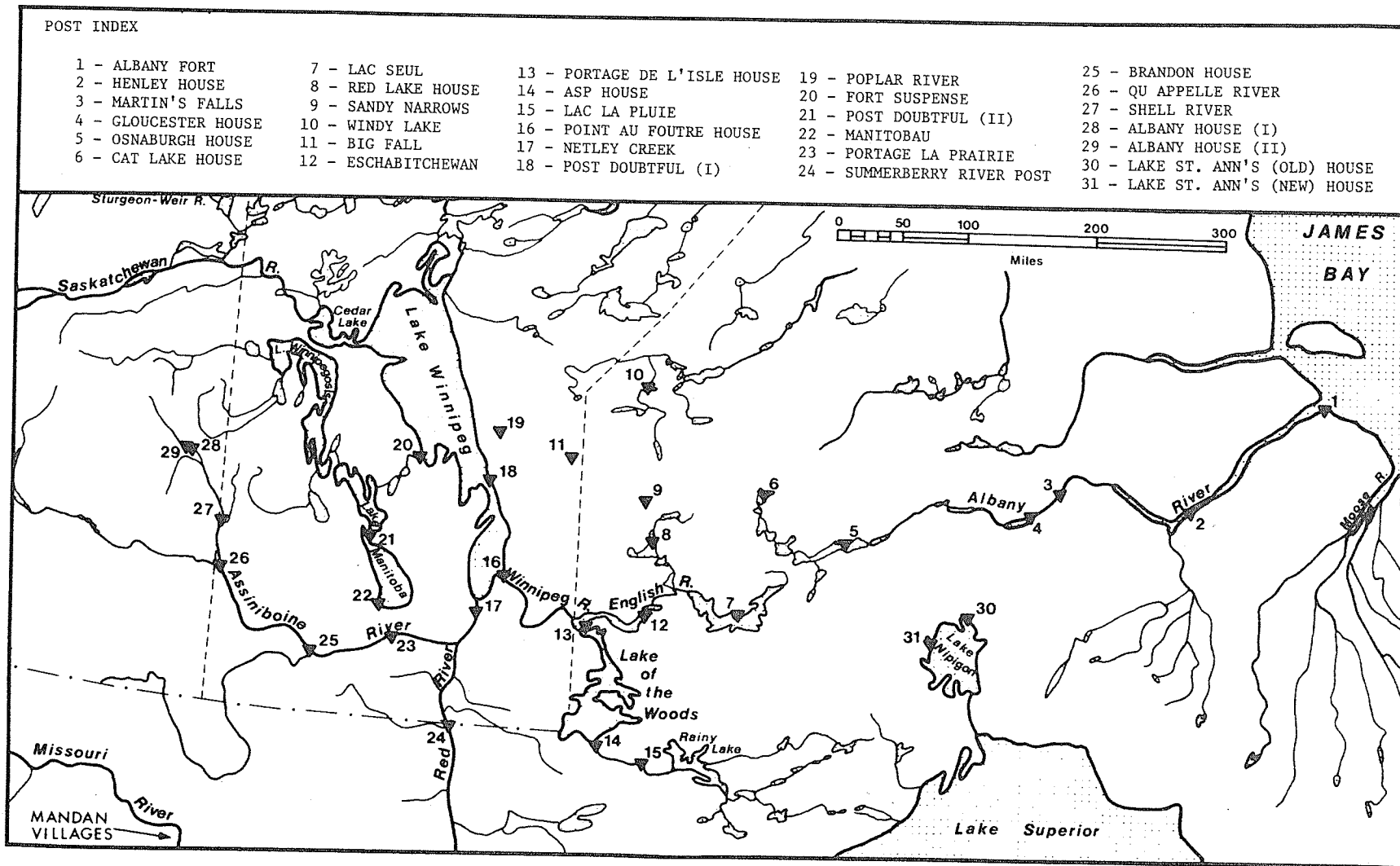


Fig. 24--Albany Fort and outposts, 1790 to 1810

reserves and ready access to provisions both justified the extended transport line inland from Albany and helped make such an extension possible. New forward posts were first constructed on the English River, the most westerly of which was located close to the trunk route of the Canadian opposition. On the south, Albany traders developed their first offshoot from their mainline, reaching beyond the Albany River drainage, and finally succeeded in settling a post on the long sought after Lake St. Ann's (Lake Nipigon) in 1792.

As impressive as this spatial expansion was, it was only the prelude to the even more dramatic extension of transport and trade which followed in 1793. That year, the Albany traders were able to establish new outposts on Rainy River southeast of Lake of the Woods, and leapfrogged to a site several hundred miles further west on the Assiniboine River, where they built the first Brandon House. Despite transport difficulties owing to navigational problems on the Assiniboine, Brandon House immediately became the operations centre for Albany's distant inland theatre. It became the nexus for its own trading network which soon included outposts further up the Assiniboine, on the southern shore of Lake Manitoba, and at Portage la Prairie further downstream on the Assiniboine River, as well as on the Red River. Brandon House also rapidly developed as the HBC's base of operations and jumping-off point for trade with the Mandan Indians on the Missouri River. This important offshoot of HBC trade, which carried Company operations out of the Hudson Bay drainage basin, was the first regular trade link beyond Rupert's Land. A significant addition to upper Assiniboine based trade was the Company's initial

use of wooden, two-wheeled carts in the interior, where their adoption was facilitated by the level, grassland environment and by the availability of horses which were then diffusing into the region in large numbers.

The HBC further consolidated its Albany to Brandon House mainline by building Point au Foutre House, later called Fort Alexander, at the mouth of the Winnipeg River in 1795. Unlike the opposition's adjacent post, which served essentially as a provision depot where passing brigades received buffalo meat obtained from the grasslands adjacent to the Red and Assiniboine Rivers, the HBC post was geared more to a direct trade in furs. As well as operating its own local outposts on an irregular basis, the post also served as the staging area for an independent, and little known thrust of the Albany trade into the Manitoba Lakes. Further east, along the trunk line which ran to Albany Fort, another unstudied appendage of the trade extended into the area east of Lake Winnipeg.

The Inland Craft

The swiftness and extent of the Albany expansion during the decade of the 1790's are distinctive in the annals of the HBC. By 1795, when Brandon House established its outpost upstream at the Indian Elbow of the Assiniboine River, the main transport artery stretching from James Bay to the interior was twice its 1790 length. The 1,500 mile-plus length of this communication line was not only exceptional for its protracted nature; perhaps even more unique at this time in the Company's history was its almost exclusive service by wooden boats and bateaux.

As previously discussed, with earlier extensions of the Albany track, the first bateau party to pass over a new section of a routeway had to roller portages for the wooden craft. It was this technology, together with the design characteristics of the craft, that permitted the Albany men to expand into the interior plains once they had crossed into the English River drainage. Thus, in the summer of 1790, when the bateau party under James Sutherland moved west to establish the new outpost at Red Lake, they rolled the main 810 yard portage separating the Albany and English River drainages with 463 rollers. The adjacent 84 yard portage required an additional 52 rollers.¹ Other portages above this divide also required rolling, and if figures for these two portages are representative, each required rollers at a spacing of about every five feet.

Donald MacKay's flotilla of three bateaux and two "N. West Canoes" passed over these portages in 1793 when they moved west to establish Brandon House. That season, while York was experimenting with its first wooden craft on the Hayes River, MacKay's craft were only a small number of a total of twenty-four bateaux used to either establish new posts, or maintain existing ones above Osnaburgh House.² Beyond the section previously traveled by bateaux, they also had to roller portages. In 1794 John Sutherland enumerated 80 carrying places over what he estimated to be the 1,316 miles from Albany to

¹B.177/a/1, f. 2d, Red Lake Post Journal, 1790-91.

²B.3/b/30, f. 57, Albany Fort Correspondence Book, 1792-93, John McNab at Albany Fort to John Thomas at Moose Factory, 25 August 1793.

Brandon House.¹ The Company's large investment of time and money in merely the preparation of the upper Albany track clearly suggests it anticipated returns from the newly developed hinterland would more than offset these initial expenditures.

Assuming that the Albany bateaux used above Osnaburgh House remained similar in design throughout the 1790 to 1810 period, a fairly clear picture of these craft emerges. In 1800 an opposition trader who encountered five HBC bateaux at the junction of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers wrote, "Their boats carry about 45 packages, of unequal weights, but averaging 80 pounds each, and are conducted by four oarsmen and a steersman. They are neatly built and painted, and sharp at both ends."² The Albany chief described one of his five man bateaux in 1803 as,

Keel 19 Ft. 6 In., of Main thaft 6 Ft. 3 1/2 In., of Fore thaft 5 Ft. 4 In., of After thaft 5 Ft. 9 In. Depth under: Main thaft 1 Ft. 5 In., After thaft 1 Ft. 6 In., Fore thaft 1 Ft. 8 In. Length: from Stem to Stern Overall 26 Ft. 6 In., Rake forward 4 Ft. 1 In., Rake aft 3 Ft. 10 In.'³

Peter Fidler described two bateaux built at Brandon House in 1810 as having, "Keel 22 1/2, 30 between both Stems, 2 ft. 7 in.

¹B.63/a/1, ff. 13 and 14d, Fort Ellice Post Journal, 1793-94.

²Elliot Coues, ed., New Light on the Early History of the Greater Northwest: The Manuscript Journals of Alexander Henry, Fur Trader of the Northwest Company, and of David Thompson, Official Geographer and Explorer of the Same Company (Reprinted ed.; 2 vols.; Minneapolis: Ross and Haines, 1965), I, p. 46 (Hereinafter referred to as Coues, New Light, I or II.)

³B.3/b/39, f. 37, Albany Fort Correspondence Book, 1802-03, John Hodgson at Albany Fort to John McNab at York Fort, 17 July 1803.

deep, 6 : 6 wide main thaft, 11 Inches sheer."¹ In an undated entry in his "Note Book (1794-1813)" he reported that a five man bateau brought inland from Albany Fort had a "Length of Keel 19 ft. 4 in., Main Thaft 6 ft., fore Thaft 5 ft. 4 in., Aft Thaft 5 ft. 6 in., three strokes from the Gunwail clinker built. Cargo 33 bundles of 90 lb. each. Provisions & Goods included[.]"²

These references show the Albany traders' bateaux used above the lowest reach of the river were approximately six feet wide at the centre, and only gradually tapered toward a pointed stem and stern. Usually manned by a crew of five, they had a cargo capacity of about 1-1/2 tons. Numerous accounts reveal they were oared, sailed, propelled with iron shod setting poles, or tracked with heavy lines. Other references substantiate their clinker construction. Such lapstrake planking represented a judicious compromise between light weight construction and structural strength. Overlapping planking required fewer frames, which reduced weight. It also permitted thinner siding than in comparable carvel built craft which further reduced weight. Lapstrake construction also produced a flexible, springy hull able to absorb severe shocks and twisting strains without separating at the seams. The resultant craft was thus uniquely suited to the rigors of passage through rapid strewn waters, yet light enough to be dragged around major navigational obstacles.

¹Peter Fidler, "Note Book (1794-1813)", p. 21, MS in the Public Archives of Manitoba. The closing date indicated for the notebook is probably an error as page 36 includes an 1816 entry.

²Ibid., p. 22.

In addition, substantially flat bottoms helped to assure shoal draft and navigability in shallow rivers and also facilitated rollering.

These bateaux were the standard mode of transport to most posts above Martin's Falls, which served as inland supply depot. To accommodate increased volume of traffic, the Martin's Falls post was expanded, and the nearby post of Gloucester House was abandoned following the 1794-95 trading season. In anticipation of supplying posts even further inland, the London Committee, in 1793, directed that Osnaburgh House also be rebuilt and enlarged "as it may be enabled to supply the distant Settlements that cannot come down so low as Martins Fall."¹ Although part of the supplies destined for the furthest inland posts were sometimes forwarded to Osnaburgh House in readiness for cartage further inland, each summer interior bateau brigades were still required to pick up most of their outfits at Martin's Falls.

Large craft used on the section of the Albany track between Albany Fort and Martin's Falls have been discussed previously, but later descriptive accounts provide additional information. In 1792 the Albany chief described three of his large boats as having 18, 12, and 4 ton capacities.² Eleven years later one of his successors described his largest inland boat, presumably used on the section of the river below Henley House or Martin's Falls, as

¹A.6/15, f. 51, London Correspondence Outward, Official, 1792 to 1795, Governor and Committee to John McNab and Council at Albany Fort, 30 May 1793.

²B.3/b/29, f. 41d, Albany Fort Correspondence Book, 1791-92, Edward Jarvis at Albany Fort to Albany Inland Masters, 14 May 1792.

Keel 36 feet, from Stem to Stern Overall 39 1/2 feet, of main thaft 12 Ft. 2 In., of fore thaft 10 Ft. 4 In., of after thaft 10 Ft. 10 In., each of the three frame floor timbers NB. The length of the Thafts & depth to Kelson will tell the lengths of these. Depth under: Main thaft to Kelson 2 Ft., fore thaft to Kelson 2 Ft. 2 In., after thaft to Kelson 2 Ft. 3 In.¹

The Brandon House Nexus

The westward reach of the Albany based traders was significantly extended with the October 1793 founding of Brandon House near the junction of the Assiniboine and Souris Rivers. Henceforth, Brandon House served as Company headquarters for the Assiniboine River region. It functioned as parent post for outposts which, at various times, included posts at Qu'Appelle River, Shell River, Indian Elbow, Portage la Prairie, Half-way bank, Turtle Mountain, and on the southwest shore of Lake Manitoba, as well as for at least two sites on the Red River above its junction with the Assiniboine.

The Brandon House trading network soon became Albany Fort's most productive. In its first season of operation, Brandon House and its first outpost, Qu'Appelle River, yielded returns of 1,166 MB.² By the 1798-99 season, returns from Brandon House totaled 8,023 MB, more than twice the returns from any of Albany's other inland posts.³ That year furs were collected at Brandon House as well as at outposts at Indian Elbow upstream on the Assiniboine, and on the Red River above the Forks. Trading expeditions to the Mandan Indians on the

¹B.3/b/39, f. 37, Albany Fort Correspondence Book, 1802-03, John Hodgson at Albany Fort to John McNab at York Fort, 17 July 1803.

²B.3/d/104, Albany Fort Account Book, 1793-94.

³B.3/d/110, Albany Fort Account Book, 1798-99.

Missouri River also supplemented returns that year, as they had done annually since the Company's first such expedition during the 1795-96 season.

Although less important in terms of trade returns than some of the outposts, the Mandan trade is distinctive in Company history, for it constituted the HBC's first regular penetration well within what became American territory, and provided the Company with firsthand information on the westward thrust by Americans up the Missouri River transport corridor. This HBC Missouri River linkage is considered in detail at the end of this section.

Transport routine and ancillary modes

Brandon House and its outposts received most supplies and trade goods directly from Martin's Falls. Even though some goods were forwarded to Osnaburgh House, the bulk of the cargo was loaded at the Martin's Falls depot, where fur returns were also deposited. Osnaburgh House was, however, considered the jumping-off point for the distant interior, and it was here that the daily journals kept en route to and from Brandon House usually began and ended.

A routine soon developed for the fall bateau parties traveling between Osnaburgh House and Brandon House. A flotilla of from three to five bateaux departed Osnaburgh from late July to early August. Passage to Brandon House required from six to eight weeks, with craft arriving between mid September and early October. The return spring trip to Osnaburgh House with fur returns usually departed Brandon House during the second or third week of May and arrived at Osnaburgh about one month later. En route, pemmican brought down from Brandon

House was cached at one or more sites along the route for use by the returning bateau parties. When the HBC's Point au Foutre House was operating at the mouth of the Winnipeg River, during the 1796 to 1802 period, it was the preferred storage site. In the interval between the arrival and departure of the Brandon brigade, furs were carried to Martin's Falls, and the remaining outfit conveyed upriver to Osnaburgh House in readiness for the fall trip and the start of the new trading season.

Each spring, outposts upriver from Brandon House conveyed their returns to the parent post just prior to the departure of the brigade. In the fall, supplies and trade goods were forwarded to the same posts after the arrival of the brigade back at Brandon House. Outposts downstream on the Assiniboine and Red Rivers, as well as the short-lived outpost on the southwest shore of Lake Manitoba, met the brigade en route to Osnaburgh House along the main track. On the return fall trip the Red River bateaux parted with the brigade at the Forks and, while in operation, trade goods and supplies were left at Portage la Prairie. All other outposts were supplied directly from Brandon House.

The main route from Osnaburgh House to Brandon House had only minor variance in terms of major alternate passages. Most notable was the Pinawa alternative to the main channel of the Winnipeg River. Passage through the Pinawa was preferable when the river was high and the main branch was treacherous. With its abundance of rapids and falls, this section of the main channel was appropriately called the White River.

John Sutherland, post master at Brandon House's first outpost of Qu'Appelle River, calculated the distance from Albany Fort to Brandon House as just over 1,300 miles, with the Osnaburgh to Brandon House section totaling 815 miles.¹ This distance by waterways from Osnaburgh to Brandon is significantly greater than suggested by a small scale map of the region. Many of these "additional" miles, which show up only on larger scale maps, are due to the extremely meandering course of the Assiniboine River. Travelers using the river frequently commented on its circuitous course and the resultant slow progress. John MacKay, master at Brandon House, considered the "crookedness" of the river as one of the wonders of nature, and claimed to have walked overland further in four hours than the bateaux could travel in two days following the winding course of the river.² John Sutherland felt it had to be one of the "Crookedest rivers in the World."³

The winding course of the river slowed travel times, but did not constitute an obstacle to navigation for the HBC's thirty-odd feet long bateaux. The bateau brigades usually floated downstream to the Forks and on to Osnaburgh House after snow melt and accompanying spring rains had raised river levels. This trip was normally made with little trouble. The return fall trip as far as the Forks was also routinely accomplished without major difficulty. Abundant areas of swamp and muskeg, and the numerous lakes in the Winnipeg and

¹B.63/a/1, ff. 13 and 14d, Fort Ellice Post Journal, 1793-94.

²B.22/a/5, f. 6, Brandon House Post Journal, 1797-98.

³B.199/a/1, f. 9d, Shell River Post Journal, 1794-95.

English River watersheds all serve as natural equalizing reservoirs which help to maintain water levels on these rivers during summer and fall. This and the rivers' relatively large size helped assure adequate water depth for passage of the Company's shallow draft bateaux. The size of the Red River alone was enough to assure sufficient water depth for its ascent to the Forks.

Once the Assiniboine was reached, the upriver fall passage usually became more difficult since high spring water levels are short-lived and summer precipitation amounts within the watershed are not large.¹ Because of a paucity of lakes in the basin, little of the precipitation is held in reserve to be released gradually.

Low water levels in the river during this season significantly increased travel time above the Forks. Slow progress usually always meant a late arrival date for the craft at Brandon House. Such delays upset trade, as many Indians took essential goods on credit in the fall to allow them to subsist and trap during the ensuing winter season. Non-arrival of craft late in the season tempted Indians who normally traded with the HBC to take their debt with the

¹Peter Fidler commented on the difficulty of this passage in 1808, "The red [Assiniboine] river is very shoal all the Way up in the latter end of Summer, that the Batteaux & Canoes have much difficulty in going up at that time even with 1/2 Cargo. The Horses meeting the Craft at the entrance of the Pembina River [Red River south of Forks]." E.3/5, f. 28, Fidler Journal, "Journal of a Journey from Charlton House on the Red River Six Leagues above the Elbow of the Said River, down it to its entrance into Lake Wennepeg -- & along the East Shores of this Lake, to its Discharge where the House, with the Celestial Observations for Latitude Longitude, Variation of the Compass &c. by Peter Fidler." Today at Regina, Saskatchewan, in the western section of the drainage basin, the combined average September and October precipitation totals only 2.07 inches. Meteorological Branch, Air Services, Department of Transport, The Climate of Canada, (Toronto, 1962), p. 53.

opposition. Such circumstances were maximized by the Northwest Company men who quickly spread rumors among the Indians that the HBC boats would fail to arrive, and they should therefore take their debt with the Nor'westers. To counter this threat, the HBC routinely sent men and horses to meet the boats at the Forks or at points further upstream on the Assiniboine River. They returned with essential cargoes before the craft arrived, and usually returned to the craft, which continued to be worked upriver, for additional goods. As well as providing Brandon House with badly needed items before the actual arrival of the bateaux, this system also served to lighten the craft. The upriver passage was thereby facilitated, and the bateau crews were provided with much needed foodstuffs, largely meat and locally grown potatoes. In at least one exceedingly low water year, shuttle trips actually emptied the bateaux before they arrived at Brandon House.¹

Parties of several men and up to fourteen horses, usually made two or more of these trips to and from the fall bateaux before their arrival at the post. This relay system, which was necessary in most years, required additional expenditures of men and money. Horses were expensive to acquire from the Indians, required feeding, and constant watch to keep them from being stolen by the natives. Their load limit was relatively small, usually restricted to two eighty or ninety pound parcels. In other areas of Company operation, similar transport stress had led to transport innovation and modification.

¹This was the case when the craft arrived at Brandon House in September 1807. B.22/a/15, f. 4d, Brandon House Post Journal, 1807-08.

On the Assiniboine, use of horses was an example of modification of more standard Company transport. When horses alone did not prove entirely satisfactory, the gradual incorporation of carts into this relay system was a logical development.

The first reference to a cart in the Brandon House post journal dates from 8 May 1804 when a man left the post with a cart to bring home six sturgeon.¹ No additional details on this early cart were provided. Post Master John MacKay was evidently pleased with the utility of his new mode of conveyance, and during the next spring, built another cart. On 3 May 1805 he recorded in the post's daily journal, "The Cooper finished what I call a Cart, it is not a Cart, but I have no Name for it."²

That fall a cart was used for the first time to carry goods between the post and the approaching bateaux. The river level was exceedingly low that year, the boats were badly worn from numerous launchings, and it even appeared that they might be unable to reach the post. On the fourth trip to the craft, which were then approaching close to Brandon House, a cart accompanied the men and ten horses. The party arrived back that same evening "with all the Cargo by having a cart with them[.]"³

These early HBC carts were not the first to be used in the Canadian West. The Company had used wheeled vehicles locally at Bayside posts during the previous century. French traders had also

¹B.22/a/11, f. 12, Brandon House Post Journal, 1803-04.

²B.22/a/12, f. 12d, Brandon House Post Journal, 1804-05.

³B.22/a/13, f. 10, Brandon House Post Journal, 1805-06.

evidently used wheeled vehicles in the western interior by at least the middle 1700's. Copies of two dispositions given at Montreal on 6 September 1817, and now in the Burton Historical Collection of the Detroit Public Library, suggest French carts were used in the western interior by at least the 1760's. Joseph Lafontaine, an old employee of the NWC, testified that fifty years earlier (1767) he had

passed by Lake Manitoba at which place he was surprised to see a caleche [open carriage] and several carts and also a hangard [cart shed] which he understood had been used by some French traders who formerly had a post at Portage de Prairies near the said lake, the remains of which were visible for many years after.¹

Testimony by another witness that same day corroborated this evidence. Carts were also evidently in use in the Saskatchewan River valley during the French regime. On 31 August 1808, Alexander Henry the Younger recorded that he camped on the site of the former French post of St. Louis "where some years ago were still to be seen remains of agricultural implements and carriage - wheels. Their road to the plains is still to be . . ." ² Alexander Mackenzie reported "wheel carriage marks" around the sites of the former French posts of Fort St. Louis and Fort Pasquia.³ Several authors have suggested that the basic design of these early French carts was probably markedly

¹Cited in "Summer Packet", The Beaver, Outfit 282 (June, 1951), p. 49.

²Coues, New Light, II, p. 482

³W. Kaye Lamb, ed., The Journals and Letters of Alexander Mackenzie (Toronto: Macmillan, 1970), p. 118n.

influenced by the carts then in widespread use in France, as well as other European countries.¹

Although the exact design and dimensions of these earliest of western carts are not known, much more is known about the subsequent NWC and HBC versions. Alexander Henry the Younger is generally credited with reintroducing the cart in the western interior in the post-1800 period. The first informative reference to these carts appears in the 1 September 1801 entry of the journal he kept at the NWC's Pembina River post. That day five small carts, each drawn by one horse and loaded with baggage and three packs, presumably 80 to 90 pounds each, left the post.² In a subsequent journal entry that winter he reported men went for meat with small carts, "the wheels of which are each of one solid piece, sawed off the ends of trees whose diameter is three feet."³ By the following fall, wheels were made with spokes, as recorded by Henry on 20 September 1802,

We have enough [horses] for all purposes, and a new sort of cart which facilitates transportation, hauling home meat, etc. They are about four feet high and perfectly straight, the spokes are perpendicular, without the least bending outward ["dishing"], and only four to each wheel. These carts carry about five pieces, and are drawn by one horse.⁴

¹See for example, Edward Van Dyke Robinson, Early Economic Conditions and the Development of Agriculture in Minnesota, Bulletin of the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, 1915, p. 32; and Grace Flandrau, Red River Trails, Great Northern Railway, n.d., p. 21, who goes so far as to state, "Patterned somewhat after ancient peasant carts of Normandy it testifies to the French descent of its inventors . . ."

²Coues, New Light, I, p. 186.

³Ibid., p. 191.

⁴Ibid., p. 205.

Cart design was quickly improved, and on 30 March 1803 Henry recorded in the Pembina River Post Journal that one of his men had completed "a real pair of wheels on the plan of those in Canada . . ."¹ In addition to improved wheels, these later Nor'wester carts were also larger, and were able to carry as much as four horses could. Since two packs were considered an average load for a horse, this suggests a cargo capacity of between 600 and 700 pounds. These were probably the earliest variety of what came to be called the Red River Carts.

During at least the initial years of NWC cart usage at its Pembina post, the HBC occupied an outpost on the Red River above the Forks, and would have been aware of this NWC transport innovation.² Even HBC employees who did not ascend the Red above the Forks might well have encountered the opposition carts, which by at least March 1803 had been sent overland from the Pembina River post on the Red River, to Portage la Prairie on the Assiniboine River.³

Carts were immediately incorporated into the NWC's regional transport system, and soon constituted an important mode of overland transport which complemented the company's watercraft. A complete lack of references to carts in the Brandon House journals for several years following their initial use by the HBC, suggests a less vigorous adoption of this new wheeled conveyance. Following the initial use of carts to relay cargoes from the approaching fall

¹Ibid., p. 210.

²The Brandon House traders sent their first trading expedition up the Red River above its junction with the Assiniboine River at the start of the 1797-98 season.

³Coues, New Light, I, pp. 210-211.

bateaux in 1805, there is no reference to a similar use until 29 September 1808 when three carts were sent to meet the craft.¹ Subsequent references to carts in the Brandon House journals are much more frequent. That same fall, Brandon House carts found new application when 3 were taken by 11 men and 14 horses to establish the new Brandon House outpost of "Manitobau", presumably on the southwest shore of Lake Manitoba.² The following fall three carts were again used to convey goods to the Lake Manitoba post, now called "Little Winnipeg."³ The Brandon House journal contains frequent references to cart construction during the winter of 1809-10. The next year, and in those years when Brandon House was in operation in the 1810 to 1821 period, carts continued to serve an important and increasingly more major role in HBC transport in the Red and Assiniboine River basins.

The Mandan trade

Beginning with the 1795-96 trading season, Brandon House became the staging area for a new branch of HBC trade which was so distinctive that it cannot be compared with trade at any other HBC post during the entire study period. On 12 November 1795, two HBC servants departed with a group of Canadians on a trading expedition to the Mandan Indians who resided in sedentary villages on the banks

¹B.22/a/16, f. 3d, Brandon House Post Journal, 1808-09.

²Ibid., f. 4.

³B.22/a/17, f. 7, Brandon House Post Journal, 1809-10.

of the Missouri River in present-day North Dakota.¹ By the middle 1790's the NWC on the upper Assiniboine had already established a regular communication with these natives dating back to at least 1790.² Post Master Robert Goodwin understood that buffalo robes, which were sold for use as cariole coverings in Montreal, were the Canadians' single most important trade item.³ Until this time the Canadians had been unopposed in this Mandan trade, and were not eager to have HBC traders tagging along "to see the country & what it produces."⁴ Goodwin had to induce them with liquor and ammunition before they would agree to allow HBC employees to join their trading party. After a six week absence, the HBC employees returned from the Mandans with 142 MB in wolves, kitts and buffalo robes, as well as two horses, for which they had traded dearly.⁵ Post Master Goodwin was evidently impressed with the trade prospects of this new source region, and in less than a week dispatched three men back to the Mandans with three horses and four dogs with sleds.⁶ Despite hardships associated with cold weather and lost horses, the party returned in early April with 120 MB and two Mandan horses. Goodwin

¹B.22/a/3, f. 8d, Brandon House Post Journal, 1795-96.

²This date is based on a note on Peter Pond's Map of 1790, Can. Arch. Rept., 1890, p. 53 which reads, "Here upon the Branches of the Missury live the Maundiens, who bring to our Factory at Fort Epinit [Pine Fort], on the Assinipoil River, Indian corn for sale, Our people go to them with loaded horses in twelve days."

³B.22/a/3, f. 8, Brandon House Post Journal, 1795-96.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid., f. 10.

⁶Ibid., f. 10d.

estimated that had it not been for "unforseen accidents" they would have returned with 300 MB or 400 MB.¹

Following these initial ventures in 1795-96, HBC trading expeditions were routinely sent to the Mandans. Men were sent each year throughout the remainder of the 1790 to 1810 period. Although the routine varied somewhat from year to year, the usual practice was to make two trips. The first party was normally dispatched from Brandon House in late September or early October, shortly after the new outfit of trade goods and supplies had arrived at the post. All, or part, of this initial party generally returned to Brandon House by mid to late December. By early January preparations were completed for the departure of the second trading expedition, which usually returned to Brandon House during March or April.

Both Company servants and Freemen conducted the HBC's Mandan trade. Freemen, who were equipped with HBC trade goods on credit, commonly traveled to and from the Mandans with one to six Company servants employed in the trade. Traveling between Brandon House and the Missouri, traders followed the Souris River as much as possible because of available firewood and protection afforded by the river valley. To avoid a westerly bend in the river's course, traders left the Souris and struck out overland, passing along the west side of the forested Turtle Mountains, before rejoining the Souris. Further downstream, east of present-day Minot, North Dakota, the river's course bends sharply to the northwest. Here, the route left

¹Ibid., f. 15d.

the river for the last time and ran south to the Missouri and the Mandan villages.

David Thompson calculated the one-way distance from the Souris mouth forts to the largest and most southerly Mandan village at 238 miles.¹ Delayed by bad weather on his 1797 trip, Thompson required thirty-three days to make the journey which he reported could normally be made in ten days.² John Macdonell, a NWC trader, likewise considered ten to twelve days winter march to be the average travel time.³ The standard mode of transport was by horse and/or dog, depending on snow conditions.

It is not possible to determine the value of each year's HBC Mandan trade since returns from Brandon House, its outposts, and the Mandans were routinely combined for accounting purposes. In some years, however, Mandan returns can be calculated from entries in the Brandon House Post Journal. Entries in the 1795-96 journal show a Mandan trade of 262 MB and four horses.⁴ That season the combined Brandon House trade totaled 4,207 MB, with the Mandan contribution smaller than in most succeeding seasons.⁵ Mandan trade contributed

¹Richard Glover, ed., David Thompson's Narrative 1784-1812 (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1962), p. 170 (Hereinafter referred to as Glover, Thompson's Narrative.)

²Ibid., p. 169.

³L. R. Masson, ed., Les Bourgeois De La Compagnie Du Nord-Ouest Recits De Voyages, Lettres Et Rapports Inedits Relaties Au Nord-Ouest Canadien (Reprinted ed.; 2 vols.; New York: Antiquarian Press Ltd., 1960), I, p. 272 (Hereinafter referred to as Masson, Les Bourgeois, I or II.)

⁴B.22/a/3, passim, Brandon House Post Journal, 1795-96.

⁵B.3/d/106, Albany Fort Account Book, 1795-96.

approximately 1,100 MB (and five horses) to Brandon House and outpost trade in 1800-01.¹ Two years later this trade contributed ten percent of the combined Assiniboine River trade of 5,486 MB.² In 1805-06 the 683 MB and 840 undifferentiated skins from the Missouri River trade added significantly to the Brandon House and outpost total of 6,399 MB.³

Although a regular and relied upon source of returns for Brandon House, the Mandan trade did not usually produce an overwhelming addition to trade. In at least one year, however, the Missouri River trade was vital to the Brandon House returns. The mild temperatures and lack of snow in the winter of 1799-1800 allowed buffalo to winter in the more open plains, away from Brandon House and the regional trading Indians. Without this important source of provisions, natives were engaged almost full time in trying to stave off starvation, and were not able to trap their normal supply of beaver.⁴ That season the Brandon House and outpost trade totaled only 5,559 MB compared to the previous season's 8,023 MB.⁵ After packing that season's disappointing returns, Post Master Robert Goodwin commented in the Brandon House Post Journal on 23 April 1800,

¹B.22/a/8, ff. 6d and 12d, Brandon House Post Journal, 1800-01.

²B.22/a/10, passim, Brandon House Post Journal, 1802-03.

³B.22/a/13, passim, Brandon House Post Journal, 1805-06; and B.3/d/117, Albany Fort Account Book, 1805-06.

⁴Rather than hunting and trapping beaver that season, natives frequented the post begging handouts of food.

⁵B.3/d/110 and 112, Albany Fort Account Books, 1799 and 1800.

"my trade would have been very little had it not been for my men going two trips to the Mandans."¹

To date, it has been assumed that British trade from the upper Assiniboine to the Mandans ended in 1807.² Even though there was a serious encounter with Indians that season, the trade was not permanently discontinued. On the return of their second trip to the Mandans in April 1807, six HBC traders were robbed by a party of over forty Assiniboine Indians. The natives stole four horses, stabbed two others, carried off part of the furs and all provisions and ammunition. Although a brief scuffle ensued between a few servants and natives, no one was seriously injured, and the HBC employees yielded to the numerically superior Assiniboines.³ Despite the loss of some furs, the Mandan trade still contributed 790 MB to the total 5,130 MB trade.⁴

Because of the possibility of renewed Indian attack en route to and from the Missouri, John MacKay decided against sending any HBC employees to the Mandans the next year. He did, however, outfit two Freemen for that trade, and they departed Brandon House in October 1807.⁵ The next spring MacKay first received intelligence that both Freemen had been killed by Assiniboine Indians, but later received word that one had died of consumption and the other was

¹B.22/a/7, f. 26, Brandon House Post Journal, 1799-1800.

²This notion was given widespread exposure as recently as 1970 in Ross, Beyond the River and the Bay, p. 129.

³B.22/a/14, f. 14d, Brandon House Post Journal, 1806-07.

⁴Ibid., passim; and B.3/d/119, Albany Fort Account Book, 1806-07.

⁵B.22/a/15, ff. 5-5d, Brandon House Post Journal, 1807-08.

afraid to come home by himself. The second report proved more factual, and even though the remaining Freeman did not return that trading season, he did return the next October, empty handed. Shortly thereafter, he was again outfitted with trade goods and sent to the Mandans in company with two Canadian traders. The party of three arrived back with five loaded horses on 15 December 1808.¹

In the fall of the next year three Canadians and two Mandan Indians arrived from the Missouri with word that a large number of American hunters had traveled up the Missouri River. The Brandon House post master decided to dispatch HBC employees with a supply of goods to trade with the Americans on their return downriver. On 9 October 1809, four HBC servants left Brandon House with the same two Mandan Indians for the Missouri.² They were not successful in meeting with the large party of Americans, but on their return to the post were forced to trade for 700 poor quality wolves by a group of Indians who threatened to plunder them if they would not accept their offer of trade.³

The next season, no attempt was made by the HBC to send even Freeman to the Missouri to trade. In the 1811-12 season the HBC combined outfits with the NWC in a joint trading expedition "for our mutual security, and to protect ourselves against the natives . . ."4 Each agreed to supply a proportion of the goods, and returns were to

¹B.22/a/16, f. 5d, Brandon House Post Journal, 1808-09.

²B.22/a/17, f. 7, Brandon House Post Journal, 1809-10.

³Ibid., f. 12d.

⁴B.22/a/18b, f. 7, Brandon House Post Journal, 1811-12.

be divided equally. On 8 January the entourage left, with the HBC servants taking four horses with sleds and four dog sleds to transport the returns.¹ On 14 March 1812, the combined Missouri River party returned with a "grand" total of 120 beaver skins, 4 buffalo robes, 14 wolves and 2 bear skins.² The traders found the Americans firmly entrenched on the Missouri and in a position to offer the natives "better encouragment."³ This last expedition marked the end of the HBC's attempts to maintain a regular trade link between the upper Assiniboine and the Missouri River.

Other Offshoots of the Albany Mainline

As well as serving the Brandon House nexus and its trade appendage in the far interior, the Albany mainline also served several important offshoots of the factory's trade. In the early 1790's HBC traders extended Company operations on the southern flank by carrying trade to both Lake Nipigon and Rainy River. In the middle 1790's annual excursions by Albany men extended trade into the Manitoba Lakes. By the late nineties Company traders had also established a regular trade link with the area east of Lake Winnipeg. Each of these offshoots was important from a transport point of view since each depended on the development and maintenance of tributary transport lines.

¹Ibid., f. 7d.

²Ibid., f. 12.

³Ibid.

The earliest of these major branches from the Albany mainline inland from Martin's Falls was that which extended Company trade to Lake Nipigon in 1792. During the preceeding year, two former Canadian traders defected to the Company's service. John and Donald MacKay gave Albany Fort additional inland expertise at a critical time in its frontier development. It was John MacKay who led the first successful HBC trading party to Lake Nipigon in 1792, and it was his brother, Donald, who established Brandon House the following year.

The track to Lake Nipigon left the Albany River west of Upashewey Lake via the fur traders' St. Ann's River. The route passed almost directly south through present-day Kagianagami Lake and into Lake Superior drainage and the north end of Lake Nipigon. Although the initial passage by Company servants in the late summer of 1792 was accomplished with two bateaux, large canoes replaced wooden craft as the usual mode of transport beginning the next season. The difficulty of the passage, which could take as long as thirty days for the one-way trip between Martin's Falls and Lake Nipigon, as well as the availability of relatively inexpensive canoes, were probably factors in this shift. Entries in the Lake St. Ann's Post Journals show the Company was routinely able to acquire three to five fathom canoes from natives at Lake Nipigon at a cost of from thirty to fifty made-beaver each.

The St. Ann's post communicated directly with Martin's Falls following the abandonment of Gloucester House at the end of the 1794-95 season. Its complement of seven to nine men accounted for

returns that increased from 572 MB its first season of operation, to 1,801 MB during the post's fifth season.¹ The greater returns this season were at least partly due to the operation of a trading outpost on the west shore of the lake.² Beginning with the next season the New House became the normal wintering residence, while the Old House at the north end of the lake was only occupied during brief periods in the fall and spring to give credit and collect furs from Indians who frequented that part of the lake. Although their use was limited on the route to and from Martin's Falls, larger and more seaworthy wooden craft were commonly used to ferry cargoes across the lake.

In the season following his successful inauguration of HBC trade on Lake Nipigon, John MacKay was entrusted to establish Company presence still further west along Albany's southern flank. The move to Lake Nipigon had been long anticipated by the HBC. Still, it could not rival the significance of the Company thrust into the Rainy River region in 1793. As well as providing furs, it was hoped that this new theatre of operations would also benefit the Company in other ways.

The founding bateau party departed Osnaburgh House on 13 August 1793 and arrived at Portage de l'Isle on 9 September.³ Beyond this point MacKay required the services of native guides, and since Company

¹B.3/d/103-107, Albany Fort Account Books, 1793 to 1797.

²Its first season the new post contributed 767 MB to the Lake St. Ann's returns. B.149/a/5, f. 18d, Lake St. Ann's Post Journal, 1796-97.

³B.105/a/1, ff. 1 and 3, Lac la Pluie Post Journal, 1793-94.

bateaux had never traveled this route, portages, such as Rat Portage at the head of the Winnipeg River, had to be cleared and rolled. After crossing Lake of the Woods, the party began the ascent of the Rainy River. Five days later they reached the site of the Pedlar post of Lac la Pluie. Donald MacKay had marked out a site for the new HBC post near the Canadians, but because of inadequate wood, the party moved back downstream to Manitou Falls, where they built their post of Lac la Pluie.

The new post was located astride the mainline track by which all NWC canoes entering and leaving the Northwest had to pass. Perhaps it was for this reason that the Committee hoped to be able to lure qualified Canadians into the Company's service. Canoes were another hoped for product from the new fort. The Rainy River region was an established source area for the Indian built canot du nord (or North Canoe) used by the NWC. Post Master MacKay was impressed by these canoes, and felt they would be a good replacement for what he understood were the small variety used in York's inland service,

[at York Factory] their Canoes I hear is by far too small in proportion to the people that works them. I understand they are 3 in a canoe and carries but 15 pieces in general. These canoes will carry 30 of our pieces which is much larger than any of the largest parcels at York Fort, and is generally worked by 4 men.¹

MacKay thought that if a qualified servant from York could spend a summer learning the necessary skills from local canoe building natives, it would be a great service to that factory. He balked, however, at being asked to supply locally built canoes to Company

¹B.105/a/4, f. 24, Lac la Pluie Post Journal, 1796-97.

posts further east along the Albany mainline. He argued that at Lac la Pluie a canoe cost 80 MB, whereas a similar canoe could be obtained at Lake St. Ann's for 45 MB to 50 MB.¹

As well as providing these above mentioned functions, the HBC's Lac la Pluie post was also to serve as a fur trading centre. During its four seasons of operation in the 1790's, the post averaged just over 1,100 MB per year.² In an attempt to boost these returns, an outpost called Lower House, or Asp House, was built at the mouth of Rainy River in the fall of 1794. The next season the Manitou Falls location was abandoned in favour of the new river mouth post, which was enlarged. Still, there was evidently occasional difficulty getting Indians to trap. As reported by MacKay, "they say; they have more profit making large Canoes for the Canadians than hunting Beaver in the spring."³

The NWC's Lac la Pluie post served as more than a source for furs and canoes. Its primary function was as break-in-bulk point and transit depot for the NWC's Athabaska operation. Describing his opposition's post in 1793, John MacKay wrote,

This post is not merely kept up for the trade it makes, its a randevous for the people of the Rabascow [Athabaska] and slave Lake as they Canot get to the Grand Portage and return the same year . . .⁴

¹Ibid., f. 24d.

²B.3/d/104-107, passim, Albany Fort Account Books, 1794 to 1797.

³B.105/a/3, f. 29, Lac la Pluie Post Journal, 1795-96.

⁴B.105/a/1, f. 6, Lac la Pluie Post Journal, 1793-94.

It was here that the canoe brigades from the far Northwest deposited their furs and picked up their outfits for the ensuing year.¹ With the Rainy River region so critical to the all important Athabaska trade, it is understandable that the NWC was not eager to have the HBC settled in such a strategic area. On several occasions the HBC Lac la Pluie bateau brigades found that the Canadians had burned rollers at their portages. However, when the Company withdrew from Rainy River at the end of the 1796-97 season, it was the intense competition for the meager fur returns of the area coupled with a general shortage of Company manpower, and not harassment by the Canadians, that prompted the withdrawal.²

Another interesting, short-lived, but usually overlooked offshoot of the Albany trade is that which carried operations into the Manitoba Lakes beginning in the middle 1790's. Evidence for this trade is scanty, but it appears that the first of these trading expeditions dates from the 1795-96 season. That year John Best, operating independently of the newly established HBC post at the mouth of the Winnipeg River, built Fort Suspense near the mouth of

¹Locally available wild rice was also given to brigades, but according to A. S. Morton it was held at the post for emergencies. Morton, Canadian West, pp. 347-348. HBC employees relied on wild rice both while traveling to and from the post and while stationed there. Natives were eager to trade wild rice they had gathered, especially for spirits and tobacco.

²Although the HBC did not resettle Lac la Pluie until 1817, the Committee had suggested as early as 1799 that the site be reoccupied at least during summer "in order to be before hand with the Canadians in buying Canoes from the Natives it would be attended with great advantages[.]" A.6/16, f. 69, London Correspondence Outward, Official, 1796 to 1803, Governor and Committee to John McNab and Council at Albany Fort, 31 May 1799.

the Dauphin River.¹ The Albany Account Book for that year credits the post with 1,591 MB that season.²

The next season Edward Clouston led a party that established Post Doubtful (I), evidently near the mouth of the Bloodvein River.³ This season in the southern Manitoba Lakes was even more successful, with returns totaling 1,720 MB.⁴ John Cobb was the next to lead a party into Lake Winnipeg during the 1797-98 season. Their destination was the Canadian post of Fort Dauphin. Since the sites of opposition posts in the immediate Lake Dauphin area changed periodically, it is not possible to decipher which Fort Dauphin was the goal. Cobb had heard that the post had traded upwards of 100 packs of fur the previous season.⁵

After reaching Lake Manitoba, Cobb was unable to engage an Indian to guide his two bateaux to Fort Dauphin. The party therefore opted for an alternative site that was reported to be only four days' travel from Fort Dauphin. The site was a place natives called "Manitoobar" or "Manitooba" in the Little Winnipeg, or Lake Manitoba, where the Canadian opposition was reported to have been settled for

¹Evidence for this is indirect and comes from the journal of a subsequent trading expedition into the Manitoba Lakes. B.53/a/1, f. 2, Post Doubtful Post Journal, 1797-98.

²B.3/d/106, Albany Fort Account Book, 1795-96.

³Evidence for this site is also indirect and comes from the journal of the trading expedition sent into the Manitoba Lakes the next season. John Cobb, the author of this journal, appears to have made an error that has bearing on this post location in an entry for September 16, which based on an entry of the previous day, should read "Mr. Clouston" and not "Mr Best." B.53/a/1, f. 2, Post Doubtful Post Journal, 1797-98.

⁴B.3/d/107, Albany Fort Account Book, 1796-97.

⁵B.53/a/1, f. 3, Post Doubtful Post Journal, 1797-98.

two years. The fort built by Cobb and his men was referred to as Post Doubtful (II) in the Albany Account Book for that year. This post was probably located near the Narrows of Lake Manitoba. Despite the local opposition, the new HBC post was able to collect 1,378 MB.¹

The Albany Account Books for the 1798-99 and 1799-1800 seasons credit Post Doubtful with 1,458 MB and 1,500 MB respectively.² Since this offshoot of the trade was not studied in detail, it is not known where this post(s) was located, or if operations continued on an annual basis after the 1800 season.³

Another branch of the Albany trade that requires additional research is that which carried trade into the area east of Lake Winnipeg. Entries in the Albany Account Books indicate that this region west of Cat and Red Lakes was developed as a distinct district, meriting its own account heading, in the 1796-97 season. Each year throughout the remainder of the 1790 to 1810 period, Albany traders were active in this east Lake Winnipeg region.⁴

Although several posts were built, many occupied on a short term or seasonal basis, the two major posts within this realm appear to have been those at Sandy Narrows and at Big Fall, or Great Fall,

¹B.3/d/109, Albany Fort Account Book, 1797-98.

²B.3/d/110 and 112, Albany Fort Account Books, 1799 and 1800.

³Since there are no other Post Doubtful Post Journals in the Company archives and Albany Fort Account Books for the years 1801 to 1805 are also not in the archives, it was not possible to make a quick check to see if subsequent Post Doubtfuls operated during these years.

⁴Returns from this area were listed under "Lake Sanderson" or "Big Fall."

on the Berens River.¹ Other more minor posts were operated at sites including Windy Lake, Rice Lake, and Owl Lake. Access to posts in this district was gained via the Cat Lake track, with bateaux operating out of Osnaburgh House as the standard mode of transport. Returns from these operations ranged from about 1,600 MB to 2,900 MB per year.²

The York Theatre

The pattern of settlement and transport inland from York Factory changed at an accelerated rate during the 1790 to 1810 period (Fig. 25). Several offshoots of the mainline carried York traders into new areas that included the Swan River-upper Assiniboine region, the Nelson or North River, and the Oxford and Merry's House areas. In conjunction with York's ambitions in the Athabaska, posts were also temporarily settled in sections of the Churchill River drainage. Unsuccessful in its attempt to maintain permanent presence in the Athabaska, York traders twice retreated after brief residences. During the period, York's inland benefited from greater transport organization and the adoption of wooden craft on both the York mainline and the track linking Severn with its new inland outposts.

¹The best single map for locating these posts is Donald Sutherland's "Sketch of Berens River District - 1819" in E.16/e/2, ff. 3d-4, Berens River District Report, 1819.

²B.3/d/107-125, passim, Albany Fort Account Books, 1797 to 1810.

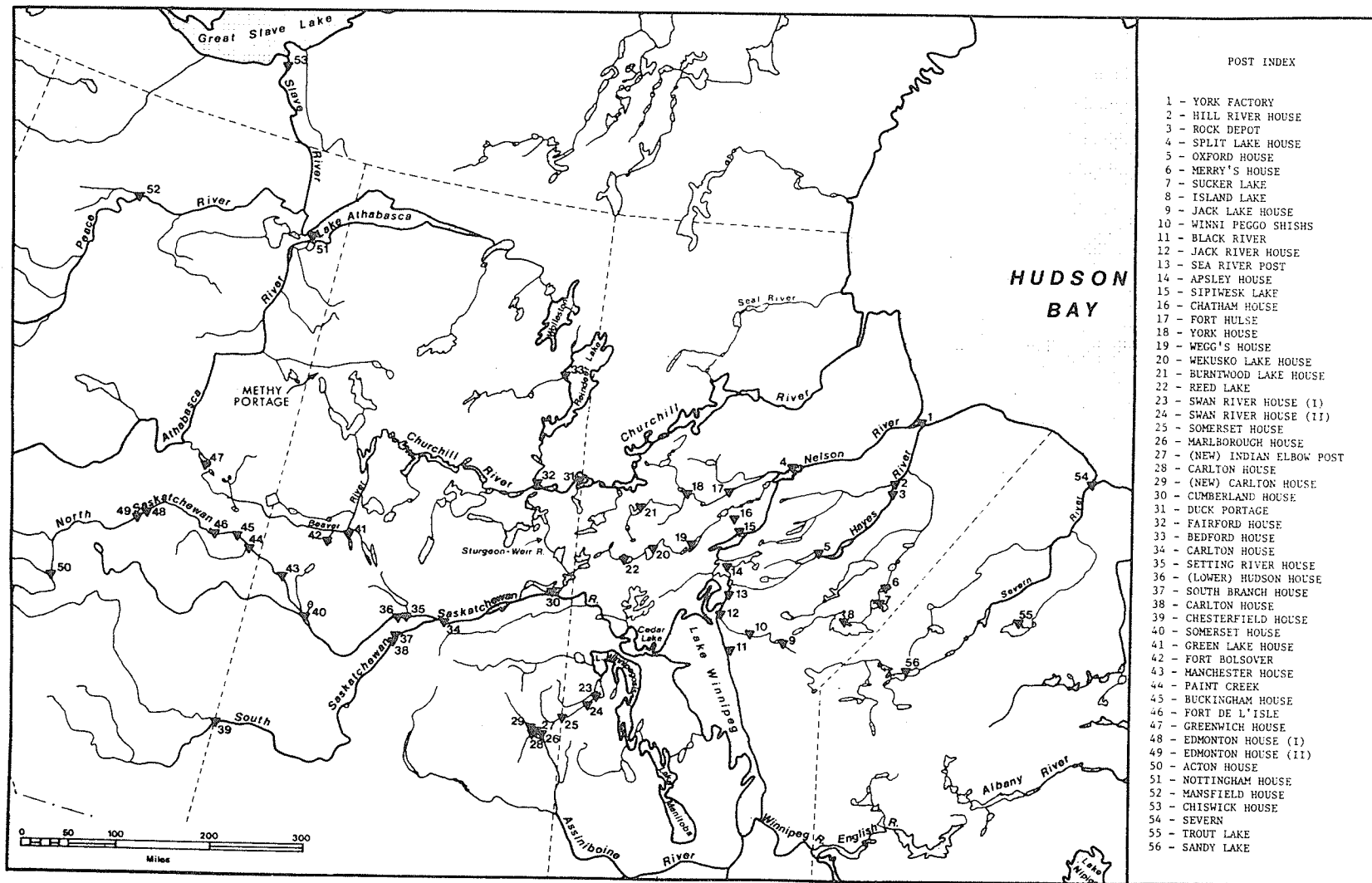


Fig. 25--York Factory and outposts, 1790 to 1810

York's Swan River District

Inland expansion from York Factory via a Lake Winnipeg-Cedar Lake-Mossy Portage¹-Lake Winnipegosis route produced the first HBC post in the area southwest of the Manitoba Lakes in 1790. That fall, as instructed, Charles Isham and his party of four large canoes chose a site on the Swan River for their new post of the same name. Had it not been for specific orders, he would have continued on another three days' travel to a better location on the Assiniboine River.² It was not, however, until the fourth season that York traders carried trade over the divide into the Assiniboine drainage, where they not only competed against Canadian traders, but also against their fellow employees from Albany Fort.

In addition to producing furs like most other posts, it was expected that new Swan River House would also become a supply centre for large bark canoes needed by the upper settlements.³ During the post's second season Resident Joseph Colen at York instructed Isham to bring down two "large luggage Canoes the same as Canadians use . . ."⁴ Colen was convinced that such craft, which could carry

¹In 1795 while traveling over this portage, which crossed the narrow of land separating Cedar Lake and Lake Winnipegosis, Peter Fidler measured its length at four miles 180 yards. B.3/2, f. 39d, Fidler Journal, "A Journal from the Long Point Cedar Lake, to Swan River House, Somerset & Carlton Houses - also the upper parts of the Red River, in 1795 by Peter Fidler."

²B.213/a/1, f. 5, Swan River House Post Journal, 1790-91.

³B.239/b/51, f. 20d, York Factory Correspondence Book, 1790-91, Joseph Colen at York Fort to William Jefferson at Churchill Factory, 25 July 1791.

⁴B.239/a/92, f. 42, York Factory Post Journal, 1791-92.

twice the quantity of goods as any other canoe then in York's inland service, would be a useful addition. Even though the Company's canoes were one-third larger than they had been only six years earlier, they were still inadequate.

Although the Swan River post was eventually able to supply some canoes, the number was minor relative to York's demands.¹ The major product of the new Swan River operation remained furs. In its first season of operation the post produced 2,364 MB.² The second season it produced upwards of 7,500 MB, of which 2,100 MB had to be left at the post because of the lack of sufficient numbers of men and canoes to convey all returns to York.³ On 29 June 1793, at the end of the 1792-93 trading year, Isham and eighteen men arrived at York Factory in six large canoes from Swan River with the product of that year's trade. The approximately 4,000 MB take that season was significantly less than the previous year.⁴ When Isham and his party embarked for their winter station on 20 July, they had instructions

¹During its first season three canoes were built at Swan River House, one of which was sent to Cumberland House for the use of that post in conveying its furs down to York that spring. A.11/117, f. 98, London Correspondence Inward from York Factory, 1787 to 1797, Charles Isham at York Factory to Governor and Committee, 20 July 1791. The three canoes built at Swan River were part of a total of thirteen canoes built by Company servants in York's inland that season. *Ibid.*, f. 123, Joseph Colen and Council at York Factory to Governor and Committee, 26 September 1791.

²B.239/b/51, f. 19, York Factory Correspondence Book, 1790-91, Joseph Colen at York Factory to John Ballenden at Severn, 25 July 1791.

³B.239/b/52, f. 15, York Factory Correspondence Book, 1791-92, Joseph Colen at York Factory to John Ballenden at Severn, 9 July 1792.

⁴B.239/a/95, ff. 35d-36, York Factory Post Journal, 1792-93.

to build a trading house on the Assiniboine River where Canadians had been reportedly intercepting trade destined for Swan River.¹

At their closest point, the Assiniboine and Swan Rivers pass within about ten miles of each other. This proximity occurs at the Indian Elbow of the Assiniboine, where the river bends sharply to the north. Still, passing between the two rivers did not merely require a ten mile cross-country transit. Shoal water above Swan River House ruled out navigation beyond a short distance above that post. Thus, when Isham and his party of eight men left Swan River House in September 1793 to build a post on the Assiniboine, their cargo was carried by six horses.²

The site chosen for the new outpost of Marlborough House was at the Indian Elbow of the Assiniboine. Several trips were required to convey up necessary trade goods and stores, some on "Stone Indian sleds" hauled by horses.³ Before the end of October, men who returned to Swan River for goods brought with them dried meat acquired at the new outpost, which was situated on the northern edge of the parkland vegetation belt with its seasonal buffalo herds. During snow season this linkage was maintained by dogs and sleds. Thus, in addition to providing furs, the upper Assiniboine trade fed itself, as well as provisioned Swan River House and Somerset House, established further upstream on the Swan River the next year. When the canoe flotilla left Swan River House for York Factory in the spring

¹Ibid., f. 40.

²B.213/a/5, f. 2, Swan River House Post Journal, 1793-94.

³Ibid., f. 4.

of 1794, there was no need to send men to Cumberland House to pick up pemmican for the trip down as they had the previous season.

The next season the York traders temporarily retreated from the Assiniboine River and operated from the new forward post of Somerset House on the Swan River. In the 1795-96 season this new post served as a jumping-off point for Charles Isham, Peter Fidler, and the party of ten men and seven horses which re-established York's presence on the upper Assiniboine. They crossed to this river and followed it upstream for a distance of five miles to where they found Canadian traders building a post. Isham opted for the same site and built his new post of Carlton House 150 yards from the Canadians.¹ That winter using dogs and sleds, an almost constant communication was maintained between the three Swan River district posts, with Somerset serving as way station. Furs and dry provisions were shuttled from Carlton House, and trade goods were conveyed from Swan River House. One-way travel time between Somerset and Carlton was about two days.

The potential for trade rivalry with Albany Fort traders operating on the upper Assiniboine was realized with York's initial penetration into that river valley. In July 1794 Colen at York wrote to Donald MacKay, who had constructed Brandon House the previous year, offering to withdraw his traders from the Assiniboine "Should it be found on tryal that goods can be conveyed with greater facility from the Hon^ble Companys Settlements in the Bay -- to Red

¹B.28/a/1, f. 3, Carlton House Post Journal, 1795-96.

[Assiniboine] river than from this place . . ."¹ He advised the two post masters to consult with each other to determine the best approach to serving that inland quarter.

In the 1795-96 season competition between York and Albany traders reached unacceptable levels. Before leaving Somerset House in October 1795 to build Carlton House, Charles Isham heard an Indian report that a Mr. Sutherland from Albany Fort was ascending the Assiniboine River with two bateaux, and was already well above his Shell River trading site of the previous season.² After arriving at the Assiniboine and beginning construction of his new post of Carlton House later in October, Isham heard Indian reports that Sutherland had ascended as far upriver as the vicinity of old Marlborough House, where he planned to erect a trading post.³

In December 1795, Isham and Peter Fidler left Carlton House to visit Sutherland at his new Indian Elbow post. Fidler estimated the distance from Carlton to the Elbow at nearly fifteen miles.⁴

¹B.239/b/55, f. 21, York Factory Correspondence Book, 1793-94, Joseph Colen at York Factory to Donald MacKay at Brandon House, 18 July 1794. Interestingly, he asked MacKay in the same letter if he could tell Isham how to obtain "Cedar built Canoes" which were "much wanted" in York's inland. Ibid.

²B.28/a/1, f. 2d, Carlton House Post Journal, 1795-96.

³Ibid., f. 3. The Elbow marked the head of navigation for larger craft on the Assiniboine River. According to Peter Fidler there was "no passage for loaded or half Loaded Canoes above the Elbow . . ." E.3/2, f. 45d, Fidler Journal, "A Journal from the Long Point Cedar Lake, to Swan River House, Somerset & Carlton Houses - also the upper parts of the Red River, in 1795 by Peter Fidler."

⁴E.3/2, f. 45d, Fidler Journal, "A Journal from the Long Point Cedar Lake, to Swan River House, Somerset & Carlton Houses - also the upper parts of the Red River, in 1795 by Peter Fidler."

Such proximity meant unavoidable intra-Company competition. Later that season in May, Isham wrote to the York resident regarding what he felt was an unacceptable situation,

Mr. John Sutherland from Albany came up the Red [Assiniboine] River last fall and wintered at the elbow of the said river, where I did in 1793 -- he says, he shall be up again this Summer with at least four Batteaux -- and it is obvious that the Trade in these parts can be carried on to greater advantage from Albany than York, as they land their Goods by Water at their Door and we have at least 120 miles to transport every thing overland -- and this Summer the Canadians are going to build about 40 miles higher up the river than before -- therefore I think the men that are stationed at Swan river could be employed to much more advantage to the Company by sending them up the Saskechewan or to the Northward, than Keeping them at this place where there is scarce any thing to be got.¹

After receiving Isham's correspondence Colen replied in July that year,

As it is not my Wish to oppose any of the Honble Company's Servants in any Quarter -- & by your own Account Craft can be navigated with ease from Albany to red [Assiniboine] River where you procured most of your Furs, I think it will be [illegible] the Benefit of our Employers that you withdraw from Swan River.²

When Post Master James Sutherland at Brandon House heard that the York traders had been instructed to withdraw from the upper Assiniboine, he quickly sent correspondence to John Sutherland at his Indian Elbow outpost instructing him to ask the York traders to continue operations in the district for at least another year or two. Given the "want of men from Europe and propper regulations [in the Albany inland] . . .", James Sutherland thought it would be "highly

¹B.28/a/1, f. 27d, Carlton House Post Journal, 1795-96. Isham reported that year there were seven different houses in opposition, and that next year trade would probably be less. Ibid., f. 27.

²B.239/b/57, f. 23d, York Factory Correspondence Book, 1795-96, Joseph Colen at York Factory to Charles Isham at Swan River House, 9 July 1796.

detrimental to the Companys Trade" if York Factory withdrew from the district before Albany was in a position to "supply their place."¹

Both York and Albany continued operations on the upper Assiniboine. In early 1798 Robert Longmoor, post master at York's Carlton House, complained in his daily journal of the Albany opposition at the Elbow who were collecting his Indian debt and behaving in "a worse manner than a Canadian."² This journal was shipped to the London Committee later that year. The next year the Governor and Committee sent sharply worded correspondence to John McNab and the council at Albany which stated, "It has been our invariable orders, and we are almost tired with repeating them, that our several Factories should pursue different directions in their Journies Inland, & by no means interfere with the trade of each other."³ Faced with the continued unfavourable economics of overlapping port hinterlands, the Company headquarters wanted the situation rectified immediately. This unacceptable situation was remedied at the end of the 1799-1800 trading year when York, not Albany, temporarily retreated from the district.

The withdrawal of the York traders from the upper Assiniboine seems to illustrate the friction of cross-country travel. Though

¹B.22/a/4, f. 27, Brandon House Post Journal, 1796-97, James Sutherland at Brandon House to John Sutherland at Indian Elbow, n.d., sent 4 January 1797.

²B.28/a/4, f. 9d, Carlton House Post Journal, 1797-98.

³A.6/16, p. 111, London Correspondence Outward, Official, 1796 to 1803, cited in Alice Johnson, "Introduction" to Alice Johnson, ed., Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1967), p. xlvii.

the physical distance between York and the upper Assiniboine was less than between Albany and that region, the more important economic distance was greater. Still, as mentioned above, this retreat by York was temporary, and in February 1807, Chief John McNab at York wrote his counterpart at Albany informing him that men would be sent that summer to resettle Swan River and the Indian Elbow.¹

The York-Albany rivalry was renewed later that season when Peter Fidler took charge of York's new Swan River post and Thomas Swain assumed command of the new Indian Elbow post.² The reappearance of the York traders in the upper Assiniboine irritated Post Master John MacKay at Brandon House, especially since Brandon had its own outpost upstream near Shell River. MacKay was probably especially perturbed that season when Thomas Swain arrived at Brandon House to acquire supplies for Peter Fidler at Swan River. Later that season he wrote in the Brandon House Post Journal,

I do not think its the Canadians we mean to oppose, its ourselves. I knocked down the Elbow its true because the natives had left their lands for a while. that the Beaver might Store. the Canadians left it likewise. I little thought the York people was waiting for dead mens Shoes.³

¹B.239/b/74, pp. 13-14, York Factory Correspondence Book, 1806-07, John McNab at York Factory to John Hodgson at Albany Fort, 27 February 1807. In the same letter McNab complained of the presence of an Albany trader at Poplar River, "a spot we can reach in few less days than you can week[s]." Ibid., p. 13.

²The new Swan River House was re-established further up the Swan River than the original post of that name. E. E. Rich, ed., Journal of Occurances in the Athabaska Department by George Simpson, 1820 and 1821 (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1938), p. 425 (Hereinafter referred to as Rich, Athabaska Department.) According to John MacKay, at Brandon House, the new York post on the Assiniboine was actually eighteen miles above the turn of the Elbow. B.22/a/15, f. 7, Brandon House Post Journal, 1807-08.

³B.22/a/15, f. 9d, Brandon House Post Journal, 1807-08.

York continued operations in the Swan River-upper Assiniboine region throughout the remainder of the 1790 to 1810 period. A total of thirteen or fourteen men were divided between the two posts annually, with nine or ten stationed at the Indian Elbow post, which supplied most of the furs, as well as provisions.¹ Combined returns from the two posts totaled 973 MB, 705 MB, and 1,480 MB respectively, during the final three seasons of this period.² Swan River district trade was not critical to York Factory, since it was merely a minor offshoot of York's much more major westerly mainline advance up the Saskatchewan River.

The York Mainline

Boats, bateaux, and depots

Although by the 1790's York had finally succeeded in developing its own corps of skilled canoe men, canoes available to the HBC still proved to be inefficient for freighting large cargoes, lacked durability, and were thus frequently in short supply. York's inland transport was not only hampered by inappropriate craft; it also lacked adequate organization. Lengthening transport lines and an expanded network of posts continued to be serviced by essentially the same craft and routine used to support Cumberland House when it was York's only inland post more than a decade earlier.

¹B.239/d/142, f. 13, York Factory Account Book, 1808-09, No.2; and B.239/d/145, f. 12, York Factory Account Book, 1809-10, No. 2.

²B.239/d/138, 141, and 144b, passim, York Factory Account Books, 1807-08, 1808-09, and 1809-10.

For York, the twenty year period following 1790 brought major changes along its mainline track into the western interior. Before York could hope to compete more effectively against its Canadian opposition, it had to improve its inland transport system. Even though boats and/or bateaux were used inland from York as early as the 1780's, their use was limited. Canoes remained the standard means of transport until the mid 1790's, at which time dramatic changes were made in both the mode and organization of transportation inland from York Factory.

Joseph Colen, resident at York, must be given much of the credit for the first successful major transport advances on York's inland track. His persistence, coupled with his innovative zeal for improved transport, produced major changes by the early 1790's. In 1790 Colen indented for a flat-bottom boat for use on the lowest reach of the Hayes River. When the craft did not arrive on the ship from England the next year, he again indented, this time for two flat-bottomed boats. The largest was described as a "Boat flat Bottom" and was to be "36 ft. long, 8 ft. wide boble Bow as indented for last Year, to be sent out in frame & to draw not more than 18 or 20 Inches water when loaded." The other craft was also to be a "Boat flat Bottom" but somewhat smaller, at "30 ft. long, 7 ft. wide, as light as possible."¹

Since the boat ordered the preceeding year had not arrived by late summer of 1791, Colen had to delay his plans for modifying York's

¹A.11/117, f. 85d, London Correspondence Inward from York Factory, 1787 to 1797, "York Factory Indent 1791."

inland transport system one more year. His September 1791 correspondence to London provides details on his proposed changes.¹

Central to his plan were the segmentation of the mainline track and the introduction of wooden boats on at least the lowest section. If the requested boat arrived, Colen had planned the next spring to build a depot at the first fall in Hill River, a section of today's Hayes River from its junction with the Fox River upstream to Swampy Lake.² The lowest section of the Hayes River flows across the sedimentary rocks of the Hudson Bay Lowland and is free of rapids for the last 120 miles of its course. At this distance inland the first fall and first portage on the river mark the contact between the more easily eroded carbonate strata of the Lowland and the resistant Shield rocks. Upstream between this point and Knee Lake are most of the rapids and portages on the Hayes. It was on the lowest section, below the first fall, that Colen planned to use his large wooden boat to shuttle cargoes between York and the new depot, just as wooden craft already shuttled cargoes to the depots of Henley

¹Ibid., ff. 114-116d, Joseph Colen at York Factory to Governor and Committee, 24 September 1791.

²Regarding the name of this river Peter Fidler wrote in 1792, "a hill appears on the SE side, near the river, quite round & prominent & about 950 feet above the level of the river, which this river derives its name from the Hill it is not more than 2 mile round its base, & from its height, may be seen, from its top & 14 small lakes of different sizes may be seen at the same time being much elevated above all the surrounding Country." Fidler also included a sketch of the "Hill" in the left margin of his journal. E.3/1, ff. 69d-70, Fidler Journal, "A Journal from York Fort Hudsons Bay, to Cumberland Hudsons, Manchester & Buckingham Houses -- up the Saskatchewan river, by Way of Lake Wennepeg in 1792 by Peter Fidler."

House and Martin's Falls on the Albany River, and to Brunswick House on the Missinaibi River. With just this improvement, Colen thought Cumberland House and Swan River canoes would be able to complete two round trips to the depot each open water season.¹

Colen's proposed changes in the transport system out of York would not only have affected the lowest section of the track. In the summer of 1791 he proposed to Chief William Tomison that a post also be built the following spring at "Buskascogan", today's Playgreen-Little Playgreen Lakes, "for the convenience of Inland Carriage."² Tomison concurred, but since this change was then viewed as part of the overall plan, it also could not be effected. With both depots in operation, Colen envisioned a shuttle system, and estimated it would be possible for men to make two, or even three, trips each summer between the upper settlements and the depot at "Buskascogan", while at the same time another group of men using canoes or even small boats could make an equal number of trips between that depot and the one on Hill River.

¹The section of the Hayes River from York to the first falls was considered "the most laborious part of the Journey Inland." A.11/117, f. 116d, London Correspondence Inward from York Factory, 1787 to 1797, Joseph Colen at York Factory to Governor and Committee, 24 September 1791. This may be explained by the difficulty of working light canoes in the strong current below the confluences of the Fox and Gods Rivers. In late July 1792 while traveling up the Hayes River to the Rock with five canoes, Peter Fidler noted "It is all tracking from the Factory to the First Carrying place Hill River." E.3/1, f. 69, Fidler Journal, "A Journal from York Fort Hudsons Bay, to Cumberland Hudsons, Manchester & Buckingham Houses -- up the Saskatchewan river, Way of Lake Wennepeg in 1792 by Peter Fidler."

²A.11/117, f. 114d, London Correspondence Inward from York Factory, 1787 to 1797, Joseph Colen at York Factory to Governor and Committee, 24 September 1791.

On 25 May 1792 in their correspondence to their officers at York, the London Committee reported that the ship which carried that factory's outfit for the forthcoming season also included the "Two Flat Bottom'd Boats agreeable to your dimension . . ." ¹ Unfortunately, the boat builder who arrived with the ship that summer landed with scurvy and was not able to assemble the large boat sent out in frame. Unsuccessful in his attempt to borrow a carpenter from the Churchill post, Colen had to abandon hopes of assembling the larger boat, and rely on the smaller, evidently preassembled, poorly suited flat boat the next spring.

When preparations were begun in May of 1793 for the first use of a wooden boat to convey trading goods up the Hayes River, Colen was surprised to find the labouring servants were set against the use of such craft. He soon found that the opposition centred around the knowledge that wooden boats would

lessen the consequence of the Steersmen, and Canoe Builders and prevent their having such frequent opportunities of making exorbitant demands for advance of wages as they do at present. ²

Colen was concerned that sabotage to the craft would thwart the maiden voyage, and young hands ordered to take the boat upriver were apprehensive about the potential "ill will of their fellow servants &c inland would bear towards them for going up with [the] Boat", but

¹A.6/15, f. 26, London Correspondence Outward, Official, 1792 to 1795, Governor and Committee to William Tomison and Council at York Factory, 25 May 1792.

²B.239/a/95, f. 31, York Factory Post Journal, 1792-93.

on 15 June eleven men departed the factory with the first wooden boat to convey trade goods up the Hayes River.¹

The boat carried three canoe loads of trade goods which were to be exchanged for the fur cargoes of three canoes at or below the first fall in Hill River. The three canoe crews were to return to Cumberland House for a second trip, and the boat return to York. If the boat did not meet the canoes before it reached the first fall in the river, part of the boat crew was to begin construction of a storehouse at that point "at least 40 ft. Square[.]"² Since the boat encountered the canoes one day's travel below the first fall, and the exchange took place there, construction of the depot was postponed until the next year.³

With the feasibility of using wooden craft, even a poorly suited one, on the lowest reach of the Hayes proven, Colen opted to use a new, larger wooden boat the next year. The craft, custom built to Colen's specifications, arrived in frame from England with the London ship in late summer of 1793. On 7 June 1794 the new boat was launched and christened the "Hope," since Colen had "great expectations of her answering for making trips Inland . . ."⁴ Empty, the boat drew eight inches, and loaded with nine tons of cargo still

¹Ibid., f. 33d.

²B.239/b/54, f. 16, York Factory Correspondence Book, 1792-93, Joseph Colen at York, evidently to George Donald, n.d.

³On the return to York the boat was only able to carry two canoe loads "as, she draws so much water when light . . ." B.24/a/1, f. 36, Buckingham House Post Journal, 1792-93.

⁴B.239/a/96, f. 27d, York Factory Post Journal, 1793-94.

displaced only two feet.¹ Four days later Colen left for Hill River with six men in a two ton capacity bateau which had been built the previous fall using country wood. On 18 June the bateau overtook the boat in Hill River and reached the site of the first fall on 21 June, two days before the "Hope."²

Construction of the new storehouse of Gordon House, also referred to as Rock Depot, or simply the Rock, started two days after Colen's arrival at the site.³ The same day, the inland canoes began arriving. By 27 June all canoes had arrived and Colen began making arrangements for twenty-four men to return to Cumberland House with eight canoes for a second round trip. Again, there was opposition, and only one employee initially agreed to return inland. After successfully settling on the men to return inland, Colen returned to York, and later that summer, on 11 August, the eight canoes sent back to Cumberland with 7,000 MB in trade goods from the Rock arrived at the factory with additional returns. That year, with the help of this second trip, an old stock of 4,557 MB which had remained uncollected from as early as the 1789-90 season, was conveyed down

¹Ibid.

²B.239/a/96, ff. 27d, 30d, 31d, 32d, and 33, York Factory Post Journal, 1793-94.

³At this point in the river a rock outcrop in the middle forms an island that forces a forty foot portage, the first in the river. The name "Rock" refers to this outcrop. E.3/1, f. 69, Fidler Journal, "A Journal from York Fort Hudsons Bay, to Cumberland Hudsons, Manchester & Buckingham Houses -- up the Saskatchewan river, Way of Lake Wennepeg in 1792 by Peter Fidler."

from Cumberland House. Some 2,000 MB still remained at Cumberland, but Colen was confident they could be carried down the next year.¹

At York Colen continued his preparations for additional transport changes still further up the York track. On 2 July he dispatched twenty-four Indians in twelve large canoes with trade goods and provisions to Gordon House,

where I hope to get up large supplies of Goods as I intend to employ the Natives to convey the same from thence next Summer to or near Boos coos caw gan -- where another House will be erected -- as a Store House, above which Boats of Large Burden can be navigated with as much ease as Canoes.²

Despite these preparations it was not until 1796 that the post of Jack River House, or Colen's Cot, was built on the shore of Little Playgreen Lake. Then, the main purpose of the post was to counter Canadian traders in the vicinity, and not to serve as a transit depot. Oxford House on the lake of the same name became the first intermediate depot between Gordon House and the upper settlements in 1798.

Accompanying the greater organization of the York mainline, with its use of boats, a depot, segmentation of the route and multiple trips in a season, was a new system of remuneration for men working the track. At Colen's request the London Committee initiated "trip money" which men received as incentive payment for each time they traveled specific sections of the York track. The details of

¹B.239/a/96, ff. 38d-39, York Factory Post Journal, 1793-94; and B.239/b/79, f. 5, "General LETTERS to ENGLAND 1793-4-5-6-7-8-9. 1800-1-2-3-4-5.6.7.8.9.1810" classified as York Factory Correspondence, 1793 to 1810, Joseph Colen and others at York Fort to Governor and Committee, 22 September 1794.

²B.239/a/96, f. 40d, York Factory Post Journal, 1793-94.

the premium scheme were outlined in the Committee's 29 May 1794 letter to Colen and the council at York.¹ After consulting with George Sutherland and Philip Turnor in London, the Committee divided the mainline out of York into four sections with estimated lengths as follows:

- 1) York Factory to Hill River (120 Miles)
- 2) Hill River to Oxford Lake (170 Miles)
- 3) Oxford Lake to Cumberland House (470 Miles)
- 4) Cumberland House to Buckingham House (600 Miles)

Each segment, with the exception of one, was to be considered a single trip. The exception was the Hill River to Oxford Lake portion, which was set equal to two trips "being so exceedingly difficult, on Account of the many carrying places, and falls . . ."² The Committee proposed the following premiums for each trip:

¹A.6/15, f. 107, London Correspondence Outward, Official, 1792 to 1795, Governor and Committee to Joseph Colen and Council at York Factory, 20 May 1794.

²Ibid. Trips were based on both length and difficulty of passage. Peter Fidler listed the length of all twenty-seven portages along the southern route from York to Cumberland House and arrived at a total length of three miles and 1,420 yards. There were none between York and Hill River House, a total of 20 with a combined length of 1 mile 840 yards between Hill River House and Oxford House at the outlet of Oxford Lake, and 6 portages with a total length of 2 miles 580 yards for the remainder of the route to Cumberland House. E.3/2, f. 102d, Fidler Journal, "All the Carrying places from York Fort to Cumberland House by way of Lake Winnipeg also the Carrying places from Cumberland House to the Isle ala Crosse -- Athapescow by way of Swan Lake -- also by the way of Portage La Loche, & from the Athapescow to the Slave Lake the measured distance of each Portage." There were no portages required between Cumberland House and Buckingham House.

To the Pilot	20/.	each Trip
To the Steersman	15/.ditto
To the Bowsman	15/.ditto
To the Middleman	10/.ditto ¹

These payments had already been made to qualifying servants who had returned to the British Isles the previous year.

Rock Depot was central to Colen's early modification of the York track. It was to serve as break-in-bulk point. Large boats and bateaux were to be used to ferry trade goods and provisions up, and furs down, the broad and portage free portion between the depot and factory. Canoes were to be used on the more difficult section above the Rock, both to carry down furs from the interior posts, and to return with trade goods. It was not necessary that the boats and canoes rendezvous at the Rock at the same time, since furs, trade goods, and provisions could all be stored at this terminal depot. Goods destined for the interior posts could be conveyed up from York after the arrival of the ship, and stored at the Rock storehouse in late fall. In the spring canoes from the interior could, if necessary, come down, drop off their cargoes, pick up goods, and return inland before winter ice had cleared from the lowest reach of the Hayes.

The next major advancement in York's inland transport system came on the Saskatchewan River in 1797. In the spring of that year two large bateaux with thirty foot keels were used to transport furs from the Company's forward post of Edmonton House down the

¹A.6/15, f. 107, London Correspondence Outward, Official, 1792 to 1795, Governor and Committee to Joseph Colen and Council at York Factory, 29 May 1794.

Saskatchewan, across the northern end of Lake Winnipeg, and east to the head of the Hayes River. George Sutherland is generally credited with initiating regular use of wooden craft for transporting Company cargo on the Saskatchewan. That year he was left in command of the Saskatchewan operations while Chief William Tomison visited England. It was probably not a coincidence that Tomison was in England when the two bateaux were launched on the Saskatchewan. As early as 1795 Sutherland, then temporarily in charge at York while Colen returned to England, expressed a desire to "get a Boat built and try how it would answer in the Siscatchewan River . . .", but abandoned that idea since his superior, Tomison, was "against any thing of that kind."¹ Joseph Colen was also convinced Tomison "always set his face against Boats being employed in Inland business . . .",² and claimed to have had his efforts to introduce such craft quashed by Tomison since 1790. Former HBC Archivist Alice Johnson has suggested that Tomison's resistance to converting to boats on the Saskatchewan was probably linked to his desire to retain a proven system, rather than to experiment with a new mode, which if proved practical, would have almost certainly meant a reduction in his already inadequate manpower. Unlike Sutherland, who had two previous tours of duty at Albany Fort and had personally seen the utility of wooden craft deep within the interior, Tomison's only firsthand experience with boats in the

¹B.239/a/97, f. 32d, York Factory Post Journal, 1794-95.

²B.239/a/100, f. 25d, York Factory Post Journal, 1796-97.

interior was limited, but his personal experience with canoes spanned two decades.¹

The two bateaux launched on the Saskatchewan River in the summer of 1797 were actually constructed and painted, one green and the other black, at the Company's Buckingham House under the immediate supervision of then Post Master Peter Fidler.² Dispatched from there with a combined crew of fourteen, they arrived at Edmonton House six days later. On 13 May the 2 bateaux and 2 canoes were dispatched with 181 of the post's 279 bundles of furs.³ Despite a minor mishap involving one of the bateaux, they reached Buckingham House three days later. Arriving at the post two days after their arrival, George Sutherland discovered that the mishap was caused by the "Buffalo" bateau being stove by a stone.⁴ After a few days' layover which allowed the damaged craft to be repaired and the furs dried, Sutherland embarked in command of the flotilla of two bateaux and nineteen canoes. Four days later the brigade reached Cumberland House where they were delayed eight days by ice.

¹Johnson, "Introduction" to Johnson, Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence, pp. xlii-xliii.

²The most complete references to the bateaux and their construction are in Peter Fidler's Cumberland House Journal for 1796-97. Fidler arrived at Buckingham House on 20 October 1796 and continued a "Buckingham House" section at the end of this journal. Clinker built and rudder equipped, the craft also had false keels as revealed in Fidler's 5 May entry, "Smith making Iron work to fix a false keel on the Boats, to save them when taken over Carrying places." B.49/a/27^b, f. 51, Cumberland House Post Journal, 1796-97.

³Johnson, Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence, p. 93. Sutherland departed with the remaining furs on 15 May in four canoes.

⁴Ibid., p. 94.

From Cumberland House on, the utility of the bateaux surprised even Sutherland. At the Grand Rapids all furs were unloaded and the craft taken down empty. Sutherland was impressed with the bateaux's performance in the falls and wrote in his daily journal, "Indeed the boats seem to exceed even my utmost expectations on the falls as they did not ship any water, although the waves ran very high."¹ Once over the Grand Rapids the party was confronted with what appeared to be a completely frozen Lake Winnipeg, a condition never before encountered so late in the season. Joined by the Swan River canoes, all were forced to wait from 19 June to 1 July before they could proceed. When finally able to continue, they used the much stronger wooden bateaux to force passage through ice clogged rivers and lakes, and arrived at the head of Trout River (present-day Hayes River from Oxford Lake to Knee Lake) on 8 July. Here Sutherland entered in his journal,

I cannot help expressing my satisfaction at the probable advantages the honourable Company are likely to reap from the use of boats in this quarter. The easy draught of water, the facility with which we have brought them from Edmonton House to this place -- a distance of 1200 miles -- the cargoes they are likely to carry up from whence they came etc.²

¹Ibid., p. 95. The Grand Rapids was a series of rapids 2 miles 56 chains long, over which the Saskatchewan dropped 43-1/2 feet before emptying into Lake Winnipeg. The portage on the north side, which extended from part way up the rapids to the head of the rapids, avoided 28-1/2 feet of the descent (Coues, New Light, II, p. 463n.) According to Peter Fidler, the portage passed over a steep point of land and was 1,980 yards long. There was also a 3-1/4 mile rarely used longer portage that avoided all the rapids by passing across the neck of the point of land. E.3/1, f. 82d, Fidler Journal, "A Journal from York Fort . . . by Peter Fidler." The Grand Rapids were obliterated by the construction of the Grand Rapids Dam in the 1960's.

²Johnson, Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence, p. 96.

Here at the outlet of Oxford Lake, furs were transferred to canoes and shuttled in two trips over the more difficult section of the route to Rock Depot. There they were deposited, and trade goods and provisions picked up for the return trip to the Saskatchewan, part of which were to be conveyed by the bateaux left at Oxford Lake. The bateaux's safe arrival back at Edmonton House on 6 October inspired Sutherland to write,

I cannot help expressing my satisfaction at seeing them [the bateaux] brought to the farthest settlement your Honours have inland, and both their crews eighteen in number have brought equal to forty men in canoes.¹

Prior to Tomison's early November arrival at Edmonton, Sutherland had men collect timber for the construction of two additional bateaux.

At York Colen was equally impressed with the bateaux's performance and tried to assume credit for their introduction. He was convinced that the new mode would "stop the Arrogance of Steersmen, who have of late taken every advantage that offered to raise their Wages", and reduce the number of required inland labourers by half.² He pointed out that savings to the Company would total in the hundreds of pounds annually, not only because of reduced manpower, but also because fewer skilled and expensive men were required. Each small canoe needed an able steersman and bowman, as well as at least one experienced middleman. A much larger capacity bateau still only required one steersman and bowman. The remainder of the crew could be low paid servants considered unfit for working canoes. Colen

¹Ibid., p. 99.

²B.239/a/100, f. 26d, York Factory Post Journal, 1796-97.

estimated that year, when only two bateaux were used, the Company saved at least £400 in wages alone. If this mode of conveyance had been adopted sooner, he was convinced the Canadians could not have achieved such a firm footing in the York hinterland and HBC trade from there might be twice its current level.¹

The extent to which the Canadian opposition was firmly entrenched in the entire Grand Nord became apparent that November, when Company employee Donald MacKay arrived from Osnaburgh House to await passage of the ship to England. En route from Osnaburgh to York he counted ninety-three fur laden Canadian canoes from the Mackenzie, Churchill, Nelson, and Hayes River drainages, all destined for Grand Portage. These canoes carried a total of 2,302 bundles of at least 55 MB each, for a total of 126,610 MB.² Since MacKay undoubtedly missed some Canadian canoes, the combined 61,395 MB trade from Churchill, York and Severn, and the Albany hinterland above the junction of the English and Winnipeg Rivers, probably amounted to significantly less than half the Canadian total obtained within the same region.³

¹Ibid., ff. 26-27.

²B.239/a/101, ff. 8d-9, York Factory Post Journal, 1797-99.

³Fur returns were compiled from Johnson, Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence, Appendix A; B.42/d/75, f. 25d, Churchill Factory Account Book, 1796-97; and B.3/d/107, Albany Fort Account Book, 1796-97. Only HBC returns from west of the junction of the English and Winnipeg Rivers were considered since MacKay reported seeing no opposition canoes from the southern settlements, only those from "rivers & lakes the water of which discharge into Hayes, Nelson & Churchill R." His list of canoe brigades, however, also includes some from the Mackenzie River drainage. He estimated the total Canadian take "from the territories of the Hudson Bay Company" at nearly 200,000 MB. B.239/a/101, ff. 8d-9, York Factory Post Journal, 1797-99.

Hopes for increased York returns inland were at least partly dependent on continued transport improvements, and Colen was quick to follow up achievements to date with instructions for the establishment of a transit depot for the exchange of bateaux and canoe cargoes at the entrance of Oxford Lake, 100-plus miles above Rock Depot. The new post of Oxford House was not only to serve as a break-in-bulk point for goods moving up and down York's mainline, it was also intended to function as a trading post to check Canadian opposition in that region.

In 1798 four bateaux were used to successfully convey fur cargoes between Edmonton House and Oxford Lake, and again, both Colen and Sutherland commented on the repeat success. Hearing of the bateau cargoes' safe arrival at Gordon House, Colen illustrated the value of the craft by showing how the wages of the 32 men in the 4 craft equaled only £355, but wages for the 72 men in 18 canoes needed to convey an equal quantity of goods totaled £1,040. To this £685 savings in wages would also have to be added trip money, savings in provisions, as well as payments for birch bark and the building of canoes.¹

Sutherland's comments on the repeat success of his wooden craft were incorporated in a personal attack on Tomison. Irritated by a derogatory comment about himself written by Tomison in the previous year's correspondence, Sutherland felt free to express

¹B.239/a/101, f. 41, York Factory Post Journal, 1797-99.

himself in the sharply worded seven page letter to Tomison.¹

Sutherland gloated at the success of his bateaux, and referred to Tomison's "old stale plan of conducting the Business with those insignificant Craft Canoes."² Sutherland pointed out that his mode reduced manpower requirements by fifty-five percent, and claimed if they had been introduced fifteen or sixteen years earlier the Company would have increased returns by over 100,000 MB and saved upwards of \$9,000 in men's wages.³ Sutherland also chided Tomison for reducing the keel length of the second two bateaux by five feet, and wrote,

. . . why forsooth because they were brought into use by another person; it is very plain that these Boats are a great eye sore to you I cannot help thinking but that our employers have too just and Idea of their own interest to suffer you or any other person so far to improve upon them, as to reduce the Boats in size far less annihilate them which I am given clearly to understand is your avowed intention, as soon as you can by any means find a plausible pretext for so doing: by the bye you are not likely to have an opportunity of this kind in this Century or even the next; as to the next especially towards the conclusion of it we need not be very solicitous about it as in all probability ere then old Charon with his wonted goodness may give both you and me a cast in his Boat which I understand is constructed on a different principle from those required up the Saskatchewan River.⁴

Once back in London Sutherland evidently met with the Committee and probably did not have to lobby very hard to have his transport plans officially endorsed, since the utility and economics of the

¹A copy of this letter is contained in B.239/b/60, ff. 37-40, York Factory Correspondence Book, 1796-98, George Sutherland at York Factory to William Tomison, 10 August 1798.

²Ibid., f. 37d.

³Ibid., ff. 37d and 39d.

⁴Ibid., f. 39. Sutherland's first two bateaux had keels of thirty feet, but the two built under Tomison's supervision were described as "25 feet of keel and nearly the same breadth as those built last year [1797]." Johnson, Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence, p. 116.

bateaux had been twice proven. In May of 1799 in their official correspondence, the Governor and Committee instructed Tomison and the council at York that large boats "built under the Direction of M^r. Sutherland" were to be used between Edmonton House and the upper Hayes River, while other sets of craft work between York and Hill River and between Hill River and the upper Hayes.¹ Despite any reservations Tomison might still have had, these now had to be abandoned to allow full sized bateaux to be permanently incorporated on the York mainline.

Transport routine

By the early 1800's wooden craft had been a standard mode of conveyance above Oxford Lake for several years. The history of regular use of even larger wooden boats and bateaux on the lowest reach of the Hayes River was entering its second decade. Along the entire York mainline, transport routine was well established, with only a short section of the middle Hayes still totally dependent on less efficient canoes. During the closing years of this decade (1800-10), even this section was traveled by a wooden bateau.

Use of boats on the Oxford House to Cumberland House section required clearing paths and rollering around major navigational obstacles, such as has already been discussed in detail in the section dealing with inland expansion from Albany Fort. On the maiden passage by the two Saskatchewan bateaux in the summer of 1797,

¹A.6/16, f. 80, London Correspondence Outward, Official, 1796 to 1803, Governor and Committee to William Tomison and Council at York Factory, 31 May 1799.

when it was necessary to prepare all launching sites, the Saskatchewan crew undoubtedly appreciated the assistance of the accompanying Swan River canoe men in the difficult task of preparing launching sites on the final approach to Oxford Lake. Between Lake Winnipeg and Oxford Lake there were only four portages, but the Hill (Gates) Portage was 640 yards long, and the White Fall Portage almost twice that length at 1,260 yards. Both the remaining portages, Sea River and Painted Stone, were each 50 yards in length.¹

Perhaps the most distinctive of these four portages from a transport point of view is the short Painted Stone Portage, which carried travelers between the Hayes River and the Echimamish River, in Cree, "the-river-that-flows-both-ways."² Eric Morse, a twentieth century canoeist who has traveled this section of the York mainline, provides the following description of this interesting river,

The Echimamish, with barely detectable current for about forty miles, links the Hayes River with the Nelson. In totally flat, swampy country the Echimamish boasts the unusual feature of rising, not at one end, but in its "middle"; two streams, from north and south, meet in a beaver pond which flows out both west and east -- respectively into the Nelson and the Hayes.

¹E.3/2, f. 102d, Fidler Journal, "All the Carrying places from York Fort to Cumberland House . . . the measured distance of each Portage."

²In 1792 Peter Fidler wrote of the Painted Stone Portage, "a round Stone painted on the Carrying place by Indians & none of them ever goes either way past it but they always leave an offering to it of Tobacco, Cloth, beads, Knives & indeed mostly of every article they Trade from the Europeans. that the Manneto may be propetious to them & their Families & relations & give them plenty to eat & free from diseases." E.3/1, f. 77d, Fidler Journal, "A Journal from York Fort . . . by Peter Fidler." Fidler considered the portage to mark the approximate halfway point between York Factory and Cumberland House, and like most early travelers, he thought the portage crossed the divide. Ibid.

At Painted Stone Portage, canoes and their cargo are carried for twenty paces, not over a divide -- as is commonly stated in the early journals -- but between two parallel streams, both of which are flowing eastward. A contour line crosses the course here, and the Painted Stone offered the shortest, simplest way to take the drop.

At the first beaver dam on the Echimamish the canoes are simply dragged up over the dam; and a long beaver-flooded section follows, still proceeding westward. Shortly after the two source streams enter, another beaver dam is encountered, where the water now is flowing down. Two lower beaver dams are met on the way toward the Nelson. The paddler in a dry summer would wish there were more, for below each dam there is sometimes hardly enough depth of water to float the canoe.¹

Although the beaver dams of the 1790's may have been at different locations than those referred to by Morse, they were definitely present and were critical to the early passage of bateaux through this section of the mainline. In late 1790's journals of passages over this section, there are several references to men lowering or raising the level of beaver dams to affect water levels. For example, while passing up the Echimamish River in July 1799 with two boats and six canoes, James Bird commented in his 14 July journal entry, "At 4a.m. embarked, paddled and carried till 4 p.m. then put up at a beaver dam in Echewemamis to allow the water time to go down before us."² That evening they evidently had lowered the level of the dam to allow water to pass ahead of them, and the next day Bird wrote in his journal, "Repaired the beaver dam, and at 7 a.m. embarked, paddled, carried and repaired beaver dams to keep a sufficiency of water in the river for the next boats."³ In the

¹Morse, Fur Trade Canoe Routes, p. 41.

²Johnson, Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence, p. 193.

³Ibid.

subsequent 1810 to 1821 period, wooden locks were considered as replacements for the beaver dams, but by as early as 1801 the Company may already have improved upon the beaver built structure as revealed in a 21 July entry in the Cumberland House Post Journal. On his upriver passage after having passed over the Painted Stone Portage and into the Echimamish River, William Tomison wrote, "their was little or no water for the boats, the Indians having broke down all the locks we made in the Spring, which will cost us much labor & Time."¹

Even though Oxford House, at the outlet of Oxford Lake, was considered the depot for inland bateaux when built in 1798, soon wooden craft also routinely traveled further downstream than that post. Although most cargoes were probably exchanged at the depot, transfer of inward and outward bound cargoes also took place below Knee Lake by the first few years of the nineteenth century. While traveling inland to Oxford House in June 1803, John McNab of York encountered boats below Knee Lake. He instructed them to proceed further downriver to the first fall, and wait there for the canoes from Gordon House.² On 2 July later that same season William Tomison wrote in his journal that two boats were dispatched downriver from Oxford House to meet the canoes from Gordon House "as Usual."³ By

¹B.49/a/31, f. 3d, Cumberland House Post Journal, 1801-02.

²B.239/a/107, f. 31, York Factory Post Journal, 1802-03, "McNabs Journal from York Factory to Oxford House." These boats arrived back at Oxford House with the cargoes of eight canoes on 29 June. Ibid., f. 31d.

³B.49/a/32^a, f. 33, Cumberland House Post Journal, 1802-03.

1806 a structure called Jack tent had been erected at the site where these wooden craft dispatched from Oxford House met the Gordon House canoes, presumably at or near the outlet of Swampy Lake.¹ The first definite passage of a bateau along the entire track from Oxford House to the mouth of Hill River was accomplished in the summer of 1809, when a Churchill River bateau was taken from the Saskatchewan to York, where it was used to convey Peter Fidler and part of his family back to Churchill Fort.² Still, by the close of the 1790 to 1810 period the use of wooden craft over even part of the Oxford House-Hill River section appears to have been strictly supplemental to canoes.

To make use of wooden craft on the lowest reach of the Hayes River even more efficient, the lowest depot was moved further downriver at the start of the 1808 season. On 30 September 1807 five men prepared to depart from York for Gordon House, where they were to deposit a cask of flour for men who would be coming down from Oxford House, and "bring down the Hinges, Locks, &c. there to the head of Steel river, where they are to build Store Houses to transact the business at in future, instead of Gordon House . . ."³ The "head of Steel river" corresponded with the mouth of Hill River,

¹John McNab commented on the structure when he reached it on 26 June 1806. B.239/a/112, f. 30, York Factory Post Journal, 1805-06, "M^r M^c Nabs Inland Journal."

²B.239/a/115, ff. 20 and 35, York Factory Post Journal, 1808-09; and B.60/a/8, f. 13, Edmonton House Post Journal, 1808-09.

³B.239/a/114, f. 1, York Factory Post Journal, 1807-08.

or with the junction of present-day Hayes and Fox Rivers.¹ Use of the new Hill River House would "avoid the difficulty and danger of getting large Craft up Hill River."²

The need for this shift can be traced to John McNab's appointment to York Factory in the 1803 season. McNab made his first trip up the Hayes to Oxford House in the spring of that year and was impressed with the section below Hill River (downriver from the confluence of the Fox). At a point eight miles up Hill River he wrote,

they say we are now over the worst of the Way from the Factory to the Rock (Gordon House) -- so far this is incomparably the best river I have seen in Hudson Bay -- here larger Craft may be navigated than from Albany to Martins fall, and with fewer men[.]³

At Albany Fort, where McNab had previously served as chief, there was an eighteen ton inland boat in use by at least 1792.⁴ Given this apparant suitability of the lower Hayes for larger vessels, that fall McNab had construction begun on "a new Inland Boat, the largest ever built at York."⁵ The new twelve ton capacity "Trial" was launched the following spring.⁶ Requiring a crew of twelve to sixteen for

¹The "Steel river" corresponded with the section of today's Hayes River between the mouths of the Fox and Gods Rivers. Tyrrell, Journals of Samuel Hearne and Philip Turnor, p. 99n.

²B.239/a/114, f. 1, York Factory Post Journal, 1807-08.

³B.239/a/107, f. 30, York Factory Post Journal, 1802-03, "M^r McNabs Journal from York Factory to Oxford House."

⁴B.3/b/29, f. 41d, Albany Fort Correspondence Book, 1791-92, Edward Jarvis at Albany Fort to Albany Inland Masters, 14 May 1792.

⁵B.239/a/109, f. 5d, York Factory Post Journal, 1803-04.

⁶Ibid., f. 11d.

an upriver trip, the "Trial" continued in service throughout the remainder of this 1790 to 1810 period. By the 1808 season the difficulty of getting the "Trial" and other large boats above the confluence of the Hayes and Fox Rivers evidently prompted the shift of the lowest Hayes depot still further downriver.

Other craft servicing this lowest reach of the Hayes during the final years of the 1790 to 1810 period included smaller inland boats, such as the "Mercury", "Jupiter", and "York", and several bateaux. These inland boats varied in size, with one built in 1802 having a keel thirty feet long.¹ By the second half of this period such boats seem to have largely replaced bateaux as the most important craft along this section of the track. Following their 1794 introduction, bateaux like the "Charolette" and "Success" were the standard craft. Like boats, but usually smaller, they also varied in size. Few specifics on these bateaux were recorded other than the fact that the first bateau used in 1794 had a capacity of two tons, and one built the next year was twenty-three feet long.²

These above discussed craft were used to lodge as much of the inland cargo as possible at the lowest depot before the arrival of the inland craft. In favourable years during the second half of the 1790 to 1810 period, the first flotilla of up to four boats and bateaux departed York by late May. Manpower requirements of such large brigades exceeded the supply of servants at York, and the Company was forced to begin relying in part on Homeguard Indians,

¹B.239/a/108, f. 31, York Factory Post Journal, 1801-03.

²B.239/a/97, f. 22d, York Factory Post Journal, 1794-95.

as had been the practice at both Albany and Moose for decades. For example, on 23 May 1809 after inland cargoes had been moved into the launch house and the craft loaded, departure was delayed until Indian assistants arrived from the nearby marsh.¹ It was not until 26 May that the nineteen Europeans and fifteen Indians left for Hill River House with three boats.² Even with such assistance the factory could be left dangerously undermanned. In early June 1802 while servants and Indians were working goods up to Rock Depot, York's complement consisted only of officers, a tailor, and three lame labourers.³

Above Gordon House or Hill River House inland goods were conveyed by canoes to Oxford House or Jack tent on Swampy Lake, where cargoes were exchanged for the fur packs of inland bateaux and canoes. These inland cargoes normally arrived at Oxford House aboard the Saskatchewan craft around mid June after a passage that routinely began one month earlier at Edmonton House. By the final years of this period the annual Saskatchewan brigade consisted of five bateaux and five or six canoes. During these years it was generally not until mid to late July that all inland bound cargoes were conveyed to Oxford House and the inland bateaux and canoes were able to embark for their winter stations. The upcountry passage to Cumberland House normally required twenty travel days, and the Cumberland to Edmonton House trip an additional thirty to forty days. Another four or five

¹B.239/a/115, f. 16, York Factory Post Journal, 1808-09.

²Ibid., f. 16d.

³B.239/a/108, f. 23, York Factory Post Journal, 1801-03.

days were commonly spent at Cumberland House and Paint Creek on the upriver passage.

The transport routine on the Saskatchewan did not differ greatly from the preceeding 1774 to 1790 period. Essentially the same routine was used to service the changing pattern of posts and lengthening mainline. Transport routine along the Saskatchewan River and the entire mainline above Oxford House is perhaps best illustrated with the movements of a single season. The trading year chosen is 1807, when Acton House, Edmonton House, Paint River, Cumberland House, and Carlton House on the South Saskatchewan River were the only York inland posts above Lake Winnipeg that were full-fledged establishments with their own post masters. That year the summer boats and canoes from Oxford had all arrived back at Cumberland House by 7 August. On 11 August two large and one small boat were dispatched for the upper settlements on the North Saskatchewan, and one boat for Carlton House on the south branch of the river. Craft traveling the mainline reached Paint River on 8 September after a tedious passage owing to high water. Three days later the three lightly loaded boats continued on for Edmonton House which they reached on 22 September. After two days a small boat and a large canoe were dispatched with goods for Acton House.¹

On such upriver passages by the Saskatchewan brigade it was not uncommon to pick up pemmican at Cumberland House which had been left there on the downriver spring trip. Another means of provisioning on the return trip was to have horses from an upper settlement

¹B.60/a/6, ff. 1 and 2, Edmonton House Post Journal, 1806-07.

meet the craft at a predetermined site, usually the Steep Rock near abandoned (Lower) Hudson House, and there make arrangements to again meet the brigade further upriver with fresh meat hunted from the adjacent plains. On the return trip in September 1807 fifteen horses that had been dispatched downriver to Steep Rock were stolen by a party of Assiniboine Indians the night before the boats' departure.¹

In the fall of each year, after the arrival at York of the ship from England, there was usually an attempt to send several canoes inland with correspondence and additional goods. For example, on 29 August 1806, eleven days after the arrival of the ship, Peter Fidler and twelve men set out from York for Cumberland House in three canoes.² The small group reached the post on 3 October and three days later three canoes were sent to posts further up the North Saskatchewan, and a single canoe was dispatched to Carlton House on the South Saskatchewan.³ Winter ice threatened the completion of such fall communication. On 28 November the next year, when his fall canoes had still not arrived, James Bird at Edmonton House commented, "how hazardous it is to depend so entirely on a Fall Supply of so many principal Articles, which so many Circumstances may prevent our receiving . . ."4

¹B.60/a/7, f. 2d, Edmonton House Post Journal, 1806-07. That December a party of Indians, assumed to be Assiniboine, stole forty Company horses from Edmonton House. The next day James Bird wrote in his daily journal, "These Stone [Assiniboine] Indians are the most useless and the most troublesome Tribe that inhabit these Parts; they kill no Furrs, and Horse Stealing is their Trade . . ." Ibid., f. 11.

²B.49/a/32^b, f. 1, Cumberland House Post Journal, 1806-07.

³Ibid., ff. 3d-4.

⁴B.60/a/7, f. 9, Edmonton House Post Journal, 1807-08.

During the 1806-07 season, long distance transport activity resumed in the spring, with the earliest movement involving the shipment of Acton House furs and provisions downriver to Edmonton. On 10 May a small boat with furs and ten bags of pemmican arrived at the post from Acton. Two days later the bulk of the Acton House returns, fifty bundles of furs totaling 1,700 MB and twenty-four bags of pemmican, arrived with the post master in two bateaux and one canoe. On 17 May two boats and one bateau started downriver with most of those two posts' returns. The craft reached the Paint River post on 19 May, and two days later the entourage of twenty-five men continued on in three boats and five canoes with the combined returns of approximately 8,500 MB and sixty bags of pemmican from the three upper posts. On 30 May the brigade arrived safely at Cumberland House, and after taking on the Cumberland and its Moose Lake outpost's returns, as well as those from Carlton House which had already been conveyed to Cumberland, departed on 4 June in four boats and five canoes with furs, feathers, leather, and pemmican for Oxford House, where they arrived on 20 June.¹

That season the five Saskatchewan posts accounted for 12,663 of the combined York and inland trade of 30,729 MB. An additional 4,300 MB that season were contributed by what was collectively called the North River trade.²

¹B.60/a/6, ff. 10d-11d, Edmonton House Post Journal, 1806-07.

²B.239/b/133, York Factory Account Book, 1806-07.

The North River Trade

The North River trade was synonomous with York inland operations on the Nelson River from Cross Lake downstream, and within the watershed tributary to Split Lake. The area corresponded with what was then loosely referred to as the Muskrat Country, to which the York traders gained access via the Nelson River or Fox-Hayes River route.¹

The beginning of the North River trade can be traced to 1790, when in the spring, Canadian traders descended the Nelson to within 120 miles of York. In an attempt to protect Company trade in the region, a party of three canoes was dispatched to proceed as far inland as possible and there erect a trading post. After one canoe was forced to return to York because of the lack of an experienced steersman, the other two were taken further inland to Split Lake where snow and ice forced a halt. Here, short of their hoped for distance inland, the men erected the log tent structure that served as Split Lake House for at least the first season. Although only an estimated 230 miles upriver from the factory, the small post initiated York's presence in the Muskrat Country.²

During the next three seasons the York traders reached progressively further into the Rat Country -- to Chatham House in

¹According to Morton, Canadian West, p. 440, "Strictly the Muskrat country lay east of the Sturgeon-Weir and between the Nelson and the Churchill, but the earlier fur-traders of the region linked up the lower valley of the Churchill as far as Reindeer Lake with it."

²B.239/b/51, ff. 9d-10, York Factory Correspondence Book, 1790-91, Joseph Colen at York Factory to Mr. Jarvis at Albany Fort, Mr. Thomas at Moose Factory, and Mr. Atkinson at Eastmain, January 1791.

1791, Sipiwesk Lake House in 1792, and Wekusko Lake House in 1793. The same year that the Wekusko Lake post was built, Churchill initiated inland trading posts by building its own outpost of Pelican Lake House on present-day Limestone Point Lake, within the Nelson River drainage and only thirty miles from Wekusko. This season marked the beginning of several seasons of intra-Company competition between York and Churchill traders within the district. For the York traders this new problem, which is considered under a subsequent section of this study dealing with Churchill's inland theatre, merely compounded those additional problems that had plagued York's North River trade since its inception.

Three problems apparent since the onset of this branch of the trade were a difficult connection with interior waterways, insufficient manpower, and inadequate numbers of canoes. Initially York's objective in the Muskrat was to merely open temporary outposts for a season or two at various sites within the area, and thereby keep all Indian groups satisfied and loyal to the Company. But even this limited objective proved difficult because of the above mentioned transport related problems.

The Nelson River afforded the York traders the most direct approach to the Muskrat Country, but it presented severe transport limitations. First, the strong current and large volume of water, amounting to the combined flows of the Saskatchewan, Red, Winnipeg, and countless other rivers, made travel in light canoes difficult. Transport was made even more laborious by the steep gradient and broken nature of the lowest 150 miles (see Figure 20). The river

was also reportedly closed by winter ice a month longer than the Hayes.¹ If not actually closed by river ice in spring, the high mounds of ice along the banks could make essential tracking impossible. This was the case in the spring of 1791 when Indian reports of ice along the shore caused the men to return from the first winter at Split Lake via a Fox-Hayes River route.² Close to the factory, which was located on the Hayes River, use of the Nelson track meant a risky passage by canoe around the Point of Marsh, or a cross country trip across the point of land separating the two rivers.

The navigational character of the Nelson was an accepted fact of the North River trade, but the other two transport related handicaps, lack of sufficient numbers of men and canoes, were problems that could be rectified. Joseph Colen at York, who initiated trade in that area and managed it through the 1797 season, was convinced that his superior, William Tomison, was to blame for the inadequate supply of both manpower and canoes.

As early as the 1790-91 season Colen detected what he saw as an attempt by Tomison to thwart his efforts on the Nelson River. The summer of that season, Tomison took seven experienced steersmen as

¹Miles Macdonell at Nelson Encampment to Lord Selkirk, 29 May 1812, Public Archives of Canada, Report, 1886, cited in Ross, Beyond the River and the Bay, p. 97.

²B.239/b/51, f. 16d, York Factory Correspondence Book, 1790-91, James Spence at Split Lake House to Joseph Colen at York Factory, 16 March 1791.

part of the crew of four canoes that returned inland up the Hayes.¹ Colen regarded this as the earliest example of the inequitable division of men and canoes between these two branches of the trade. In the following years he noted numerous examples where canoes and men were deliberately kept from the Nelson trade by Tomison's orders.

Alleged reports from other Company employees substantiate Colen's perception. In July 1794 David Thompson told Colen of "strange and Unaccountable measures" that had been taken to prevent extra canoes necessary for North River operations from being brought down from Cumberland House.² Colen understood that ten canoes had been left at Cumberland that year, some of which could have been taken to York that season considering the number of men who had arrived in the Saskatchewan craft. Mitchell Oman, an inland master, reportedly told Colen that same summer that "he had often heard M^r Tomison declare that he would take good care, no Canoe from Cumberland should be employed elsewhere, but up the Saskechewan River."³

Colen claimed usable canoes had been brought down to the factory in the past and, because of lack of suitable birch bark in the York-North River region, it was such canoes that had allowed the inauguration of the North River trade. Since that time, Colen wrote

¹Ibid., f. 12, Joseph Colen at York Factory to Mr. Jefferson at Churchill Factory, 22 February 1791. In their official correspondence to Tomison and his council at York the next year the Company headquarters, evidently having noted Colen's correspondence, directed that only one steersman be sent in each canoe. A.6/15, ff. 24-24d, London Correspondence Outward, Official, 1792 to 1795, Governor and Committee to William Tomison and Council at York Factory, 25 May 1792.

²B.239/a/96, f. 42, York Factory Post Journal, 1793-94.

³Ibid.

in July 1794, "great care has been taken at Cumberland to bring no more Canoes down than are necessary to carry up trading goods--unless those that no man would venture in to return back in."¹ It was those canoes "left down as condemned, and reckoned unfit to be employed conveying Goods elsewhere"² that serviced the North River trade.

Colen could assign no reason to Tomison's actions other "than it is done purposely to overturn the plans of a Brother officer--and prevent the success of his undertaking--"³ Tomison's command evidently did not entitle him to bounties on furs taken from the North River trade, and he may have viewed assistance as merely a diversion of men and canoes from his already undermanned Saskatchewan district. As early as July 1791 he wrote to the London headquarters reporting the Nelson River trade as well as that at Swan River and efforts to push into the Athabaska had already weakened the three upper settlements on the Saskatchewan by drawing off skilled canoe men.⁴

Lacking their own canoes and sufficient men, the Nelson traders had to rely heavily on Indian transport. Tomison pointed out that the Company's Saskatchewan transport had also relied heavily on Indian transport during its early history, and suggested such a

¹Ibid., ff. 42d-43.

²B.239/b/55, f. 23d, York Factory Correspondence Book, 1793-94, Joseph Colen at York Factory to Malchom Ross at Reed Lake, 20 July 1794.

³Ibid.

⁴A.11/117, f. 101, London Correspondence Inward from York Factory, 1787 to 1797, William Tomison at York Factory to Governor and Committee, 22 July 1791.

reliance should also be accepted as part of the evolutionary development of transport on the Nelson track.¹ The North River's dependence on both Homeguard and other Indians only gradually decreased. Perhaps this can be partly explained by the greater availability of canoes and manpower as less of both were required following the increased reliance on more efficient wooden craft on the Saskatchewan. By the closing years of this 1790 to 1810 period, the less than ten men assigned to the North River trade in the 1790's had grown to twenty or more men assigned yearly to the four more stationary posts in that district. Canoes, using both the Fox-Hayes and Nelson River routes, remained the standard craft. Even though staffed with twice the manpower and serviced by more dependable Company operated transport, trade returns declined from an annual average of 4,235 MB during the 1796 to 1800 seasons to 3,845 MB through the 1806 to 1810 period.²

Transport and Trade Northward
to the Churchill Drainage and the Athabaska

Despite attempts to occupy the fur rich Athabaska country during the 1790 to 1810 period, York traders were unable to establish a permanent Company presence. The first York and HBC penetration into the Mackenzie River drainage was accomplished by a party that included Philip Turnor, Malchom Ross, and Peter Fidler in 1791, and

¹B.239/b/55, ff. 34d-35, York Factory Correspondence Book, 1793-94, William Tomison on the Echimamish River to Joseph Colen at York Factory, 2 August 1794.

²Johnson, Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence, Appendix A; and B.239/d/131, 133, 138, 141, and 145, York Factory Account Books, 1806 to 1810.

lasted for just one season. The next Company employee to reach the Mackenzie basin was David Thompson in the summer of 1796 via a Reindeer Lake approach. His was merely an explorative survey, and after reaching the extreme eastern end of Lake Athabaska, he returned to Reindeer Lake. Although York's presence continued in the lower Churchill drainage into 1797, and was temporarily extended north into the upper Churchill and Athabaska River valley during the 1799-1800 season, Lake Athabaska was not again reached by York traders until 1802, when they began a precarious four season residence in the district.¹ Following their 1806 withdrawal from the Athabaska, HBC traders would not again reoccupy the district until 1815 when the Company began permanent residence.

When Turnor and his party crossed the drainage divide into the Mackenzie basin with their two canoes in June 1791, they entered a realm that had remained an exclusive Canadian fur reserve since Peter Pond's 1778 initiation of trade in that drainage. The party had left Cumberland House on 13 September 1790 and traveled via the Saskatchewan and Sturgeon-weir Rivers, over Frog Portage, and into the Churchill River, which they ascended until 6 October when they reached Lac Isle-à-la-Crosse. They had hoped to reach the Athabaska that year, but were forced to winter at Isle-à-la-Crosse when lack

¹During the 1800-01 season Edmonton House maintained an outpost called Summerberry River House. Its name suggests a location on the Pembina River, a tributary of the Athabaska River. The location of this is, however, not known.

of provisions and an early fall forced a layover in a house lent by an opposition trader.¹

Fidler claimed the "sole motive" for this Athabaska expedition was to allow "M^r Turnor to survey those parts in order to settle some dubious points of Geography as both Mesrs Hearne & Pond fixes those places in their respective maps far more to the Westward than there is good reason to think them."² As with earlier inland expansion from York, as well as other Bayside posts, such exploration was necessary to provide the road maps essential to the subsequent expansion of trade. This expedition was clearly seen as a prelude to the extension of regular transport and trade into that region.

The party embarked from Isle-à-la-Crosse on 30 May 1791.³ They crossed the divide into the Clearwater River west of the usual portage after Canadian traders warned them that provisions would be scarce over that route. They were evidently the first Europeans to use this more indirect portage via a lake they referred to as Swan Lake.⁴ From this point on, the journals of both Turnor and Fidler extol the great potential of the Canadian Eldorado they were entering. Beyond the portage Fidler commented on the large numbers of buffalo

¹Turnor's journal of this passage is in Tyrrell, Journals of Samuel Hearne and Philip Turnor, pp. 325-339. Fidler's brief summary of this part of the trip is in E.3/1, ff. 2-2d, Fidler Journal, "A Journal from Isle a la Cross by way of Swan Lake a new Track to the Athabascow Lake in the Year 1791 by Peter Fidler."

²E.3/1, f. 2, Fidler Journal, "A Journal from Isle a la Cross by way of Swan Lake . . . by Peter Fidler."

³Tyrrell, Journals of Samuel Hearne and Philip Turnor, p. 365.

⁴Tyrrell in Ibid., p. 376n suggested the portage may have been between Garson Lake and Formby Lake.

and moose, as well as numerous beaver. Regarding the latter he wrote, "indeed this is the most plentiful place for Animals of that discription, that any of our people has ever seen, who have wintered in various parts of this Country for a number of Years--." ¹ Having reached the Clearwater River and descended it to the Athabaska River, the party floated downstream. West of the river Turnor noted the "great quantity of good Birch Rind fit for building large Canoes . . ." ² Thus, even before reaching Lake Athabaska three essentials for the successful extension of transport and trade, i.e., furs, provisions, and birch bark, appeared to be present in abundance.

On 28 June the group reached the NWC's Fort Chipewyan, which Turnor described as the company's "Grand Magazine of the Athapiscow Country" and "the compleatest Inland House I have seen in the Country . . ." ³ The party continued north to Great Slave Lake after acquiring a Chipewyan guide, and returned to Lake Athabaska in August. Turnor and Fidler then departed in a canoe with two other men to survey the east end of the lake. The purpose of this reconnaissance was dual, to establish the eastern limit of the lake, and thus its extent, and to gather intelligence on the suitability of an eastern approach to Lake Athabaska. It had been known for decades that Indians from the Athabaska could reach the Churchill and Nelson drainages via the east end of the lake. This Indian canoe track

¹E.3/1, f. 8d, Fidler Journal, "A Journal from Isle a la Cross by way of Swan Lake . . ." by Peter Fidler."

²Tyrrell, Journals of Samuel Hearne and Philip Turnor, p. 393.

³Ibid., p. 398.

entered the lake through Black River, today's Fond du Lac River, which Fidler described as "too shole for large loaded Canoes . . ." ¹ Still, it was this short cut approach to the Athabaska which passed through the ill-suited Black River that York traders subsequently tried unsuccessfully to develop in the 1792 to 1797 period. ²

At the western end of the lake the HBC group erected temporary structures 600 yards south-southeast of the Canadian post where they spent the winter of 1791-92. ³ Peter Fidler, however, was sent to winter with the Chipewyan Indians in order to learn their language, an essential for regular trade with any Indian group. ⁴ The next fall the Company men began their return trip to Cumberland House by retracing their route down the Athabaska River and up the Clearwater River, but continued further east up the latter past the portage they had used the previous spring. The party left the Clearwater and crossed the height of land via Methy Portage, the main Canadian gateway to the Athabaska, thereby becoming the first Company employees to cross this historic portal.

The portage, which was also known as Portage La Loche, was measured by Fidler to be 12 miles 310 yards long. It actually consisted of two segments, a 3 mile and 705 yard section that ran

¹E.3/1, f. 21, Fidler Journal, "A Journal from Isle a la Cross by way of Swan Lake . . . by Peter Fidler."

²Fidler's journal was written at a later date and may reflect information on the Black River also gathered at some later time.

³Tyrrell, Journals of Samuel Hearne and Philip Turnor, pp. 441-442.

⁴The journal of Fidler's travels with the Chipewyans is in Ibid., pp. 493-555.

south from the Clearwater River to a small lake (later named Rendezvous Lake), and an eight mile 1,365 yard section from the other side of the lake south to a small creek that runs into Lac La Loche, then called Methy Lake.¹

At the northern end, the portage path ascends rapidly from the Clearwater River valley to the top of the southern bank. Fidler measured the top of the bank at 712 feet above the river level.² The view from the top moved many who wrote of its spectacular nature. Fidler was no exception, and on reaching the top of the bank on 21 May he wrote,

From the Top of the Bank a very fine view of the adjacent country may be seen, particularly down the river, that runs on a serpentine Course betwixt the Hills alternately sweeping the different Hills at their bases. The view below is a great extent until the Country is lost in the blue expanse.³

The path continued south to small Rendezvous Lake. Here the cargoes could be loaded into the canoes and floated approximately one mile across the lake. At the opposite shore the cargoes were again unloaded and all carried over the longer southern leg of the portage. Limiting their carrying to the cooler early morning and evening

¹E.3/1, f. 52, Fidler Journal, "A Journal from Isle a la Cross by way of Swan Lake . . . by Peter Fidler."

²Ibid., f. 50d.

³Ibid.

hours, the transit across the entire portage took five days.¹ Below this point, the party retraced their route back to Cumberland House where they arrived in late June.

The HBC Athabaska returns of "13 smallish Packs" was insignificant compared to the 319-plus packs traded by the opposition in the same region.² Still, the expedition's members returned convinced that it was imperative that the Company immediately permanently extend transport and trade into the Athabaska, and at least temporarily pass over the unexplored intervening territory between that region and the Company's established trade area.³ Turnor pointed to the area's requisite pine and birch bark necessary for canoe construction and the meat provisions that could be procured, like the Canadians, from the buffalo herds of the Peace River.⁴ At least two posts, one on Lake Athabaska and the other on the Peace River, were seen as essential.⁵ Their own observations and the large Canadian returns proved the abundance of both beaver and marten. Turnor considered six canoes the minimum acceptable size brigade,

¹They usually began carrying from 2 a.m. to 3 a.m. and carried until 6 a.m. or 7 a.m., rested during midday, and then again carried from around 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. Tyrrell, Journals of Samuel Hearne and Philip Turnor, pp. 469-470.

²Ibid., p. 456; and E.3/1, f. 47, Fidler Journal, "A Journal from Isle a la Cross by way of Swan Lake . . . by Peter Fidler."

³Turnor's appeal is contained in a letter to his superiors at York in B.239/b/52, ff. 18d-20, York Factory Correspondence Book, 1791-92, Philip Turnor at York Factory to William Tomison and Council at York Factory, 9 July 1792.

⁴Ibid., ff. 19 and 20.

⁵Ibid., ff. 18d-19.

and was confident they could travel a shorter route to the Athabaska from York via the Nelson or Churchill Rivers.¹

Turnor returned to London in 1792 to report to the Committee on his Athabaska expedition. But before departure on the ship that late summer, he was dispatched on a survey of the Nelson River to Chatham House. Since this track was being considered as the first leg of a short cut to the Athabaska from York, it was necessary to gather more particulars, since the HBC was "not as yet sufficiently informed of its communications with other rivers & Lakes."² Turnor was thus instructed to "take a cursory view thereof and give us your opinion how far it is practicable to get boats of burthen, we wish to know the Strength of Current the depth of Water and height of falls . . ."³

In an undated letter to Chief Tomison and his council at York, presumbaly written after his survey of the Nelson, Turnor wrote that he thought Chatham House was "the part that in my present opinion the Northern trade must be carried through[.]"⁴ From Indian intelligence relayed by a fellow employee, Turnor heard of two possible approaches to the Athabaska via the Burntwood River,⁵ Both canoe routes

¹Ibid., f. 19d.

²B.239/b/52, f. 20d, York Factory Correspondence Book, 1791-92, William Tomison and Council at York Factory to Philip Turnor at York Factory, 23 July 1792.

³Ibid., f. 21.

⁴Ibid., f. 22, Philip Turnor to William Tomison and Council at York Factory, n.d.

⁵Tyrrell, Journals of Samuel Hearne and Philip Turnor, p. 573.

ascended that river from Split Lake and passed over the Burntwood Portage¹ to the Churchill River. It could then either be ascended to Reindeer River and Lake and west through Wollaston Lake and Black River to Lake Athabaska, or taken still further west where the Athabaska could be reached from Methy Portage, a route with which Turnor was familiar above Frog Portage.

Given the Company's incomplete knowledge of the geography of the territory north of the Nelson drainage, it still seemed likely that the approach via Reindeer Lake would be York's most direct. The southern route via Cumberland House had already been explored, and by surveying the Reindeer Lake approach, only the short section of the Churchill River between Reindeer River and Frog Portage would remain unexplored. Thus, it was this Reindeer River and Lake track which David Thompson set out to explore in August 1792.

Joseph Colen instructed Thompson to proceed "to the Mis a nippie [Churchill River] where five Tracks meet, one leads to Cumberland, two leads to the Athapiscow one to Churchill and one to York[.]"² From there he was to take the track to Athabaska which passed through Reindeer Lake to the east end of Lake Athabaska through Hatchet Lake, Black Lake, and Black River. En route he was to keep a daily journal in which he was instructed to gather particulars

¹For a discussion of Burntwood Portage see H. B. Brehaut, "The Burntwood Carrying Place," The Beaver, Outfit 304 (Winter, 1973), pp. 54-59.

²B.239/b/52, f. 30, York Factory Correspondence Book, 1791-92, Joseph Colen at York Factory to David Thompson at York Factory, 30 August 1792.

not only of the Rivers but the produce of the Country and in order to Benifit Gehography you are to be as exact as possible in Laying down your track and fixing the Latitude and Longitude of the different Rivers and Lakes you pass Thr'o.¹

Thompson was unable to complete his exploration and wintered at Sipiwesk House, within the Nelson River drainage.

In 1794 Malchom Ross, with Thompson as his subordinate, joined in the quest for a Reindeer Lake track to the Athabaska. The duo was unable to reach Lake Athabaska until the summer of 1796, when David Thompson alone finally succeeded in reaching the east end of the lake by that route.² When both he and Ross, who preferred going by the Isle-à-la-Crosse route, and their party of fifteen men and seven canoes tried to travel the same section west of Reindeer Lake later that same summer, they were forced to return only several days west of Reindeer Lake when water became so shallow as to barely cover one's foot.³ Too late to return to York, the group was forced to winter at Bedford House, which they built on the west side of Reindeer Lake.

That winter David Thompson defected to the Canadians. The next spring Ross led his men back to York by way of Cumberland House with the word that the short cut seemed to offer little potential. In conjunction with their push toward the Athabaska, the York men had built three posts in the Churchill drainage--Duck Portage (1795), Fairford House (1795), and Bedford House (1796). York's presence in

¹Ibid., f. 30.

²David Thompson's story of this survey is in Glover, Thompson's Narrative, pp. 108-120.

³This attempt to travel west of Reindeer Lake is described in B.14/a/1, ff. 8d-10, Bedford House Post Journal, 1796-97.

the Churchill inland disturbed the chief at that post who had already proven the navigability of the lower Churchill River and begun establishing his own inland complement of posts in 1793. On 2 August 1797, the day Ross arrived at York, a council meeting was held at which it was decided that York would "relinquish all pursuits to the Athapuscow-- and leave that trade solely to be carried on by the Company Servants from Churchill[.]"¹

Churchill Factory was unable to reach the Athabaska, and when York finally did succeed in establishing a temporary presence in 1802, the approach used was the already proven Churchill-Methy Portage route. Although there was renewed interest in the Reindeer Lake short cut, this route never developed as a viable HBC approach to the Athabaska.

Prior to York's resettlement of the Athabaska in 1802, a thrust engineered from the Saskatchewan carried York trade into the upper Churchill River valley in 1799. Both that northern drive, as well as the push further up the North Saskatchewan that year had been initiated under the assumption of increased availability of men owing to the greater use of more efficient wooden craft on the Saskatchewan. The Saskatchewan's Beaver River expedition of that year once again brought York based traders into direct competition with inland Churchill traders, and again the York traders retreated after only one season when it became apparent that they would be unable to extend their reach north into the Athabaska.

¹B.239/a/100, f. 29, York Factory Post Journal, 1796-97.

Although the most direct route between the North Saskatchewan and Beaver River was over a combination water and overland route between Buckingham House and Moose Lake Creek, this route did not carry the main body of Saskatchewan traders who manned the 1799 Beaver River expedition. The party of twelve men, including Peter Fidler, Charles Isham, and an Indian guide, with thirty pieces of trade goods in three canoes followed the more conventional route via the Sturgeon-weir and Churchill River after leaving Cumberland House on 5 August that year.¹ In the Churchill track east of Isle-à-la-Crosse, they came upon William Auld's Churchill party of three bateaux also destined for Beaver River as part of that factory's advance toward Athabaska.² The two rival groups continued together with the Churchill men building at both Isle-à-la-Crosse Lake and Green Lake. The Saskatchewan traders continued further upriver to build Bolsover House on Meadow Lake, and Greenwich House on Lac la Biche, then called Red Deers Lake, in the Athabaska River valley, just northwest of the Beaver River headwaters.

While Fidler and his party had not taken the short cut north of Buckingham House to the Beaver River, this route was still important to their expedition, as it was to be for both Churchill's and York's subsequent Athabaska directed ventures. After selecting a site for Bolsover House, Fidler continued upriver to establish his own post. Further upstream at the mouth of Moose Lake Creek he and

¹Johnson, Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence, p. 197.

²Fidler comments on this meeting in E.3/2, Fidler Journal, "Journal from the Mouth of the Beaver river up it towards the Green Lake, Bolsover House and Greenwich House at Red Deers Lake in 1799 by Peter Fidler."

his three companions received goods which had been carried overland from Buckingham House. In early September James Bird had dispatched four men with eleven horses loaded with goods for Moose Lake Creek, and a day later he sent nine men with canoes to travel the same route to Moose Lake Creek, pick up cargoes there, and proceed to Lac la Biche ahead of Fidler.¹

Peter Fidler continued on to the head of the Beaver River, over the 300 yard portage linking that river with the Athabaska River valley and Lac la Biche, where the advance party from Buckingham House had already arrived.² Greenwich House, only the second HBC post built in the Mackenzie drainage, was erected on the south shore of the lake.³ After the arrival of two men in early October with four additional horse loads of goods from Buckingham House, those horses and all others that had arrived previously, were taken back down to Buckingham House for the winter.⁴

That winter there was frequent overland travel between the Saskatchewan and the Beaver River posts, as well as Greenwich House. This communication included Fidler and three men who traveled from Greenwich House to Edmonton House for goods in December. Fidler returned to his post by the same route, but his men with their dogs

¹Johnson, Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence, p. 207. John Pruden accompanied this last group. After overseeing their departure up the Beaver River he went on to Bolsover House to assume command of the new post.

²E.3/2, f. 56, Fidler Journal, "Journal from the Mouth of the Beaver river . . . in 1799 by Peter Fidler."

³A sketch map in Ibid. shows the location of the post.

⁴Johnson, Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence, p. 216.

and loaded sleds took the better track down to Buckingham House and then across to the Beaver River.¹ On 6 January William Auld from the Churchill post of Green Lake, and John Pruden from Bolsover left the latter post to visit Edmonton House, where they arrived on 16 January.² Both left with horses from Buckingham House on 20 January and arrived back at Bolsover House on 30 January.³ Later that winter James Bird traveled overland from the North Saskatchewan to Greenwich House to make arrangements for the summer.⁴

Rather than retracing their route down the Beaver and Churchill Rivers that spring, men, with their furs, used the Moose Lake Creek to Buckingham House short cut to return to the North Saskatchewan.⁵ John Pruden and his men abandoned Bolsover House in early April, and later that month three canoes with three men in each left Greenwich House.⁶ Fidler and three other men left the post in mid May, after

¹Ibid., pp. 228-229.

²Ibid., p. 230; and B.20/a/1, f. 8d, Bolsover House Post Journal, 1799-1800.

³Johnson, Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence, pp. 230-231; and B.20/a/1, f. 10d, Bolsover House Post Journal, 1799-1800.

⁴Johnson, Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence, p. 231.

⁵Bolsover's trade totaled only 190 MB and that at Greenwich House equaled the 1,073 MB credited to the post that season plus the 83 MB credited to it the next season. Since Greenwich House was not operated in the 1800-01 season, the 83 MB credited it must be an "after package" obtained by the men who maintained a brief summer residence there in 1800. Johnson, Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence, Appendix A.

⁶E.3/a, f. 60d, Fidler Journal, "Journal of the water communication between the Beaver and Saskatchewan Rivers, by the Moose Lake by P. Fidler."

handing over summer command to Charles Isham, who arrived with two other men from Buckingham House.¹

On his return passage Fidler noted the numerous rapids on the Moose Lake Creek that had delayed the three Greenwich canoes earlier that spring. Once through Moose Lake, Fidler's party continued to Swan Lake where they met three Buckingham men with horses awaiting their arrival. They had been dispatched to assist Fidler's passage by dragging the canoe and carrying the furs once the canoe was unable to proceed. The canoe, however, was able to pass three miles through Swan Lake and still further south until they arrived at the end of Long Portage. Here the cargo was transferred to the horses and the canoe paddled somewhat further. When taken from the creek to be dragged overland to the lake just over the height of land, evidently Moosehills Lake, the fragile craft was probably placed on the same device used to carry the canoe from the lower end of the same lake, overland three miles to Buckingham House. This travois-like device was

made of 2 long pieces of wood about 4 Inches square & turned up at each end a little before & 6 or 8 upright posts at proper distance on each side, a line betwixt each is put across & the Canoe is lain upon them & so conveniently & safely conveyed from one place to another.²

Confident that Churchill alone would be unable to completely occupy the entire Athabaska district, James Bird had planned to send

¹Johnson, Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence, p. 242n.

²E.3/2, f. 62, Fidler Journal, "Journal of the water communication . . . by P. Fidler." At the lower end of this lake Fidler commented on a bridge "over the creek built of wood about 200 yards from the lower end of the Lake." Ibid.

a few canoes there in the summer of 1800. But because of impending retirement of essential steersmen, exorbitant wage demands by other canoe men, and uncertainty regarding Company wishes, no such party was sent to the Athabaska that year.¹ Rather, efforts were directed to the south, up the South Branch of the Saskatchewan, where Peter Fidler erected Chesterfield House at the mouth of the Red Deer River and began a two season, boat and bateau serviced branch of the York trade.²

South Branch trade at Chesterfield House may, in part, have been a diversionary action by the HBC to draw off some opposition attention from the Athabaska until the Company was able to penetrate that reserve. When Chesterfield House was abandoned in the spring of 1802, plans were in motion for just such a thrust. Finally, in the summer of that year the York traders again embarked on another

¹Johnson, "Introduction" to Johnson, Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence, p. lxxx.

²The Chesterfield House post journals for these two seasons are published in Johnson, Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence, pp. 253-321. Both years the HBC traders traveled up the South Branch with two boats and returned with the two boats and a bateau they had built at the post. The bateau brought down in the spring of 1802 was described as "34 feet long by 7 1/2 foot wide." Ibid., p. 230. Use of such large bateaux to float returns and/or provisions downstream was not limited to the HBC. The NWC had equally large bateaux on both the Saskatchewan and Assiniboine-Red Rivers. In May 1810 at the NWC post of Fort Vermillion on the North Saskatchewan, four bateaux with 40 foot keels were built. Coues, New Light, II, p. 600. In 1808 Peter Fidler described a Canadian bateau used to carry cargoes down the Assiniboine River as "36 feet long & 12 feet wide . ." E.3/5, f. 23, Fidler Journal, "Journal of a Journey from Charlton House on the Red River . . . by Peter Fidler." Both opposition and HBC bateaux of this size were used for a single downriver passage since they were too large and cumbersome to take back upriver. The large bateau brought down by Fidler from Chesterfield House in the spring of 1802 was broken up at Cumberland House on 16 June 1802. B.49/a/32^a, f. 2d, Cumberland House Post Journal, 1802-03.

Athabaska expedition. On 7 August 1802 Peter Fidler, Thomas Swain, and sixteen men in five canoes left Cumberland House to build two houses in the Athabaska.¹

Outlining his ideas on an Athabaska trade ten years earlier, Philip Turnor had considered posts at both Lake Athabaska and on the Peace River, where dry provisions as well as furs could be acquired, essential for a successful trade. These were Fidler's intended building sites. His northern expedition that departed Cumberland House that summer was only one short of the recommended six canoe minimum set by Turnor. But rather than passing by a short cut Turnor had thought might be discovered, the flotilla traveled the proven Canadian route to Athabaska via the Churchill River and Methy Portage.

The long and arduous nature of this track was common knowledge among Company servants, and stories of scarce provisions and a subsistence diet of fish within the district were legion. Fidler was familiar with their entire intended route from Cumberland to Lake Athabaska. The track included 37 portages with a combined length of 17 miles and 290 yards, including the infamous 12-1/4 mile Methy Portage.² Thus it was only with great difficulty, and with promises of increased wages and unprecedented one year contracts, that Tomison was able to induce sixteen men to undertake the expedition.³

¹B.39/a/1, f. 1, Fort Chipewyan [Nottingham House] Post Journal, 1802-03.

²E.3/2, f. 102d, Fidler Journal, "All the Carrying places from York Fort . . . the measured distance of each Portage."

³Johnson, "Introduction" to Johnson, Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence, pp. c and cn.

The brigade reached the south end of Methy Portage on 3 September and worked until the tenth of the month before all was conveyed over.¹ While working canoes and cargoes across, Fidler commented that several men were "nearly incapable of carrying, not being used to such a long Carrying place before."² Seventeen days later the canoes arrived at the entrance of Lake Athabaska, where, even before starting construction on a post, goods were sorted and Thomas Swain was dispatched with nine men in three canoes to proceed up the Peace River to build in the buffalo country.³ Following their departure, Fidler settled on a small island three-fourths mile from the opposition's Fort Chipewyan, and began construction of Nottingham House.⁴

This post served as headquarters for the HBC Athabaska operation during the next four seasons. The first year it remained the Company's only Athabaska post occupied the entire season, since Swain was unable to maintain residence at Mansfield House, which he had built on the Peace River adjacent to the NWC's Fort Laird. The post was a failure because the HBC had hired an ineffectual Indian hunter, and thus the supply of provisions was rapidly depleted. Unable to hire another hunter because the NWC had sent all Indians capable of hunting and not already in their employ, further downriver,

¹B.39/a/1, ff. 4 and 5, Fort Chipewyan [Nottingham House] Post Journal, 1802-03.

²Ibid., f. 5.

³Ibid., f. 6d.

⁴Ibid.

provisions became critically low, and by end December the men were forced to eat parchment skins.¹ They abandoned the post on 9 and 10 January 1803 and retreated to Nottingham House assured by the NWC, which had five posts between the mouth of the river and the Rockies, that they had "no business in this part of the Country."² That June when Swain and four men returned to spend the summer at Mansfield House, they were again unable to acquire sufficient provisions and retreated to the Lake Athabaska post.

With the Peace River essentially closed to the HBC, Swain was sent further north up the Slave River to establish another outpost in the fall of 1803. On 16 September he left Nottingham with eight men in two canoes to build the new post of Chiswick House adjacent to two opposition posts on an island in the Slave River, fifteen miles south of Great Slave Lake.³ This outpost continued to operate until York abandoned the Athabaska in 1806.

Transport routine both to and from the Athabaska, as well as within that region, is perhaps best illustrated by tracing the movement during one season. The year selected is 1803-04. Cumberland House was considered the jumping-off point for the Athabaska, and it was here that the Nottingham House post journals began and ended each season. In 1803 Fidler and nine men left Cumberland House with three canoes on 3 August. They arrived at the Churchill operated post of

¹B.41/a/2, ff. 5d-6d, Chiswick House Post Journal, 1802-04. This journal also includes the 4 October 1802 to 10 January stay at Mansfield House.

²Ibid., f. 6d.

³Ibid., f. 12.

Isle-à-la-Crosse on 22 August, and there picked up three bags of pemmican per canoe, and two additional bags for the entire party. This post served as provision depot for the Athabaska brigade, where they picked up pemmican that had been dispatched from the Saskatchewan River valley. Reprovisioned, the party left on 23 August and five days later arrived at the southern end of Methy Portage. It was not until 4 September that all cargoes and canoes were carried over and they were able to embark down the Clearwater River. On 12 September, forty-one days after leaving Cumberland, the men arrived at Nottingham House.¹

Shortly after the arrival of the canoes, Thomas Swain was dispatched to erect the post of Chiswick House. In the following two years, Swain departed for this post just after the arrival of the the Cumberland House canoes. Swain and most of his men arrived back at Nottingham House with their returns in two canoes on 18 May 1804. Three days later Fidler, Swain and six men departed with their joint returns in two canoes. The party traveled to Isle-à-la-Crosse, where they undoubtedly took on pemmican, and arrived back at Cumberland House on 16 June.²

Although there was variety in the number of men and canoes servicing the Company's Athabaska operations, the consistency in the arrival and departure dates for these craft is striking. With one exception, arrival and departure dates for trips between Cumberland

¹B.39/a/2, ff. 1-4, Fort Chipewyan [Nottingham House] Post Journal, 1803-04.

²Ibid., f. 21.

House and Lake Athabaska, and vice versa, were within one week of each other.¹ The number of HBC wintering servants in the Athabaska, the number of canoes returning each year, and Company returns each season appear in Table 11.

TABLE 11

THE HBC'S ATHABASKA VENTURE, 1803 TO 1806

Trading Year	Canoes Returning	Wintering Servants	Returns in MB
1803	3	18	261
1804	2	18	463
1805	2	17	462
1806	?	16	417

Sources: B.239/d/125, 128, 129, and 131, York Factory Account Books, 1803 to 1806; and B.39/a/1, 3, 4, and 5, Fort Chipewyan [Nottingham House] Post Journal, 1803 to 1806.

When the strength of the HBC Athabaska operation is compared with that of the opposition in the region north of Methy Portage, the opposition's actions, the Company's meager returns, and its short term residency are not surprising. During the 1799 trading year, when the NWC operated unopposed in the region with 126 men, their returns were reported to have been 648 packs of 90 pounds each.² The new Canadian XY Company began competing against the NWC in the

¹The one exception was the June 1806 trip from Nottingham House to Cumberland House when the Company abandoned the Athabaska.

²B.39/a/1, f. 24, Fort Chipewyan [Nottingham House] Post Journal, 1802-03.

district the next year, and two years later the HBC joined in this rivalry. At the end of the 1803 season the HBC returns equaled only 261 MB, but the NWC's returns had fallen to 182 packs, while the XY returns equaled 31 packs.¹ Fidler assumed the NWC attributed their trade decline "entirely as I suppose on ours & the New Co^s account . . ." ² The next season all companies' returns increased -- the HBC to 463 MB, the NWC to 315 packs, and the XY Company to 81 packs.³ That season the 195 Nor'westers and 84 XY men outnumbered the 18 HBC men by better than 15 to 1.⁴

The HBC was harassed by the numerically superior Canadians as soon as they established trade in what the opposition considered to be their own exclusive trade area. Following the 1804 coalition of the XY Company with the NWC, this harassment reached new heights. Traveling back to their winter station in the summer of 1805 Fidler and his men arrived at Isle-a-la-Crosse where they heard that the Canadians had not only burned down Green Lake House, which Churchill had been forced to abandon that spring because of insufficient manpower, but they had even destroyed the post's garden. Informed of Churchill's intention to abandon this critical post which served

¹Ibid.; and B.239/d/125, York Factory Account Book, 1802-04.

²B.39/a/1, f. 24, Fort Chipewyan [Nottingham House] Post Journal, 1802-03.

³B.39/a/3, f. 21d, Fort Chipewyan [Nottingham House] Post Journal, 1803-04, Fidler reported that the NWC received 76 packs from the 110 Iroquois Indians up the Peace River and near the Rockies, and the XY Company obtained 46 packs from the same Indians; and B.239/d/128, York Factory Account Book, 1803-04.

⁴B.39/a/3, f. 21d and passim, Fort Chipewyan [Nottingham House] Post Journal, 1803-04.

partly to relay pemmican to Isle-à-la-Crosse for the Athabaska brigade, the York command that summer had sent James Sutherland and seven men to resettle the post as a York dependency.¹ Despite Canadian threats at Isle-à-la-Crosse that the HBC canoes would be burned on Methy Portage if they tried to proceed, Fidler and his small party arrived back safely at Nottingham House.

There Fidler found the unified opposition had stepped up harassment of the HBC men. That December Fidler wrote his superior at York to inform him of their plight,

The Canadians privately destroyed our Canoes that they had to go after Ind^s or on hunting -- pulled up our Garden stuff -- came into the House and examined all the skins traded here this summer -- Pitched a Tent within 5 Yards of our House -- and would suffer no Indian to come near the House even the sight of a common Canadian is sufficient to keep them away they are all so very much afraid -- at the Slave Lake they have forceably taken Indians out of the House who came in to Trade -- whenever our people went out on duck hunting for their Lively.^d some of the Canadians would always accompany them & holloing &c. frightned every Thing away and it appears that it has been their fixed determination to starve our people. our people had such a very disagreeable summer that not a man would remain another if his wages was doubled -- we are therefore under the necessity of Leaving this in the Spring -- . . .²

Fidler reported he had already made an arrangement with the NWC agreeing to withdraw if they would pay the HBC's outstanding Indian debts of 500 MB.³

¹The following May a boat was sent from Isle-à-la-Crosse to Sutherland's post of Green Lake to pick up pemmican for Fidler's Cumberland House bound canoes, as well as twelve bags for the Isle-à-la-Crosse post. B.89/a/1, f. 10d, Isle-à-la-Crosse Post Journal, 1805-06.

²B.239/b/72, ff. 109d-110, York Factory Correspondence Book, 1801 to 1806, Peter Fidler at Nottingham House evidently to John McNab at York Factory, 23 December 1805.

³Ibid., f. 110.

On 9 June 1806 the HBC withdrew from the Athabaska. The four previous seasons had proven the feasibility of the logistics of a sustained York based trade in that district. The failure of the Company trade in the district was not transport related. Rather, it was due to inadequate Company manpower in the face of a numerically superior and hostile opposition. As Fidler wrote, "so very few of us and situated as we are against such numbers of the worst Actions & Designs that we are not able to do any thing here advantageous for the Company--."¹ The HBC did not successfully reoccupy the Athabaska until 1815 when it was prepared to compete with the NWC on a more equal footing.

The Oxford House and Merry's House Districts

Two districts that merit mention, but were not studied in detail, are those centering on Oxford House and Merry's House. Following its 1798 establishment, Oxford House developed its own complement of subsidiary posts. The number of outposts varied from year to year, but during the last few years of the 1790 to 1810 period, totaled four or five each season. Out stations operating for more than one season during this period included Island Lake, Cross Lake, Black River, Winni peggo shishs, and Jack River. Canoes appear to have been the standard mode of conveyance between Oxford House and these outposts. During the period 1805 to 1810 men stationed at Oxford House and its dependencies averaged about

¹Ibid.

twenty-two, and combined fur returns during the same period averaged 3,321 MB.¹

The York based outpost of Merry's House was established in the Bungee Country on Sharpe Lake in 1800. It was joined by a second post built at Sucker Lake, presumably Red Sucker Lake further upriver, in 1806. The route used to communicate with these posts was not determined, although during the subsequent 1810 to 1821 period, HBC traders at the Gods Lake post in the same general vicinity used the track up the Hayes River to Knee Lake where they crossed over to Gods Lake. Transport between both posts and York Factory was independent. While use of boats was instituted on the Sucker Lake run in 1808, canoes remained the only type of craft servicing Merry's House through this period. The eleven to thirteen men stationed at these posts produced combined returns that averaged 1,774 MB during the 1807 to 1810 seasons.²

Severn Inland Transport and Trade

When James Swain arrived at Severn from London in the summer of 1806 he came with authorization for Severn to establish its own inland outpost. Swain, who returned as second in command at the post, had suggested to the Company headquarters that trade at Severn would be enhanced by such an outpost. The London Committee evidently concurred, granting permission, and authorizing their agent in the

¹B.239/d/129, 131, 133, 138, 141, 142, 144^b, and 145, York Factory Account Books, 1805 to 1810.

²B.239/d/133, 138, 141, 142, 144^b, and 145, York Factory Account Books, 1807 to 1810.

Orkneys to hire the necessary additional men for Severn. Their only stipulation was that it avoid interfering with the inland traders from York and Albany.¹

The next June, James Swain led two inland boats, which drew only eighteen inches of water, up the Severn and Fawn Rivers to Trout Lake where he built Severn's first inland outpost.² Canadian traders were already active in the area, and upon hearing Indian reports that the Severn traders were finally moving inland to offer on site competition, one opposition trader was reported to have told Indians, "O my Country men do not be decieved with the Stories of these old Women any longer, they have talked about coming, long enough, but have not come yet or ever will."³ This trader, Mr. Cameron, was probably the master of the Canadian post Swain found on Trout Lake. Absent at the time of their arrival, Indians reported that Cameron had left for Grand Portage that spring, but would be back in the summer. Anticipating his return, Swain opted for the lake as the situation for his post, which he built on the north shore.⁴

That summer Swain returned briefly to Severn in hopes of acquiring a qualified person to operate a second outpost south of Trout Lake. Evidently unsuccessful in obtaining a suitable

¹A.6/17, ff. 84d-85, London Correspondence Outward, Official, 1804 to 1809, Governor and Committee to Thomas Thomas at Severn, 31 May 1806.

²Swain's trip is covered in B.220/a/1, ff. 4-9, Trout Lake Post Journal, 1807-08.

³Ibid., ff. 7-7d.

⁴Ibid., f. 8d.

individual, Trout Lake House remained Severn's only inland post that season, and contributed 1,170 MB to Severn's joint trade of 5,586 MB.¹

It was not until the 1808-09 season that Severn succeeded in opening its second inland post of Beaver Lake House south of Trout Lake. That season its 513 MB and the 1,148 MB from Trout Lake were an important part of Severn's 5,362 MB trade.² The next year Trout Lake moved its outpost to Sandy Lake, presumably the Sandy Lake located in the headwaters area of the Severn River. The new outpost and Trout Lake combined to account for 2,338 MB of Severn's 6,332 MB trade that year.³

Wooden Inland Boats provided most communication between Severn and its inland posts even though such craft were not deemed particularly suitable for that service. In February 1808 Thomas Thomas at Severn wrote James Swain at Trout Lake,

I have built no Inland Boats as you said it was not necessary, besides I am Opinion that Boats with 5 Men will be found not to answer the best purpose for our small concern it being necessary in general that two Boats should go together, and as the Committee have not thought proper to send a supply of Hands we cannot at all times send ten Men with one outfit . . .⁴

Thomas had previously approved of Swain's plans to build canoes for the service and had suggested the canoe size used at York, which he reported as being, "very nearly . . . Length 24f^t. Breadth 4 feet

¹B.198/d/81, f. 12, Severn Account Book, 1807-08.

²B.198/d/83, f. 15, Severn Account Book, 1808-09.

³B.198/d/86, f. 13, Severn Account Book, 1809-10.

⁴B.220/a/1, ff. 53-53d, Trout Lake Post Journal, 1807-08,
Thomas Thomas at Severn to James Swain at Trout Lake, 13 September 1807.

2 In. depth 2 feet."¹ Despite this sentiment, boats remained the standard mode of transport between Severn and Trout Lake, as well as that used to service the Sandy Lake outpost its first season. Upriver travel time from Severn to Trout Lake was approximately three weeks, while the downriver trip required only one week.²

Though limited in scale, the London Committee evidently felt Severn's inland operations should be given the same consideration as those of other Bayside posts. In May 1808 they wrote authorizing that inland men there were entitled to bounties on fur returns like other employees, and promised that once the situations of the outposts were reported, they would also begin receiving trip money.³ Despite this expressed concern for Severn's inland theatre, the Committee was not able to meet the post's request for the additional manpower. Thomas at Severn concluded that the Committee's lack of response to his "earnest and repeated requests" for more men could only mean that "they have no Inclination to support the Inland Establishment at this Factory."⁴

¹Ibid., f. 50, Thomas Thomas at Severn to James Swain at Trout Lake, 12 October 1807.

²The utility of more durable wood construction proved invaluable when a small boat was taken to Trout Lake in late fall of 1809. Not departing the factory until 29 September, the crew experienced cold weather on the passage which caused three to four inches of ice to build up on the side of the boat in just two hours' time, caused by the splashing of the setting poles. Below Trout Lake the crew had to chop its way through ice and on reaching the lake, had to drag the boat for 1-1/4 miles over the frozen surface. B.220/a/2, ff. 5-7, Trout Lake Post Journal, 1809-10.

³B.198/c/1, f. 1d, Governor and Committee to Thomas Thomas and Council at Severn, 20 May 1808.

⁴B.220/a/2, f. 28, Trout Lake Post Journal, 1809-10, Thomas Thomas at Severn, 20 May 1808.

Inland from Churchill Factory

Despite its numerous handicaps, once Churchill initiated inland trading in 1793 it succeeded in developing its inland transport line at an impressive rate (Fig. 26). By 1799 its traders were competing directly against York inland traders in the Beaver River valley. Churchill traders had reached that valley only six years after that factory's first inland post had been established, whereas York inland traders did not establish posts on the river until their twenty-fifth season. Linked to Churchill's relatively rapid extension of transport was the early experimentation with wooden craft, and quick development of bateaux as the standard mode on that track.

During the 1790 to 1810 contest with York for control of its share of the Grand Nord, Churchill was hampered by a difficult trunk line inland. For the first 200 miles from the Bay, the Churchill is more a series of lakes and interconnecting falls than it is a continuous river. In this section the river drops almost 800 feet in elevation (see Figure 20). Further west the river is a better track, although much of it passed through provision poor areas. Scarcity of country provisions gave Churchill a bad reputation among servants, and made it difficult for the factory to acquire adequate manpower, another transport handicap. With its more northerly location Churchill's inland track was also hampered by a relatively shorter open water season than posts further south (see Figures 10 and 11). Although historical freeze-up dates at Churchill approximate those at York Factory, spring break-up dates were about thirty

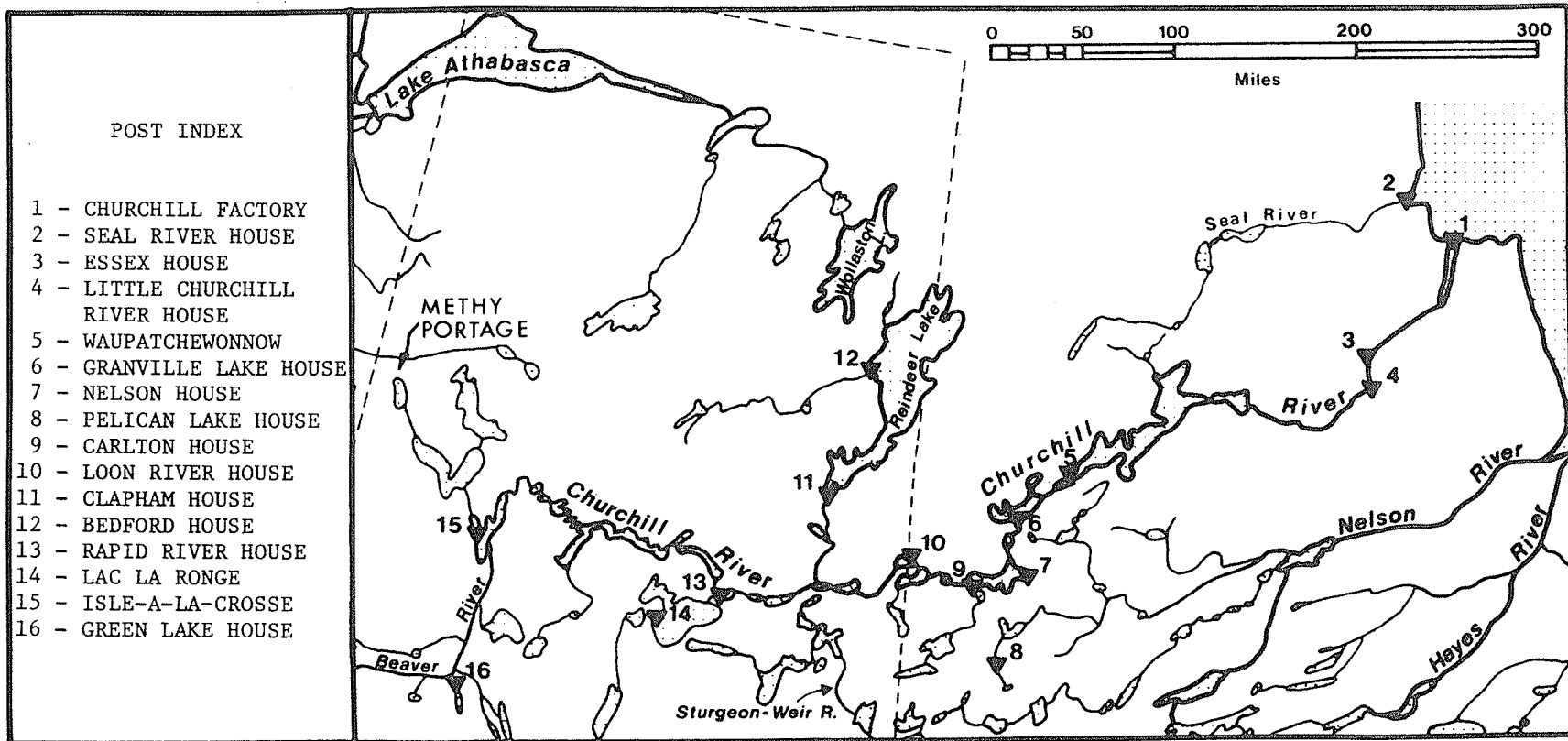


Fig. 26--Churchill Factory and outposts, 1790 to 1810

days later than at York.¹ One distinctive, and favourable, characteristic of the Churchill River is its much more even stream-flow throughout the year.² This attribute helped facilitate multiple inland trips by like craft during the open water season.

Initiation and Development of the Lower Mainline

By the early 1790's Churchill Factory's trade had been adversely affected by inland Canadian traders for almost twenty years. The post's 16,000-plus made-beaver trade of the 1770 and 1771 seasons had dropped by more than half by the early 1790's.³ During that time Churchill had not moved inland to meet the Canadian competition like all other major Bayside posts. The fact that Churchill stood by and did not engage this competition in the interior can at least partly be explained by the assumed difficulty of navigability of the Churchill River. In 1768-69 Andrew Graham described the river as "so shoal that canoes can but just come down. No cock boat can be got up it twenty miles from the Fort."⁴ Joseph Hansom traveled up the Churchill and on to the Saskatchewan River in 1773-74 and wrote,

the Rivers &c to and from Churchill are excessive bad and particularly this River [Churchill] occasioned by the Number of Falls which is in it; which greatly obstructs the passage of 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 . . .⁵

¹Moodie and Catchpole, Environmental Data, pp. 114-115 and 118-119.

²Ibid., pp. 101-104.

³Williams, Graham's Observations, p. 269n.

⁴Ibid., p. 244.

⁵Tyrrell, Journals of Samuel Hearne and Philip Turnor, p. 240n.

Thus, in the early 1790's when Chief Thomas Stayner at Churchill Factory began claiming in his correspondence that the Churchill was navigable, Resident Joseph Colen at York was obviously taken by surprise, since this was "the reverse of all former Accounts."¹ Colen fitted out David Thompson in the late summer of 1792 for a journey of discovery toward Lake Athabaska via the Nelson River track. Colen was aware that Thompson might not reach his ultimate objective, and if this were the case Colen wanted to take the opportunity to verify the reported navigability of the Churchill River. If unable to complete his Athabaska assignment Thompson was directed to return, "and if possible survey the Track from down to Churchill and from thence return to this place . . ."² Colen offered Stayner the proposition "which ever track shall be found best & safest for Canoes, will be most proper for business, should it turn out that Churchill River is adapted for large canoes you may depend on every assistance in my power . . ."³--a promise he never kept. Thompson was unable to return by way of Churchill Factory, but Peter

¹B.42/b/34, f. 7d, Churchill Factory Correspondence Book, 1792-93, Joseph Colen at York Factory evidently to Thomas Stayner at Churchill Factory, 13 March 1793.

²B.239/b/52, f. 30, York Factory Correspondence Book, 1791-92, Joseph Colen at York Factory to David Thompson at York Factory, 30 August 1792.

³B.42/b/34, f. 3, Churchill Factory Correspondence Book, 1792-93, Joseph Colen at York Factory evidently to Thomas Stayner at Churchill Factory, 14 September 1792.

Fidler did survey both the Churchill and Seal Rivers in 1793.¹ He found the Churchill River to be a difficult track, but reported the Seal River afforded a good approach to the interior along which flat-bottomed boats might be used.²

In 1779 Samuel Hearne and his council at Churchill commented in their London correspondence on the Canadian incursion into the Athabaska region, then part of the factory's trading hinterland. They expressed a hope that this interruption of their trade would only be temporary since, as they wrote, "the distance from Canada is so great, that we are in hopes that the trouble and danger that attends so long a Journey will prevent them from repeating their visits."³ This, however, was not the case. With greater cooperation and better organization the Canadian opposition consolidated its position on the Churchill River, as well as extended its range even beyond Lake Athabaska. When Churchill began its inland expansion programme in 1793, it not only encountered these firmly entrenched Canadians, but also had to contend with the tenacious opposition of York inland traders.

¹Although Thompson was unable to hire an Indian to pilot him down the Churchill River to the factory, he did inquire about the section of the river he did not see. Indians described it as having a strong and fast current too powerful to paddle against, and steep high rock banks that prevented tracking or carrying. B.239/b/54, ff. 27-27d, York Factory Correspondence Book, 1793, David Thompson at York Factory to Joseph Colen and Council at York Factory, 28 July 1793.

²Morton, Canadian West, p. 447; and Rich, Hudson's Bay Company, II, pp. 174-175.

³A.11/15, f. 57, London Correspondence Inward from Churchill Factory, 1774 to 1791, Samuel Hearne and Council at Churchill Factory to Governor and Committee, 17 September 1779.

Churchill's first inland post of Pelican Lake was built on Limestone Point Lake within the Nelson drainage in the summer of 1793.¹ Late that June several canoes of Southward Indians arrived at Churchill to trade. Stayner was impressed enough with their two largest canoes to purchase them.² The native's favourable account of the navigability of the Churchill River and the acquisition of the two canoes were enough to induce Stayner to "put it beyond the possibility of a doubt that this River is navigable for large Canoes . . . equal in size I think to those at York Fort."³ Using the two newly purchased large canoes and several smaller ones, George Charles and four servants successfully ascended the Churchill River and crossed over into the Nelson drainage where they built Churchill's first inland post. The region was supposedly a good area for acquiring canoes, and Stayner hoped to be able to secure an additional supply there.

Stayner strongly suspected that flat-bottom boats could be used on the Churchill, and later that same summer he sent George

¹George Charles had been instructed to settle on "We pis cow Lake", today's Burntwood Lake, but according to David Thompson's observations of 23 June 1794, Charles evidently built on what is today's Limestone Point Lake. This passage in Thompson's Notebook in the Public Archives of Canada is cited in Staff Report, Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada, Thematic Study of the Fur Trade in the Canadian West, 1670-1870, Agenda Paper 1968-69, p. 95.

²The largest canoe was 24 feet long by 3 feet 7-1/2 inches wide by 19 inches deep, and the other was 22 feet 2 inches long by 3 feet 1-1/2 inches wide by 18-1/2 inches deep. B.42/b/34, f. 11d, Churchill Factory Correspondence Book, 1792-93, Thomas Stayner at Churchill Factory to Joseph Colen and Council at York Factory, 5 July 1793.

³Ibid.

Donald 150 miles upriver to check its suitability for such craft.¹

Donald returned to report that he thought boats could be taken upriver at least as far as he had traveled, and according to Indian accounts of the river above that point, even further inland. At the close of his journal of the survey he wrote,

having been near 150 Miles up the River, which in my opinion is no ways deserving the bad name it gets. I am almost certain that was the water two feet higher than it is at present Boats might be got up with safety as they have worse rivers to go up at Albany & Moose then this is, as far as I have seen.²

His account was enough to induce Stayner to authorize construction of two flat-bottomed boats.³ This was yet another example of a Company employee with first hand knowledge of the application of wooden craft on the Albany River using his experience to effect transport innovation in another factory's inland.

By the spring of 1794 both flat-bottomed boats were in readiness. That June, as a precaution, Stayner had an empty boat make a trial run upriver about 110 miles.⁴ On 30 June Stayner, Donald, and eight servants assisted by four Northern Indians started up the Churchill River in the two flat-bottomed boats. The craft were mostly tracked for the first few days until 4 July when passage was stopped after one of the boats was stove in the aft section.

¹His journal of this survey is B.42/a/120a, "Geo^e Donald up Churchill River," classified as Churchill Factory Post Journal, 1794.

²Ibid., f. 3.

³B.42/d/119, f. 3d, Churchill Factory Post Journal, 1793-94. These craft were built of "Country stuff."

⁴Ibid., ff. 23 and 24.

Since repair of the damage required a skilled boat builder, the party returned to the factory.¹

Having received favourable accounts of the Seal River, Stayner decided to use the remaining time before the arrival of the London ship to personally inspect the track and determine its suitability for boats. He traveled in a boat to Seal River House, which had been built at the mouth of the Seal River that spring, and started upriver in a canoe on 16 July. Traveling upcountry he noted where boats would have to be tracked or carried and the distances involved. On 4 August he arrived at Southern Indian Lake, in the Churchill River track. He retraced his route down the Seal River and arrived back at Churchill Factory on 12 August.²

Stayner returned to the factory convinced that flat-bottomed boats could pass up the Seal River as far as he had seen, and probably with little difficulty, on to Granville House, which had been built on Granville Lake that season using large canoes.³ He envisioned that boats as large as those used on the Albany and Moose Rivers would be in use on the Seal River within a year or two.⁴

¹B.42/a/120b, ff. 2-3, "Remarks & Occurrences up Churchill River -- 1794," in Churchill Factory Post Journal, 1794.

²Ibid., ff. 3-9d, "Remarks &c. up Seal River."

³A post had been planned for Reindeer Lake that year, but the failure of the flat-bottom boats forced a settlement further down in the track.

⁴B.42/a/120b, f. 9d, "Remarks &c. up Seal River," in Churchill Factory Post Journal, 1794.

The Seal River track was not unknown to trading Indians, although they did not use it at the time. According to William Auld, Indians considered the Seal River to be a better track than the lowest reach of the Churchill River.¹ The river had been used by Southern and Athabaska Indians previously, but following the infusion of Canadian traders, the havoc caused by the small pox epidemic twelve years earlier, and the confusion following the French destruction of the fort in 1782 all combined to cause the old track to be forgotten.² Stayner saw the unused Seal River becoming "the track persued by Englishmen from hence."³

Stayner's immediate problem was an inadequate number of servants to man the bateau expedition he planned for Seal River the next spring. He had reportedly requested twenty new labouring servants that year, but when the Prince of Wales arrived at Churchill he found he had only been sent two, not enough to proceed with his intended expedition. In a desperate and unprecedented move to alleviate his manpower problem, he appealed to the captain of the ship, and received nine of the twenty to thirty new servants destined for York.⁴

¹B.42/a/119, f. 28, Churchill Factory Post Journal, 1793-94.

²Ibid.

³B.42/b/36, f. 5, Churchill Factory Correspondence Book, 1793-94, Thomas Stayner at Churchill Factory to Joseph Colen and Council at York Factory, 25 August 1794.

⁴Ibid., f. 5; and B.42/b/44, f. 52, Churchill Factory Correspondence Book, 1783 to 1801, Thomas Stayner and William Auld to Governor and Committee, [1794].

Displeased with the two poorly constructed flat boats built in 1793, Stayner had two new ones, as well as two wooden canoes, built at Churchill in the spring of 1795. That summer, using the Seal River track to South Indian Lake, one bateau succeeded in reaching the junction of the Kississing and Churchill Rivers, where Carlton House was erected.¹ The other bateau was lost twenty-six miles up the Seal River.² Hearing later that fall that a bateau had proceeded beyond Granville House, Stayner claimed, "thus far the River in the Vicinity of Churchill have proved superior to those of York as a Batteau has not yet been Navigated up the river from thence although it is 21 Years since Inland was established."³

Considering the strong current in the track, William Linklater, the leader of the 1795 expedition, felt even larger wooden craft would be more appropriate.⁴ That September Stayner had the shipwright and boatbuilder begin preparing timbers for two new bateaux

¹William Linklater's objective was Reindeer Lake, but he was unable to reach it when his Indian pilot refused to travel further. B.29/a/1, f. 4d, Carlton House Post Journal, 1795-96.

²B.42/b/37, f. 9, Churchill Factory Correspondence Book, 1794-95, William Linklater on Seal River to Thomas Stayner at Churchill Factory, 26 July 1795. The loss was generally attributed to the inability of the crew of two Indians and two servants to communicate.

³B.42/a/122, ff. 2-2d, Churchill Factory Post Journal, 1795-96. Stayner was evidently not aware of the initial use of a bateau on the lower Hayes River the previous year.

⁴Ibid., f. 9.

"rather larger dimensions than the last."¹ A later journal reference gives the dimensions of both bateaux as "20 ft long 5 ft wide & 2 ft. deep."²

With these craft Stayner planned to push toward the Athabaska and at least reach Reindeer Lake or Hatchet Lake.³ In July when Stayner tried to arrange the bateau crews, eight men refused to travel inland. Their refusal upset Stayner's Lake Athabaska plans, but rather than lose the entire season, both he and inland master Charles agreed to steer a bateau. When the party left Churchill on 6 July they proceeded up the Churchill River rather than the Seal River.⁴ The craft performed well, safely reached Carlton House, and arrived back at the factory on 19 August.⁵ Indians arriving back at Churchill before the bateaux reported "the Batteauxs go so well, and are managed with so much ease that not one Birch rind Canoe (not even the Indians) were able to Keep up with them, the Boats being

¹B.42/a/122, f. 1, Churchill Factory Post Journal, 1795-96.

²Ibid., f. 1d. A later entry in the same journal indicated the keels were 24 feet long. The length and width of the bateau reported here do not equal the dimensions Stayner reported when he summarized his inland progress in a January 1799 letter to Chief Thomas at Moose Factory. In that correspondence he referred to the summer 1796 use of these same bateaux and gave their dimensions as "length 27 feet breadth 4 feet 9 Inches depth 1 foot 10 Inches." B.42/b/41, f. 3d, Churchill Factory Correspondence Book, 1799, Thomas Stayner at Churchill Factory to Chief Thomas at Moose Factory, 20 January 1799.

³B.42/b/44, f. 52, Churchill Factory Correspondence Book, 1783 to 1801, Thomas Stayner and William Auld to Governor and Committee, [1794].

⁴B.42/a/122, f. 15, Churchill Factory Post Journal, 1795-96.

⁵Ibid., f. 15d.

frequently oblig'd to stop for them."¹ Even though carrying places had to be prepared en route, the bateaux still arrived at their destination in less time than required by canoes.²

The utility of bateaux on the Churchill now an established fact, Stayner planned that they would be the only type of craft used to carry Company cargoes the next season (1796-97). To expedite the factory's push toward Athabaska, Stayner had two new bateaux built. To facilitate their use, launching sites were prepared, and Stayner began organizing the inland track around forwarding depots, his preparations conforming to the format already established by other Bayside factories at a comparable juncture in the development of their inland transport.

Inland masters at both Churchill's inland posts were instructed to clear and roller portages on their spring 1797 return to the factory.³ In September 1796 two bateaux were used to convey trade goods and provisions to the new log tent of Essex House at the junction of the Churchill and (Little) Beaver Rivers "in readiness against next Year for conveying to the Inland Settlements."⁴ The

¹B.42/b/38, f. 15, Churchill Factory Correspondence Book, 1795-96, Bartholomew Nelson at Churchill Factory to Joseph Colen and Council at York Factory, 25 July 1796.

²B.42/b/39, f. 2d, Churchill Factory Correspondence Book, 1796-97, Thomas Stayner at Churchill Factory to Chief Thomas at Moose Factory, 2 January 1797.

³The two inland posts that season were Carlton House and Portland House, on Pike Lake of an unknown location, evidently south of Southern Indian Lake.

⁴B.42/a/123, ff. 1d and 2d, Churchill Factory Post Journal, 1796-97.

next spring two new bateaux were completed and two others were modified to make their ends "fuller."¹

These four bateaux were used to make a total of six trips inland from the factory during the summer of 1797. Stayner steered one of the two bateaux that left Churchill in late June. That trip he had hoped to reach further inland before meeting George Charles, but ice delayed their passage and Stayner met him in Southern Indian Lake. Charles was fitted out there and dispatched on 8 August to proceed as far as possible toward Lake Athabaska via either the Reindeer Lake-Hatchet Lake route or the Isle-a-la-Crosse track.² Stayner returned to the factory after leaving goods at Southern Indian Lake, where later that summer William Linklater built the post of Waupatchewonnow³ "to act as a store to the North.^d. Stations."⁴

Late that summer, 1797, Chief Stayner returned home to England in the Company ship. He had successfully inaugurated Churchill's inland expansion and developed a serviceable craft for the mainline track, but progress inland continued to be handicapped by some conditions which he felt the London Committee could rectify.

¹Ibid., f. 11d.

²B.42/b/39, f. 4d, Churchill Factory Correspondence Book, 1796-97, "Instructions for M^r Charles" from Thomas Stayner, 8 August 1797.

³Thomas Stayner's 1801 sketch map shows a post of this name on the north shore at the west end of Southern Indian Lake. B.42/b/46, folding map attached to back of p. 39, Churchill Factory Correspondence Book, 1802-03.

⁴B.42/b/39, f. 5d, Churchill Factory Correspondence Book, 1796-97, "Instructions for M^r Linklater" from Thomas Stayner at Churchill Factory, 27 August 1797.

His primary motive for returning was to meet with the Committee in hopes of solving the manpower problem at his post. Not only was he lacking sufficient numbers of inland labourers, those he had in that service were evidently still "Ignorant of the Management of Batteaux."¹ Despite great expense in sending large quantities of goods inland, fur returns remained small.² Stayner felt this would continue to be the case until he was supplied with more capable men. As an inducement to attract and retain qualified servants he also planned to lobby for additional remuneration for those who wintered inland from the factory, where they had to subsist largely on fish,³ in contrast to the neighboring York inland where preferred pemmican was more readily available.

Hinterland Overlap and Muskrat Rivalry

Another problem Stayner brought before the London Committee on his 1797 trip was the rivalry with York Factory in the Muskrat Country. During the preceding seven seasons Churchill competed first indirectly, and then directly, against York traders within the

¹Ibid., f. 6d, Thomas Stayner at Churchill Factory to William Auld at Churchill Factory, 31 August 1797.

²In 1795 Churchill's trade totaled 5,379 MB, of which 1,602 MB came from Granville House. The following year the combined factory and inland trade equaled 6,560 MB, with 1,137 MB coming from Granville House and 998 MB from Carlton House. The next year Carlton House contributed 1,014 MB and Portland House 497 MB to Churchill's total trade of 6,312 MB. B.42/d/73, ff. 24-24d, /74, ff. 27-28d, and /75, ff. 24-25d, Churchill Factory Account Books, 1795, 1796, and 1797.

³B.42/b/39, f. 6d, Churchill Factory Correspondence Book, 1796-97, Thomas Stayner at Churchill Factory to William Auld at Churchill Factory, 31 August 1797.

region. The southwesterly trend of the Churchill track and the westerly trend of the Nelson made such a conflict almost unavoidable.

Stayner claimed the detrimental affect of the York traders in the Rat Country was felt as soon as Split Lake began operating in 1790. Reports he received indicated that the first Indians to visit the Split Lake post were Chipewyan, who had not previously traded at York. The next year, with the addition of a second York outpost in the area, Churchill's returns again fell, and Stayner attributed those declines to York's competition. When York extended its reach still higher up the Nelson track the following year, Churchill returns declined even further.¹

In 1793 Churchill's first inland post of Pelican Lake brought Churchill traders in direct competition with York inland traders. That winter their post and York's new inland outpost of Wekusko Lake House operated within thirty miles of each other. In the ensuing years both York and Churchill were warned by the Company headquarters to avoid such intra-Company rivalry.

If drainage basins tributary to a Bayside post are considered the legitimate minimal trade area of that post, it was Churchill that first crossed the divide and began trading in an area that more rightly belonged to York. This incursion was short-lived, and the factory withdrew the next year to the Churchill drainage. Chief Stayner and the council at Churchill Factory, however, saw York's

¹B.42/a/1, f. 48d, Churchill Factory Miscellaneous, 1797 to 1810, "Reasons for preferring Churchill River, to York River, for conducting the Northward Trade" Thomas Stayner, London 29 November 1797.

activity up the Nelson River as an incursion into inland territory that belonged to their factory, and suggested to the London Committee that York canoes operating in that vicinity could be better employed on the Saskatchewan.¹ In a 1795 letter from Stayner to George Sutherland, locum tenens resident at York, he repeated his complaint of York inland competition and pointed out "the folly of two distant Factorys making Settlements among the same Indians . . ."2 He facetiously wrote that it would not even surprise him to hear that Malchom Ross and David Thompson were wintering in Reindeer Lake, to which he had already sent men.³ In fact, both Ross and Thompson did winter in the Churchill track that year, with Ross at Fairford House and Thompson at Duck Portage.

That season both these York based traders wintered further up the track than Churchill's own Granville House and Carlton House. Carlton, however, was less than fifty miles downriver from Thompson's Duck Portage post, and trading conflicts quickly developed. A log tent outpost from Carlton House was built at Duck Portage that winter to collect Indian debts due Carlton. The winter was marked by protracted correspondence between Thompson and William Linklater at Carlton, each claiming his right to the Duck Portage trade.⁴

¹B.42/b/44, f. 57, Churchill Factory Correspondence Book, 1783 to 1801, Thomas Stayner and Council to Governor and Committee, 8 September 1795.

²B.42/b/37, f. 11d, Churchill Factory Correspondence Book, 1794-95, Thomas Stayner at Churchill Factory to George Sutherland at York Factory, 14 August 1795.

³Ibid.

⁴B.29/a/1, passim, Carlton House Post Journal, 1795-96.

When Chief Stayner at Churchill heard of York traders' northward incursion into his inland track he accompanied the winter packet to York to discuss the situation with Joseph Colen. At York, Stayner informed Colen of his success with large capacity wooden craft on the Churchill River and of the recent movements of Ross and Thompson. Colen wrote to both men that spring instructing them to yield to the Churchill men if it appeared they were able to push on to the Athabaska in 1796.¹ As explained previously, Stayner's planned Athabaska venture of that year did not materialize, and Carlton House remained Churchill's furthest inland post. Unchallenged by the Churchill traders, Ross and Thompson continued with their push toward Lake Athabaska, and when unable to reach their goal, built Bedford House on the west side of Reindeer Lake.

Although Ross and Thompson had reached beyond the Muskrat Country in 1796-97, the York-Churchill rivalry in that region continued. That season Carlton House faced York competitors five days' walk away at Fort Hulse and other York traders on Burntwood Lake only two days away.² Since Indians debted to Carlton traded at these two York outposts, Post Master Linklater visited both posts that winter.

When Ross withdrew from Bedford House in 1797 the potential of an Athabaska short cut via the Nelson River and Reindeer River appeared unlikely. As previously mentioned, York traders yielded

¹Johnson, "Introduction" to Johnson, Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence, p. liii.

²Ibid., p. lix; and B.29/a/2, f. 1, Carlton House Post Journal, 1796-97.

Athabaska ventures to Churchill that year. Colen also ended the Muskrat rivalry in 1797 by ordering that all posts near the Churchill traders be closed, and that no new York inland posts be built beyond Split Lake.¹

Bateaux Toward Athabaska

While in London in 1797 Chief Thomas Stayner presented the Committee with his case for a Churchill approach to the Athabaska. In a November brief to them entitled, "Reasons for preferring Churchill River, to York River, for conducting the Northward Trade", Stayner presented four major arguments of varying validity to support his factory's approach. He began by pointing out that the Churchill track provided the shortest possible route. Secondly, he suggested that the rapid adoption of large capacity bateaux on the Churchill River had proven navigation on the river was easier than on the York track, where less efficient canoes still remained the standard inland craft after more than twenty years of inland trading. He next claimed that the Churchill River was reportedly the best supplied river in terms of available food along its course within 400 miles of the Bay. These locally available provisions meant craft could carry fewer provisions and thus greater cargoes. His final argument, that Churchill provided the best harbour in the Bay, was more factual.²

¹Johnson, "Introduction" to Johnson, Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence, p. lix.

²B.42/a/1, f. 48, Churchill Factory Miscellaneous, 1797 to 1810, "Reasons for preferring Churchill River, to York River, for conducting the Northward Trade" Thomas Stayner, London, 29 November 1797.

Stayner's appeal did not result in the immediate granting to Churchill sole responsibility for developing the Athabaska. In their 1798 outward correspondence to acting Chief William Auld and his council at Churchill, the Committee still expressed the belief that the Athabaska was large enough for both York and Churchill.¹

Stayner did, however, return with a new system of remuneration for inland service at the factory. In 1794 he and William Auld had written to London requesting a liberal bounty for men employed in the Churchill inland where "the Season being much shorter here than down the Bay, for Boat Work, it will consequently require the people to work 14 or 15 hours out of the 24 . . ." ² The next year the Committee wrote back saying they would only agree to the usual bounty of forty shillings per trip, the same allowed the men inland from York.³ On his London visit Stayner also lobbied for greater rewards for his inland servants. This personal appeal evidently had greater impact, and he returned to Churchill with a more liberal system. That year the Committee wrote,

In consideration of those Men who travel Inland & live on Fish 20^s/ a Trip will be added to their pay & in order to encourage your men to go Inland, we allow them similar advantage to those at York & have therefore resolved on the following Trip Money to be allowed them Viz. From C.F. [Churchill Factory] to little

¹A.6/16, f. 57, London Correspondence Outward, Official, 1796 to 1803, Governor and Committee to William Auld and Council at Churchill Factory.

²B.42/b/44, f. 51d, Churchill Fort Correspondence Book, 1783 to 1801, Thomas Stayner and William Auld at Churchill Factory to Governor and Committee, [1794].

³A.6/15, f. 140, London Correspondence Outward, Official, 1792 to 1795, Governor and Committee to Thomas Stayner and Council at Churchill Factory, 30 May 1795.

C.R. [Churchill River] being about 130 Miles & the journey taking near a Fortnight we denominate as one Trip. To the Pilot 24^s/ Steersmen 18^s/ Bowsman 15^s/ Middleman 12^s/. From little C.R. to the [Southern] Indian Lake being 200 Miles with many carrying Places as one Trip & a Quarter To the Pilot 30^s/. Steersman 22^s/6^d. Bowsman 18^s/9^d. Middleman 15^s/. From the Indian Lake to Charlton House about 170 Miles but being a much better passage than any of the Former as one trip the Pilot 24^s/ Steersman 18^s/ Bowsman 15^s Middleman 12^s/.¹

On his return Stayner found that the most recent, 1797, attempt to reach the Athabaska had failed like all earlier efforts. George Charles with two bateaux had only reached as far as Lac la Ronge, where he built on the north shore. Stayner and his council attributed his failure to the lack of servants' skill in working the bateaux, as well as "difficulty of procuring a Pilot, we may also add absolute necessity on a first expedition of clearing Carrying Places & laying rollers for dragging the boats upon . . ." ² Although Charles had failed to reach his hoped for destination, he did succeed in extending the Churchill track still further inland. It was expected that the next season he would be able to proceed on to either the Athabaska or Beaver River, and Stayner asked London for a copy of Philip Turnor's draft and remarks on the track toward Athabaska to assist them in that region.

In 1798 George Charles set out from the factory to proceed to either the Athabaska or Reindeer Lake. More preparation had gone into this year's attempt, and when he left the factory on 5 July with

¹B.42/b/44, f. 65, Churchill Fort Correspondence Book, 1783 to 1801, Governor and Committee to Thomas Stayner and Council at Churchill Factory, 31 May 1798.

²Ibid., f. 66, Thomas Stayner and Council at Churchill Factory to Governor and Committee, September 1798.

two bateaux worked by a crew of eight servants and two Chipewyan Indians, he proceeded to the new store house at the mouth of the Little Churchill River to pick up additional trading goods.¹ After a further passage of twelve days he arrived at the Southern Indian Lake post where he took on additional cargoes.²

At Waupatchewonnow six days were spent repairing the bateaux and packing goods for both his expedition and the group that was to accompany him as far as the Loon River. The combined party left the post on 1 August and arrived at the mouth of the Loon River nine days later. A site was selected for the new post on an island near the junction of both rivers, and Charles' party continued on. It was expected that the new post of Loon River House would not only serve as a fur trading post, but also as a provision post to supply the lengthening Churchill track. The two bateaux reached Rapid River where Charles had left an employee at a temporary house with goods that spring. This individual was to have hired an Indian pilot to take the group on to either the Athabaska or to the Beaver River, but as no Indians had arrived at the post since Charles' departure that spring, no guide had been engaged. As ordered under those circumstances, the party moved back down the Churchill River, and up the Reindeer River to Reindeer Lake where they built close to the Canadian opposition at the entrance of the lake. As well, using dogs and sleds, the HBC post that had been occupied on Lac la Ronge the

¹B.179/a/1, f. 2, Reindeer Lake Post Journal, 1798-99.

²Ibid., f. 2d.

winter of 1797-98 was again occupied that season as an outpost from Reindeer Lake.¹

The next season William Auld successfully led three Churchill bateaux beyond Lac la Ronge to establish posts on both Lac Isle-à-la-Crosse and Green Lake in the Beaver River valley. His party was slightly in advance of the Saskatchewan Beaver River canoe expedition, which overtook them at Primeau Lake. The Saskatchewan traders continued on to build Bolsover House in the Beaver River valley and Greenwich House on Lac la Biche. Although the Saskatchewan traders withdrew from these posts after only one season, Churchill maintained Green Lake House until 1805 and Isle-à-la-Crosse through the 1806 season.

For the Churchill traders a settlement in the Beaver River valley had been seen as both a goal in itself, as well as a necessary adjunct to a successful push into the Athabaska. When Auld left Churchill for inland in the summer of 1799 he was directed to collect a supply of pounded meat and fat from the nearby buffalo country to supply the traders who were to proceed into the Athabaska the next summer. Later that season with the arrival of the London ship, Stayner learned that Churchill was now solely responsible for developing the Athabaska. Malchom Ross was to undertake that venture with the addition of men to be hired in the Orkneys. The Committee wrote Stayner that they had "the highest expectations of success from your repeated representations to us of the advantages which must

¹Ibid., ff. 2d-7.

naturally follow from this Trade being carried on from Churchill . . ."¹ However, they suspected that servants' "insuperable objection to engage for Churchill on account of the scarcity of provisions when travelling Inland" would make it difficult to hire men for that service.²

Malchom Ross, the experienced northern traveler who was to lead an Athabaska expedition, drowned 150 miles up the Churchill River in the fall of 1799.³ His death and the lack of steersmen made an attempt to settle the Athabaska impractical that season. Stayner viewed these latest setbacks as only a postponement of Churchill's entry into that region, and in preparation for extending his bateau track there he requested that Linklater at Isle-à-la-Crosse send "an account of the Methy Portage, what kind of a Carrying Place it is, and whether a sort of Cart could not be constructed for the more easy conveyance of Goods and Boats across it."⁴

Stayner wrote to John Ballenden at York in the summer of 1800 to warn him against violating the Company directive by sending men to the northward. But later that same summer with the arrival of correspondence from London, Stayner learned that Churchill's one year

¹B.42/b/44, f. 67, Churchill Fort Correspondence Book, 1783 to 1801, Governor and Committee to Thomas Stayner and Council at Churchill Factory, 31 May 1799.

²Ibid., f. 67d.

³B.42/b/42, p. 15, Churchill Factory Correspondence Book, 1799-1800, Thomas Stayner at Churchill Factory to Thomas at Severn, 3 February 1800.

⁴Ibid., pp. 37-38, Thomas Stayner at Churchill Factory to William Linklater at Isle-à-la-Crosse, 4 July 1800.

monopoly on development in the Athabaska had been terminated. The Committee wrote that they could "now see clearly that we have been premature in our decisions on that subject & we fear we shall severely feel the ill effects of listening too readily to the ill digested plans of interested advisers . . ." ¹ Churchill was not only stripped of sole responsibility for developing the Athabaska, it was also stated that unless the factory was more productive it would be made "subordinate to York as Severn is at present." ²

The reaction from Stayner and his council was immediate. In their London inward correspondence that fall they again claimed that it was "literally impossible that ever this Northward Trade can be conducted so well from York as from Churchill . . ." ³ Further, they considered it "really discouraging after the great exertions we have made getting unweildy boats, with such indifferent Hands so many hundred miles up the Country that now when we have opened the door others should step in & swallow up the Profits." ⁴

¹B.42/b/44, f. 72d, Churchill Fort Correspondence Book, 1783 to 1801, Governor and Committee to Thomas Stayner and Council at Churchill Factory, 28 May 1800. The same year York was told that the Athabaska was large enough for both Churchill and York and that "The Country to the Northward is of extent enough to employ with Success Ten times the Number of Men that the Canadians or ourselves will ever be capable of sending there. A.6/16, f. 102d, London Correspondence Outward, Official, 1796 to 1803, Governor and Committee to John Ballenden and Council at York Factory, 28 May 1800.

²B.42/b/44, f. 72d, Churchill Fort Correspondence Book, 1783 to 1801, Governor and Committee to Thomas Stayner and Council at Churchill Factory, 28 May 1800.

³Ibid., f. 76, Thomas Stayner and Council at Churchill Factory to Governor and Committee, 9 September 1800.

⁴Ibid.

The newest London directive did not rule out future Churchill attempts toward the Athabaska, and in July 1801 Stayner wrote Post Master Linklater at Isle-à-la-Crosse pointing out that a post at the junction of the Clearwater and Athabaska Rivers would help Churchill's efforts to settle areas still further north.¹ Then, as on previous attempts to reach north beyond the Churchill drainage, Churchill traders were unable to settle a post. This time the desertion by two men stationed at Isle-à-la-Crosse prevented even an attempt.² The next season it was York based traders who successfully extended Company trade into the long sought after Athabaska and began a four year residence there.

While York occupied the Athabaska, Churchill appears to have refrained from all ventures directed toward that region other than allowing its Green Lake post to serve as a provision forwarding station for Saskatchewan pemmican, and its Isle-à-la-Crosse post to act as a provision depot for York's Athabaska canoes. During the 1803 to 1806 period Churchill limited its trading to the Churchill River valley, where the complement of posts did not change dramatically.

There has been no effort to trace the changing annual pattern of posts in the Churchill inland during this period. Nelson House, built on Highrock Lake in 1799, however, does merit special mention.

¹B.42/b/43, p. 48, Churchill Factory Correspondence Book, 1800-01, Thomas Stayner at Churchill Factory to William Linklater at Isle-à-la-Crosse, 3 July 1801.

²B.42/b/45, p. 36, Churchill Factory Correspondence Book, 1801-02, William Linklater at Isle-à-la-Crosse to Thomas Stayner at Churchill Factory, 31 May 1802.

The post immediately began serving as the most distant inland transport centre where bateau brigades met, and where cargoes could be forwarded in both directions. It appears to have assumed the forwarding and provisioning role of Essex House, the store house at the Little Churchill River, and a short-lived post on Northern Indian Lake, all of which were abandoned by 1802.

Although bark and wooden canoes were sometimes used, bateaux remained the standard craft on the Churchill. While Isle-à-la-Crosse was in operation, bateaux servicing it communicated directly with Churchill Factory. Two bateaux usually departed the factory for the post and Green Lake, while it operated, in early July. The track to Isle-à-la-Crosse reportedly had sixty-three carrying places, besides lightening places.¹ The upriver trip to Nelson House required three to four weeks, and the final leg an equal period of time.² The downriver spring party from Isle-à-la-Crosse with two bateaux set out in early June and arrived at Nelson House about two weeks later. The Nelson House to Churchill section normally required just over one week more. Other inland posts also communicated directly with Churchill for the majority of their cargoes. During the single 1803-04 season there were a total of fifteen bateau arrivals and

¹E.3/3, f. 24, Fidler Journal, "Journal of a Journey by Water in a Canoe from Cumberland House To the East End of the Athapescow Lake by Deers Lake, & Lake Wollaston and from the Entrance of Deers River down the Missin nip pee or Churchill River down to Churchill Factory, & from thence in a Boat to York Factory along the Coast by Peter Fidler."

²Fidler reported that twenty-six days was considered the average time for completing the Churchill to Nelson House passage. Ibid., f. 28d.

departures at Churchill.¹ The Churchill bound cargoes of these bateaux during selected years between 1798 and 1810 are shown in Table 12.

Churchill and inland documents provide interesting details on these bateaux. One especially revealing source was the Churchill Account Books, particularly the Shipwrights and Small Craft Indents. Entries in these indicate at least two standard sized bateaux in use by 1800, those with 24 foot keels and others with 26 foot keels, evidently the large and small bateaux referred to in post journals and correspondence.² A request for elm boards for use as bateau bottoms shows at least three thicknesses were used, 1 inch, 1-1/4 inch, and 1-3/4 inch.³ Keels appear to have been either of oak or elm, both hardwoods that were best able to withstand the rigors of the Shield's bare rock rivers and frequent portaging. Indents for bateau stems of six feet show the craft had at least a pointed bow.⁴ All steering oars ordered for the bateaux were of ash, and were

¹B.42/a/129, passim, Churchill Factory Post Journal, 1803-04.

²B.42/d/79, f. 11, Churchill Factory Account Book, 1799-1800; and B.42/d/80, f. 20d, Churchill Factory Account Book, 1800-01. The bateau Thomas Stayner sent to John Ballenden at York in 1798 was described as having a cargo capacity of thirty bundles of seventy-five to eighty pounds each. It is not known if this was a large or small bateau, but considering Stayner's attempts to convince York of the navigability of the Churchill, it seems likely it was a large variety. B.42/b/40, f. 7, Churchill Factory Correspondence Book, 1797-98, Thomas Stayner at Churchill Factory to Joseph Colen at York Factory, 12 September 1798.

³B.42/d/80, f. 20, Churchill Factory Account Book, 1800-01.

⁴B.42/d/91, f. 7, Churchill Factory Account Book, 1808-09; and B.42/d/79, f. 11, Churchill Factory Account Book, 1799-1800.

TABLE 12

FUR RETURNS AT CHURCHILL FACTORY AND INLAND, 1798 TO 1810

Trading Year Returns in MB									
Post(s)	1798	1799	1800	1805	1806	1807	1808	1809	1810
Churchill Factory	4608	3308	5165	3161	4322	6626	6700	6801	5830
Inland	2731	3900	4259	3778	3075	3401	3110	2583	2539
Combined	7339	7208	9424	6939	7397	10,027	9810	9384	8369

Sources: B.42/d/76, 77, 78, 83, 85, 86, 88, and 92, Churchill Factory Account Books, 1798, 1799, 1800, 1805, 1806, 1807, 1808, 1809, and 1810.

nineteen feet in length.¹ In the indent for 1809, twelve "Plates tin of a thick kind for Batteaux" were ordered "to mend on the voyage any broken place for the present."²

Account books and other sources also provide additional information on bateau tracking lines and sails. The length of each tracking line was fifty fathoms, or 300 feet.³ Lines were made of fine white yarn and came in at least three diameters, 1 inch, 1-1/4 inch, and 1-1/2 inch.⁴

Bateau sails were of No. 7 canvas.⁵ If the grading system of the nineteenth century was the same as now, this would mean the sails were very heavy by today's standards for dacron and nylon sails. A No. 7 canvas would weigh just over nineteen ounces per square yard and be comparable to the type of canvas now used for water bags.⁶ Today a number designation implies a double fill construction in which two strands running in one direction are twisted before weaving. This type of construction provides greater strength, as well as increased resistance to both water and abrasion, all essential for use in the rugged near Arctic environment of the Churchill River.

¹B.42/d/81, f. 3d, Churchill Factory Account Book, 1802-03; and B.42/d/91, f. 7, Churchill Factory Account Book, 1808-09.

²B.42/d/91, f. 7, Churchill Factory Account Book, 1808-09.

³B.42/a/132, f. 17d, Churchill Factory Post Journal, 1806-07.

⁴B.42/d/79, f. 7, Churchill Factory Account Book, 1799-1800; and B.42/d/81, f. 3d, Churchill Factory Account Book, 1802-03.

⁵In 1801, 400 yards of No. 7 canvas "p^r Batteau Sails" was indented for. B.42/d/80, f. 8d, Churchill Factory Account Book, 1800-01.

⁶Frank Swirles, Jr., Swirles' Handbook on Basic Fabrics (Los Angeles: Distributed by Swirles and Company, 1956), p. 54.

In June 1807 Peter Fidler traveled from Cumberland House north into the Churchill track and on to Reindeer Lake to personally inspect the short cut from the east. At the HBC post of Clapham House on that lake he stopped to pick up an abstract of David Thompson's 1796 journal to Lake Athabaska. Fidler continued on and actually revisited the exact site he had first reached from the west in August 1791. On his passage west of Reindeer Lake he was most impressed with Black Lake as a potential post site. The lake was excellent for fishing and therefore an important rendezvous for Chipewyan Indians. Fidler assumed that the 5,700 yard portage out of that lake could be avoided by two or three shorter ones of 100 yards each.¹

He traveled to Churchill Factory that summer, surveying the rivers and lakes en route. Before reaching the factory he met John Charles who had been sent to intercept him, and then proceed on to a site toward Athabaska that Fidler suggested for a post. This preferred site was Black Lake. At Churchill Fidler reported to Auld that the track "is by no means deserving the terrific colouring given to it by M^r D^r Thomson [sic] in the year 1797 [1796]."² With this favourable report Auld envisioned an eventual second Churchill mainline with "a chain of posts in a new direction . . ."³

¹E.3/3, ff. 2, 4, 15d, and 16, Fidler Journal, "Journal of a Journey by Water in a Canoe from Cumberland House To the East End of the Athapescow Lake . . . along the Coast by Peter Fidler."

²B.42/a/132, f. 20d, Churchill Factory Post Journal, 1806-07.

³B.42/b/50, f. 19d, Churchill Factory Correspondence Book, 1806-07, William Auld at Churchill Factory to John McNab at York Factory, August 1807.

Because of "the want of Provisions & the chief thing Canoes fit for the purpose"¹ Charles was unable to reach Black Lake, and spent the winter of 1807-08 in Malchom Ross' old post of Bedford House on Reindeer Lake near the mouth of Swan River. By this time Churchill's inland theatre was geared to almost exclusive use of wooden craft, and not to the construction or even acquisition of suitable bark canoes. Thus Auld turned to James Bird on the Saskatchewan for both provisions in the form of pemmican, and canoes, pointing out how he had previously assisted the Churchill traders when they were settled at Isle-a-la-Crosse.²

Bird agreed to supply these essentials, and Auld and Fidler personally traveled to Cumberland House to pick them up on 1 June 1809 after wintering inland at Clapham House. Fidler continued on down to York in the Churchill bateau, probably the first wooden craft to cross Frog Portage, and possibly also the first to travel the entire route from Cumberland House to York Factory. Auld returned to the Churchill track with the two new large canoes and 3,760 pounds of pemmican.³ That season after arriving at York Factory Fidler continued on by small craft to Churchill and then up that river to Nelson House with bateaux. He departed on 20 August with two bateaux and one canoe, probably one of the large new canoes

¹B.42/b/51, f. 4d, Churchill Factory Correspondence Book, 1807-08, John Charles "Near the Hatchet [Swan] river" to William Auld at Churchill Factory, 14 December 1807.

²Ibid., ff. 12-12d, William Auld at Churchill Factory to James Bird, 6 August 1808.

³B.60/a/8, f. 13, Edmonton House Post Journal, 1808-09.

recently arrived from Cumberland House, not to establish a post at Black Lake, but rather to re-establish Isle-à-la-Crosse.¹

The next season a complete reorganization of the Company trading area into the Northern and Southern Departments demoted Churchill to a subsidiary of York as threatened by the London Committee a decade earlier. Although the Isle-à-la-Crosse returns of 1810-11 were carried down to Churchill, that post's trading hinterland was subsequently restricted to the lower Churchill drainage, and returns from there were conveyed to York for shipment to London. After seventeen seasons of varying degrees of competition, the commercially superior York track, with its access to the all important pemmican of the prairie-parkland zone, was victorious over its ill-suited rival track to the north.

Near Status Quo in the Moose Factory Inland

Limited by the restricted size of its potential hinterland, transport and the pattern of posts within Moose Factory's inland did not change dramatically during the 1790 to 1810 period (Fig. 27). Only two changes merit mention, the 1794 building of Abitibi House on the lake of the same name, and the erection of Michipicoten House on the north shore of Lake Superior in 1797.

In June of 1794 two bateaux and several canoes succeeded in reaching Abitibi Lake and settled a post a short distance from the Canadian opposition on the south shore of the lake. For the first several years bateaux were dispatched from the post to meet factory

¹B.14/a/3, f. 2, Nelson House Post Journal, 1809-10.

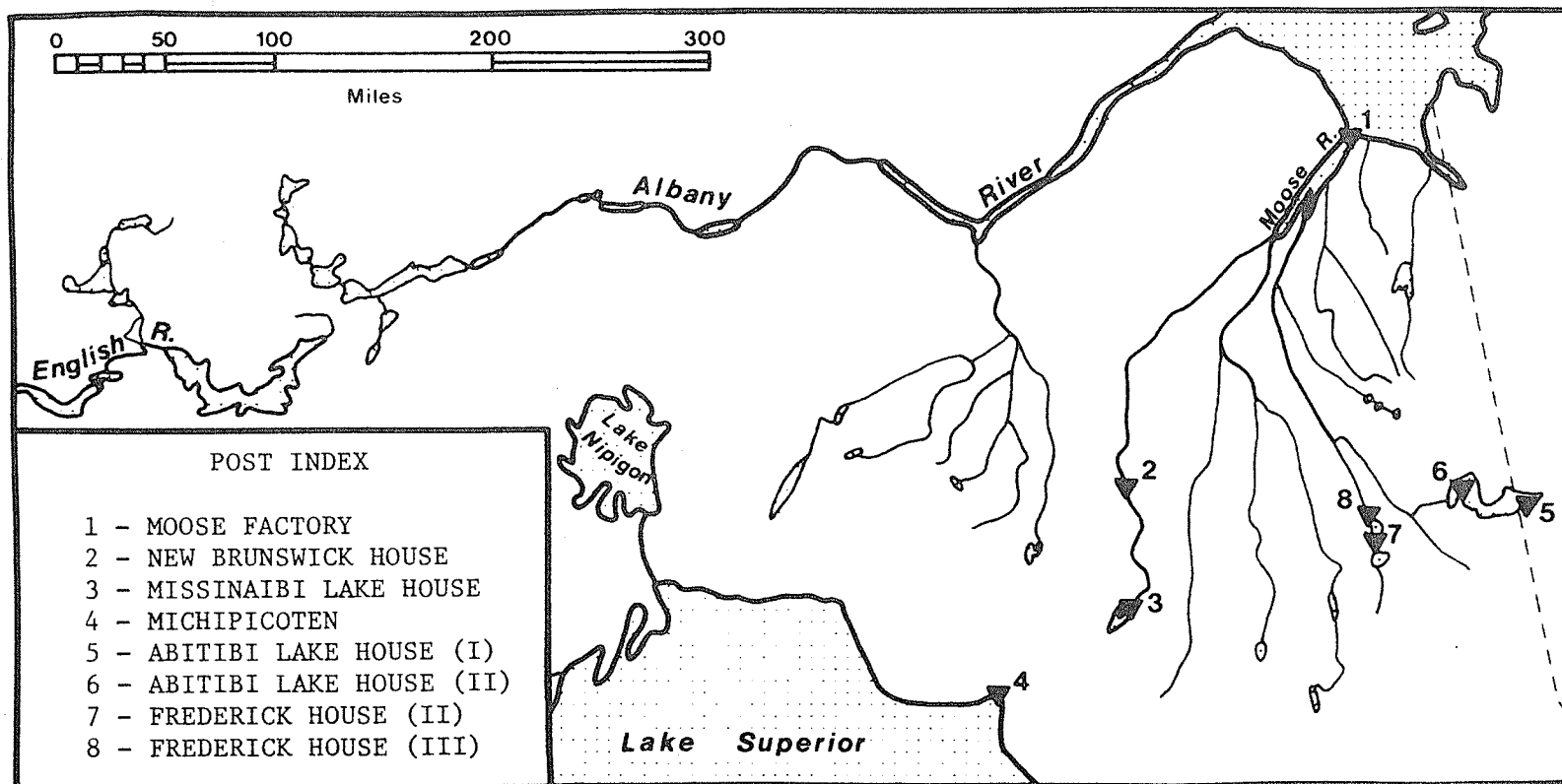


Fig. 27--Moose Factory and outposts, 1790 to 1810

canoes further down the track. Beginning in the late 1790's canoes began communicating directly with Moose Factory, with the usual upriver passage requiring twenty-one days.

Moose based traders under Henry John Moze finally succeeded in erecting a post at Michipicoten in June 1797, one-third mile from the Canadian post.¹ As with Abitibi House, wooden craft were used to communicate with this new outpost during its first few seasons. Later canoes were used between New Brunswick House and the last carrying place before Michipicoten. Goods were carried over that two mile-plus portage, where an awaiting boat at the foot of the portage carried cargoes on to Michipicoten. The post continued to operate until the end of the 1803 season when by agreement with the NWC traders in the district, the HBC abolished Michipicoten in exchange for the NWC's withdrawal from the vicinity of New Brunswick House.²

Geography of HBC Transport, 1790 to 1810

The year 1790 marked the beginning of a twenty year period of dramatic spatial expansion by the HBC (Fig. 28). During these years the shift of the geographical balance of Company operations into the interior accelerated at an impressive rate. In this essentially new era in transportation, the dominant east-west components in the Company's transport system established in the preceding period, were significantly extended, and major, dominantly north-south feeder

¹B.129/a/1, f. 5, Michipicoten Post Journal, 1797.

²B.129/a/7, f. 8d, Michipicoten Post Journal, 1802-03.

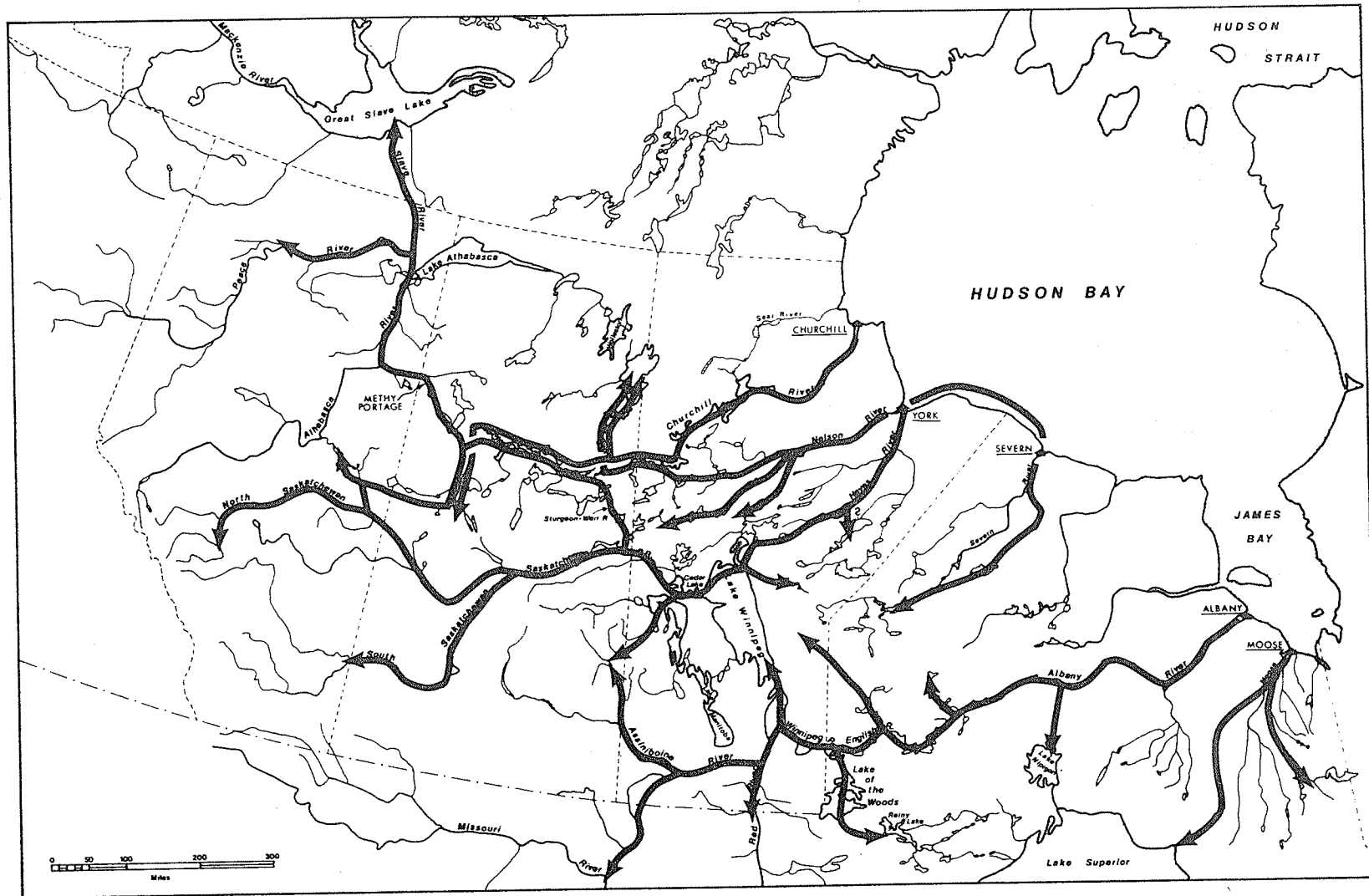


Fig. 28--Lines of HBC transport, 1790 to 1810

lines were developed. As well, both Churchill and Severn established their own inland systems of transport and trade. In their zealous quest for new areas of commerce several Bayside posts temporarily operated under the uneconomic condition of overlapping port hinterlands.

The most sustained of the major advances was that which carried Albany over the divide separating the Albany and English River drainages. Once through this portal the Albany traders had ready access to the southern section of the Lake Winnipeg basin and its cornucopia of provisions and furs. Using efficient bateaux which had been introduced and refined along the Albany River in the previous period, the Albany based traders swiftly pushed west to the upper Assiniboine. Having reached the prairie-parkland zone, Albany, like York, could now funnel significant quantities of provisions into the western section of its mainline. At several points along this newly extended mainline, branches of transport and trade were thrust into adjacent areas including Lake St. Ann's, the Lac La Pluie region, the east Lake Winnipeg region, the Manitoba Lakes, Red River and even to the Mandan villages on the Missouri River, outside Rupert's Land.

During the period York also adopted wooden craft, first on the lowest reach of the track from Rock Depot to the factory, and then on the upper section of the mainline above Oxford House. The use of these more efficient craft meant men and canoes were freed for other operations, including the ultimate objective of the York traders during the period -- the fur rich Athabaska region within the southern section of the Mackenzie River drainage. Although

unsuccessful in establishing a permanent presence in that area during the period, York traders proved the feasibility of a canoe based transport system for servicing that distant theatre.

Other branches of York's trade, which caused friction with adjacent factories, were more successful and more long lasting. The North River trade within the Nelson drainage became a permanent canoe serviced part of York operations which at least initially caused significant friction with Churchill based traders who were simultaneously pushing their trade into the same general area. The drive by York traders into the upper Swan River-Assiniboine River region likewise clashed with Albany based traders operating out of Brandon House.

The most serious hinterland overlap, however, involved York and Churchill traders within the Churchill River drainage. After establishing its first inland post in 1793, Churchill traders, using bateaux probably modeled at least in part after those in use within the Petit Nord, pushed west to the Beaver River valley within six years as part of that factory's Athabaska directed venture. Simultaneously, York based traders, also with the Athabaska as their goal, unsuccessfully tried to develop a Reindeer Lake approach before settling on a Churchill River-Methy Portage route. During this developmental era and through York's brief residence in the Athabaska starting in 1802, both factories shared a section of the Churchill River-Beaver River track.

Severn, itself an outpost of York, became the first Bayside post to adopt boats in its first season of inland trading when it

established its first inland out station in 1807. Restricted by a limited drainage basin and situated between other York inland operations and the hinterland of Albany, Severn remained little more than a curious backwater of the trade.

The pattern of transport in the Moose hinterland did not change dramatically during the 1790 to 1810 period. Even at the start of the period little undeveloped space remained. Temporary extension of the Moose track over the drainage divide to Michipicoten on Lake Superior was the only notable change during the period.

As mentioned above, the years 1790 to 1810 represented a new era in transportation. During the period all Bayside posts used wooden craft in their inland operations. Within the Red-Assiniboine River basin the HBC adopted a new mode of transport, the two-wheeled cart, and found increasing applications for this versatile overland vehicle. In the succeeding 1810 to 1821 period this same lower Lake Winnipeg basin area became the heart of Lord Selkirk's grant and the Red River Colony, the dominant factor in the geography of the entire fur trade in the final eleven years of this study.

CHAPTER VI

THE NEW ORDER, 1810 to 1821

A more ordered and aggressive HBC competed against its NWC opposition during the 1810 to 1821 period. Central in the resultant new geography were the establishment of the Red River Colony in the heart of the NWC's transport and provisioning system, and a permanent thrust into the Athabaska, both of which proved to be major factors in the victory of the HBC over the NWC and their 1821 coalition.

Colony related transport soon introduced serious stress on the lower York mainline. To meet these increased demands a winter road, as well as the use of steamboats, were proposed. Further south in the Red-Assiniboine River basin, a previously introduced mode of transport, the two-wheeled cart, assumed an expanded role.

After having failed in earlier attempts to settle the Athabaska, the HBC finally succeeded in permanently expanding its transport and trade north into the Mackenzie River basin. Ironically, this move into the Athabaska depended in part on a regular linkage with the NWC's headquarter city of Montreal.

Reorganization and Retrenchment

The year 1810 marked a turning point in HBC development. Napoleon's conquests in Europe had closed the Company's traditional markets, causing the value of Company stock to drop from previous

levels of over £250 a share to lows of £50 to £60 in 1810.¹ That year the HBC reacted by significantly changing Company policy in order to recoup lost trade and to reposition itself in the rivalry with the NWC. Reorganization and a general austerity programme were key elements in this revamping.

A new regionalization scheme divided Company operations into two large administrative regions -- the Northern Department serviced from York, and the Southern Department, corresponding to the port hinterland of Moose Fort. Each department was under the supervision of a superintendent and was further subdivided into administrative districts, or factories (Fig. 29). Although the Committee preferred drainage divides as the logical limits to factories, they left the determination of the dividing line between the Winnipeg and Albany Factories to the newly appointed superintendents.

The area west of this north-south dividing line, which is the primary regional focus of this chapter, was made tributary to York. All inbound and outbound cargoes of this department were to pass through that post. Thus, the new regionalization provided a definitive operational framework which clearly recognized the supremacy of York over Churchill, and formally eliminated the possibility of uneconomic rivalry between York and Albany. York, with its superior route inland and ready access to provisions, was chosen to command the Company's entire western trade. It became the strategic node

¹A. S. Morton, "The Place of the Red River Settlement in the Plans of the Hudson's Bay Co., 1821-1825," Annual Report of the Canadian Historical Association, 1929, p. 104.

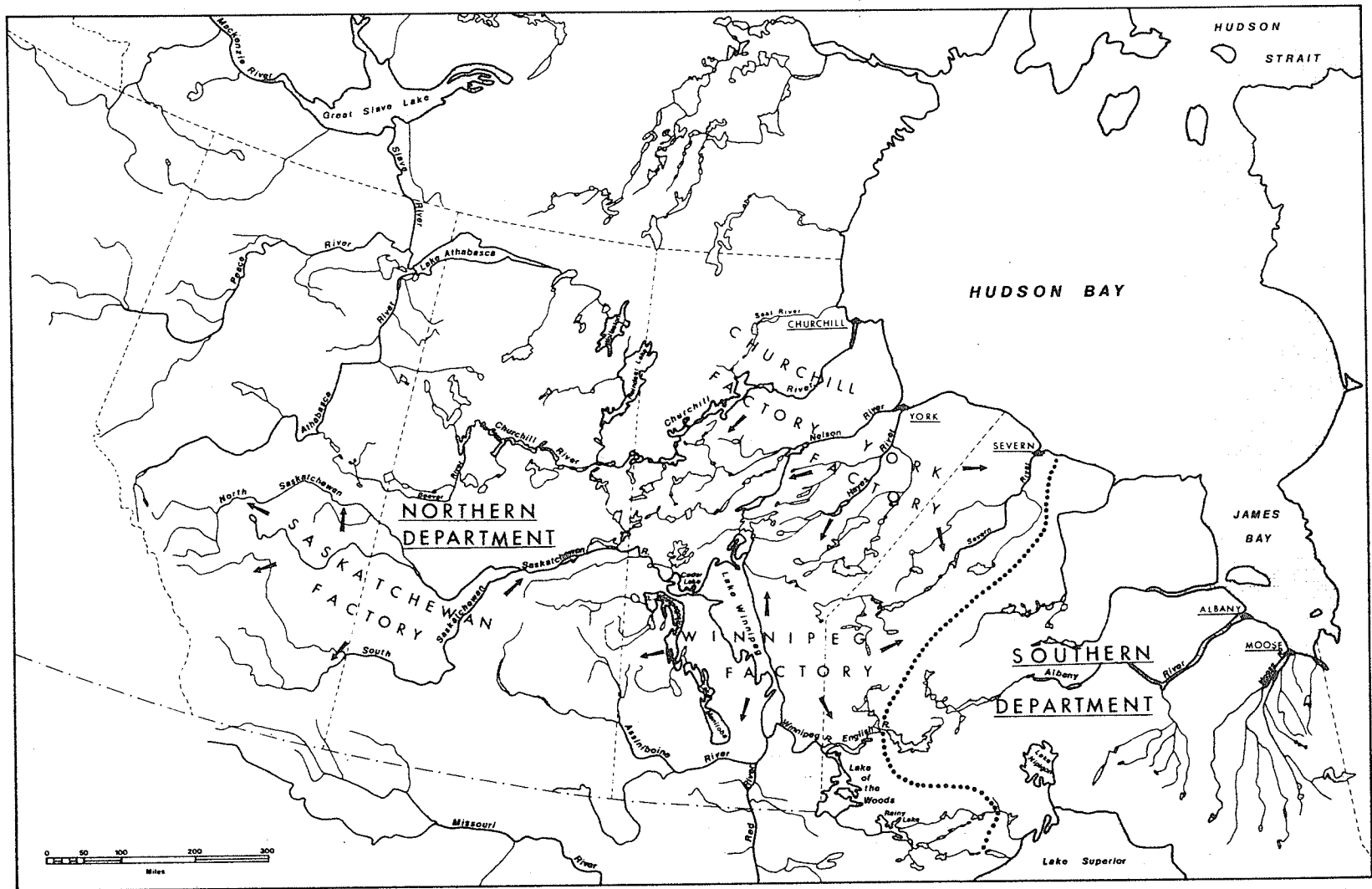


Fig. 29--The Northern and Southern Departments and factories within the Northern Department, 1810

and access point where the HBC's western transport network made connection with the Company's transatlantic linkage.

As part of the 1810 reform, the Company initiated a profit sharing programme with employees. It was hoped such a system would make those in the field more loyal and aggressive in the trade. The Committee also abolished all bounties, trip money, and other allowances, and replaced them with higher fixed wages. The Company's hiring agent at Stromness, in the Orkney Islands, was instructed that only men who were "Stout & active, between the Age of 18 & 30"¹ would be acceptable, and that the Board did not consider itself bound by an agreement made with newly hired servants who did not meet those minimum requirements.²

At this time the HBC also expanded the geographical limits of its recruiting area. The Company had maintained an agent in the Orkney Islands for decades, and by 1810 already had another in Glasgow, Scotland. In late 1810 the Company Secretary wrote to engage still another hiring agent in Scotland, this one on the island of Coll in the Inner Hebrides. The newly appointed agent in western Scotland was directed to hire 100 men, if possible, for terms of three years at £20 per annum, except for professionals, such as

¹A.5/5, f. 31, London Correspondence Outward, General, 1808 to 1818; Alexander Lean in London to David Geddes at Stromness, Orkney Islands, 8 December 1810.

²The problems caused by poorly suited inland labourers were serious, and had significant transport implications. In 1809 Churchill actually stipulated "It is particularly requested we may not have any Old infirm men or Idiots." B.42/d/91, f. 9, Churchill Factory Account Book, 1808-09.

seamen, blacksmiths, coopers, and carpenters who were to receive an additional £ 5 per year.¹ Among the nonprofessionals, men conditioned to "the management of Boats in rapid & intricate Places"² were especially in demand. In 1812 the Company expanded its hiring field still further to temporarily include Ireland.

Added emphasis was also placed on increasing self-sufficiency at Company Bayside posts. Augmented herds of cattle and other expanded farming operations were planned to reduce the uneconomic, heavy one-way traffic between London and the Bay. In 1811 Chief John Thomas at Moose was sent a new "small Scotch Breed"³ of cattle to replace the less hardy stock previously received from London. He was promised a premium for each adult animal slaughtered and was encouraged to use livestock manure as a fertilizer. For each acre of grain or potatoes brought into production he was promised additional premiums. Thomas Vincent at Albany was likewise encouraged to raise cattle and "cultivate every part of the Country that is likely to produce any sort of Crop, that the demand for European Provisions may annually decrease."⁴

¹A.5/5, f. 32, London Correspondence Outward, General, 1808 to 1818, Alexander Lean at London to Charles McLean at Gallanach on Coll, 4 December 1810.

²Ibid.

³A.6/18, p. 48, London Correspondence Outward, Official, 1810 to 1816, Governor and Committee to John Thomas at Moose Factory, 31 May 1811.

⁴Ibid., p. 44, Governor and Committee to Thomas Vincent at Albany Factory, 31 May 1811.

Within the interior a similar reduction in demand for European provisions was to be accomplished by the more widespread distribution of provisions acquired from the prairie-parkland zone. Both the Winnipeg and Saskatchewan districts were to supply pemmican and dried meat. Albany was to receive these provisions from the Red River region and allow credit to the Winnipeg district at the rate of two pence for each pound delivered to the depot that was to be established at the mouth of the Winnipeg River. The Saskatchewan district was likewise to supply Cumberland House with provisions for use by Churchill Factory. Both the Winnipeg and Saskatchewan districts were allowed six pence for each pound of these provisions provided York.¹

Closely aligned with this "Retrenching System," as this 1810 house ordering has been called, was the establishment of an agricultural settlement in Rupert's Land. Increasing production of provisions at Company posts could be expected to meet only part of the food requirements. Posts were located in areas which were marginal for many types of agriculture, and large numbers of men could not be spared from the inland brigades to work extensive agricultural enterprises during the concurrent growing season. An agricultural colony with full time farmers was needed to provide the necessary foodstuffs to more economically maintain and expand transport and trade.

The site chosen for the new colony was the fertile region centering on the forks of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers. In 1811

¹Ibid., pp. 1-2, Governor and Committee to William Auld, 31 May 1810.

the Company granted the 116,000 square miles that became the Assiniboia District of Rupert's Land to Thomas Douglas, fifth Earl of Selkirk, who was made responsible for settling the area. Even though it did not function as planned during the remainder of this study period, the Red River Colony was a major factor in the geography of HBC transport and trade during this time. The Colony, and more central to this study, its communication link to York and the impact of that linkage on Company transport, are examined in the following section.

The Red River Colony and the York Mainline

Transport and the Initial Years

Governors William Auld and Thomas Thomas were informed of the HBC's transfer of a large block of land to Lord Selkirk in the Company's official outward correspondence of 31 May 1811 (Fig. 30). They were assured that the new arrangement would provide the HBC with a regular annual supply of 200 men.¹ The benefits of locally produced foodstuffs were obvious, but it was also planned that the Red River Settlement would serve as a retirement centre for Company employees, and that the promise of free land there after completing tours of duty would facilitate hiring servants. They were told to expect the arrival of Governor Miles Macdonell of the Colony at York that fall with an advance party, which was to proceed to Red River to prepare for the first colonists expected the next year. Auld and

¹A.6/18, p. 29, London Correspondence Outward, Official, 1810 to 1818, Governor and Committee to William Auld and Thomas Thomas, 31 May 1811.

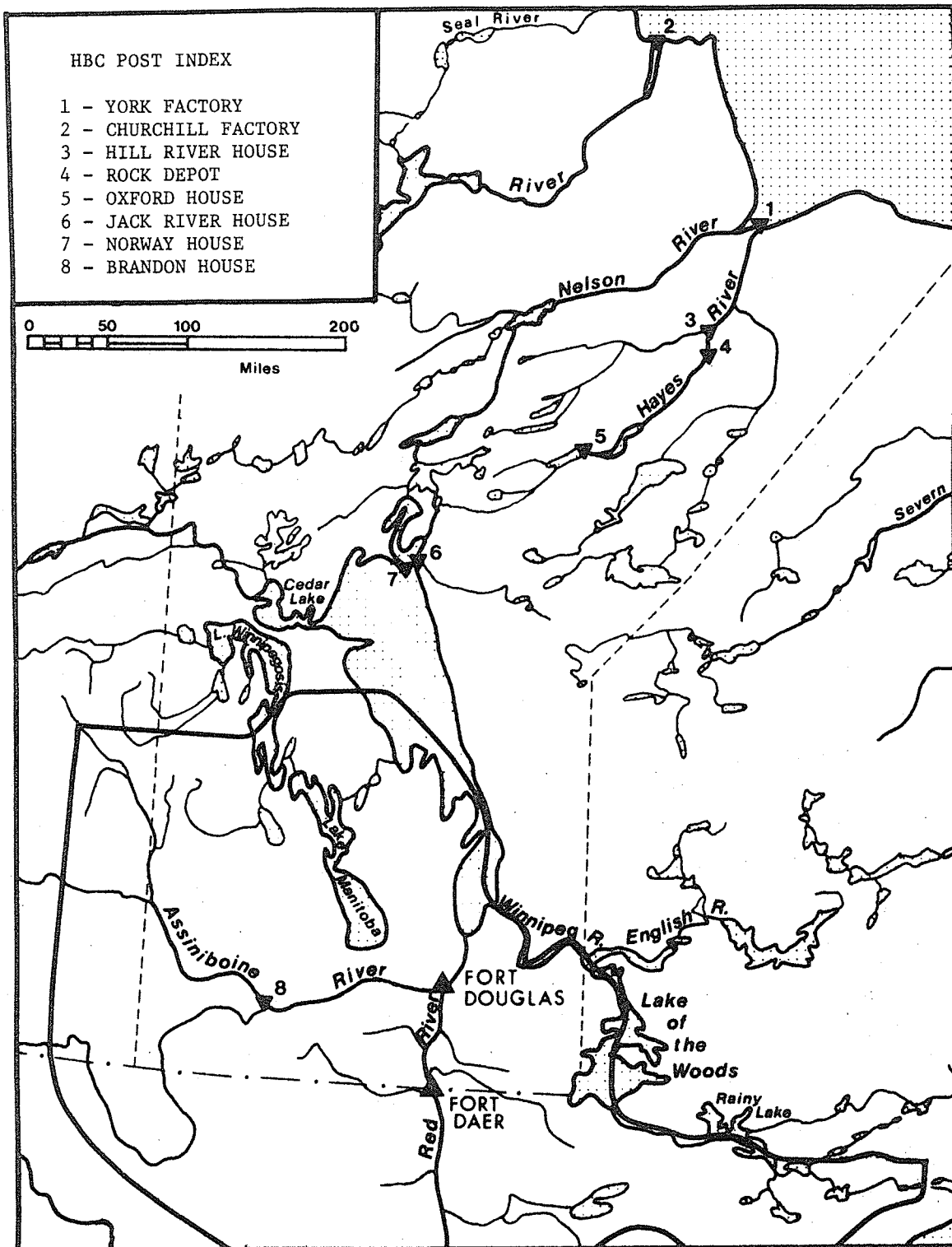


Fig. 30--The northern section of the District of Assiniboia and the lower York mainline, 1810 to 1821.

Thomas were instructed to "give all assistance possible for conveying his People speedily to the place of his destination . . ."¹

Further, the master at Brandon House was to provide Macdonell with seed corn, potatoes, and horses.

The Company ships Eddystone and Prince of Wales sailed respectively to York and the Bottom of the Bay that year. A third ship, the hired Edward and Ann, provided the additional space for the 105 new Company employees hired by Selkirk's agents.² Although seventy men were intended for the Colony, they also were considered Company employees. The late arrival of transatlantic shipping in the Bay that year forced changes in the planned return voyages of all three vessels. Both the Eddystone and Edward and Ann sailed directly for England. The Eddystone abandoned plans to stop at Churchill on the return trip and the Edward and Ann, which left without even unloading all cargo, dropped the intended trip to Moose to take on timber. The Prince of Wales was even less fortunate, having to winter in the Bay. The advanced season also forced the vanguard party of colonists and other new employees destined for the interior to winter in the vicinity of York.

Macdonell and his hand-picked selection of the newly arrived employees settled for the winter at "Nelson Encampment" on the Nelson

¹Ibid., p. 30.

²Rich, Hudson's Bay Company 1670-1870, II, p. 302.

River about twenty-three miles from York.¹ Since all boats needed to convey Macdonell and his men were not unloaded from the Edward and Ann, the subject of providing adequate transport for the party was a major topic of local correspondence that winter.² This correspondence merits scrutiny since it provides interesting details on both the status of Company transport at this time and on the beginnings of Colony transportation.

William Auld, at York during the unloading of the two ships that fall, was not impressed by the boats that had been sent to carry Macdonell and his men upcountry. Their shape and the flimsy material used in their construction convinced Auld that they would not be able to reach even 200 miles up the Hayes.³ Other boats, sent out in frame, could not be unloaded from the Edward and Ann, but if they

¹The location of the encampment is shown in a sketch map of the York vicinity facing f. 1 in B.42/b/57, Churchill Factory Correspondence Book, 1811-12. A sketch of this map appears in Ross, Beyond the River and the Bay, facing p. 96.

²A number of factors including a misunderstanding between ship captains, a poorly manned Edward and Ann, and lack of lighters kept the ship from being completely unloaded. B.42/b/57, f. 16, Churchill Factory Correspondence Book, 1811-12, Miles Macdonell at Seal Island to William Auld at Churchill Factory, 25 December 1811; and A. 11/118, f. 33Ad London Inward Correspondence from York Factory, 1807 to 1870, William Auld at York Factory to Alexander Lean at London, 4 October 1811. Evidently to meet his requirements for a lighter, Auld wrote the Company secretary that year, "If we had a good model /for I would not wish the Co^y to be at the expence of sending one in frame/ of a vessel such as is used in London River very flat with deck almost all hatches about 40 feet keel & 12 feet broad she could be built here if the keel were sent us[.] the model ought to be very complete & distinct." A.11/118, f. 33Ad, William Auld at York Factory to Alexander Lean at London, 4 October 1811.

³A.11/118, f. 28d, London Inward Correspondence from York Factory, 1807 to 1870, William Auld at York Factory to Governor and Committee, 26 September 1811.

were the same kind as those landed, Auld felt "no regret. . ."¹ He already had four bateaux sent from Churchill for Macdonell's use, each capable of carrying thirty pieces of ninety pounds each and requiring a crew of six.² The Churchill boat builder was also at York and with the assistance of Macdonell's boat builder, Auld assumed four additional bateaux could be built by 1 June.³

Auld was equally impressed with Macdonell's other preparations for traveling inland. The very shape of packages and the quantity of baggage, as well as lack of essentials, such as tracking lines, bateau coverings and tents, convinced Auld that "the most fatal misconception of these Rivers"⁴ had directed preparations. Since Auld had been instructed to provide the assistance of experienced Company boatmen, he pointed out to Macdonell that servants would refuse to work an overloaded boat or one in which packs weighed more than eighty or ninety pounds. Ordered by Company headquarters to assist Macdonell's passage as far as Lake Winnipeg, the excess cargoes worried him, since "the quicker that be dispatched the less loss will acru^e to the Hon^{ble} Company[.]"⁵ He envisioned the raw recruits using a large three-bateau capacity boat to make two trips to ferry Colony goods to the Rock, and then wait there for the

¹B.42/b/57, f. 3d, Churchill Factory Correspondence Book, 1811-12, William Auld at York Factory to Miles Macdonell evidently at Seal Island.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid., f. 3.

⁵Ibid., f. 3d.

arrival of experienced boatmen from the interior. They would then assist the Colony brigade over the more difficult section above Rock Portage, and the Red River boats could continue on alone.

Macdonell agreed that experienced HBC boatmen would be needed for the five or six craft of his party, one each for all but those carrying families, which would require two. However, he rejected Auld's Churchill bateaux as "not in my opinion the fittest for shoal River navigation . . ." ¹ He disapproved of their bow and stern construction which did not permit men to stand and work setting poles at either end of the craft. Macdonell wrote that all the boats he had ever seen used on shoal rivers were flat-bottomed and only somewhat resembled those he had seen at York. Interestingly, he was especially critical of the Churchill craft having keels, which he felt "must be a constant impediment always touching stones in shoal water . . ." ²

Rather than use the Churchill bateaux, he planned that his boatbuilder, with assistance, could build

two or three [flat-bottomed boats] next spring such as are used on the St Lawrence & Mohawk Rivers similar to this construction. They will be easier built lighter carry more & managed by as few hands as your boats & when proved to be better fit for your rivers here I am persuaded they will be generally adopted[.] ³

¹Ibid., f. 16d, Miles Macdonell at Seal Island to William Auld at Churchill Factory, 25 December 1811.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

Auld received Macdonell's above correspondence at Churchill, and entered comments on the letter in the post's correspondence book.

Obviously perturbed, he wrote,

Of his boats he speaks highly of our as lowly and we would be fools indeed if his are as he reports & continue to use our own. Boats without keels must ever be unfit for our rivers & that circumstance alone proves that the rivers he has seen are widely different from ours[.] on Portages the Keels are wonderful strengtheners of the Batteaux indeed on our largest boats we have false keels laying hid on every portage ready to put on as the boats arrive with Iron screws[.] they drag over the Rollers better & easier because only the keel touches[.] the Reader is desired to push a rough Calf book (flat) across a table covered with a green cloth & then try it on its back only touching but a flat is even weaker than one of our construction & the more a boat is like an arch the stronger is her bottom -- He thinks we don't know the use of Setting Pole!¹

Having returned to a winter residence at Churchill, Auld left William H. Cook in charge at York. There he was to oversee the construction of craft for Macdonell's party according to a scale drawing left at the post. Cook tried unsuccessfully to modify the design of the craft, and when Macdonell insisted they be built exactly to his specifications, Cook wrote Auld at Churchill Fort seeking authorization. Cook wrote that Macdonell was

arduous in his sollicitations to have them 30 feet long without a Keel & in form & appearance not much unlike our oval washing tubs. His dimensions are bottom 3 f^t perpendicular height 6 f^t broad at Gunnels amid ship & 4 at the bottom which is as flat as the table[.]²

¹Ibid., f. 19, William Auld, "Remarks on the above Letter" [i.e., Miles Macdonell at Seal Island to William Auld at Churchill Factory, 25 December 1811].

²Ibid., f. 21d, William Cook at York Factory to William Auld at Churchill Factory, 29 February 1812. Cook also reported that Macdonell planned to teach his raw recruits to be expert hands by exercising in the Nelson River before the inland journey. Those who still lacked some skills would "complete their education on the way up." Ibid.

Auld agreed to allow Macdonell to "have his way entirely"¹ since if he did not yield, Macdonell's almost certain failure might be blamed on him. Although Auld had offered Churchill bateaux, he was not partial to that variety, and in fact, preferred "the Swan or Red River make."² But since none were available as a model, he thought it best to allow the boats to be built as Macdonell wished. This correspondence clearly shows that Company craft associated with Bayside posts, and even with particular inland regions, were of varied design and/or size. At this time, there was obviously no single York Boat servicing the Company's inland trading network.

Having received authority to build craft to Macdonell's specifications, Cook sent boat builders to Nelson Encampment to receive firsthand instructions. Macdonell provided the following dimensions:

PS Dimensions of a River Boat

28 Feet long in the Bottom

4 d^o Width d^o

6 d^o d^o d^o

2 feet 8 Inches Height of the side in the Middle

6 or 8 Inches higher in the Bow & Stern

to what it is in the middle

Upper side of Thafts to be 3 Inches only below the Gunnel

Rowlocks to be little raised

Thowlpins to be round

About 2 feet rake for and aft³

¹Ibid., f. 23, William Auld at Churchill Factory to William Cook at York Factory, 18 March 1812.

²Ibid., f. 23d.

³B.239/b/82, ff. 28-28d, Miles Macdonell at Nelson Encampment evidently to William Cook at York Factory, 31 March 1812.

On 6 July 1812 Macdonell's party of twenty-two men started up the Hayes River from York in what Auld referred to as "the newfangled Bateaux built here . . ."¹ At thirty feet, these would have been the largest craft to travel the entire section of the York-Lake Winnipeg track. At that time the procedure over the difficult section of Hill River was for inland boat brigades to "bring down their large boats only to that place and convey the furs, &c to the Rock in small vessels (Canoes) of several trips as they return they carry back merchandize . . ."² With the assistance of seasoned Company boatmen met en route, Macdonell's party successfully reached Jack River House. On the trip he had received a large new boat from William Sinclair of Oxford House, and a large condemned boat from James Bird in exchange for sixty-four pounds of bar iron to replace its nails, and twenty yards of new canvas for its sails and rigging.³

These two boats and one of his York built bateaux safely conveyed Macdonell and his party the remainder of the distance to Red River. Too late to grow foodstuffs for the large group of settlers expected that fall, he traveled to Pembina to arrange for hunters to supply the fledgling Colony with provisions.

¹B.42/b/57, f. 51, Churchill Factory Correspondence Book, 1811-12, William Auld, "Remarks on the Four last letters."

²Ibid., f. 48d, William Auld at York Factory to Miles Macdonell evidently at Seal Island, 20 May 1812.

³Ibid., f. 62, Miles Macdonell at Jack River House to William Auld at York Factory, 8 August [1812].

Using a total of eleven craft, including all Churchill bateaux, and perhaps the bateaux Macdonell had replaced with HBC boats early that season,¹ the 120 colonists who arrived aboard the Robert Taylor that fall left York Factory for the Colony.² In late October they arrived at Macdonell's new post of Fort Daer, at the junction of the Red and Pembina Rivers, where they spent the winter adjacent to the wintering buffalo herds.

William Auld, who was told by Lord Selkirk to expect 400 or 500 new colonists in 1813,³ set about organizing for the necessary craft. By January 1813 he had two officers and twenty-one men engaged in boat construction in and around York Fort.⁴ Selkirk wrote Auld that he had hired a boatbuilder in Stromness who had promised to build ten or twelve boats there, but Auld doubted the reliability of this source since the boatbuilder had "never wrought of such kind Carvel-built in his life before . . ."⁵ This comment

¹Regarding the custom built craft Macdonell took inland in 1812, William Auld wrote Macdonell in January 1813, "I was vastly pleased on seeing your Batteaux after the trip up with yourself last Summer return here with the very improvement which every body sought for & that was a good stout Keel which was found nailed on the outside of the boards as a substitute . . ." B.239/b/83, f. 10, York Factory Correspondence Book, 1812-13, William Auld at York Factory to Miles Macdonell at Red River, January 1813.

²Ibid.; and Morton, Canadian West, p. 550.

³B.239/b/83, f. 10, York Factory Correspondence Book, 1812-13, William Auld at York Factory to Miles Macdonell at Red River, January 1813.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

suggests that the thirteen boats Auld reported built by 13 June, 1813¹ were probably of carvel construction, in contrast to the clinker design of the Company's Saskatchewan craft. These six small and seven large boats were the same shape, but somewhat smaller than those of the previous season.

The colonists expected at York in the late summer of 1813 did not arrive. With fever afflicting the passengers, the captain of their transatlantic ship left the group at Churchill, refusing to continue on to York. Members of this group, the third party of colonists, reached Red River in June 1814 after first trekking overland from Churchill to York earlier that spring; other colonists reached Red River in late August.

Even before this third season of Company support for the Colony, while traffic was still only one-way, it was obvious that the maintenance of such a settlement would severely tax the HBC's limited manpower, craft, and equally important, critical time during the short open water season within the interior. Company posts on both the Assiniboine and Saskatchewan Rivers had already been directed to supply large amounts of pemmican, as well as leather and leather products. All Churchill bateaux had been made available to the colonists, and York was engaged in a major boat construction programme in support of the Colony. The Saskatchewan had also been

¹Ibid., f. 22, William Auld at Jack River House to Miles Macdonell at Red River, 13 June 1813.

asked to provide craft¹ for the Colony's use, and its skilled boatmen had devoted critical summer travel time to assisting Colony craft.

Increased demand on the trunk line inland from York "seriously interrupted the business of the fur trade,"² and caused the Company to review its entire transport system inland from York. The HBC's earlier switch from canoes to wooden craft had been a major and necessary step in the evolution of inland transport. Now it was felt that this process would have to be carried one step further if the Company's trade in furs was to continue while an agricultural colony was simultaneously maintained in the interior. Such a settlement eventually required high order linkage which could handle the large volumes of bulky commodities associated with such an operation. A winter road was proposed as the next step in the process of transport innovation and modification.

¹In September 1813 Miles Macdonell wrote to James Bird at Edmonton requesting three or four of "the second largest sized Boats or more if you can build them for us . . ." B.60/a/12, f. 4d, Edmonton House Post Journal, 1813-14, Miles Macdonell on Hill River to James Bird at Edmonton House, 22 September 1813. Bird received his correspondence on 16 November and set men to work on the three new craft of the size specified by Macdonell on 19 November. In February 1814 Bird wrote Macdonell to inform him that he expected to be able to provide him with the boats requested, with "twenty four feet Keel." Ibid., f. 9d, James Bird at Edmonton House to Miles Macdonell at Red River, 8 February 1814. This above information thus shows that the second largest HBC boats on the Saskatchewan River at this time had a twenty-four foot keel.

²E. E. Rich, "Introduction" to E. E. Rich, ed., Colin Robertson's Correspondence Book September 1817 to September 1822 (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1939), p. lii (Hereinafter referred to as Rich, Robertson's Correspondence Book.)

Transport Stress, a Winter Road and Steamboats

Even without the advent of the Red River Colony, the greater centralization introduced by the HBC's 1810 reorganization would undoubtedly have soon introduced sufficient transport stress along the Lake Winnipeg to York mainline to force a re-evaluation of technologies and methods. It seems likely that the Colony's presence probably only accelerated the rate of the on going process of transport innovation and modification. The mere proposal for a roadway, and even steamboats, serving a transport line from the shore of the Bay into the interior is a profound comment on the maturing European occupance of the Northwest. To date, this historic aspect of early western transport has remained largely unstudied.

The idea for a winter road inland from York can probably be attributed to Lord Selkirk, whose visionary nature provided a fresh perspective on transport potentials.¹ William Auld at York first heard of the proposed new scheme in an 1812 letter from Lord Selkirk, who thought the course of the road could be marked the next year.

In his May 1813 correspondence from London, Auld received more details on the newly proposed road. This correspondence shows that the Company headquarters preferred a summer road from York to

¹The idea of a road was not entirely new to the Company. One of much shorter length was suggested by the Committee in 1811. That year William Auld and Thomas Thomas were instructed to have a section of the Nelson River re-examined with the intention of reducing 22 carrying places to 5 with the construction of 12 miles of road in the vicinity of Limestone Rapid. The Committee expected "wheel carriages" could be used on such a road. A.6/18, pp. 31-32, London Correspondence Outward, Official, 1810 to 1818, Governor and Committee to William Auld and Thomas Thomas, 31 May 1811.

Lake Winnipeg, even if it had to be more circuitous than the present water route. If, according to natives, such a summer road was impractical because of the numerous intervening rivers, lakes, and marshes, they still wished a winter road to be opened. In that case Auld was instructed to have Indians

blaze a road as it is called in America, that is notch or Mark the tree to the right & left as they go along; The next step is to send a proper person to examine this Line & if approved a few Men with Indians will soon cut down the trees to the right & left when the Roadway may be considered as made at least for the Winter Season.¹

The proposed mode of carriage was sleds drawn by either horses or reindeer. The Committee considered reindeer best adapted for winter use, since they

would be the easiest supported & when once tamed they are very quiet indeed in the Northern part of Europe no other domestic Animal is used[.] We should think you could Catch a number of young Rein Deer alive which might be tamed & tho they would not perhaps be so quiet as those that have been long domesticated yet the next generation of them would be quiet enough --.²

If horses were to be used, farming stations were needed at a spacing of fifty or sixty miles along the route where locally grown crops would be available for animal feed. If grain would not grow on these sites, hay and potatoes, which could be used raw or boiled, would provide horse feed. It was planned that horses from each provisioning station would take sleds to the next, assumed to be a three day journey, and then return. In addition to these more major depots were small intervening stations spaced at one day's interval

¹Ibid., pp. 115-116, Governor and Committee to William Auld at York Factory, May 1813.

²Ibid., p. 116.

where travelers could spend nights while on the road. The Committee suggested Auld discuss the road with Governor Macdonell since men from the settlement would have to assist in the road's construction, and he was evidently familiar with winter haul roads in Canada.¹

The next year more detailed specifics on the winter road were received in Rupert's Land from both Lord Selkirk and the Company headquarters. That year the Committee devoted eight pages of its correspondence to the newly appointed Superintendent of the Northern Department, Thomas Thomas, to the subject of the winter road. They pointed out that with it,

So much more goods may be transported in this way during a winter, than could be done by the same number of men in boats during the short season of the Rivers being open, that it nearly amounts to bringing the maritime navigation to Lake Winipie.²

In fact, they assumed that one man using horses and a sled on the road during a winter would be able to transport at least three times the cargo of a boatman during one summer.³

The Committee enumerated five other obvious advantages they associated with the winter road:

1. The Company would be spared the expense of so many skilled steersmen;
2. if a ship arrived late, essentials could still be conveyed inland;

¹Ibid.

²Ibid., p. 186. Because of the importance of the communication, the Company sent the correspondence to York via Montreal and Moose Factory to assure its arrival before the ship from London.

³Ibid., p. 189.

3. provisions and bulky furs could be taken down to York as back carriage;
4. once the road was extended to Red River and the colonists began producing exportable commodities, so much would be carried down to York for export that Company goods essential for its trade could be carried up at little expense each winter to the Grand Rapid of the Saskatchewan or Lake Winnipeg, where inland boats could pick up the cargoes in the spring;
5. it would facilitate the communication of intelligence and the occasional passage of principal officers.¹

They were convinced of the practicability of such a haul road and pointed to use in other parts of America and Europe, as well as in "every part of the extensive dominions of Russia."² A group of Scandinavians, who were not to be attached to Company trading establishments but were to be paid from a fund which had been established for permanent improvements, was sent to York that season to begin work on the road.

The Committee had accepted Auld's suggestion that the road follow frozen lakes and rivers where practical, passing overland only to cut across points of land. Such sections could thus also double as portages during summer. Establishing a chain of posts at a moderate spacing to house men who would be employed building the road was seen as the first step. Since the Committee assumed eighteen days to be the required time for a sled drawn by two horses to travel from York to Playgreen Lake, and they wanted major stages at three day intervals, they directed that five intermediate depots

¹Ibid., pp. 186-187.

²Ibid., p. 187.

be built between York and a depot on Playgreen Lake.¹ In selecting the sites for these intermediate stages Auld was instructed to consider fishing potential and to try to locate them as close as possible to difficult sections along the water road so men stationed at them year round could occasionally assist the passage of boats, even though their primary summer responsibility would be cultivation of crops to feed themselves and horses. But in choosing locations, it was made clear "the consideration of most indispensable necessity is that the soil be favorable for cultivation."² Possible sites suggested by the Committee for these intermediate stages included one on Hill River near the head of smooth water, one near the outlet of Knee Lake, and another near Oxford House. If the road were extended to the Great Falls on the Saskatchewan, an additional stage would be needed between there and Playgreen Lake. The Committee hoped that Thomas would have the sites for the stages selected and a log house built at each before the arrival of the ship at York that year. They looked forward to limited use of the road in the winter of 1815-16, and to its completion by the next winter.

Writing to Thomas later that season from Gravesend, the Committee provided a list of Norwegians who had been engaged, and also mentioned that they expected three Swedes from Bothnia to join ship at Stromness from whom they expected considerable advantage because

¹Ibid., pp. 188-189.

²Ibid., p. 190.

of their practical skill in cold land cultivation.¹ The Norwegians were to be assigned to clearing land and planting. Thomas was instructed that when each had cleared and planted fifteen acres, their three years' service would be considered met. For each additional acre cleared a man was to receive £4. As further encouragement each was also entitled to one shilling for each bushel of potatoes above eighty bushels harvested from each acre, and three shillings for each bushel of grain over fifteen bushels per acre. The Committee suggested the Norwegians be broken into only two groups the first season, and then sent to the other stations the second year. That first year all cleared land was to be planted in potatoes or spring corn, and all newly cleared land between the sowing of these crops and August be planted in rye.²

Lord Selkirk's spring 1814 London correspondence to Governor Macdonell also concerned the subject of the planned winter road and its importance to the Colony's eventual export trade. But since by that time the HBC was solely responsible for the cost of construction of the road from York to Playgreen Lake, his letter dealt primarily with the section from Playgreen Lake to Red River, which

¹The three Swedish labourers experienced in cold land agriculture did not reach Stromness until after the departure of the ship. Later that season in correspondence sent via Montreal, Thomas was told, "In order to remedy in part the inconvenience arising from the detention of these men, directions were given to send you from Canada, three or four Axemen, expert in the American method of Cultivation & clearing the Woods." *Ibid.*, p. 238, Governor and Committee to Thomas Thomas at York Factory, 4 January 1815.

²*Ibid.*, pp. 231-232, Governor and Committee to Thomas Thomas at York Factory, 28 May 1814.

was the Colony's responsibility. To facilitate the establishment of the Colony's section, the HBC granted permission for Selkirk to lease small areas of Company land between Playgreen Lake and the northern boundary of the grant for winter road stations. Selkirk planned for the road to pass down the west side of Lake Winnipeg, and thought it would require two stations on HBC lands and five additional ones within the Colony. As well, the Company had granted permission for the Colony to lease land necessary to establish its own depot at the outlet of Lake Winnipeg and another on Hill River below the Rock. Macdonell was instructed to select sites for each of these establishments and set men to work at each. In applying to Auld for permission to use Hill River House until their own structures were built, Macdonell indicated that he eventually planned to have most cargoes carried directly from the ship to Hill River House and the Rock without even being landed at York, and thereby limit inconvenience to the Company.¹

Selkirk evidently had supplied Macdonell with a plan of the road and asked him to consult with Auld on it and the requisite stations. Above the Rock, Macdonell considered a stage at White Fall the most important. The site was favourable for timber and grass, and was well suited for cultivation. There he assumed the road would have to follow a new track to avoid a steep, rocky ascent "so that

¹Provincial Archives of Manitoba, MG 2 A1, "Selkirk Papers," pp. 1008, and 1034-1037, Lord Selkirk at London to Miles Macdonell at Red River, 14 April 1814. (Hereinafter referred to as "Selkirk Papers.")

the boats might be easily brought over on truck carriages & the goods in carts . . ."¹

Although eight Norwegians and an interpreter had been sent to York in 1814, it does not appear that they began construction of the first new winter road depot, Norway House, that year. This proved to be only the beginning of a long series of delays which prevented the completion of the winter road during the study period. Almost from the start there were doubts of the practicability of the road among ranking officers in the Northwest. Just before losing his post as Governor of the Northern Department, William Auld, in the spring of 1814, decided to not cooperate with plans for the winter road. On his return to London he intended to point out the impracticability of the road, along which he was sure no HBC cargoes would ever be carried. He felt it would be detrimental to the trade to have Company servants employed in transport during the winter months when they should be engaged in obtaining furs and attending the natives. He was also convinced that horses in such country would not be able to drag even half the load along the planned route.²

In 1815 Thomas Thomas, the newly appointed Governor of the Northern Department wrote,

I have always thought that the Winters Roads on the Rivers would be found difficult if not impracticable here, and could

¹Ibid., p. 954, Miles Macdonell at Fort Daer to William Auld at York Factory, 4 February 1814.

²Ibid., pp. 1077-1078, William Auld evidently at York Factory to Miles Macdonell evidently at Red River, 11 May 1814.

not conceive the means by which they were made to answer in other Countries -- M^r Pritchard informs me that they are only used in inhabited Countries where every Settler is obliged to assist in keeping the Snow Road in good Order, this cannot be done here as the Country may be said to be uninhabited, I dare say M^r P. [Pritchard] will tell you that it would have been impossible for Horses to have travelled on the Ice over which he has passed, though he has only seen it late in the Season, when those Parts in which the Ice was not plied very high have been made in fine Degree level by the Snow.¹

He saw more potential in improved water communication, and the previous year had suggested that service on the York track could be improved by using different types of craft, custom built to service specific sections of the route. The Company headquarters welcomed his proposed modifications along the water road, but did not want it to supercede the planned winter road. They wrote,

It will be of essential advantage to have a free communication at all seasons of the year; and the two plans so far from being inconsistent will materially assist each other, as the men who are employed in the various species of river Craft in the summer may be employed at the winter stations during the sledging season, so that a profitable employment may be found for them during the whole year instead of one season only.²

Thomas asked that Macdonell note sections along the York track where large boats could be used on his return to York in 1815, and he planned to personally inspect the route that spring to determine what type and size craft would be best suited to each segment below Playgreen Lake. What makes Thomas' plans even more distinctive is

¹B.239/b/85, ff. 38-38d, York Factory Correspondence Book, 1814-15, Thomas Thomas at York Factory to Miles Macdonell at Red River, 25 March 1815.

²A.6/18, p. 238, London Correspondence Outward, Official, 1810 to 1818, Governor and Committee to Thomas Thomas at York Factory, 4 January 1815.

his proposal that steamboats be used on the route. Although the first use of a steamboat dates back to 1783 in France, the first practical employment of such craft dates only from 1802 when one began service on the Firth and Clyde Canal in Southern Scotland.¹ It was not until seven years later that the first steamboat in British North America was put in water at Montreal.² Thomas' proposal for the application of steam power to Company craft seems somewhat less innovative when it is realized that as Governor of the Southern Department, he was familiar with the erection of a steam driven saw mill at Moose in 1813.³

On his August 1815 return to York from Playgreen Lake, Thomas carefully examined rivers and lakes along the water road determining what types of craft would be best suited for each section. From the outlet of Lake Winnipeg to Sea River Fall downstream on the Nelson River, a distance Thomas estimated to equal about thirty-six miles, he thought a decked barge of fifteen to twenty tons with lee boards could be employed. Rather than portage such a large craft he

¹"Transportation, History of," The New Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1974, XVIII, p. 654.

²G. P. deT. Glazebrook, A History of Transportation in Canada (2 vols.; Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1964), I. p. 67.

³This was probably the first steam engine used in northern Canada. Thomas, however, was unfamiliar with steamboats and wrote to Macdonell requesting him to "make some Enquiries, if you have an Opportunity, as to the Depth of Water which a Boat of this Kind requires, and the Quantity of Power which can by Steam be applied to it, and I should be glad to know what space in the Boat, an Engine of a given Power /say 2, 3, or 4 Horse Power/ must occupy . . ." B.239/b/85, f. 38, York Factory Correspondence Book, 1814-15, Thomas Thomas at York Factory to Miles Macdonell at Red River, 25 March 1815.

suggested that cargoes be conveyed overland to another of the same type vessel on the opposite side of the portage. This craft could then proceed east to Painted Stone Portage, where again cargoes would be transferred to a third craft of the same description. He assumed that by building two small locks, the Echimamish could be navigated by such barges. Below Painted Stone Portage, this vessel would service the section between there and White Fall, where cargoes would again have to be transferred to yet another vessel. Thomas envisioned this lengthy portage crossed by a road over which wheeled carriages could travel. He did not mention what size craft would continue on below this portage, but the implication was that the same size vessel would be appropriate. Hill Portage was also to be upgraded to accomodate wheeled carriages. Below there a smaller craft of unspecified size would be necessary. On Oxford Lake a large decked barge of from 30 to 60 tons could be used. Between there and Knee Lake much smaller boats with a capacity of 60 pieces of 90 pounds each would be the largest possible craft. He considered Knee Lake navigable for vessels of 50 or 60 tons, but below there downriver to the Rock, the same 60 piece capacity boats would have to be used until improvements were made in the track. A large steamboat would ply the final section between there and York.¹

¹"Selkirk Papers", pp. 1596-1600, Thomas Thomas, "Remarks on a Journey from Jack River to York Factory by Thomas Thomas [1815]". No immediate action was taken on Thomas' suggestion and three years later acting Governor James Bird of the Northern Department was directed to improve the York to Lake Winnipeg route by upgrading portages, and providing "boats adapted to the different parts of the navigation . . ." A.6/19, f. 47, London Correspondence Outward, Official, 1816 to 1826, Governor and Committee to James Bird at York Factory, 20 May 1818.

Although Lord Selkirk supported the winter road, he also realized that an adequate water communication between York and the Colony was essential for its success, and directed in 1813 that a schooner be built for use on Lake Winnipeg. The next year he wrote that the best substitute for sailing vessels on the lake would be Durham Boats which by then were in common use on the St. Lawrence River.¹ Reportedly eighty or ninety feet long, no wider than a bateau, and manned by eight oarsmen, they could carry 150 barrels, six to seven times the capacity of a bateau.² Assuming such craft could be used both on Lake Winnipeg and on the Hayes River below the Rock, Selkirk requested that the exact dimensions be obtained at Montreal.

Although the Colony did not use steamboats or even Durham Boats on either section of the York to Red River line, it did use large sailing craft during the study period. The Red River Colony was not able to produce a large agricultural surplus or other exportable staples prior to 1821, and only managed two good crop years in the first ten years of its existence.³ Thus, the Colony's demand for transport along the route to York did not increase

¹The Durham Boat, evidently an American invention, was introduced on the St. Lawrence River in 1809. Its larger size lessened the importance of the bateaux as cargo carriers on that river. Glazebrook, A History of Transportation in Canada, I, pp. 63-64.

²"Selkirk Papers", p. 1037, Lord Selkirk at London to Miles Macdonell at Red River, 14 April 1814.

³Barry Kaye, "Some Aspects of the Historical Geography of the Red River Settlement, 1812-1870" (Unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Manitoba, 1967), pp. 85 and 92. There has been no

dramatically during this period. During this time, however, the Colony appears to have reduced its dependence on HBC assistance. This can probably be explained by the Colony's practice of hiring Canadian Freemen to work in the boats, and to acquired navigational skills among colonists.

Although the winter road between York and Playgreen Lake was completed in some form by the late 1820's, work on it continued sporadically into at least the 1830's.¹ The road never became viable proposition, and like the colonists, the HBC relied mainly on improved water and portage communications. Company transport along the York to Lake Winnipeg route came to depend almost exclusively on wooden craft, even on the most difficult section of Hill River. The HBC's displacement of canoes by boats on this final section may be linked to the Colony's inability to maintain a fleet of canoes for use on this short reach and a need to rely on a uniform mode along the entire track. A distinctive aspect of Company transport, its use of carts as long distance carriers, is examined in the following section.

attempt in this study to trace in detail the development of the Red River Colony. Two widely available published sources covering the Colony prior to 1821 are Alexander Ross, The Red River Settlement (Reprint ed.; Minneapolis: Ross and Haines, Inc., 1957); and John Perry Pritchett, The Red River Valley 1811-1849 (New Haven: Yale University Press, and Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1942).

¹At a meeting of the Council of the Northern Department on 9 June 1831, it was decided that work on the winter road should continue, "It being very desirable to follow up the winter road plan, which in due time promises important advances to the Country at large . . ." R. Harvey Fleming, ed., Minutes of Council Northern Department of Rupert's Land, 1821-31 (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1940), p. 280.

An Expanded Role for Carts

HBC use of two-wheeled carts for long distance carriage increased dramatically in the Red, Assiniboine, Swan River region during the 1810 to 1821 period (Fig. 31). It was probably during this period and within this predominately plains and grasslands region, that the cart now popularized as the Red River Cart, received its final refinements. In the post-1821 period, when cart design remained essentially unchanged, this versatile overland vehicle became a standard mode of inland transport along a network of cart trails, which stretched from Red River to the upper Saskatchewan, and well south into American territory. There has been no attempt in this section to collect all information previously published on the Red River Cart, but rather to provide what the author considers to be new findings on Company carts and their use prior to 1821.

Cart usage by the Company was best developed on three routes within the above mentioned area during the 1810 to 1821 period:

- 1) from the forks of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers (Forks) to the upper reach of the Assiniboine;
- 2) from the upper Assiniboine to the Swan River;
- and 3) in the Red River valley.

As indicated in an earlier section, HBC use of carts dates back to the early 1800's at Brandon House. In the 1810 to 1821 period, this post remained an important centre for cart transportation, as well as construction.

Although there was no one standard of construction, a general type of cart, now known as the Red River Cart, was used by the HBC, NWC, and Freemen, as well as by the métis. Few articles or book passages dealing with these historic vehicles fail to point out their

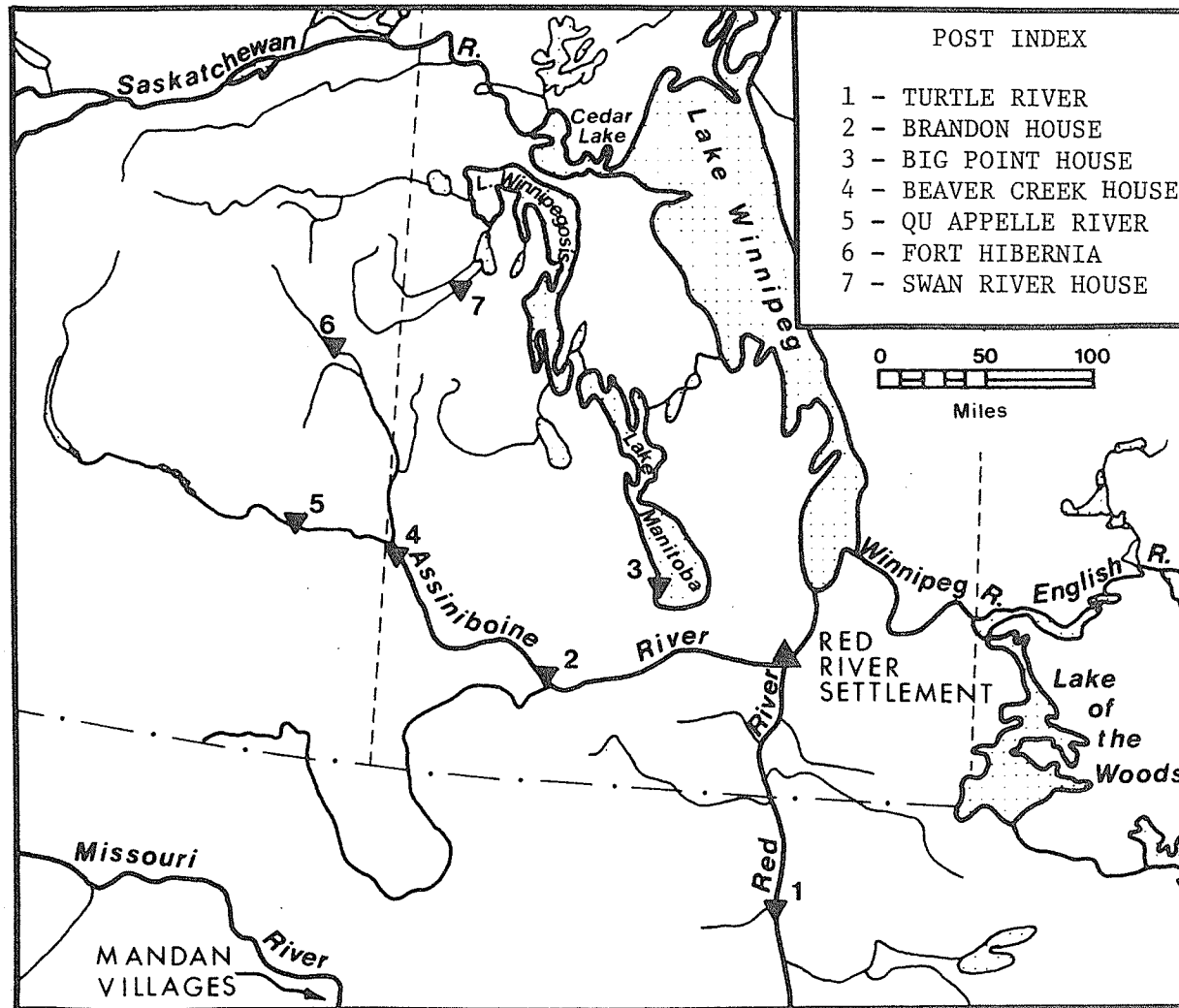


Fig. 31--The Red and Assiniboine River valley region, 1810 to 1821

iron and bolt free construction, one of their most distinctive features. Details on the construction of the earliest HBC carts are scarce in the Company archives. Other than reference to extensive use of oak or other indigenous hardwood in their construction at Brandon House, there are few specifics. Thus, it is especially interesting that one passage in the 1810-11 Brandon House journal suggests an early variety of Company carts built at Brandon House had metal part(s). On 29 April 1811 two men reportedly "went down to Pine Fort to get repaired several Iron Works belonging to the Carts and Hatchets and Augers."¹ In all previous instances the writer has seen in Company archives, "Iron Works" referred to metal parts, usually of boats, bateaux, or post structures (such as hinges), and not to metal tools. It could not be ascertained from Company records what metal parts were incorporated in these carts, or if use of metal was a standard feature of all Company carts at this time.

The most detailed description of HBC carts built at Brandon House during this period comes from a private journal of Peter Fidler, who served as post master for several years. In an undated entry in his journal which includes years from 1794 to at least 1816, he described carts at Brandon House as follows:

¹B.22/a/18a, f. 14d, Brandon House Post Journal, 1810-11.

Carts at Brandon House

F	I	
5	.10	Long
2	.10	Wide
2	. 2	Deep
4	. 8	Neph of Wheel
11	. 6	Length of Shafts
5	.10	D ^o Axle Tree
1	. 3	D ^o Nave
0	. 9 to 10 1/2	Diameter D ^o
0	. 3 1/2	Innor
0	. 3	wide End

Outer

Length of spokes same [same?] length as the felloes. 6 felloes in 1 wheel
 12 Spokes, breadth of felloes 3 1/2 In
 3 In. thick.¹

The fact that basic cart size did not vary significantly is obvious when Fidler's dimensions are compared with those of much later carts now at the Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature in Winnipeg, and at the National Historic Park at Lower Fort Garry, north of Winnipeg. Using these relic carts, Harry Brehaut has drafted detailed scale drawings of what he believes to be a typical Red River Cart. He considers a 6 feet long, by 2 feet 9 inch wide, by 2 feet 4 inch deep box as typical -- only slightly different than those described by Fidler. The Brandon House axle, at 5 feet 10 inches, was only slightly smaller than the 6 feet 2 inches plus Brehaut considers typical. Both described a felloe consisting of 6 sections, each with a 3 inch tread, 3-1/2 inches thick, and a wheel with 12 spokes. Perhaps the greatest difference was in shaft length, which Fidler gave as 11 feet 6 inches, and Brehaut gives as 12 feet 4 inches.

¹Peter Fidler, "Note Book (1794-1813)", MS in the Public Archives of Manitoba, Winnipeg, p. 37.

Still, the similarity between these carts, perhaps built seventy or more years apart, is striking.¹

By at least as early as the late summer of 1812, carts from Brandon House traveled the entire distance down to the Forks to await the arrival of the fall boats from York.² Such use of carts became part of the annual transport routine on the Assiniboine. As pointed out in an earlier section of this study, low water levels in the Assiniboine River during the fall severely hampered Company water communication, and carts became an important adjunct to HBC transport along the river during this season. The years 1816 to 1819 were especially dry, and during summers and falls of those years, boat communication on the Assiniboine was effectively stopped.³

Entries in the Brandon House post journals provide interesting details on the HBC use of carts within the Assiniboine River valley. The Company relied on its own carts, as well as those owned and operated by local Freemen. From at least 1816 to 1819, "our freemen," presumably those loyal to the HBC, received a payment of 10 shillings for each 90 to 100 pound piece they conveyed with their own horse and cart on a provisioned one-way trip between the Forks and Brandon House. Canadian Freemen hired by the HBC received a payment of twenty skins for every six pieces, which was considered

¹Ibid.; and Harry B. Brehaut, "The Red River Cart and Trails: The Fur Trade." Papers read before the Historical and Scientific Society of Manitoba, Series III, No. 28, 1971-72, pp. 10-11.

²"Selkirk Papers", p. 764, Miles Macdonell at Red River to Lord Selkirk, 17 July 1813.

³B.22/e/1, f. 6, Peter Fidler, Brandon House District Report, 1819.

a full load for a one-horse cart. The same rate applied for Freeman carting between Brandon and the Company's Qu'Appelle River post.¹

Although the HBC had its own carts built² and purchased others from Freeman,³ hired carters appear to have provided most of the service during this three year period. In the fall of 1817 one Freeman completed four trips between the Forks and Brandon House.⁴ One-way trips in either direction normally required six or seven days. The route traveled varied, but usually followed either an inner or outer trail, both of which passed north of the Assiniboine River. It is not clear which trail Fidler has sketched as far as Portage la Prairie on his 1819 map of the Red River District (Fig. 32). Arrowsmith's 1824 map also shows a Brandon House trail (Fig. 33).

Carts from Brandon House were used to communicate with outposts on the southern shore of Lake Manitoba, and also saw service in the briefly revived Mandan trade. In November 1817 the HBC and NWC again organized a joint trading expedition to the Mandans. The previous year NWC men had seen a large stock of furs while at the Mandans, and Post Master Peter Fidler was eager to direct some to

¹B.22/a/20, ff. 14-14d, Brandon House Post Journal, 1817-18; and B.22/a/21, f. 35, Brandon House Post Journal, 1818-19.

²Some were evidently built by Freeman as on 7 October 1817 a Freeman was hired at Brandon House to build carts for the HBC during the winter. B.22/a/20, ff. 17-17d, Brandon House Post Journal, 1817-18.

³On 1 September 1817 while at the Forks, Peter Fidler purchased two carts from Freeman for \$25 each. Ibid., f. 13d.

⁴Ibid., f. 20d.

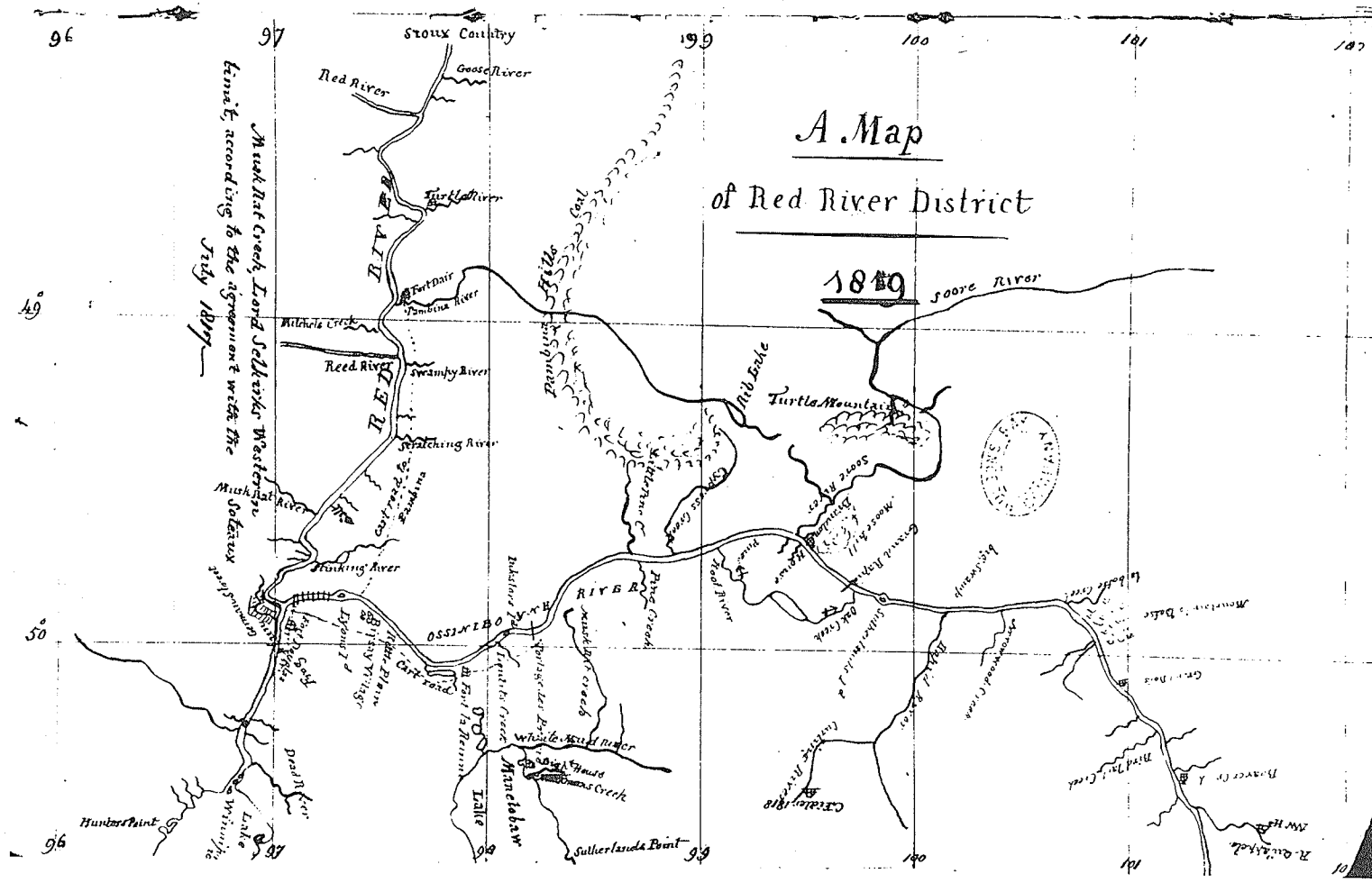


Fig. 32--Peter Fidler's map of the Red River District, 1819

Source: B.22/e/1, f. 1d, Peter Fidler, Brandon House District Report, 1819. Supplied courtesy of the Hudson's Bay Company, Winnipeg.



Fig. 33--Section of Arrowsmith's map of 1824

Source: A. Arrowsmith, "A Map Exhibiting all the New Discoveries in the Interior Parts of North America . . .", dated 1795 with additions to 1811, 1818, 1819, 1820, and 1824. Classified as G.3/135, Part 2. Supplied courtesy of the Hudson's Bay Company, Winnipeg.

the HBC. Both companies agreed to provide equal amounts of goods for the journey, and to split the returns. On 15 November the combined party, with 2 carts, 2 horses, 6 dogs, and 2 sleds departed for the Missouri. They reached the first Mandan village thirteen days later, traded at two villages to which furs from all five villages had been sent, and were back at Brandon House on 15 December, after an eleven day return via a route around the east side of the Turtle Mountain taken as a precaution to avoid being intercepted by Indians. The HBC had left their horse and cart at the Mandans, and the NWC had to abandon their cart on the return trip when snow made its use impossible. The HBC's share of the returns, which included furs (some of which Indians had stolen from American trappers), saddles, and horses, equaled just over £232, more than four times the cost of outfitting the expedition.¹

Company carts were also used to link Fort Hibernia on the upper Assiniboine with Swan River House on the river of the same name. Fort Hibernia was situated fourteen to twenty miles above the Indian Elbow on the site of former Carlton House.² Lacking direct water communication with Swan River House, it was connected

¹Ibid., ff. 21 and 24-25. One Brandon House man also joined the Colony organized party that traveled to the Mandans the next winter to trade for horses, but a Company cart was not used, and Colony carts were abandoned en route. B.22/a/21, ff. 37, 38, 39d, and 40, Brandon House Post Journal, 1818-19.

²B.159/e/1, f. 10, William H. Cook, Fort Pelly District Report, 1818-19.

to that post by an overland transport route variously reported to be 90 and 120 miles long.¹

Until 1818, Swan River House functioned mainly as a transit depot for cargoes moving to and from Fort Hibernia. Each summer, trade goods and other essentials were unloaded at or just below the Swan River post by boatmen from York Fort. Until snow season, horse drawn carts were used to convey cargoes overland to Fort Hibernia.² In 1818-19 William H. Cook of the district wrote of the post and its overland communication as follows:

Fort Hibernia is an overland Settlement or outpost from Lower Swan River, about 90 miles to the S.E. [sic], and has a good Cart road cut through the Thickets that lay in the way -- but in most parts the track is cleared by nature and the general quality of the ground so dry and firm that the supplies are conveyed by Horses and Carts /for there is no Water communication/ to the settlement with little difficulty and trouble.³

During winter seasons four-dog sleds were used to shuttle cargoes between both posts.⁴ In the winter of 1818-19 a total of 62 dogs were kept at Fort Hibernia, although only 24 were evidently needed

¹Ibid., f. 2; and B.22/e/1, f. 7, Peter Fidler, Brandon House District Report, 1819.

²Horses were reportedly bought from Indians for twenty to thirty shillings each. B.159/e/1, f. 8, William H. Cook, Fort Pelly District Report, 1818-19.

³Ibid., f. 2.

⁴Ibid., f. 7d. Fidler reported three-dog sleds with cargo capacities of 250 pounds each were used on the winter run between the two posts. B.22/e/1, f. 7, Peter Fidler, Brandon House District Report, 1819.

by the 6 "trippers" who worked the Swan River to Fort Hibernia winter communication.¹

In late May 1817 four boats departed from Swan River House for the last time with returns that included those which had been conveyed overland from Fort Hibernia.² Beginning with the next season, fur returns from Fort Hibernia were sent out via the Assiniboine River, although trade goods and supplies from York Factory continued to be sent overland from Swan River House. In late May 1818 the five Fort Hibernia craft passed Brandon House en route to York.³ Cook described these craft as "Boats of 28 feet keel and Battaux of 33 feet in length . . ."⁴ Although these vessels were built at Fort Hibernia they were evidently first taken downriver either empty or lightly loaded, perhaps as far as the Indian Elbow, where fur returns carted from Fort Hibernia were unloaded. This prompted Cook to prefer an alternate post site somewhat further down the Assiniboine. In his 1818-19 report on the district he wrote,

¹The other dogs were evidently kept as pets. All dogs were fed at the expense of the post, and those living at Fort Hibernia and others passing through reportedly consumed 2600 lbs. of beat meat, 265 lbs. of fat, 55 lbs. of dried meat, and 46 lbs. of green meat, plus what they consumed while returning from the hunting tents during the 1818-19 season. B.159/e/1, f. 7, William H. Cook, Fort Pelly District Report, 1818-19.

²B.213/a/7, f. 1, Swan River Post Journal, 1817-18.

³B.22/a/20, f. 44, Brandon House Post Journal, 1817-18.

⁴B.159/e/1, f. 2d, William H. Cook, Fort Pelly District Report, 1818-19.

The Elbow is below the troublesome Shoals of the Assneboyne River -- which are impassable with loaded Craft and render the Carting of Goods destined for the Bay by Red River a matter of necessity -- the Carting business is attended with much trouble and some risk of damage from Wet &c and some anxiety is occasioned by a dread of losing the Spring flushes a Circumstance which would be attended with difficulties inculcable -- added to these, the distance it would save in carting Goods from lower Swan River . . .¹

Company cart usage along the Assiniboine River, between it and Swan River, as well as the actual and planned cartage on portages, suggests a strong correlation between cart use and lines of significant transport stress. This principle does not, however, seem to fit the application of carts in the Red River valley parallel to the river, especially south of the Forks. The Red provides an excellent water road during the entire open water season for the size craft used by the HBC at this time. Still, carts were used to communicate between the Forks and Company posts further upriver.

The cart trail linking the Pembina River area with the Forks was probably one of the earliest in southern Manitoba. The frequently traveled route lay west of the Red River, striking a course south from a cart trail which ran west from the Forks, possibly six miles² up the Assiniboine River. This important crossing of the Assiniboine River was commonly noted by cart travelers and was known by such names as "Passage", "Crossing Place", or "Ferry". When Miles Macdonell traveled south from the Forks to choose a site for Fort Daer at the mouth of the Pembina River in the fall of 1812,

¹Ibid., ff. 10-10d.

²This distance is based on a 9 September 1812 entry in "Selkirk Papers," p. 16,749, "Miles McDonell, N^o 2, Journal From 6th July 1812 to 22nd April 1-13."

he forded the river at this point, already an important intersection in the evolving transport network. Crossing with his three carts he noted several Indian lodges there and wrote, "This is a very public situation being the pass for all travellers . . ." ¹ Macdonell's cart trip from the Forks to the mouth of the Pembina River took four days.

The frequency of cart use on the trail between the Forks and Pembina was not determined in this study, although it was probably less important along that route than along the Assiniboine. Company use of carts may have reached further south than Pembina, perhaps to the Turtle River post, or even to the Grand Forks post by 1821, as indicated by the 3 June 1821 arrival at the Red River Settlement of Company men with carts from the Sioux District. ²

The NWC also made extensive use of carts, including those of hired Freeman, in the Red and Assiniboine River valleys. Métis in and around the Red River Settlement relied on carts for their colourful annual buffalo hunts. Alexander Ross reported that 540 carts converged at Red River for the first métis buffalo hunt of the season in 1820. ³ Since these two applications of carts, as well as Colony cart use, were beyond the defined limits of this study, they are not given further attention.

¹ Ibid.

² B.235/a/4, f. 24, Winnipeg Post Journal, 1820-21.

³ Ross, The Red River Settlement, p. 246. For an excellent discussion of these buffalo hunts see Ibid., pp. 255-267.

The Athabaska and a Montreal Link

HBC transport and trade were again extended north into the Athabaska region in 1815, after a nine year absence (Fig. 34). Despite a tenuous and profitless beginning in the area, the Company retained residence there throughout the remainder of the study period. The HBC's continued operation in this formerly exclusive NWC reserve was a factor in consolidating the HBC's 1821 victory over the NWC. It is therefore paradoxical that the Company's sustained drive into this region was linked in large part with the distant NWC fur trading centre of Montreal, a geographical focus which has previously been used to help explain the defeat of the NWC, not the final victory of the HBC.

Three years after the Company's 1806 withdrawal from the Athabaska, the London Committee was approached by an ex-Nor'wester who was convinced the HBC should immediately re-enter that region. Colin Robertson presented his general plan of action with supporting arguments to the Committee in January 1810. He felt that the NWC was already extended beyond its transport capabilities since three sets of men were needed to communicate with the MacKenzie and New Caledonia districts. He chided the Company for its previous poor showing in the Athabaska, an operation he referred to as "a kind of Contraband trade."¹ He wrote, "You ought not to be idle spectators in a Country where your natural situation might enable You to be the

¹A.10/1, f. 88d, London Correspondence Inward, General, 1712 to 1816, Colin Robertson at London to Governor and Committee, 17 January 1810.

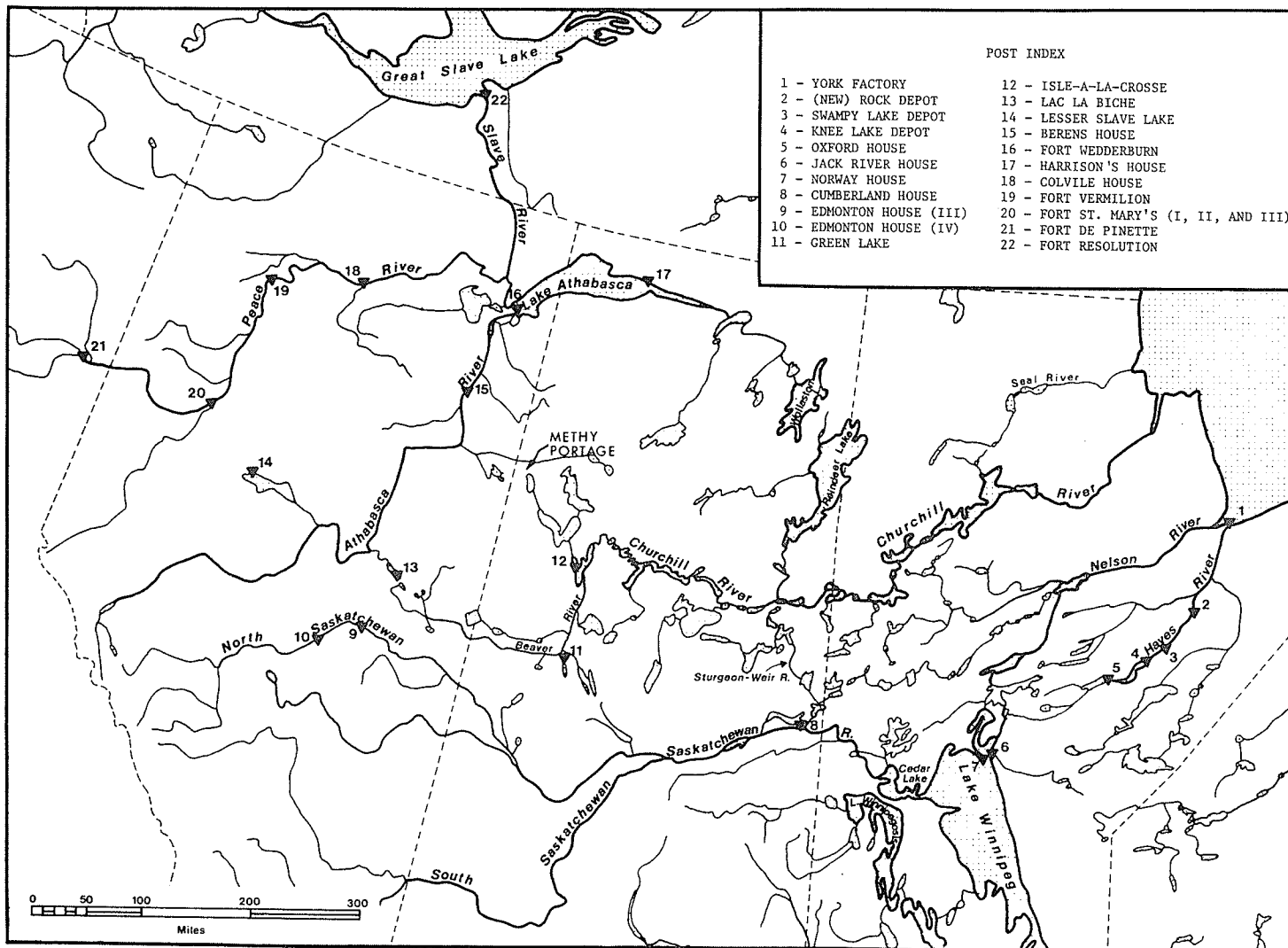


Fig. 34--York Factory and selected outposts, 1810 to 1821

principal Actors."¹ This natural situation undoubtedly referred to the HBC's shorter approach via the Bay, along which Robertson favoured Churchill Fort as both the best approach to the Athabaska, and as the logical post to command all inland operations. With expenses only one-third those of the NWC, Robertson felt the Company could realize a profit of £20,000 annually in the Athabaska alone, but would have to take the initiative soon.²

The most interesting aspect of Robertson's proposal involved purchasing goods and hiring Canadian voyageurs at Montreal. He rejected the use of Orkneymen on an Athabaska venture and considered the Canadians "the best Voyagers in the World."³ An agent in Canada would be necessary to hire these men, as well as to purchase essentials such as high wines, tobacco, and provisions. Available at costs of fifteen to twenty percent less than in the London market, these goods could be sent to the Bay in a small vessel, or one of the transatlantic vessels could stop at Quebec to pick them up en route to the Bay.⁴ Robertson went on to propose the suggested procedures for the remainder of 1810 and for 1811 which he felt would effect an HBC Athabaska operation.

¹Ibid., f. 88.

²Ibid., f. 87d.

³Ibid., f. 89d.

⁴Ibid., f. 90d.

Even though the London Committee was open to changes and was then laying the groundwork for the 1810 Retrenching System, Robertson's proposal was not immediately accepted. Such a venture would require large expenditures, and although the Committee was in an innovative mood, they were more receptive to immediate economizing moves. Still, Robertson's proposal was retained, and both he and his ideas figured largely in the HBC thrust into the Athabaska five years later.

By 1814 the end of the Napoleonic wars and four years of the Retrenching System had brought a return to more profitable Company operations. Now, the HBC was in a position to adopt a modified version of Robertson's 1810 Athabaska proposal.¹ As a preliminary adjunct to a push north over Methy Portage, the HBC post of Isle-à-la-Crosse, abandoned in 1811, was resettled in 1814. Earlier plans in 1812 and 1813 to re-establish Company presence there had produced no results.

In 1814, as in the two previous years' plans, Irish servants were to man the Isle-à-la-Crosse expedition. The HBC presence at the lake was in part designed to provide an opportunity for the Company to re-establish contact with the Chipewyan Indians prior to a large scale move further north into their territory. The Irish servants were to help assure that the Company's presence could be maintained. Previous encounters with the Nor'westers in the upper

¹This plan is outlined in A.10/1, ff. 116-117, London Correspondence Inward, General, 1712 to 1816, Colin Robertson at London to Andrew Wedderburn, 15 March 1814.

Churchill-Athabaska region had proven that poorly manned Company ventures in that region were futile.

The Irish employees who arrived at York in 1811 had a reputation for their toughness, and it was expected they would "check the bullying Conduct of the North West Company . . ." ¹ When they were unloaded at York in the late summer of 1811, only one former servant whose contract had expired would agree to re-engage, and then only for Severn, reportedly "to be at a distance from the Irish Men and it is in a great measure to this dislike of these people that not more re-engaged . . ." ² That first season the new Irish employees wintered up the Nelson River adjacent to Macdonell and his colonists. Regarding the new employees William Auld wrote,

The arrival of such Strangers as the Irish men is highly disgusting to every servant of the Company's and I am much mistaken if we shall not find them more dangerous to us than our enemies[.] No fear of seeing Orkney men or other peaceable people in 3 years after this and a more fatal blow was never given nor ever will be again given to the H. B. Coy. than employing Irishmen the sweeping's I understand of jails. ³

That winter a group of Irishmen evidently made "a grand attempt to destroy a house full of poor orkney as they were going to bed on the

¹A.6/18, p. 67, London Correspondence Outward, Official, Governor and Committee to William Auld at York Factory, 4 March 1812.

²B.42/b/57, f. 2d, Churchill Factory Correspondence Book, 1811-12, William Auld at York Factory to Miles Macdonell evidently at Nelson Encampment, 16 October 1811.

³Ibid., f. 19, William Auld, "Remarks on the above Letter" [i.e., Miles Macdonell at Seal Island to William Auld at Churchill Factory, 25 December 1811].

night of 1st Jan^y . . ."1 William Auld was convinced that "if the Hon^{ble} Committee send more Irishmen there will be a termination to the Trade & existence of the Company together as every one is fully bent on quitting the country both Scotch & Orkney men."² The Company's use of Irishmen attests to its intention to meet the NWC on a more equal footing within the northern theatre. This determination is also reflected in the HBC use of Canadian voyageurs hired at Montreal to man their 1815 Athabaska venture.

The Committee wrote to Thomas Thomas, newly appointed Superintendent of the Northern Department, in May 1814 to inform him of their plans for a large HBC presence in the Athabaska with four or five settlements the summer of 1815. One hundred men and sixteen to eighteen canoes were to have been acquired at Montreal the previous winter and were expected to reach Lake Winnipeg by June the next year. Thomas had been sent supplies over and above his indent, sufficient to load the canoes with about twenty-five pieces each, and was to have these goods waiting for the Company's Montreal brigade either at the mouth of the Saskatchewan River or at Cumberland House, whichever he thought best. As a precaution, in case all necessary canoes could not be purchased at Montreal,

¹Ibid., f. 57, William Auld at York Factory to Thomas Thomas evidently at Albany Fort, 10 June 1812.

²Ibid., f. 57d.

six or eight new ones were to be built and made available for the expedition's use at Cumberland House.¹

The returning London ship that fall carried Thomas' response to the Committee's directives. First, he informed them it would not be possible to have the Athabaska cargoes at Lake Winnipeg until 12 July and suggested that the canoes from Montreal delay their departure so as to arrive at Jack River on that date. He was still sure that the HBC brigade would precede the Canadians to the Athabaska since NWC canoes did not usually pass the Grand Rapid until middle August. Thomas also wrote that he doubted he would be able to provide the requested canoes and suggested the brigade may have to rely on several boats.²

That winter, Colen Robertson was in Montreal representing the Company. There he was to hire Canadians, purchase canoes, and lead the Company's Athabaska brigade to the Northwest. At Montreal Robertson evidently had difficulty acquiring canot du nord for the expedition, where he doubted if they could be purchased for even £20 apiece. Unlike the opposition, the HBC did not yet have an established transport line between Montreal and the Northwest. Therefore, they would have been unable to transfer cargoes from the canot du maître, too large for use beyond Lake Superior, to awaiting canot du nord. Seven or eight large Montreal Canoes, however, would

¹A.10/1, ff. 135-137d, London Correspondence Inward, General, 1712 to 1816, Governor and Committee Private Letter to Thomas Thomas evidently at York Factory, [25] May 1814.

²Ibid., ff. 114-114d, Thomas Thomas at York Factory to Governor and Committee, 19 September 1814.

have been large enough to convey all men and their baggage to Michilimackinac or Sault Ste. Marie, where there was a greater chance of acquiring the necessary North Canoes.¹

Robertson and his party of sixteen canoes left Montréal in early May 1815, following the track of the Canadian opposition.² In case Americans blocked his passage through Lake Huron, he was instructed to leave the Montreal mainline at the Mattawa River, and travel north through Lake Timiskaming and over the divide, to rejoin the main track at Michipicoten on Lake Superior.³ On 12 May 1815 Robertson wrote London from Michilimackinac that he had successfully reached that point the previous night with 2 partners, 18 clerks, 140 active men, and 7 Indian hunters.⁴ En route, NWC men had tried to sabotage the expedition and draw off HBC men. Robertson had already lost eight men to desertion, but had expected such trouble on the trip and had purposely hired thirty extra.⁵ He planned to divide the 140 active men as follows: 90 to the Athabaska, 20 for Lesser Slave Lake and the Rocky Mountains, and 30 for the Lake

¹Ibid., f. 152C, Colin Robertson at Montreal to Governor and Committee, 8 November 1814.

²Rich, Hudson's Bay Company 1670-1870, II, p. 323.

³A.6/18, p. 258, London Correspondence Outward, Official, 1810 to 1816, Andrew Colvile[?] to Colin Robertson at Montreal, 8 December 1814.

⁴A.10/1, f. 235, London Correspondence Inward, General, 1712 to 1816, Colin Robertson at Michilimackinac to Andrew Colvile, 12 May 1815.

⁵Ibid.

Winnipeg-Lac la Pluie-Lake Nipigon region.¹ On or about 18 June, Robertson and his party of twenty canoes, with seven or eight men in each, left Sault Ste. Marie.²

When the Athabaska canoes reached the Jack River post, they found about sixty of the Red River settlers who had been driven from the Colony by the harassment of NWC servants and métis.³ Here Robertson left the Athabaska expedition under the charge of John Clarke and led the displaced colonists back to the Forks. By early August all Athabaska canoes had departed Jack River. That year the Lac Isle-a-la-Crosse post was continued at a different location with an outpost opened at Green Lake, a new post was built on Lesser Slave Lake, and Fort Wedderburn was established on Lake Athabaska, while outposts were built on other sites. A combination of NWC control over Indians and misjudgment on Clarke's part resulted in the failure of his short-lived Fort Vermillion on Peace River and the starvation deaths of sixteen of his servants.⁴

As the Athabaska canoes departed Jack River in the summer of 1815 preparations were already under way to improve the logistics to service that region. In early August 1815 Governor Thomas Thomas dispatched Peter Fidler from the Jack River post with men in a boat to proceed down track to establish a depot at the lower end of Knee

¹ Ibid.

² Ibid., f. 261, Colin Robertson at Sault Ste. Marie to Andrew Colville, 16 June 1815.

³ Morton, Canadian West, p. 571.

⁴ Rich, Hudson's Bay Company 1670-1870, II, p. 334.

Lake, specifically for serving the Athabaska. Thomas doubted that HBC canoes would have time each summer to come all the way down to York, and the depot was therefore, as Fidler wrote, to function "similar to the Rain[y] Lake, where the NW[C] get their annual supplies who winter to the Northward of Portage la Loche, or Methy Carrying place --"¹ Traveling toward York, Fidler encountered servants from the Swan and Saskatchewan River regions, who were evidently on their second trip back to Jack River with their own cargoes, having earlier carried up goods destined for the Athabaska. At Knee Lake Fidler settled on a site about four miles from the lower end of the lake on the north shore, where a sandy area of about two acres adjacent to some well treed islands was selected for the depot.² The size of the planned structures at the depot reflected the scale of the HBC's Athabaska plans. Two temporary small bark covered houses were to afford protection until the main buildings were built, which Fidler assumed would take eight men three years to complete,

according to the extensive plan of the Buildings, that is 3 Buildings of 90 feet long each 25 feet wide & 2 stories high, to be built of Board & Quartering. Two to be Stores &. and the other to be divided into different rooms for the accommodation of the Northern Gentlemen, whilst they remain here every Summer probably from 7 to 10 days, till the Men are supplied and Canoes fitted out.³

¹B.22/a/19, f. 2, Brandon House Post Journal, 1815-16.

²Ibid., f. 3.

³Ibid., ff. 3-3d.

Fidler marked out a plot of land 124 feet square for the buildings and set the men to work on the two 20 feet by 16 feet temporary structures, before continuing on to York with men whose contracts had expired.¹ Work on the depot continued that fall.

There was immediate opposition to the Knee Lake Depot, and it was moved even before the buildings were completed. In December 1815, Robert Semple, new Governor of Assiniboia, wrote the London Committee questioning the need for an HBC Athabaska depot.² The NWC Athabaska men traveled much further to pick up their supplies and he could not understand why the HBC men would not have enough time to travel to York and return. James Bird rejected this argument and saw such a depot as essential, at least until a firm footing was established in the Athabaska and the HBC's Canadian servants were more expert canoe men. As well, he pointed out how such a depot saved wear and tear on Athabaska canoes that would otherwise have to travel over the difficult section of Hill River.³ He did agree, however, that the depot site at Knee Lake was inappropriate and directed that it be dismantled in 1816 and moved to Swampy Lake, closer to York and "to which place the Boats of all

¹Ibid., ff. 3d-4.

²A.10/1, f. 360, London Correspondence Inward, General, 1712 to 1816, Robert Semple at Red River to Governor and Committee, 20 December 1815.

³In 1816 James Bird wrote "The two or three Canoes which have been navigated this season, by Canadians, down and up Hill River were so much injured as to require repairs as expensive as half the first Cost of the Canoes." B.60/e/2, f. 5d, James Bird, Edmonton District Report, 1816.

the Districts can carry a Cargo of Goods from YF without great inconvenience, whereas their bringing Goods to Knee Lake is the cause of much embarrassment and delay."¹ The new post appears to have been called simply Swampy Lake Depot or Logan's Depot, after the individual who superintended its construction.

Directions were also issued that year for two other new posts along the York to Lake Winnipeg line. Norwegians, with the help of colonists, who had again been forced from the Colony by NWC inspired aggression, were to build a post on what is today's Mossy Point, on the west side of the outflow of Lake Winnipeg. The armed aggression that year by the NWC in the Red-Assiniboine River valley made such a fort "at the only outlet of Lake Winnipeg the head of the water communication with the Bay /an object of importance at all times but in the present situation of affairs of considerable Consequence/ . . ." ² Norway House almost immediately became the most important node in the Company's water-borne transport system, linking the lower York mainline with both the Saskatchewan and Lake Winnipeg-Red River trunk lines. On the lower York mainline a new depot was to be built one-half mile upriver from former Gordon House, ³ abandoned by the HBC after Hill River House was built in 1807-08. Bird saw both the new Athabaska depot and the new Rock Depot as essential if the Athabaska were ever to be operated as extensively as planned.

¹B.60/a/15, f. 47, Edmonton House Post Journal, 1815-16.

²Ibid., f. 52.

³Ibid., f. 55.

In September 1816 he described the first year's campaign of the HBC's Athabaska venture as "a very unfortunate one . . ."¹ Fur returns were meager, amounting to only seven packs from the area north of Methy Portage,² and more than a dozen employees had died from starvation. The Company, however, did not expect a profit in the region during the first season, or even the first several seasons. The Athabaska brigade, as well as those bound for Lesser Slave Lake and Isle-à-la-Crosse, were refitted and sent back upcountry. The return Athabaska brigade consisted of about sixty men in ten canoes supplied with what Bird described as a very complete outfit.³

That summer a second contingent of Canadians, hired by the HBC at Montreal, were expected to arrive at the outlet of Lake Winnipeg. The party of eighty men evidently got no further than Fort William at the west end of Lake Superior.⁴ Their non-arrival worried Bird, who was concerned with the affect on Canadians already in the Company's service. Regarding these new employees he wrote the London headquarters,

The disappointment these men have felt from the non-arrival of Canoes from Canada (an Event which they expected

¹B.60/e/2, f. 3d, James Bird, Edmonton District Report, 1816.

²B.39/e/3, f. 22, William Brown, Athabaska Lake District Report, 1821. Seven additional packs had to be paid to the NWC to acquire provisions.

³B.60/e/2, f. 3d, James Bird, Edmonton District Report, 1816.

⁴A.6/19, f. 21d, London Correspondence Outward, Official, 1816 to 1826, Governor and Committee to "Governor in Chief of the Northern Districts", 14 May 1817.

with no small degree of Interest) has made impressions on their Minds not at all favourable to your cause; and should another summer pass away without your establishing a direct intercourse between Montreal and Jack River they will be easily led to form opinions of the power and influence of the North West Company that cannot fail to be extremely prejudicial to your Interests[.]¹

He suggested the Montreal canoe brigade use an alternate route which might assure their arrival at Jack River by early August. Although unfamiliar with the area himself, several Company officers had suggested the utility of a passage to Jack River by way of Moose, Albany, and Osnaburgh House. Departing Montreal in late April or even early May, canoes following that route should still be able to reach Jack River by early August. He was not sure if the route was a viable alternate, but he was convinced "the present state of your Affairs imperiously requires the opening of a regular communication between Winnipeg and Montreal[.]"²

A regular Lake Winnipeg to Montreal link and the hiring of Canadians in that city remained integral parts of the Company's Athabaska venture throughout the remainder of the pre-1821 period. From 1815 to at least the 1820 season, HBC canoes were dispatched annually from Montreal. Although the London Committee directed as early as 1817 that Europeans be prepared to gradually replace the Company's expensive Canadians in the Mackenzie drainage,³ Canadians

¹B.60/e/2, ff. 4-4d, James Bird, Edmonton District Report, 1816.

²Ibid., f. 4d.

³A.6/19, f. 21.d, London Correspondence Outward, Official, 1816 to 1826, Governor and Committee to "Governor in Chief of the Northern Districts", 14 May 1817.

remained the basis for the HBC's occupance in that watershed. As late as the 1821 season, Canadians comprised forty-five of fifty-nine men listed as employed in the Athabaska Lake District.¹ Iroquois Indians hired in Montreal also played a role in the Company's trade in the Peace River region, and in June 1818, Peter Fidler, while at the Red River Colony, encountered some of the forty Iroquois hired that year on two-year contracts by the HBC.²

Even with the added advantage of Canadian servants, the Athabaska region continued to be a financial burden for the Company. During the 1816-17 season NWC men seized the main HBC Athabaska post of Fort Wedderburn, as well as posts at Lesser Slave Lake, and Isle-a-la-Crosse and its Green Lake outpost. HBC officers were taken prisoner, and fur returns and cargoes of the fall canoes were delivered up to the NWC. The next year a small complement of HBC men returned to the Athabaska under a Mr. Decoigne, strictly "for the purpose of Keeping up the place, he not being arranged in any shape for contending with the opposition -- And of course made no returns."³

In May 1817 the Governor and Committee had directed that the Athabaska was "of the most essential importance to the permanent interests of the Company that the opposition to the NWCo in the

¹B.39/e/3, ff. 15d-17, William Brown, Athabaska Lake District Report, 1821. The list only included 5 Orkneymen and 1 Scotsman as well as 3 métis, 2 Freeman, 1 American, 1 German, 1 Iroquois and 1 Negro.

²B.22/a/21, f. 4, Brandon House Post Journal, 1818-19.

³B.39/e/3, f. 22, William Brown, Athabaska Lake District Report, 1821.

Athabaska should be vigorously pursued"¹ and they were even prepared to temporarily drain lower settlements of men and supplies if necessary to support their Athabaska initiative. In the 1818-19 season Colin Robertson led into the Athabaska a well stocked party of twenty-two canoes manned by five or six men each which not only continued on at Fort Wedderburn, but resettled Fort Resolution on Great Slave Lake, and opened the two new Peace River posts of Colville House and Fort St. Mary's.² Despite the boost in manpower and a more secure footing, the HBC still produced only seventeen packs and, according to William Brown, lost approximately £4,076 in the district that year.³ In the 1819-20 season the HBC was back in Athabaska in force, and managed to operate the new posts of Berens House on the Athabaska River, and Harrison's House on the east end of Lake Athabaska. Although trade from the Lake Athabaska District increased to forty packs, the Company still suffered a loss in that region.⁴

In the 1821 season George Simpson assumed command over the Athabaska District. The journal of his travels that season, plus

¹A.6/19, f. 21, London Correspondence Outward, Official, 1816 to 1826, Governor and Committee to "Governor in Chief of the Northern Districts", 14 May 1817.

²Morton, Canadian West, p. 610.

³B.39/e/3, f. 22, William Brown, Athabaska Lake District Report, 1821.

⁴Rich, Hudson's Bay Company, 1670-1870, II, p. 368. B.39/e/3, ff. 22, William Brown, Athabaska Lake District Report, 1821 indicates that only fourteen packs of seventy pounds each were produced in the Athabaska District and loss there was estimated at just over £4,834.

references to other post-1815 passages to the Athabaska and return provide a fairly complete picture of this northern communications link. On 15 August 1820, George Simpson and his complement of twelve canoes navigated by sixty-eight men departed from Norway House loaded with trade goods and provisions for the area north of Methy Portage.¹ Jack River and when completed, Norway House, were considered jumping-off posts for the far north, and it was there that Athabaska post journals were usually begun. Although the depot at Swampy Lake did serve the northern brigades, some supplies usually had to be picked up by the returning Athabaska brigades at either the newly built Rock Depot or Hill River House.

Because of the vicissitudes of the northern trade during the preceding five years, no "usual" departure date for the northern brigades was established. Simpson's 15 August departure compares with other departure dates which ranged from early July to late August. Although trips began on varying dates, the travel times along the Athabaska track and the routine on the passage were well established by the 1821 season.

Large bark canoes with capacities of 20 to 25 pieces, of from 80 to 90 pounds each, and manned by a crew of 5 or 6 were the standard craft servicing the HBC northern operation during the 1815

¹References to Simpson's journey are from E. E. Rich, ed., Journal of Occurrences in the Athabaska Department by George Simpson 1820 and 1821 (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1938), pp. 9-54 (Hereinafter referred to as Rich, Athabaska Department by George Simpson 1820 and 1821.)

to 1821 period. These were organized into brigades in an attempt to eliminate congestion and to minimize confusion and delays while preparing to depart and while en route to their wintering stations. Brigades included those based at Fort Wedderburn, St. Mary's House, Fort Resolution, and Colville House. The Lesser Slave Lake and Isle-a-la-Crosse brigades were viewed as distinct from these more northerly brigades and are considered in a latter part of this section. Simpson's nine day passage from the outlet of Lake Winnipeg to the vicinity of Cumberland House was of average time. Each canoe making the trip was routinely provisioned with 1-1/2 or 2 bags of pemmican of from 90 to 100 pounds each, to carry them as far as Cumberland House; Simpson received 1-1/2 bags per canoe.

Additional pemmican, which had been provided by the upper Saskatchewan posts, was picked up at Cumberland House. The usual procedure after entering Pine Island (present-day Cumberland) Lake on which Cumberland House was located, was to have only one or two canoes from a brigade continue on to the post to pick up the pemmican while others in the party waited on an island at the eastern entrance to the lake, several miles from the post. Appropriately named Athabaska Island, the site also afforded an opportunity to repair canoes. Most canoes in a brigade were evidently kept away from Cumberland House to avoid the drinking and merrymaking that was commonly associated with their arrival at a Company post.¹

¹In July 1818 while en route to the Athabaska, Joshua Halcro, in charge of a three canoe brigade, let his men talk him into stopping at Cumberland House. The next day some employees were so drunk that the brigade could not continue on until 3:00 p.m. B.44/a/1, f. 3d, Colville House Post Journal, 1818-19.

Simpson's party picked up an additional supply of six bags of pemmican per canoe to support them most of the remainder of their trip; four to seven bags per canoe was normal. The passage from Pine Island Lake to the post at Lac Isle-a-la-Crosse via the Sturgeon-weir River, over Frog Portage, and up the Churchill River took Simpson's party eleven days, several days faster than usual. Additional pemmican, which had been sent overland from the Saskatchewan River valley, was usually available here. Simpson's brigade left the post on 9 September and headed northwest up Lac Isle-a-la-Crosse and arrived at the Isle-a-la-Crosse outpost of Lac la Loche four days later. Several days were then spent carrying canoes and cargoes over the long Methy Portage. This was the main bottleneck on the Athabaska route, and Simpson had been instructed to improve it.¹ He directed that the portage path be upgraded for the present, but envisioned the eventual use of boats to communicate with the Athabaska, used in conjunction with a relay system of horses and carts over the portage.² The previous year Colin Robertson had suggested that if the Company planned to continue operations in the Athabaska, horses should be used to carry cargoes over the portage, and with a post there, boats could be used within the entire Athabaska region.³

¹Rich, Hudson's Bay Company, 1670-1870, II, p. 375.

²Rich, Athabaska Department by George Simpson 1820 and 1821, p. 32.

³B.190/a/2, ff. 6-6d, Fort St. Mary's Post Journal, 1819-20.

Simpson's 1820 brigade followed the usual route passing over Methy Portage, down the Clearwater River and on to Fort Wedderburn on Lake Athabaska where they arrived on 26 September, eighteen days after leaving Isle-à-la-Crosse, an average time, and forty-three days out of Norway House, several days faster than usual. On arrival at Fort Wedderburn the Peace River brigade which was traveling with the party continued on to their winter stations.

Men remained on the trapping grounds throughout that winter, and by May of 1821 furs from the several posts had been collected at Fort Wedderburn for the return to Norway House. That year the planned 26 or 27 May departure of the returning brigades was delayed by the late arrival of the necessary pemmican from Isle-à-la-Crosse. During past seasons it was routine for brigades to proceed from Fort Wedderburn with pemmican that had been saved from the previous year or supplied from within the region, and pick up an additional small supply at Methy Portage which had been conveyed up from Isle-à-la-Crosse. This would provision them until they arrived at Isle-à-la-Crosse where a larger supply of Saskatchewan valley pemmican was taken on. From here brigades retraced their route of the previous summer to Norway House. Traveling mostly downstream, the Lake Athabaska to Norway House spring return trips, with lighter cargoes of furs, usually required only about one-half the time of the reverse summer trips.

The Company's other frontier fur trading operations centering on Lesser Slave Lake and Isle-à-la-Crosse were seen as distinct from those north of Methy Portage. But like the more northerly

districts, both depended on large canoes as the standard mode of conveyance. Because of its location closer to York, the Isle-à-la-Crosse post was normally expected to communicate directly with York, while the Lesser Slave Lake canoes were to be supplied with cargoes above that factory. As early as 1816, James Bird had suggested that the Isle-à-la-Crosse canoes might communicate with York via the Nelson River track in order to avoid damage on Hill River,¹ but these canoes continued to use the York mainline. Although the Lesser Slave Lake district was within the Mackenzie River drainage, ingress and egress was via a Churchill River-Beaver River-Lac la Biche Portage route.

The operation of all the above northern districts depended heavily on support from the Company's Saskatchewan River posts, especially Edmonton House. Upper Saskatchewan forts provided the pemmican to both Cumberland House and Isle-à-la-Crosse which fueled the passing northern brigades. In addition, Edmonton House developed as a supply centre for bark canoes used on the Athabaska passage. Built at the post "after the Shape of the Canadian Canoes"² they were conveyed downriver to Cumberland House in the spring, presumably carrying pemmican, where they were left to be picked up by the passing northern brigades. Edmonton House also maintained a direct all season communication link with the Athabaska River valley over which items as diverse as potato and barley seeds, iron work, horses,

¹B.60/e/2, f. 5d, James Bird, Edmonton District Report, 1816.

²B.60/a/15, f. 39, Edmonton House Post Journal, 1815-16.

buffalo robes and leather goods, as well as pemmican, were sent directly into the Mackenzie drainage via Lac la Biche Portage.

One commonly overlooked section of the HBC's Montreal link is the segment that crossed Lake Superior. With Company reliance on communication sent via that city and voyageurs hired there, the Lake Superior linkage became essential. In 1816 Michipicoten was re-established, not primarily for a direct trade in furs as previously, but rather as described in 1818 as,

more of a kind of Depot for the Supplying of Provisions to our Settlements towards the Seacoast [Hudson Bay] and also for the Supplying of Provision, &c to our Canoes passing from the Interior through Lake Superior . . . as a Post of communication from Canada to the Bay Settlement it is also very eligible.¹

New Brunswick House, located inland from Michipicoten, was the normal winter residence of the Governor of the Southern Department, a strategic situation considering the London Committee's increasing reliance on the Montreal route for communication with the Bay. The post at Michipicoten had easy access to provisions available at Sault Ste. Marie, Drummond Island, or Michilimackinac, where locally produced foodstuffs, as well as those shipped in from as far away as Detroit or York (Toronto), were readily available at lower rates than similar foodstuffs from the British Isles. Using craft variously described as boats, bateaux, and barges, the Michipicoten post maintained a regular communication with the Sault Ste. Marie area where provisions were purchased for its own use as well as

¹B.129/e/1, f. 6, Andrew Stewart, Michipicoten District Report, 1818.

for New Brunswick House, the Company's passing Athabaska canoes, and Point Meuron.

Point Meuron, a post evidently maintained at the Company's expense by the HBC's Montreal agents of Maitland, Garden, & Auldjo, served an important function further west along the Company's Montreal line. Built by at least 1817 the post was situated on the north bank of the Kaministikwia River, just under three leagues upriver from the NWC's entrepôt of Fort William.¹ The Point Meuron post was designed to serve as a way station for men traveling between Montreal and the Northwest. Here the Company's Montreal brigade would find materials for repairing their canoes, and occasionally, completed canoes for their use. The post also provided locally grown provisions, especially potatoes, and by the fall of 1820 a total of fourteen acres had been cleared and an additional five or six acres of woods had been cut and had yet to be cleared.² As at Michipicoten, Colony related travelers also received assistance at the post.

Point Meuron, like Michipicoten, received provisions sent from Sault Ste. Marie in the wooden craft that serviced Michipicoten. In 1820 a Mr. Giasson, in charge at Point Meuron, suggested that the

¹B.231/a/6, f. 3d, Fort William [Point Meuron] Post Journal, 1820-21. In May 1820 the post consisted of a 40 feet by 24 feet two storey house and an almost completed 50 feet by 21 feet store house, all enclosed in pickets. B.231/a/5, f. 3ld, Fort William [Point Meuron] Post Journal, 1819-20.

²B.231/a/6, f. 3d, Fort William [Point Meuron] Post Journal, 1820-21.

depot at Michipicoten be moved to Sault Ste. Marie¹ where provisions could be purchased for both New Brunswick House and Point Meuron.² Other non-foodstuffs could be shipped to the latter post from Moose Factory.³ The previous year in a letter to Governor Williams, Giasson had further suggested the utility of a winter haul road connecting the Sault with Point Meuron via the north shore of Lake Superior, passing west to the Red River Colony.⁴

In 1819 an attempt was made to inaugurate the use of a large HBC vessel on Lake Superior to link Sault Ste. Marie with Michipicoten and the west end of the lake. While traveling to the Sault, a Michipicoten party found a ninety piece capacity boat in the woods that had been discarded by a group Lord Selkirk had sent from Fort William in the fall of 1816. The vessel was much larger than any the Company then used on the lake, and it was taken on to the Sault for repair. On 23 June it arrived at Michipicoten with a cargo of provisions.⁵

Later that same summer Thomas Vincent, Governor of the Southern Department, wrote Andrew Stewart at Michipicoten suggesting

¹Giasson reported that HBC employees had hewn timber for a store at the Sault under a Mr. Jones in 1817-18. B.231/a/3, f. 3, Fort William [Point Meuron] Post Journal, 1818-19.

²B.231/a/5, f. 30d, Fort William [Point Meuron] Post Journal, 1819-20.

³Ibid.

⁴This letter is referred to in B.231/a/3, f. 30d, Fort William [Point Meuron] Post Journal, 1818-19.

⁵B.129/e/3, f. 1, Andrew Stewart, Michipicoten District Report, 1820.

that there would be advantages to having a small decked vessel in use on Lake Superior. He pointed out that with such a craft goods could be moved more economically and more swiftly between the Sault, Michipicoten, and Point Meuron. He suggested Point du Pau, near the Sault, as the most likely site for the construction and launching of such a craft, and sent the Moose shipwright, assistant shipwright, and a sawyer to Michipicoten with orders to proceed to the building site.¹

Stewart's party left Michipicoten in mid August. They proceeded to the designated Point au (or du) Pau where they found an abundance of straight timber, but no crooked timber there or in the vicinity.² In his journal Stewart reported that the NWC had previously built two vessels at that site.³ This may suggest that the point was actually Pine Point, nine miles from the Sault, where the NWC earlier maintained a dockyard for ship construction.⁴ The party tried another site that had a suitable supply of timber, both straight and crooked, but could not build the large craft there because of shallow water.

¹B.129/a/10, ff. 9d-10, Michipicoten Post Journal, 1819-20, Letter from Thomas Vincent at Moose Factory to Andrew Stewart at Michipicoten, 7 July 1819.

²Ibid., f. 13.

³Ibid. By 1800 the NWC had a ninety-five ton capacity vessel in use on Lake Superior. Innis, The Fur Trade in Canada, p. 222.

⁴Innis, The Fur Trade in Canada, p. 223n.

A New Order and Coalition

By 1821 York commanded a well integrated and expansive inland transport network which stretched from American territory within the Red River valley, north to Great Slave Lake in the Arctic drainage, and west from Montreal to the foothills of the Rockies. The previous year Company employees had even temporarily extended operations west over the Continental Divide via the upper Smoky River, a tributary of the Peace River.¹

In the new order York's supremacy over Company operations within this region was unchallenged by other Bayside posts. Churchill no longer even had direct annual shipping from London, but rather received goods from, and shuttled fur returns to York via a schooner, like the other York subsidiary post of Severn. Where once Churchill employees ventured as far inland as the Beaver River valley, in 1819 the officer in charge of the "Churchill Old Factory District" reported, "The few men belonging to the District being employed during Summer in conveying the Trade of the year to York Factory, and bringing back the Supplies for the ensuing years . . ."² Churchill's once protracted inland transport line was now limited to areas below Southern Indian Lake. York now commanded the posts of Reindeer Lake, Nelson House and (Southern) Indian Lake, communicating with them with boats using the Burntwood

¹For information on the effort see B.190/a/2, ff. 18-48d passim; and B.190/a/3, f. 6, Fort St. Mary's Post Journals, 1820 and 1821.

²B.42/e/1, f. 2d, Adam Snodie, Churchill Old Factory District Report, 1819.

Carrying Place-Split Lake route. Thus restricted from its former trading hinterland, Churchill tried unsuccessfully in 1820 to extend trade to "North lined Lake" in the interior north of the post via Whitefish River, which proved unsuitable for navigation.¹

The maturity and flexibility of York's inland transport system was tested during the 1818 season when the Company's and Colony's fall boats were stopped below Oxford House, far short of their destinations, when ice closed the river. In late December Peter Fidler at Brandon House received word that sleds had already been sent from the Swan and Saskatchewan River posts to retrieve essentials from the waylaid craft. On 2 January he dispatched 4 men with 4 sleds and 12 dogs to fetch goods from Oxford House, and sent word to his Beaver Creek outpost further up the Assiniboine to dispatch an additional 6 sleds. On 16 January, six men from Beaver Creek House were also dispatched for Oxford House. Fidler's men were supplied with their own provisions, but were expected to stop at HBC posts en route to obtain food for the dogs. The Brandon House party of four sleds arrived back with recovered cargoes on 7 and 8 March, and the last of the Beaver Creek House men arrived at Brandon House on 28 March.²

That spring it was also planned that three boats would be sent to Martin's Falls to pick up 100 pieces of goods in lieu of

¹B.42/e/2, f. 2, William Ross, Churchill Old Factory District Report, 1821.

²B.22/a/20, ff. 26d, 30, 36, 37, 37d, and 38, Brandon House Post Journal, 1817-18.

the short supply received in the York inland the fall of 1818.¹ On 19 June 1818 Peter Fidler left the Forks to travel to Martin's Falls in two boats to deliver a cargo of dressed skins, buffalo robes, and pemmican to the Albany posts, and to pick up goods needed in the York inland.² Fidler reached Martin's Falls on 18 July and was back at the Forks with supplies on 30 August.³

Stale intelligence and other communications limitations associated with only one annual correspondence between London and the Bay was one of the handicaps of early HBC competition with its Canadian opposition. This weakness was partly rectified starting in the second decade of the 1800's when some Company correspondence began being routed through HBC agents in Montreal. Although not as immediate as intercourse between elements within the NWC, this Montreal routing allowed the Company to compete more effectively.

In 1821 the NWC and HBC joined in a coalition under the name of the Hudson's Bay Company. By then persistent action by the HBC in the Southern Department⁴ and more ordered, extensive and effective

¹Ibid., f. 35d.

²B.22/a/21, f. 4d, Brandon House Post Journal, 1818-19. Fidler traveled from the Forks with Mr. Campbell, with his one boat and one canoe loaded with sixty bags of pemmican, as far as Portage de l'Isle where Campbell swung south toward Rainy Lake to meet the HBC's canoes expected there from Montreal. Ibid., ff. 4d-8.

³B.22/a/21, ff. 22 and 28d, Brandon House Post Journal, 1818-19. By 2 September part of the goods needed by the Saskatchewan River posts were dispatched to Norway House. Ibid., f. 29d.

⁴Aside from the development of the Michipicoten-Montreal link the most dramatic change in the Southern Department was the opening of the Attawapiskat Lake Post as an out station of Albany Fort. Summer communication with the post was maintained with bateaux using a James Bay-Attawapiskat River route. For the location of

competition in the Northern Department contrasted markedly with the NWC. The Nor'westers' expansion over the Continental Divide and onto the Pacific Slope cost more than it earned. Expansion into the Columbia had been undertaken on the assumption that transit privileges through the Bay would become available. Since these privileges were not forthcoming, the NWC was forced to operate at a considerable annual loss in that area as the furs did not cover the full cost of transport via the company's normal transportation system. At this time all the virgin fur areas within reach of the NWC had already been tapped. The era of rapid expansion was thus ended, and the company found itself in a stationary condition.

This was obviously unsuitable for the Nor'westers who were geared for continued geographical expansion into previously untapped territory. Under these circumstances the flaws in the company's operations surfaced. These included lack of discipline, extravagance, personal incompetence, and unnecessary luxuriousness in the field.¹ One fur trade historian has described the NWC as a "sprawling, headless octopus."² In the long run, the Nor'westers' rough treatment of the Indians also worked against them. One unavoidable factor detrimental to the NWC was the duty charged on furs exported from Montreal, which averaged about \$20,000

the winter track linking that post with the Albany River Valley see the map in B.78/e/3, Gloucester House District Report, 1816.

¹Glover, "Introduction" to Rich, Cumberland House Journals 1779-82, p. xlvi.

²Ibid., p. xli.

annually.¹ The HBC avoided such export duties because of its Hudson Bay route, which also provided much more direct communication with the western fur forest. The distance from the outlet of Lake Winnipeg to York was only 350 miles, but to Montreal it was 2,500 miles. Transport over this greater distance cost the NWC an extra £10,000 a year above comparable HBC costs.² It is paradoxical that this distant Montreal focus imposed a financial burden on the NWC, which was undoubtedly a factor in its defeat by the HBC, while the same geographical link proved essential for the HBC's sustained drive into the Athabaska, itself a factor in the HBC victory. The 1821 triumph of the HBC over the NWC seems almost a logical consequence of the HBC's tightened internal organization, more aggressive attitude, and more importantly, inland transport advances and advantages afforded by the Hudson Bay approach to the West.

Geography of HBC Transport, 1810 to 1821

At first glance the pattern of HBC trade at the close of the 1810 to 1821 period (Fig. 35) appears surprisingly like that of the 1790 to 1810 period (see Fig. 28). But closer inspection shows that the former pattern (1810 to 1821) is more than a mere stabilization of the latter. The following five major differences stand out: 1) general expansion of the area tributary to York; 2) dramatic reduction of the Churchill hinterland to include only

¹Innis, The Fur Trade in Canada, p. 178.

²Glazebrook, A History of Transportation in Canada, I, p. 54.

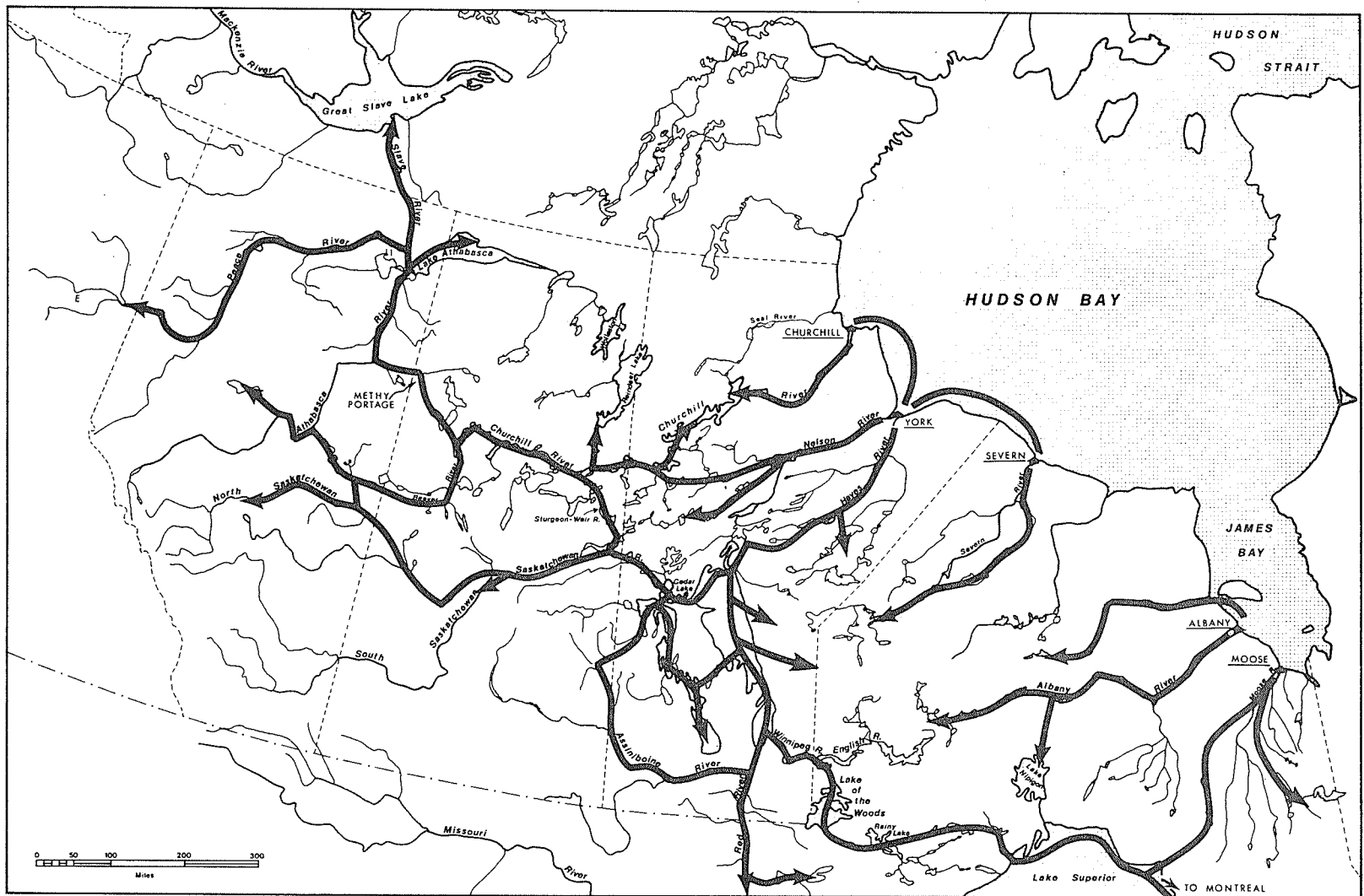


Fig. 35--Lines of HBC transport, 1810 to 1821

the lowest reach of the Churchill River; 3) reduction of the Albany trade area to essentially the drainage of the Albany River; 4) an expanded operation within the southern sector of the Mackenzie River drainage; and 5) development of a Montreal linkage via the Nor'wester route.

Central to the new pattern is a reorientation of HBC transport to conform to the more unified control central to the 1810 administrative organization of Rupert's Land into Northern and Southern Departments. In the new order virtually all areas within the Nelson-Hayes drainage, the Churchill River basin above Southern Indian Lake, and the Mackenzie River drainage, were made tributary to York Factory. With its now well developed trunk line inland and ready access to provisions in the interior, York was chosen to command the Company's entire western and northern theatres.

Churchill was demoted to a mere outpost of York, connected to its parent post by small craft. Where previously Churchill had a trading network that extended west to the Beaver River valley and even had plans to expand north into the Athabaska, it now had its trade area reduced to only the lowest section of its former track. Likewise, Albany lost its distant inland hinterland to York and was forced to withdraw to essentially the limits of the Albany River drainage. With its former hinterland thus restricted, the post pushed trade inland along another axis to the north of its constricted mainline.

Further north York reoccupied the Athabaska, this time on a permanent basis. As previously, this portion of the York trade

remained serviced by bark canoes throughout the study period because of the obstacle to boats constituted by the long and arduous Methy Portage. In conjunction with the sustained drive in the Athabaska the HBC maintained a regular transport linkage with Montreal for the primary purpose of acquiring manpower for their Athabaska operation. Begun initially as a communications link which forwarded London correspondence to the Bay posts prior to the arrival of the Company ships from England, the Montreal connection developed into a more substantial linkage, essential to the Company's Athabaska venture. An interesting adjunct to this communications function of the Montreal linkage was the physical tie between it and the Moose inland, which eventually also received some provisions and stores from the upper Great Lakes.

One aspect of Company related transport which is not apparent in Figure 36 is that associated with the Red River Colony. In many ways the Colony and the sustained presence in the Athabaska represented a culmination of the HBC offensive that had built since 1790. Still, maintaining the Colony severely taxed the Company's track between York and Red River. It was along this line of maximum transport activity that the most visionary proposals to date called for the construction of a winter haul road and for the use of steamboats.

By the closing years of the study period, the HBC's interior transportation system had reached a level of maturity that even the most optimistic employee could not have imagined just fifty years earlier. The far-flung network of trading posts and associated

transport now reached from Great Slave Lake within the Arctic drainage on the north, to the upper Red River valley on the south, and east from the foothills of the Rocky Mountains to James Bay and beyond. This extensive area was now administered in a more ordered fashion which eliminated hinterland rivalries. Most areas were now served by efficient and durable wooden craft custom built for particular regions. Increasingly, transport bottlenecks were serviced by carts, and there was even talk of the use of steamboats. Hudson's Bay Company transport had come of age.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSIONS

In this concluding chapter there has been no attempt to summarize the geographical character of each developmental era around which this study has been organized, since end sections of each substantive chapter serve this purpose. Rather, this chapter permits a consideration of several aspects of HBC transport at a higher level of generalization, one which transcends individual developmental eras.

One such aspect was an apparent process in the sequence of transport innovation and modification within the hinterlands of the major Bayside posts. Although the rate of progression varied, a general shift from small Indian canoes, to larger varieties of bark canoes, to progressively more efficient and specialized wooden craft is discernable. Associated with this repeated shift to better suited varieties and species of craft was the segmentation of mainlines and the use of transport depots. Martin's Falls on the Albany River, Brunswick House on the Missinaibi, Rock Depot on the Hayes River, and Essex House on the Churchill River were the earliest examples of forwarding depots. As transport lines were extended, other posts served as more distant inland depots, such as Osnaburgh House on the Albany River, Oxford House on the Hayes, Cumberland House on the Saskatchewan, and Nelson House and Isle-à-la-Crosse on

the Churchill River. With segmentation and the use of depots came the complementary and simultaneous use of sets of men along specific routes.

Another feature of the Company's transport was the changing proportion of fixed to variable transportation costs with the progressive shift in modes of transport. Greater fixed, or construction costs, were required with the use of boats. Such vessels needed rolled paths around obstacles to navigation and, in other areas, simple locks were required. Both improvements represented investments of time and money beyond that required by canoes. This added expenditure was, however, more than offset by more economical boats. A winter road and steamboats would have required even greater fixed transportation costs, but presumably would have had much lower variable costs.

One objective of this study was to shed light on the development of the York Boat, the standard HBC inland freighting craft in the post-1821 period. Findings of this study suggest that not only the early prototype of the York Boat, but techniques and technologies associated with inland travel as varied as rollering and packaging were first developed along the Albany track. The Albany inland was the most innovative of the Company's interior realms in the pre-1810 period, and it was often there that individuals who were later associated with transport advances inland from other Bayside posts gained knowledge and practical experience with wooden craft on interior rivers.

It seems unlikely that the large barge-like vessels used on the lower Albany as early as the 1740's fit in the direct line of evolution of the York Boat. But bateaux used on this river beginning in 1780 may be considered the early prototype of the York Boat. The Albany inland bateaux in use on the Assiniboine River by at least 1800 evidently resembled the later York Boats except for size. Modeled at least in part after French Canadian bateaux, these Albany craft were further modified in the York inland. Interestingly, the craft that Albany veteran George Sutherland had launched on the Saskatchewan River in 1797 were initially referred to as bateaux. During the remainder of the study period, these craft were further modified and became more boat-like than bateau-like. Retaining a pointed bow and stern and at least a flattish bottom, several varieties and sizes of these craft were in use before 1821. At this time it seems there was still too much variety to consider them as York Boats. It was evidently in the post-1821 period that a more standard construction led to what became known as the York Boat.

Few authors have attempted meaningful generalizations of HBC transport. Richard Glover's 1948 article is one of the most insightful.¹ In considering the Company's difficulty in penetrating the Canadian West, he recognized three dominant factors which delayed the initial push and then retarded early development: 1) lack of adequate manpower; 2) insufficient canoes; and 3) a dearth of skills

¹Richard Glover, "The Difficulties of the Hudson's Bay Company Penetration of the West," Canadian Historical Review, XXIX (1948), pp. 240-254.

in canoemanship. Although he refers to the difficulties as a Company problem, he limits his discussion almost exclusively to the York inland. But prior to 1821 three other arms of HBC transport and trade reached west from the shores of the Bay. A close look at development of York transport as well as the transport history of Albany, Churchill, and Severn suggests that Glover's trio of factors is an oversimplification when viewed in the context of the Company's entire western penetration.

At York the major factor in the late penetration of the interior was official headquarters policy against inland York outposts. Granted, inadequate manpower, canoes, and navigational skills were all factors once York traders moved inland, as they were for other Bayside posts, but to attribute the initially slow rate of York's development to these factors precludes the fact that wooden craft could have been adopted earlier than they were on that track. Such craft would have made more efficient use of limited manpower, would have been more consistent with the navigational skills of the Orcadian servants, and would have reduced the problem of access to suitable bark and canoes. When Severn moved inland to establish its first inland outpost in the first decade of the nineteenth century, it used wooden boats. Earlier, Albany had shifted to use of boats its fourth season of inland trading and Churchill had made a similar shift its third season inland. Churchill, with a location on the southern fringe of the tundra, even further removed from sources of suitable canoe birch bark than York, a York transport handicap emphasized by Glover, succeeded in reaching west to the Beaver River

valley despite the additional problems of a difficult and provision poor track. Relying on more readily acquired bateaux, which were easier to learn to navigate and made more efficient use of limited manpower, the Churchill traders proved the value of transport innovation. The fact that York did not earlier adopt more suitable wooden craft can probably be attributed to the transport conservatism of Inland Chief William Tomison. In command of the York theatre, Tomison could, and apparently did, block the adoption of wooden craft in the far interior. As pointed out in Chapter V, the first long distance use of boats in York's deep interior took place the year Tomison was away in England.

The eventual shift to more efficient and durable wooden craft within the hinterlands of each of the Bay Company's tidewater posts was critical to maintaining the HBC's competitive position as overhead in the trade increased. If George Sutherland's 1798 figures are correct, use of inland wooden craft, rather than canoes, reduced crew size by 55 percent and total crew's wages by an even greater 66 percent because of the need for fewer highly skilled servants who commanded higher wages. Additional savings were also realized in fewer provisions, as well as payments for birch bark and building of canoes. The NWC was unable to counter this HBC development with an equally dramatic transport innovation or modification in the critical section of its attenuated transport line west of the Great Lakes drainage.

The so-called natural advantage of a Hudson Bay re-entrant approach to the West and the savings in taxes by exporting furs via

the same route were undoubtedly both factors in the eventual success of the HBC. The HBC's shorter geographic approach has been frequently cited as the single most important advantage in their competition with the NWC, but the validity of this argument seems to be somewhat reduced when the critical role of the HBC's own Montreal link is considered. During the closing years of the study period, the Company's important Athabaska operation depended on a regular linkage with Montreal. While the HBC's transport link with Montreal was not nearly as important as that of the NWC, the fact that such a connection was necessary for the HBC's final success reduces the argument of the natural advantage of the Bay approach.

The subject of transportation is innately geographical since transport is an essential aspect of the organization of an area. Researchers who have studied in detail the early history of the HBC can easily lapse into a lack of appreciation for the impressive spatial extent of Company operations. Yet, it is important to remember that in terms of scale and integration over large areas, the corporate geography of the HBC, and of the NWC, were unrivaled by any other company in North America to that point in time. Even with twentieth century transportation, integration of many sections of the study area remains inadequate.

In this study which spans over 150 years and covers an area of over 1,000,000 square miles, some subjects obviously must either be left undeveloped or excluded entirely. Despite many hundreds of hours of archival research in conjunction with this dissertation, many questions regarding HBC transport remain unanswered. One logical extension of this research would be an examination of the post-1821 period, which would

include the Company's operations within the Pacific drainage. A more comprehensive study of the HBC's transatlantic linkage is another obvious area for further study. To date there has been no comprehensive geographical study of the NWC's transportation system. Further consideration of the role of transportation in the struggle between the HBC and the NWC must await such a study.

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- a. Post Journals
- b. Correspondence books
- c. Correspondence Inward
- d. Account Books
- e. Reports on Districts
- f. Lists of Servants
- z. Miscellaneous Items

The Company archives is further classified into Sections C, D, E, F, G, and H. Section C, which contains documents relating to ships and transatlantic communication, and Section E, which is a miscellaneous category including journals of individual Company employees, were two sections of this group most often referred to in the study.

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