

The Hudson Bay Lowland Cree in the Fur Trade to 1821:
A Study in Historical Geography

by

Victor Petro Lytwyn

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Geography
University of Manitoba
Winnipeg, Manitoba

August, 1993

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ISBN 0-315-86146-0

Canada

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ABSTRACT

This is a study of the indigenous people of the Hudson Bay Lowlands, known as the Lowland Cree. The time period is coincident with the European fur trade period in the region from about 1670 to 1821. A review of the archaeological literature has also been included to establish that Aboriginal people occupied the region long before Europeans arrived. The fact that the Lowland Cree lived in the Hudson Bay Lowlands before the arrival of European fur traders is an important element in understanding developments in the post-European contact period. It is also important because it is contrary to the prevailing view in the literature that the resources within the region could not support Aboriginal people without assistance from the European traders.

The methodological framework for the study is consistent with traditional approaches in historical geography. A central theme is the relationship between the Lowland Cree and the natural environment. The examination of the human/land interface in the Hudson Bay Lowlands has shown that these people adapted successfully to developments in the fur trade until major transformations to the natural resource base occurred in the late 18th and early 19th century.

Contrary to the prevailing view in the literature, most Lowland Cree did not become quickly dependent on the European fur traders. Until the late 18th century many Lowland Cree favoured traditional pursuits over involvement in the commercial trade and wage labour activities. The smallpox epidemic in 1782-83 was a major factor in bringing the Lowland Cree into a more intensive involvement in the fur trade. Contributing to the post-smallpox adaptations among the Lowland Cree was the rapid expansion of the Hudson's Bay Company's inland trading networks. Unusual climatic conditions also played a role in reducing the availability of traditional subsistence and commercial resources. The decline in the caribou population was especially critical in prompting many Lowland Cree to migrate outside of their traditional homelands. By 1821, the competitive fur trade period had ended throughout much of the Canadian subarctic, and monopoly conditions provided a check against major fur trade developments.

PREFACE:

This study of the Lowland Cree is an outgrowth of my previous work relating to the historical geography of the subarctic fur trade in North America. My interest in the subject was first kindled in 1978, when I was introduced to the study of the historical geography of Native North America by Dr. D. Wayne Moodie, who was a visiting professor at the University of Toronto in my final year of undergraduate study in the Department of Geography. Professor Moodie encouraged me to continue my studies at the Master's level in the Geography Department at the University of Manitoba in 1979.

My research experience expanded in the period from 1979 to 1982, when I was intensively involved in the Historical Atlas of Canada project. I was fortunate to work on that project with Professor Moodie, Professor Barry Kaye, also with the Geography Department, Professor Douglas N. Sprague from the History Department and Professors Arthur J. Ray and R. Cole Harris from the History and Geography Departments respectively from the University of British Columbia. Our contributions focused on cartographic themes depicting the development of the fur trade in the western interior of Canada. The work on the atlas project encompassed a wide range of research initiatives. The main source of primary data for our thematic maps was the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) Archives in Winnipeg.

My Master's thesis, which was completed in 1981, also drew on my experience from the atlas project. It involved the study of the fur trade in the region south of the Hudson Bay Lowlands which was known as the Little North. That study was especially focused on the development of Euro-Canadian fur trade networks and the location of trading posts and transportation routes. Although the main area of study was outside of the Hudson Bay Lowlands, it was essential to know about the bayside trade with the Lowland Cree in order to understand the patterns that developed inland. Much of the primary research concentrated on the HBC records from Albany Fort, Severn House and York Factory; places that would later be pivotal to this study.

In 1984, I completed a report for Parks Canada that examined the ethnohistory of the York Factory area. That study was essentially a review of the available sources of information that related to the history of the Lowland Cree in the hinterland of York Factory. I conducted an extensive review of published and archival material in the context of York Factory ethnohistory. The report also assessed the need to focus on the broader regional historical geography of the Lowland Cree in the fur trade period in order to understand the developments in the York Factory area.

Since 1984, I have presented various aspects of my research on the historical geography of the Lowland Cree in the fur trade period at a number of academic conferences. For example, in 1987 I presented a paper at the nineteenth Algonquian Conference in Washington, D.C., entitled: "Northern Algonquian Caribou Hunters in the Hudson Bay

Lowlands." That paper investigated the seasonal migration of large herds of caribou through the Hudson Bay Lowlands in relation to the subsistence and economy of the Lowland Cree. In 1988, I presented a paper at the third Rupert's Land Research Centre Colloquium in Churchill, Manitoba, entitled: "People of the Muskeg: The Albany River Homeguard Cree in the Fur Trade Period." That paper examined the involvement of a particular group of Lowland Cree near the mouth of the Albany River who were known as Homeguard Cree. It focused on the relationship between the Homeguard Cree and the Hudson's Bay Company traders at Albany Fort. In 1990, I presented a paper at the annual Conference for the American Society of Ethnohistory in Toronto, Ontario, entitled: "Canoe Brigades to the Bay: Mapping the Locations of Indian Trading Groups in the Little North." That paper addressed the identity and location of Upland Indian groups who made annual trading trips to the Hudson Bay coast. The relationship between the Upland Indian groups and the Lowland Cree was an important aspect in the development of this study.

During my study at the University of Manitoba I have benefitted from graduate courses in the Departments of Geography and History. Professor Moodie's courses in Historical Geography provided insights into the historical and philosophical underpinnings of the discipline. Professor William Norton taught a course in Cultural Geography that traced the development of that field of thought. That course was important in outlining the linkages between Anthropology and Geography, especially in the development of culture area studies. Professor Jennifer S.H. Brown offered a graduate course in the Department

of History at the University of Winnipeg that focused on the study of Aboriginal people in the North American fur trade. The course was held in the Hudson's Bay Company Archives, and it provided valuable experience in the use of archival documents.

My work on this thesis has also benefitted from the advice and assistance of a number of colleagues. Professor Dan Blair helped in setting up a computer programme that was very useful in organizing data from the HBC archives. Gary Doige provided assistance in sorting through other archival information, especially from the HBC account books. Paul Hackett forwarded valuable information from his research relating to the transmission of disease epidemics among the Lowland Cree. Laura Peers provided me with a copy of her unpublished M.A. Thesis on the Western Ojibwa. Professor Scott Hamilton sent me an advance copy of his archaeological research report on the Wapekeka burial site. Dr. Jean-Luc Pilon gave me a copy of his published dissertation on the archaeology of the lower Severn River area.

This study would not have been possible without the assistance of the staff of the Hudson's Bay Company Archives. Shirlee Smith, former Keeper of the Archives, encouraged my research and provided useful advice on the Company's records. Judith Beattie, Michael Mooseberger, Anne Morton and David Arthurs have also provided help in accessing the voluminous holdings of the archives.

I would like to thank the members of my Ph.D committee for their careful review of this

dissertation. The University of Manitoba committee members were Dr. Jean Friesen, Associate Professor of History and William Norton, Head of the Department of Geography. The external committee member was Dr. Arthur J. Ray, Professor of History at the University of British Columbia.

I would also like to thank my advisor, Professor Wayne Moodie, for his patient support and guidance. From the moment I stepped off the train in Winnipeg in the summer of 1979, Professor Moodie has been a kind teacher, advisor, colleague and friend. His unwavering interest in this study has been a great help in completing the work.

Finally, I would like to thank my family and friends for understanding the importance of my studies. Over the years, the most understanding person has been my wife, Joanne, who has patiently supported and encouraged my work.

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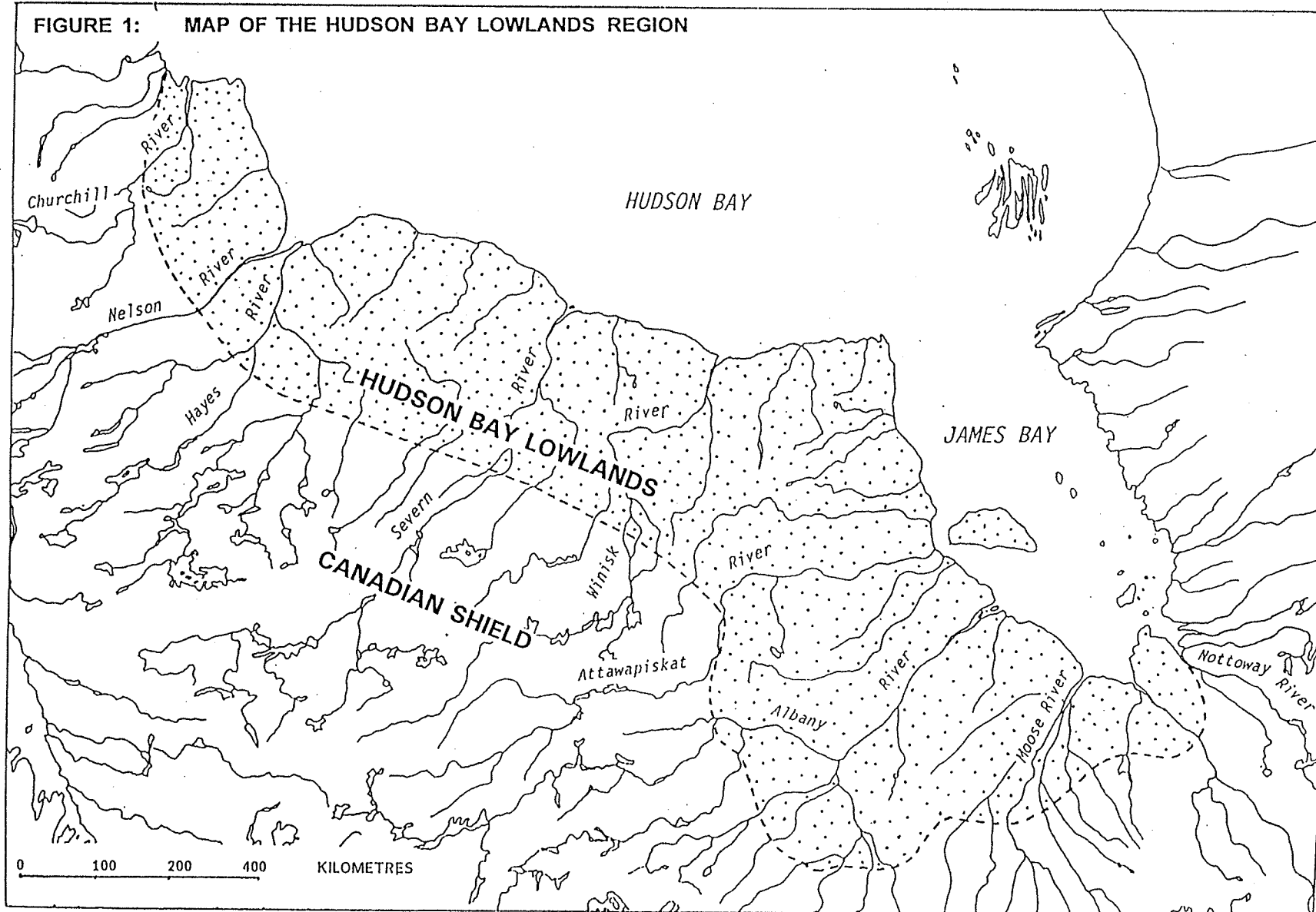
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION:

The Hudson Bay Lowlands is a vast subarctic region of predominantly swampy, low-lying terrain (see figure 1). The indigenous people of the Hudson Bay Lowlands, identified as the Lowland Cree in this study, became directly involved in the European fur trade when trading posts were established at strategic river-mouth locations along the western Hudson and James Bay coast beginning in the 1670s. The role of the Lowland Cree in supplying provisions was especially critical in sustaining the European bayside trade, and in supporting an extensive inland network of posts that developed in the late 18th century.

The main coastal trading posts were built and operated by the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC), and voluminous records were kept by the Company. The HBC records provided details relating to the business activities of the Company, but they also documented the activities of the Indian people who traded at the posts. The Lowland Cree figured prominently in these records because they lived nearby, and they were important contributors of provisions, furs and other country produce. The Lowland Cree also contributed labour and provided other services that were essential to the operation of the fur trade posts.

FIGURE 1: MAP OF THE HUDSON BAY LOWLANDS REGION



Despite the availability of a large volume of written information relating to the Lowland Cree in the fur trade period, relatively little scholarly attention has been focused on these people.¹ The first specific study of the Lowland Cree was undertaken by James Mooney, who referred to them as the "Maskegon," or "Swampy Cree" in his contribution to the Bureau of American Ethnology's handbook on North American Indians that was published in 1907.² Mooney noted that the Maskegon comprised "An Algonquian tribe so closely related to the Cree that they have appropriately been called a subtribe."³ Mooney's brief description of the Maskegon was the first to specifically identify the Lowland Cree as a distinct group of people.

The pioneering work of Mooney and others who contributed to the handbook was followed by other scholars who were interested in classifying and enumerating the Native people of North America. For example, Edward Curtis departed little from Mooney's assessment of the Lowland Cree in his massive study of North American Indians that was published in 1928.⁴ Diamond Jenness's compendium on Canadian Indians that was

¹For a review of the literature relating to the Lowland Cree near York Factory, see Lytwyn, 1984.

²Research for the handbook project was begun in 1873, and two volumes were published in 1907 and 1910. Material relating to Indians in Canada was extracted and published in 1913 as an appendix to the tenth report of the Geographic Board of Canada (Hodge, 1913). James Mooney was a renowned American ethnologist, whom Diamond Jenness considered to be one of the foremost authorities on Canadian Indians (Jenness, 1960: 1).

³Mooney, 1913: 276.

⁴Curtis, 1970.

published in 1932 also followed the classification that had been previously established by Mooney. In addition, Jenness also examined the relationship between the Lowland Cree and Europeans during the fur trade period. He depicted the Lowland Cree as becoming quickly dependent on European material goods because they were superior to aboriginal technology.⁵ Jenness viewed the contact between Europeans and North American Indians generally as a process of cultural disintegration of the latter.

During the twentieth century, comprehensive studies of North American Indians became less popular in the field of anthropology as the focus shifted to specific ethnological studies of particular groups of people. The few works that persisted in the generalist tradition provided little new information on the Lowland Cree.⁶

The earliest ethnological fieldwork study in the Hudson Bay Lowlands was conducted by Alanson Skinner and published in 1911. Skinner's work was primarily focused on a descriptive catalogue of contemporary Lowland Cree material culture traits. However, Skinner provided a brief historical overview, and he concluded that the European fur trade period had wrought significant negative changes to Lowland Cree culture. At the time of his investigation, Skinner commented that: "it seems impossible for the forests of the north to have originally supported the present population, which is at present kept

⁵Jenness, 1960: 32-33.

⁶See, for example, Swanton, 1952; Trudeau, 1968; and Fisher, 1969.

alive largely by food obtained from the Hudson's Bay Company."⁷

In 1938 and 1940, Leonard Mason conducted ethnological fieldwork studies among the Lowland Cree in the vicinity of Oxford House. Mason's work, which was published in 1967, reflected a new emphasis on cultural change in the anthropological literature. Thus, Mason was interested in reconstructing the changes that had taken place among the Oxford House Lowland Cree since their initial contact with Europeans. He considered the pre-European period to be the "Golden Age" of the Lowland Cree.⁸ According to Mason, the arrival of European fur traders and their material goods had a negative impact on Lowland Cree society. Mason argued that, through contact with European fur traders, the Lowland Cree quickly became dependent on European material goods, and much of their traditional culture vanished.

In 1947 and 1948, John Honigmann visited several Lowland Cree communities near Attawapiskat, and he attempted to reconstruct the changes in the Lowland Cree way of life that had been caused by contact with Europeans. Honigmann relied on interviews with Lowland Cree elders who provided information about changes that had occurred during their lifetime. As such, the time-frame for the study was limited to the period from the late 19th century.⁹ Although Honigmann acknowledged that the establishment

⁷Skinner, 1911: 11.

⁸Mason, 1967: xi.

⁹Honigmann's informants were born between 1870 and 1900.

of fur trade posts in the region began much earlier, he argued that the Lowland Cree at Attawapiskat had been relatively isolated from these influences until about 1850 when missionaries first visited the area. With these assumptions in mind, Honigmann concluded that cultural change among the Lowland Cree near Attawapiskat was rapid, but certain material culture traits persisted and provided evidence that traditional ways of life did not completely disintegrate following European contact.¹⁰

Historians initially depicted the Hudson Bay Lowlands as a region devoid of humans before European fur trade settlement. The theory of the Hudson Bay Lowlands as a *terra nullius* was first advanced by Arthur S. Morton in 1939. According to Morton, the Indian people who came to live in the Lowlands near the mouth of the Nelson and Hayes Rivers were "Maskegon or Swamp Crees" whose aboriginal homeland was the upland forest of the Canadian Shield near Lake Winnipeg.¹¹ Thus, when Thomas Button and his crew wintered at the mouth of the Nelson River in 1612-13, Morton concluded that

¹⁰Since Honigmann's work among the Lowland Cree near Attawapiskat, there have been few ethnological studies in the region. David Turner and Paul Wertman investigated the Lowland Cree community at Shamattawa in the 1970s, but their study incorporated little historical information. Like Honigmann, Turner and Wertman assumed that longer term historical developments in the region were not essential to their study of the Shamattawa community (Turner and Wertman, 1977).

¹¹Morton, 1973: 32. Morton appears to have borrowed selectively from the work of James Mooney. However, Mooney included the Hudson Bay Lowlands as the original homeland of the Lowland Cree. Mooney observed that: "From the time the Maskegon became known as a distinct tribe until they were placed on reserves by the Canadian government they were scattered over the swampy region stretching from lake Winnipeg and lake of the Woods to Hudson Bay, including the basins of Nelson, Hayes, and Severn rivers" (underline added, Mooney, 1913: 276).

they met no Indians because "they would be inland in the forest."¹² Jens Munk's failure to meet with Indians at the mouth of the Churchill River was also explained in similar terms. Morton noted that "The Indians must have been in the interior in their winter home in the forest."¹³

While it is true that only Henry Hudson's voyage into James Bay in 1610-11 recorded contact with an Aboriginal person, other early explorers observed signs of recently abandoned camps along the coast of the Hudson Bay Lowlands. Jens Munk, who spent the winter of 1619-20 at the mouth of the Churchill River, noted that: "Although we did not see any natives, we saw traces of their summer camps in a number of spots."¹⁴ Luke Fox encountered a recently abandoned camp near the mouth of the Nelson River on August 17, 1631. Fox observed that: "upon the shore we found, the broad footing of Deere [caribou], and hard by them, the frame of a Tent standing, which had been lately made, with the studdle of the fire, the haire of Deere, and bones of fowle, left here."¹⁵ Thomas James also found the remains of Indian camps on Danby Island in southern James Bay during his expedition in 1631-32.¹⁶ The abandoned camps provided ample evidence that Indian people were living in the Lowlands at the time of initial

¹²Morton, 1973: 30.

¹³Ibid: 32.

¹⁴Munk, 1980: 20.

¹⁵Fox, 1965: 216.

¹⁶James, 1973: 44, 102.

European contact, Morton and others disregarded the significance of these sightings.

Morton's views on the pre-European contact territory of the Lowland Cree were strongly influenced by his interpretation of the role of the environment in determining where and how Aboriginal people lived. He wrote that:

The climate, then, and in particular the moisture of these three North-Wests [forest, prairie and barren grounds], determines the plant life in the respective areas. The plant life in turn limits the animal life, and all of these together define the possibilities of human existence.¹⁷

The Hudson Bay Lowlands were equated with the barren grounds, and Morton ruled out human settlement in the region because of harsh environmental conditions.

The image of the Hudson Bay Lowlands as an uninhabited region was further developed by another historian, William L. Morton. In 1957, W.L. Morton reviewed the accounts of the early European explorers who visited the Lowlands, and he concluded that: "As the explorers had noted, the Indians did not inhabit the coast, but frequented it only in summer."¹⁸ According to W.L. Morton, Indian occupation of the Lowlands on a year-round basis was made possible only after the establishment of fur trade posts. He also inferred that the Indian people who came to inhabit the Lowlands were formerly part of the "tribes of the farther interior." These tribes were among the "Cree Nation" who

¹⁷Ibid: 3.

¹⁸Morton, 1957: 14.

inhabited "the forest belt of the Shield" prior to the arrival of the European fur traders.¹⁹ After the establishment of trading posts, W.L. Morton concluded that some of the Upland Cree came to live in "the seaward forest belt," and were described as "the later 'Home Indians' of Company [HBC] parlance."²⁰ According to this view, the Lowland Cree became geographically separated from the majority of the Cree Nation who continued to occupy their original upland territory, and who were described by W.L. Morton as "the merry-hearted Crees of the inland forest."²¹

Walter Hlady, an archaeologist, was influential in perpetuating the myth of an uninhabited Hudson Bay Lowlands before European contact. In 1961, Hlady presented a paper to the Historical and Scientific Society of Manitoba that supported the view that Aboriginal people did not live year-round in the Lowlands before the arrival of the Europeans.²² Although trained as an archaeologist, Hlady did not present archaeological evidence to support his conclusions. Instead, he relied upon interpretations that had been formulated by A.S. Morton and W.L. Morton. Hlady was especially influenced by W.L. Morton's views about the effect of the European fur trade in attracting Indian people from the upland forest to live in the coastal lowlands. Following Morton, Hlady commented that:

¹⁹Ibid: 14.

²⁰Ibid: 19.

²¹Ibid: 19.

²²Hlady, 1960-61: 24-53.

The setting up of fur trade posts on Hudson Bay begins to provide many check points on the location and movements of tribes. The Cree were first contacted by a party [of French fur traders] from the mouth of the Nelson and Hayes Rivers in 1682. The party must have travelled about one hundred miles inland before establishing contact. It was obvious that the Cree had preferred being inland, spending some time on the coast.²³

The main objective of early fur trade historians was not to elucidate the Indian role in the fur trade, but to establish the fur trade as an aspect of European imperial history or of Canadian business and economic history. Indian people were viewed as part of the natural landscape, and secondary to the European achievements in commerce and exploration. Furthermore, the generally peaceful relations between Europeans and Indians in the fur trade appeared to validate the view that Indian people were eager recipients of a vastly superior European material culture. Thus, prominent fur trade historians such as Harold Innis portrayed the influence of European technology as destructive to aboriginal ways of life, and conducive to dependency on the European traders.²⁴ A.S. Morton portrayed the initial contact between the Lowland Cree and European fur traders near York Factory in terms of the rapid dominance of the Europeans. Morton observed that the European fur traders quickly established their superiority over the local Indians, and acknowledged "the sway they gained over a fretful race."²⁵

²³Ibid: 26.

²⁴Innis, 1930.

²⁵Morton, 1973: 129.

The eminent historian of the Hudson's Bay Company, E.E. Rich, provided some of the most enduring images of the Lowland Cree as dependent upon the European fur traders. Rich depicted Indian people in general as becoming dependent on Europeans for their survival shortly after the first fur trade contacts. For example, after only five years of trading at Charles Fort at the mouth of the Rupert River, Rich contended that the historical records indicated "the marked tendency for the Indians to become dependent on the traders."²⁶ This "marked tendency" was singularly linked to the few occasions when Indian people asked the HBC traders for food. While Rich chose to focus on the HBC providing food to the Indian people as a tendency toward dependency, he downplayed the reverse situation of Indian people providing food to the European traders. After five years of fur trade settlement at Charles Fort, Rich concluded that the local Indian population faced starvation if the yearly HBC supply ship failed to arrive.

Rich's view that the Lowland Cree became quickly and "utterly" dependent on European fur traders and their goods was based upon a notion that Lowland Cree were primitive people who were rapidly overwhelmed by the more advanced and superior Europeans.²⁷

²⁶Rich, 1960, vol. 1: 71.

²⁷In 1682 the HBC was forced to return over 12,000 defective knives, 141 guns, 740 powder horns, 720 scrapers and 346 sword blades to England. Rich concluded that the Company was forced to return these goods because "these were all goods on which an Indian's life might depend" (Rich, 1960, vol. 1: 153). While a defective gun may have proven deadly to an Indian hunter if it accidentally blew up, it is difficult to imagine any circumstance in which a faulty scraper or sword blade could have produced such mortal effects. The return of these goods more likely reflected their rejection by knowledgeable Indian customers rather than the Company's concern for the life and death consequences of allowing these goods into the hands of unwitting Indian traders.

This assumption is made clear in numerous statements, but only a few will suffice to make the point. For example, Rich stated that: "the impact of the ordinary trading habits of western peoples [western Europeans] on an uncivilized race has as deep and lasting an effect as the more self-conscious changes in habits and cultures advocated by priests and educationalists."²⁸ In another passage, Rich explained that: "the nature and the desires of the Indians [for European goods]" did not "differ greatly from any other primitive people brought into contact with the productive capacity and resources of Europe."²⁹ Rich summarized the relationship between Indian and European fur traders as follows:

They [Indian traders] showed the first natural reaction of savages in trade-contacts with Europeans in that in their initial dealings they placed but little value on their wares, which to them were superfluous. There was no thrift, and little sense of value, in them, and being used to regard the peltry which the Europeans wanted as surplus commodities and to want European goods only as luxuries, they were not disposed to exert themselves provided they could satisfy their immediate needs. Sophistication came early, as the Indian became dependent on the trade-gun instead of on the bow and arrow, and as iron goods became a part of his life. But with his habits and characteristics the Indian, even when he had become dependent on European trade, could normally be stirred to extra endeavour by his desire for luxuries for immediate consumption rather than by his basic needs. It was the Europeans who, on the whole, worried about keeping the Indian alive and capable of hunting through the winter, not the Indians themselves.³⁰

²⁸Ibid: 493.

²⁹Ibid: 510.

³⁰Ibid: 510.

Although Rich portrayed Indian people generally as becoming quickly dependent on the European fur traders, he focused specifically on the Lowland Cree who were known as Homeguards. Rich acknowledged that the Europeans who lived in the bayside posts were seasonally dependent on the Homeguards who provided food from their hunts,³¹ but he also claimed that this drew the Homeguards into living close to the fort throughout the year, which forced them to depend on the Company for food during the winter season. Rich stated that: "Dependence on them [Homeguards] for the goose and partridge hunts entailed the obligation to feed them through the winter and to keep them both loyal and fit for hunting."³²

In a later study, Rich focused more specifically on the relationship between the HBC fur traders and the Indians who were involved in the trade. Rich concluded that Indian people were motivated by much more than the novelty of European hardware and trinkets. He also contended that they did not behave like "rational economic men" in the commercial exchange of furs for European goods.³³ Rich argued that the Indian traders were more interested in achieving political alliances with the newcomers than maximizing their economic returns. According to Rich, these alliances were predicated on the need

³¹Rich stated that: "It was the 'home-guard' Indians who conducted the hunts, not the Europeans. For a whole generation yet to come the European servants were unable to hunt for their own food; so much so that the Indians told the English they had not one man could kill a goose, and as late as 1750 the Indians were able to threaten to starve the posts by refusing to hunt" (*Ibid*: 495).

³²*Ibid*: 496.

³³Rich, 1960a.

to obtain reliable supplies of European firearms that were used against traditional native enemies.

Rich's ideas about a political basis for the fur trade were further developed by Abraham Rotstein, an economist who viewed the fur trade as a continuation of an aboriginal system of treaties and alliances.³⁴ Rotstein argued that European market conditions governing the fur trade were insignificant in comparison to well-established aboriginal treaty alliances. Thus, the development of the fur trade conformed closely to aboriginal concepts of ceremony and reciprocity rather than European rules that governed market economies.

Arthur Ray's study of the involvement of Upland Indian groups in the fur trade provided new insights into the economic motivations of Indian middleman traders.³⁵ Although Ray agreed with Rich and Rotstein that treaty trade was an important aspect of the initial contact period between European and Indian fur traders, he argued that it was quickly replaced by economic considerations as Indian middleman traders sought to control the secondary trade that developed among more distant Upland Indian groups who did not have direct access to the European trading posts. Ray explained that Indian traders were acutely aware of price differences and drove hard bargains with the European merchants, especially during times of low supply and high demand. Furthermore, Indian traders

³⁴Rotstein, 1967.

³⁵Ray, 1974.

were also engaged in middleman exchange networks that reaped high economic returns. For example, Ray cited a HBC report that indicated Upland Cree and Assiniboine traders marked-up used European goods from 300 to 900 per cent in their middleman trade with more distant Indian groups.³⁶

Ray also focused more specifically on the question of the dependency of Indian people on the European fur traders.³⁷ He argued that, prior to European contact, Indian people were engaged in sustainable resource harvesting activities and reciprocal exchange and redistribution networks with neighbouring groups, and these factors minimized the risk of severe privation during periodic shortages of subsistence resources. The establishment of European fur trade posts changed these traditional patterns so that more time and effort was spent on hunting and trapping small fur bearers or harvesting provisions for the sustenance of the European traders. In turn, certain resources such as big-game animals and fur bearers were over-hunted and depleted. Ray also argued that the new focus on commercial trade eroded traditional practices of communal resource sharing, thereby further restricting the ability of Indian people to cope with conditions of food scarcity. The impact of this new order was felt most acutely among groups like the Lowland Cree who were located close to major fur trade posts. This led the Lowland Cree to depend on the trading posts for material goods and food supplies, especially after the collapse of big-game and beaver populations in the early 19th century,

³⁶Ibid: 40.

³⁷Ray, 1984.

Charles Bishop's study of the Lowland Cree in the western James Bay area concluded that the negative impact of the European fur trade was felt much earlier than that depicted by Ray. Bishop asserted that: "Euro-Canadian contact with the James Bay Cree was early and intense. By the late seventeenth century, the Coastal Cree had come to depend on a regular annual supply of European goods."³⁸ Unlike the Upland Indians who initially traded for luxury goods, Bishop contended that the Lowland Cree traded mainly for necessities. In addition, the Euro-Canadian fur traders supplied the Lowland Cree with foodstuffs such as oatmeal and salted geese and fish. Like Rich, Bishop interpreted the giving of food as symbolic of the dependency of the Lowland Cree on the fur traders for their survival. He concluded that:

[P]rior to the establishment of trading posts during the 1670's, some Cree groups hunted geese during the spring and early summer along James Bay. In the late summer they retreated inland wintering on the edge of the Shield where game was more plentiful. However, the construction of trading posts on James Bay disrupted the cycle since traders required Indians to hunt geese in the autumn as well as the spring. By late October, weather conditions prevented the goose hunters from returning inland to the Shield. They thus learned to survive, albeit with great difficulty, within about 100 miles of the post. It was, then, those Cree who first became heavily dependent upon trade materials including donations of store foods.³⁹

In later publications, Bishop acknowledged that dependency may not have been effected until the 1730s. He stated that: "Adaptation to trapping, goose hunting, and trading-post

³⁸Bishop, 1972: 63.

³⁹Ibid: 66.

dependency had considerably altered mobility patterns and group size by the 1730's.⁴⁰ Thus, the Lowland Cree became dependent on the Europeans because their participation in the fur trade caused radical transformations in their way of life. The traditional territory of the Albany River Lowland Cree was geographically telescoped from an extensive range between the coast and the Upland Shield to a year-round coastal environment in which food was less secure, and this resulted in dependency on the trading post for their survival. Bishop explained that:

The establishment of the trading post and the reliance upon Indians to hunt geese in the spring and autumn seems to have altered aboriginal seasonal movements. The autumn goose hunt was particularly disruptive since the homeguards were obliged to hunt until mid-October. Thus they had little time to prepare a larder of food for the winter while the formation of ice in the rivers hindered them from travelling inland to hunting and trapping areas. They were also growing increasingly dependent upon the trading post, which was to the advantage of the Company.⁴¹

The view that the Lowland Cree quickly became dependent upon European goods was explained by Bishop in terms of general acculturation processes. He argued that contact between Europeans and the Lowland Cree resulted in rapid and dramatically different forms of social organization in Indian societies.⁴² In 1983, he offered additional explanations supporting his view that the Lowland Cree near Albany Fort became dependent on the European traders. In particular, he contended that the European trading posts drew the Lowland Cree to live year-round in close proximity of the coastal post.

⁴⁰Bishop, 1975: 158.

⁴¹Ibid: 157.

⁴²Bishop, 1982: 254.

This change in the territorial range of these Indians led to increased stress on food animals in the coastal region. Bishop focused on big-game animals such as caribou and beaver which he believed were rapidly over-hunted in the coastal area. This depletion of big-game animals led to instances of starvation, and brought the Lowland Cree into a relationship of dependency upon the European traders who were able to provide emergency supplies of food. Accordingly, the establishment of European trading posts along the coast of Hudson Bay "created" the Lowland Cree, in the sense that these Indians came to live within the coastal region year-round only after the European posts were built. In turn, the Lowland Cree over-harvested the animal resources within the region, and this led to greater dependency upon the European traders. Bishop portrayed these changes as a "narrowing of their range of options," and the Lowland Cree became quickly tied to the post for their survival.

According to Bishop, the involvement of the Lowland Cree in the European fur trade created "severe stress" which led to hardship, hunger and even death by starvation. The most significant factor leading to stress was the dependency of the Lowland Cree on European goods, especially firearms. He stated that: "Over the years, Indians who became accustomed to receiving these goods would have grown dependent upon them, especially if they were used in hunting."⁴³ Central to Bishop's hypothesis was the

⁴³Bishop, 1984: 41. Earlier writers emphasized the significance of European firearms in intra-Indian warfare patterns. Donald Gunn was among the first to publish the view that European guns enabled the Lowland Cree to push the Upland Indians farther into the interior and occupy a greater extent of territory. Gunn postulated that: "there was one thing in which they [French and English fur traders] seemed to agree, namely, in

importance of guns in hunting during winter when Indians formed small hunting groups consisting of several families. In these settings, he asserted that guns would have been essential in hunting caribou. Presumably, in pre-contact times Indians remained in larger groups in which communal hunting efforts would have been more efficient using aboriginal technology. Bishop argued that involvement in the European fur trade "involved a tendency for family groups to remain separated for longer periods of time in winter than had been the case in pre-contact times."⁴⁴

The apparent superiority of European hunting weapons, particularly firearms, was the main factor in shaping Bishop's argument that the Lowland Cree were able to rapidly deplete the numbers of caribou and beaver which were the main food animals. Although beaver were "apparently never numerous in the lowlands," Bishop argued that Indians killed more of these animals because they were valuable trade items. He pointed to Bacqueville de la Potherie's description of beaver hunting near York Factory to give support to his view that European fur trade influences changed beaver hunting methodologies and caused beaver populations to be rapidly depleted. However, it is interesting to note that La Potherie described beaver hunting techniques that employed aboriginal technology such as wooden stakes and nets made of caribou skin. Despite

supplying the natives with fire-arms and ammunition, which they soon learned to use with deadly effect against the inland tribes, whose only weapons were the tomahawk, the bow and the arrow. The swampy Crees would be induced by many reasons to abandon the frosty forests that border on the Bay, and press on to a milder climate and occupy a country abounding in the larger animals of the chase" (Gunn, 1880: 85-86).

⁴⁴Bishop, 1984: 43.

these inconsistencies, Bishop concluded that by the early 18th century, "beaver, which may formerly have been an important food source during stressful times, had been significantly reduced."⁴⁵ Additionally, a similar pattern of over-hunting was also applied to caribou. Although he admitted that the HBC records provided "limited evidence" for a decline in caribou numbers in the early European fur trade period, Bishop stated that by 1705, "there were fewer animals [caribou] available to kill."⁴⁶ The decline in caribou near Albany Fort was attributed to the "practice" by Lowland Cree of supplying caribou meat to provision the trading post.

Bishop asserted that, by the 1690s, the decline in "traditional" food sources such as caribou and beaver caused "increasingly frequent and intensive stresses," and forced the Lowland Cree to depend on less reliable animals such as snowshoe hare.⁴⁷ The decline in caribou and beaver also caused the Indians to rapidly become involved in hunting geese on a regular basis. The involvement in goose hunting, especially during the fall hunt, caused the Lowland Cree to remain closer to the post during winter. He suggested that hunting geese in fall prevented the Albany River Lowland Cree from travelling to their traditional winter hunting grounds in the upland Shield country. Remaining near the coast year-round was made possible only by relying on the trading post for food supplies. Furthermore, he stated that: "The willingness of traders to tide destitute

⁴⁵Ibid: 44.

⁴⁶Ibid: 44.

⁴⁷Ibid: 45.

Indians over, and a corresponding awareness on the part of the homeguard Cree that help was available to those who could reach the post, created a recurrent dependence on post assistance."⁴⁸

John Foster's study of the Homeguard Cree in the pre-1770 period came to some different conclusions about the nature of their involvement in the European fur trade. Foster depicted the European trading posts as safe havens that enabled the Lowland Cree to live more comfortably within the region. Foster explained that: "Their economic relationship with the trading post improved their margin of safety in terms of their survival in a harsh environment. With large supplies of both European and Country provisions, goods and services, the trading post was an inexhaustible storehouse that the Cree could draw upon when they were in need."⁴⁹ Foster also pointed out that, prior to 1770, dependency was a two-way relationship, or one of "economic interdependence," as the European traders were often dependent on the Lowland Cree for extra supplies of provisions and other products. He also noted that unions between European men and native women added to the complexity of the involvement of the Lowland Cree in the fur trade. Foster concluded that the "enduring peaceful relationship" between the Lowland Cree and the European fur traders was predicated on a "familial context" that built upon both indigenous and adapted social and cultural patterns.⁵⁰

⁴⁸Ibid: 46.

⁴⁹Foster, 1977: 52.

⁵⁰Ibid: 61.

Paul Thistle's recent study of the fur trade in the Lower Saskatchewan River provided a two-sided view of Indian dependency on the European fur traders. Thistle set up a dichotomy between the Lowland Cree who were described as becoming rapidly dependent on the Europeans, and the Upland Cree who occupied the area near the Lower Saskatchewan River who were depicted as relatively aloof from fur trade influences. Thistle's depiction of the Lowland Cree as dependent on Europeans appears to have been formulated in order to set up a contrasting argument for the Saskatchewan River Cree. However, a close examination of the historical records reveals that this was a false dichotomy. Many of the sources Thistle used to support the apparent independence of the Saskatchewan River Cree were actually descriptions of Lowland Cree. For example, Thistle's analysis of Andrew Graham's observations was based on the false premise that Graham's comments applied to the Upland Cree.⁵¹ Another oversight in Thistle's thesis is the fact that many of the people who were identified as Upland, or Western Woods Cree, were originally Lowland Cree who migrated there from the York Factory area beginning in the 1790s.

Toby Morantz's thorough study of the Eastern James Bay Cree concluded that their involvement in the European fur trade was based on reciprocal exchanges that promoted inter-dependency.⁵² She argued that the Eastern James Bay Cree successfully adapted to the fur trade economy, and did not become dependent on the European fur traders

⁵¹Thistle, 1986: 48-49.

⁵²Morantz, 1983.

until at least the mid-19th century. Morantz observed that the Eastern James Bay Cree were able to expand their range of subsistence and commercial activities during the fur trade period, and this led to changes in patterns of social organization. However, these changes built upon traditional social structures. Instead of debilitating aboriginal culture, Morantz argued that the fur trade promoted a strengthening and diversification of existing social organization among the Eastern James Bay Cree.

Morantz's study of the Eastern James Bay Cree challenged the views of those scholars who portrayed the fur trade period as one in which aboriginal people quickly became dependent on Europeans. However, Morantz has been careful to explain that the European fur trade was not monolithic, and it did not affect all aboriginal peoples in the same way. She has demonstrated that the impact of the European fur trade on the Eastern James Bay Cree was less overwhelming than the impact on Indian groups to the south and west. In effect, she has shown that regional studies are essential to our understanding of the involvement of Indian groups in the fur trade.

The study of human history within a regional context has long been a fundamental methodological approach in historical geography.⁵³ The work of Carl Sauer, in

⁵³Anthropologists such as Alfred Kroeber, Clark Wissler and Robert Lowie were earlier proponents of regional studies involving native North American culture groups (see, for example, Kroeber, 1939; Wissler, 1917; and Lowie, 1920). Historical geographers have recently used the concepts of culture areas to develop new insights into the complex historical evolution of the human landscape in Canada. Volume one of the Historical Atlas of Canada is a good example of the contributions of historical geographers to culture area studies. Cole Harris explained that the aim of the atlas was

particular, has been influential in establishing the importance of studying the relationship between culture groups and regional landscapes. Sauer was primarily concerned with change over time in human/land relationships.⁵⁴ Sauer also recognized the importance of understanding the differences between culture groups in different regions. He remarked that: "The reconstruction of past cultures is a slow detective work, as to the collecting of evidence and weaving it together."⁵⁵ William Norton has noted that: "Sauer was effectively proposing a form of historical regional geography, with regions being natural and human landscape complexes."⁵⁶

Regional studies of North American Indian groups have been undertaken by several historical geographers. For example, Conrad Heidenreich's study of Huronia focused on the development of Huron settlement patterns within the parameters of the natural environment of their traditional territory.⁵⁷ Heidenreich has shown that the complexities

to "describe the changing geographical pattern of early Canada much more comprehensively than heretofore" (Harris, 1987: iii). Historical geographers such as Conrad Heidenreich, Arthur Ray, Wayne Moodie and Barry Kaye contributed atlas plates that depicted the changing involvement of Indian groups in the fur trade period. This study of the Lowland Cree has been significantly influenced by the work of historical geographers who were involved in the atlas project.

⁵⁴Sauer, 1969: 333. Excerpt from: "The Morphology of Landscape," originally published in 1925 (University of California Publications in Geography. vol. 2 (2): 19-54).

⁵⁵Sauer, 1969: 361. Excerpt from: "Foreword to Historical Geography," originally published in 1941 (Annals of the Association of American Geographers. vol. 31: 1-24).

⁵⁶Norton, 1989: 164.

⁵⁷Heidenreich, 1971.

of the natural ecology of the region known as Huronia is critical to our understanding of the history of Huron settlement, and the involvement of the Huron in the European fur trade.

Arthur Ray's study of the Indians in the western interior of North America during the fur trade period was also cast within the framework of regional historical geography.⁵⁸ Ray focused on the identities and locations of different Indian groups, and examined their adaptations to different ecological regions during the fur trade period. His study of the prairie, parkland and boreal forest regions provided the basis for understanding the movements of various Indian groups and their involvement in the fur trade. He also explored the changing adaptations of Indian groups to seasonal and longer-term resource availability in these ecological regions. Ray emphasized the importance of the seasonal cycle of subsistence and commercial resources within each region, and the significance of population movements between different regions in response to the changing availability of resources.

The following study seeks to contribute new insights into the understanding of the Lowland Cree during the fur trade period. It is essentially a regional historical geography of the Lowland Cree in the fur trade period from about 1670 to 1821. The relationship between the Lowland Cree and their natural environment is an important underpinning of this study. The lack of careful examination of the Hudson Bay

⁵⁸Ray, 1974.

Lowlands environment by previous scholars has led to erroneous conclusions about the suitability of the region for human habitation. It will be shown that the Hudson Bay Lowlands was not the desolate and unfruitful place that has been depicted in many previous studies. The year-round and seasonal resources within the Lowlands were sufficient to sustain the Lowland Cree before the arrival of European traders and the advent of European goods in the region. Among the variety of natural resources that will be discussed in this study, the importance of caribou, migratory birds and fish to the Lowland Cree will merit special attention.

This study also examines the identity and territory of the Lowland Cree, and focuses on their changing adaptations during the fur trade period. In addition, a review of the archaeological literature provides a link with what is currently known about the Lowland Cree in the pre-European contact period. The acquisition of European trade goods prompted adaptations in aboriginal subsistence strategies, but did not radically alter the Lowland Cree way of life until the end of the 18th century. These changes were also reflected in their social, political and commercial relationships with neighbouring Indian groups and European traders. The smallpox epidemic in 1782-83 was an event that caused significant mortality among the Lowland Cree, and brought about adaptations to cope with the negative after-effects of the disease. Adaptations were also necessary in response to short-term and long-term fluctuations in traditional subsistence and commercial resources. The major impact of the European fur trade was felt between about 1790 and 1810, when caribou and beaver populations in the Hudson Bay Lowlands

were over-harvested and depleted to the point of near extinction. The adaptive responses of the Lowland Cree included changes in subsistence and commercial resource harvesting activities and population movements within and outside the Hudson Bay Lowlands.

CHAPTER 2: THE IDENTITY AND TERRITORY OF THE LOWLAND CREE:

2.1: The Identity of the Hudson Bay Lowland Cree:

The indigenous people of the Hudson Bay Lowlands identified themselves as "A'thin new" or "Athinuwick," meaning person or people respectively in their own language.¹ Names that connoted other identities were conceived of and applied by outsiders. For example, Andrew Graham noted that the names he recorded to describe various groups of Lowland Indians were given by visiting Indian people who lived in the Upland region.² The term "Indian" was a European invention, and misnomer, that was used to describe indigenous peoples throughout North America. However, the term was used commonly by the European fur traders who worked and lived in the Lowlands, and therefore it will also be used as a generic term when referring to indigenous peoples in this study.

The name Cree was derived from the French word "Kiristinon" that was originally used

¹James Isham explained that the term "A'thin new" meant "an Indian" (Isham, 1949: 17). Andrew Graham used the term "Athinuwick" which he translated as "Indians" (Graham, 1969: 192). David Pentland, an Algonquian linguist, commented that the term "ininiw" was used as a self-designation by Cree speakers (Pentland, 1981a: 227).

²Graham, 1969: 192.

in the 17th century to describe several groups of Indian people who lived in the southern James Bay area.³ As French fur traders and missionaries moved into the upper country beyond Lake Superior, the term was applied to a large number of groups of Indian people who spoke a similar language. English-speaking observers later shortened the name to Cree, and it became widely used in the literature to describe Cree speakers who lived throughout much of the subarctic and prairie regions of northern North America. Although the name Cree was not commonly used in the Hudson Bay Lowlands during the fur trade period, it will be employed in this study to avoid confusion with the existing literature.

The Hudson Bay Lowland Cree population was spread over a vast territory, but their group identity was maintained through marriage connections and other social relationships such as feasts, spiritual gatherings, ceremonies, warfare and trade.⁴ The Lowland Cree also possessed a common language and cultural traditions that set them apart from their

³David Pentland suggested that the French term Kiristinon may have been derived from an Ojibway word (Pentland, 1981a: 227).

⁴The network of social linkages among the Lowland Cree was widespread. Links through marriages were especially important within the Lowland Cree population. For example, in 1716, Thomas Macklish, who was in charge of Albany Fort, noted that the "northern Indians" who lived near the Severn River were linked by marriages with the Albany River Lowland Cree. Macklish remarked that: "most of their [northern Indians's] wives is this country Indians" (Davies, 1965: 45). In 1769, Andrew Graham who was in charge of Severn House, noted the arrival of a family of Homeguard Cree from York Factory who were "on a visit to his Relations who are Home Indians here" (HBCA, B.198/a/11, June 22, 1769, fo. 31d). In 1796, John Ballenden, who was in charge of Severn House, observed that a Lowland Cree man died, and his wife and children intended to go to Albany Fort "where she belongs and her friends reside" (HBCA, B.198/a/47, January 13, 1796, fo. 21).

neighbours. Although regional sub-groups existed among the Lowland Cree (which are discussed below), the collective⁵ unity of these people was apparent to early European observers.

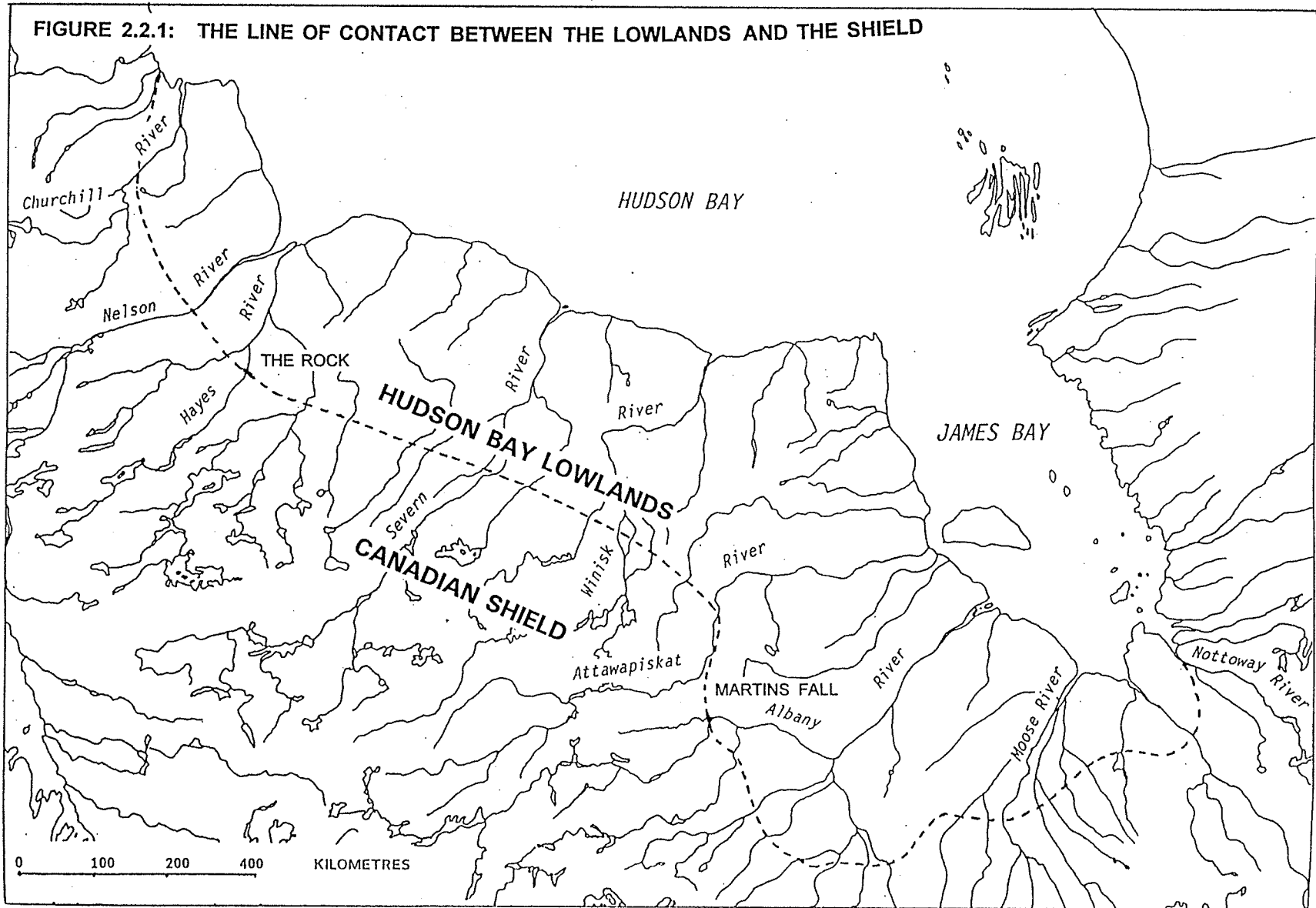
2.2 The Territory of the Lowland Cree:

The Hudson Bay Lowlands comprise a vast region of predominantly gently sloping, swampy land. The Lowlands are underlain by bedrock dating from the Palaeozoic era (225 to 570 million years ago), while the bedrock of the adjacent Uplands is from the older Precambrian era (older than 570 million years). This geological boundary occurs almost uniformly at about 500 feet above sea level.⁶ The Lowlands extend inland in a crescent-like shape, reaching its maximum inland extension of about 250 miles along the Albany River. The northern boundary of the region tapers toward the Hudson Bay coast north of the Churchill River, and the southern limit of the Lowlands reaches the James Bay coast near the Nottaway River (see figure 2.2.1).

⁵The terms nation and tribe were used interchangeably by European fur traders to describe the Lowland Cree. The term nation was more commonly applied to the larger grouping of Cree speakers, and tribe was used to describe regional subdivisions.

⁶Fahlgren and Matthews, 1985: plate 11. William Dean suggested that the 450 foot contour line approximated the boundary between the Precambrian Uplands and the Palaeozoic Lowlands (Dean, 1957: 56).

FIGURE 2.2.1: THE LINE OF CONTACT BETWEEN THE LOWLANDS AND THE SHIELD



The line of contact between the Lowlands and Uplands is most visible across the beds of rivers where waterfalls or rapids emphasize the difference between the harder bedrock of the Uplands and the softer sedimentary rock of the Lowlands.⁷ Along the Hayes River the boundary is crossed at a place called "The Rock." Robert Bell, a 19th century geologist, reported that: "the character of the river changes at The Rock; and from that point downward no more rapids occur all the way down to the sea."⁸ Along the Albany River the line of contact occurs at Martins Fall. Bell observed that: "Below Martin's Falls the river changes its character entirely, becoming more uniform in breadth, depth and velocity of current."⁹

Other physical features that are unique to the Lowlands region generally follow and are influenced by this geological boundary line. For example, the general vegetation pattern in the Lowlands has been called a "bogs-organic terrain," and the extent of this vegetation regime is roughly co-terminus with the geological boundary (see figure 2.2.2). This flat, marshy region reaches its greatest inland expansion along the Albany River, where it stretches inland for about 200 miles from the James Bay coast.

⁷In addition to the major division between the bedrock of the Hudson Bay Lowlands and the Upland Canadian Shield, local outcroppings of different geological formations are responsible for a few other rapids in the Lowlands. For example, the Whiteseal Falls and the Limestone Rapids in the Severn River are caused by the contact between two different geological formations that bisect the river at those places (Pilon, 1987: 6).

⁸Bell, 1879: 7CC.

⁹Bell, 1912: 85.

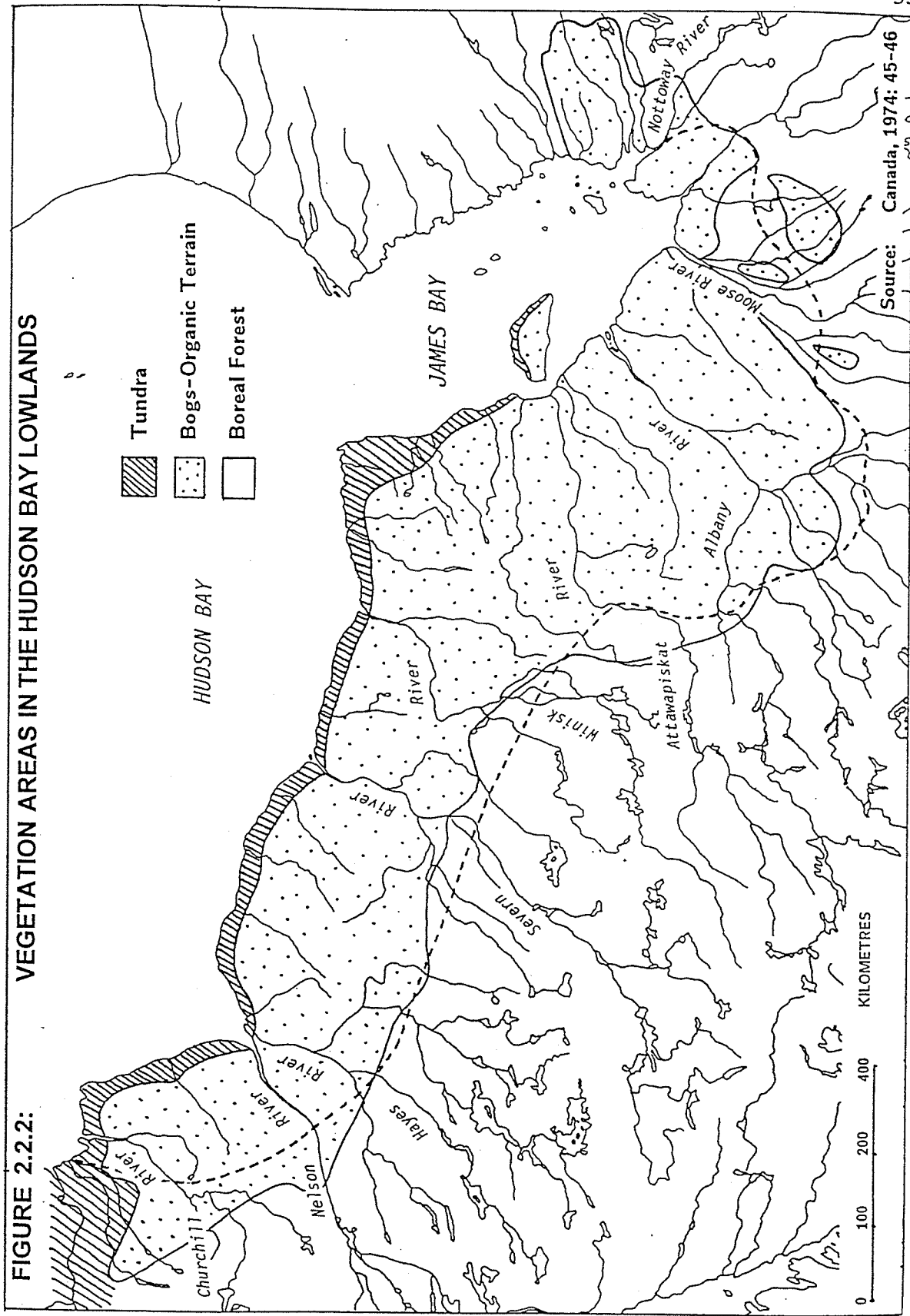


FIGURE 2.2.2: VEGETATION AREAS IN THE HUDSON BAY LOWLANDS

The Hudson Bay Lowlands are gradually rising after being submerged by the massive weight of the last great ice sheets about 9,000 years ago. In a process called isostatic rebound, the Lowlands are rising at a rate of about 0.7 metres every century.¹⁰ Although barely perceptible, this gradual uplift adds about one to two kilometres of land to the coastline every century.¹¹ The beach, or strand line that existed at the time of initial European contact, about 380 years ago is approximately six kilometres inland today.¹²

At first glance, the Hudson Bay Lowlands appear as a monotonous, level expanse of muskeg and bog, and, over 90 per cent of the area is classified as wetland.¹³ Many visitors to the Lowlands have observed that the dominating feature of the landscape is the flat, swampy terrain. Robert Bell, who surveyed the lower Albany River and surrounding Lowlands, reported that: "the river is so straight that, sitting in a canoe and looking from one end of them, the sky and water appear to meet on the horizon."¹⁴ W.J. Wilson, another geologist, wrote that: "the most remarkable feature of the west

¹⁰Martini, 1982: 421 (cited in Pilon, 1987: 7).

¹¹The Lowland Cree who lived near the coast were well aware of the gradual uplift of the land. In the summer of 1878, Robert Bell conducted geological surveys in the area around the mouths of the Hayes and Nelson Rivers, and he reported that: "The Indians say their old goose hunting grounds along the coast to the northward of the mouth of the Nelson are now deserted by the geese, the water having 'dried up'" (Bell, 1879: 25CC).

¹²Pilon, 1987: 7.

¹³Riley, 1982: 544 (cited in Pilon, 1987: 4).

¹⁴Bell, 1887: 32G.

coast of James bay is its extreme flatness. Looked at from a distance there is no distinct shore line, but the water and land seem to merge into each other."¹⁵

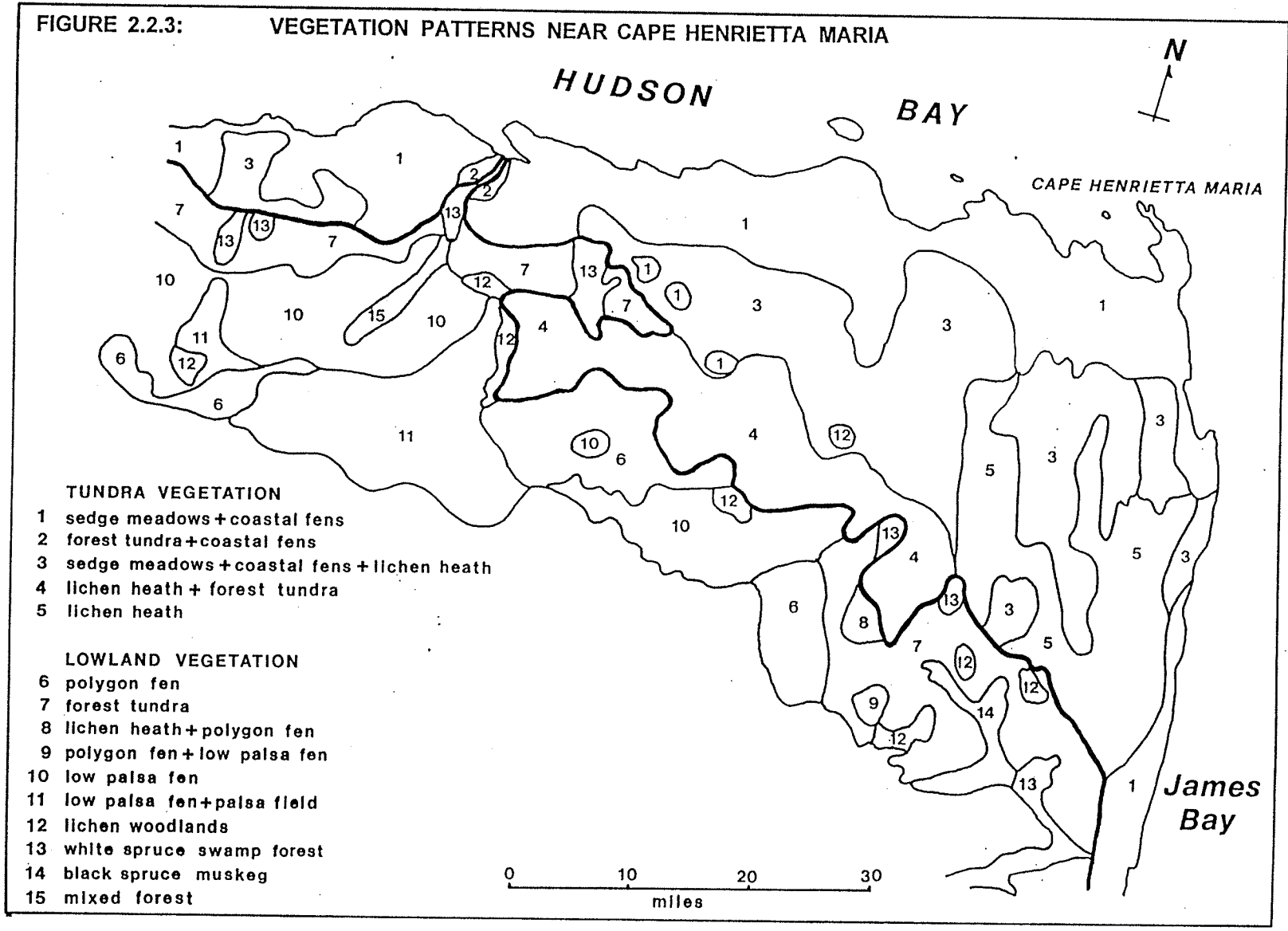
Although much of the Lowlands is characterized as swamp or muskeg, a closer examination reveals subtle yet significant differences in the vegetation. Figure 2.2.3 shows the different vegetation patterns near the coast at Cape Henrietta Maria. Of special significance is the coastal strip of tundra vegetation that is favoured habitat for caribou and other Lowland animals.

The initial visual impressions of a monotonous, featureless landscape gave way to other, more complex images of the region as observers probed the environmental and ecological details of this vast lowland. A closer examination revealed many discrete ecological niches containing diverse species of flora and fauna.¹⁶ River valleys and other areas

¹⁵Wilson, 1903: 233A.

¹⁶See, for example, the report of W. Stewart Dobbs, who conducted a geological survey of the Hayes River valley from Gods River to York Factory in the summer of 1905. Speaking of the Manitou River portion of the valley (from Gods River to Shamattawa River), Dobbs noted that: "The waters of the Manitou teem with sturgeon, trout and pike, while in the valley there are ducks and geese." Below the confluence with the Shamattawa River, Dobbs observed that: "The country abounds with life, both feathered and furred. We saw abundance of coloured foxes, and mink was very common. Every marsh or weedy bend in the river sent up its quota of ducks on our approach and several times later in the season we saw large flocks of wild geese moving southeastward. The river teemed with fish, principally young sturgeon, speckled trout and pike. One reach, nearly twenty miles long, near Puskajewan, is an ideal place for the breeding of wild duck." On his return journey, at the end of August, near the Shamattawa River, Dobbs observed that: "the woodland caribou were crossing the river in droves, and this enabled us to lay in a good supply of fresh meat, in addition to which we killed geese, duck, sturgeon, whitefish, &c." (Dobbs, 1906: 70-71).

FIGURE 2.2.3: VEGETATION PATTERNS NEAR CAPE HENRIETTA MARIA



within the Lowlands abounded with a rich and diverse ecology, prompting some observers to describe these places as oases within the swampy lowlands.¹⁷

Along the coast, marshes provided seasonal habitat and were staging grounds for large numbers of migratory waterfowl. The coastal tundra from north of the Churchill River to Akimiski Island provided favourable habitat for massive herds of caribou that migrated each summer to feed and calve on these grounds. Edible plants, including a variety of berries were abundant during the brief summer period. Many of the rivers and larger lakes within the Lowlands contained abundant fish species such as whitefish, pike, sturgeon and sucker. In short, the Hudson Bay Lowlands were not as desolate as some first impressions indicated. Jean-Luc Pilon, who conducted archaeological investigations along the lower Severn River in the 1980s concluded that: "It may be said that complexity, diversity and dynamics summarize the environment of the Hudson Bay Lowlands."¹⁸

When European fur traders settled along the coast of the Hudson Bay Lowlands, the Lowland Cree occupied much of the vast Lowland tract. Only small portions of the northern and southern extremities of the region appear to have been avoided by the

¹⁷John Pollock and William Noble, who conducted archaeological investigations in the Hudson Bay Lowlands, described Hawley Lake as one such oasis. They observed that: "the Hawley Lake area stands out as a fertile pocket within an otherwise dismal topography of muskeg bog so typical of the Lowlands. It might even be termed a 'northern oasis'" (Noble and Pollock, 1975: 79).

¹⁸Pilon, 1987: 20.

Lowland Cree because of conflicts with enemy groups. The small northern lobe between the Nelson and Churchill River was an uninhabited buffer zone between the Lowland Cree and the Western Hudson Bay Inuit.¹⁹ The southern tip of the Lowlands near the Nottaway River was also avoided by the Lowland Cree because of earlier conflicts with long-distance Iroquois raiding parties.²⁰

The inland extent of Lowland Cree territory is more difficult to ascertain from the early historical records. Few Europeans ventured inland from the coast until long after trading posts had been settled, and details about the geography of the upland territory remained unknown to European fur traders until the late 18th century. However, remarks made by some Europeans who interviewed Indian informants point to a wider territorial distribution of the Lowland Cree in the early fur trade period. The observations of Andrew Graham in particular are revealing about the earlier geographic range of the Lowland Cree. In 1775, Graham reported that the Lowland Cree had been gradually

¹⁹When the HBC established Churchill Fort in 1717, the Lowland Cree and Western Hudson Bay Inuit were engaged in periodic warfare. The area between the Nelson and Churchill Rivers was an unoccupied buffer zone. James Knight remarked that: "we have no Indians on this side [north] of Portnellson River but the 2 as are with me" (Knight, 1932: 140).

²⁰The name Nottaway was used by the Lowland Cree to describe their enemies. Daniel Francis and Toby Morantz pointed out that the first European map to depict the Nottaway River, the Franquelin map of 1699, identified it as the "River of the Iroquois." They also noted that oral traditions collected by J.M. Cooper at Rupert House indicated that the Nottaway River was named after the Iroquois who came down the river on raiding parties (Francis and Morantz, 1983: 21). See also chapter five for a detailed discussion of the Iroquois raids into Lowland Cree territory.

pushed to the north by groups of Northern Ojibway.²¹ The oral traditions of the Northern Ojibway support Graham's observations and these will be discussed in greater detail in chapter four.

The names "Lowland Indians" and "Low Country Natives," used commonly by European fur traders to describe the Lowland Cree, reflected the low-lying nature of the territory they inhabited. These names also served to distinguish the Lowland Cree from the so-called Upland Indians who occupied the Upland Shield region. The generally flat aspect of the terrain throughout the Lowlands was also salient to the group identity of the Lowland Cree. The flatness of the land was reflected in the name "Plain Indian" that was also commonly used by the European fur traders. For example, in 1762, HBC trader Andrew Graham observed that: "Severn River is situated in the very heart of your Honours Settlements, and am certain in the very middle of the plain, or Miskick Indians."²² James Isham, who was in charge of the HBC's York Factory in 1757, explained that the name Plain Indian was used to describe the Indian people who lived in the flat land around the factory.²³

²¹HBCA, E.2/9, fo. 83.

²²HBCA, B.198/a/3, April 9, 1762, fo. 25. The term "Miskick" appears to have been a phonetic variation of "Muskeowuck," which means swampy ground (see discussion of this term below). Graham's list of words in the Lowland Cree language indicated that the name for a "Level Country" was "Muscuti Tuski," a name that was later applied more commonly to the interior prairie region (Graham, 1969: 208).

²³HBCA, B.239/a/42, May 19, 1757, fo. 46. Isham equated the Plain Indians with people who were called Home or Homeguard Indians by the HBC. See section 3.6 below for a discussion of the term Homeguard. Early scientific observers who visited the Western Hudson Bay Lowlands also noted the use of the term plains to describe the

2.3: Coasters and Inlanders:

Within the Lowlands there are two major physiographical subdivisions; the coastal tundra zone and the interior muskeg zone. These broad sub-regions gave rise to two group identities within the Lowland Cree population; coasters and inlanders. Toby Morantz has noted a similar distinction among the Indians who lived on the east coast of James Bay. Morantz commented that: "The European fur traders throughout the records of both centuries [18th and 19th] always distinguish between coasters and inlanders, a distinction it seems the local people might have made themselves as they do now."²⁴ Among the Hudson Bay Lowland Cree, the distinction between coasters and inlanders was not as sharp as that depicted by Morantz for the Indians who lived in the Eastern James Bay area.²⁵ However, the coaster/inlander dichotomy within the Lowland Cree population was a basic sub-division that was recognized by the European fur traders.

region. In 1886, Robert Bell conducted a geological survey of the lower Albany River and he observed that: "The country on either side [of the Albany River] is quite flat...In some parts, it is so open as to be called "plains," (Bell, 1887: 32G).

²⁴Morantz, 1983: 38. J.W. Anderson, a HBC fur trader who worked in the Hudson Bay Lowlands in the early twentieth century, noted the basic division of the Lowland Cree into coasters and inlanders. Anderson observed that: "The James Bay Crees divided themselves into two distinct classes depending on whether they lived on the shores of James Bay or gained their livelihood in the interior up one or other of the various rivers. The coast Indians called themselves *Winni-pay-ko-ininew* and the inlanders were *Noo-che-mik-ininew* but in common English usage they were known as 'coasters' and 'inlanders'" (Anderson, 1961: 126).

²⁵A major difference between the west and east coasts of James Bay is the inland extent of the lowlands region. On the west coast, the Lowlands extend inland for more than a hundred miles. On the east coast, the lowlands are confined to a narrow coastal belt.

The unique features of the coastal region, such as tundra vegetation, tidal flats and beach ridges provided the basis for the distinct identity of the Indians who lived within this area.²⁶ M. de Bacqueville de la Potherie, who visited the French trading post at the mouth of the Hayes River in 1698, observed that: "The tribe that lives nearest the fort [Fort Bourbon] are the Ouenebigonhelinis, which means 'the people of the sea shore'."²⁷ Andrew Graham recorded the name "Winipeg Athinuwick," which signified the people of the seaside, or coast of Hudson Bay.²⁸

The inlanders lived in the low-lying, swampy ground that characterizes much of the

²⁶John Macfie noted the significance of the unique ecological zone along the Hudson Bay coast. Macfie observed that: "The coast Crees, drawing their livelihood from these contrasting elements, have developed a way of life distinct from that of the main body of eastern Canada's Algonkian tribes" (Macfie, 1967: 15). The coastal Lowland Cree appear to have made less use of canoes than the people who lived inland. Since their coastal adaptation was focused on lateral movement across the coastal plains, pedestrian and dog-assisted transport was more important than riverine transport. They also had less access to canoe-building material. In 1778, Humphrey Marten, who was in charge of York Factory, noted that more than 50 Lowland Cree remained near the factory because they had no canoes (HBCA, B.239/a/75, August 10, 1778, fo. 58). Many other HBC traders noted that the coasters lacked canoes, and Company boats were often used to ferry the coasters across rivers. In 1801, John Ballenden, who was in charge of York Factory, gave a small boat to a group of coasters to enable them to cross the river. He noted that "they have no canoes" (HBCA, B.239/a/105, June 13, 1801, fo. 47d). The York Factory traders purchased canoes from upland Indians expressly for supplying them to the Homeguard Cree. For example, in 1728, the York Factory accountant noted the purchase of "7 canoes for our home Indians that Hunts Spring and Fall for the Factory" (HBCA, B.239/d/18, fo. 8).

²⁷Tyrrell, 1931: 262.

²⁸Graham, 1969: 192. Isham translated the Indian word "We ne pek" as meaning "the Sea or ocean [sic]" (Isham, 1949: 5). David Pentland explained that: "The Cree word wi-nipe-k 'foul water, salt water' refers primarily to Hudson Bay" (Pentland, 1981a: 229).

Lowlands inland from the coast. Bacqueville de la Potherie identified the inlanders as a group, or "tribe,"²⁹ called the "Monsaunis" or "people of the marsh." According to La Potherie, the Monsaunis "live in a country which is full of marshes and which is higher than the country of the Ouenebigonhelinis."³⁰ Graham also used the term "Muchiskewuck Athinuwick," meaning people of the swampy ground, to describe the Indians who occupied the interior region of the Lowlands.³¹

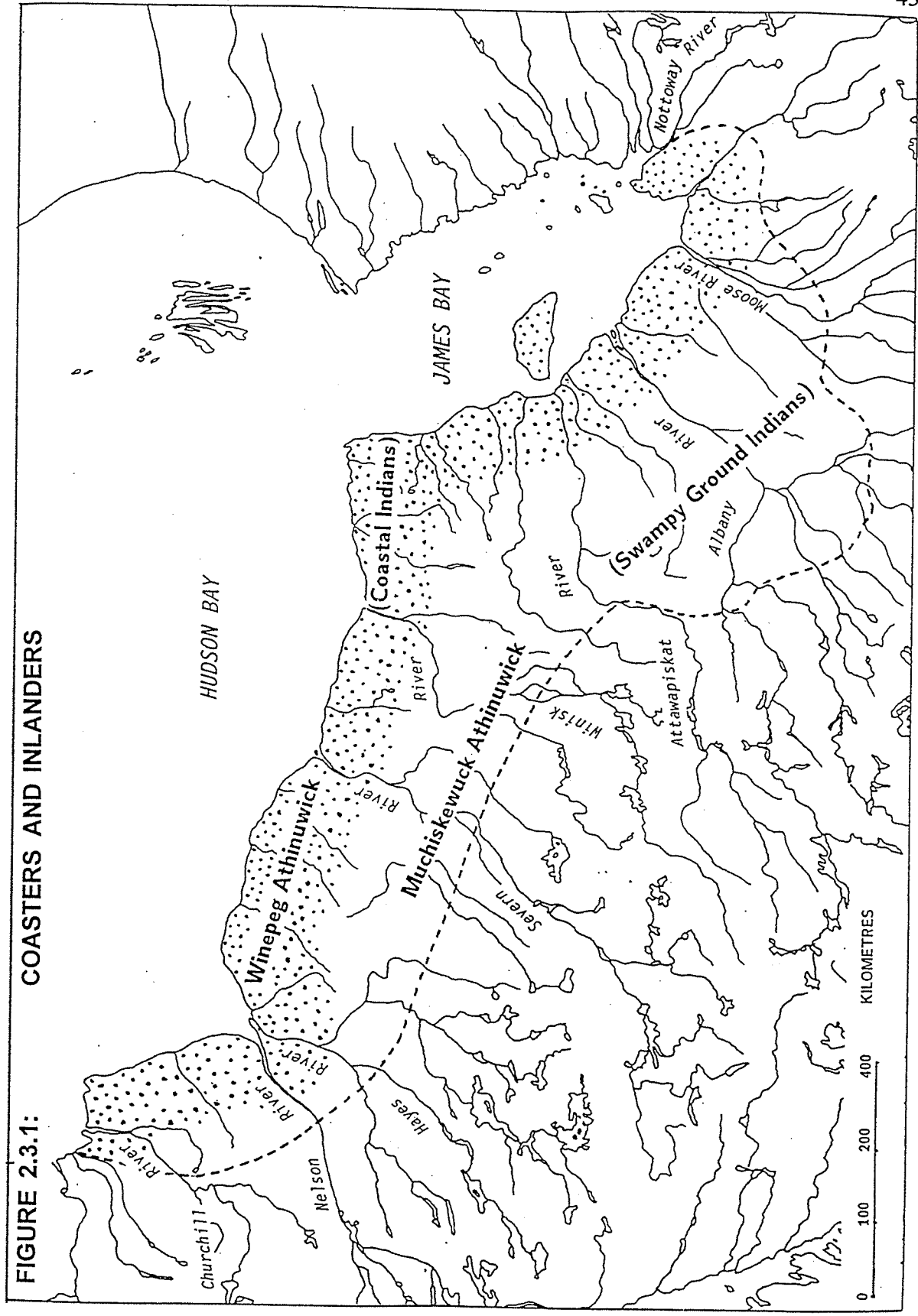
Thus, two regional group identities were recognized within the Lowland Cree population. The coasters, or Winepeg Athinuwick, occupied the coastal zone. The inlanders, or Muchiskewuck Athinuwick, lived in the interior, swampy ground of the Lowlands (see figure 2.3.1).

²⁹The term "tribe" was also a European appellation. It was commonly used to describe groups of Indian people who spoke the same language and were linked by social, cultural, political and other customary traditions. European fur traders who worked in the Lowlands often used the term to describe groups of Indian people who occupied specific regional territories. Other terms, such as "gangs" and "bands" were also used as substitutes for tribes.

³⁰Tyrrell, 1931: 263.

³¹Graham, 1969: 192. Pentland translated the Cree word "omaske-ko-w" as "muskeg person, swamp person" (Pentland, 1981a: 227). John Honigmann, who conducted an anthropological study of the people who lived near the mouth of the Attawapiskat River, commented that there was a distinction between the coastal and inland people. However, the generic term for self-identification was "omooskekowak," which he translated as "Swampy Cree" (Honigmann, 1948: 19). John Long also observed that the Albany and Moose River Lowland Cree term for self-designation was "omaskekowak," meaning swamp or muskeg person (Long, 1986: 15).

FIGURE 2.3.1: COASTERS AND INLANDERS



2.4: River Basin Groups:

Within the coaster and inlander populations of the Lowland Cree, specific groups of Indians were usually named after prominent physiographical features within their home territories. Andrew Graham noted that: "they take their names from the lakes, rivers, or whatever kind of country they inhabit."³² Group identities were especially associated with river basins. For example, the Lowland Cree who occupied the area within the Albany River basin were known as Albany River Indians, or Kastechewan Indians, after the Cree word for the Albany River meaning swift current.³³ The Lowland Cree who occupied the Severn River basin were called Washeo Sepee Indians, after the Cree word for the Severn River.³⁴ Rivers cut through inland and coastal zones, and thus river basin group identities encompassed both coasters and inlanders.

Group names also reflected sub-divisions of Indian people within larger river basin groups. This is apparent from Andrew Graham's list of Lowland Cree groups, or tribes, who lived in the hinterland of York Factory. The Indians who lived along the Hayes River valley nearest to the factory were called Penesewichewan, or Penesewichewan

³²HBCA, E.2/5, fo. 4d.

³³Pentland, 1981a: 229.

³⁴The Lowland Cree word "Washeo" described Hudson Bay, and "Sepee" meant river. Thus, the name Washeo Sepee has been literally translated as Hudson Bay River (Ibid: 229).

Sepee Indians, after the name of the lower section of the Hayes River.³⁵ Upriver from the confluence with the Shamattawa River, the river was known as Steel River, and the Indians who lived along this section of the river were known as Apet Sepee, or Steel River Indians.³⁶ Farther upriver, the river was known as the Hill River above the confluence with the Fox River, and the Indians were called Chucketenaw Sepee, or Hill River Indians (see figure 2.4.1).³⁷

The importance of river basins in defining Indian group identities was noted by a number of Europeans who were involved in the fur trade. An early account written by Thomas Gorst who was stationed at Charles Fort (at the mouth of the Rupert River) in 1674, outlined the significance of river basins in the political organization of the Indians. Gorst observed that:

The Indians of certain Districhs [sic], which are bounded by such and such Rivers, have each an Okimah, as they call him, or Captain over them, who is an Old Man, consider'd only for his Prudence and Experience.³⁸

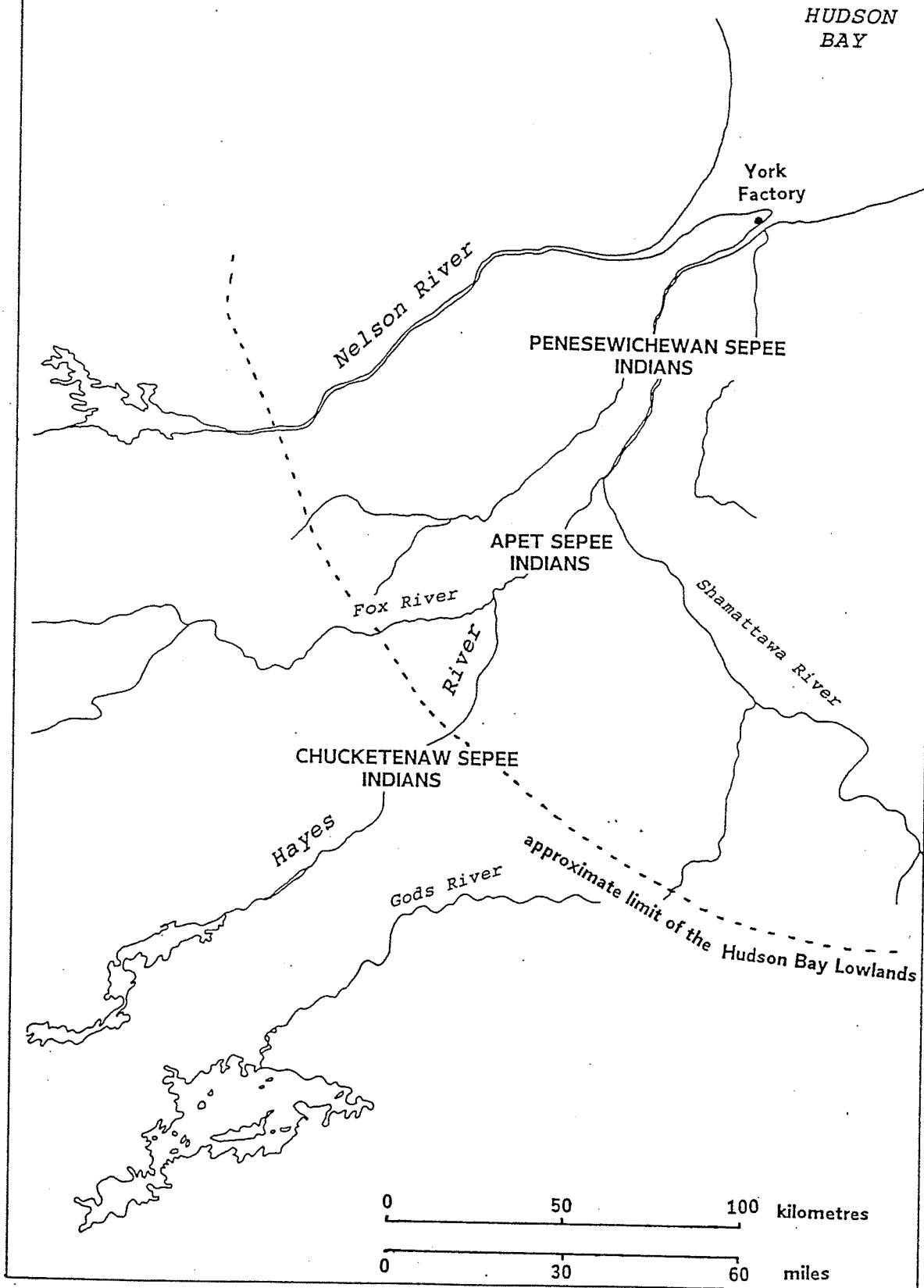
³⁵Graham observed that the Indian name for the Hayes River near York Factory was "Penesewichewan Sepee" (Graham, 1969: 209). Pentland explained that the name translated as "flows-down-the-bank river" (Pentland, 1981e: 269).

³⁶Graham noted that the Indian name for firesteel was "Apit" (Graham, 1969: 209). La Potherie explained that about 14 leagues upriver from its mouth, the Hayes River was known as "Apitsibi," which he translated as "the river of arrow flints" (Tyrrell, 1931: 260).

³⁷On his journey inland from York Factory in 1774, Matthew Cocking observed that: "all Hills are [called] Chuckitanah, from which the river receives its name" (HBCA, B.239/a/72, July 11, 1774, fo. 2d).

³⁸Tyrrell, 1931: 382.

FIGURE 2.4.1: LOCATION OF LOWLAND CREE GROUPS IN THE HAYES RIVER BASIN



Other early fur trade documents confirm that river basins provided significant territorial boundaries for groups of Lowland Cree. For example, early fur traders at York Factory reported that the leader of the Lowland Cree was a man called the "Captain of the [Hayes] River."³⁹ Another Lowland Cree leader called the "Captain of Severn River" was also noted in the early York Factory and Albany Fort records. In 1692, the HBC traders at Albany Fort noted that a man named "Tick-a-tuckoy" was recognized as the "great Leading Indian of this River."⁴⁰ He may have been the same man referred to as "the King" by the HBC's Governor Bailey who met with a group of Indians at the mouth of the Albany River in 1674.⁴¹

The significance of river basins in the territorial organization of Lowland Cree was reported by George Sutherland during a trip north of Albany Fort in 1777. Sutherland explored the coastal region as far north as the Ekwan River, and noted the location of the hunting grounds of several Lowland Cree leaders who traded at Albany Fort. On March 30, 1777, Sutherland arrived at Thawashe River (Lawash Channel), which was described as "Saquot's river." Farther north, at the Attawapiskat River, Sutherland

³⁹HBCA, B.239/d/7, fo. 7d (1714).

⁴⁰HBCA, B.3/d/1, fo. 15d.

⁴¹Oldmixon, 1931: 391. According to Oldmixon's account, Bailey "treated with the King, and his Son." Later HBC records from Albany Fort indicated that Tick-a-tuckoy had a number of sons who took over the position of Captain of Albany River following their father's death. By 1695, Tick-a-tuckoy was called "ye old Captain of this River," another indication that he may have been "the King" who, along with one of his sons, met with Bailey 21 years earlier (HBCA, B.3/d/3, fo. 9; B.3/d/6, fo. 16; B.3/d/11, fo. 17 and B.3/d/13, fo. 12d).

reported that "this is Captain Assup's ground likewise Archekishick." Sutherland also noted that an Indian named Questach "has a branch in this river [Attawapiskat] that runs to the NW." At the Ekwan River, Sutherland commented that "Pusquothecot is the man that frequents this river."⁴² The five Indian men noted in Sutherland's journal were prominent leaders of groups of Lowland Cree. Denominated "Captains" by the HBC, they were probably equivalent to the Okimahs described by Gorst above. These Captains: Saquot, Assup, Archekishick, Questach and Pusquothecot, and their territories are shown in figure 2.4.2.

Some scholars have advanced the view that such territorial organization was a product of the contact between European and Aboriginal peoples. Eleanor Leacock was an early proponent of the correlation between European fur trade influences and the establishment of hunting territories among subarctic Indian groups.⁴³ However, the accounts of fur traders in the Hudson Bay Lowlands do not support such a theory. Instead, the fur trade records clarify that Lowland Cree groups already occupied well-defined territories when Europeans first arrived in the area. This complements the findings of Toby Morantz who has studied the territorial organization of the Indian people who lived east of James Bay. Morantz concluded that: "some form of family hunting system was in existence then [at the time of initial European fur trade contact in eastern James Bay]."⁴⁴ In 1831, HBC

⁴²HBCA, B.3/a/73, March 29 to April 1, 1777, fos. 2-4.

⁴³Leacock, 1954.

⁴⁴Morantz, 1978: 235.

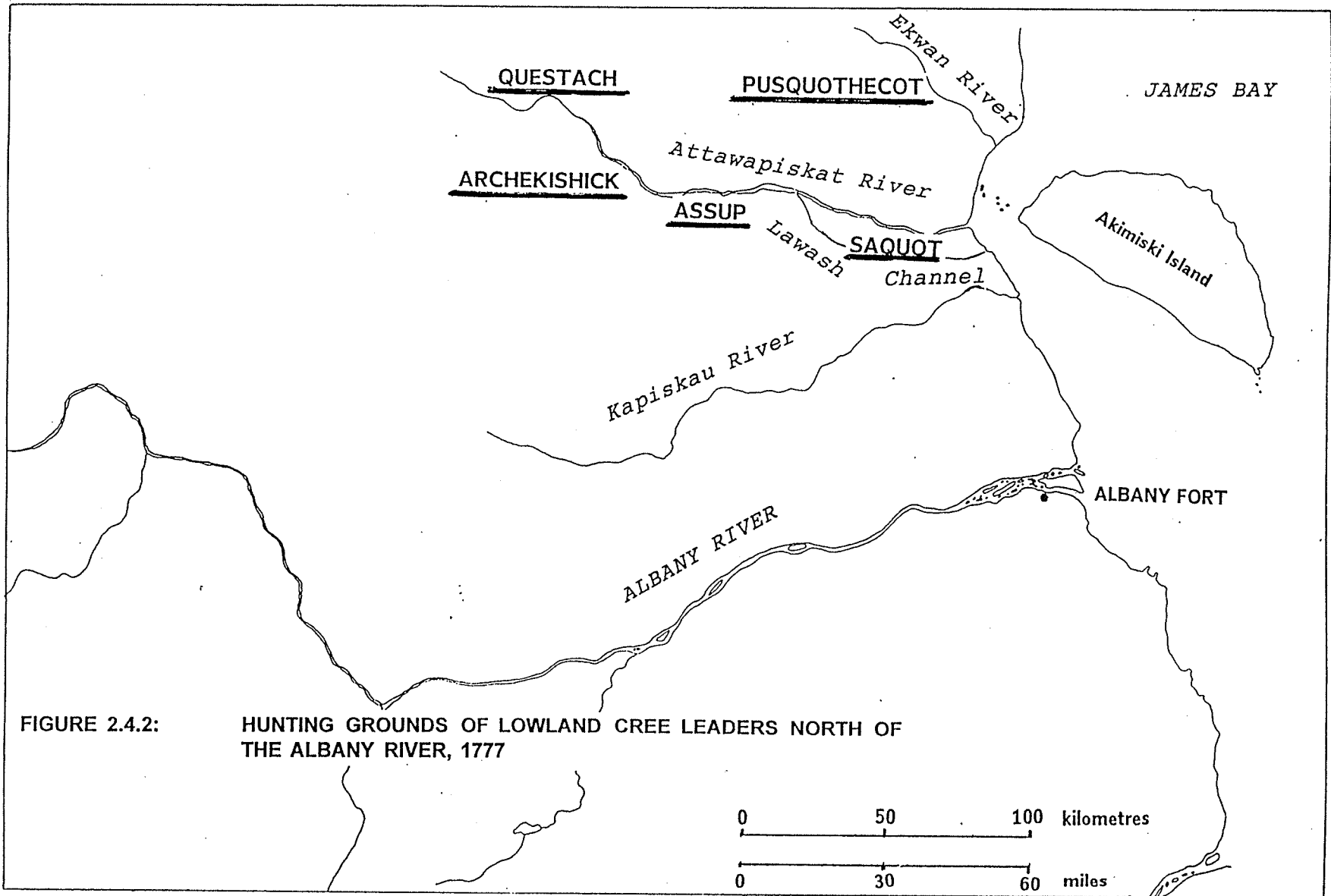


FIGURE 2.4.2: HUNTING GROUNDS OF LOWLAND CREE LEADERS NORTH OF THE ALBANY RIVER, 1777

Governor George Simpson commented on the negative impact of closing down trading posts which prompted some Indians to move into new territories. Simpson remarked that: "formerly each band had its own hunting grounds which, altho' not strictly watched were kept in better condition by its proprietors than it can be now when open to strangers whose wants compel them to leave their own lands and encroach on those of their neighbours."⁴⁵

Although it is apparent that traditional territories of hunting groups of Lowland Cree corresponded to natural divisions such as river basins, there was considerable movement of individuals and families throughout the Lowlands. HBC traders reported many examples of Indian people moving back and forth between river basins. For example, in 1788 an Indian named Messescape, who was a brother of a leading Albany River Lowland Cree named Tabethimo, returned to the Albany River area after spending several years in the Moose River basin.⁴⁶ In 1787, three Lowland Cree from the Severn River area arrived at York Factory, and Joseph Colen noted that "York Factory is their place of birth."⁴⁷ Seeseekis, an Albany Indian, was "noted for never staying two years at one place."⁴⁸ In 1788, John Ballenden, who was in charge of Severn House, commented that: "many of my Indians is not to be depended on (notwithstanding

⁴⁵HBCA, D.4/98, July 18, 1831, fo. 30d.

⁴⁶HBCA, B.3/a/89, July 14, 1789, fo. 49d.

⁴⁷HBCA, B.198/a/37, July 20, 1787, fo. 4d.

⁴⁸HBCA, B.198/a/37, May 18, 1788, fo. 34d.

their many promises) continually running from place to place."⁴⁹ In 1790, Ballenden again remarked that: "the Chief part of my Homeguards are quite averse to hunting either spring or fall, taking delight in nothing but visiting from place to place."⁵⁰

2.5: The Cree Nation:

According to Andrew Graham, the Lowland Cree were members of a larger linguistic family known as the "Keishkatchewan Nation."⁵¹ The Keishkatchewan Nation, or Cree Nation, included many groups, or tribes, who lived in a large geographic territory including the Lowlands and extending westward into the prairie region. The common factor linking these groups together was language.⁵² Graham observed that the language spoken by the various tribes of the Cree Nation was "only differing in a few words, and

⁴⁹HBCA, B.198/a/37, February 25, 1788, fo. 25.

⁵⁰HBCA, B.198/a/39, February 22, 1790, fo. 21d.

⁵¹Graham, 1969: 191-193.

⁵²Modern linguists use the term Cree for the language spoken by the people denominated the Keishkatchewan Nation by Graham. Cree is derived from a larger language base called Algonquian. Those who live in the Hudson Bay Lowlands speak a dialect that is commonly referred to as Swampy Cree. Other regional dialects include Woods Cree and Plains Cree. Among the Swampy Cree, some linguists have identified sub-dialects known as Western and Eastern Swampy Cree. The speakers of these sub-dialects live on either side of a boundary line that bisects the Lowlands roughly half-way between the Severn and Winisk Rivers (Rhodes and Todd, 1981: 53). Dialect divisions between the Lowland Cree were not recognized by European observers in the 17th, 18th and early 19th centuries. These differences may have developed later in the 19th or 20th century.

pronunciation."⁵³ Europeans who were familiar with the Lowland Cree were surprised to find that other Indians who lived as far away as the prairie region spoke the same language. For example, William Falconer met a group of Plains Cree who came to Severn House in the summer of 1769, and he observed that: "some of whom [Keishkatchewan Indians] comes six and seven hundred miles from the SW where they chiefly feed on buffalo's flesh, and most of them are cloathed in their skins....They are robust looking people and talks the same language as our Home-guard Natives [underline added]."⁵⁴

Graham's list of the tribes belonging to the Cree Nation is shown in figure 2.5.1, and a map depicting the geographical locations of the tribes is shown in figure 2.5.2. It can be seen from these figures that Graham's list included broad regional group identities such as the "Winnepeg" people who occupied the Hudson Bay coast. The list included river basin groups such as the "Washeo-Sepee" people who occupied the Severn River

⁵³HBCA, E.2/5, fo. 4d. In 1831, John McLean visited York Factory, and he remarked that: "The Indians of this quarter are denominated Swampies, a tribe of the Cree nation, whose language they speak with but little variation, and in their manners and customs there is a great similarity" (McLean, 1932: 194).

⁵⁴Falconer, 1768-69: July 8, 1769, n.p. Paul Kane, who visited Norway House in the summer of 1846, commented that: "The Indians belong to the Mas-ka-gau tribe, or 'Swamp Indians,' so called from their inhabiting the low swampy land which extends the whole way from Norway House to Hudson's Bay" (Kane, 1925: 71). Kane, who had travelled among the Upland Cree who lived in the prairie region, was not impressed with the physical features or the language of the Lowland Cree living in the vicinity of Norway House. He observed that the Lowland Cree were "rather diminutive in comparison with those who inhabit the plains....Their language somewhat resembles the [Plains] Cree, but is not so agreeable in sound" (*Ibid*).

Figure 2.5.1: The Keishkatchewan (Cree) Nation

Name of Tribe*	Territory**	Trading Location***
Winnepeg	Hudson Bay coast	YF, SH & AF
Muskegowuck	Swampy ground near Hudson Bay	YF, CF & SH
Washeo-Sepee	Severn River	SH
Kastechewan	Albany River	AF
Moosu-Sepee	Moose River	MF
Penesewichewan	Hayes River (lower Hayes R.)	YF
Apet-Sepee	Steel River (middle Hayes R.)	YF
Chucketenaw	Hill River (upper Hayes R.)	YF
Poethinecaw	Nelson River	YF & CF
Mantua-Sepee	Lower Churchill River+	CF
Missinepee	Upper Churchill River	YF & CF
Pimmechikemow	Cross Lake	YF & CF
Pegogamow	Saskatchewan Forks ¹	YF
Muscasicow	Saskatchewan Prairies	YF & CF
Amiska-Sepee	Beaver River	YF & CF
Athupescow	Athabasca Lake	YF & CF
Wuskesew-Sepee	Red Deer River	YF & CF
Nemow	Sturgeon River	YF
Ooho-Sepee	Owl River	CF
Wenunnetowuck	not given ²	YF & CF

Sources: *Graham, 1969: 206

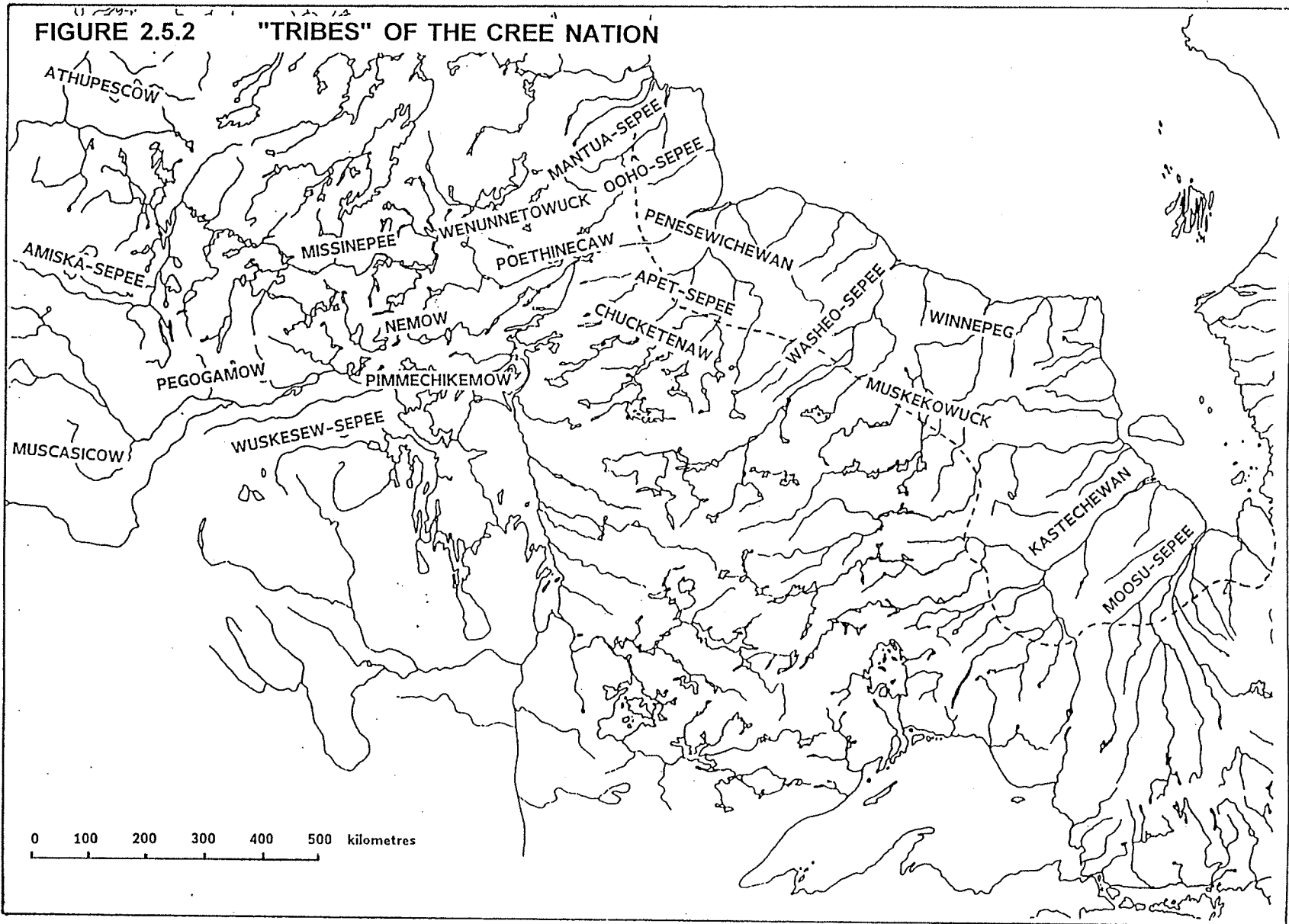
**Richardson, 1969, vol. 2: 37

***Graham, 1969: 206, and HBCA, E.2/9, fo. 84. YF=York Factory, AF=Albany Fort, SH=Severn House, CF=Churchill Fort, MF=Moose Fort

¹One of Graham's lists published by John Richardson gave "Muddy Lake" or "Moose Lake" as the district inhabited by the "Peoge-me-u nipi" (Richardson, 1852, vol. 2: 37). The suffix, "nipi," was probably transcribed incorrectly from the original "sipi" or sepee, meaning river. Dale Russell presented new evidence to show that a more accurate location for this group of Indians was the area near the forks of the North and South Saskatchewan Rivers (Russell, 1991: 142-146).

²Neither Graham or Isham provided a translation for this name. A 19th century Cree dictionary included the term "wanitutawukaw," which was translated as: "a bend in the clay banks of the river, [or] it is a crooked bank" (Faries and Watkins, 1938: 499).

FIGURE 2.5.2 "TRIBES" OF THE CREE NATION



basin. Graham's list also included sub-divisions within the Hayes River basin, such as the "Penesewichewan" people who lived along the lower Hayes River.

While Graham had extensive, first-hand knowledge about the Indians who visited Churchill Fort, York Factory and Severn House, his information about the Indians who visited Albany Fort, Moose Fort and Eastmain House came from second-hand sources, and is generally less reliable.⁵⁵ A significant omission in his list of tribes belonging to the Cree Nation was the Moosu-Sepee, or Moose River Indians. Graham included the Moose River Indians with the "Oupeshepou" Indians who lived on the eastern side of James Bay. However, other HBC records clearly indicated that the Moose River Indians were closely related to the Albany River Lowland Cree, and should have been included in Graham's list of the Cree Nation.⁵⁶ For example, one of the earliest leaders of the Albany River Lowland Cree, a man named Miskemote, was originally from the Moose River area.⁵⁷ The close relationship between the Albany and Moose River Lowland Cree was noted by many HBC traders. For example, on December 30, 1740, Joseph Isbister, who was in charge of Albany Fort, reported the arrival of three Moose River

⁵⁵Graham was employed by the HBC from 1749 to 1775, and divided his time at postings to Churchill Fort (1749-53, 1774-75), York Factory (1753-61, 1765-66, 1771-72) and Severn House (1761-65, 1766-69, 1770-71, 1772-74).

⁵⁶Modern linguists agree that the Cree language spoken by the Indian people who live in the Moose River basin is closely related to the dialect of the Albany River Lowland Cree (Rhodes and Todd, 1981: 55).

⁵⁷Miskemote, was regarded as the "Captain" of the Indians who lived near Albany Fort. He was the son of a prominent leader of the Moose River Lowland Cree who was called Noah (HBCA, B.3/d/5, fo. 15d).

Indians and commented that: "These Indians oregonally were albany Indians."⁵⁸ Figures 2.5.1 and 2.5.2 have been amended to include the Moose River Lowland Cree.

The distinctiveness of the Lowland Cree in relation to other Upland Cree groups was noted by Europeans. For example, John West, an Anglican missionary who visited the York Factory area in 1820, remarked that: "These [Lowland Cree near York Factory] are called Muskeggouck, or Swamp Indians, and are considered a distinct tribe between the Nahathaway or Cree [Upland Cree] and Sauteaux [Northern Ojibway]."⁵⁹

2.6 Homeguard Cree:

In the fur trade records, groups of Lowland Cree came to be identified with the trading post where they regularly conducted their business. Thus, the terms York, Churchill, Severn, Albany and Moose Indians were usually substituted for traditional Indian names. The fur traders also identified groups among the Lowland Cree according to their relationship with the trading post. Those who lived close to the post, and who provided food and other country produce to sustain the European fur traders, were called

⁵⁸HBCA, B.3/a/30, fo. 23.

⁵⁹West, 1967: 16.

Homeguard Indians.⁶⁰ John Foster remarked that the Homeguard Cree comprised "small bands of coastal Cree who specialized in supplying the trading posts with goods and services derived from the new world environment."⁶¹

The Homeguard Indians were primarily Coastal Cree. Inlanders usually spent too much time away from the coastal area to be considered Homeguard Indians. Andrew Graham observed that the name "home-guard Indians" was synonymous with the "sea shore Indians," or Coastal Cree.⁶² Graham explained that the Homeguard Cree remained near the coast for most of the year except winter, when "they go a little distance inland and traps martins etc [underline added]."⁶³ Henry Ellis also remarked that: "those they call Home Indians [are] always in Parts near the Factory, not going far up into the Country [underline added]."⁶⁴

The name Homeguard was applied to the Coastal Cree because they were able to visit

⁶⁰Arthur S. Morton described three groups of Indians who were involved in the trade with the HBC coastal factories. These were the "Home Indians," "Half Home Indians" and the "Uplanders" or "trading Indians." Morton used a time-distance function to identify the Indians who belonged to each group. That is, the Home Indians arrived at the post first because of their close proximity to the post, the Half Home Indians were next and the Uplanders who lived farthest away were the last to reach the post (Morton, 1973: 153).

⁶¹Foster, 1977: 51.

⁶²HBCA, E.2/7, fo. 16d.

⁶³HBCA, E.2/4, fo. 80d.

⁶⁴Ellis, 1968, vol. 1: 178.

the post throughout the year, and provided food and other necessary country produce such as snow-shoes to the European fur traders. As early as 1690, Henry Kelsey referred to the Indians who lived near York Factory as "Home Indians."⁶⁵ In 1706, Anthony Beale who was in charge of Albany Fort described the Coastal Lowland Cree who hunted geese for the Company as "home Indians."⁶⁶ Andrew Graham explained that: "At the Forts there are Natives which we style home-guards or home-Indians...who are employed as hunters to supply the Forts with provisions."⁶⁷ Henry Ellis commented that the people known as "Home Indians...[lived] at all Times near the Factories, for which they kill Provision, and go a Hunting, just as the [HBC] Governor gives them direction."⁶⁸

Prior to the inland expansion of fur trade posts in the 1770s, the home territory, or hunting range of most Homeguard Cree was usually limited to about 100 miles from the coastal trading posts. Although oriented toward the coast, the Homeguard Cree periodically ranged over a wider territory for social, commercial and other reasons. In the hinterland of Albany Fort, the winter hunting grounds of some Homeguard Cree

⁶⁵Kelsey, 1929: 2.

⁶⁶Williams, 1975: 51.

⁶⁷HBCA, E.2/4, fo. 80d.

⁶⁸Ellis, 1968, vol. 1: 180.

extended as far as the Kenogami River in 1755.⁶⁹ In the 1780s, some Severn River Homeguard Cree spent the winter season in areas located over 100 miles from the trading post.⁷⁰ Near York Factory, the Homeguard Cree also occupied an area that was usually circumscribed by a distance of about 100 miles from the post.

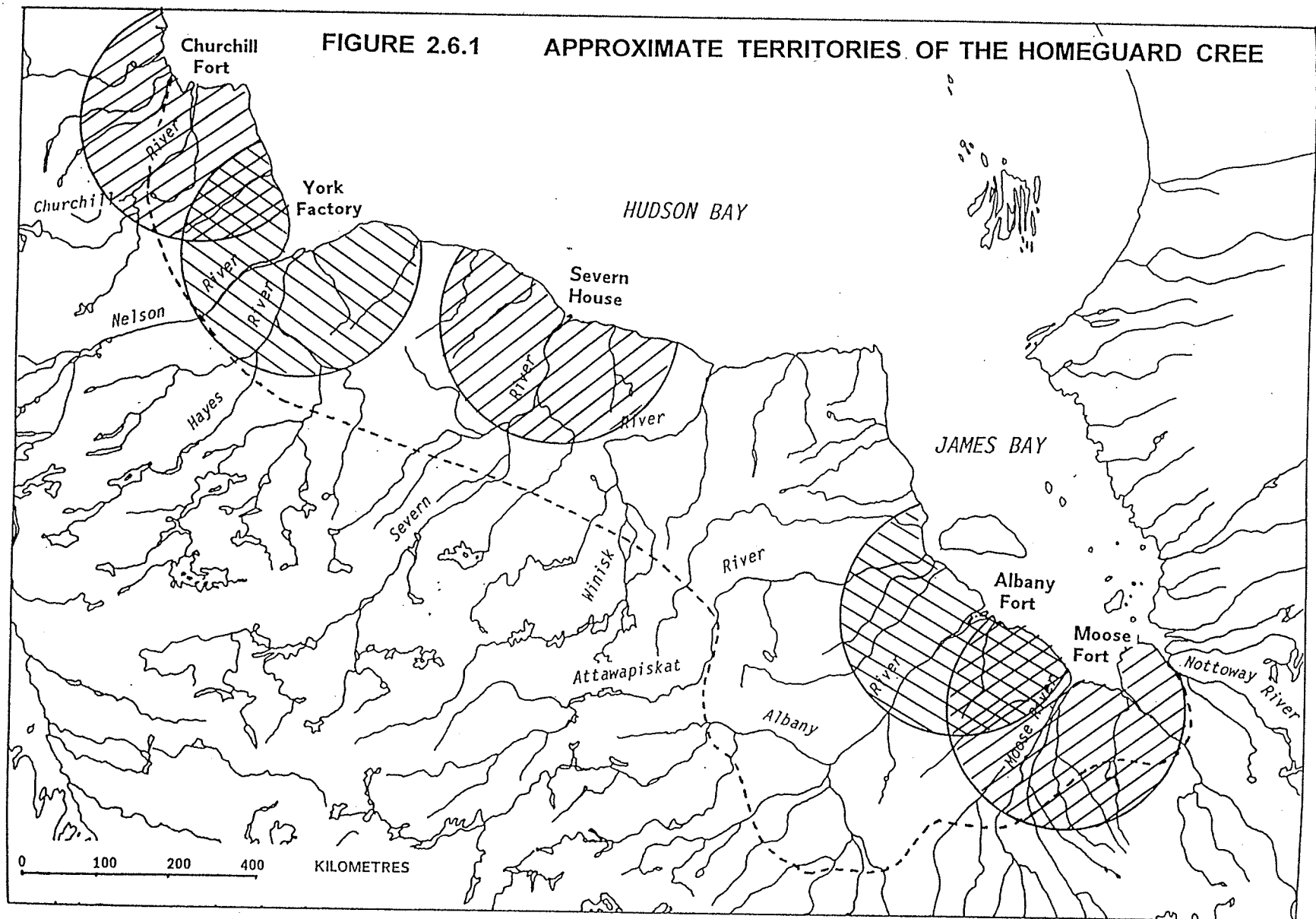
Figure 2.6.1 shows the approximate winter hunting territories of the Homeguard Cree who traded at the coastal posts. In the hinterland of Albany Fort, Severn House and York Factory, the entire range was within the limits of the Hudson Bay Lowlands. The situation at Churchill Fort and Moose Factory was significantly different, with a greater overlap of Homeguard Cree territory into the adjacent Uplands.

It can also be seen from figure 2.6.1 that considerable overlap would have existed in the territories of the York Factory and Churchill Fort Homeguard Cree, and the Albany Fort and Moose Fort Homeguard Cree. This overlap was noted by the HBC traders who were stationed at these posts. For example, on May 22, 1750, George Spence, who was in charge of Albany Fort, reported difficulty in distinguishing the Homeguard Indians who traded at Albany and Moose Forts. Spence noted that: "two factories so close that

⁶⁹In 1755, Joseph Isbister recommended that the HBC re-establish Henley House near the confluence of the Kenogami River because French fur traders were settled nearby. Isbister stated that leaving Henley House unoccupied "will leave the french at full liberty to carry off all the Trade of ye Bay, not only by intercepting all the upland Indians but also to take off all our home and Sea Indians by reason they go as far inland as Henley to catch goods" (HBCA, B.3/a/47, March 6, 1755, fos. 24-24d, underline added).

⁷⁰See, for example, HBCA, B.198/a/29, February 20, 1784, fo. 19d.

FIGURE 2.6.1 APPROXIMATE TERRITORIES OF THE HOMEGUARD CREE



its hard to distinguish to which River the Indians properly belongs."⁷¹ After Moose Fort was re-established in 1730⁷², many of the Indians who came to be known as Moose River Homeguard Cree were drawn from the Albany River Homeguard population. Carol Judd observed that the Moose River Homeguard Cree probably came from the Albany River population.⁷³ In addition, there was movement by individuals and families between the two posts which added to the confusion between the identities of the two groups of Homeguard Cree.

A similar overlap was evident between the York Factory and Churchill Fort Homeguard Cree populations. York Factory was the original home territory of the Churchill Fort Homeguard Indians. When Churchill Fort was established by the HBC in 1717, the traders encouraged some York Factory Homeguard Cree to relocate to the Churchill River area. The HBC records indicate that: "James Knight, when he made his first settlement here [Churchill], for his further advantage took a Indian called Factory with his family along with him and adopted him Captain of this river."⁷⁴ The genesis of the Churchill Fort Homeguard Cree population can be traced to this HBC-induced relocation of Homeguard Cree from the Hayes River area.

⁷¹HBCA, B.3/a/41, May 22, 1750, fo. 22.

⁷²English and French trading posts operated intermittently at the mouth of the Moose River from 1673 to 1696. The HBC re-established Moose Fort in 1730.

⁷³Judd, 1983: 24, and Judd 1984: 82.

⁷⁴HBCA, B.42/a/1, September 12, 1718, fo. 23.

The general seasonal movements of the Homeguard Cree can be reconstructed from HBC documents. In winter, the Indians usually lived in small groups of several closely related families. These winter hunting groups were spread throughout about a 100 mile radius of the coastal post. Those who lived closer to the post visited several times in the winter to sell furs, provisions and other country produce. Most remained in their winter camps until the end of winter, at which time they gravitated toward the coastal area. The movement toward the coastal trading post was motivated by a number of factors. They came to trade extra furs and hides procured in the winter. They also came to renew social relationships with other Coastal Cree and the European fur traders and to give and receive gifts, thereby continuing to renew bonds of friendship and alliance.

The movement of Homeguard Cree toward the coast was also triggered by more ancient influences. The coast abounded with animal and plant resources during the spring, and the Homeguard Cree shifted their annual range to places where caribou, geese and other resources were available. The gathering of large numbers of people was also necessary for communal caribou hunting. During the summer, the Homeguard Cree moved away from the trading posts to hunt, fish and gather wild plants along the coastal zone. In the fall, there was a movement back to aggregations near the large rivers and river-mouth marshes to hunt caribou and geese in the fall migration period. The onset of cold weather dispersed the Homeguard Cree once again to customary winter hunting grounds.

2.7 Half-Homeguard Cree:

The Muchiskewuck Athinuwick, or inlanders as described above, were Lowland Cree who lived farther inland, especially during the winter months. These people were usually called Half-Home, or Half-Homeguard Indians by the coastal fur traders. In addition, some Coastal Cree whose hunting grounds were farther removed from the trading posts were also identified as Half-Homeguards. They were called Half-Homeguards because they spent the winter months farther away from the posts, generally over 100 miles away, and usually did not visit the coastal posts until the end of winter. The Half-Homeguard Cree were also occasionally employed by the HBC to hunt geese and bring in other provisions, but their inland or more remote coastal orientation during the winter months made them less reliable than the nearby Coastal Cree as provisioners. Henry Ellis explained that: "There are others [in addition to the Homeguard Cree] who come at the Time the Geese are going Northward [spring], in order to shoot Geese for the Factories, continue there in the summer, fishing; kill Geese again, when they are going south [fall]; and, the Season being over, return up the Country."⁷⁵

During the summer months, Half-Homeguard Cree often hunted in the same area as the Homeguard Cree. In the Severn River watershed, Homeguard and Half-Homeguard Cree hunted caribou together. A popular hunting ground for caribou was Waweaston. On June 17, 1776, William Falconer reported that all the Half-Homeguard Indians were

⁷⁵Ellis, 1968, vol. 1: 180-181.

camped at Waweaston, waiting for the caribou to cross in their annual migration.⁷⁶

The Half-Homeguard Cree who lived in the hinterland of Albany Fort usually spent the entire year within the Lowlands region. The Lowlands stretch inland from the coast for about 250 miles to Martins Fall on the Albany River, and this allowed for ample territory for both Homeguard and Half-Homeguard Indians to live in the region. At Severn House, the Half-Homeguard Cree did not hunt geese for the Company, but were noted for "bringing in furs in the spring and venison in the summer."⁷⁷ William Falconer remarked that the Half-Homeguard Cree spent the winter in places over 100 miles away, thereby making it difficult for them to hunt geese for the Company.⁷⁸ Some of the Severn River Half-Homeguard Cree wintered in the Upland region, more than 130 miles inland from the coast. At York Factory, the boundary of the Lowlands is about 100 miles up the Hayes River and 50 miles up the Nelson River, and it is apparent that most Half-Homeguard Cree resided in the Upland region during the winter. At both Churchill Fort and Moose Factory the edge of the Lowlands is very close to the coast, and thus both Homeguard and Half-Homeguard Cree invariably lived part of the year outside of the Hudson Bay Lowlands.

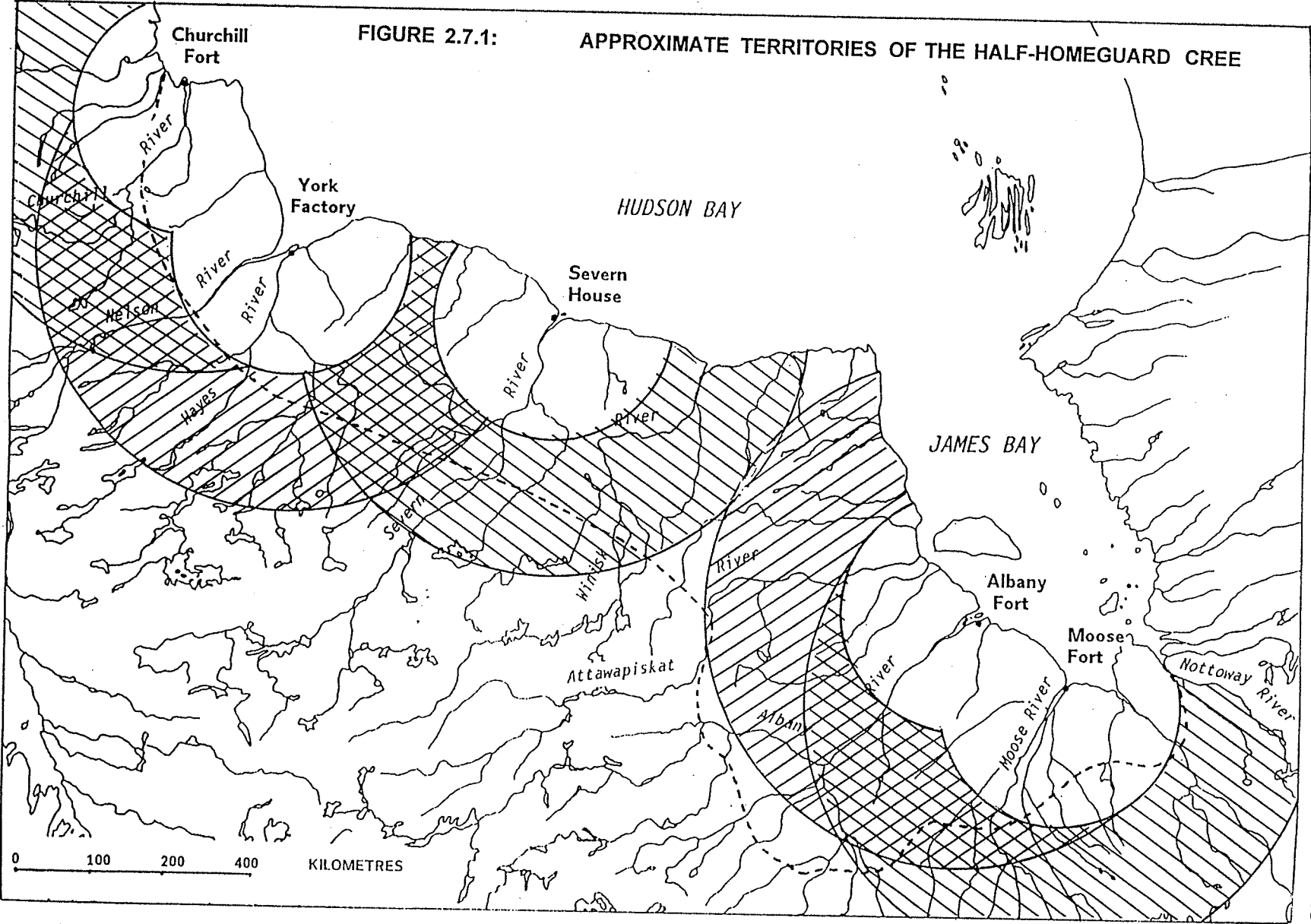
Figure 2.7.1 is a schematic representation of the winter hunting territory of the Half-

⁷⁶HBCA, B.198/a/20, fo. 38.

⁷⁷HBCA, B.198/a/23, June 4, 1779, n.p.

⁷⁸HBCA, B.239/a/21, October 21, 1776, fo. 5d.

FIGURE 2.7.1: APPROXIMATE TERRITORIES OF THE HALF-HOMEGUARD CREE



Homeguard Cree. The real territorial range of these people was undoubtedly much more complex, but the map is intended to portray the approximate geographic limits of the Half-Homeguard Cree in the early fur trade period. As the inland fur trade developed in the late 18th century, these models become less useful because of trade-related migrations of Homeguard and Half-Homeguard Cree. These population movements will be discussed in chapter nine.

2.8 Pensioners, Widows, Orphans and Domestic:

The trading posts served as temporary places of refuge for Indians who were in need of emergency aid. In times of scarcity Indian men would sometimes leave their families at the post until they had obtained sufficient food to provide for them.⁷⁹ For example, on March 24, 1706, Anthony Beale noted that an Indian "left his wife and children and designs to bring them some victuals if he can get it."⁸⁰ However, these were temporary arrangements, and Indian families rarely remained separated for long periods. Some Lowland Cree used the trading posts to cache preserved foods in case of future need. For example, on October 26, 1723, several families of Homeguard Cree arrived

⁷⁹Carol Judd stated that the temporary care of sick and elderly Lowland Cree by the HBC traders at Moose Fort was critical in the genesis of the Homeguard Cree population (Judd, 1983: 24).

⁸⁰HBCA, B.3/a/1, fo. 33d.

at Albany Fort to retrieve bundles of dried meat they had left at the fort.⁸¹

Among the Homeguard Cree population near each of the coastal trading posts, there were a few Indians who came to depend on longer term care from the European traders.⁸² Among these were elderly people, who were sometimes called pensioners by the HBC traders because they expected the Company to take care of them. These expectations were based on the reciprocal nature of the relationships that developed between Indians and Europeans at the trading posts. Indians who supplied the European traders with food and other goods expected that they would be able to receive similar treatment from the traders.

The pensioners included very old and infirm Indians who were usually without family members to take care of them. Anthony Beale described the situation at Albany Fort in 1706 as follows: "The Indians are all gone today except those which will be pencheners the hole winter, they are five in number, first a old woman soo decripl'd with age and

⁸¹HBCA, B.3/a/12, fo. 9.

⁸²Guy Joubert divided the Homeguard Cree into three groups: the Sedentary, Semi-Sedentary and Occasional Homeguards. The Sedentary Homeguard Cree were people who remained at the post year-round. These included several families who were employed as hunters by the HBC, and sick, elderly and other needy people. The Semi-Sedentary Homeguard Cree referred to the remainder of the Homeguard population who wintered near the trading post and hunted seasonally for the Company. The Occasional Homeguard Cree included the Half-Homeguard Cree and other Upland Indian people such as the Northern Ojibway who lived in areas adjacent to the Hudson Bay Lowlands (Joubert, 1984: 28-37).

she is not able to stand, next a lame man, his wife and two children."⁸³

Prominent leaders often became eligible for special treatment by the fur traders because of their influence over other Indians. At Albany Fort, a Homeguard Cree leader named Miskemote became a "pentioner" in the fall of 1712.⁸⁴ Miskemote was considered by the HBC traders to be the "Captain of the Home Indians" near Albany Fort.⁸⁵ He had served the Company well for many years as leader of the goose hunt, and in his old age he came to expect the Company would take care of him and his family. Thomas Macklish explained that Miskemote was unable to travel to his winter hunting grounds because he was "so decripled and antient that he cannot hunt."⁸⁶ Macklish also observed that: "Here is Miskemote and Wife, and 3 Antient Widows ye I shall be Obliged to keep ye winter, they having no children or relations to keep them."⁸⁷ Despite his old age, and disabilities, Miskemote did not depend entirely upon the charity

⁸³HBCA, B.3/a/2, October 26, 1706, fo. 12.

⁸⁴HBCA, B.3/a/4, October 18, 1712, fo. 9.

⁸⁵HBCA, B.3/d/17, fo. 11.

⁸⁶HBCA, B.3/a/9, January 26, 1716, fo. 6d.

⁸⁷HBCA, B.3/a/9, fo. 3. The composition of Miskemote's family group is difficult to reconstruct, but the HBC records indicate that Macklish's comments in the fall of 1715 were not entirely accurate. When Miskemote arrived at Albany Fort on December 11, 1715, his "family" included six individuals (*Ibid*, fo. 5). In the fall of 1716, Miskemote and his wife cared for a grandchild while they stayed at Albany Fort (*Ibid*, October 16, 1716, fo. 16). On January 27, 1718, Miskemote arrived at Albany Fort with two women and two boys (*Ibid*, fo. 27d). Macklish may have considered the members of Miskemote's extended family to be too few, or too young to be able to support him and his wife and the three widows.

of the HBC. Throughout the rest of his life, Miskemote and his family spent much of their time away from Albany Fort to hunt, trap and fish. Miskemote's health continued to deteriorate, but he was still recognized as the leader of the Albany River Homeguard Indians. In 1719, he received gifts from the HBC valued at 31 made beaver.⁸⁸ No other Indian leader, including Upland Indians, received such valuable gifts from the Company that year. After a lingering illness, Miskemote died near Albany Fort on September 12, 1721.⁸⁹

Orphans were sometimes left at the trading posts until family members or others came to take care of them. Anthony Beale, who was in charge of Albany Fort in 1713, noted the importance of family support for orphan children. He observed that: "a lame girl that cant walk was left here, haveing no friends to take care of her."⁹⁰ Other HBC records indicated that orphan children were soon adopted and taken away from the posts. William Falconer discussed the affection shown to orphan children by the Lowland Cree:

When Parents dies and leaves Children that are not able to provide for

⁸⁸HBCA, B.3/d/27, fo. 10d.

⁸⁹Miskemote's disability was attributed to gout. On February 16, 1717, Miskemote was reported to be "dangerously sick of the gout" (HBCA, B.3/a/9, fo. 19). On December 23, 1718, Miskemote was carried into the fort because he was "lame of the Gout" (*Ibid*: fo. 47). Shortly after learning of Miskemote's death, Joseph Myatt commented that: "he lived to a good old age, but at the same time, I think I never saw a European more afflicted with the Gout than he hath been for this several years past" (B.3/a/10, September 12, 1721, fo. 4). Although gout appears to have been a rare ailment among the Indian population, another case was noted among the Albany Homeguard Indians in 1724. Richard Staunton reported there was an old man called "Sucutash who is lame with the gout and rhumattisme" (B.3/a/12, fo. 31d).

⁹⁰HBCA, B.3/a/4, fo. 34d.

themselves; if there are no surviving Relations they are took care of by their neighbours, with the strictest affection, and humanity, they could have expected from their Parents.⁹¹

The European fur traders usually encouraged several Homeguard Cree families to stay near the trading posts year-round. These people, called "domesticks" by the HBC traders, provided food and other country produce for the Europeans. In the fall of 1775, William Falconer, who was in charge of Severn House, noted that: "the homeguards all got debt and pitched away except two men with their families who are to stay and make snow shoes etc., these with the infirm and orphan Natives make our domesticks, 16 in number."⁹² Andrew Graham remarked that: "There are commonly two families of home-guards entertained at each fort (besides widows, orphans and helpless people) all the winter to hunt, go with the packets [deliver letters], make snow-shoes etc."⁹³

Prior to the smallpox epidemic in 1782-83, most Lowland Cree followed traditional pursuits and lived quite apart from the European traders. The majority of Lowland Cree spent most of their time away from the trading posts, with occasional visits during the winter and summer and longer visits in the spring and fall during the caribou and goose hunting seasons. Very few Lowland Cree were dependent on the European traders for

⁹¹Falconer, n.d.: 33.

⁹²HBCA, B.198/a/20, September 23, 1775, fo. 6d.

⁹³Graham, 1969: 192.

long-term care or employment.⁹⁴

2.9 Leadership Patterns:

European observers were unanimously impressed by the lack of a rigid, hierarchical political order among the Indians. William Falconer wrote that: "They are subject to no foreign power, neither have they any Monarch of their own, every man being sole Governor of his family."⁹⁵ Andrew Graham remarked that: "The father or head of a family owns no superior, obeys no command."⁹⁶ Some scholars have taken these kinds of statements to mean that the Lowland Cree and neighbouring Indian groups were originally egalitarian, and that individual leaders arose in the context of Indian-European contact. Eleanor Leacock was among the first to advance the view that pre-European contact Indian societies were communistic and egalitarian.⁹⁷

A closer examination of the European fur trade records reveals that leadership was well

⁹⁴Occasionally, large groups of Lowland Cree gathered near the coastal factories in winter. For example, during the winter of 1770-71 at York Factory large numbers of Lowland Cree arrived for occasional supplies of food. On December 25, 1770, there were 106 Lowland Cree encamped near the factory. It appears that unusually severe weather conditions drove many to seek temporary relief at the HBC post (HBCA, B.239/a/65, fo. 16).

⁹⁵Falconer, n.d.: 20.

⁹⁶Graham, 1969: 170.

⁹⁷Leacock, 1954.

developed among the Lowland Cree at the time of initial fur trade contact. The confusion in the fur trade literature seems to have derived from the fact that the social and political organization of the Lowland Cree was very much different from European structures of leadership and authority.⁹⁸ Lowland Cree leaders were remarkably different from European leaders of the same period. Lowland Cree leaders did not rule with force or dictate the lives of their followers in the same manner as European monarchs. The authority of Lowland Cree leaders derived from life skills, experience and wisdom. Leadership was consultative rather than dictatorial. Group members were able to make independent decisions but usually followed the advice of their leaders. It is thus not surprising that William Falconer remarked that there were no monarchs among the Lowland Cree.

The views of Leacock and others who have promoted the idea of an egalitarian, leaderless Aboriginal society have been recently challenged by other scholars. For example, Toby Morantz documented leadership patterns among the Indians of eastern James Bay at the time of early European fur trade contact. Morantz argued that the HBC practice of recognizing captains among the eastern James Bay Indians was rooted in a pre-existing leadership system. She concluded that: "the trading captain system was an

⁹⁸Zachariah Gillam, who was the captain in charge of the first trading ventures at Charles Fort on the east coast of James Bay in 1668 and 1670, stated that: "As to their government, they have some chief men above ye rest, yet working as ye rest." Toby Morantz observed that Gillam's assessment "seems to have captured well the essence of a leadership operating within an ideology of egalitarianism, a coalescence that seems to have confounded some anthropologists" (Morantz, 1992: 192, 179).

overlay, a stratum grafted onto the existing traditional, subsistence-oriented structures."⁹⁹ This study of the Hudson Bay Lowland Cree supports Morantz's assessment that leadership roles that were fostered by European fur traders were rooted in pre-existing leadership structures.

Given the vast territory of the Lowlands it is unlikely that paramount leaders were recognized among the Lowland Cree. However, several Lowland Cree leaders were followed by large groups of people, and possessed wide-ranging influence. For example, in the late winter of 1715, a man known as The Swan, or Wapesew, arrived at Albany Fort from the north with his family and a large number of followers.¹⁰⁰ Over 400 Indians were enumerated in a camp near the fort. Since the usual number of Homeguard Cree who gathered near Albany Fort for the spring goose hunt was about 100, it is evident that Wapesew's followers numbered at least several hundred. Michael Grimington, who was in charge of Albany Fort, noted this extraordinary assembly of Lowland Cree and remarked that Wapesew was "one of the best Indian [sic] to the

⁹⁹Morantz, 1982: 495.

¹⁰⁰Another Indian named The Swan was noted in the York Factory journals about the same time. The Swan who visited York Factory was also a great leader, but he was a Missinepee Indian who lived in the upper Churchill River area. James Knight, who was in charge of York Factory, noted the arrival of several "Mishenipee Indians" including "The Swan" or "Waupisoo" in June of 1715 (HBCA, B.239/a/1, June 19, 1715, fo. 42). It is improbable that Wapesew could have travelled from Albany Fort back to the upper Churchill River and then down to York Factory between March and June.

English upon all this Cost [coast]."¹⁰¹

Another incident recorded in the early fur trade records provided evidence of wide ranging leadership. In the summer of 1683, a group of 14 or 15 Indians, including a man who was known as the "captain of the Indians of the river New Severn" arrived at the French trading post located at the mouth of the Hayes River.¹⁰² The Severn River leader demanded gifts from the French fur traders because they had not paid for the privilege of building their trading post in Lowland Cree territory. Jean Baptiste Chouart reported that the Severn River leader stated that: "I [Chouart] had not paid by presents for the country I inhabited to him who was chief of all the nations."¹⁰³ Although this claim was later refuted by other Indian leaders who came to the French trading post, the actions of the Severn River leader evidenced a claim to wide-ranging authority over

¹⁰¹HBCA, B.3/a/6, March 14 and 18, 1715, fo. 11. James Settee, who grew up at Split Lake, recorded a large gathering of Lowland Cree at the mouth of the Nelson River in the fall of 1823. Settee attended the assembly with his grandfather whose birthplace was near the mouth of the Nelson River but had relocated to Split Lake. Settee observed that: "We saw a large camp. The whole plantation of the mouth of the Nelson River was full of lodges of deer skins as white [as] white cloth. Hundred of Indians had assembled from Churchill, Severn and moose Factory from James' Bay York Factory. All the Head men came and greeted my grand Father and took him to a large Tent prepared for us. My grand Father had been elected as the Chief of all tribes living on the seacoast, he was called the Little Englishman" (Brown, 1977: 39). This large assembly was not reported in the HBC archival records. Charles Tuttle, who visited the Hudson Bay Lowlands and adjacent uplands in 1884, noted that one man who lived in the area of the upper Nelson River was considered to be the leader of a large population. Tuttle observed that: "An old chief who lives on the banks of the Nelson [River], about three hundred miles above York, who is at the head of two or three hundred families (Tuttle, 1885: 378).

¹⁰²The term captain was used by fur traders to distinguish prominent Indian leaders. Leaders of lesser rank were usually denominated lieutenants.

¹⁰³Radisson, 1896: 67.

Lowland Cree territory.

Lowland Cree leaders were usually associated with river basin groups. The leadership of so-called Captains of Rivers was recognized by Europeans during the early fur trade period. Tickatuckoy, the leader of the Albany River Lowland Cree when the HBC re-established a trading post in 1692, was described as "ye great Leading Indian of this River."¹⁰⁴ When the HBC re-established Moose Fort in 1730 the Lowland Cree leader named Sacaconapit was said to have "Great Sway over the Indians."¹⁰⁵ The European traders were impressed by the power of these leaders and showed their respect by giving them presents including decorative clothing.

Many European traders noted that heredity was an important factor in determining leaders among the Lowland Cree. Although Andrew Graham wrote that "merit alone gives the title to distinction," other HBC traders noted that leadership patterns usually followed paternal lineage among the Lowland Cree.¹⁰⁶ For example, the Albany River Lowland Cree leader named Tickatuckoy who died in 1700 was succeeded by one of his sons named Nee-peen-naw-tai.¹⁰⁷ The HBC traders noted that many other Lowland

¹⁰⁴HBCA, B.3/d/1, fo. 15d.

¹⁰⁵HBCA, B.135/d/2, fo. 8.

¹⁰⁶Graham explained that a leader was "a person who is an expert hunter, one who knows how to make long harangues, is a conjurer and has a family of his own" (Graham, 1969: 170).

¹⁰⁷As early as 1695, "Nee-peen-aw-toei" was recognized as "the young Captain of this River" (HBCA, B.3/d/5, fo. 15d).

Cree leaders were hereditary chiefs. For example, in 1725, the son of a leader from Moose River known as the White Flag Merchant took over the role of leader when his father became too old to visit the post.¹⁰⁸ In 1769, a leader named Tobateekeeshick died and his son, Winnenaywaycappo, was recognized as the new leader of a group of Half-Homeguard Lowland Cree. Thomas Hopkins, who was in charge of Albany Fort, remarked that: "Lieutenant To-ba-tee-kee-shick's son brought 2 canoes to trade, his father being dead, gave him his coat as usual, the same as his father used to have."¹⁰⁹ In 1785, a leader named Lieutenant Wauchusk was succeeded by his eldest son, Tabethimo.¹¹⁰ After the death of an Albany River Lowland Cree leader named Wapiswacatho in 1787, his son Cookenap was recognized by the HBC as the new leader. Edward Jarvis explained that: "as he is the only surviving son of Lt. Wapiswacatho, gave him his father's coat."¹¹¹

The HBC also "created" Indian leaders in order to stimulate greater efforts in the fur and provision trade. For example, after the death of Captain Questach in the spring of 1785,

¹⁰⁸HBCA, B.3/a/13, May 25, 1725. The Flag Merchant, whose Cree name was Socomekee, died in the winter of 1737-38 near Moose Fort. His son was recognized by the HBC as the new leader (HBCA, B.135/d/7, fo. 9).

¹⁰⁹HBCA, B.3/a/61, May 28, 1769, fo. 35d. The HBC gave presents to Indian leaders, among which a decorated coat was a symbol of rank as a captain or lieutenant.

¹¹⁰HBCA, B. 3/a/84, April 22 and 23, 1785, fos. 34d and 35.

¹¹¹HBCA, B.3/a/88, May 16, 1787, fo. 30d. Some Albany River Lowland Cree leaders were connected by marriage to former leaders. For example, when Captain Questach died in 1785, he was succeeded by his brother-in-law, Poscothecot (HBCA, B.3/a/84, April 23, 1785, fo. 35).

a man named Moosumas was recognized by the HBC traders at Albany Fort as the new leader of the Albany River Lowland Cree. Moosumas was not related to the recently deceased Captain Questach, but Edward Jarvis explained that he was made a captain "on account of his numerous connexions by his daughters marriages."¹¹² Family size also played a role in elevating a man named Monk to the rank of captain in 1796. John McNab, who was in charge of Albany Fort, explained that Monk was made a captain because he had "a promising family, and being the oldest Indian here."¹¹³

When Churchill Fort was built in 1717, a Lowland Cree named Factory was "adopted" by the HBC as the Captain of Churchill River. Factory had been encouraged by the HBC to move with his family from the York Factory area to the newly established post at the mouth of the Churchill River. However, this HBC appointment was not well received by the traditional leader of the Hayes River Lowland Cree, a man named the Old Captain, who claimed authority over the Churchill River area. In the summer of 1718, the Old Captain and some of his followers arrived at Churchill and confronted Factory. The Old Captain refused to recognize the authority of Factory as leader of the Churchill River area. The Old Captain also made it clear to the HBC traders at

¹¹²HBCA, B.3/a/84, May 3, 1785, fo. 36d. Moosumas died eleven days after becoming captain, and he was replaced by Poscothecot who was the brother-in-law of the former captain.

¹¹³HBCA, B.3/a/97, August 19, 1796, fo. 31. Many Lowland Cree leaders were elderly men who were past their prime hunting years. For example, on August 13, 1751, a Lowland Cree leader named "Uncle Thomas" died near York Factory, and James Isham noted that: "its computed he was near a 100 years old, had been a leading Indian upwards of 40 years" (HBCA, B.239/a/35, fo. 2d).

Churchill Fort that his leadership extended to the Churchill River. He told the HBC trader at Churchill that: "if I dont use him according to his expectation that I shall find he will interpose his authority in his Nation to make a general warr with the Northern [Chipewyan] Indians."¹¹⁴

Although the HBC traders privately disdained the attitude of the Old Captain, it is clear that they respected his authority among the other Lowland Cree. The Old Captain of Hayes River spent the winter of 1718 in the area around Churchill Fort, and he received gifts from the HBC commensurate with his position as leader of the Lowland Cree. In the spring of 1719, he sent some of his followers to Churchill Fort for "provisions and a silk handkerchief." The HBC trader complied with this request, and noted that: "it being a usuall custome to give him one every spring."¹¹⁵ The Churchill Fort account books confirm that gifts were given to the Old Captain of Hayes River, his wives and his brother.

While the HBC respected the authority of the Old Captain of Hayes River, the Company continued to nurture the leadership of the Factory as their choice for Captain of Churchill River. The HBC system of creating leaders or captains was motivated by a desire to stimulate extra efforts by these Company Captains to bring furs and other country produce. While the Upland Indians who were recognized as HBC Captains were

¹¹⁴HBCA, B.42/a/1, November 5, 1718, fo. 29.

¹¹⁵HBCA, B.42/a/1, May 8, 1719, fo. 45.

encouraged to bring down more furs, the Lowland Cree Captains were usually asked to bring in more provisions. For example, the man named Factory, who was appointed Captain of Churchill River, was rewarded for his ability to lead other Indians in the spring and fall goose hunts.

The difference between traditional Indian leaders and Company-appointed leaders was noted by Henry Ellis. In his description of Company leaders, Ellis noted that: "the other Indians will join him, obey his Directions during the Voyage [to the HBC post], while at the Factory, and upon their Return; but no longer does the obligation continue."¹¹⁶ In contrast, the traditional leaders, called Captains of Rivers by Ellis, were men of "distinguished Merit," who were leaders because of "the Esteem which the People have for him."¹¹⁷ Ellis explained that a Captain of a River was: "the leading Indian of the Indians about that River, or a Person whom the others consult in such Affairs as they think his Advice necessary in; and they will attend to what he at any Time may propose, as to going in Parties to Hunt, to War, or to Trade."¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶Ellis, 1968, vol. 1: 228.

¹¹⁷Ibid: 229.

¹¹⁸Ibid: 229.

2.10 Population:

The population of the Lowland Cree was small in comparison to the vast area they inhabited. William Falconer noted that: "The Indians are not numerous, especially near the sea coast."¹¹⁹ Andrew Graham remarked that: "I know for truth that from Nelson River to Moose River, and from the sea inland to the Great Lake, the country is thinly inhabited."¹²⁰ In 1771, Graham estimated that the Homeguard Cree population at York Factory and Albany Fort was about 150 to 200 people in the hinterland of each establishment.¹²¹ The Homeguard Cree populations were lower at Churchill Fort, Severn House and Moose Factory, averaging about 75 to 100 people at each post.¹²² Using these rough figures, the total Homeguard Cree population in the Hudson Bay Lowlands was about 500 to 700 prior to the smallpox epidemic in 1782-83.¹²³

¹¹⁹Falconer, n.d.: 20.

¹²⁰Graham's statement derived from his knowledge of the numbers of Indians who traded at the coastal posts, and from information provided by HBC inland travellers, especially William Tomison (Graham, 1969: 269).

¹²¹Ibid: 192.

¹²²According to Samuel Hearne, 69 Homeguard Cree lived in the vicinity of Churchill before the smallpox epidemic (McCarthy, 1985: 83). Guy Joubert estimated that the pre-epidemic population of Homeguard Cree near Severn House was between 75 and 100 people (Joubert, 1984: 32).

¹²³John Foster stated that: "Although population figures are tenuous at best, learned 'guesstimates' indicate a slow but steady increase in population over the years following initial contact" (Foster, 1977: 55). Unfortunately, Foster provided no substantive evidence to support this view other than a reference to Charles Bishop's undocumented assertion of "marked population growth among both the Ojibwa and Cree between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries" (Bishop, 1975: 154).

The population of the Half-Homeguard Lowland Cree is more difficult to estimate because they did not usually participate *en masse* in the goose hunts near the trading posts. However, the HBC traders often noted the arrival of large groups of Half-Homeguards who came to the posts in the summer with furs or provisions. The wide area between Albany Fort and Severn House was home to a large number of Half-Homeguard Lowland Cree who occasionally traded at both posts. Based on the size of their hunting grounds, it would appear that their population was at least twice that of the Homeguard Cree. Thus, the Half-Homeguard Cree population in the hinterland of Albany Fort and York Factory may have been about 300 to 400. At Churchill Fort, Severn House and Moose Fort, there were about 150 to 200 Half-Homeguard Cree who visited each post. Using these figures, the total population of the Half-Homeguard Cree would have been about 1,000 to 1,400.

Combining the Homeguard and Half-Homeguard populations, the total Lowland Cree population was about 1,500 to 2,100.¹²⁴ The smallpox epidemic in 1782-83 reduced the population by about half.¹²⁵ However, by the 1820s, the Lowland Cree population appears to have rebounded to near the pre-smallpox numbers. For example, at Albany Fort in 1829, an enumeration counted 71 men, 51 women, 68 boys, 53 girls and 16

¹²⁴This compares well with Andrew Graham's statement that: "I am certain the total of Indians along the whole coast of Hudson's Bay, would not exceed two thousand" (Graham, 1969: 330).

¹²⁵The smallpox epidemic of 1782-83 is discussed in greater detail in chapter eight.

widows.¹²⁶ The total population of 259 included Homeguard and Half-Homeguard Cree. A few Half-Homeguard Cree were probably among the 167 Indians enumerated in the Martins Fall district in 1829.¹²⁷ At York Factory in 1815 there were 180 adults in the population of Lowland Cree.¹²⁸ If the population structure of the Lowland Cree near York Factory was similar to the people living near Albany Fort, the total population would have been about 380. By 1820, very few Lowland Cree lived near Churchill Fort. The HBC reported that only eight Lowland Cree hunters lived in the vicinity of the fort.¹²⁹ At Severn House in 1823 there were 151 adults in the population of Lowland Cree¹³⁰, or about 320 people including children. At Moose Fort 35 hunters were enumerated in 1816, which indicated a total population of about 130.¹³¹ These data suggest that, by the 1820s, the total population of the Lowland Cree had recovered to approximately the same level as the pre-smallpox period.

The population of the Lowland Cree was also affected by out-migration, especially from

¹²⁶HBCA, B.3/e/15, fo. 3.

¹²⁷The HBC traders counted 50 men, 41 women, 39 boys, 35 girls and two widows and orphans in the Martins Fall district in 1829 (HBCA, B.3/e/15, fo. 3). According to George Barnston, who was in charge of Martins Fall district in 1839, most of the Indians were "Sauteux" or Northern Ojibway (HBCA, B.123/e/14, fo. 3d). The Northern Ojibway will be discussed in greater detail in chapter four.

¹²⁸HBCA, B.239/e/1, fo. 5d.

¹²⁹HBCA, B.42/e/2, fo. 6 (quoted in McCarthy, 1985: 85).

¹³⁰HBCA, B.198/e/6, fo. 8.

¹³¹HBCA, B.135/e/3, fos. 7-9.

the York Factory area beginning in the 1790s. A significant number of York Factory Lowland Cree moved south along the Hayes Rivers transport route and settled around inland trading posts such as Oxford House and Norway House. This migration, and contributing factors, will be discussed in greater detail in chapter nine.

**CHAPTER 3: THE LOWLAND CREE BEFORE EUROPEAN CONTACT:
IMAGES AND REALITY**

3.1 The Image of an Unoccupied Land:

According to oral tradition, the Lowland Cree occupied the Hudson Bay Lowlands long before the arrival of the Europeans. Alanson Skinner, who conducted ethnological fieldwork among the Lowland Cree in the early 20th century, reported that: "their traditions hold that they have always occupied the region where they now dwell."¹ In 1985, James Wesley, a Lowland Cree elder from Moose Factory, told John Long about the way of life in the Lowlands "before the coming of the white man." Wesley explained that: "My grandfather said it was just Indian people living in this particular area, on the west shores of James and Hudson Bays."²

Unfortunately, Lowland Cree oral traditions have not been extensively published in the literature and, until recently, little weight has been assigned to their validity as historical

¹Skinner, 1911: 9.

²Long, 1986: 25. Jesuit missionaries interviewed several Lowland Cree in 1667 and reported that an old man remembered the first arrival of Europeans. He stated that: "he had also seen a House which the Europeans had built on the mainland, out of boards and pieces of wood; and that they held Books in their hands, like the one he saw me holding when he told me this" (Thwaites, 1896-1901, vol. 51: 57).

information.³ The Lowland Cree did not possess a literate tradition, and the physical conditions in the Lowlands quickly eroded many of the visible signs of past occupancy in the region.⁴ The accounts of the early European exploring expeditions are also inconclusive about the nature of the Aboriginal occupation of the Lowlands. Only in the past few decades have archaeological investigations uncovered artifacts confirming that Aboriginal people lived in the Lowlands for over 1,000 years before European settlement in the region. Prior to these findings, the prevailing view in the literature depicted the Lowlands as an unoccupied land.

3.2 Puzzling Pottery: Early Archaeological Investigations in the Lowlands:

In 1878 and 1879, Robert Bell conducted geological surveys in the Hudson Bay Lowlands along the lower Hayes and Nelson Rivers. During these expeditions, Bell

³Bruce Trigger cautioned against the use of Aboriginal oral traditions in his study of the Huron. Trigger observed that: "A final source of information that can supplement archaeological data is oral traditions. While such information, gathered directly from native people, can be extremely valuable for studying the recent past, orally transmitted accounts frequently are altered over time. Hence claims about the more remote past cannot be accepted without independent confirmation" (Trigger, 1985: 55). However, recent research by Wayne Moodie, Alan Catchpole and Kerry Abel on the White River volcano eruption has illustrated the value of Athapaskan oral traditions in documenting historical events in the remote past (Moodie, Catchpole and Abel, 1992).

⁴Conditions in the Lowlands did not help to preserve artifacts of past settlements. Seasonal encampments in river valleys were annually washed away by the scouring action of ice and water during spring break-up. Camps built on higher ground were exposed to the erosive action of wind, rain and snow.

recorded a wide range of information about the natural history of the area. At the mouth of the Nelson River he found fragments of pottery that appeared to pre-date the arrival of Europeans. These artifacts were catalogued along with many other geological specimens and transported to Ottawa where they were stored in the National Museum. Although Bell had uncovered important evidence of Aboriginal life in the Lowlands, he did not appreciate the significance of these ancient artifacts. The pottery fragments remained literally buried in storage for almost 100 years.⁵

Robert Bell's fieldwork took place during a period when there was little academic interest in archaeology. In Canada, interest in Aboriginal artifacts such as pottery and arrow heads was initially generated by people who collected these items for their value as curiosities and objects of antiquity. The establishment of museums in the late 19th century increased the interest in collecting Aboriginal artifacts for public display.⁶ The growth in museum collections led to the development of scholarly interest in the field of archaeology. Archaeological fieldwork was sponsored by museums in order to add to their collections, and to provide valuable contextual information for their display of

⁵The pottery artifacts were initially reported in the archaeological literature by James V. Wright in 1968. Wright noted that: "Two rim sherds recovered by Dr. Robert Bell of the Geological Survey of Canada (National Mus. Can. records) at the mouth of the Nelson River both relate to the Blackduck focus" (Wright, 1968b: 66). It appears that they were deposited by Bell in the National Museum without further notice until Wright's publication in 1968.

⁶The first Canadian museum was established in Halifax, Nova Scotia, in 1868. Museums in Ontario and British Columbia were built in 1886 (Forbis and Noble, 1985: 72).

artifacts. The work of archaeologists thus enabled the museums to fulfil educational goals in addition to attracting the public as places of curiosity and entertainment. In 1926, the University of Toronto established a department of anthropology and became the first university in Canada to offer courses in the field of archaeology. By 1946, archaeology was well established as a professional and scholarly discipline in Canada. Field investigations, although concentrated in southern Ontario, spread throughout much of Canada.

Despite the post-war expansion in the field of archaeology, the Hudson Bay Lowlands remained untouched for decades. Archaeologists were initially uninterested in the Hudson Bay Lowlands because of the prevailing view in the literature that the region was uninhabited until Europeans established fur trade settlements in the late 17th century. The image of the Hudson Bay Lowlands as a no-man's land offered little incentive for archaeologists to undertake costly and difficult investigations in the region.

The first archaeological excavation in the Lowlands was motivated by interest in discovering the remains of early European fur trade settlements. In 1960, Walter Kenyon investigated the site of the first HBC trading post near the mouth of the Albany River. Between 1960 and 1970, Kenyon returned to the site seven times and uncovered numerous artifacts that belonged to the European traders. Although he found several Aboriginal artifacts such as flint arrow-points, bone awls and bone lances, Kenyon believed that these items had been deposited at the site after the Europeans had built

Albany Fort. According to Kenyon, the arrow-points made of flint "were either collected by the fur traders (possibly as souvenirs) or left in the fort by native visitors."⁷ Kenyon did not expand his investigation beyond the boundaries of the trading post, and therefore his contextual analysis was limited to the post-European settlement period.

Kenneth Dawson was the first professional archaeologist to conduct fieldwork specifically focused on Aboriginal sites within the Hudson Bay Lowlands. In 1962 and 1966 Dawson made "cursory" investigations along the lower Albany and lower Hayes Rivers.⁸ Dawson was unimpressed with the potential of these areas for Aboriginal settlements. Like Walter Hlady and the others before him, Dawson considered the environmental conditions of the Hudson Bay Lowlands to be "generally unsuitable for human habitation."⁹ His brief visits were relatively unproductive, but he did find several pottery fragments near the mouth of the Hayes River that were from the pre-European settlement period. However, Dawson believed that the pottery was left by Upland Indians who occasionally visited the area before Europeans established fur trade settlements. Therefore, Dawson concluded that there was "no evidence of prehistoric

⁷Kenyon, 1986: 45.

⁸Dawson did not publish a report of his field investigations in 1962 and 1966, but a summary of his work was noted in 1976 (Dawson, 1976a: 79).

⁹Dawson, 1976a: 79. The view that the Lowlands lacked sufficient resources for aboriginal people to subsist in the region was reinforced by other scholars. For example, Jean Trudeau remarked that: "The limited availability of country food [in the Hudson Bay Lowlands] made the introduction of flour, lard and tea supplied by the trader in return for pelts highly desirable" (Trudeau, 1968: 130).

settlement in the lower reaches [of the Albany and Hayes Rivers]."¹⁰

During the summers of 1967 to 1969, Dawson returned to the Albany River, but concentrated his efforts higher upriver between the confluence with the Kenogami River and Miminiska Lake (see figure 3.2.1). This stretch of the Albany River included about 100 miles located within the Lowlands downstream from Martins Fall. Dawson was unable to locate any archaeological sites in the Lowlands section. However, he did find ample evidence of pre-contact Aboriginal settlements along the Albany River in the upland Shield. Ten sites upriver from Martins Fall produced stone, bone and pottery artifacts. Dawson explained the difference between the upland and lowland regions as follows:

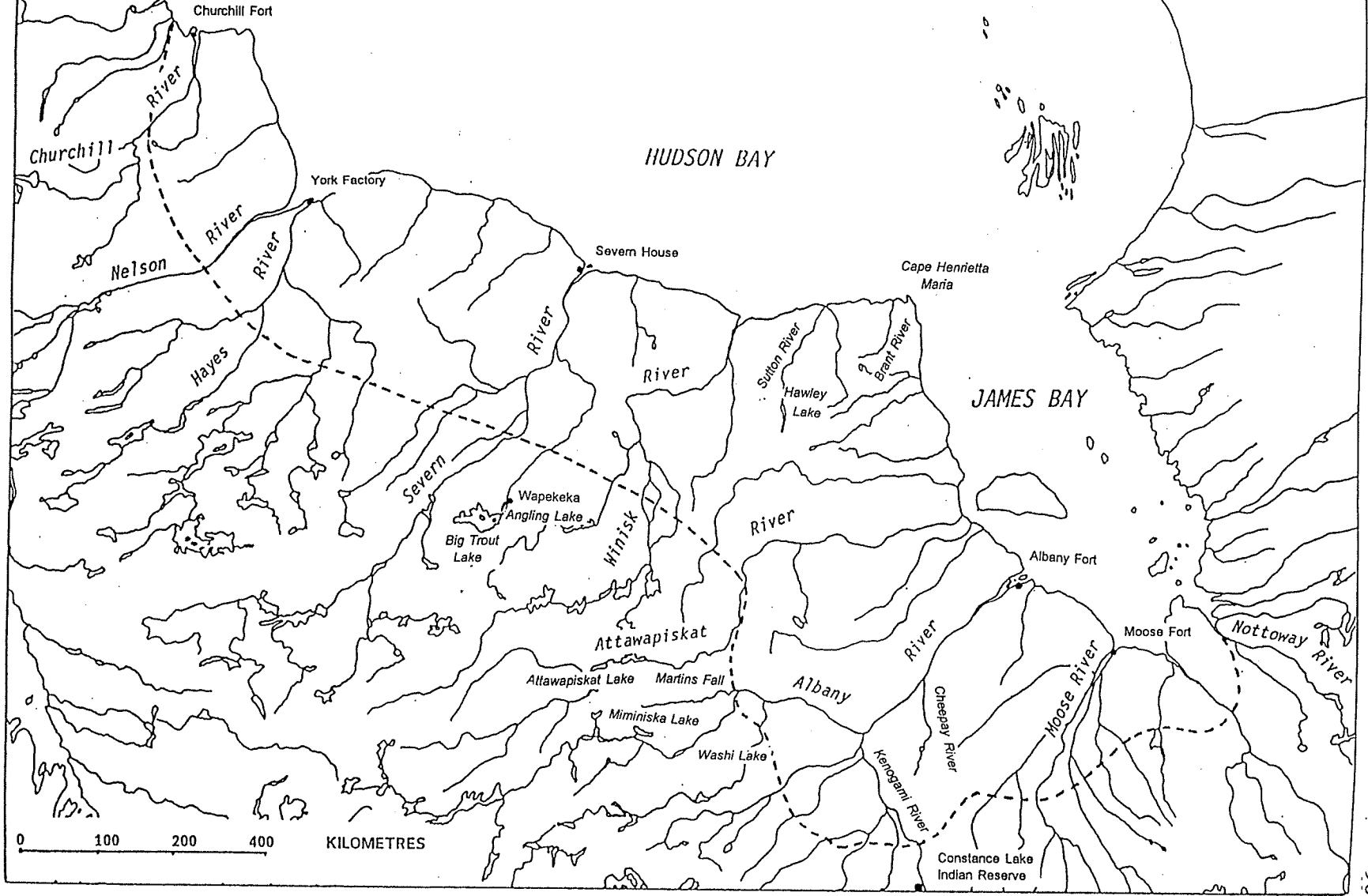
Given the very short seasonal abundance of exploitable littoral resources on this dismal post-glacial uplifted coast, it seems reasonable to speculate that the pattern of occasional visits, only has been a long standing pattern. In other words, prehistoric populations were living inland on the Shield where resources, while scarce, could be exploited year round and in the course of this subsistence pattern they would make an occasional visit to the shores of Hudson Bay. (underline added)¹¹

Thus, Dawson reaffirmed his view that the ecological conditions in the Lowlands were dismal and inhospitable. Dawson believed that Aboriginal people did not occupy the Hudson Bay Lowlands except for occasional seasonal visits from homelands in the Upland Shield.

¹⁰Dawson, 1976a: 79.

¹¹Ibid: 79.

FIGURE 3.2.1: ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY LOCATION MAP



Dawson's failure to find artifacts in his river valley surveys within the Lowlands may have been due to natural factors rather than the absence of humans. The Lowland river valleys were annually scoured by water and ice, especially during spring break-up. The erosion of river banks near the coastal trading posts was noted by many European observers. According to Henry Ellis, the Indians preferred to camp in places that were located in areas that were subject to flooding and erosion. Ellis noted that: "tents are seldom pitched in the Middle of the Woods, or upon Heights, but upon Creek or Riversides, in Bottoms; which may be done for the Convenience of getting water or Ice."¹² Any remains of encampments in these places would have been easily washed away by the spring floods.

By 1970, the information about the pottery found by Bell and Dawson near the mouth of the Nelson and Hayes Rivers was available to other archaeologists, but the idea of permanent human occupation of the Lowlands was still discounted. In 1970, Walter Hlady incorporated these findings to slightly re-adjust his earlier views on the pre-European history of the Hudson Bay Lowlands and adjacent area. Hlady observed that:

Initial attempts to contact the Cree from York Fort were well inland. It is obvious that the shores of Hudson Bay were not as attractive as the inland areas to the Cree except possibly in the autumn when geese congregated in tremendous numbers.¹³

According to Hlady, the Lowlands became attractive to Indian people on a year-round

¹²Ellis, 1968, vol. 1: 185.

¹³Hlady, 1970: 95.

basis only after Europeans built trading posts along the coast.

William Mayer-Oakes, an archaeologist who had done fieldwork at Grand Rapids on the Saskatchewan River, questioned the source and antiquity of the pottery that had been found near the mouth of the Nelson River. Mayer-Oakes believed that the pottery found near the mouth of the Nelson was probably left by Upland Indian people who came to trade with the Europeans during the early fur trade period.¹⁴ He argued that pottery continued to be used despite the availability of more durable replacement European wares, and the pottery found at the mouth of the Nelson River post-dated European settlement in the area. Thus, Mayer-Oakes contributed to the image of an unoccupied Hudson Bay Lowlands by advancing the view that post-European contact fur trade influences were responsible for bringing Upland Indians to the coast for trade purposes.

3.3 Accidental Discoveries: Archaeological Research in the 1970s:

The minimal results of Dawson's brief investigations discouraged follow-up archaeological fieldwork in the Lowlands. Renewed interest in archaeological studies within the Hudson Bay Lowlands was stimulated by an accidental discovery of artifacts near Cape Henrietta Maria in 1972. During the course of wildlife surveys in the area of Polar Bear Provincial Park, park officials came across bones and other artifacts along

¹⁴Mayer-Oakes, 1970: 354.

the Brant River and notified other government authorities. In September of 1972, John Tomenchuk and William Irving spent three days investigating two sites on the Brant River, located about 12 miles south of the Hudson Bay coast and 25 miles from Cape Henrietta Maria (see figure 3.3.1).

One of the sites, known as BRS-2, or Brant River Site Number Two, yielded a number of artifacts that appeared to pre-date European contact. These included a number of bone and stone fragments, a small chert projectile point and some pottery shards. The projectile point was similar in appearance to other stone points found in sites attributed to "late prehistoric northern Algonquian" peoples.¹⁵ The pottery fragments resembled pottery found in sites in southwestern Manitoba and at Michipicoten on the northern shore of Lake Superior. The Manitoba sites had been interpreted by other archaeologists to be ancestral to modern Cree, while the Michipicoten site had been associated with ancestral Ojibway occupancy.¹⁶ Tomenchuk and Irving interpreted the pottery as being brought to the Brant River site by Upland Cree or Ojibway peoples who lived to the south or southwest. They pointed to 20th century ethnographic studies done by Skinner (1911) and Honigmann (1956) that indicated the local Aboriginal people of the Lowlands did not have a knowledge or a tradition of pottery manufacture.¹⁷

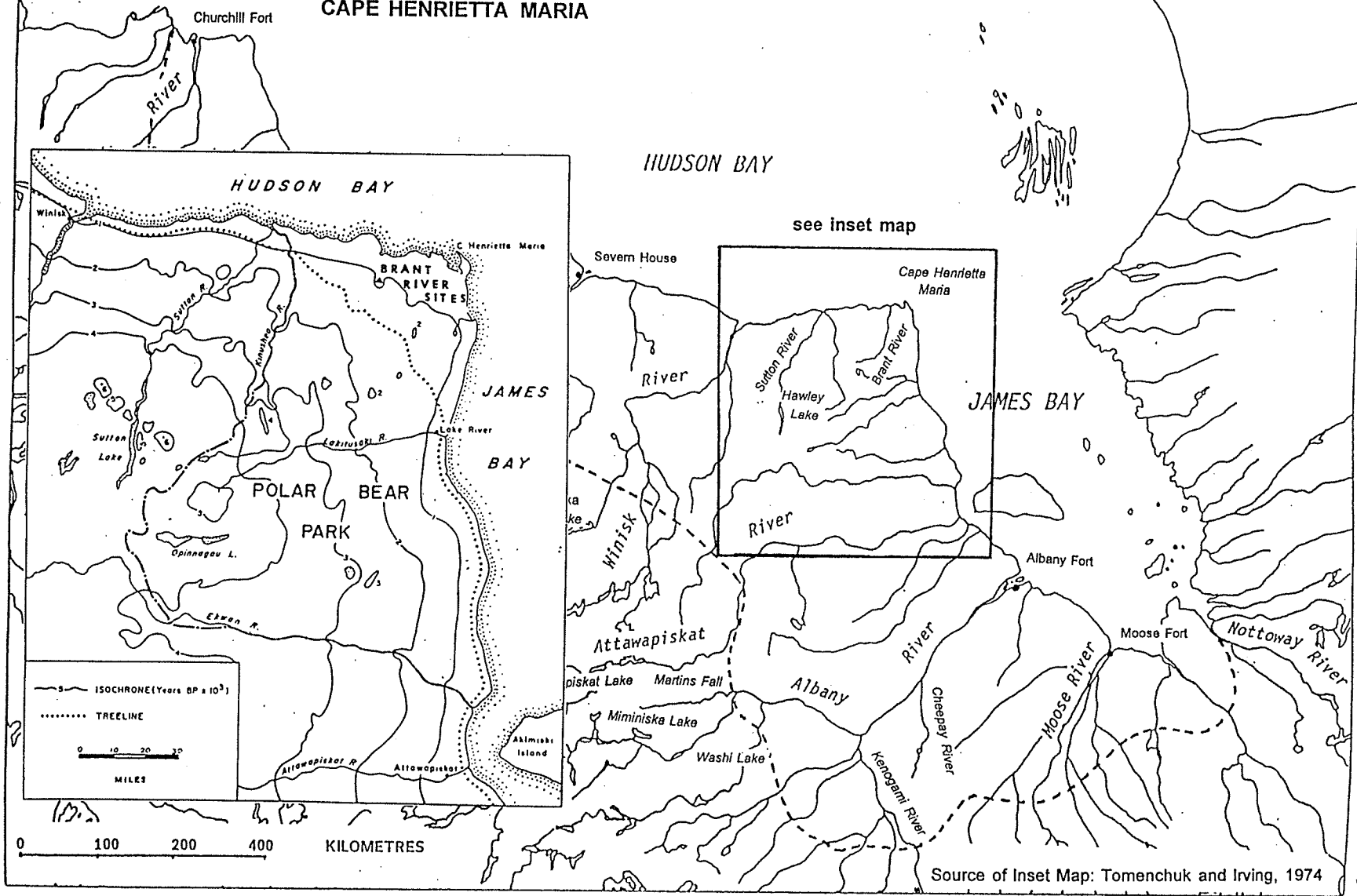
¹⁵Irving and Tomenchuk, 1974: 41.

¹⁶Ibid: 43.

¹⁷Ibid: 42.

FIGURE 3.3.1:

LOCATION OF SITES NEAR
CAPE HENRIETTA MARIA



Tomenchuk and Irving's fortuitous investigation of the Brant River sites produced "the first systematically described evidence for occupation of the Hudson Bay Lowlands".¹⁸ Their report also stimulated the second systematic archaeological study within the Lowlands. In a footnote to their report, Tomenchuk and Irving remarked that they had found fire-cracked rocks and a cervid bone at Hawley Lake during a brief stop-over during their trip to Brant River.¹⁹ This information became available to other archaeologists before the publication of the Brant River report, and in the summer of 1974, John Pollock and William Noble travelled to Hawley Lake to further investigate the site noted by Tomenchuk and Irving.

Pollock and Noble spent two weeks surveying archaeological sites along beach ridges near Cape Henrietta Maria and along the shoreline of Hawley Lake located about 50 miles to the southwest (see figure 3.3.1). Only one site was found during their brief survey of the beach ridges. This site (known as GeHo-3) comprised six noticeable depressions on the crest of a prominent beach ridge. One of the pits was excavated, and it proved to be a subterranean cache that contained caribou remains. No scientific dating of the cache was attempted, but the investigators assigned an approximate date as "late prehistoric or historic" on the basis of descriptions of similar subterranean caches by John Honigmann, an anthropologist who had conducted ethnographic fieldwork in the

¹⁸Ibid: 33.

¹⁹Ibid: 46.

area around Attawapiskat in 1947-48.²⁰

The survey work done around the shore of Hawley Lake was also brief, but Pollock and Noble were able to locate 16 sites (two sites were found along the Sutton River about five miles downstream from the lake) that contained archaeological artifacts. Of these, two sites yielded important new data about the pre-contact Aboriginal history of the area. One site, known as GdId-1, or the Hawley Lake Site, was located on the west side of the lake about two miles from its outlet. It contained evidence of a number of hearths, and the artifacts included a projectile point made from greyish-white chert and a number of fragments and flakes from stone tools. Most importantly, charcoal extracted from the hearths yielded a date of 915 A.D. +/- 100 years.²¹ This finding represented the first indisputable evidence of human occupation of the Lowlands prior to European contact.

Another site, known as GdId-7, or the Cowell Site, was located on the eastern shore of Hawley Lake. The excavations uncovered "hearth materials, decorated pottery, bones, cores, and numerous flakes, all at a substantial depth beneath a heavy layer of peat."²² Dating of this site was estimated at 1410 A.D., +/- 95 years. The faunal material revealed a heavy focus on caribou. Analysis of the caribou remains suggested that the

²⁰Noble and Pollock, 1975: 76.

²¹Ibid: 83.

²²Ibid: 88.

caribou had been killed and butchered elsewhere and the meat carried back to the site.²³ The pottery shards found at the site apparently came from a single medium-sized pot "manufactured by a paddle method, decorated near the rim by corded impressions, and on the body by babiche. The interior was smoothed over by a comb-like instrument."²⁴ Typologically, the investigators had some trouble assigning this pot to pottery traditions known from other subarctic sites. They concluded that it probably belonged within the pottery tradition known as Selkirk which was common in sites that were apparently ancestral to modern Cree. However, they did not rule out a connection with the Black Duck tradition which was commonly attributed to ancestral Ojibway. Because of this incongruity, Pollock and Noble observed that this could be explained if "exchange systems were operating between these two different groups [ie. Cree and Ojibway]."²⁵

Kenneth Dawson incorporated Pollock and Noble's findings in his updated overview of the "prehistory" of northern Ontario published in 1983. Dawson noted that the archaeological investigations around Hawley Lake had confirmed the presence of Aboriginal people in the area before European contact. However, Dawson was not convinced that these findings could be applied to other areas within the Lowlands. As a result, Dawson portrayed the Hawley Lake area as an island of human occupation within the vast unoccupied Lowlands. He offered the following conclusion: "the Hudson

²³Ibid: 93.

²⁴Ibid: 89.

²⁵Ibid: 95.

Bay Lowland...except for the Hawley Lake area appears to have been virtually unoccupied in prehistoric times."²⁶

Dawson did not incorporate findings from another archaeological investigation in the Lowlands that was conducted in 1977 and 1978, at a site on the Albany River near the confluence with the Cheepay (Ghost) River (see figure 3.2.1). In the summer of 1977, Christopher Trott located a small site on a high level terrace that was protected from the annual ice-scouring erosion that takes place along the beaches and slopes of the river valley. This site, known as EiHu-2, or the Cheepay River Site, was briefly investigated. Two small shovel tests produced artifacts that included burned bone fragments, fire-cracked rocks and 10 fire-treated chert flakes. Trott concluded that this material was "the only clear evidence of prehistoric occupation found during the survey."²⁷ In addition to this evidence, Trott recorded some oral history of the people at the Constance Lake Indian Reserve which corroborated the antiquity of these findings. Trott observed that "The people at Constance Lake tell a story that a 'battle' between the local Cree and the Iroquois took place in this area."²⁸ Trott also noted that "The people at Constance Lake talk of finding bones and 'arrowheads' eroding out of the banks at Mammattawa indicating a similar [pre-European contact] type of occupation."²⁹

²⁶Dawson, 1983: 55.

²⁷Trott, 1978: 52.

²⁸Ibid: 62.

²⁹Ibid: 64-65.

One year later, in the summer of 1978, Norman Williamson returned to the Cheepay River site and conducted additional archaeological investigations. Williamson found more pre-contact artifacts, including two pottery rim shards. These fragments were difficult to compare with other pottery found elsewhere, but Williamson noted that "similar specimens are known from south-eastern and northern Manitoba and north-western Ontario."³⁰ Based upon this rough comparison, the pottery at the Cheepay River site was dated about A.D. 800 - 1,000.

In areas adjacent to the Hudson Bay Lowlands, other archaeological fieldwork in the 1970s and 1980s yielded additional data about the pre-contact Aboriginal peoples who lived in the bordering Upland Shield region. During the summers of 1978 and 1979, David Riddle investigated 94 sites along the Albany River from its headwaters downstream to Washi Lake, about 80 kilometres above the edge of the Lowlands (see figure 3.2.1). The artifacts found in these sites confirmed that the Albany River had been "a well-used area in both prehistoric and historic times," and Riddle calculated that some of the material was 5,000 years old.³¹ Riddle noted that the frequency of locating sites diminished as he moved downstream, and he postulated that "less use was made of the periphery of the Shield near the edge of the Hudson Bay Lowland/Canadian Shield."³² Although Riddle had not investigated the Albany River within the Lowlands

³⁰Williamson, 1979: 71.

³¹Riddle, 1981: 208.

³²Ibid: 256.

region, he presumed that "The differences in the environment between the Shield and Lowlands may have caused the population to view the Lowlands with disfavour."³³

In the summer of 1980, Riddle investigated 53 sites around Attawapiskat Lake (see figure 3.2.1).³⁴ Riddle's report included abundant evidence of pre-European contact Aboriginal occupancy around Attawapiskat Lake. Six sites yielded artifacts that were attributed to the Archaic period.³⁵ Although scientific dating was not done on these sites, James V. Wright, who had originally surveyed the sites in 1968, estimated that the Archaic period in the Shield region began about 3,000 B.C.³⁶ A number of sites contained pottery fragments, including one known as FbJa-7, or the Sandy West Narrows Site, which produced a pottery rim shard that was considered to be of Iroquoian or mixed Iroquoian-Algonkian origin.³⁷ Riddle indicated that the presence of Iroquoian-style pottery as far north as Attawapiskat Lake posed problems for interpreting pre-European distributions and movements of Aboriginal peoples. However, he observed that "The rim from FbJa-7 while adding little to this as yet poorly understood problem adds a northerly extention [sic] to the spacial [sic] distribution of such material."³⁸

³³Ibid: 256.

³⁴Riddle, 1982: 17. Riddle noted that James V. Wright had done some fieldwork in the area around Attawapiskat Lake in 1968, but the results had not been published.

³⁵Ibid: 109.

³⁶Wright, 1981: 88.

³⁷Riddle, 1982: 29.

³⁸Ibid: 29.

Riddle believed that the artifacts at Attawapiskat Lake represented the farthest downstream pre-European habitation of Aboriginal people within the Attawapiskat River basin. As in his earlier Albany River survey, he based this opinion on the assumption that Aboriginal people did not occupy the Lowlands prior to European settlement in the region. Riddle concluded: "If Laurel peoples had no predilection to travel onto the Lowlands, Attawapiskat Lake may be the eastern terminus of this movement."³⁹

In 1989 and 1990 Scott Hamilton investigated a burial site at Wapekeka, located on the shore of Angling Lake in the Upland Shield near the edge of the Hudson Bay Lowlands (see figure 3.2.1). Radiocarbon dating indicated that the burial occurred about 7,000 years ago.⁴⁰ Hamilton observed that the burial site was near the edge of the Tyrrell Sea, the precursor of modern Hudson Bay. The people who were connected with the burial were thus geographically akin to the Coastal Lowland Cree. Hamilton suggested that the Wapekeka burial confirmed that Aboriginal people quickly occupied the land in the fore of the receding Tyrrell Sea.⁴¹

While archaeological investigations increasingly pointed to a long period of human occupation of the Hudson Bay Lowlands and adjacent Uplands, the image of an unoccupied land continued in the literature. For example, in 1975, Dale Russell

³⁹Ibid: 110.

⁴⁰Hamilton, 1991: 2.

⁴¹Ibid: 71.

suggested that the Lowlands was a "no-man's land" before Europeans built trading posts and attracted Indians from the Uplands to live as dependents of the European fur traders.⁴² Russell proposed that the migration of Indian people into the Lowlands after European settlement "necessitated a displacement of Indian people to the coast, originating the Home Guard Indians. Because of adverse aspects of the coastal environment, the Home Guard Indians became dependent on the Hudson's Bay Company."⁴³ Charles Bishop provided a different view of the pre-European contact population dynamics among the Lowland Cree who lived in the Albany River basin. Bishop argued that, prior to European fur trade settlement in the region, the Albany River Lowland Cree hunted geese along the coastal lowlands in spring and early summer. However, the arrival of European fur traders caused some of the Lowland Cree to remain year-round in the Lowlands because they stayed to hunt geese in the fall for the fur traders, and were unable to reach their traditional upland winter territories.⁴⁴ Arthur Ray agreed with Bishop's view, and added that: "Indians apparently did not inhabit the lowlands throughout the year. There simply was not enough game."⁴⁵ In 1986, Paul Thistle repeated these views when he wrote that: "The ecology of the Hudson Bay Lowland made subsistence along the coast difficult, if not impossible, during the

⁴²Russell, 1975: 424.

⁴³Ibid: 422.

⁴⁴Bishop, 1972: 66.

⁴⁵Ray, 1984: 7.

winter without support [from European traders] of some kind."⁴⁶

Even archaeologists preferred to downplay the new evidence, and continued to portray the Lowlands as a no-man's land. In 1981, James V. Wright viewed the European fur trade settlements as magnets for the Lowland Cree population. Wright remarked that:

This region [Hudson Bay Lowlands] appears to have been virtually unoccupied in prehistoric times and its historic Algonquian population is regarded as a recent phenomenon that is directly related to the establishment of European trading posts around the coast of Hudson Bay.⁴⁷

3.4 The Reality of an Occupied Land: Archaeology in the 1980s:

In the early 1980s, two archaeological investigations in different parts of the Hudson Bay Lowlands began to put the pieces of the puzzle together, and the picture of the pre-European contact occupancy of the area began to emerge. The area along the lower Albany River within the Lowlands was investigated by Patrick Julig in the summer of 1981. Julig located twenty pre-contact sites, but only a few were excavated because of time and other constraints. Despite these limitations, Julig was able to find a number of significant features in these sites that yielded new information about the pre-contact Aboriginal people who lived in the area. For example, some of the pre-contact sites

⁴⁶Thistle, 1986: 16-17.

⁴⁷Wright, 1981: 87.

were located on high terraces and this suggested winter occupation. Julig observed:

Many of these were, on the basis of site location, cold weather encampments. They were often situated well back in the bush from summer beaches, on high terraces above maximum spring flood levels. Such general site locations were anticipated prior to the field surveys, on the basis of ethnographic information. Native bands wintering in the interior would return to the locations where their canoes were cached before spring breakup and soft snow conditions. This suggested camp locations on high terraces near major tributaries during late winter/early spring, when travel was difficult.⁴⁸

Julig's interpretation that Aboriginal people lived in the Lowlands during cold weather was a major departure from the established archaeological and historical literature. Julig searched for sites near the Albany River estuary, but found that severe erosion had taken place and all evidence of past human occupation had been washed out into the bay. He noted: "tremendous annual flooding of the lower terraces, which would likely have destroyed many, if not all sites over the past three centuries."⁴⁹ Despite this lack of information, Julig concluded that the pre-contact Aboriginal people occupied sites near the Albany River estuary in the summer months, and moved to interior sites during the cold weather months.

In a recent publication Julig summarized the lifeways of the pre-contact people who lived in the Lowlands:

[P]rehistoric Algonquian bands occupied the Lowlands and coastal zone

⁴⁸Julig, 1982: 80-81.

⁴⁹Ibid: 89.

of Hudson and James Bay. Their adaptive strategies were based on general foraging of several ecological zones on a seasonal basis; however, all bands did not necessarily 'rush back' to the Shield for cold weather, as has been suggested.⁵⁰

Although Julig limited his archaeological research to the lower Albany River area, he made some hypothetical reconstructions of pre-contact Aboriginal history in other areas of the Lowlands. He suggested that the situation of people living in the northern Lowlands would have been considerably different than the experience of people living along the lower Albany River. Julig observed:

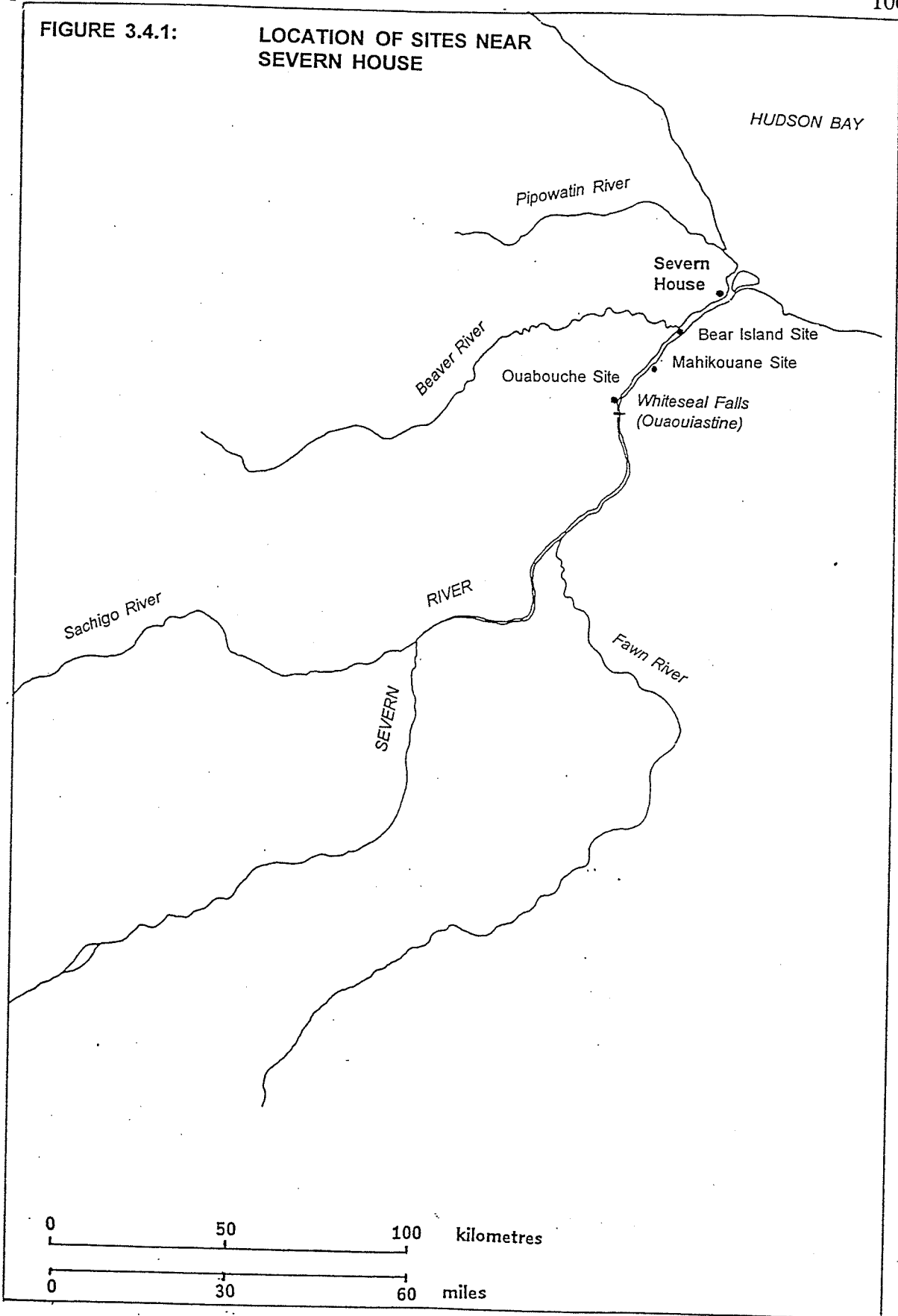
For the Cree bands frequenting the northern reaches of the lowlands, adjacent to Hudson Bay, an adaptation based primarily on fish, caribou and small game is hypothesized, with similarities to adjacent Chipewyans. These northern bands exploited the barren ground caribou that migrated along the coast in the spring and fall.⁵¹

Julig's work along the lower Albany River was paralleled by another archaeologist, Jean-Luc Pilon, who began fieldwork in the vicinity of Fort Severn in the summer of 1981. Pilon spent four seasons excavating and studying over thirty archaeological sites along the lower Severn and Sachigo Rivers (see figure 3.4.1). Pilon's work represents the most detailed archaeological investigation within the Lowlands to date. After extensive fieldwork and laboratory analysis of artifacts found in pre-contact sites, Pilon concluded that Aboriginal people have lived within the Lowlands near the Severn River for 1,500 to 2,000 years. He noted that:

⁵⁰Julig, 1988: 130.

⁵¹Julig, 1982: 86.

FIGURE 3.4.1: LOCATION OF SITES NEAR SEVERN HOUSE



The failure, until now, to find evidence for regular prehistoric seasonal or year-round occupation of the Hudson Bay Lowlands cannot be attributed to the unsuitability of the region for human habitation. It had game, fish, fuel, and raw materials necessary for the manufacture of shelters and tools, all in relative abundance.⁵²

Pilon's study provided a detailed outline of Aboriginal occupancy in the Severn River Lowlands. The fact that Aboriginal people inhabited the Lowlands before European contact was significant in terms of challenging prevailing theoretical assumptions about Aboriginal history. Pilon noted that: "The existence of a prehistoric indigenous population affects both our larger understanding of subarctic subsistence systems, and our interpretation of relations between Native people and Europeans in the Lowlands."⁵³

Among the numerous sites excavated by Pilon and his crew, many provided significant new information. One site, known as Ile de l'Ourson (Bear Island), or G1Iw-5, was located on a large island in the Severn River about 20 kilometres from the coast and just upstream from the confluence with the Amiskou Sebe (Beaver River). A large quantity of caribou bones were recovered, suggesting that the site was used for "killing and processing large numbers of caribou."⁵⁴ Pilon further noted that caribou were probably killed by "the use of some mass capture technique, such as a fence or snares, on the

⁵²Pilon, 1987: 139.

⁵³Ibid: 1.

⁵⁴Ibid: 70.

island, which is a natural crossing point in the river for migrating caribou."⁵⁵ An examination of antler fragments suggested that the caribou were killed during the late spring or early summer migration period. Although radiocarbon testing was not done on this site, Pilon noted that stratigraphic analysis indicated that it was occupied in the "prehistoric" (pre-European contact) period.

The Mahikoune (Wolf) site, or G1Ix-1, was located about 30 kilometres upstream on the east shore of the Severn River. Radiocarbon testing produced a date of 730 +/- 90 years B.P. (before present), or about A.D. 1165-1395. The Severn River narrows at this point, and it offered another strategic location for hunting caribou as they crossed the river. Caribou bones represented the majority of artifact remains at the site, suggesting that it too was a caribou hunting camp. In addition to caribou bones, Pilon recovered moose bones which was unexpected since biologists had assumed that moose had only recently extended their range north of Lake Superior. Pilon's discovery clearly refuted that assumption, and he noted that: "Without a doubt then, the pre-contact range of Alces alces can be described as within a few kilometres of the shores of Hudson Bay."⁵⁶

About 40 kilometres up the Severn River from the coast is a waterfall known as Ouaouiastine, or Whiteseal Falls. A site called Ouabouche (Hare), or GkJa-3, was located near the foot of the falls. A large number of artifacts were found at this site,

⁵⁵Ibid: 71.

⁵⁶Ibid: 82.

indicating that it was a well-used camp location both before and after European contact (although no radiocarbon dates were obtained). The faunal remains found at the site included a wide range of mammal, fish and bird species. Caribou bones were present in significant numbers, but the presence of numerous fur bearer, fish and bird remains suggested a diversified subsistence and fur trade occupancy. These artifacts also suggested a multi-season occupancy at the site, including the winter months based, in part, on the number of small fur bearers that were present. Pilon also suggested that fishing could have taken place year round with hooks, nets and weirs.⁵⁷ Fish weirs were known to have been used after the river was frozen, and gill nets were also used under the ice. Pilon concluded that the Ouabouche site was "used at different times of the year within a well-co-ordinated round of resource exploitation."⁵⁸

Pilon was able to show that Aboriginal people have occupied the Severn River lowlands for 1,500 to 2,000 years.⁵⁹ This occupancy was based upon exploiting a number of

⁵⁷A recent examination of archaeological and historical information relating to fish weirs in the Hudson Bay Lowlands by Kenneth R. Lister has provided evidence of year-round use of fish weirs both before and after European contact. Lister's radiocarbon date of 3,920 +/- 180 years B.P. for a site on the Shamattawa River which flows into the Winisk River is the earliest recorded date for human occupation in the Lowlands (Lister, 1988: 72-99).

⁵⁸Pilon, 1987: 105.

⁵⁹Other archaeologists have supported Pilon's conclusions. For example, in 1991, Donald Clark summarized the pre-European distribution of the Cree people, and indicated that their geographic range included the Hudson Bay Lowlands (Clark, 1991: 135). James V. Wright revised his earlier views in 1987, when he included the Lowlands in a map depicting the distribution of Cree between A.D. 500 and European contact (Wright, 1987: plate 9).

seasonally available animal species of which caribou was a focal resource. Pilon concluded that this pattern of resource use remained relatively unchanged until the 19th century when the caribou resource was seriously reduced.⁶⁰ In a recent article, Pilon has stated that the material culture of the Severn River Lowland people closely reflected their adaption to the seasonal movements of the caribou. According to Pilon, the focus on caribou by the Lowland people "stands in marked contrast to their neighbours, who today share the same ethnic label."⁶¹ Pilon explained that the identification of the Severn River Lowland people as "Cree" did not recognize the distinct difference between regional groups. He argued that:

Instead, it may perhaps prove more fruitful to examine changes in the adaptive strategies through time in particular areas and in larger regions in order to understand the nature of the adaptations to different environmental settings within the Subarctic.⁶²

In effect, Pilon argued for an approach that is essentially historical geography. Although the present study was initiated independently of Pilon's work, it complements Pilon's findings and seeks to contribute a further understanding of the adaptive strategies of the Lowland Cree during the European fur trade period.

⁶⁰Pilon, 1987: 224.

⁶¹Pilon, 1988: 100.

⁶²Ibid: 108.

CHAPTER 4: UPLAND INDIAN NEIGHBOURS: THE NORTHERN OJIBWAY, UPLAND CREE AND EASTMAIN CREE:

4.1 The Northern Ojibway:

By the time European fur traders ventured into the Upland territory in the 1770s, much of the area bordering the Hudson Bay Lowlands was occupied by groups of people known as Ojibway or, more specifically, Northern Ojibway.¹ Their northern territorial range extended along the edge of the Lowlands from the Moose River to the Hayes River (see figure 2.2.1).

According to several European accounts, the Northern Ojibway had migrated into the Upland territory adjacent to the Lowlands sometime before 1770. For example, in 1775, Andrew Graham remarked that: "It is my opinion that this people [Northern Ojibway] have drawn up to the Northward gradually as the Keiskatchewans [Lowland Cree]

¹Ojibway, Ojibwa and Chippewa are variations of the same name that has been used to describe a large group of people who have common cultural traditions and speak the same language. Although regional dialects of the Ojibway language exist, the basic language group occupies a large territory that surrounds much of the Great Lakes watershed. The name Chippewa has been generally used in the United States, while Ojibwa or Ojibway has been the common appellation in Canada. The name Saulteux, originally applied by French visitors to the Ojibway people who lived in the Sault Ste. Marie area, has also been commonly applied to these people. Their self-designation is Anishinabae, which means the people.

receded [sic] from it toward the southwest."² In 1839, George Barnston observed that the Northern Ojibway had pushed northward from Lake Superior to the edge of the Lowlands near Martins Fall.³

The European accounts of migration noted above conform in general to Ojibway oral traditions. According to an oral tradition recorded by Ojibway historian William Warren, the Northern Ojibway migrated into the area north of Lake Superior from the Lake Huron area in the early 16th century.⁴ Warren calculated that the migration began about A.D. 1530.⁵ That the migration began before European contact is corroborated by Warren's statement that at the time of this migration "they were living in a primitive state, when they possessed nothing but the bow and arrow, sharpened stones, and bones

²HBCA, E.2/9, fo. 83.

³HBCA, B.123/e/14, fo. 3d.

⁴According to Ojibway oral tradition the migration was two-pronged, with one division moving north and west of Lake Superior and the other moving south and west of the lake (Warren, 1984: 76-94).

⁵Warren was told by Ojibway elders that the migration took place about eight generations before his time (1852). He explained that the length of one generation was about 40 years, and noted that: "From the manner in which they estimate their generations, they may be counted as comprising a little over half the full term of years allotted to mankind, which will materially exceed the white man's generation. The Ojibways never count a generation as passed away till the oldest man in the family has died, and the writer assumes from these, and other facts obtained through observation and inquiry, forty years as the term of an Indian generation" (*Ibid*: 90). According to this formula, the date of the migration was about A.D. 1530.

of animals."⁶

Warren explained that some Ojibway remained in the vicinity of Sault Ste. Marie, and were subsequently called "Saulteaux" by the French traders.⁷ The Ojibway who migrated into the area north of Lake Superior divided into a number of regional groups. Those who settled along the north shore of Lake Superior were known generally as "Sug-wau-dug-ah-win-in-e-wug, or men of the thick fir woods."⁸ The French traders usually called these people "Bois Forts" or "Gens des Terres." Another group settled at the lakehead near Grand Portage, and were known as the "Ke-nouzhay or Pike." A large group who migrated westward to Rainy Lake, were called "Ko-je-je-win-e-wug," a name describing the "numerous straits, bends and turnings of the lakes and rivers which they occupy."⁹ The Rainy Lake Ojibway became allies with the "Ke-nis-te-no" (Upland Cree) and "Assineboins" (Assiniboine).¹⁰ At that time, a large group of Upland Cree lived in a village at "Ne-bo-se-be, or Dead River [Netley Creek]" near the mouth of the

⁶Ibid: 91. In another passage, Warren attributed the cause of the migration to warfare with the Iroquois Nations who lived south of Lake Ontario (Ibid: 83). Warren also stated that the Iroquois were aided by English and Dutch firearms (Ibid: 123). The apparent conflict with the pre-European timing of the migration could be explained if several waves of migration occurred.

⁷Ibid: 123.

⁸Ibid: 85.

⁹Ibid: 82.

¹⁰Ibid.

Red River, and the Assiniboine were neighbours.¹¹

Harold Hickerson suggested that the Ojibway migration was induced by European fur traders. He reasoned that, beginning about 1660, the Ojibway migrated westward in order to better position themselves as middlemen in the European fur trade that was developing in the St. Lawrence valley and on Hudson Bay.¹² Charles Bishop expanded on the Hickerson's views, and asserted that some Northern Ojibway began to move north of Lake Superior in the 1680s as a result of European fur trade pressures, and completed their expansion about 1770.¹³

Bishop's view that the Northern Ojibway migrated into the area north of Lake Superior after European contact has been rejected by a number of scholars. Edward Rogers and Mary Black Rogers were among the first to propose that the Northern Ojibway occupied the area north of Lake Superior before the arrival of European fur traders.¹⁴ Adolph

¹¹Charles Bishop suggested that the Assiniboine occupied the area west of Lake Superior at the time of European contact (Bishop, 1974: 4-5). However, other scholars have presented persuasive arguments against this position. Clinton Wheeler provided evidence to show that the Assiniboine lived south of Lake Winnipeg when French fur traders first visited Lake Superior (Wheeler, 1977: 119-121). The Assiniboine were long-distance traders and warriors who also travelled to Hudson Bay to trade with the HBC. Gary Doige conducted an extensive review of the early historical documents and Assiniboine oral traditions, and he concluded that the "territorial heartland of the protohistorical Assiniboine lay in the Lake Winnipeg - lower Red River valley region" (Doige, 1989: 45).

¹²Hickerson, 1967: 44; Hickerson, 1988: 66.

¹³Bishop, 1974: 345.

¹⁴Rogers and Rogers, 1982: 162-165.

Greenberg and James Morrison suggested that the apparent post-European contact migration of the Northern Ojibway was due to the changing names used in French and English accounts.¹⁵

The different views about Ojibway migration may be reconciled if greater reliance is placed on the Ojibway oral tradition. According to the tradition, the Northern Ojibway migrated into the area about 1530. Thus, the Northern Ojibway would have been well established in the area north of Lake Superior before Europeans arrived. The migration was gradual, and the movement of Northern Ojibway continued beyond 1770. They likely displaced Upland Cree groups in many areas north of Lake Superior, and also caused the Lowland Cree to gradually shift their territorial range farther north. Figures 4.1.1a and 4.1.1b provide a schematic representation of the migration of the Northern Ojibway north and west of Lake Superior between 1530 and 1821.

According to Warren, the group of Northern Ojibway who moved farthest north were called "Omushke-goes, or Swamp People."¹⁶ However, Warren also identified the "Omush-ke-goag (Musk-e-goes), (Swamp people)," or Lowland Cree, as a different tribe. The confusion may have arisen because of the close proximity of the Northern Ojibway and the Lowland Cree. Other 18th and 19th century observers made similar remarks about the identity of the Northern Ojibway who lived adjacent to the Lowland Cree. For

¹⁵Greenberg and Morrison, 1982.

¹⁶Warren, 1984: 85.

FIGURE 4.1.1a: APPROXIMATE TERRITORIAL DISTRIBUTION OF THE LOWLAND CREE AND THEIR NEIGHBOURS, 1530 and 1740.

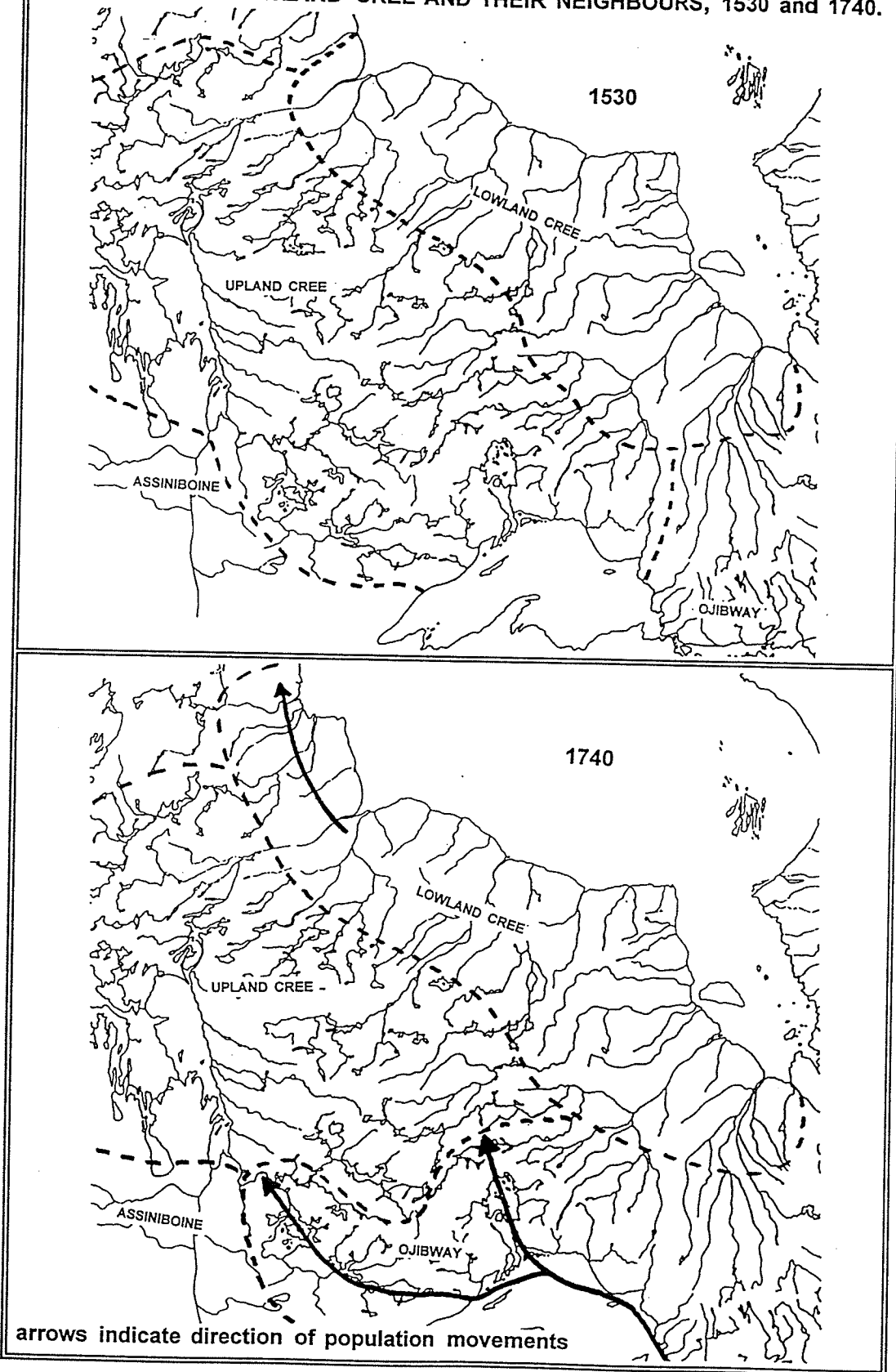
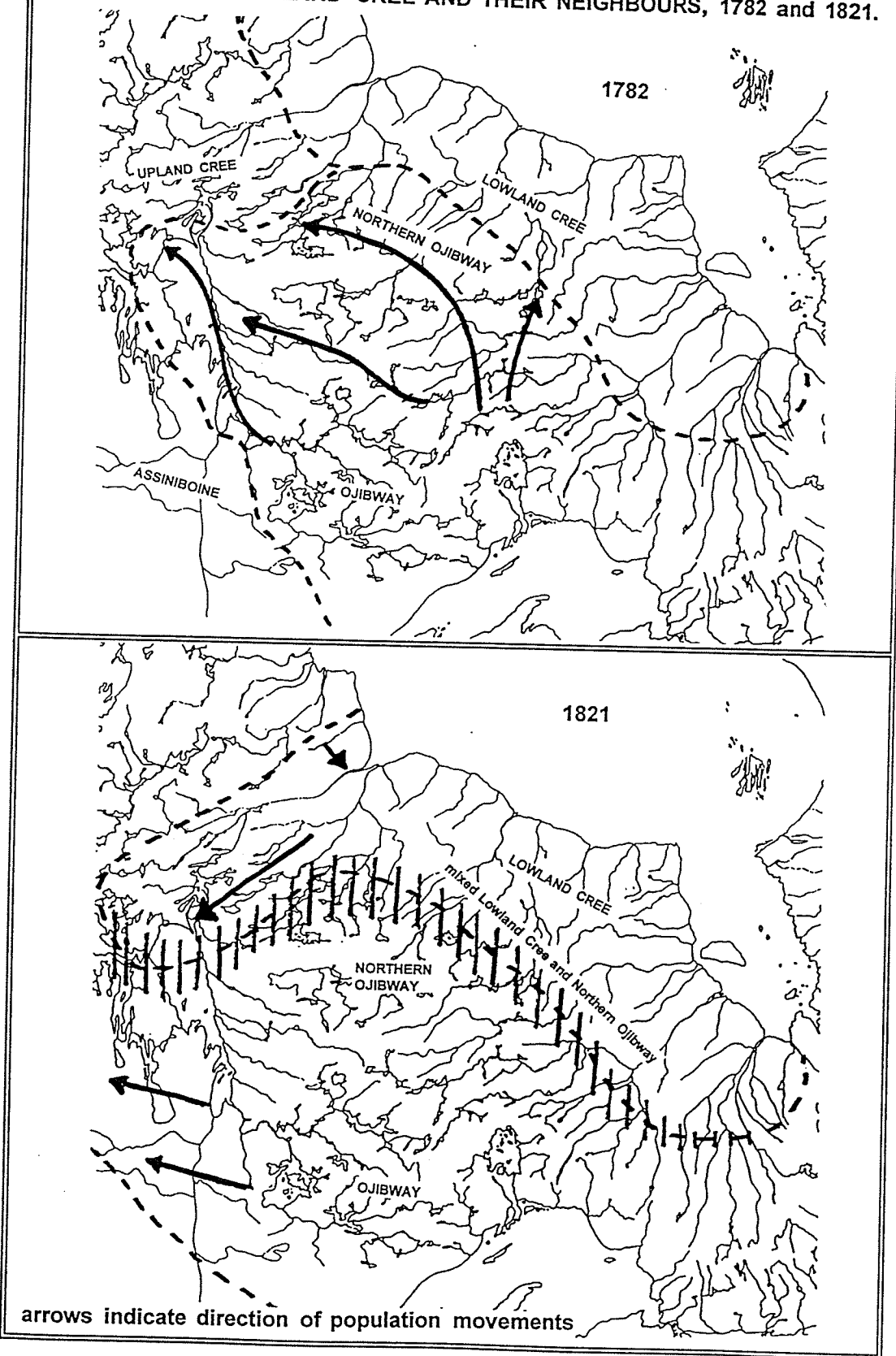


FIGURE 4.1.1b: APPROXIMATE TERRITORIAL DISTRIBUTION OF THE LOWLAND CREE AND THEIR NEIGHBOURS, 1782 and 1821.



example, in 1795, an unnamed North West Company fur trader wrote that: "The Indians to the North of Lac Winnipic are a mixture of Saulteux [Ojibway] and Christineaux [Cree], speaking a mixt language and are called Masquegons they extend to Nipigon and Hudson Bay."¹⁷ John Lee Lewes, who was in charge of Oxford House in 1833, remarked that the Indians who lived near the post "may be classed under two Heads, Muskago or Swampy Souteaus [Northern Ojibway], and the Swampy Crees [Lowland Cree]."¹⁸

The HBC fur traders commonly used the name "Nakawawuck" to describe the Northern Ojibway.¹⁹ According to one translation, the name Nakawawuck meant "those who speak differently."²⁰ Viewed from the perspective of Europeans who were familiar with the language spoken by the Lowland Cree, it would have been a useful descriptive term for the Northern Ojibway. Andrew Graham observed that: "Their [Northern Ojibway] speech differs greatly from the Keskachewan Indians [Cree]; they having so many words to represent one thing makes it difficult to converse with them."²¹ George Sutherland, who was the first HBC trader to winter among the Northern Ojibway at Sturgeon Lake

¹⁷Masson, 1795: 4.

¹⁸HBCA, B.156/a/13, fo. 61.

¹⁹Graham, 1969: 204.

²⁰Howard, 1965: 9. S.M. Shrofel and H.C. Wolfart explained that the modern usage of the term "nahkawewak" is a Cree verb meaning "they speak Saulteaux" (Shrofel and Wolfart, 1977: 157).

²¹HBCA, E.2/7, fo. 17.

(west of Lake Nipigon), noted that: "these Indians...differe far in their language from our Indians at hudsons bay."²²

Another name for the Northern Ojibway was "Bungee" or "Pungee." According to HBC trader George Barnston, the term Bungee was "a name, I imagine, given to them from their use of the Sauteux word Pungee - a little."²³ Charles Bishop suggested that Bungee was used by the HBC traders because of "their practice of begging" when they visited the trading posts.²⁴ Peter Fidler, the HBC trader in charge of Fort Dauphin in 1820, explained that the "Soteaux," or Northern Ojibway, "obtained the name of Bungees by us [HBC traders] from the word Bungee in their language signifying small or little which they so frequently repeated when their supplies was not adequate to their wants, that they have thus obtained the word as a fixed term to the whole Tribe."²⁵

²²HBCA, B.211/a/1, January 31, 1780, fo. 30d.

²³HBCA, B.123/e/14, fo. 4. The name Bungee was still used in the late 19th century to describe Northern Ojibway who lived east of Lake Winnipeg. James Stewart, a HBC trader at Berens River, recalled that the Indian people "went under the name of Bungays, a name I have not heard of in any other part of the country" (Stewart, 1905: 89).

²⁴Bishop, 1974: 16n. Bishop cited George Barnston's 1839 report on the Martins Fall district as the source, but Barnston did not refer to begging (HBCA, B.123/e/14).

²⁵HBCA, B.51/e/1, fo. 15d. Laura Peers cited Fidler's report and added information from James Isham's vocabulary of Northern Ojibway words that confirm Fidler's interpretation of the origin of the name Bungee (Peers, 1987: 23). During the late 19th century, the term Bungee was used to describe the unique speech of descendants of English, Scottish and Orkney fur traders and their Lowland Cree or Northern Ojibway wives who settled in the Red River colony (Blain, 1987: 7). Margaret Stobie explained that the term was originally applied to Northern Ojibway, but by the 1840s it was also applied to Lowland Cree who migrated south to the Norway House area (Stobie, 1968: 68-69).

The HBC traders at York Factory and Severn House also used the name "Lake Indians" to describe the Northern Ojibway. The origin of the name is difficult to ascertain, but it may have been related to their former homeland around the Great Lakes. By the mid-18th century the term "Lake Indians" could have also been descriptive of the geographic location of the Northern Ojibway in the Upland Shield area along the margins of the Hudson Bay Lowlands. The Shield is literally dotted with lakes, and stands out in marked contrast to the Lowlands which is characterized by vast expanses of swamp and bog. The difference between the two regions can be easily seen in maps depicting drainage patterns. Figure 4.1.2 shows the approximate boundary between the Lowlands and Uplands, and illustrates the difference between the numerous lakes in the Uplands and the generally swampy Lowlands.

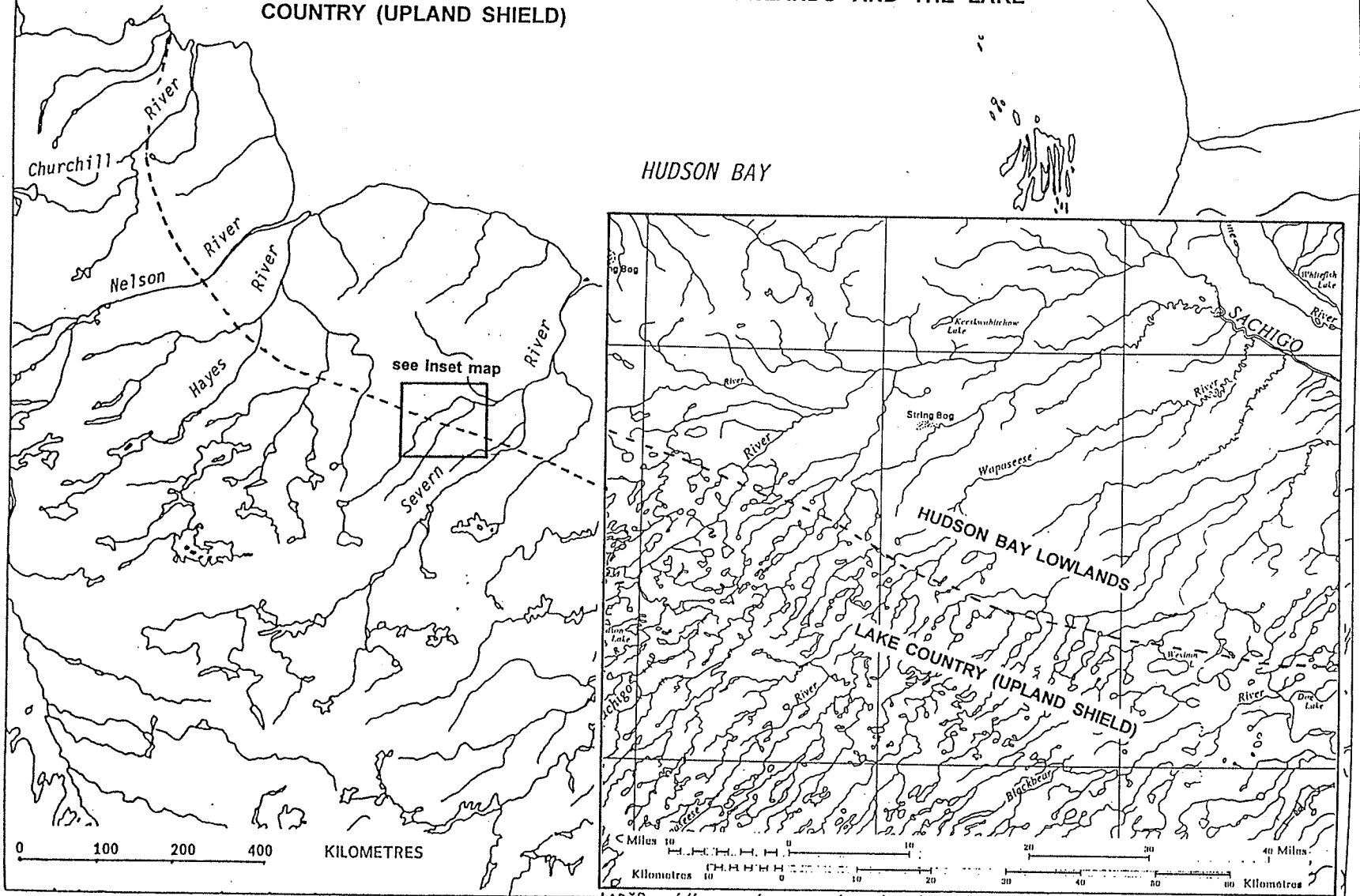
The names Lake Indians, Nakawawuck and Bungee were used commonly in the area around York Factory and Severn House, but not farther south near Albany Fort.²⁶ George Barnston, who was in charge of Martins Fall House in 1839, noted that the name Suckers was used in that locale instead of Bungee. Barnston explained that the majority of Indians in the vicinity of Martins Fall in 1839: "belong to that tribe of Sauteux, denominated the Suckers - a Band of the Great Chippewa Divisions which appears to have pushed farthest to the northward, at least in this quarter [near Martins Fall]."²⁷

²⁶Graham used the term Nakawawuck to describe the Upland Indians who traded at Albany Fort (Graham, 1969: 266).

²⁷HBCA, B.123/e/14, fo. 3d.

FIGURE 4.1.2:

THE LINE OF CONTACT BETWEEN THE LOWLANDS AND THE LAKE COUNTRY (UPLAND SHIELD)



According to Barnston, the "purer Chippewas" lived to the south of the Albany River.

The name Suckers represented an animal-named group, or division, among the Northern Ojibway. This is consistent with the oral history of the Ojibway people. According to Ojibway historian, William Warren, the general population was sub-divided into a number of animal-named clans, or totems.²⁸ In addition to the Sucker totem, Warren included the Goose, Beaver, Sturgeon, Gull, Hawk, Cormorant and Whitefish totems among the Northern Ojibway. Significantly, Warren also remarked that the Suckers and other Northern Ojibway clan groups migrated north and settled near the "Musk-keegoos," or "Swamp People."²⁹

The Suckers were reported to be the northernmost group of the Northern Ojibway. However, other animal-named groups were also identified by European fur traders. Duncan Cameron, a North West Company trader, who operated in the area near the headwaters of the Severn River in the early 19th century, noted other animal-named groups among the Northern Ojibway. In addition to the Suckers, Duncan Cameron enumerated eleven other "totems or tribes," who lived north of Lake Nipigon. His list included: Moose, Reindeer [Caribou], Bear, Pelican, Loon, Kingfisher, Eagle, Sturgeon,

²⁸Warren explained that the Ojibway were: "divided into several grand families or clans, each of which is known and perpetuated by a symbol of some bird, animal, fish, or reptile which they denominate the Totem or Do-daim (as the Ojibways pronounce it) and which is equivalent, in some respects, to the coat of arms of the European nobility" (Warren, 1984: 34-35).

²⁹Ibid: 33, 45.

Pike, Sucker, Barbue [Catfish] and Rattlesnake.³⁰

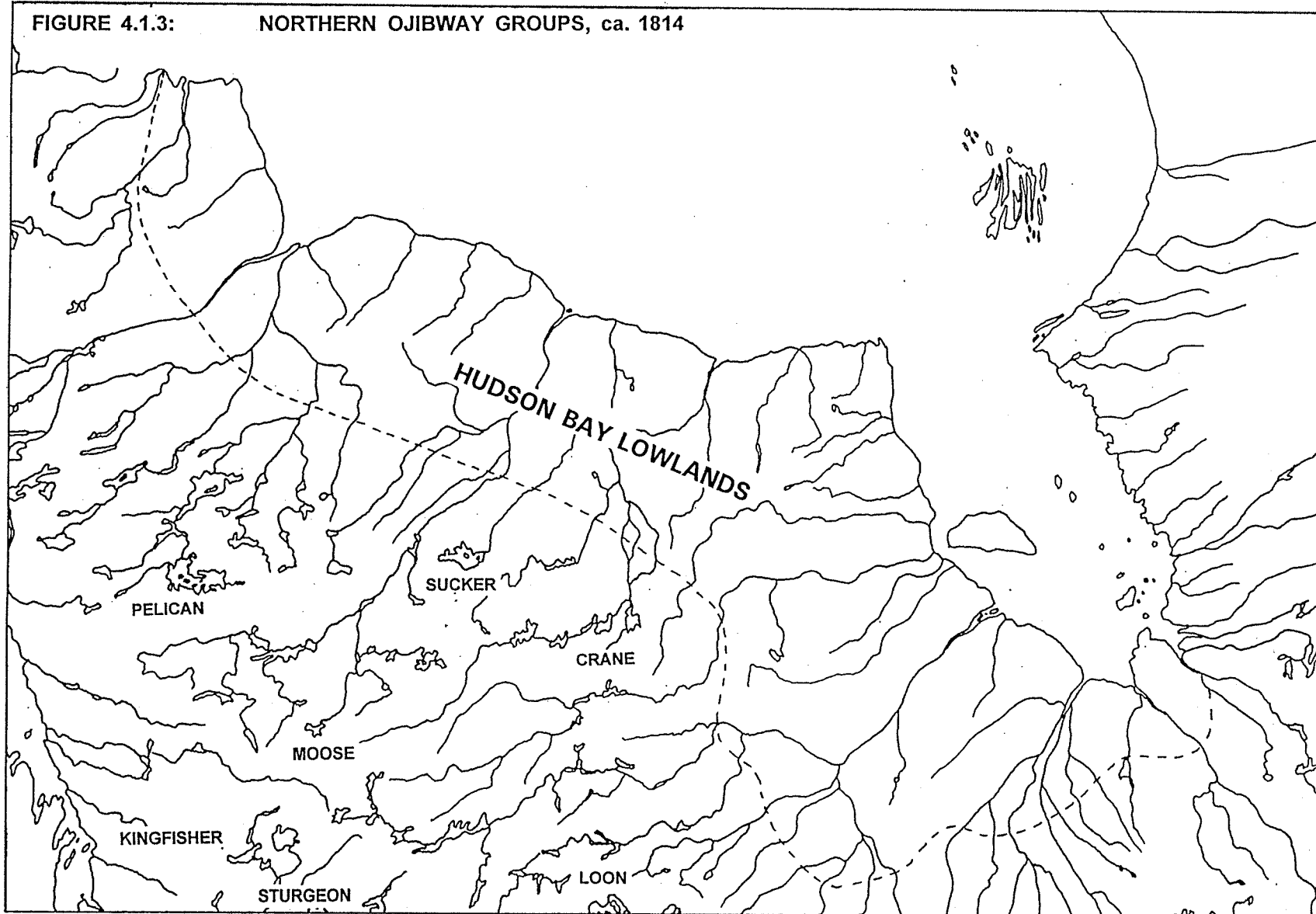
HBC inland traders also noted the significance of animal-named groups among the Northern Ojibway. According to David Sanderson, who was an experienced HBC inland fur trader, the "Succars tribe of Indians" lived in the area around the upper Berens and Poplar Rivers in 1797.³¹ In 1815, George Holdsworth, who was in charge of the HBC's post on the Berens River, observed that the Indian population was divided into four bands, or tribes. The Pelican, Moose and Sucker tribes occupied the area east of Lake Winnipeg and north of the Bloodvein River. The Kingfisher tribe lived in the area around the Bloodvein River. In 1814, William Thomas, who was in charge of Osnaburgh House, remarked that: "There are several different Tribes (as they are called) of Indians inhabiting the District viz: Cranes, Suckers, Loons, Moose, Sturgeons, Kingfishers and Pelicans."³² According to Thomas, the Suckers and Cranes were the northernmost groups, occupying the territory between Osnaburgh House and Trout Lake. The Loons hunted between Osnaburgh and Lake Nipigon, the Moose and Sturgeon groups lived to the southwest of the post, and the Kingfishers and Pelicans lived toward Lake Winnipeg. Figure 4.1.3 shows a schematic map of the locations of these groups.

³⁰Cameron, 1960, vol.2: 246. Alanson Skinner noted the following animal-named clans among the Northern Ojibway: "at Lac Seul, deer, moose, bear, beaver, pelican; at Osnaburgh, sturgeon, sucker, loon, caribou; and at Fort Hope, moose, sturgeon, loon, crow (raven?), goose, duck. The snake and kingfisher clans were also reported, and the Indians admitted there were more, the names of which they did not know" (Skinner, 1911: 150).

³¹HBCA, B.3/a/98, July 17, 1797, fo. 46.

³²HBCA, B.155/e/1, fo. 3d.

FIGURE 4.1.3: NORTHERN OJIBWAY GROUPS, ca. 1814



Farther west, the identification of animal-named groups among the Northern Ojibway was reported by other HBC traders. For example, in 1823, Joseph McGillivray, who was in charge of the Norway House District, enumerated four "tribes" who lived in the district, and identified the heads of families and the locations of their hunting grounds. The Lowland Cree were called "Maskegons or Swampies" by McGillivray, while the Northern Ojibway were divided into three animal-named groups called Pelican, Moose and King Fishers. Figure 4.1.4 displays the information provided in McGillivray's report.

Unlike the Northern Ojibway, animal-named groups among the Lowland Cree were rarely recorded by European fur traders. However, Alanson Skinner reported in 1911 that animal-named clan groups were formerly known among the Albany River Lowland Cree. Skinner noted that:

The clans once found among the Albany Cree, may have been derived from the Northern Sauteaux. The Albany natives remember the following totems, but there were many others which they could not recall: moose, caribou, fish, sucker, sturgeon, loon, and Hell-diver [cormorant]. The whale and seal were never known. Some of the old men are of opinion that in former times young men occasionally dreamed the clan to which they were to belong, as well as their personal guardians. Descent was in the father's line and there were no marriage restrictions.³³

The only reference in the fur trade records to an animal-named group among the Lowland Cree was a group called the "Jack [northern pike] Indians." The HBC traders at Albany Fort in the 1720s reported that the Jack Indians lived near the Severn River.

³³Skinner, 1911: 56.

FIGURE 4.1.4: LOWLAND CREE AND NORTHERN OJIBWAY GROUPS IN THE JACK RIVER DISTRICT, 1823

"Tribe"	Hunting Grounds	Heads of Families
Maskegon (or Swampies) [LOWLAND CREE]	Northside Lake Limestone Lake Cross Lake Jack Lake Jack River Little Winnipeg	Mistunnisk Uchegan Ku ku wa thinish Pah pethukes
Pelican [NORTHERN OJIBWAY]	Cross Lake Jack Lake Jack River Deers Lake Thunder Lake Winipeg Jack Head	Pakekan Namuch Keg Memechis Indian Legs Squirrel Bear Peritess Hepass Sloterry Little Swan
Moose [NORTHERN OJIBWAY]	Sandy Point Lake	White Coats Sturgeon
King Fishers [NORTHERN OJIBWAY]	Bad Lake	Sharp Eyes Arrow Legs
Source: HBCA, B.154/e/2, fos. 12d-14.		

However, the name Jack Indians fell into disuse, and the group was commonly known as the Severn or Seaside Indians after 1733.³⁴

While the initial migration of Northern Ojibway began before European fur trade settlements were established in the Hudson Bay Lowlands, it is clear that some Northern Ojibway continued to move north and west throughout the 18th century. The Northern Ojibway were first reported in the HBC records at York Factory in 1741. James Isham recorded the name "Bungee Indians" as one of the groups of Upland Indians who traded at York Factory in the summer of 1741.³⁵ Although Isham had carefully recorded the group names of Upland trading Indians since 1737, this was the first specific mention of Northern Ojibway at York Factory. Earlier HBC traders at York Factory who also recorded Upland Indian group names did not mention Bungee, Nakawawuck, Lake Indians or any other name that can be linked specifically to the Northern Ojibway.³⁶ After 1741, the Northern Ojibway were regularly reported at York Factory during the

³⁴The Jack Indians were first reported at Albany Fort on May 17, 1729 (HBCA, B.3/a/17, fo. 21). Joseph Adams, who was in charge of Albany Fort in 1730, noted that the Jack Indians came from the north (HBCA, B.3/a/18, June 19, 1730, fo. 18d). The leader of the Jack Indians was a man named "Putchekeechuck" (HBCA, B.3/a/19, June 3, 1731, fo. 20; B.3/a/21, May 14, 1733, fo. 17d). The name Jack Indians was not used by the HBC traders after 1733, but Putchekeechuck and his followers continued to trade at Albany Fort for many years under the name Severn or Seaside Indians.

³⁵HBCA, B.239/a/22, June 12, 1741, fo. 35d.

³⁶David Pentland made a linguistic connection between an Indian named "Ashkee Ethinu," who visited York Factory in 1719, and a Northern Ojibway named "Missinekegick" who lived in the Cumberland House area in 1774. Pentland remarked that: "It is thus possible that there had been Ojibwa speakers in the Cumberland House area for 50 years before they were first noticed by the traders" (Pentland, 1985: 158).

summer trading season. Given these facts, it is probable that the year 1741 marked the beginning of Northern Ojibway trade at York Factory, and it may have also indicated their recent arrival in the York Factory hinterland.

By 1749, James Isham had become more acquainted with the Northern Ojibway, and he observed that they lived in the area that: "Borders with the french at the Little sea [Lake Winnipeg]."³⁷ Between 1749 and 1782, it is apparent that some Northern Ojibway shifted their territorial range farther northward. An indication of this migration can be seen in the increasing involvement of the Northern Ojibway in the provision trade at York Factory and Severn House.³⁸ In 1769, Andrew Graham observed that: "we get provisions from the Nekawawuck or lake Indians, who are every now and then, summer and winter, coming in to trade furs."³⁹ The fact that Northern Ojibway visited the coastal trading posts in winter confirmed that their hunting grounds had shifted northward. In 1771, Graham commented that: "This game [caribou hunting] formerly was the business of the poor home-guard natives, but at present is the employment of above sixty families of lake Indians."⁴⁰ He explained that: "Since the year 1762 the

³⁷Isham, 1949: 112.

³⁸For example, on June 6, 1773, eight canoes of Northern Ojibway visited York Factory and traded 36 sturgeon (HBCA, B.239/a/68, fo. 41d). On May 26, 1774, seven canoes of Northern Ojibway traded 11 caribou, four caribou hearts and one sturgeon at York Factory (HBCA, B.239/a/70, fo. 35).

³⁹HBCA, E.2/4, fo. 81.

⁴⁰Graham, 1969: 280. In 1781, a group of Northern Ojibway in ten canoes traded over 300 caribou skins at York Factory (HBCA, B.239/a/79, July 8, 1781, fo. 43).

lake Indians have forsaken their rich hunting grounds and harboured about York Factory killing deer for brandy, which prevents them from getting up to the lakes before the frost sets in."⁴¹

By 1775, some Northern Ojibway who traded at York Factory had moved close enough to the coast to be considered local Indians. Ferdinand Jacobs reported on June 17, 1775, that: "7400 Beaver [made beaver] have been traded from the Bungees [Northern Ojibway], Port Nelson [Nelson River Cree] and home Indians [Lowland Cree], we having neither seen nor heard from any upland Indians."⁴² The northward movement of the Northern Ojibway in the vicinity of York Factory was noted by other HBC traders. In 1771, Andrew Graham observed that the Northern Ojibway "command all the lakes from York Fort rivers [Nelson and Hayes] down towards Canada; leaving the poor degenerated home-guards [Lowland Cree] scarcely room between them and the sea."⁴³ In 1775, Graham was more specific about the location of the Northern Ojibway, observing that: "These [Northern Ojibway] inhabit the Country from about an hundred miles from the sea-coast of Hudson's Bay south and easterly unto the great Lakes of Christinaux." Graham also remarked that: "It is my opinion that this [sic] people have drawn up to the Northward gradually as the Keiskatchewans [Cree] receded [sic] from

⁴¹Graham, 1969: 281. The northward shift of some Northern Ojibway in 1762 may have been in response to declining fur trade opportunities in the south as a result of the fall of New France to British forces in the early 1760s.

⁴²HBCA, B.239/a/71, fo. 30.

⁴³HBCA, E.2/7, fo. 17.

it towards the south-west."⁴⁴

Figure 4.1.5 is a copy of a map attributed to Graham in 1774, and it shows the location of the "Nekawawuck Indian Country" between Severn House and York Factory.⁴⁵ Although the Upland geography is distorted, the map clearly depicted the Northern Ojibway territory bisecting the Severn and Gods Rivers, and extending as far as the Hayes River about 150 miles upriver from the coast.

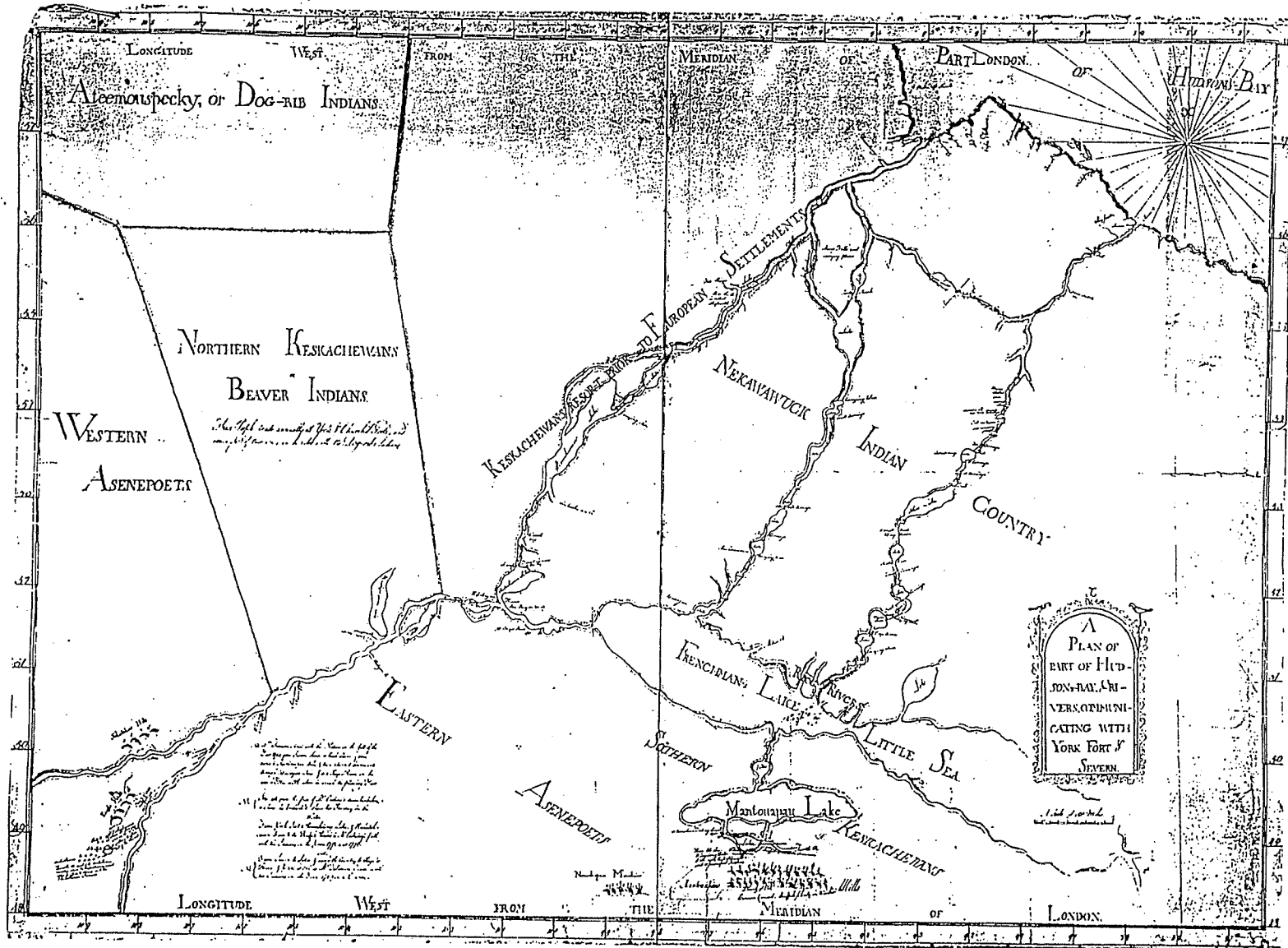
In 1775, Graham identified eight "tribes" or sub-groups within the Northern Ojibway population who traded at the HBC coastal posts. These groups are listed in figure 4.1.6, and their locations are shown on figure 4.1.7. As his map illustrated, Graham was only familiar with the Upland country through Indian reports and a few HBC inland travellers. The trading locations may have been added later by Richardson or others who were more familiar with the country.

By the time HBC fur traders established inland trading posts in the 1770s, the boundary between the Lowland Cree and Northern Ojibway followed roughly the boundary between the Hudson Bay Lowlands and Upland Shield region. In 1839, George Barnston described the boundary line between the Lowland Cree and the Northern Ojibway near Martins Fall as crossing the "Atawapiscut and Capusco Rivers somewhat obliquely, and

⁴⁴HBCA, E.2/9, fo. 83.

⁴⁵Ruggles, 1991: plate 6.

FIGURE 4.1.5: THE "NEKAWAWUCK INDIAN COUNTRY"



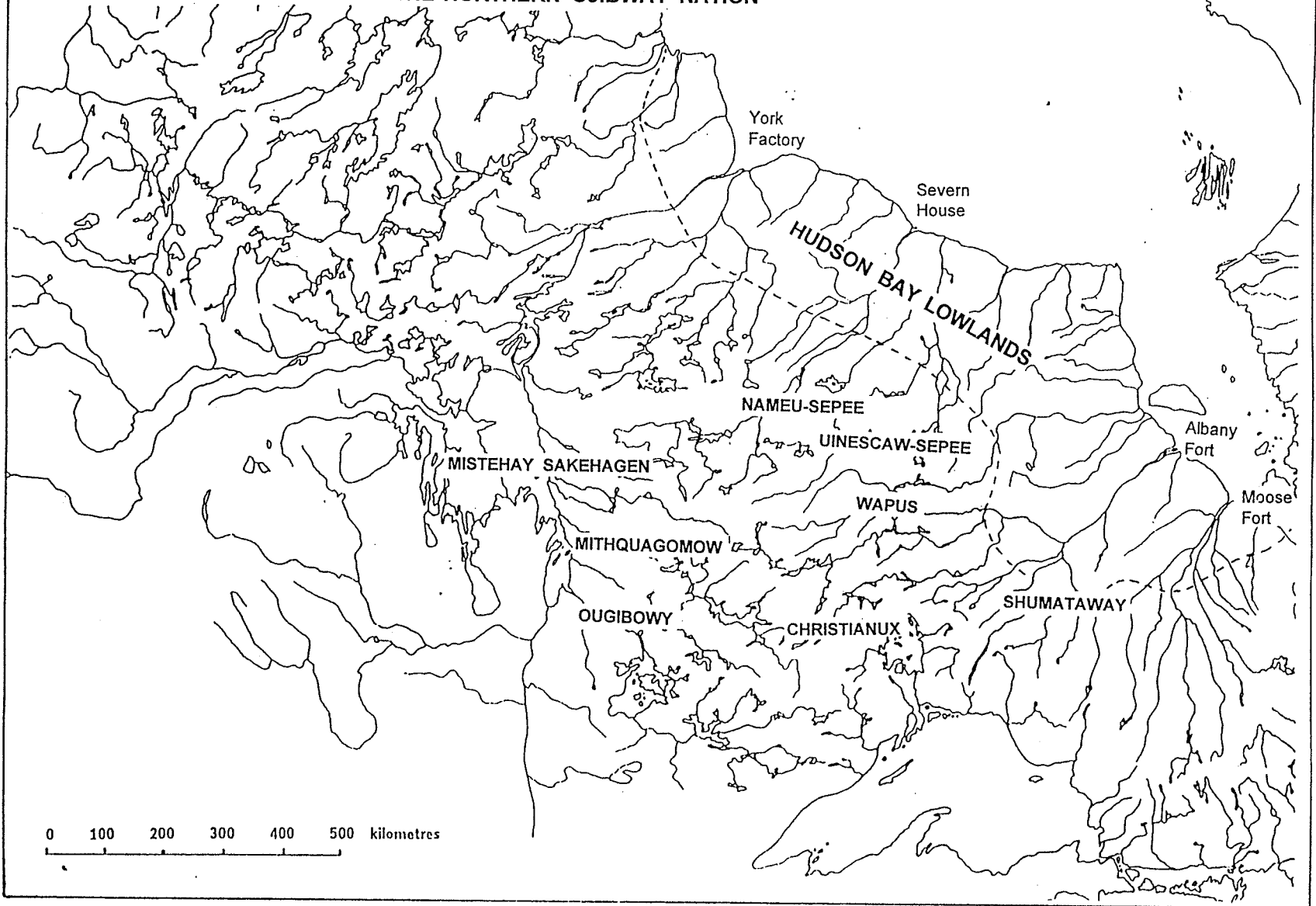
Source: Ruggles, 1991: plate 6

FIGURE 4.1.6: THE NAKAWAWUCK (NORTHERN OJIBWAY) NATION

Name of "Tribe"**	Territory**	Trading Location***
Shumataway	Henley House River+	AF, SH & YF
Mithquagomow	Red or Bloody River	AF
Ougibowoy	Winnipeg River	AF
Uinescaw-Sepee	Winisk River	SH & AF
Wapus	Hare River	SH & AF
Nameu-Sepee	Trout River	SH
Christianaux	Lake Winnipeg [Nipigon]	AF, MF & SH
Mistehay Sakahegan	Great Lake Winnipeg	YF, SH & AF

Sources: *Graham, 1969: 206
 **Richardson, 1969, vol. 2: 37.
 ***Graham, 1969: 206, and HBCA, E.2/9, fo 84; YF=York Factory, SH=Severn House, AF=Albany Fort, MF=Moose Fort
 +Shumataway may also refer to the Shamattawa River near York Factory

FIGURE 4.1.7: "TRIBES" OF THE NORTHERN OJIBWAY NATION



runs through swamps and forests."⁴⁶ The boundary between the Lowland Cree and Northern Ojibway was sharply defined in the area between the Hayes River and Gods River. The HBC report for the Island Lake District in 1827 noted the differences between the Lowland Cree who lived near Oxford House and the Northern Ojibway who lived near Gods Lake. In a reply to a Company directive to close one of the trading posts and make the two groups of Indians visit one post, the report stated that:

I am afraid not - they are not only distinct Tribes, but the Damn Algonquons [Northern Ojibway] have but an indifferent opinion of the Swampy Crees [Lowland Cree] of Oxford - while the latter profess an unutterable aversion to the hostile disposition of the former, which in my opinion is a pretty strong proof against an immediate union of these two tribes.⁴⁷

In 1824, Alexander Stewart who was in charge of the HBC's Island Lake trading post also noted the difference between the Lowland Cree who lived near Oxford House and the Northern Ojibway who lived in the vicinity of Island Lake and Red Sucker Lake. Stewart remarked that the Northern Ojibway were "good hunters, superstitious and very ignorant and some of them , particularly at the latter place [Red Sucker Lake], very quarrelsome not only with the traders but amongst themselves." In contrast, Stewart

⁴⁶HBCA, B.123/e/14, fo. 5. Alanson Skinner remarked that: "Between Agumiska [Akimiski Island] and York, the Ojibway, who originally dwelt inland along the north shore of Lake Superior, have worked northward to the headwaters of the Attawapiscat River in pursuit of furs, since the advent of the Hudson's Bay Company, forming a northern wedge, as it were, projecting into the Cree domains" (Skinner, 1911: 11).

⁴⁷HBCA, B.283/e/1, fo. 4. As early as 1800, William Sinclair, who was in charge of Oxford House, reported that the local Lowland Cree were afraid to travel into the neighbouring "Bungee Country" (HBCA, B.239/b/66, February 29, 1800, fo. 106).

depicted the Lowland Cree as "industrious and much more civilized than the above [Northern Ojibway]." ⁴⁸ Stewart attributed the milder disposition of the Lowland Cree to their long association with HBC traders. ⁴⁹

In many other areas the interface between the Lowland Cree and Northern Ojibway resulted in considerable overlaps in the territory occupied by the two groups. For example, figure 4.1.4 shows that there was a considerable overlap in the territory occupied by the Lowland Cree and the Pelican clan group of Northern Ojibway near Norway House in 1823.

By the early 1800s, many European fur traders noted a mixed Cree-Ojibway dialect that was spoken by Indians who lived in territories shared by Lowland Cree and Northern Ojibway. In 1804, Duncan Cameron, a North West Company fur trader, observed that the Indians who lived in the Severn River basin near the edge of the Lowlands spoke a language that was: "a mixture of the Ojiboiay, or Chippeway as some call it, spoken at Lake Superior and the Cree or Masquigon spoken at Hudson's Bay." ⁵⁰ Cameron believed that the unique language was a result of several generations of intermarriage and

⁴⁸HBCA, B.93/e/3, fo. 3.

⁴⁹The characterization of the Lowland Cree as timid and the Northern Ojibway as aggressive was common in the HBC records in the 19th century. For example, in 1825, Alexander Stewart, who was in charge of Island Lake House, remarked that the Northern Ojibway who lived near Red Sucker Lake were "turbulent and quarrelsome" (HBCA, B.93/e/4, fo. 1). In 1827, at Oxford House, the Lowland Cree were described as acting with "timidness" whenever they met with Northern Ojibway (HBCA, B.283/e/1, fo. 4d).

⁵⁰Cameron, 1960, vol. 2: 241.

mixing between the Ojibway and Cree people. He explained that: "Every old man with whom I conversed, and from whom I made some enquiry on this subject, told me that his father or grand father was from either of these two places [Lake Superior or Hudson Bay]."⁵¹ In 1839, George Barnston noted that the mixing of Lowland Cree and Northern Ojibway near Martins Fall had "produced a Half Cree, Half Sauteux Breed, affecting the Language and Character in no slight degree."⁵²

The HBC traders referred to some Indians as "half-Bungee," suggesting that marriages occurred between Lowland Cree and Northern Ojibway.⁵³ The half-Bungee population in the hinterland of York Factory appears to have grown after the 1782-83 smallpox epidemic. In the summer of 1792, Joseph Colen noted the arrival of several large groups of "half-Bungees." One group came to the factory in ten canoes and two other groups arrived in six canoes each.⁵⁴ In 1929 the term Bungee was used to describe people of

⁵¹Ibid: 242.

⁵²HBCA, B.123/e/14, fo.4.

⁵³The first reference to the term "half-Bungee" was made by Joseph Colen at York Factory, on August 16, 1786 (HBCA, B.239/a/86, fo. 56d).

⁵⁴HBCA, B.239/a/92, June 9, 1792, fo. 33; June 17, 1792, fo. 34; August 22, 1792, fo. 47. Tension between the Lowland Cree and Northern Ojibway persisted despite the close links that developed between the two groups. For example, a man named Chucky who was murdered by a Lowland Cree near Severn House in the fall of 1774 was described as: "a stout man, of about 24 years of age, of upland extraction, and always hated by the low country natives, tho' apparently not ill-natured, he was the best goose hunter belonging to this place" (HBCA, B.198/a/19, October 2, 1774, fo. 8d). Chucky, who was probably a Northern Ojibway, had married a Lowland Cree woman and resided among his wife's family near the coast. He was murdered by his wife's uncle.

mixed Lowland Cree and Northern Ojibway ancestry who lived near Big Trout Lake located on the margins of the Hudson Bay Lowlands. Sydney Keighley, who worked for the HBC at the Big Trout Lake post, remarked that: "The native people were a mixture of groups. There were some Cree, some Ojibway and some were called Bungee. I believe this last group should properly be called Sauteaux. They were a mixture of Cree and Ojibway, and had developed a language using both parts of the parent languages."⁵⁵

In 1852, Peter Jacobs, a travelling missionary, visited the Rossville Mission near Norway House and commented on the mixed language spoken by the local Indians. Jacobs stated that: "I am not a competent judge of this mixed language of Ojibway, Cree, and Swampy. The Cree and Swampy are nearer kin to each other than either to the noble and majestic Ojibway."⁵⁶ In 1831, John McLean made a similar assessment of the mixed language spoken by the Indians who lived near Norway House. McLean noted that: "they speak a jargon of Cree and Sauteux, which sounds very harshly."⁵⁷

⁵⁵Keighley, *et al.*, 1989: 122. Keighley later revised his assessment of the identity of the people who were known as the Bungee when he visited the HBC post called Big Beaver House on the Winisk River, located about 100 miles south of Big Trout Lake. Keighley wrote that: "The natives here we called simply the eastern tribe. Later I came to identify these people as the Bungee. Their ways were very different from the Big Trout people, who looked down on them because of some of their customs" (*Ibid*: 126).

⁵⁶Jacobs, 1858: 46.

⁵⁷McLean, 1932: 132. The mixing of Lowland Cree and Northern Ojibway extended to the area north of Lake Superior near Michipicoten. In 1830, George Keith, who was in charge of the HBC post at Michipicoten, remarked that: "There does not exist a doubt that the majority [of the Indian population] derive their origin from the Ojhibeway or Sauteau Tribe, altho' a number of them are descended from the Maskegon or Swampy Cree Tribe" (HBCA, B.129/e/7, fo. 3).

The mixing of Lowland Cree and Northern Ojibway was also noted among other groups of Indians who lived near the edge of the Hudson Bay Lowlands. In 1886, A.P. Low visited Trout Lake, and he noted that: "These Indians speak a language made up chiefly of Cree words, with a mixture of the Sauteaux dialects."⁵⁸ W. McInnes, who conducted a geological survey in the area around the headwaters of the Winisk and Attawapiskat Rivers, reported that: "They are of the Ojibway tribe, though mixed to a certain extent with the Cree of Hudson Bay basin, the purest Ojibway stock being found among the bands about the heads of the rivers. They seem to be men of larger frame than the Crees of the coast."⁵⁹ J.C. Boileau Grant, who visited Island Lake in 1929 reported that the language spoken was a mixture of Lowland Cree and Northern Ojibway. Grant noted that: "Father Du Beau of the Roman Catholic mission at Island Lake, a very good linguist, tells me that the language spoken around the part of Island Lake at which he is stationed is a mixture of Sauteaux and Cree; some words being Sauteaux, others being Cree; compound words being in many cases hybrids of the two."⁶⁰

⁵⁸Low, 1887: 13F.

⁵⁹McInnes, 1909: 47.

⁶⁰Grant, 1929: 1. Irving Hallowell visited Island Lake in the summer of 1930, and noted the influence of the Lowland Cree language on the speech of the Northern Ojibway who lived at Island Lake. Hallowell remarked that: "Linguistically, the Island Lake natives may be characterized by calling them Sauteaux or, better perhaps, Sauteaux-Ojibwa, indicating more clearly by this hyphenated term the close relationship of their language to Ojibwa proper. Locally, they are said to speak a mixed dialect of Sauteaux and Cree....The linguistic base at Island Lake may very well be Sauteaux-Ojibwa with an overlay of Cree due to modern conditions. On the other hand, it is not impossible that a much older contact with Cree-speaking peoples has affected the language much more deeply than a superficial inspection would indicate, since the Sauteaux of this region may have been marginal to Cree bands for a considerable period, because to the south and east we find only Sauteaux spoken today (Hallowell, 1938: 131-132).

The mixed Lowland Cree and Northern Ojibway speech noted by fur traders and other observers in the 18th and 19th centuries has been the subject of several recent linguistic studies. Evelyn Todd conducted linguistic studies among Indian communities in the upper Severn River basin in the 1960s, and explained that "Native speakers, who do not differentiate between language and dialect, refer to their language as anihsinapemowin 'language of the Indians', and describe it as a mixture of Cree and Sauteaux."⁶¹ Todd concluded that the language was "definitely Ojibwa," and called it the Severn Ojibwa dialect. She noted that a number of Lowland Cree lived among the Severn Ojibwa communities, but "few of the dialect features of Severn Ojibwa can be directly attributed to the influence of Cree."⁶² S.M. Shrofel and H.C. Wolfart studied the Severn Ojibwa dialect spoken by people at Island Lake, and they concluded that it is "a dialect of Ojibwa with an admixture of Cree."⁶³ They agreed with Todd's assessment that: "the interference of Cree is not very prominent in the verbal morphology."⁶⁴

Todd, Shrofel and Wolfart also agreed that the Severn Ojibwa dialect was distinct from the Ojibway dialect spoken at Berens River and points farther south. Wolfart believed that the differences could be attributed to the migration routes followed by the two

⁶¹Todd, 1971: 1.

⁶²Ibid: 265. H.C. Wolfart came to the same general conclusions in his study of the Severn dialect among the Indian people who lived in the area around Island Lake (Wolfart, 1973: 1317).

⁶³Shrofel and Wolfart, 1977: 164.

⁶⁴Ibid: 164.

groups. He suggested that the Ojibway living at Berens River and south along the east coast of Lake Winnipeg were more closely connected to the dialect spoken by the Ojibway in the Lake of the Woods and Rainy River region.⁶⁵ In the 1930s, Irving Hallowell traced the genealogies of the Ojibway who lived at the mouth of the Berens River and found that migration to the area had occurred from all directions except the north.⁶⁶ The Island Lake Ojibway traced their immediate origins to the upper Severn River area. This northern migration route was noted as early as 1815 by James Sutherland, the HBC trader who was in charge of Norway House.⁶⁷ This two-pronged migration of the Northern Ojibway can also be deduced from cultural traits that differ between the people who occupied the upper Severn River area and those who lived along the Berens River. Edward Rogers noted that: "Cultural traits generally graded imperceptibly into one another [Northern Ojibway groups] throughout the region. One partial exception is between the Indians of the Deer Lake area [upper Severn River] and those of Pikangikum [upper Berens River]. Between the two runs a southeast-northwest line above which are the Northern Ojibwa who lack clan names, Midewiwin, and the sucking tube, traits found among the Indians below the line."⁶⁸

The migration of the Northern Ojibway north of Lake Superior probably followed the

⁶⁵Wolfart, 1973: 1318.

⁶⁶Hallowell, 1992: 22.

⁶⁷HBCA, B.154/e/1, fo. 5d.

⁶⁸Rogers, 1983: 90.

transportation routes that were later used by European fur traders who settled in the Little North.⁶⁹ Some Ojibway probably followed the most direct route connecting Lake Superior and Lake Winnipeg. Other groups of Ojibway entered the region from the Lake Nipigon basin. Some ventured westward toward Lake Winnipeg, while others moved northward to the edge of the Hudson Bay Lowlands. A schematic representation of the changing territorial distribution of the Lowland Cree and their neighbours is depicted in figure 4.1.1.

4.2 The Upland Cree:

By the time HBC traders established inland trading posts in the 1770s, the Upland Cree were neighbours of the Lowland Cree along only a fairly narrow border in the northwest. Andrew Graham's observations indicated that the territorial interface between the Lowland Cree and Upland Cree groups was limited to the Hayes, Nelson and Churchill Rivers. According to Graham the Upland Cree groups who lived adjacent to the Lowland Cree included the Pimmechikemow, Poethinecaw, Missinepee and possibly the Wenunnetowuck (see figure 2.5.2).

⁶⁹See, for example, Lytwyn, 1987: plate 63.

As discussed above, the Upland Cree appear to have occupied a larger territory to the east of Lake Winnipeg prior to the migration of the Northern Ojibway into that area. This is consistent with Upland Cree oral traditions. For example, in the winter of 1787-88 David Thompson interviewed an Upland Cree elder named Saukamappee who related accounts of the westward migration of his people. Saukamappee, who was about 90 years old, was born near the confluence of the Saskatchewan and Pasquia Rivers (near The Pas, Manitoba), which he described as: "my native country and of my fathers for many years."⁷⁰ Saukamappee recalled that his people moved up the Saskatchewan River and settled beyond the Eagle Hills because they were pushed away from their homelands by people who came from east of Lake Winnipeg.⁷¹

Later fur trade accounts indicated that the westward migration of Indian people continued in the early 19th century. In 1815, James Sutherland, who was in charge of the HBC post at the mouth of the Jack River (later named Norway House), reported that: "The original inhabitants of this place seem to have all emigrated to the westward."⁷² This is consistent with the information collected by George Holdsworth who was stationed at Berens River in 1815. Holdsworth reflected on the westward migration of the Indians who had formerly lived east of Lake Winnipeg:

It is probable that these tribes were formerly confined to the East side of Lake Winipic, but from the difficulty of procuring subsistence occasioned

⁷⁰Thompson, 1916: 48-49.

⁷¹Ibid: 49.

⁷²HBCA, B.154/e/1, fo. 5d.

by the diminution of animals, there appears to have been a general migration to the westward, one tribe displacing or rather driving back other tribes till at length a greater part are now found to the westward of it whilst the original inhabitants of the westward are driven still farther into the interior.⁷³

Relations between the Lowland Cree and their adjacent Upland Cree neighbours were generally amicable. However, the fur traders noted that the Upland Cree who lived farther away often extorted food and other goods from the Lowland Cree when they met near the trading posts. The far away Upland Cree and other Upland Indians usually travelled into the Lowlands to trade at the coastal posts in large flottilas of canoes. These large groups were able to intimidate the Lowland Cree, and the HBC traders often noted that the Lowland Cree stayed away from the posts during the summer trading season to avoid contacts with the Upland Indians

The Upland Cree who came down to the coastal trading posts in the summer were occasionally aggressive in their behaviour with the Lowland Cree. For example, in the summer of 1716 parties of Upland Indians, who had arrived at York Factory to find that the annual supply ship from England had failed to arrive, robbed Lowland Cree of goods and food. Even the Captain of the Lowland Cree was victimized by these marauders. James Knight reported on August 1, 1716, that: "the Captain of this River and his Gang arrived to Day but they mett with about 40 of the Upland Indians that Plundered him and

⁷³HBCA, B.16/e/1, fo. 6d.

took away all there Victualls."⁷⁴ Later that month, the Captain paid Knight another visit and indicated that the failure of the HBC supply ship had caused extraordinary suffering, and he warned Knight about a possible attack on the factory by the Upland Indians. Knight reported that: "came in the Captain of this River in very bad humour and told me that all the Indians were very much exasperated against us for their Disappointment of a Supply of Goods after such a fatigue in coming so farr for it and not having any and withall he told me he would be gon [sic] from the factory for he desires not stay any longer for he believes the Indians would come and attempt to do us a Mischief that cuts us of that they shall never be no more disappointed in their coming down as they have been Both by the french and us and withall cautioned me not to send any Man abroad."⁷⁵ A similar incident occurred near Albany Fort in the summer of 1729. On that occasion, a group of Upland Indians (probably Northern Ojibway) were caught unprepared by a storm that swept through the area, and they took some tents away from the Lowland Cree who were camped nearby. Joseph Myatt, who was in charge of Albany Fort, let the Lowland Cree into the fort while the Upland Indians took shelter in their tents. Although Myatt considered this action by the Upland Indians as a slight against the Lowland Cree, it may have been a mutually acceptable course of action because the Lowland Cree understood that they could seek refuge within the HBC fort.

James Knight observed that the Upland Indians often bullied the Lowland Cree near York

⁷⁴HBCA, B.239/a/2, fo. 50.

⁷⁵HBCA, B.239/a/2, August 22, 1716, fo. 54d-55.

Factory. On May 11, 1716, Knight observed that some of the Lowland Cree moved away from York Factory because they feared that the Upland Indians would try to take away their goods because the HBC had few items remaining in their store.⁷⁶ In the summer of 1717, a group of Upland Indians led by "Old Caesar" acted aggressively against the Lowland Cree who were near York Factory. James Knight commented that: "they are very rude amongst our Indians here takeing away their wives and daughters by force and lyes with them and these poor fellows [Lowland Indians] are so fearfull as they darst not offer to hinder them."⁷⁷

The Lowland Cree usually kept clear of York Factory for fear of being molested by the Upland Indians. This was especially the case when large groups of Upland Indians came to trade. The Lowland Cree were knowledgable about the usual travel times of the Upland Indians, and stayed clear of the Hayes and Nelson Rivers during the peak trading period. For example, John Newton, who was in charge of York Factory in the summer of 1749, observed that:

Sent ye Longboat over to the French Creek, brought 3 familys of Indians who intend for the N. [Nelson] River, but they as well as those who came before, are afraid to goe till ye great gang of trading Indians that comes

⁷⁶HBCA, B.239/a/2, fo. 31.

⁷⁷HBCA, B.239/a/3, May 19, 1717, fo. 49. This incident may have been exaggerated by Knight, who was relatively unfamiliar with these Indians. The sexual conduct of the Indian people was misunderstood by Knight and other Europeans. Several years later, Knight reported that some Upland Indians who visited York Factory "offered to prostitute their wives, they being in so great want of food" (HBCA, B.239/a/5, June 14, 1719, fo. 52d).

down that River have been here and gone again.⁷⁸

In 1786, Humphrey Marten noted that the Upland Cree who lived in the upper Nelson River area were accustomed to robbing the Lowland Cree of their goods. Marten observed that:

[T]he North river Indians did not chuse to trade, while they stayed; consequently, they were disappointed in the rich harvest, they hoped to obtain, by plundering (in their usual unmerciful manner) the home Indians, who dare not refuse them, what goods they take a fancy to.⁷⁹

At Severn House, the HBC traders noted that the Lowland Cree feared the Uplanders, and avoided contact as much as possible. In 1783, William Falconer remarked that: "they [Lowland Cree] being afraid of the Uplanders, as I have seen during my stay here, when only one canoe of Uplanders come down, the very sight of them drove every one of these Homeguards away."⁸⁰ The HBC traders at Severn House sometimes helped the Lowland Cree move away from the post before the Upland Indians arrived. For example, on May 28, 1762, Andrew Graham employed the Company's boats to transport the Lowland Cree across the river. Graham observed that he had taken this action so that the Lowland Cree would be "out of the way of the trading Indians."⁸¹ The Upland Indians who traded at Severn House acted in a belligerent way to the HBC men as well

⁷⁸HBCA, B.239/a/32, June 25, 1749, fo. 34d.

⁷⁹HBCA, B.239/a/86, May 31, 1786, fo. 38.

⁸⁰HBCA, B.198/a/28, August 19, 1783, fo. 26d.

⁸¹HBCA, B.198/a/3, fo. 33.

as the Lowland Cree. In 1760, Humphrey Marten was forced to arm his men in order to get some "saucy" Upland Indians out of the house.⁸²

Although incidents of harassment and robbery were fairly common when Upland Indians met the Lowland Cree, violent encounters were rarely reported by the HBC men. On these occasions, it is evident that alcohol was a factor in motivating such attacks. For example, in the summer of 1774, several groups of Northern Ojibway traded at Severn House. Andrew Graham remarked that trading was interspersed with drinking brandy. On June 11, 1774, Graham reported that a quarrel had erupted during the previous night, and a Lowland Cree was stabbed to death by one of the Northern Ojibway.

The Albany River Lowland Cree appear to have been more at ease with the Upland Indians. For example, in the summer of 1725, Richard Staunton complained that the Lowland Cree were very troublesome because they waited near the fort to drink brandy that they received from Upland Indians.⁸³ Some Albany River Lowland Cree acted very aggressively against the Upland Indians who came to trade at Albany Fort. An Albany River Lowland Cree leader named Wappisiss or Woudbe was noted for intimidating the Upland Indians and extorting furs and other goods.⁸⁴ Because of his behaviour,

⁸²HBCA, B.198/a/2, September 22, 1760, fo. 42d.

⁸³HBCA, B.3/a/13, June 3, 1725, fo. 29.

⁸⁴HBCA, B.3/a/47, fo. 1d. Woudbe was a captain of the Albany River Homeguard Cree. In 1755 he was involved in the murders of HBC men at Henley House. George Rushworth, who was stationed at Albany Fort, remarked that Woudbe "paid his debts by robbing the upland Indians of there goods which I have seen him do it" (HBCA, A.11/2,

Woudbe was also called the "Land Pirate" by the HBC traders.⁸⁵

4.3 The Eastmain Cree:

The eastern neighbours of the Lowland Cree were called Oupeshou, or Eastmain Cree.⁸⁶ The Nottaway River marked the approximate boundary between the Lowland Cree and the Eastmain Cree (see figure 4.3.1). Although the dialect spoken by the Eastmain Cree was derived from the same basic language (Algonquian), it was noticeably different from the speech of the Lowland Cree. Richard Preston observed that the Lowland Cree "cannot follow a conversation in the East Main language at all."⁸⁷ Graham noted that the language spoken by the Eastmain Cree "differs in some few words

September 8, 1755, fo. 173).

⁸⁵HBCA, B.3/d/55, fo. 12.

⁸⁶Graham, 1969: 207. Pentland explained that the name "Oupeshou" was probably derived from a term meaning "one who uses a [fish] weir" (Pentland, 1981c: 205). Modern, English-speaking scholars have commonly used the term East Main Cree, despite acknowledging that their language is more closely related to that spoken by Naskapi and Montagnais Indians to the east and south (Rhodes and Todd, 1981: 55).

⁸⁷Preston, 1981: 196. Truman Michelson conducted linguistic studies among the communities on the west and east coasts of James Bay, and he stated that: "Rupert's House Cree and East Main Cree are really not Cree at all, but Montagnais-Nascapi dialects" (Michelson, 1936: 75).

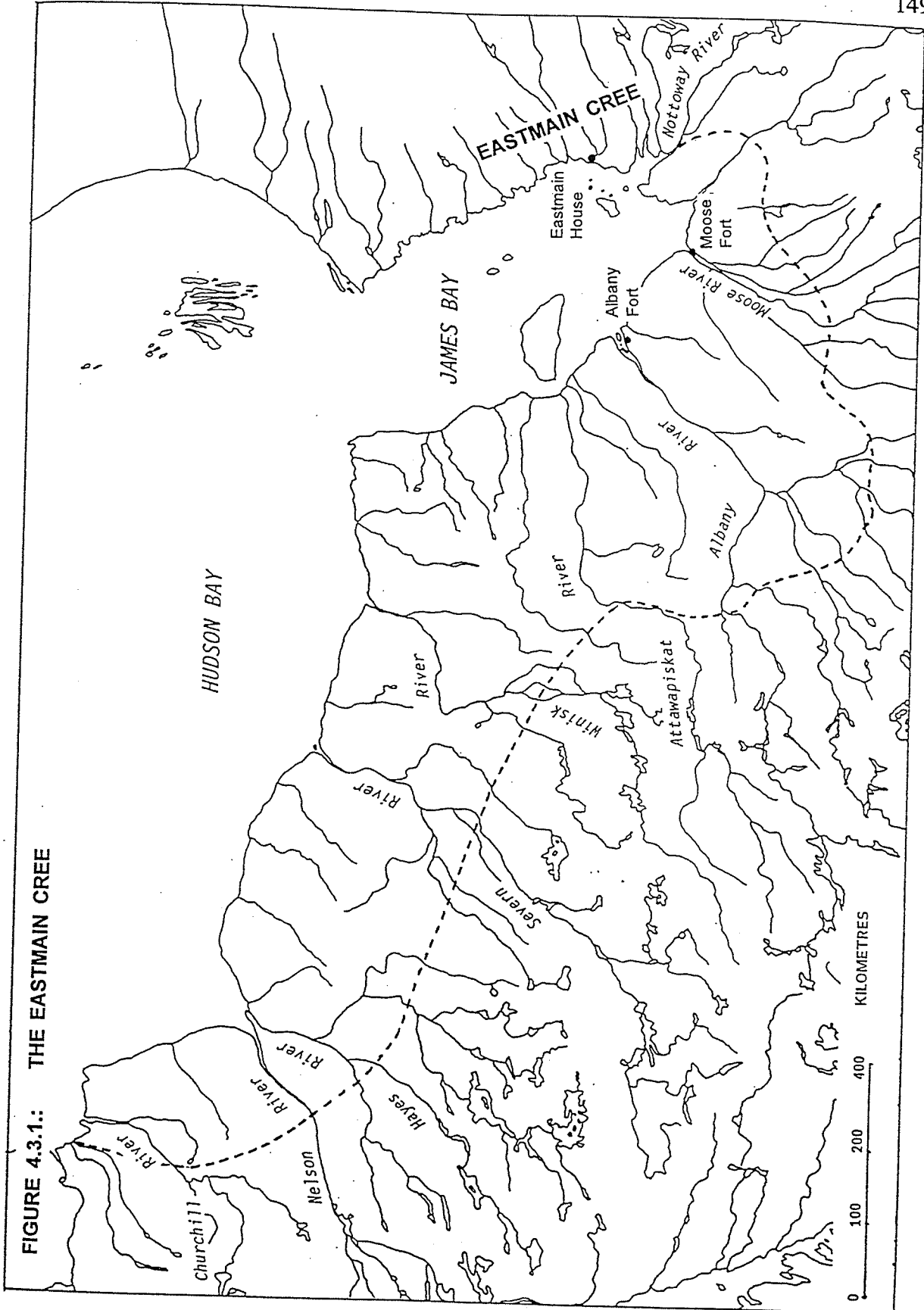


FIGURE 4.3.1.: THE EASTMAIN CREE

and in the pronunciation."⁸⁸

According to Graham, the group of Eastmain Cree who lived near East Main House were called "Uinnepiskowuck."⁸⁹ The Eastmain Cree did not interact much with the Lowland Cree. The Moose River Lowland Cree occasionally visited East Main House to trade with the HBC, but they did not have close ties with the Eastmain Cree. Morantz noted that the Moose River Lowland Cree often bullied the local Indians whom they met near East Main House. One Moose River Cree extorted payment from the Eastmain Cree for protecting them from being killed by other Indians. Morantz quoted a HBC trader at East Main House who stated in 1792 that the Eastmain Cree were "naturally timid [therefore] they are soon imposed upon."⁹⁰

Albany and Moose River Lowland Cree often passed through the territory of the Eastmain Cree during the summer on route to war against the Inuit who lived on the eastern coast of Hudson Bay. During these forays, the Albany and Moose River

⁸⁸Graham, 1969: 204. Richard Preston observed that there was a significant dialect difference between the Eastmain Cree and other Cree speakers. He noted that: "speakers of dialects of Cree proper cannot follow a conversation in the East Main language at all" (Preston, 1981: 196).

⁸⁹Graham, 1969: 207. According to Pentland, the name "Uinnepiskowuck" was synonymous with the eastern coast of Hudson Bay (Pentland, 1981c: 205). It was similar to the term "Winnepeg" that was used to describe the Indians who lived near the western coast of Hudson Bay.

⁹⁰Morantz, 1983: 54.

Lowland Cree were unopposed by the Eastmain Cree.⁹¹ Not only did the Eastmain Cree not get involved in these raids against the Inuit, they were occasionally the targets of frustrated warriors. For example, in the summer of 1738, a war party of Lowland Cree warriors killed three or four families of Eastmain Cree after failing to find their intended Inuit victims.⁹² The killing of Eastmain Cree instead of Inuit was a common occurrence according to the testimony of East Main Indians who told HBC traders in 1755 that:

[I]ts Common for ye Albany and Moose River Indians when they cannot find the Eusquamays they kill Our Indians, for their Scalps and Makes their country Men Believe there Scalps is Eusquamays. Robinson Crouseo [an East Main Indian] tells me that his Brother and 3 More was kill'd by the Albany and Moose River Indians about 12 years ago and scalp'd.⁹³

The Eastmain Cree did not attempt to rebuff the aggressive behaviour of the Lowland Cree. On the other hand, the Lowland Cree were not interested in territorial expansion or gaining access to resources in the East Main territory. Although they were relatively close neighbours, relations between the Lowland Cree and the Eastmain Cree remained distant during the fur trade period. The Aboriginal fur trade which focused on James Bay from rivers draining into the bay from west and east, probably promoted closer ties between the Lowland Cree and Eastmain Cree in the pre-European fur trade period.

⁹¹Morantz noted that: "Interestingly, eastern James Bay Indians are never reported to have participated in these forays" (*Ibid*: 34). Morantz and Francis observed that: "For some reason more easterly Indians from the east coast did not participate" (Francis and Morantz, 1983: 76).

⁹²HBCA, B.3/a/28, July 3, 1739, fo. 4.

⁹³HBCA, B.182/a/7, fo. 43 (quoted in Francis and Morantz, 1983: 77). This incident probably refers to the 1738 raid noted above.

After European fur trade posts were built in the region, the fur trade orientation was focused away from the bay, and thus weakened earlier linkages that may have supported a closer relationship between the two groups in aboriginal times. The Europeans split the bayside trade into two largely autonomous administrative units. As a result, there was little interaction between the Lowland Cree and Eastmain Cree during the European fur trade period.

CHAPTER 5: DISTANT ENEMIES: THE INUIT, CHIPEWYAN AND IROQUOIS:

5.1 The Inuit:

When European fur trade posts were established on the coast of Hudson and James Bay, the Lowland Cree were actively engaged in warfare with the Inuit who lived in the northern areas, on both the western and eastern coasts of Hudson Bay. Warfare patterns described by early European observers suggest that hostility between the Inuit and the Lowland Cree pre-dated European contact, and involved reciprocal revenge raiding into each other's territory. However, Inuit raids into Lowland Cree territory ceased soon after European fur trade posts were established. On the other hand, the Lowland Cree continued to raid into Inuit territory long after European fur posts were established.

The success of the Lowland Cree in their warfare against the Inuit was attributed by many European observers to their early acquisition of firearms and other European weapons such as knives and bayonets. The view that European arms were superior to Aboriginal weapons has been disputed recently by several scholars. Joan Townsend's comparative study of the effect of European and Aboriginal weapons in Alaska concluded

that European firearms were not superior to the pre-existing technology.¹ She argued that European firearms provided neither technical or tactical advantages in early warfare.

In order to accept Townsend's theory, one must assume that the Europeans who visited the Hudson Bay trading posts must have consistently exaggerated the impact of European firearms in the warfare between the Lowland Cree and the Inuit. However, the evidence clearly shows a correlation between the acquisition of European weapons by the Lowland Cree and their success in war against the Inuit. Shortly after the establishment of fur trade posts within the Lowland Cree territory, the Inuit on both coasts of Hudson Bay responded by shifting their territorial range farther northward.

Lowland Cree raiding parties travelled hundreds of kilometres to reach the Inuit. Generally, men were involved in the warfare, but some accounts indicate that women and entire families occasionally accompanied the warriors. They travelled in small canoes, ranging in number from several to several dozen. War parties were mobilized in early summer, usually after the spring goose hunt, and returned in late summer, generally in time for the fall goose hunt. The warfare was characterized by surprise attacks on small Inuit camps. The objective was to kill adult males and the elderly, and to take young women and children captives.

The cause of the warfare between the Lowland Cree and the Inuit has perplexed scholars

¹Townsend, 1983.

who have recently studied this subject. Territorial expansion for economic or other reasons can be ruled out because the Lowland Cree did not occupy Inuit territory, nor did they use these areas for hunting or other purposes. On the east coast of Hudson Bay, the East Main Indians occupied the territory between the Inuit and the Lowland Cree. These Eastmain Indians were neutral in the Lowland Cree warfare against the Inuit, and the Lowland Cree displayed no desire to occupy or use the territory along the east coast of James Bay.

Andrew Graham commented that: "Revenge, jealousy, animosities, death of one of the family, or even the indulgence of an inhuman levity, are sufficient for a hostile expedition."² Daniel Francis's study of the Lowland Cree-Inuit warfare on the eastern coast of Hudson Bay concluded that warfare was "motivated by a complex of psychological and cultural needs."³ Francis pointed to a number of explanations for this warfare that were given by contemporary European observers. These included the Lowland Cree belief that the Inuit possessed magical powers that caused shortage of game, sickness and death among their ranks.⁴ Another factor was prestige for Lowland

²Graham, 1969: 172.

³Francis, 1979: 73.

⁴Ibid: 76. This explanation was common among other Indian groups over a wide area. The Chipewyan Indians attributed sickness and death to the magical powers of their enemies. Samuel Hearne, reported that: "When any of the principle Northern Indians [Chipewyan] die, it is generally believed that they are conjured to death, either by some of their own countrymen, by some of the southern Indians [Lowland and Upland Cree], or by some of the Esquimaux" (Hearne, 1958: 216-17).

Cree men, who gained warrior status by participating in these raids.⁵ The taking of Inuit captives, especially children and young women suggests that the warfare satisfied other needs. Some Europeans noted that gifts of Inuit captives to southern Indian groups such as the Ottawa cemented alliances and prevented outbreaks of warfare between the Lowland Cree and their southern neighbours.⁶ Sales or gifts of Inuit captives to the HBC, although portrayed by the latter as motivated by Indian economic gains and Company compassion for the Inuit "slaves," may have also been linked to alliances between the Lowland Cree and the HBC.

Another factor suggested by Francis, and supported by historical accounts, was revenge for former Inuit attacks against the Lowland Cree.⁷ Although no Inuit raids into Lowland Cree territory were recorded by European observers, there is sufficient evidence from Indian accounts that point to aggressive Inuit warfare against the Lowland Cree prior to European contact. It is possible that revenge continued to be a factor that motivated Lowland Cree hostility against the Inuit even after generations had passed since the last Inuit attacks. The memory of those raids may have been kept alive through the

⁵Francis, 1979: 80.

⁶William Coats, who was employed by the HBC from 1727 to 1751, explained that Inuit captives were given to the Five Nations of Iroquois who acted as middlemen to the Ottawa. Coats observed that: "these powerful people [Ottawa] are such a terror to the servile tribes, that although they do not constantly go annually a Usquemow hunting for their bloody inhumane sacrifice, those poor creatures [Lowland Cree] do this for them, or are sure to be that sacrifice for themselves; and these, when procured, are to be tendered to the heads of the five nations of Iroquois, or Eliquoës, to be distributed to these very Notawais, or Otawais" (Coats, 1852: 56-57).

⁷Francis, 1979: 76.

transmission of stories that recorded the oral history of the Lowland Cree.

The western Hudson Bay Inuit, also known as the Caribou Eskimo⁸, periodically ranged as far south as the Churchill River⁹ at the time of European contact¹⁰ (see figure 5.1.1). In 1716, James Knight, who was in charge of York Factory, learned from some Lowland Cree that great numbers of Inuit visited Churchill every four or five years to hunt white whales and build boats.¹¹ Earlier, Nicolas Jeremie had written that Inuit sometimes

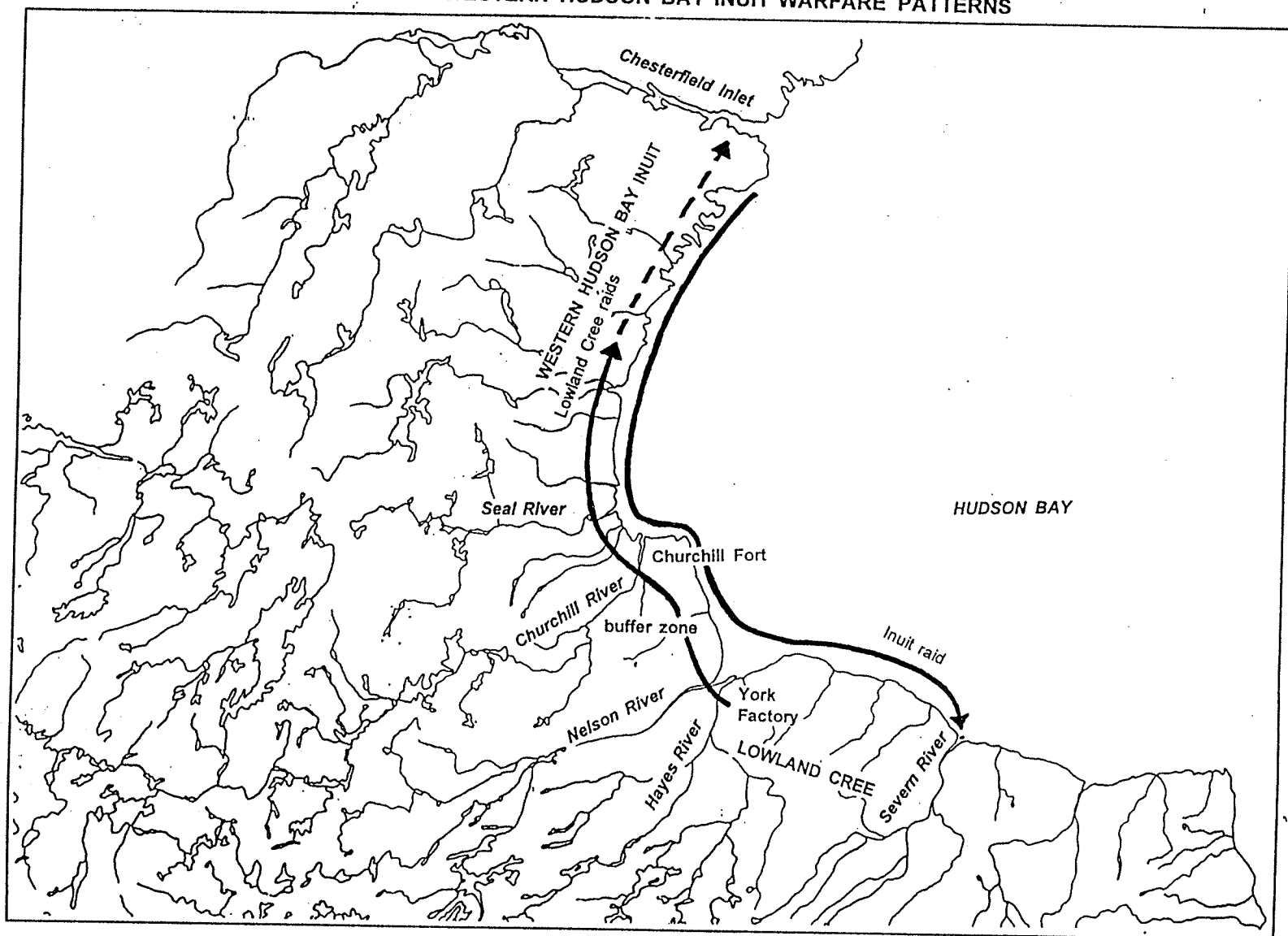
⁸Arima, 1984: 447-462. Brenda Clark's archaeological study of the Western Hudson Bay Inuit referred to these people as Thule in pre-European contact times, and Caribou Eskimo in the post-contact period (Clark, 1979: 89).

⁹The Lowland Cree called this river "Manoteou-sibi" or "Manato-e-sepe." Jeremie, who recorded the former name, translated it as meaning "strangers' river" (Jeremie, 1926: 18), while Coats offered the latter version which he translated as "a sea-like river" (Coats, 1852: 35).

¹⁰The pre-European contact territory of the Western Hudson Bay Inuit has been difficult to determine because of the lack of archaeological data, but Clark suggested that they occupied the coastal area as far south as Churchill River beginning about A.D. 1200 (Clark, 1979: 89, 96). Ernest Burch postulated that the Western Hudson Bay Inuit migrated to the Hudson Bay coastal area from the Coppermine region in the 17th century. Drawing upon linguistic and archaeological data, Burch concluded that: "The migrants were numerous enough to assimilate and/or exterminate their predecessors" (Burch, 1979: 202). Burch and James G.E. Smith suggested that the territory occupied by the Western Hudson Bay Inuit about 1718 included only a small stretch of coastline from Eskimo Point (north of the Seal River) to Chesterfield Inlet (Burch and Smith, 1979: 79).

¹¹HBCA, B.239/a/2, July 29, 1716, fo. 49. Inuit boats, called umiaks, were very large according to the reports of Lowland Cree. Inuit umiaks reportedly carried 30 Inuit men and their families. (*Ibid.*) Jeremie remarked that an umiak was capable of carrying more than fifty people (Jeremie, 1926: 16). Burch suggested that Knight was engaged in "an exercise in fantasy" because Burch believed that the Inuit did not occupy any part of the western coast of Hudson Bay in the 17th and early 18th century (Burch, 1978: 12). While Knight may have exaggerated certain elements of what he saw or was told by the Lowland Cree, it is unlikely that so many other European observers would have fabricated accounts of Inuit on the western coast Hudson Bay in that period.

FIGURE 5.1.1: LOWLAND CREE AND WESTERN HUDSON BAY INUIT WARFARE PATTERNS



came by boat to the mouth of the Churchill River to scavenge for iron left behind by Jens Munk who wintered there in 1619-20.¹² James Isham recalled that: "the Ehuskemay's, who before the English Settled here us'd frequently to come to Churchill River or Ehuskemay point so Call'd, from their g'raves and mark's of their Dwellings, some of which are still Remaining."¹³ Joseph Robson provided another account of pre-European Inuit occupation of the Churchill River area. Robson observed that:

Churchill was much frequented by the Eskimaux before we settled there, the point on which the fort is built, being called Eskimaux-point. Upon digging for the fort many traces were discovered of their abode here, such as the pit in which they secured their provisions, pieces of stone-pots, spears, arrows, &c. This point they kept for some time after they were driven from the adjacent country, because it lies far in the open sea, they could discover the distant approaches of their enemies, and repair in time to their canoes, in the management of which they are peculiarly dextrous: but they were at length forced to go farther northward to Cape Eskimaux

¹²Jeremie, 1926: 21-22. The signs of habitation that Munck found nearby may have been remains of Inuit encampments. According to Clark's archaeological study, the Inuit camps at the mouth of the Churchill River would have been occupied only in summer. She stated that: "It is doubtful that the Inuit would have wintered at Churchill because the nature of the sea ice along the coast south of Eskimo Point is very poor for ice hunting methods (Clark, 1979: 96). Burch suggested that the charcoal pictographs found by Munck were probably made by the Lowland Cree. However, the other artifacts such as stone dwellings were probably made by the Inuit (Burch, 1978: 4-5). It is conceivable that the artifacts were left by both Lowland Cree and Inuit, suggesting that both groups periodically occupied the area.

¹³Isham, 1949: 181. When James Knight built a trading post for the HBC at the mouth of the Churchill River in 1717, he found the remains of a large Inuit encampment at a place called Esqimaux Point [present Eskimo Point]. It appeared that about 300 to 400 Inuit had wintered at this point. They had built umiaks nearby, and hunted white whales. A fight had broken out here in the spring of 1717 between the Inuit and a small group of Chipewyan who had left York Factory to return to their homelands following a peace mission. (Knight, 1932: 116-117, 142).

and Whale Cove: and are now totally dispossessed of this retreat.¹⁴

Andrew Graham added that: "Many of them [Inuit] formerly resided upon Churchill River, but on the Company's building a Fort there, in the beginning of this present century, and the Indians resorting thither to trade, the Esquimaux retired farther to the north."¹⁵

That the Inuit had been aggressors in the warfare against the Lowland Cree in the period prior to European contact is suggested by the Lowland Cree depiction of the Inuit as "bloodthirsty people."¹⁶ Nicolas Jeremie observed that: "They [Inuit] make war on all their neighbours, and when they kill or capture any of their enemies, they eat them raw and drink their blood. They even make infants at the breast drink it, so as to instil in them the barbarism and ardour of war from the tenderest of years."¹⁷ There is also intriguing evidence that the Inuit had formerly raided deep into Lowland Cree territory.

¹⁴Robson, 1752: 64. Robson's observation that the Inuit preferred to encamp on points of land near the open sea was the same as the account made by Lowland Cree who spoke with James Knight in the summer of 1716. According to the report of the Lowland Cree, Knight remarked that: "they [Inuit] Always make there Tents upon points of head Lands that they see any body before they come to them so they Launch their Boats and get to Sea" (HBCA, B.239/a/2, August 2, 1716, fo. 50).

¹⁵Graham, 1969: 213-214. Most contemporary observers attributed the withdrawal northward of the Inuit from the Churchill River area to hostility with the Lowland Cree and the Chipewyan who were better armed with European firearms. The HBC refused to trade firearms to the Inuit until the latter part of the 18th century, and only small numbers of firearms were available to the Inuit thereafter (Ibid: 236).

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Jeremie, 1926: 16.

For example, James Knight was informed in 1716 that: "they [Lowland Cree] see one of them [an Inuit umiak] off Severn once which they took it by the bigness of it to be one of our Ships under Sail twill they see them putt into Shore and take in a great number of there Men as was along Shore hunting Deer and Geese."¹⁸ This was a hostile raid, and the phrase "take in a great number of there Men" probably referred to Lowland Cree who were casualties of the skirmish or possibly captives.¹⁹ The event appears to have taken place after European contact, because the Inuit vessel had been mistaken for a European ship. The reference to "one of our ships" suggests that the attack took place sometime after the HBC settled at York Factory.

Although no Inuit raids in the area around the Severn River were recorded by the HBC in the period after 1717, animosity between the Severn River Lowland Cree and the Inuit remained intact until at least the mid-18th century. For example, in the spring of 1747 James Isham, Chief Factor at York Factory recorded the following:

A Severn Indian or more properly an Albany Indian [perhaps because he usually traded at Albany Fort] came here with his family to trade. But with a Design for to go to war against the Esquimau's to ye Northward of here. But [I] argued the case with him and persuaded him from it.²⁰

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹This interpretation is supported by contextual evidence. Knight followed this account with a lengthy discourse on the need to fortify the proposed trading post at Churchill because the Inuit were regarded as a "numerous and bloodthirsty people." Ibid.

²⁰HBCA, B.239/a/29, April 9, 1747, fo. 25d. Accounts of Inuit near the mouth of the Severn River continued to be recorded in the early twentieth century. In 1928, S.J.C. Cumming, a HBC trader, reported one such account, and he noted that: "the story being that women of a wandering Eskimo tribe were captured near Severn, on Hudson

It is also evident that the Lowland Cree who traded at York Factory had raided deep into the Inuit territory north of the Churchill River prior to the arrival of the Europeans.²¹ James Knight interviewed several Lowland Cree at York Factory in the summer of 1716, and one man remarked that: "he has been many times in their [Inuit] country to Warr against them but they never had the luck to kill any Iskemays."²² Other Lowland Cree described geographical details of the Hudson Bay coast far to the north of the Churchill River that evidenced a familiarity with the region. The Indians informed Knight that: "the Shore is very flatt all along a foul broken ground out a great way towards the Sea and the water ebbs so farr out that they cannot see the Land in there Canoos at Low water but when they are gotten pretty ways to the Norward the Land rises very high again and the water begins to grow deep to the very Shore and that there is abundance of islands and many Iskemays."²³

During the early European fur trade period, the region between the Nelson and Churchill

Bay, many years ago, and were taken inland by the Indians" (Cumming, 1928: 117).

²¹Burch and Smith downplayed the warfare between the Lowland Indians and the Western Hudson Bay Inuit during the fur trade period. They commented that: "the Cree were anything but belligerent vis-a-vis the Caribou Inuit, with whom they had almost no direct contact" (Burch and Smith, 1979: 77). However, they recognized that linguistic evidence pointed to a different conclusion. The Inuit word for the Lowland Cree was *unaalit*, a term that means belligerent or competitive (*Ibid*).

²²HBCA, B.239/a/2, August 2, 1716, fo. 50.

²³HBCA, B.239/a/2, April 29, 1716, fo. 25. Knight estimated that these Indians had been as far north as 64 degrees, in the vicinity of Chesterfield Inlet (see figure 5.1.1). This agrees with statements made by Lowland Cree to Jeremie. They indicated that they had travelled along the coast of the bay north of the Churchill River to "a strait where one can readily see across from one side to the other" (Jeremie, 1926: 21).

Rivers was an unoccupied buffer zone between the warring parties.²⁴ For a long period after the establishment of Churchill Fort in 1717, the Inuit kept far to the north. Contemporary HBC observers believed that the Lowland Cree were able to drive the Inuit northward because of their acquisition of superior European firearms.²⁵

Lowland Cree warfare against the Inuit appears to have diminished following the establishment of Churchill Fort. The HBC traders at Churchill discouraged Lowland Cree war parties from going north to war against the Inuit.²⁶ Despite these efforts by the Company, it is evident that periodic raids continued. For example, Henry Ellis who visited York Factory in 1746-47, observed that Indian-Inuit warfare had been "almost entirely lay'd aside, through the good Management of the Governors at the Factories

²⁴Robert Janes downplayed the impact of the hostility between Lowland Cree and Inuit in the area around the mouth of the Churchill River. Although Janes pointed to examples of "no man's land" areas elsewhere in the subarctic, he stated that: "No information was found, however, that would indicate the presence of such a buffer zone in southern Keewatin during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries" (Janes, 1973: 47). Janes, Burch and Smith portrayed the territory near the mouth of the Churchill River as occupied by the Chipewyan Indians at the time of first European fur trade contact (Burch and Smith, 1979: 79). However, the HBC archival documents clearly indicate that the territory of the Chipewyan was far removed from Churchill Fort when it was established in 1717.

²⁵Burch dismissed the HBC accounts of the withdrawal of Inuit northward as a result of the acquisition of European firearms by Indians. However, Burch incorrectly focused on the Chipewyan Indians as the people who reputedly drove the Inuit north (Burch, 1978: 11). The HBC accounts refer more specifically to the Lowland Cree as the agents of this warfare. Viewed from this perspective, the HBC accounts of Inuit withdrawal northward because of Lowland Cree attacks can not be discredited in the manner employed by Burch (1978), and Burch and Smith (1979).

²⁶See, for example, HBCA, B.42/a/4, fo. 32.

[underline added]."²⁷ Ellis's detailed description of Lowland Cree raids against the Inuit indicated that warfare persisted at least into the mid-18th century. Ellis observed that the Lowland Cree went to war against the Inuit because they were blamed for any misfortunes that befell the Lowland Indians. Ellis explained that:

The Indians are inclinable to War; if there is a bad season of hunting in the Winter, or if anyone of their People is missing, or that they have a Sickness amongst them, they must prepare in Spring to go and seek out the Eskemaux, and make a Carnage of them; for they attribute to them the Cause of their Misfortunes: It is the Eskemaux that have killed their Friend; it is the Eskemaux have kept the Deer away; and the Sickness is occasion'd by a Charm or Witchery of the Eskemaux.²⁸

Ellis stated that the Lowland Cree prepared for war in the spring. War parties were made up of men and a few women, and specially built canoes were employed to facilitate quick travel to the Inuit territory and flight in the aftermath of the raid. Dried meat was taken to provision the war parties because time was not available to hunt on the war trail. According to Ellis, the Indians endeavoured to kill all the Inuit men, but captured women and children. Male children were sold to the HBC in exchange for brandy.²⁹

The purchase of Inuit slaves, especially boys, was noted in the York Factory records. For example, on April 24, 1720, Henry Kelsey reported that "Eskimoes" were employed

²⁷Ellis, 1968, vol. 2: 44.

²⁸Ibid: 43-44. Burch and Smith incorrectly attributed this statement to Chipewyan-Inuit warfare (Burch and Smith, 1979: 80).

²⁹Ellis, 1968, vol. 2: 45-46. Ellis also noted that Inuit scalps were taken and displayed prominently in festive dances when the warriors returned to York Factory.

at the caribou hedge.³⁰ The York Factory account book for 1719-20 included expenditures for "ye Esquemoes and Company's Slave Boys."³¹

The Lowland Cree warfare against the Western Hudson Bay Inuit diminished after the building of Churchill Fort in 1717. The HBC traders at Churchill actively discouraged the Lowland Cree from raiding the Inuit in the hope that Inuit would be drawn in to trade with the Company. However, it is clear that the Lowland Cree, assisted by European firearms, had already driven the Inuit far to the north by the time Churchill Fort was established. Churchill Fort soon attracted other Indian groups, including Chipewyan from the upper Churchill River region, and this acted to further minimize contacts between the Inuit and Lowland Cree.

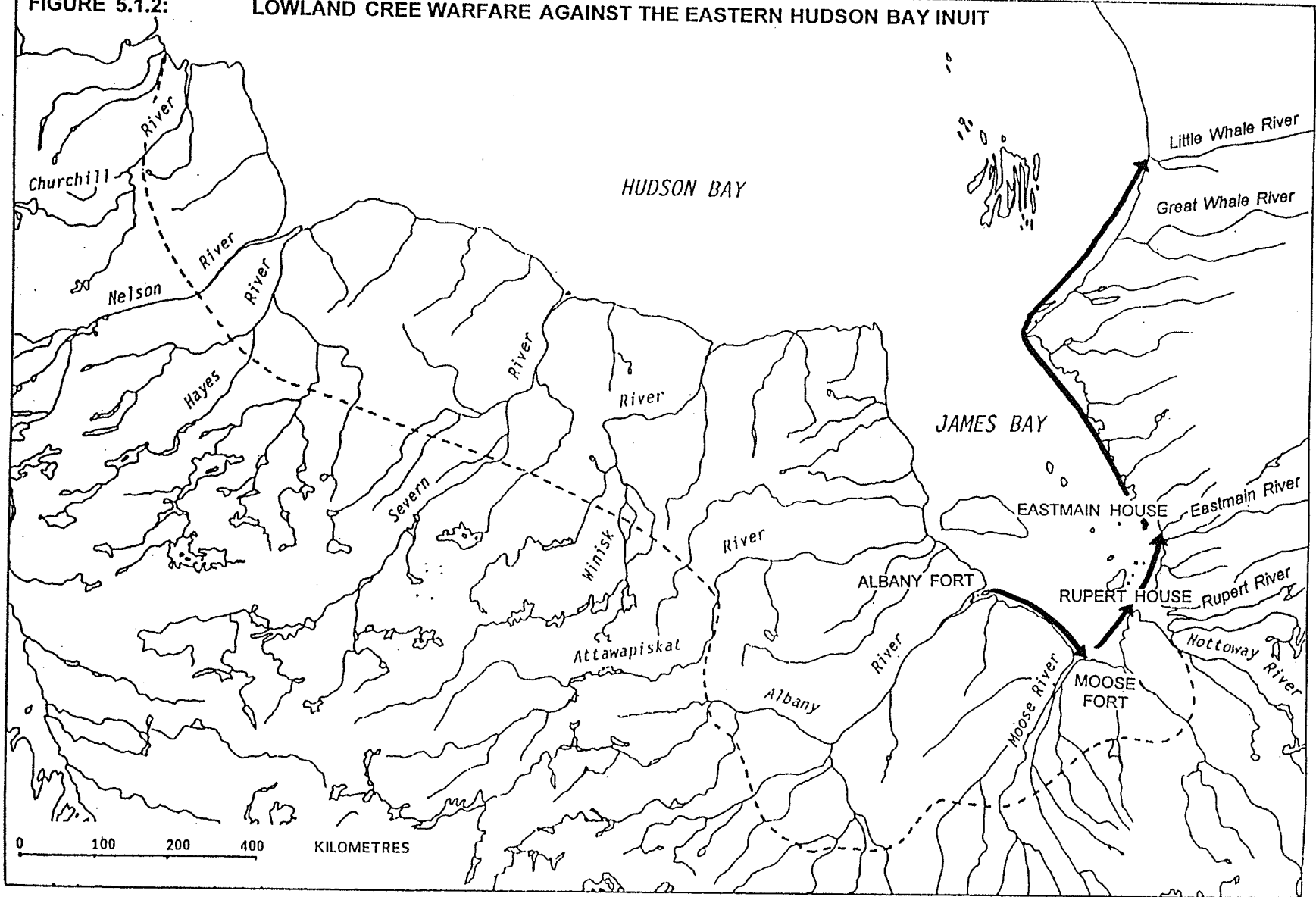
The Eastern Hudson Bay Inuit, also known as the Inuit of Quebec,³² occupied the territory north of Richmond Gulf during the early fur trade period (see figure 5.1.2). According to information obtained from Indians by the fur traders, the territorial range of the Eastern Hudson Bay Inuit extended farther south prior to European contact. Joseph Robson observed that the Inuit "used to inhabit the country on the east-main between the straits and the bottom of the Bay: but they are since driven away to the northward by the Indians, who are rendered much superior to them, on account of the

³⁰HBCA, B.239/a/5, fo. 72d.

³¹HBCA, B.239/d/10, fo. 53d.

³²D'Anglure, 1984: 476-507.

FIGURE 5.1.2: LOWLAND CREE WARFARE AGAINST THE EASTERN HUDSON BAY INUIT



supply of arms and ammunition which they receive from the English."³³

Other evidence from European fur traders also points to a more southerly range of Inuit territory in the pre-contact period. Early fur trade accounts indicated that the Inuit had formerly conducted raids into East Main Indian territory. John Oldmixon reported that the Inuit: "sometimes in slight Parties make Incursions on the other Indians, and, having knock'd 8 or 10 on the Head, return in triumph."³⁴ William Coats remarked that the Inuit had formerly terrorized the Indians who lived on the eastern coast of James Bay. He observed that these Indians "have been cruelly ravaged by the Usquemows, with whom at present [they are] at peace." Elsewhere Coats commented that the Eastmain Indians "live in a sort of servile frindship [sic] with them."³⁵ Inuit raiding into Indian territory ceased after European fur trade posts were established, and the Inuit shifted their territorial range farther northward in a defensive reaction against the superior firepower of the Lowland Cree.

Like the Lowland Cree-Inuit warfare on the western Hudson Bay coast, the pre-European contact wars on the Eastmain were characterized by revenge raiding into each other's territory. Lowland Cree raids into Inuit territory were noted in the earliest European records. For example, in 1686, Chevalier de Troyes, who met four Indians near the

³³Robson, 1965: 63.

³⁴Oldmixon, 1931: 381-382.

³⁵Coats, 1852: 61.

mouth of the Rupert River, commented that: "ils venoient de faire la guerre aux eskimos."³⁶ Although it is impossible to determine who these Indians were, other evidence indicates that the Lowland Cree were involved in warfare against the Inuit at the time of initial European fur trade contact.

Another indicator of the time-depth of these wars is the presence of Inuit slaves living among the Lowland Cree during the early fur trade period. For example, the 1693-94 Albany Fort account book noted that James Knight purchased "an As'scomore slave boy for the use of ye factory." The price paid was a gun, blanket, kettle, one pound of tobacco and a woman's shroud.³⁷

Lowland Cree warfare against the Eastern Hudson Bay Inuit was recorded in the early Albany Fort journals. For example, on April 27, 1707, Anthony Beale noted that six Lowland Cree warriors left Albany Fort and headed toward the Eastmain. That party was followed on May 19, 1707, by a canoe of "Home Indians" who went to the "Wars against the Eskemaise."³⁸

The first detailed account of Lowland Cree warfare against the Eastmain Inuit was recorded in the Albany Fort journal on May 25, 1728. Joseph Myatt, who was in charge

³⁶Francis and Morantz, 1983: 75.

³⁷HBCA, B.3/d/2, fo. 12d.

³⁸HBCA, B.3/a/2, fo. 27d and 30.

of Albany Fort, noted that: "Eight Curnoes of our home Indians fitted out from hence in order to goe to Warrs with the Esquomays."³⁹ The war party was headed for the Eastmain, north of the Slude [Eastmain] River. Although HBC policy directed its officers to discourage warfare, Myatt was unable to prevent these Lowland Cree from going to war. He observed that: "Severall of the Home Indians being Disordered the last Winter they attribute all those things to the Mallice of their Enimies."⁴⁰ Several of the warriors returned to Albany Fort on August 7, 1728, and reported that they had not been able to find any Inuit.⁴¹

The Lowland Cree who lived near the Albany River often joined with those who lived near the Moose River in raids against the Inuit. On May 29, 1730, a war party consisting of several Albany Lowland Cree travelled to Moose River "in order to joyne the Indians of that place to goe to Warrs against the Esquomeas."⁴² Once again, Joseph Myatt tried but was unable to stop them from going to war.

In the summer of 1735, a war party of Albany and Moose River Lowland Cree raided into Inuit territory on the Eastmain coast. On May 29, 1735, five canoes of Albany River Lowland Cree warriors arrived at Moose Fort, and on June 2, 1735, seven canoes

³⁹HBCA, B.3/a/16, fo. 18.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹HBCA, B.3/a/17, fo. 1.

⁴²HBCA, B.3/a/18, fo. 17d. The result of this initiative was not recorded in the HBC documents.

departed "to the Eastmain to wars with the Usqueemay."⁴³ The warriors returned to Moose Fort about two months later with 14 Inuit scalps and one girl prisoner.⁴⁴

On June 8, 1736, a large war party was assembled at Albany Fort, led by "ye Old Captin of this River [Indian Doctor]."⁴⁵ Seventeen canoes of Albany River Lowland Cree, or "Westmain Indians," were joined by eight canoes of Moose River Lowland Cree on this war expedition. On July 30, 1736, some of the warriors returned to Moose Fort and reported that they had killed five Inuit men and 15 women, and they had taken 10 Inuit children prisoners.⁴⁶ Six Inuit children were taken by the Albany River Lowland Cree, while four remained with the Moose River Lowland Cree.⁴⁷

One of the Inuit captives brought back by the Albany River Lowland Cree in 1736 was purchased by the HBC. The Albany Fort account book noted that one pound of tobacco, one gallon of brandy and one and one-half yards of blue cloth were paid for "a young Eskemoe boy."⁴⁸ Several Inuit boys were raised at Albany Fort, and became productive

⁴³HBCA, B.135/a/5, fo. 17d.

⁴⁴HBCA, B.135/a/5, July 30 and August 7, 1735, fo. 21.

⁴⁵HBCA, B.3/a/24, fo. 27. The Albany Fort records indicate that this was a male war party, who left their families at home. On July 24, 1736, Joseph Adams noted that: "several of our home Indian familys came here today whose husbands are at ye warrs" (Ibid: fo. 31d).

⁴⁶HBCA, B.135/a/6, fo. 13.

⁴⁷HBCA, B.3/a/24, August 1, 1736, fo. 32d.

⁴⁸HBCA, B.3/d/45, fo. 7d.

employees of the Company. Jack Eskemay, who began serving the Company in 1742, may have been the boy who was purchased by the HBC in 1736. Other Inuit children had difficulty in adapting to life in the service of the Company. For example, Joseph Isbister, who was in charge of Albany Fort on August 30, 1746, wrote that he:

[C]onfined ye Eskemay Boy for stealing Goods out of ye Wharehouse and shirts from ye men, he is such a wicked Boy, that he never will prove a good servant to the Company, therefore am resolved to turn him away among the Northern Indians on ye East Main coast.⁴⁹

Inuit slaves continued to be purchased by the HBC throughout much of the 18th century. For example, on June 10, 1780, Thomas Hutchins noted that: "Tolio the Esquimaux" drowned at Moose Fort.⁵⁰ On April 19, 1783, Edward Jarvis reported that he had "traded an Esquimaux boy" from the Albany River Lowland Cree. The Inuit boy was about seven years old, and Jarvis gave him the name Easter. Jarvis paid 30 made beaver for Easter, but he justified the expenditure because the Lowland Cree had planned to kill the boy.⁵¹

In most cases, the HBC reported that the war parties consisted of Albany River and Moose River Lowland Cree. However, on one occasion a number of Upland Indians were reported to have engaged in a raid against the Eastmain Inuit. That raid occurred

⁴⁹HBCA, B.3/a/38, fo. 5.

⁵⁰HBCA, B.3/a/77a, fo. 26d.

⁵¹The Lowland Indians may have intended to kill the Inuit boy in retribution for the sickness and deaths caused by the smallpox epidemic in 1782-83 (HBCA, B.3/a/81, fo. 24). John Easter later became an apprentice with the HBC, and entered the service of the Company in 1788 (HBCA, B.3/d/99, fo. 5d).

on September 10, 1738, and Thomas Bird who was in charge of Albany Fort noted that: "five Uplanders came here today that has been att ye Warrs with ye Eskemoes."⁵² The identity of these Upland Indians is uncertain, but since they travelled up the Albany River it is likely that they were Northern Ojibway.

Lowland Cree raids against the Eastmain Inuit continued to be reported by the HBC in the 1740s and 1750s. For example, on June 26, 1741, a group of Albany River Lowland Cree were reported to have left to "goe a Usquemay hunting."⁵³ On June 6, 1755, a group of Indians in 12 canoes arrived at Albany Fort from the north. Joseph Isbister described them as mostly "home Indians" who intended to go to war against the Eastmain Inuit. Isbister tried to dissuade them from their intended plan, but he was unsuccessful.

He recorded in his journal that:

I taukt with the leading Indian about it and forbid him to go and used my utmost indeavours to perswade them from going upon so idle an enterprise, but all to no purpose, they said that they must go because they are displeas'd with the Eskemays for the loss of their friends and some children that died this last winter (as if they were ye cause thereof) so idle are the notions of these people.⁵⁴

On June 7, 1757, Robert Temple, who was in charge of Albany Fort, reported that: "a great many of our Indian hunters are gone a Usquemeaux hunting."⁵⁵ Some of them

⁵²HBCA, B.3/a/28, fo. 4.

⁵³HBCA, B.3/a/32, fo. 20.

⁵⁴HBCA, B.3/a/47, June 6, 1755, fo. 37d.

⁵⁵HBCA, B.3/a/49, fo. 30. This war party was headed north of Eastmain House, since Temple gave a letter to the warriors to be delivered to the post.

returned on August 22, 1757, in time for the fall goose hunt.⁵⁶

On June 9, 1766, a large group of Lowland Cree assembled at Albany Fort and prepared for war against the Eastmain Inuit. Humphrey Marten, who was in charge of the fort observed that:

25 men came dressed and painted to the Fort, they said they were determined to go to war with the Esquemaes, on which they sang the war song, after which about 60 more men, women and children, all home guard, came to joyne with them in the Begging dance, they said it was usual for the Chief to give them great Presents on such occasions.⁵⁷

Marten complied with their request, and remarked in his journal that: "they expected I would do as my Predecessors had done before."⁵⁸ The war party set off from Albany Fort on June 10, 1766, but most of the warriors returned ten days later because of sickness that had spread through their ranks shortly after leaving Moose Fort.

On May 28, 1770, Humphrey Marten noted that: "eleven canoes of home Indians set off for the Uskemay hunt, as they phrase it."⁵⁹ On July 1, 1770, one man, four women and three children belonging to the warriors arrived at Albany Fort for food.

On April 7, 1774, four Albany River Lowland Cree went to Moose Fort to join with the

⁵⁶HBCA, B.3/a/50, fo. 1.

⁵⁷HBCA, B.3/a/59, fo. 34.

⁵⁸*Ibid.* Marten had taken charge of Albany Fort in 1764.

⁵⁹HBCA, B.3/a/62, fo. 27d.

Lowland Cree of that place in an "Esquimaux hunt."⁶⁰ The warriors were unusually late in returning, and on September 2, 1774, Marten remarked that: "almost all the other hunting Indians in despair, at not hearing from their friends that went to war with the Esquimaux."⁶¹ The warriors were also missed by the Company men at Albany Fort because they were usually employed as goose hunters for the Company.⁶² Finally, almost six months after they had left Albany Fort, the warriors returned. A prominent leader of the Lowland Cree goose hunters named Lieutenant Wauchusk, was among the returning warriors. No information relating to their success or failure was reported in the HBC records.

On May 14, 1777, Thomas Hutchins, who was in charge of Albany Fort, noted that: "I find the hunting Indians are bent upon another Expedition against the Esquemaux."⁶³ However, Hutchins did not elaborate further on this planned raid so that it is difficult to

⁶⁰HBCA, B.3/a/66, fo. 19d. In a letter to Andrew Graham, who was in charge of Severn House, Marten remarked that: "most of our Indians are going on an Esquimaux hunt, being invited thereto by the Moose Fort Indians" (HBCA, B.198/a/18, May 26, 1774, fo. 31d). There may have been more than one war party that set out from the Albany River area in 1774. Thomas Hutchins reported that: "in June last [1774] ten of the best Indian men went from hence to warr with the Esquimaux in defiance of every perswasion and remonstrance to the contrary" (HBCA, A.11/3, September 15, 1774, fo. 200).

⁶¹Ibid, fo. 33d.

⁶²Thomas Hutchins, who was in charge of Albany Fort on January 9, 1775, recorded his lamentation on the failure of the fall goose hunt in a letter to William Falconer at Severn House. Hutchins complained that: "Our Goose season turned out but poorly, having ten of the best hunters about at war with the Esquimaux" (HBCA, B.198/a/19, fo. 27).

⁶³HBCA, B.3/a/74, fo. 21d.

assess whether a war party was actually mustered.

On May 23, 1781, Hutchins reported that: "several of our Hunters set off for the Esquimaux War."⁶⁴ They had apparently been invited to participate in this war because several days earlier Hutchins had noted the arrival of some Moose River Lowland Cree who had "come to see their friends." Some of the Albany River warriors returned to the fort on July 1, 1781, but Hutchins failed to report on the success or failure of the war party. Some HBC reports of Lowland Cree war parties indicated that entire families took part in these expeditions. For example, on June 5, 1782, Hutchins noted that: "3 families of Indians going on the Esquemay hunt."⁶⁵

The HBC records from Severn House (beginning in 1759) did not contain specific information concerning the participation of Severn River Lowland Cree in warfare against the Inuit. However, indirect evidence from the Severn House records clearly indicates that the local Lowland Cree were involved in the Inuit warfare. For example, on August 14, 1793, John Ballanden who was in charge of Severn House noted that: "Invalid Natives repairing the seine net, a Blind Esquimaux woman superintends."⁶⁶ On March 3, 1796, Ballanden recorded the death of the blind Inuit woman. He wrote that: "She has resided many years at Severn, and was taken when a child from the

⁶⁴HBCA, B.3/a/78, fo. 22d.

⁶⁵HBCA, B.3/a/80, fo. 21.

⁶⁶HBCA, B.198/a/45, fo. 4.

Eastmain Esquimaux by the Albany and Moose River Indians who annually wars with them."⁶⁷

On June 10, 1791, Edward Jarvis who was in charge of Albany Fort reported that a prominent Lowland Cree hunter named Saquot had led a war party against the "Esquimaux."⁶⁸ This war party included Half-Homeguard Cree who lived near Henley House. A leader of the Henley House Cree named Captain Wausakeeshick was among these warriors. A year later, at Henley House, Captain Wausakeeshick and his followers celebrated their victory over the Inuit the previous summer. John Hodgson, who was in charge of Henley House, reported on May 15, 1792, that Captain Wausakeeshick and his "gang" were: "drinking and exulting over the scalps of the Esquimaux some of these Indians having had a hand in the murders of 4 last summer."⁶⁹

On May 27, 1793, Saquot and his "gang" left Albany Fort for an expedition against the Inuit. Once again, they were joined by the Henley House leader, Captain Wausakeeshick and some of his followers.⁷⁰ This was the last Lowland Cree raid against the Inuit recorded in the HBC documents.

⁶⁷HBCA, B.198/a/47, fo. 28d.

⁶⁸HBCA, B.3/a/92, fo. 27. In a letter dated June 6, 1791, to John Hodgson who was in charge of Henley House, Edward Jarvis complained that: "Our Indians are going upon the Esquimaux hunt, and still hanging about till the Ice is off the Sea shore, and upon all occasions crazing for Brandy" (HBCA, B.86/a/45, fo. 46).

⁶⁹HBCA, B.86/a/46, fo. 19.

⁷⁰HBCA, B.3/a/94, fo. 23d, 24.

The warfare between the Lowland Cree and the Eastmain Inuit appears to have been motivated by a desire for revenge. Andrew Graham remarked that: "all the men and old women are slain; and if the spirit of revenge is very raging none escape."⁷¹ However, it is difficult to conceive that revenge motivation could be an overriding factor when there is no evidence in the written records of Inuit incursions into Indian territory.⁷² Perhaps the period of aggressive Inuit warfare against the Lowland Cree predated the arrival of Europeans. This could explain why Andrew Graham commented that the Lowland Cree and the Inuit were "inveterate and hereditary foes."⁷³ For their part, the Inuit appear to have also harboured longstanding and deep feelings of anger and revenge against their enemies. Speaking of relations between the Inuit and the HBC, Graham observed that: "Revenge, often under the mask of friendship, lies brooding in his heart for months and years; and only waits for its effect until the unhappy object is found in an unguarded moment."⁷⁴

Arthur Dobbs included a brief account of the warfare between the Western Hudson Bay Lowland Indians and the Eastern Hudson Bay Inuit. According to Dobbs's information, the Inuit were: "in a manner hunted and destroyed by the more Southerly Indians, being

⁷¹Graham, 1969: 174.

⁷²An exception was the report of an Inuit raid against the Lowland Cree near the mouth of the Severn River that was recorded by James Knight at York Factory in 1716 and noted above.

⁷³Graham, 1969: 226.

⁷⁴Ibid: 219.

perpetually at war with each other."⁷⁵ Edward Chappell, who visited the eastern Hudson Bay region in 1814, observed that:

It is a curious fact, that the inland or hunting tribes of Indians in Hudson's Bay believe the Esquimaux to be a nation of sorcerers. Should the season prove a bad one in procuring their furs, they say that the Esquimaux have enchanted the game; and they then set off to the northward, to punish them accordingly. Whenever they discover the tents of the supposed magicians, they remain lurking about the place until a favourable opportunity offers; when, raising the dreadful war-whoop, they rush on to the attack with inconceivable fury. Every individual of the vanquished is instantly massacred, whether they make resistance, or implore for mercy. The animosity between them is hereditary, bloody, and implacable.⁷⁶

Victorious war parties often returned with captives and trophies such as scalps of their Inuit victims. Their return was attended with much feasting and dancing. Graham remarked that: "those who have killed an enemy are painted all over with black; and when they meet their families they have a grand dance."⁷⁷ A grand ceremony was also held in which every warrior ate a piece of raw flesh from a slain Inuit.⁷⁸ Bacqueville de la Potherie observed similar festivities near the mouth of the Hayes River. He wrote that: "When their enemies fall into their hands they scalp them. They tear off the skin

⁷⁵Dobbs, 1967: 49.

⁷⁶Chappell, 1970: 110.

⁷⁷Graham, 1969: 174.

⁷⁸This practice was remembered in the oral history of the Moose River Lowland Cree in the early 20th century. Alanson Skinner, a field anthropologist who conducted surveys in that area, noted that: "Scalping was carried on, and in the old wars against the Eskimo, it was customary for the victor to eat a piece of fat cut from the thigh of the slain enemy" (Skinner, 1911: 78-79).

which covers the skull and they put as many marks on themselves as they have taken scalps. I saw three Ouenebigouchelinis [Coastal Cree⁷⁹] who had wild goose feathers attached to their caps above their ears as trophies of their victories over their enemies.⁸⁰ Henry Ellis observed that; "An Indian who kills an Eskemaux scalps him; then takes and rounds a Bit of Willow, sowing the Scalp to it, and hangs one or two, or more of them, if he hath them, on a Stick at the End of his Canoe, when he returns; when at Home carries it to all Feasts, there dancing with it in his Hands."⁸¹

The HBC records after 1793 do not mention warfare between the Lowland Cree and the Inuit. Daniel Francis attributed the cessation of Lowland Cree raiding activities to developments in the HBC fur trade. The establishment of inland trading posts in the 1780s and 1790s required Lowland Cree labour, especially during the summer transport season which was the traditional time for raids against the Inuit.⁸² These developments will be explored more fully in chapter nine. The growing involvement of the Lowland Cree in the fur trade diverted them away from traditional activities such as the warfare against the Inuit.

⁷⁹La Potherie's spelling of this name is variable throughout his observations.

⁸⁰Bacqueville de la Potherie, 1931: 233.

⁸¹Ellis, 1968, vol. 2: 46.

⁸²Francis, 1979: 79-80.

5.2 The Chipewyan:

At the time of European fur trade contact, the Lowland Cree who lived in the vicinity of the Hayes and Nelson Rivers were also engaged in warfare against the "Northern Indians," or Chipewyan, who occupied a large area north of the upper reaches of the Churchill River.⁸³ The most easterly groups of Chipewyan lived in the region north of Lake Wollaston, Reindeer Lake and Seal River,⁸⁴ hundreds of kilometres away from the Lowlands (see figure 5.2.1).

Like the warfare with the Inuit, the Lowland Cree carried on long-distance raids against the Chipewyan.⁸⁵ According to the earliest European accounts this warfare pre-dated their arrival. Pre-European contact warfare patterns appear to have involved reciprocal revenge raiding. Jeremie commented that a "nation called Dogribs," who lived in the direction of the upper Seal River, "make war on our Maskegons [Lowland Cree]."⁸⁶ However, Jeremie also observed that the Lowland Cree also raided successfully into

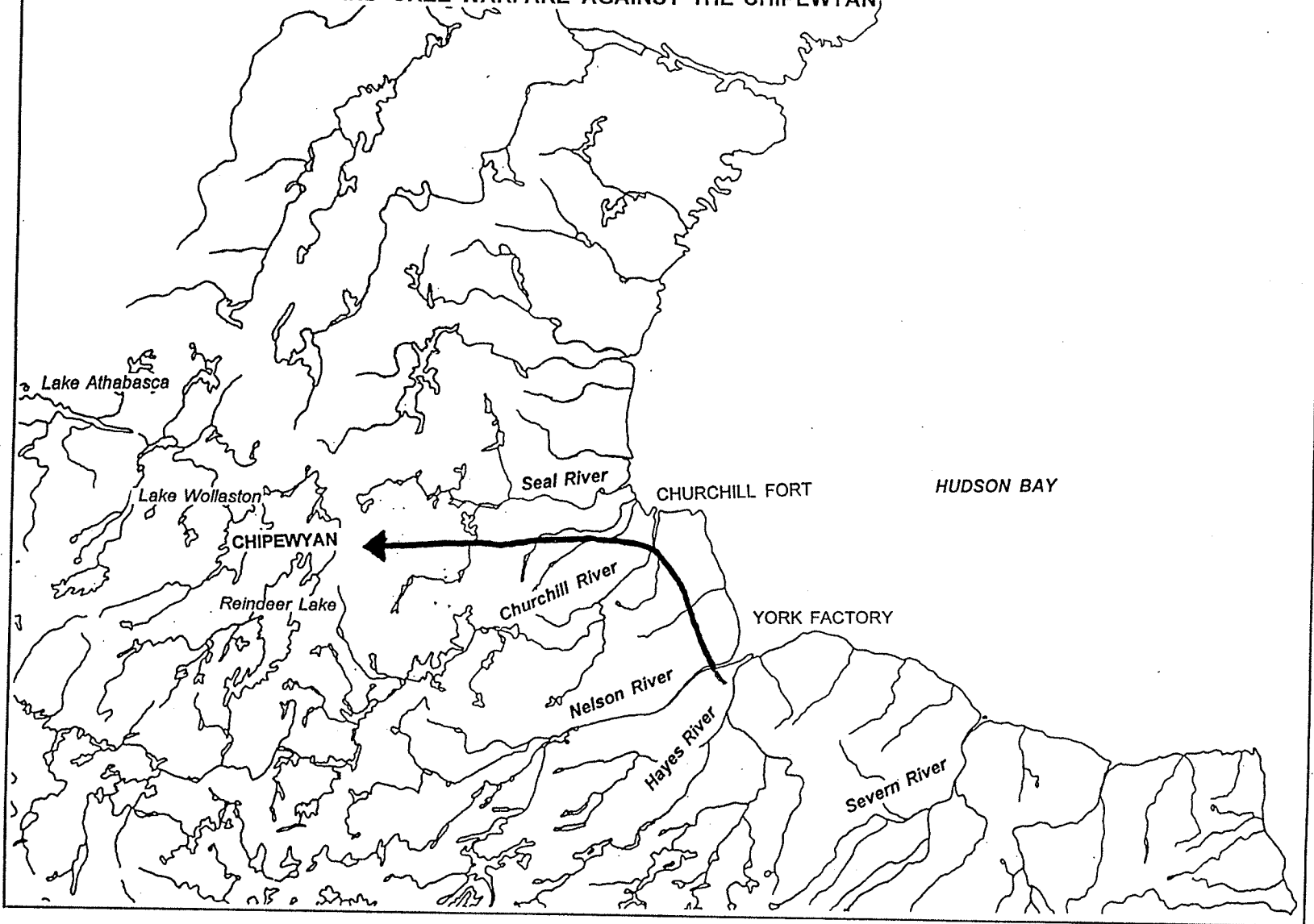
⁸³James G.E. Smith observed that the territory of the Chipewyan at the time of European contact included: "the taiga-tundra ecotone from the Seal River (approximately 59 degrees North Latitude) through the southern Keewatin (approximately 64 degrees North), westward to Great Slave and Great Bear lakes, and north to the vicinity of the mouth of the Coppermine River." (Smith, 1981b: 134).

⁸⁴Ibid: 135.

⁸⁵Andrew Graham observed that: "They [Chipewyan] hold no intercourse with any of the southern Indians; and are looked on by them in the same despicable light as the Esquimaux" (Graham, 1969: 195).

⁸⁶Jeremie, 1926: 20. Maskegon was substituted by the English translators for the original French term "Savanois."

FIGURE 5.2.1: LOWLAND CREE WARFARE AGAINST THE CHIPEWYAN



Chipewyan territory. Jeremie noted that the Chipewyan "have no experience with fire arms," and that the sound of gunshots was sufficient to cause the Chipewyan men to retreat, leaving women and children behind who were captured by the Lowland Cree. By the time the HBC re-established York Factory in 1714 the Lowland Cree held a definite advantage in the wars against the Chipewyan.⁸⁷

When the HBC re-settled York Factory in 1714 the Company was anxious to facilitate a peace between the Lowland Cree and the Chipewyan. The Company had economic motivations for encouraging such a peace initiative. The HBC planned to establish a trading post at the mouth of the Churchill River that was intended to collect furs from the Chipewyan. There were also rumours of precious metals in the Chipewyan territory, and the Company wanted to develop a friendly relationship with the Chipewyan in order to potentially exploit these mineral resources. The motivation for peace on the part of the Lowland Cree is more difficult to ascertain. There were no obvious economic advantages to be gained by making peace with their traditional enemies. However, the peace initiative does make sense if it is viewed from the perspective of the alliance between the Lowland Cree and the HBC. As allies of the Company, the Lowland Cree may have participated in peace-making with the Chipewyan in order to solidify their relationship with the English traders.

⁸⁷James Knight, who was in charge of York Factory in 1716, estimated that 5,000 to 6,000 Chipewyan Indians had been killed in war since the first European trading post was built at the mouth of the Hayes River (HBCA, B.239/a/1, May 6, 1716, fo. 26d). Although Knight's estimate may have been exaggerated, it is clear that the Lowland Cree held the upper hand in the warfare.

A careful examination of the peace mission in 1715-16 clarifies the role of the Lowland Cree in this initiative. This peace mission has been previously analyzed by scholars who have been interested in the role of the HBC⁸⁸ or the Chipewyan slave woman who acted as interpreter.⁸⁹ However, the role of the Lowland Cree who actually made the peace with the Chipewyan Indians has been down-played or ignored.⁹⁰ The following section will review the peace mission from the perspective of the Lowland Cree who participated in the event.

The leader of the Lowland Cree who lived in the area of the lower Hayes River was called the Captain of the River. He was also known as the "Frenchifyd Captain⁹¹," a reference to his former allegiance to the French traders who occupied a post at the mouth of the Hayes River before 1714. James Knight, who re-established York Factory for the HBC in 1714, was careful to pay due respect to the Captain of the River. In the fall of 1714, Knight presented the Captain with a coat in recognition of his position as leader of his people.⁹² In the spring of 1715, the Captain's son also received a coat from the

⁸⁸See, for example, Morton, 1973: 132-34.

⁸⁹See Van Kirk, 1974: 40-45.

⁹⁰Morton expressed a negative assessment of the role of the Lowland Cree in this peace initiative. He speculated: "what likelihood was there that a rabble of Crees armed with guns could meet those who had been hitherto their victims in a council of peace?" (Morton, 1973: 132).

⁹¹HBCA, B.239/d/9, fo. 4.

⁹²HBCA, B.239/d/7, fo. 8. The coat was made of 2 1/2 yards of cloth, 6 yards of baize lining, 36 fancy buttons and 22 1/4 yards of lace gartering.

HBC,⁹³ and the Captain's wife received gifts in exchange for a "Slave Boy."⁹⁴

In the summer of 1715, James Knight made several feasts and promised many presents to convince the Lowland Cree Captain to make peace with the Chipewyan.⁹⁵ The Captain agreed to undertake the peace mission, and he was followed by 17 men and their families, numbering about 150 people in total.⁹⁶ Accompanying this large group of Lowland Cree was a young Company employee named William Stewart (Stuart) and a Chipewyan woman named Thanadelthur, who had been captured by the Lowland Cree.

On June 27, 1715, the Lowland Cree Captain and his party left York Factory and headed north along the Hudson Bay coast toward the Churchill River. Nothing was heard of the peacemakers until April 13, 1716, when three Lowland Cree who had accompanied the Captain arrived at York Factory with news that the party had suffered from a shortage of food and they were forced to break into four or five smaller groups. According to their report, the Lowland Cree Captain had taken four men along with Stewart and

⁹³HBCA, B.239/d/7, fo. 9.

⁹⁴HBCA, B.239/d/7, fo. 10. The gifts included 2 yards of cloth, 3/4 pounds of beads, 1 pound of Brazil tobacco and 4 knives.

⁹⁵The gifts included 100 lbs of shot, 50 lbs of powder, 18 lbs of Brazil tobacco, 8 lbs of roll tobacco, 16 oz of vermilion, 1 gun, 28 hatchets, 72 knives 20 ice chisels, 20 scrapers, 16 bayonets, 18 mocotogans, 3 skeins of twine, 24 fire steels, 60 hawks bells, 15 blankets, 18 ivory combs and 27 yards of cloth (HBCA, B.239/d/8, fo. 6). The total value of these gifts amounted to 469 made beaver.

⁹⁶HBCA, B.239/a/1, June 17, 1715, fo. 41d; B.239/a/2, April 22, 1716, fo. 22d. The Captain's son was apparently not among the peacemakers because he received a gift of a coat at York Factory in the spring of 1716 (HBCA, B.239/d/8, fo. 7).

Thanadelthur in the direction of the Chipewyan winter hunting grounds. Another group of eight Lowland Cree men also continued toward that destination along a different route, while the rest returned to their home territory. This story was confirmed by other Lowland Cree who arrived at York Factory in the following days and weeks. Among these were three men who had been among the party of eight who went toward the Chipewyan territory. These men reported that they had met a group of Chipewyan and killed nine people in self-defence. After the skirmish they took four women and five children hostages, and allowed one woman and a boy to return to their countrymen as a gesture of peace.

On May 7, 1716, the Lowland Cree Captain returned to York Factory with Stewart, Thanadelthur and four Chipewyan men. The latter had joined the Captain as evidence of the peace that had been made between the two groups of Indians. According to Stewart's report, their party came across the bodies of the Chipewyan who had been slain by the other Lowland Cree. Stewart noted that Thanadelthur agreed to go out and bring her countrymen to the camp in order to explain the situation and reach a peace. Within ten days Thanadelthur returned with 400 Chipewyan, including 160 men. Using Thanadelthur as an interpreter, the Lowland Cree Captain explained that they had come in peace and offered his pipe to smoke in friendship. The Chipewyan leaders accepted and after two days of meetings and gift exchanges they parted company in peace.⁹⁷

⁹⁷The Lowland Cree Captain took four Chipewyan boys who were "adopted" as a sign of this peace. One of these boys remained with the Captain, and he was treated as his own son (HBCA, B.239/a/3, May 6, 1717, fo. 46d).

The Lowland Cree Captain had accomplished his mission, and Knight rewarded him with "very large presents."⁹⁸ Despite the success of the peacemakers, Knight was cautious about the future relations between the Lowland Cree and the Chipewyan. He observed that the Lowland Cree were the "[most] saucy fellows in the world when any number are gott together, they have been so flushed in blood."⁹⁹ On April 17, 1717, Knight commented that: "the [Lowland] Indians are in a Curs'd Ill humour by reason so many Indians dying all this winter and doo think that the makeing of the Peace with the Northern Indians has been the Occasion of it, for they are of the Opinion the Devill must have so many every year if they can but kill their Enemys they may spare themselves."¹⁰⁰ Several days later, the Captain arrived at York Factory with an intention of going to war against the Chipewyan. The Captain informed Knight that: "his Mind was to go to warr to Revenge himself upon the Norward People to sacrifice the Ghost of some of those Indians for those as are Dead that he might kill so many of his Enemys to pacifye the Devill."¹⁰¹

The Lowland Cree Captain had other motivations for expressing his desire to go to war against the Inuit. Knight observed that: "the Captain of this River and some other

⁹⁸HBCA, B.239/a/2, May 10, 1716, fo. 29d.

⁹⁹HBCA, B.239/a/2, May 8, 1716, fo. 28d.

¹⁰⁰HBCA, B.239/a/3, fo. 41.

¹⁰¹HBCA, B.239/a/3, April 20, 1717, fo. 41d. According to other Indian reports the winter of 1716-17 had been hard, and the ghosts likely referred to Lowland Cree who had died during the winter. The Captain's desire to revenge these deaths by killing Chipewyan Indians was similar to a reason attributed to warfare against the Inuit.

Indians came and brought their friendly pipe to smoke it and gave me some presents and told me that he obey'd me in going to make peace with ye Northern Indians, and he did expect I shall fall the price of Guns."¹⁰² Although Knight refused to lower the price of guns, which remained at 13 made beaver, he did give presents to the Captain and made feasts for him and his followers to discourage them from going to war.¹⁰³ In the York Factory account book these expenditures were explained by the following comments:

Presented to the Frenchified discontented Captain of this River to keep him in tempor from Going to warr with the Northern Indians, he often threatning it and never thinking himself gratified for his going and making Peace with them, but is often Rehearsing up the French's Benevolence to him and complaining of our unkindness.¹⁰⁴

The HBC continued to provide gifts annually to the Lowland Cree Captain for his peace initiative. The 1719-20 York Factory account book noted that goods valued at 93 1/2 made beaver were given to the Captain. The HBC accountant explained the expenditure as: "The Old Capt. yearly sallery for making ye Peace."¹⁰⁵ The Captain became ill soon after, and he died near York Factory on January 29, 1722. The Lowland Cree

¹⁰²HBCA, B.239/a/3, April 20, 1717, fo. 41d.

¹⁰³HBCA, B.239/d/9, fo. 7. These gifts included 1 gun, 2 knives, 1 coat, 1 pair of stockings, 1 white shirt, 1 yard of cloth for his two wives and 1 coat for his brother. In his journal, Knight noted that: "I Gave them a feast of Oatmeall, Plumbs and Tobacco and a present of a Coat and Capp to ye Captain and I promised him another feast when 5 or 6 Tents more of the Indians was come in" (HBCA, B.239/a/3, April 20, 1717, fo. 42).

¹⁰⁴HBCA, B.239/d/9, fo. 7.

¹⁰⁵HBCA, B.239/d/10, fo. 52.

leaders who succeeded the Captain of the River evidenced sporadic attempts to rekindle the warfare against the Chipewyan.

Although Chipewyan captives were called slaves, some were adopted by the Lowland Cree. For example, the Lowland Cree named Factory who assisted the HBC in establishing Churchill Fort had a Chipewyan wife.¹⁰⁶ The Captain of the Lowland Cree near York Factory had a Chipewyan boy who was adopted as a son.¹⁰⁷ James Knight tried unsuccessfully to buy the Chipewyan boy from the Captain. Knight observed that: "he [the Captain] is so jealous of him [the boy] that he doth not care for him to come near the factory and part with him I believe he would not for half the Goods in the Country."¹⁰⁸ Other Lowland Cree were less attached to their Chipewyan captives, and sold them to the HBC. However, the price was high according to Knight who paid 60 made beaver in goods for a Chipewyan woman.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶HBCA, B.239/a/3, May 2, 1717, fo. 45d.

¹⁰⁷HBCA, B.239/a/3, May 2, 1717, fo. 45d. According to Knight, he was about 18 years of age (HBCA, B.239/a/3, March 31, 1717, fo. 38d). Other Indians were reported to have adopted Chipewyan boys as sons. For example, an Upland Indian arrived at York Factory on May 18, 1717, with an adopted Chipewyan son (HBCA, B.239/a/3, fo. 48d). Captain Swan, the leader of the Missinepee (Upper Churchill River) Cree also adopted a Chipewyan boy after he made peace with those Indians in 1716. Captain Swan told James Knight that the two nations agreed to hold a special meeting in which boys and girls would be exchanged and adopted as a symbol of the peace. (HBCA, B.239/a/3, June 5, 1717, fo. 54; June 6, 1717, fo. 54d).

¹⁰⁸HBCA, B.239/a/3, May 6, 1717, fo. 46d.

¹⁰⁹HBCA, B.239/a/3, May 6, 1717, fo. 46d.

The establishment of Churchill Fort in 1717 promoted peaceful relations between the Lowland Cree and the Chipewyan by drawing the latter to trade with the HBC. In the winter of 1723-24, the HBC sent a young employee named Richard Norton to winter among the Lowland Indians. His purpose was to "divert 'em [Lowland Cree] from going to warr and to desire 'em to go to trade at York Fort and not come here for they should not have any Encouragement."¹¹⁰ James G.E. Smith credited Norton with preserving the peace between the Lowland Cree and the Chipewyan¹¹¹, but other accounts point to the importance of Lowland Cree peacemakers. William Coats interviewed an Indian named "Mack-qua-ta, or Long Day's son" who stated that he and two other Lowland Cree had been sent by Norton into the territory of the Chipewyan and arranged the peace. Coats remarked that: "by this means effected and established such a peace as has not been broke since, and now are so united by marriages and kindnessis [sic] as give a hopeful prospect for the time to come."¹¹² These comments indicate that the Lowland Cree could not afford to jeopardize their alliance with the Company by continuing their hostility against the Chipewyan.¹¹³

¹¹⁰HBCA, B.42/a/4, fo. 23.

¹¹¹Smith, 1981b: 141.

¹¹²Coats, 1852: 32.

¹¹³Andrew Graham observed that: "Before their [Chipewyan] intercourse with the English they were pursued by Enemies by the Keiskatchewan Indians [Lowland Cree], as they themselves pursu'd the Esquemaux, who border on the North and East coasts of the Bay, but by the interposition of the Chief at Churchill, their animosities are almost subsided and they are brought to smoak a pipe together, or at least to avoid destroying each other as formerly" (HBCA, E.2/10; quoted in Isham, 1949: 312).

5.3 The Iroquois:

At the time of initial European fur trade contact in the Hudson Bay Lowlands, the Iroquois confederacy of five nations (Mohawk, Onondaga, Oneida, Cayuga and Seneca) lived south of Lake Ontario, about 500 miles away from the Lowlands (see figure 5.3.1). Beginning in 1650, the Iroquois conducted raids into the north, penetrating as far as the Lowlands and causing widespread fear among the Lowland Cree.

The Albany and Moose River Lowland Cree called the Iroquois "Nataway Indians,"¹¹⁴ "Nattawees,"¹¹⁵ "Nattaways"¹¹⁶ or "Nottaway Indians,"¹¹⁷ after the Cree word for enemy. The Nottaway River was so named because it was used by Iroquois war parties to reach the Lowlands and attack the Lowland Cree. Iroquois raids in the direction of the Hudson Bay Lowlands were first documented in 1650. In the summer of 1650, Jesuit missionaries in New France reported that Iroquois war parties travelled up the St. Maurice River and attacked the Attikamegue [Whitefish] Nation (see figure 5.3.1). It is uncertain whether the Iroquois extended their raids into the Lowlands in 1650, but the Lowland Cree were undoubtedly aware of the raid because of their trading relationship

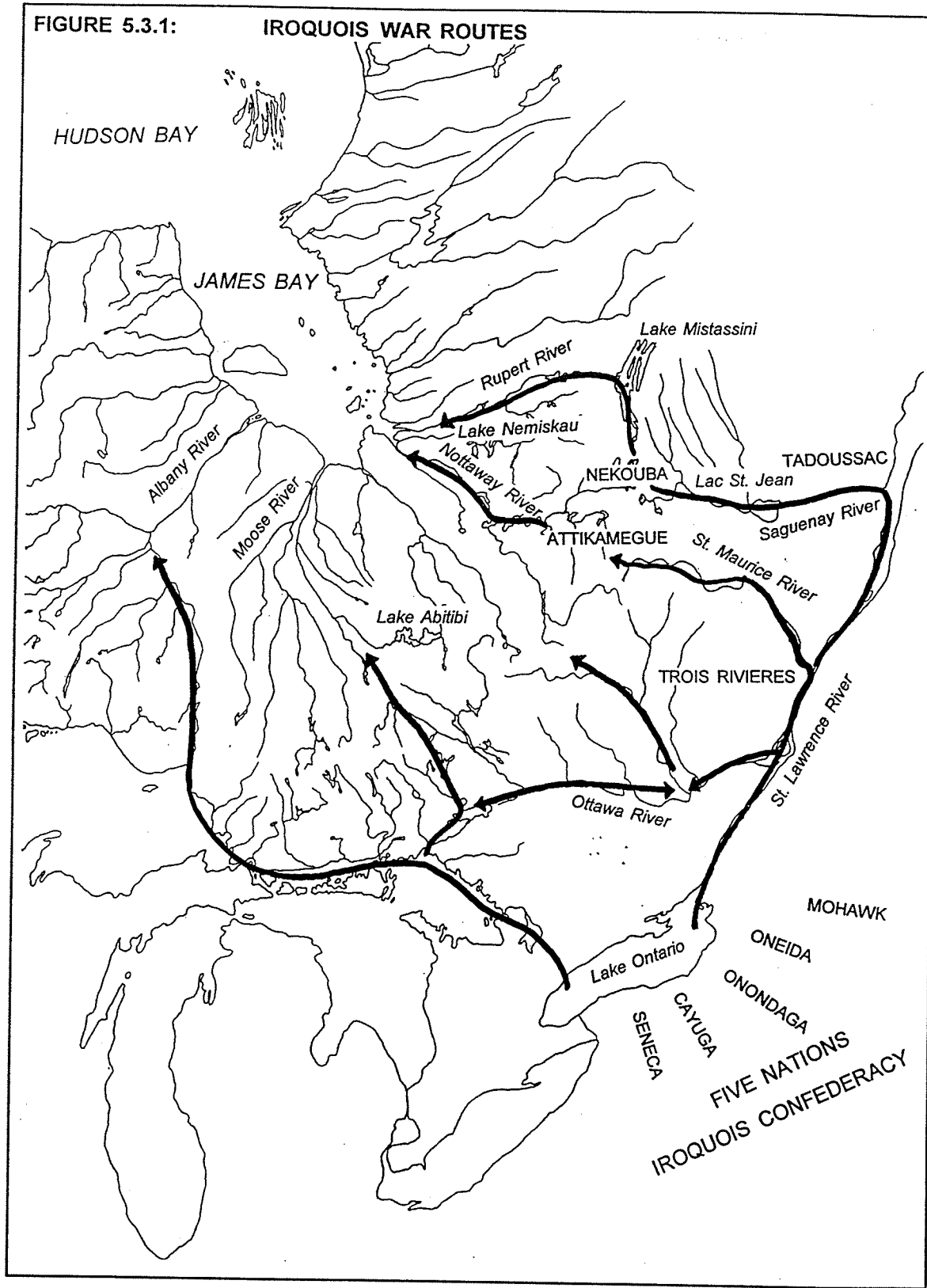
¹¹⁴HBCA, B.3/a/31, June 3, 1741, fo. 40.

¹¹⁵HBCA, B.3/a/35, May 14, 1744, fo. 30d.

¹¹⁶HBCA, B.3/a/48, Sept. 8, 1756, fo. 40.

¹¹⁷HBCA, B.3/a/50, March 1, 1758, fo. 17.

FIGURE 5.3.1: IROQUOIS WAR ROUTES



with the Attikamegue.¹¹⁸

In 1657, Iroquois warriors launched another raid into the north, and attacked Indian groups in the territory between Lake Abitibi and Lac St. Jean.¹¹⁹ By 1660, the Iroquois raids had prompted the northward migration of a number of Indian groups to the James Bay region. The Jesuit missionaries learned that: "various Algonkin Nations...have settled on the shores of that sea [James Bay]."¹²⁰

In the summer of 1661, the Iroquois launched a major northern war campaign. Three hundred Mohawk warriors raided in different directions north of the St. Lawrence River from Trois Rivieres to Tadoussac. Two Jesuit missionaries, Claude Dablon and Gabriel Druillettes, were caught in the middle of the conflict. They had accompanied a party of 80 Montagnais and Algonkin middlemen on a journey up the Saguenay River to trade with the "Kiristinons" on the coast of James Bay. The party was forced to return at a place called Nekouba near the headwaters of the Saguenay River because of nearby Iroquois war parties. Dablon noted that: "the panic is said to have spread to the Seacoast whither we were going, and whither these barbarians fully intend this year to extend their cruelty, in order to push their conquests as far toward the North as they have

¹¹⁸The Jesuits reported that the Attikamegue regularly communicated with the Indian groups on James Bay (see, for example, Thwaites, 1896-1901, vol. 43: 51).

¹¹⁹Francis and Morantz, 1983: 19.

¹²⁰Thwaites, 1896-1901, vol. 45: 225.

done, of late years, toward the South."¹²¹

The Jesuits were informed that the Iroquois spent the winter of 1661-62 near Nekouba and killed many people in the vicinity (see figure 5.3.1). They reported that: "all the lands of the North, which had never before seen any Iroquois, have become so infested with them that there is no cavern in those vast regions of rocks dark enough to serve as a place of concealment."¹²² The Jesuits remarked that: "We were told that the plan of the Iroquois was, not to pause there, but to push on as far as the North sea, to carry all before them, like a torrent, then to descend by way of Lake St. John and Tadoussac."¹²³

In 1665 Iroquois war parties returned to the headwaters of the Saguenay River and terrorized the Indians in the surrounding territory.¹²⁴ In 1672, Father Albanel visited Lake Nemiskau and described the ruins of Indian settlements and an Iroquois fortification. Albanel observed that:

Five large rivers empty into this lake [Nemiskau], making it so rich in fish that the latter formed the main subsistence of a populous savage nation dwelling here eight or ten years ago. The sad monuments of their place of residence are still to be seen; and also, on a rocky islet, the remains of a large fort constructed of stout trees by the Iroquois, whence he guarded all the approaches and made frequent sallies. Seven years ago

¹²¹Ibid, vol. 46: 287, 291.

¹²²Ibid, vol. 47: 151.

¹²³Ibid: 153.

¹²⁴Ibid, vol. 50: 37.

[1665] he killed on this spot, or led away captive, eighty persons; this caused the entire abandonment of the place, its original inhabitants departing thence.¹²⁵

The last of this series of Iroquois attacks in the north were recorded in 1673 and 1674. In 1673, Iroquois warriors were reported to have made raids in the Moose River area. A group of Indians who came from "Quebec" to the HBC post at the mouth of the Rupert River on October 23, 1673, reported that: "as they past Moose River, about 10 Days journey from Rupert's, they saw some dead bodies of Indians, which they suppos'd to be Onachanoes, most of that Nation being destroyed by the Nodwayes, who were then about Moose River."¹²⁶ In 1674, the Jesuits reported that Iroquois warriors were in the vicinity of Lake Mistassini, and "fear reigned everywhere."¹²⁷

After 1674, the Iroquois raids subsided, but the alliance that developed between the French fur traders and the Iroquois on the one hand, and the Lowland Cree and the English HBC fur traders on the other continued to pose a threat to the security of the Lowland Cree. While threats of Iroquois attacks were usually more imagined than real, periodic raids into Lowland Cree territory were reported. For example, on May 27, 1706, a rumour circulated around Albany Fort that the French and their Indian allies planned to attack the fort. Anthony Beale reported that:

¹²⁵Ibid, vol. 56: 183.

¹²⁶Oldmixon, 1931: 385.

¹²⁷Thwaites, 1896-1901, vol. 59: 39.

[T]he french and Indians that where [sic] coming against our factory are hindered by those Indians that lies between them and us who will not suffer them to pass through their countrey, notwithstanding they have offered them presents to that end but they have been utterly refused.¹²⁸

By 1713, French fur traders had established trading posts at the headwaters of the Moose and Albany Rivers, and rumours of French attacks against Albany Fort were common.¹²⁹ One Indian who visited Albany Fort in the spring of 1713 told Anthony Beale that he been among the "ba bi tim my [Abitibi] Indians," and he was told that the French planned to attack Albany Fort.¹³⁰ This story caused most of the Albany River Lowland Cree who usually hunted geese for the HBC to move northward away from the

¹²⁸HBCA, B.3/a/1, fo. 50d.

¹²⁹The locations of the French fur trade posts are difficult to pinpoint because the HBC traders relied on information that was conveyed by Indians. On May 3, 1716, Indians reported that the French had built a post on the Albany River located about seven days travel by canoe upriver from Albany Fort. This may have been in the area near the confluence of the Albany and Kenogami Rivers, where the HBC later built Henley House (HBCA, B.3/a/9, fo. 10d). In the summer of 1732, Upland Indians reported that there were two French posts on the Albany River (HBCA, B.3/a/20, June 7, 1732, fo. 25). After the HBC established Henley House in 1743, the French withdrew from that area of the Albany River but they still maintained posts upriver. Indian reports indicated that the nearest French post was about 150 miles upriver, probably near the site of the future HBC post named Gloucester House (HBCA, B.3/a/37, May 7, 1746, fo. 38). In 1754, Indian reported that French traders had been within 50 miles of the sea coast between Albany Fort and York Factory. This may have referred to French traders on the lower Severn River (HBCA, B.3/a/46, June 6, 1754, fo. 31d). Another Indian report in 1716 described a French trading post that was located about eight days paddle by canoe up the Moose River. This may have been the French post on Lake Abitibi (see Heidenreich and Noel, 1987: plate 39).

¹³⁰HBCA, B.3/a/4, March 24, 1713, fo. 26.

fort to be out of the way of the intended attack.¹³¹ On May 14, 1716, one canoe of "French Indians" arrived at Albany Fort with news that the French traders had promised to pay the value of 30 beaver skins to any Indian who brought them the scalp of a HBC trader.¹³² In the fall of 1723, sightings of strange Indians near Albany Fort caused the goose hunt to come to an abrupt end, and the Lowland Cree goose hunters came to the fort and told Richard Staunton that the "Cannadie Indians are come to kill them."¹³³

In the spring of 1729, some Upland Indians informed the HBC that the French fur traders had mobilized a force that included "Morohawkes (who are in their interest)" to attack Albany Fort.¹³⁴ On June 7, 1729, the HBC sentries shot and wounded an Iroquois who had been sent to scout the area around the fort.¹³⁵ On June 18, 1729, HBC men opened fire on a war party of 10 or 12 men who were in sight of the fort.¹³⁶

¹³¹Other Indians who visited Albany Fort in the summer of 1713 reported that the French raid failed because the leaders of the Upland Indians who lived near the headwaters of the Moose River refused to join them. Beale noted that: "the french had designed to come against [Albany Fort] this summer, that they were gott up into the Lakes [at the head of Moose River] for that end, and had called together severall leading Indians, giving them presents of tobacco and other things to gett them to joyne them in their expedition, butt ye Indians disdainfully refused in taking their present that lay on ye ground before them broke with their fitt [feet]" (HBCA, B.3/a/4, June 3, 1713, fo. 34d).

¹³²HBCA, B.3/a/9, May 25, 1716, fo. 26; B.3/a/13, June 3, 1725, fo. 29.

¹³³HBCA, B.3/a/12, September 22, 1723, fo. 5d.

¹³⁴HBCA, B.3/a/17, May 7, 1729, fo. 20.

¹³⁵HBCA, B.3/a/17, fo. 22d. This wounded man later died according to Indian information (HBCA, B.3/a/18, July 25, 1730, fo. 21).

¹³⁶HBCA, B.3/a/17, fo. 23.

The fear of the Iroquois among the Moose and Albany River Lowland Cree continued throughout much of the 18th century. Most reports turned out to be false alarms, but the reactions of the Lowland Cree evidenced great fear of the Iroquois. Rumours that the Mohawk intended to attack Albany Fort in the summer of 1744 caused panic among the Lowland Cree. Joseph Isbister remarked that reports of Mohawk warriors "works on the superstitious Indians and frightens them out of their wits."¹³⁷ As late as 1788, reports of Iroquois warriors near Albany Fort caused panic among the Lowland Cree population.¹³⁸

¹³⁷HBCA, B.3/a/35, May 17, 1744, fo. 30d. The same fear was expressed about attacks by the "Attawawas," a name that was generally used to describe the Ottawa, an Algonquian-speaking group who lived around Lake Huron. In 1778, Thomas Hutchins, who was in charge of Albany Fort, reported that: "The Attawawas still seem to harbour an hostile intent...they frighten all our Indians out of their wits being esteemed canibals" (HBCA, A.11/4, March 14, 1778, fo. 71d).

¹³⁸HBCA, B.198/a/37, June 26, 1788, fo. 43. A year earlier, many Albany River Lowland Cree stayed clear of Albany Fort because of a fear that "a tribe of Indians called the Notaways which they expected were coming to invade their country" (HBCA, B.198/a/ 35, June 4, 1787, fo. 36d). In a letter to the London Committee of the HBC in the summer of 1788, Edward Jarvis noted "the old fear the Indians [Lowland Cree] have so often been under of being attacked by far away Indians." Jarvis interviewed a Canadian fur trader who had deserted from a post near Abitibi, and he reported that the far away Indians were "Outois Indians who cultivate corn which the women take care of in the mens absence" (A.11/5, fos. 82, 83d).

CHAPTER 6: THE LOWLAND CREE AND THE LAND: SEASONAL ADAPTATIONS TO REGIONAL RESOURCES

6.1: The Seasonal Cycle:

Human life within the Hudson Bay Lowlands adapted to and depended upon the ebb and flow of the seasonal cycle. The changing seasons shaped the locale and numbers of different animals and other natural resources within the vast Lowland region. The Lowland Cree understood the seasonal rhythm of the natural world around them, and patterned their activities according to the changing abundance and decline in these resources. For the Lowland Cree, the quest for food and shelter was a circular journey, leading them to traditional places of seasonal resource availability that had sustained their ancestors for countless generations.

The significance of the changing seasonal patterns of resource abundance in the Hudson Bay Lowlands was reflected in the Lowland Cree concept of time. The yearly calendar of the Lowland Cree described the changing moons in terms of important natural events such as animal migrations. Andrew Graham recorded the Lowland Cree names and meanings of the months, and these are shown in Figure 6.1.1.

FIGURE 6.1.1: LOWLAND CREE CALENDAR

MONTH	INDIAN NAME	TRANSLATION (GRAHAM)
March	Mekisseu-Apeshem	Eagle Moon - when the eagles make their appearance
April	Niscock-Apeshem	Goose Moon - when the grey geese [Canada Geese] make their appearance
May	Atheak-Apeshem	Frog Moon - when the frogs begin to croak
June	Oupinnihou-Apeshem	Incubation Moon - when the geese lay their eggs
July	Oupusakou-Apeshem	Moulting Moon - when the geese are moulting
August	Uppahau-Apeshem	Flying Moon - when the young geese fly
September	Wuskaohow-Apeshem	Shedding Moon - when the deer [Caribou] shed their horns
October	Wesack-Apeshem	Rutting Moon - when the deer are rutting
November	Askuttatesaw-Apeshem	Frost Moon - when the rivers freeze over
December	Powatchinchanisish-Apeshem	Short Day Moon - when the days are short and the nights are long
January	Shepowartiscinum-Apeshem	Cold Moon - when the severe cold sets in
February	Shea-Apeshem	Old Moon - when the winter is old and the day is lengthening

6.2 Spring:

It is significant that the Lowland Cree calendar year began with the month of March. Graham noted that March was the month "which seems to be the most remarkable by them [Lowland Cree]."¹ The Bald Eagle (Haliaeetus leucocephalus), known as Mிக்கேசுவ (Graham) or Me ke su (Isham) in the Lowland Cree language, was the first migratory bird to arrive in the Lowlands.² Graham also observed that: "these princely birds claim the premier distinction [among all species of birds] not only on account of the respect usually paid by the ancients to them, but because they are the first that visit us with the returning spring."³ Thus, the arrival of the Bald Eagle to the coastal lowlands was the first sign of spring and, for the Lowland Cree, a spiritual signal of the rebirth of a new year.

As the Moon of the Eagle (March) waned, caribou began to arrive in the coastal lowlands near the Nelson and Hayes Rivers. Great herds of migrating caribou, or Attick (Graham)⁴, travelled each spring from the upland forest, following well-worn paths that

¹Graham, 1969: 166.

²References to Graham and Isham in parentheses relate to their transcriptions of Lowland Cree names.

³Graham, 1969: 38. William Falconer also noted that: "The first bird of passage is the Eagle, who makes its appearance in this month [March]." Falconer, n.d.: 16.

⁴These were probably Barren-Ground Caribou (Rangifer arcticus). However, scientific classification of these animals has been problematic since the herds disappeared in the 19th century. According to Samuel Hearne, the Lowland caribou was much larger than the Barren-Ground caribou he observed northwest of Churchill Fort (Hearne, 1958: 145). Following Hearne, others classified the Hudson Bay Lowland animals as

crossed over the frozen Nelson, Hayes and Severn Rivers.⁵ The caribou herds moved southeast, parallel to the Hudson Bay coastline, before dispersing in summer breeding grounds on the coastal tundra as far away as Cape Henrietta Maria and Akimiski Island. After calving and feeding on the tundra vegetation, the caribou aggregated into large herds for the return migration in late summer. Retracing ancient pathways, and crossing

Woodland Caribou. Foremost in this regard were John Richardson (Richardson, 1829: 250) and Edward Preble (Preble, 1902: 41). However, other investigators have challenged these conclusions. For example, J.B. Tyrrell identified the Lowland animals as Barren-Ground Caribou (Tyrrell, 1913: 178). A.W.F. Banfield's landmark study of the Barren-Ground caribou also concluded that the Lowland herds were Barren-Ground Caribou. Unlike previous investigators who relied on Hearne's description of size differences, Banfield was the first to focus on migration patterns and herd size as indicators of caribou taxonomy. Banfield concluded that: "the range of the barren-ground caribou formerly extended eastward along the shore of Hudson Bay as far as Cape Henrietta Maria and that Hearne and Preble erroneously believed these to be woodland caribou" (Banfield, 1954: 12). Francis Harper attempted to reconcile the differing opinions on the identification of the Lowland caribou, and concluded that: "Possibly chief reliance should be placed upon the testimony of such high authorities as Hearne, Richardson, and Preble when they refer to the animals as Woodland Caribou. Furthermore, none of the early writers identify them unequivocally as the Barren Ground species. It remains fairly evident that long ago some species of Caribou in great numbers did actually cross these rivers in a southerly direction in the spring, pass the summer on coastal tundra east of York Factory, and return northward or northwestward in late summer or autumn. Whichever species it was, it represented a segment of the population that must have become reduced to utterly insignificant numbers, if not entirely extirpated, some decades ago. In any event, it does not seem very likely that we shall ever be able to reconstruct the actual movements of the 'incredible multitudes' in the York Factory region of more than a century ago" (Harper, 1955: 9-10). John Kelsall's detailed study of the Barren-Ground Caribou in 1968 was also inconclusive about the identification of the caribou that historically visited the Lowlands. However, Kelsall admitted that: "some of the earliest reported movements were so large that they must have involved migratory [Barren-Ground Caribou] herds" (Kelsall, 1968: 61). According to the oral history of Lowland Indians living near the mouth of the Attawapiskat River in the 1940s, "The brush caribou (locally called 'deer') (*hatik'*), once fairly plentiful along the west coast of James Bay, has all but disappeared from the country" (Honigmann, 1948: 161).

⁵Nicolas Jeremie noted that the paths made by the caribou "form a closer net work than the streets of Paris (Jeremie, 1926: 22).

ice-free rivers, the caribou returned to the upland forest where they dispersed into smaller herds for the winter (see figure 6.2.1). Andrew Graham noted that the direction of the caribou migrations was: "contrary to the birds of passage and other migratory animals they go to the southward in the beginning of summer, and to the northward at the approach of winter."⁶

The spring migration of caribou across the Hayes River usually began in late March or early April. Joseph Colen, who was in charge of York Factory in 1788, noted that the "usual season" for caribou to begin crossing the Hayes River was the "Change of this Moon [March]."⁷ Nicolas Jeremie, who was stationed at the French post at the mouth of the Hayes River, observed that the caribou: "pass twice a year. The first time is in the months of April and May, on which occasion they come from the north and go south."⁸ The Lowland Cree called the spring migration the season when "Deer walk."⁹

A number of Europeans commented on the large numbers of caribou that migrated into the Lowlands during the early fur trade period. For example, Jeremie remarked that: "the number of them is almost countless."¹⁰ Gabriel Marest was more specific, noting

⁶Graham, 1969: 14.

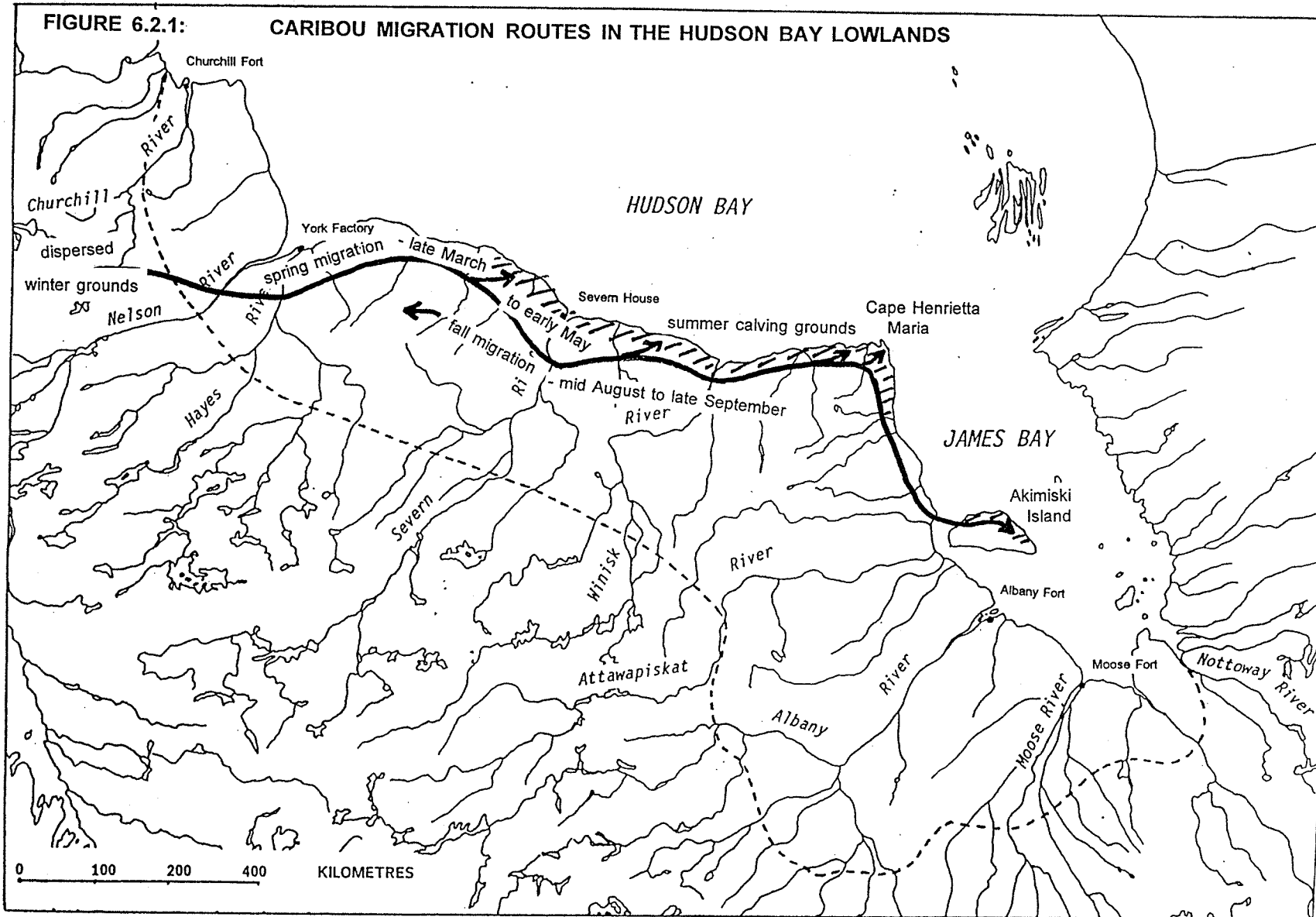
⁷HBCA, B.239/a/88, March 29, 1788, fo. 33d.

⁸Jeremie, 1926: 22.

⁹HBCA, B.239/a/30, Feb. 17, 1748, fo. 17.

¹⁰Jeremie, 1926: 22.

FIGURE 6.2.1: CARIBOU MIGRATION ROUTES IN THE HUDSON BAY LOWLANDS



that individual herds numbered more than 300 to 400 caribou, and more than 10,000 caribou crossed the Hayes River in two days.¹¹ Bacqueville de la Potherie estimated that each herd contained 700 to 800 caribou.¹² In 1747, T.S. Drage, who visited York Factory, wrote that:

The latter part of this Month [March] the Deer began to cross the Hay's River, twenty miles above the Factory; where Indians were waiting for to kill them. One year they passed in four Columns or in four different Tracks, all within three miles space, one of the Columns passing near the Factory, and the whole four Columns did not contain less in Number than eight or ten thousand Deer. This happen'd in the Month of April.¹³

In the spring of 1792, David Thompson, recorded a graphic description and enumeration of several caribou herds that crossed the Hayes River. Thompson encountered the caribou about 20 miles upriver from York Factory. His sighting of the caribou was preceded by a noise that sounded like "distant thunder."¹⁴ The caribou travelled in a long column, about 100 yards wide. Beside the main column, there were small outlying groups of caribou numbering ten to twenty each. Thompson reported that it took an entire day for the main column to ford the river. The following day, he observed a second great herd and several smaller herds crossing the river. Thompson, who was trained in mathematics and surveying,¹⁵ estimated that three million caribou crossed the

¹¹Marest, 1931: 127.

¹²Bacqueville de la Potherie, 1931: 221.

¹³Drage, 1968, vol. 2: 17.

¹⁴Thompson, 1916: 100.

¹⁵Nicks, 1985: 879.

river in two days. Although this extraordinary figure more likely reflected flaws in his memory (his memoirs were written more than fifty years after the event) than his experience as a scientific observer, Thompson undoubtedly witnessed a spectacular caribou migration across the Hayes River in the spring of 1792.

The caribou herds usually followed the same routes each year, and crossed rivers at well-worn crossing places. These habits made them relatively easy prey for Lowland Cree hunters. The Lowland Cree set up hunting camps in late winter near migration routes in anticipation of the arrival of the caribou.¹⁶ The caribou herds usually crossed the Hayes River about 20 to 60 miles above York Factory.¹⁷ Caribou crossings on the Nelson River were located about the same distance inland from the coast.¹⁸ Smaller herds sometimes crossed the rivers closer to the coast, and occasionally large herds came

¹⁶The significance of traditional caribou crossing sites was noted by A.W.F. Banfield, who wrote that: "The location of well-used migration crossing points was of great importance to natives and European explorers relying on the barren-ground caribou for their existence on the tundra and in the sub-Arctic forests" (Banfield, 1954, part 1: 14). According to Bryan Gordon, caribou water crossings have been important places for hunting by Indians for thousands of years. Bryan observed that: "Caribou aggregation, predictable habits and relative ease in killing suggest that North American Palaeo-Indians would have utilized water crossings in a manner similar to that of the Upper Palaeolithic hunters of Europe" (Gordon, 1977: 81).

¹⁷See, for example, HBCA, B.239/a/10, March 22, 1728, fo. 16d (60 miles); B.239/a/13, March 26, 1731, fo. 17 (20 miles); B.239/a/13, March 30, 1731, fo. 17 (40 miles); B.239/a/17, March 26, 1735, fo. 19 (40 miles); B.239/a/25, March 19, 1744, fo. 18 (20 miles); B.239/a/28, April 7, 1747, fo. 25d (20 miles); B.239/a/35, March 27, 1752, fo. 26 (34 miles); and B.239/a/42, March 18, 1757, fo. 34 (50 miles).

¹⁸On August 25, 1775, Samuel Hearne was about 50 miles up the Nelson River when he "arrived at the Place where several Home Natives are waiting to kill Deer, several crossing the River Here at times." The next day, Hearne observed that: "Many Deer crossing the River in Places" (Rich, 1951: 4).

within sight of York Factory. For example, on April 26, 1743, Thomas White, Chief Factor of York Factory, wrote that: "severall large herds of Deer Cross ye river."¹⁹

After crossing the Nelson and Hayes Rivers, most of the caribou continued moving southeast parallel to the Hudson Bay coast, crossing the Severn River about 20 to 40 miles inland from the coast. Many of the Severn River Lowland Cree established hunting camps about twenty miles upriver at a place known as Ouaouiastine²⁰ or White Seal Falls. On March 26, 1775, William Falconer, who was in charge of Severn House, reported that: "The Indians that came yesterday went away to Waweaston about 22 miles up the river; from whence came two more who inform us the most of our Homeguards are there waiting for Deer."²¹ Sometimes, scouting parties were sent from Severn toward York Factory to detect the movement of the caribou herds. For example, on April 11, 1769, two Indians arrived at Severn with news that: "the Deer were plenty within 3 days journey to the Northwest."²²

The caribou did not migrate as far south as the Albany River during the fur trade period.

The most southerly destination was Akimiski Island, where large numbers spent the

¹⁹HBCA, B.239/a/24, fo. 22d.

²⁰The spelling of Ouaouiastine follows the convention used by Pilon in his archaeological study of the lower Severn River. Pilon explained that: "The site names were written using French orthography with which I am quite familiar, and which, I felt, more accurately reproduced the Cree sound system" (Pilon, 1987: 40).

²¹HBCA, B.198/a/19, fo. 32.

²²HBCA, B.198/a/11, fo. 24.

summer on the tundra of the island's northern shore. According to William Coats, the name Akimiski, or Agomisco, meant "where deer [caribou] herds."²³ Coats also stated that there were "herds of deer all the summer, where our home Indians go to kill and dry quantities of it for their and ours uses at Albany."²⁴

During the spring migration, caribou usually crossed over frozen rivers and the best method of hunting was to build fences or hedges with snares set in them to trap the animals. During the return migration in late summer the caribou swam across the open rivers, and the most productive hunting method was to spear them from canoes. Both techniques did not require European technology, and suggest that caribou could be easily harvested during both the spring and fall in the period before European contact.²⁵

The caribou fence, or hedge, was an Indian invention, and European fur traders built copies patterned after the Indian model. The construction of the Lowland Cree caribou hedge was described by James Isham as follows:

²³Coats, 1852: 43.

²⁴Ibid: 60. In the summer of 1887, Albert P. Low conducted a geological survey of Akimiski Island, and he reported that the island was easily accessible by canoe at low tide when the distance from the mainland to the northern tip of the island was less than a mile (Low, 1888: 25J).

²⁵Pilon identified the remains of many caribou at a site located about 10 miles above Severn House, at a place known as Ile de l'Ourson. It was a pre-European camp site, with a heavy focus on caribou as a food resource. Pilon concluded that: "Given the relatively large number of animals represented at the site, it can reasonably be assumed that they died during either of the two annual migrations. The recovery of antler fragments lacking cortex suggests occupation of the site during the spring migration or early in the summer" (Pilon, 1987: 71).

...their snares are made of Deer, or other skins Cutt in strips, plating several things together,-they also make snares of the Sinnew's of beast after the same manner, they then make a hedge for one or two mile in Length. Leaving Vacant places,-they then fall trees and Sprig them as big as they can gett, setting one up an End at the side of the Vacant place, fastning the snare to one of these trees, then setting the snare round they Slightly studdy the snare on Each side, the bottom of the snare being about 2 1/2 foot from the ground, Driving stakes under'ne that they may not creep under, they then Leave them when the Deer being pursued by the Natives other way's they strive to go thro these Vacant places, by which they are Entangld. and Striving to gett away the tree falls Downe, sometimes upon them and Kills them if not they frequently hawl these trees for some miles tell a growing tree or stump brings them up,-when the Indians going to the snares the next Day, trak's them and Knock's them on the head.²⁶

Caribou hedges were noted in the early European records from the York Factory area. For example, when the HBC returned to the mouth of the Hayes River in the fall of 1714, they found that the French traders had constructed two caribou hedges upriver. The locations of the caribou hedges near York Factory varied over time, but generally ranged from three to 16 miles upriver.²⁷ Caribou hedges were also built near Severn House and Churchill Fort. These too were constructed within walking distance of the post, and were patterned after Indian-built hedges.

Unfortunately, there are very few descriptions in the HBC records of caribou hedges built and operated exclusively by the Lowland Cree. It is apparent that hedges built by Indians were located farther upriver, away from the hinterland of the factory. Upriver

²⁶Isham, 1949: 152-53. See also Graham, 1969: 16.

²⁷HBCA, B.239/a/2, March 17, 1716, fo. 18; B.239/a/4, April 2, 1718, fo. 18d.

hedges were also more effective since the most of the caribou herds passed over the river at least 20 miles from the factory, beyond the reach of the upper-most HBC hedges.²⁸

Caribou hunting camps were occupied by large groups of Lowland Cree.²⁹ Communal efforts were needed to construct and effectively operate caribou hedges. Other methods of caribou hunting such as spears and bow and arrows were employed, but the caribou hedge was evidently the best technique to capture large numbers of caribou in the spring. After the acquisition of European firearms, guns may have been used to replace aboriginal technology such as spears and arrows, but the caribou hedge persisted as a preferred method of capturing caribou.

Relative to other times of the year, caribou were least desirable as a food and commercial resource in the spring. Caribou skins were of little value during the spring time because many were infested with warble fly larvae that began to eat holes in the

²⁸HBCA, B.239/a/6, fo. 17d. In the spring of 1718, a hedge was built by Lowland Cree who lived close to York Factory. Henry Kelsey reported that it was located: "almost from this River to Port Nelson a cross a neck of land that is about five mile through. It's but eighteen mile up this River and will be far more advantageous than that which is twenty four miles up [another Indian hedge]" (HBCA, B.239/a/4, April 26, 1718, fo. 20d).

²⁹For example, at York Factory on July 19, 1780, Humphrey Marten noted that: "about 180 young and old home Indians came to the Fort with a little dried meat and upwards of 100 deer skins" (HBCA, B.239/a/78, fo. 40). Indian ceremonies connected with the caribou hunt were rarely recorded by the European traders, perhaps because the hunting camps were usually located at a distance from the trading posts. Joseph Colen, who was in charge of York Factory in 1787, reported that the Lowland Indian caribou hunters "had their Grand Hunting Feast and Dance" (HBCA, B.239/a/87, July 26, 1787, fo. 45).

skin in late winter and early spring.³⁰ During the spring migration, caribou depleted fat reserves and thus little fat was available for commercial sales to the European fur traders. Caribou meat was also usually lean during the spring period, and therefore of little value as a trade item at that time of the year.

Shortly after the spring caribou migration, geese and other migratory birds arrived in the coastal marshes. The northward spring migration of geese and other birds was closely associated with the spring break-up of ice in the lakes and rivers. Coastal ponds and sloughs which comprised the main feeding areas for most migratory waterfowl became clear of ice in advance of the break-up of lakes and rivers.³¹ This connection was noted by Joseph Colen, Chief Factor at York Factory, who observed that: "Ducks and other aquatic fowl made their appearance in great numbers; - a sure sign the River ice upwards having given way - tho we have no signs at present near us."³² Waterfowl generally made their first appearance on the coast several weeks in advance of the spring ice break-up.

³⁰Ernest Burch noted the seasonal differences in the quality of caribou skins, and he wrote that: "As winter wanes and the molt approaches, warble fly larvae, developing from eggs deposited under the skin the previous summer, begin to eat holes in the hide. From this point (February) on, the skins are worthless for any purpose" (Burch, 1972: 343).

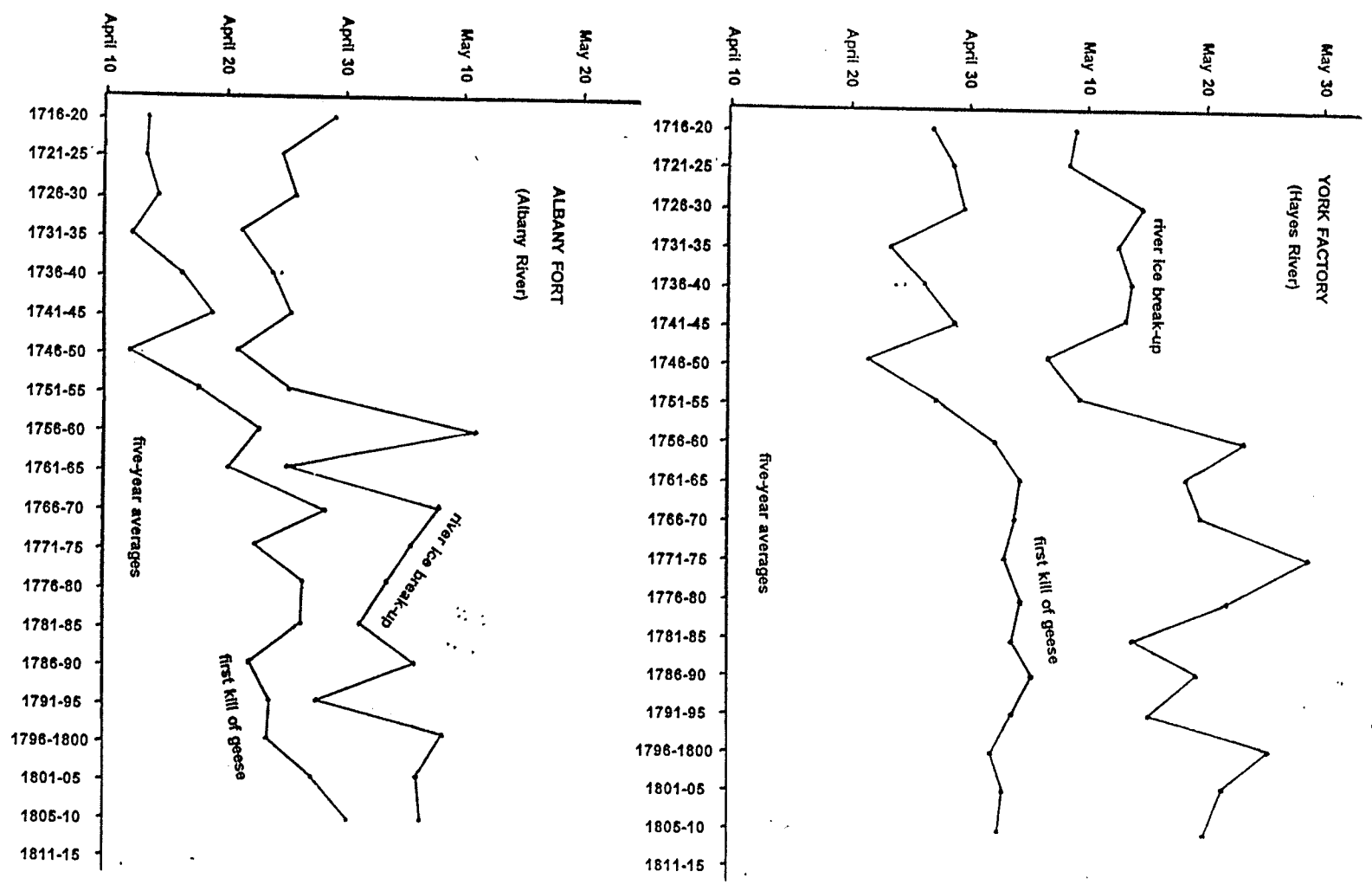
³¹Arthur Dobbs's critique of the HBC included the following account of the arrival of geese to the Albany Fort area: "The wild Geese come to these Rivers from the Southward in the Middle of April, as soon as the Swamps are thawed, at which Time they are lean; they stay until the Middle of May, when they go Northward to breed" (Dobbs, 1967: 52-53).

³²HBCA, B.239/a/91, fo. 20d.

The beginning of the spring thaw was a critical event in the seasonal movement patterns of the Lowland Cree for a number of reasons. Thawing conditions hampered overland travel as hard-packed snow gave way to slush and mud. Movement across rivers and lakes was also restricted once the thaw melted ice to the point that could not sustain the weight of human travellers. The break-up of lake and river ice made these water bodies extremely dangerous. Broken ice driven by the current scoured river banks and ice-jams caused flooding that spilled-over onto adjacent valley lands.

The spring break-up of ice in rivers flowing into James and Hudson Bay occurred at different times, and was generally influenced by the latitudinal location of each coastal estuary. Thus, the more southerly Albany River broke clear of ice before the Severn River, which in turn was ice-free before the Hayes River. Because both the arrival of the first geese and the spring break-up were very significant events in the yearly cycle at the HBC coastal posts, they were often carefully recorded in the HBC journals. Figure 6.2.2 shows the average dates of the first kill of geese and river ice break-up at Albany Fort and York Factory between 1716 and 1815.

FIGURE 6.2.2: RIVER ICE BREAK-UP AND FIRST KILL OF GEESE AT YORK FACTORY AND ALBANY FORT, 1716-1815



Unusual wind conditions often caused deviations from the usual timing of the spring migration.³³ For example, William Falconer, who was in charge of Severn House in the spring of 1784, noted the delayed arrival of geese and attributed it to the lack of westerly winds.³⁴ In the spring of 1788, John Ballanden noted the importance of westerly winds near Severn House when he wrote that: "the wind harbouring so much in the eastern quarter will make but a poor goose hunt this spring."³⁵ At York Factory, wind conditions also played an important role in shaping the migration patterns of geese. For example, on May 13, 1717, James Knight remarked that strong southerly winds had caused the geese to move north, and he wrote that: "I am afraid this hard Wind has Carry'd away most of the Geese too ye Northward and I believe wee shall have butt a very indifferent Season without a Northerly Wind comes and brings them back again."³⁶

Air temperature was also noted by HBC traders as an additional, complementary factor influencing geese migrations. For example, the spring of 1797 near Severn House was unusually cold and geese were late in coming to the coast. By May 16, 1797, the

³³Timothy Ball's study of HBC archival records at York Factory and Churchill Fort between 1715 and 1851 indicated that: "It appears that the birds [geese] relate their migratory decisions primarily to one climatic variable, namely wind direction. The warming conditions would be expected with a south wind in these latitudes and are therefore not the controlling factor" (Ball, 1983: 86). It should be noted that Ball's data for the first sighting of geese at York Factory do not correspond with the figures that I obtained from the York Factory records.

³⁴HBCA, B.198/a/29, May 15, 1784, fo. 32d.

³⁵HBCA, B.198/a/37, May 7, 1788, fo. 33.

³⁶HBCA, B.239/a/3, fo. 47d.

temperature began to warm and Thomas Thomas remarked that: "the Weather rather milder tho' not sufficiently so to admit of the Geese coming to the Coast."³⁷ In the spring of 1735, warm weather and southerly winds were blamed for a poor goose hunt near York Factory. Thomas White observed that although he had employed "20 extraordinary goose hunters... the only cause of our Disappointment has been ye weather here having been nothing but hot weather with Southerly winds for these 6 Days past, which Drove ye Geese to ye Northward, and so far out to Sea, out of Reach of all our hunters."³⁸

Snow conditions also played a role in influencing the migration patterns of geese. For example, the goose hunt in the spring of 1790 was extremely poor at York Factory, with only 401 geese killed in total. Joseph Colen commented that: "the old Natives say they never knew such a scarcity of Geese" and he explained that: "The few Geese seen is imputed to the small quantity of snow falling in the Winter, and which dissolved early in the Spring, that most of the Lakes and Ponds were open in the plains, where the Geese resort and feed during the cold weather, and took their flight Northerly without visiting the Coast as was usual at this time of the Year."³⁹ A similar explanation was recorded by Thomas White at York Factory on May 14, 1743. White noted that: "ye winds hanging so much easterly, and ye snow being so soon consumed of ye ground has drove

³⁷HBCA, B.198/a/48, fo. 36d. The Severn River did not break-up until May 28, 1797. The first goose was killed on May 23, 1797.

³⁸HBCA, B.239/a/17, May 10, 1735, fo. 23d.

³⁹HBCA, B.239/a/90, May 30, 1790, fo. 44d.

all ye geese inland."⁴⁰

European visitors to the Hudson and James Bay coasts were impressed with the number of migratory birds that visited the coastal Lowlands. Gabriel Marest reported that: "In spring and autumn, there are also found a prodigious number of wavys [Lesser Snow Geese], Canada geese, ducks, brants, and other river birds."⁴¹ Bacqueville de la Potherie wrote: "The wild geese and ducks are so plentiful in spring and autumn that the banks of the river Ste. Therese [Hayes River] are all covered with them."⁴²

Among the various species of migratory waterfowl, ducks and plover (a term used to describe shore birds in general) were usually the first to arrive on the coast. The Snow Bunting (Plectrophenax nivalis⁴³) which was called Wapathecusish (Graham) or Wap pa tha ko sish (Isham) by the Lowland Cree, arrived in early April and stayed along the coast for five to six weeks before continuing northward to their breeding grounds. Andrew Graham noted that numbers of these birds were caught with nets, and that they were "very fat and reckoned a delicacy."⁴⁴ The Mallard Duck (Anas Platrhynchos), also known by the HBC men as the Indian Duck, and called by the Lowland Cree,

⁴⁰HBCA, B.239/a/24, fo. 22d.

⁴¹Marest, 1931: 127.

⁴²Bacqueville de la Potherie, 1931: 221.

⁴³The scientific names for birds follows the convention used by W.E. Godfrey (1986).

⁴⁴Graham, 1969: 41.

Etheenieship (Graham) or E'thi thu ship (Isham), was described by Graham as a "beautiful duck [which] is of great service, being good food both to Indians and Europeans."⁴⁵

Canada Geese (Branta canadensis) were usually the first species of geese to arrive in the coastal marshes.⁴⁶ Called Grey Geese by the HBC, and Niscock (Graham) or Neishcoock (Isham) by the Lowland Cree, Canada Geese were especially numerous in the James Bay area. Andrew Graham remarked that Canada Geese arrived in flocks of ten to thirty, and stayed near the Company's posts for about three weeks feeding in the coastal marshes. Thereafter, the geese separated into pairs and moved into the coastal plains to breed.

A closely related species of goose, the Richardson's Goose (Branta canadensis hutchinsii), known as the Canada Goose by Graham, and Apistiskish (Graham) or Appiskeske (Isham) in the Lowland Cree language, usually arrived in large flocks several

⁴⁵Ibid: 47.

⁴⁶Although flocks of Canada and Lesser Snow Geese sometimes arrived at the same time, Canada Geese generally arrived first. For example, near Severn House in the spring of 1790, the first Canada Goose was sighted on May 5, while the first Lesser Snow Goose was reported on May 23. In the spring of 1792, Canada Geese appeared near Severn House on April 27, while Lesser Snow Geese were first sighted on May 17. Occasionally, Lesser Snow Geese arrived before Canada Geese, and this was seen as a bad omen for the goose hunt. For example, on April 14, 1707, Anthony Beale, Chief Factor at Albany Fort, was informed by some Indian hunters that: "Whay waies begun to be very plentiful about and the Gray Geese scarce, which make much fear a Bad Goose Season" (HBCA, B.3/a/2, fo. 27).

weeks after the Canada Geese. The Richardson's Goose resembles a small Canada Goose, but Graham noted that they seldom mixed. Their feeding habits were also different, and Graham explained that Richardson's Geese were "always found about the high-water mark feeding on salt grass and sea-slime, which food causes their flesh to taste disagreeable."⁴⁷ Despite his negative assessment of its taste, Graham remarked that: "many hundreds are killed by the natives for the service of the factories."⁴⁸

The most numerous geese to migrate past the Severn and Hayes Rivers was the Lesser Snow Goose (white phase) (Anser caerulescens). It was also known as White Geese by the HBC traders, and Wavy after the Lowland Cree name, Wehwe (Graham) or Wappawewewuck (Isham). Lesser Snow Geese usually arrived several weeks after the Canada Geese and often travelled in huge flocks that numbered in the thousands. Although flocks of Lesser Snow Geese flew over the Albany River area, they were generally too high to be killed by the hunters. In the Severn River area and northward along the Hudson Bay coast these geese usually stayed in the marshes for about three weeks before moving northward to their summer breeding grounds. Andrew Graham remarked that: "At the height of the season the shores are quite covered with them, they rise like clouds and make a great noise."⁴⁹ James Isham wrote that: "they are Extrodinary good Eating fresh or Salt, and a Great help to the mentanence of the English

⁴⁷Graham, 1969: 42.

⁴⁸Ibid: 42.

⁴⁹Ibid: 43.

who Settles these parts, the Natives Killing for them some thousands of a Season, and is the chief of our Diet. "⁵⁰

While Lesser Snow Geese (white phase) generally overpassed the coastal area around Albany Fort for more northerly regions, the blue phase ⁵¹ known as the Blue Goose, and Cathactew Whewe (Graham) or Kurskatawawawuck (Isham), came to feed in the Albany River marshes in the thousands during the same migration period. Andrew Graham noted that: "Great numbers of this blue species are killed and stored up for food at the southern settlements. "⁵²

Another species of goose that frequented the coastal lowlands was the Brant Goose (*Branta bernicla*), which was known as Withawapawew (Graham) or Wirthawappawawuck (Isham) by the Lowland Cree. The Brant Goose is small, resembling a large duck in size rather than a goose, and remained along the coast all summer, feeding, breeding and rearing their young. Despite their availability, Brant Geese were not an important food or commercial resource for the Lowland Cree because of their disagreeable taste. Andrew Graham explained that these geese were "so fishy tasted that they are quite

⁵⁰Isham, 1949: 120-121.

⁵¹The Lesser Snow Goose and the Blue Goose were considered by some ornithologists to be colour phases of the same subspecies (Currie and Hanson, 1957: 219).

⁵²Graham, 1969: 44.

disregarded both by Europeans and Indians."⁵³

Swans, including the Trumpeter Swan (*Cygnus buccinator*) and Whistling or Tundra Swan (*Cygnus columbianus*)⁵⁴, were also migratory visitors to the Lowlands. Known generically as Wapeseew by the Lowland Cree, swans arrived together with the various species of geese, sometimes slightly in advance of the Canada Geese. Although much less numerous than geese⁵⁵, and a minor commercial resource, swans were highly regarded by the Lowland Cree. Andrew Graham noted that: "their flesh is coarse, and therefore not regarded by Europeans, but the natives are very fond of them."⁵⁶

Generally, Canada Geese and Blue Geese were the main species taken at Albany Fort during the spring goose hunt. Lesser Snow Geese dominated the Severn House and York Factory areas, with additional numbers of Richardson's Geese taken at the latter post

⁵³Ibid: 43. George Barnston agreed with the negative assessment of the Brant Goose. He commented that: "The Brant goose (*Bernicla Brenta*) the Calliwappemaw of the coast Cree, is but little looked after or cared for in Hudson's Bay, being a small species, keeping out to sea on the shoals, and towards lowest watermark, and affording a dish not high in estimation" (Barnston, 1861: 340).

⁵⁴Edward Umfreville noted that there were two species of swans, but did not identify them by name (Umfreville, 1954: 89).

⁵⁵Isham stated that he had seen hundreds of swans together, but Graham remarked that he never saw more than twelve in a flock (Isham, 1949: 127; Graham, 1969: 48). George Barnston remarked that: "The swan, except in a few particular localities, is a scarce, rather than a plentiful bird, on the shores of Hudson's Bay" (Barnston, 1861: 338).

⁵⁶Graham, 1969: 48.

each spring.⁵⁷

Some scholars have down-played the importance of waterfowl as a subsistence resource for the Lowland Cree prior to the acquisition of European firearms. Beryl Gillespie emphasized the post-contact hunting of waterfowl when she wrote that: "migratory waterfowl became an important food resource for the Indians of the Hudson Bay Lowland during the historic period."⁵⁸ Charles Bishop also commented that:

It is unlikely that Indians exploited geese either early in the spring or late in the fall: goose-hunting during the late April and early May break-up would have been hazardous; and after late August, full feathered birds unencumbered by flightless offspring would have been difficult quarry. Furthermore, and probably more important, Indians who remained near the coast after mid-September would have been exposed to an unpredictable existence in an area where travel was difficult.⁵⁹

Dale Russell made a direct correlation between the arrival of European fur traders and the advent of goose hunting by the Lowland Cree. Russell believed that the coastal region was a "no-man's land" prior to the establishment of European fur trade posts.⁶⁰ Following European fur trade settlement, Russell concluded that: "This necessitated a

⁵⁷Thomas Macklish, who became Chief Factor at York Factory in 1722, had been previously in charge of Albany Fort, and he noted the difference in the species of geese that frequented both places. Macklish observed that: "here [York Factory] being but few Gray Geese at the Sea Side, where is plenty at the Bottome of the Bay [Albany Fort]" (HBCA, B.3/239/a/8, April 15, 1723, fo. 44d).

⁵⁸Gillespie, 1981: 17.

⁵⁹Bishop, 1984: 31.

⁶⁰Russell, 1975: 424.

displacement of Indian people to the coast, originating the Home Guard Indians."⁶¹

Other scholars have advanced different views on this subject, indicating that migratory waterfowl may have been an important resource to the Lowland Cree prior to European contact despite the apparent limitation imposed by the lack of firearms. John Honigmann, who conducted ethnographic studies among the Lowland Cree near Attawapiskat in the 1940s and 1950s, stated that: "While waterfowl may not have played the outstanding role in diet aboriginally that they do today (the assumption being that shotguns are better suited for their killing than bow and arrows), they must have been fairly significant nevertheless."⁶²

The significance of migratory waterfowl as a subsistence resource for the Lowland Cree before European contact is difficult to assess from the available archaeological data. Jean-Luc Pilon did not find significant amounts of migratory waterfowl bones in the remains of pre-contact sites along the lower Severn River. However, he pointed out that avian remains may have been absent because the killing and butchering may have taken place elsewhere.⁶³ Pilon also noted that: "Although guns were not available, evidence from the Brant River suggests that waterfowl could be taken in significant numbers, especially during the moult, with technologically simpler means. Snares and blunt-tipped

⁶¹Russell, 1975: 422.

⁶²Honigmann, 1956: 32.

⁶³Pilon, 1987: 202.

arrows and perhaps bolas were important hunting devices."⁶⁴ This conclusion is supported by comments made by HBC traders. For example, Andrew Graham reported that "a great many" Canada Geese were taken by the Lowland Cree during the summer moult in the coastal plains, by simply knocking them on the head.⁶⁵ Lowland Cree also used dogs to hunt moulting geese and ducks. Joseph Colen, who was in charge of York Factory in 1798, commented that: "Our whole dependence at present for fresh victuals is on young ducks and moulting water fowl killed by Indians with dogs."⁶⁶ James Isham noted that Snow Bunting were caught with nets.⁶⁷

Several early European observers also suggested that the Lowland Cree hunted migratory waterfowl successfully prior to obtaining European firearms. For example, in the summer of 1631, Luke Fox described an abandoned Indian camp near the mouth of the Nelson River which contained the "bones of fowle."⁶⁸ Pierre Esprit Radisson, who claimed to have visited the James Bay area in the summer of 1660, stated that: "We went from isle to isle all that summer. We plucked abundance of ducks, as of all other sorts of fowle. We wanted not fish nor fresh meat [underline added]."⁶⁹ Radisson's use of

⁶⁴Ibid: 35.

⁶⁵Graham, 1969: 41.

⁶⁶HBCA, B.239/a/101, July 25, 1798, fo. 42.

⁶⁷Isham, 1949: 41.

⁶⁸Fox, 1965: 216.

⁶⁹Radisson, 1961: 146.

the word pluck suggests that the birds were taken by hand, possibly with a club as noted by Graham above. Radisson also explained that a bow and arrow were used to kill waterfowl, and he noted that: "I have seen wildmen [Indians] killing three ducks at once with one arrow."⁷⁰

Like caribou and geese, fish were seasonally abundant in the Lowlands, especially during spawning periods. The spring spawners included sucker, lake sturgeon and northern pike. Edward Umfreville observed that the fishery resource in the Lowlands was superior to that found in the upland regions. He stated that: "On the whole, fish are not so numerous in the inland parts, as in those waters which join to the sea."⁷¹

⁷⁰Ibid: 146.

⁷¹Umfreville, 1954: 90. William McInnes conducted geological surveys of the Winisk and Attawapiskat Rivers in 1905, and he provided a good summary of the fish that were available in those rivers. McInnes observed that: "Whitefish and sturgeon are the best food fishes, and occur in most of the lakes. Both are taken in nets, and the latter also by spearing from scaffolds built out over rapids in the rivers. Dore [pickereel] and pike are also generally distributed over the whole area, and form an important source of food supply, though the sucker among the fishes, like the rabbit among the mammals, holds the most important place, as it can be caught everywhere, not only in the larger lakes but also in the smaller ponds and streams. Brook trout were actually caught [by the surveying party] only in the Winisk river near its mouth, and in the streams running into the Albany river, but were seen in the rapids below Weibikwei; the Indians assert that they occur also in the lake itself. Lake trout were caught in large numbers in Trout Lake at the head of the Severn river, but are not found in either the Winisk or Attawapiskat rivers" (McInnes, 1909: 45). J.B. Tyrrell, who conducted a geological survey of the Hayes and Severn Rivers in 1912, was also impressed by the fishery resource in the rivers and lakes within the Lowlands. Tyrrell commented that: "Fish form the staple food of the inhabitants of this country. The principal kinds so used are trout, whitefish, tullibee [lake herring] and suckers" (Tyrrell, 1913: 180).

The Lowland Cree used a number of techniques to catch fish, including nets, spears, hooks and weirs or traps.⁷² Weirs, also called traps or baskets, were reported by Andrew Graham as a method used by Indians to catch hundreds of whitefish.⁷³ Kenneth Lister described the construction and operation of fish weirs in the Lowlands as follows:

Such weirs were built in fast water and were comprised of a combination of fence and trap. In both the ice-free and ice-covered seasons a fence of poles spanned the river blocking the movement of fish downstream. This fence of poles is referred to as a weir. The trap element of the structures, however, differed between the two seasons. In the ice-free season the trap consisted of a ramp and an open-top box-like enclosure made from poles lashed together. The ramp and box were placed on the downstream side of the weir. Through an opening in the weir the ramp angled obtusely from the river bottom. The top of the ramp remained slightly below the surface of the water with a thirty centimetre overhang into the box enclosure. The sides of the box, with the exception of the ramp side, were raised above the water level. The weir channelled the fish into the ramp opening where the fish were forced up the ramp and into the box. The fast moving water combined with the ramp overhang impeded the fish from escaping back down the ramp. The fish were then scooped out of the box with a dip net.⁷⁴

Fish weirs were built by Indians at various locations in the Lowlands. James Swain, who

⁷²Lake sturgeon were sometimes taken with a gun. Matthew Cocking observed that Indians who accompanied him on an inland journey in 1774 killed sturgeon with guns in the Chuckitanah (Hill) River (HBCA, B.239/a/72, July 10, 1774, fo. 2d). In their study of the Weagamow Ojibway who live on the border of the Lowlands, Black and Rogers commented that: "The technology for securing fish was more complex than that employed in hunting and gathering. It consisted of hooks, gaffs, spears, traps, jack lights, and even arrows" (Black and Rogers, 1976: 6). They also noted that: "in the old days, people sometimes gathered at small rapids during the spring and used clubs and their hands to catch walleye and suckers" (*Ibid*: 7).

⁷³Graham, 1969: 122.

⁷⁴Lister, 1988: 75.

was in charge of Severn House in 1815, reported that: "There are almost innumerable places convenient for weirs, in the interior, most of which produce vast quantities in the proper seasons."⁷⁵ In the Winisk River basin, weirs were located on the Shamattawa and North Washagami Rivers.⁷⁶ Lowland Cree operated several fish weirs in the Nelson River. The "lower fishing weir" was located downstream from the last fall in the river.⁷⁷ The Albany River Lowland Cree operated weirs at a number of locations along the Albany River and its tributaries. An important fish weir was located at the Fishing Creek, a tributary of the Albany River, located about 50 miles above Albany Fort.⁷⁸ Other weirs were located at the mouth of Chemohoggan Creek and the Little Fishing Creek.⁷⁹

A number of different types of fishing nets were used by the Lowland Cree. Scoop nets

⁷⁵HBCA, B.198/e/1, fo. 4d. In the summer of 1905 William McInnes conducted geological surveys on the Winisk and Attawapiskat Rivers. McInnes reported that: "'in the spring, camped close to a rapid on one of the larger streams, they [Indians] live on fish, principally carp [suckers], caught automatically by a michiken or fish-weir, crossing the stream at the rapid" (McInnes, 1906: 79).

⁷⁶Lister, 1988: 94.

⁷⁷HBCA, B.88/a/1, July 9, 1797, fo. 22.

⁷⁸HBCA, B.3/e/2, fo. 1d; and B.3/e/17, fo. 1d.

⁷⁹HBCA, B.3/a/103, June 17-18, 1800, fo. 39. John Martin made a trip from Albany Fort to Henley House in 1774, and he recorded some other Indian fishing stations. One, called "Pue kee tee wan" or the "Fishing Place" was located near the confluence of Sandy Creek, about 29 miles above the fort. Another, called "Mechiscanashish" or the "Little Fishing Place" was located near the mouth of the Fishing Creek, about 34 miles farther upstream. Martin observed that the Little Fishing place was "a noted place for Trout, Jack, Tickomeg, Methy and Perch" (HBCA, B.3/a/67, March 8 and 10, 1774, fo. 3d, 4d).

were employed mainly in connection with fish weirs. Gill nets were set in many locations and could be operated at all times of the year, including winter when they were set under the ice. Seine nets, also called drag nets, were used in ice-free conditions. In the Albany River, seine nets were considered to be "the only sure means of success."⁸⁰

The Sucker (Catostimidae) was usually the first fish to make spawning runs in the Lowlands. Two species were common in the Lowland region: the White Sucker (Catostomus commersoni), known as Namepith (Graham), or Ne ma pett (Isham) in the Lowland Cree language, and the Longnose Sucker (Catostomus catostomus), or Mithnamepith (Graham). Both species preferred spawning in shallow streams with gravelly bottoms, shortly after the spring ice break-up. The Longnose Sucker usually spawned several days in advance of the White Sucker.⁸¹

Suckers were plentiful throughout the Lowlands. During the spring spawning period,

⁸⁰HBCA, B.3/e/8, fo. 3. At Moose Fort seine nets were productive, especially in the fall. On October 16, 1739, Richard Staunton noted that: "I sent all hands to gitt a hawl with ye Saine and when they came home they brought near 2000 fish small and great, for our Saine is like Death, it spares neither small nor great" (HBCA, B.135/a/8, fo. 6).

⁸¹Scott and Crossman, 1979: 532, 540. According to information obtained from Indian people living in the area around Sandy Lake near the headwaters of the Severn River, the spawning behaviour of the sucker denoted special significance. Thomas Fiddler, a Chief of the Sandy Lake people, belonged to the Sucker Clan and he stated that: "there is not that much special about the sucker. But, when suckers spawn, even when there is little water - a trickle - a sucker can still climb to the top of the falls. With strong fins it will even go over the tops of steep falls, It's like it flies to the top of rivers. So a sucker can go places other fish can't go" (Fiddler and Stevens, 1985: 5).

suckers could be caught easily because they congregated in large numbers and weirs constructed by Indians captured thousands of suckers in certain locations.⁸² The Lowland Cree preferred other species of fish for food, but the sucker afforded a large and dependable subsistence resource when other fish were not easily available.⁸³ Suckers were also an important source of dog food.

After the sucker, other species of fish made spring spawning runs in the Lowlands. Notable among these fish was the Lake Sturgeon (Acipenser fulvescens), which was called Nemew (Graham) or Ne ma u (Isham) in the Lowland Cree language. Sturgeon were not commonly found near the coast, but they were abundant in the upper portions of the waterways in the Lowlands.⁸⁴ Andrew Graham commented on the distribution of sturgeon as follows: "They are found in great plenty in the Lakes one hundred miles up the country, and sometimes (though rarely) a strayed one is found in the creeks near the Fort."⁸⁵ Sturgeon spawned several weeks after the sucker, near river rapids or at

⁸²Lister, 1988: 75.

⁸³Although other species of fish were preferred, suckers were regularly consumed by the Lowland Indians. Andrew Graham, who was in charge of Severn House on December 8, 1772, observed that: "suckers...a soft bony fish not eaten by us, but by the natives" (HBCA, B.198/a/17, fo. 17d).

⁸⁴Edward Umfreville, who was stationed at Severn House and York Factory from 1771 to 1782, observed that: "in the spring of the year, the river [possibly the Severn or Hayes River] is known to abound with exquisite Sturgeon" (Umfreville, 1954: 90).

⁸⁵Graham, 1969: 118. James Isham also noted that sturgeon were more abundant in the upper waters of the Hudson Bay drainage basin (Isham, 1949: 168).

the foot of waterfalls.⁸⁶ The slow-growing and late-maturing sturgeon can live over 100 years and attain a weight of several hundred pounds.⁸⁷ Indian fishermen commonly used spears to capture these large fish, but nets and weirs were also used effectively in certain locations.⁸⁸

In addition to fresh sturgeon, Indians consumed and traded other types of sturgeon flesh.

⁸⁶Scott and Crossman, 1979: 84. A sturgeon fishing station was located near the mouth of the Cheepay River, about 90 miles upriver from Albany Fort. In 1743, Joseph Isbister made note of the sturgeon fishery when he established Henley House. Isbister reported that the Indians who had been hired to assist the HBC abandoned their duty when they arrived at the sturgeon fishery. Isbister noted that: "our Indians are loth [sic] to leave this place, having caught some sturgeon." On his return journey, Isbister found the Indians still engaged in sturgeon fishing (HBCA, B.3/a/34, June 12, 18, fos. 44d, 46d).

⁸⁷Andrew Graham observed that the average weight of sturgeon ranged between 20 and 30 pounds (Graham, 1969: 118). This compares well with an observation made by James Isham on May 21, 1748, who traded 17 sturgeon that weighed 330 pounds, or about 20 pounds each (HBCA, B.239/a/30, fo. 28). Much larger sturgeon were occasionally encountered by the HBC traders. For example, James Isham remarked that one sturgeon measured 7 feet 4 inches in length (Isham, 1949: 168).

⁸⁸James Isham observed that: "these [Lake Sturgeon] are Catch't, by the Natives in Wair's" (Isham, 1949: 168). Sturgeon weirs were noted on the Albany River above the location of Henley House, near the confluence with the Kenogami River (HBCA, B.86/a/33, July 29, 1780, fo. 48d; B.86/e/1, fo. 2). A sturgeon weir was also built on the Winisk River. In 1833, George Barnston described the Winisk River sturgeon weir as: "a fishing station of the Crane tribe, where they bar up the River, tho' it be full 150 yards across, and have a Basket on one side, in which they take in some seasons an immense number of sturgeon" (HBCA, B.234/a/1, fo. 7, quoted in Lister, 1989: 81). Matthew Cocking described a sturgeon weir at a small river called Kippaeagan Sepy, or Shut Up River, near the mouth of the Saskatchewan River. Cocking observed that: "the Natives have a stage built across on which they stand to spear sturgeon, stopping the passage with long sticks stuck in the ground a small space asunder, supported at top by the stage; before these they have other small sticks stuck in the ground, about a foot asunder unsupported at top, the sturgeon swimming against these shake them which directs the Indians where to strike" (HBCA, B.239/a/69, July 23, 1772, fo. 7d).

A common method of preparing sturgeon flesh for later consumption was to sun-dry or smoke-dry the flesh over a low fire. Quantities of dried sturgeon could be prepared and cached for future needs. Lowland Cree also processed some of the sturgeon flesh into a dry, powdery mixture called ruaheggan (Graham) or ruhiggan (Isham), that constituted a nutritious, portable food supply capable of being kept in sturgeon skin containers for long periods of time before spoiling⁸⁹. Sturgeon pemmican was produced by adding fat and berries to the ruhiggan.⁹⁰

Northern Pike (*Esox lucius*), called Keneshue (Graham) or Ke no shue (Isham), was another important spring spawner. Although most easily caught in spring, the pike was an important food resource year-round. Andrew Graham remarked that: "They are very numerous and are much valued by the Lake Indians [Northern Ojibway], as they are a supply for them at all seasons, when their gun and ammunition fails, or other food fails.

⁸⁹James Isham explained that ruhiggan was the term used to describe flesh that had been dried and pounded. Ruhiggan made from caribou flesh was tied into bundles for easy transportation, and could be kept for years without spoiling. Isham distinguished pimmegan, or pemmican, as a mixture of ruhiggan, fat and cranberries (Isham, 1949: 81, 155-56).

⁹⁰John D. Cameron, who was in charge of the HBC's post at Lac la Pluie (later named Fort Frances) in 1826, described the Indian method of preparing sturgeon pemmican as follows: "they cut up [sturgeon flesh] in flakes and dry over a slow fire, after which they pound the dried flakes between stones until it becomes like a kind of sponge; this with the oil they gather; affords them a rich and substantial food of which they are very fond" (HBCA, B.105/e/6, fo. 4). James Sutherland, who explored the region around Lake St. Joseph on the Upper Albany River in 1784, encountered a Canadian fur trader who subsisted on sturgeon ruhiggan. Sutherland remarked that: "He carries his provisions with him which is dry'd sturgeon beat up into Ruaheggan, this he mixes with water and eats contentedly" (HBCA, B.78/a/9, May 31, 1784, fo. 7).

Great numbers are caught at the forts and are reckoned excellent food by us."⁹¹ The Lowland Cree employed several methods for catching pike, including nets, hooks and spears.

The Lake Whitefish (Coregonus clupeaformis), known as Tickomeg (Graham) or Tickomegg (Isham), spawned in the fall but quantities were caught in the spring.⁹² Henry Ellis who visited York Factory in 1746-47, remarked that the spring fishery was "extremely successful," and catches of up to 500 fish, mostly whitefish, were common with a single haul of a seine net. Ellis noted that "Salmon Trout" (probably the Brook Trout, Salvelinus fontinalis), also a fall spawner, was caught in the spring with "set nets" (gill nets) in the creeks near York Factory.⁹³

6.3 Summer:

The warm winds of summer ushered a quick departure of most geese from the coastal

⁹¹Graham, 1969: 118-19.

⁹²Andrew Graham noted that whitefish were in best condition during the fall. He stated that: "in summer they frequent the rivers, but are then very poor. In autumn they are in good condition and then is the time we catch them" (Ibid: 122).

⁹³Ellis, 1968: vol. 2: 32.

marshes to breeding grounds farther afield,⁹⁴ but the caribou hunt continued as Lowland Cree pursued the caribou to their summer calving grounds along the coastal tundra.⁹⁵ The Hayes and Severn River Lowland Cree moved eastward with the migrating herds. The Albany River Lowland Cree began their caribou hunt in summer, travelling north to meet the migrating herds.

Many of the Lowland Cree who had been employed in the goose hunt turned their attention to caribou after receiving payment for their geese. If the goose hunt failed early, the attraction of the caribou hunt was strong, and many goose hunters gave up their positions in the marshes in order to search for caribou in the coastal calving grounds.⁹⁶ Often, HBC boats at York Factory were employed to carry hunters and their families across the Hayes River. The Lowland Cree travelled on foot, following the beach ridges in pursuit of the caribou.

Many of the Lowland Cree spent the entire summer along the coastal lowlands, returning

⁹⁴Some species of geese, such as Brant Geese, stayed along the Hudson and James Bay coasts, breeding on coastal islands. Many Canada Geese also stayed in the Lowlands to breed, but they were scattered throughout the vast area and a focused hunt for geese was not possible during the summer period.

⁹⁵According to James Knight, who was in charge of York Factory in 1717, mature female caribou calved every second summer. Knight wrote that: "ye Deer is comeing down out of the Country to calf their young ones upon the Sandy Banks [coastal beach ridges] which they doo once in 2 years" (HBCA, B.239/a/3, April 13, 1717, fo. 40d).

⁹⁶See, for example, HBCA, B.239/a/26, May 15, 1745, fo. 17.

only to set up camps upriver to wait for the crossing of caribou in the fall migration.⁹⁷ The main caribou calving grounds were reported to be east of the Severn River in the vicinity of Cape Henrietta Maria, but some caribou spent the summer between York Factory and Severn House. For example, Thomas Macklish, Chief Factor at York Factory, observed on June 10, 1732, that: "severall of our home Indians kill'd some breeding Deer about 80 miles to ye Southward."⁹⁸

The Severn River Lowland Cree who hunted caribou in the summer divided into regional hunting groups. Those who hunted caribou along the coast to the east of Severn House were known as the "Eastward Home guards," while other Severn caribou hunters remained at upriver locations during the summer and they were known as "Southern Homeguards."⁹⁹ Another group of Severn River Lowland Cree hunted caribou in the region northwest of Severn House, and were known as the "Northern Homeguards."¹⁰⁰ On April 29, 1777, William Falconer noted that the southern and northern Home Guards remained to hunt geese near Severn House while the eastern Home Guards and the upriver "Half-Home Guards" returned to their caribou hunting camps.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷See, for example, HBCA, B.239/a/35, August 16, 1751, fo. 3.

⁹⁸HBCA, B.239/a/14, fo. 24.

⁹⁹HBCA, B.198/a/9, June 22, 1775, fo. 40d; B.198/a/21, April 15, 1777, fo. 20. See chapter three for a discussion of the term Homeguard.

¹⁰⁰HBCA, B.198/a/20, July 12, 1776, fo. 43d.

¹⁰¹HBCA, B.198/a/21, fo. 21.

Large groups of Lowland Cree hunted caribou in the summer. For example, in the summer of 1779, the York Factory boats were sent across the river to the French Creek to transport 65 Lowland Cree who brought 170 caribou skins and dried venison to trade.¹⁰² In the summer of 1780, a group of 180 Lowland Cree traded dried meat and over 100 caribou skins at York Factory.¹⁰³

Many Albany River Lowland Cree spent the summer on Akimiski Island hunting caribou.¹⁰⁴ In most years the hunt was successful; evidenced by Indians bringing venison, tongues and fat to trade at Albany Fort. In some years the caribou did not migrate as far as Akimiski Island and the Lowland Cree were forced to return early to the vicinity of the Albany Fort to wait for the arrival of the geese. For example, on July 27, 1726, Richard Staunton, Chief Factor at Albany Fort, reported that: "11 canows of our home Indians came here they being all starved upon Ogomiska, ye deere having failed them this summer."¹⁰⁵

¹⁰²HBCA, B.239/a/76, July 25, 1779, fo. 58d.

¹⁰³HBCA, B.198/a/78, July 19, 1780, fo. 40.

¹⁰⁴Moose River Lowland Cree also travelled to Akimiski Island for the caribou hunt. See, for example, HBCA, B.135/a/7, June 14, 1737, fo. 16d, and B.3/a/30, June 21, 1741, fo. 52.

¹⁰⁵HBCA, B.3/a/14, fo. 26d.

Preserving caribou meat was an important industry for the Lowland Cree¹⁰⁶ during the summer months. The meat was cut into thin strips and dried in the sun or smoke-dried in order to prevent it from spoiling. Another method of preparing caribou meat, similar to that described for sturgeon above, was to beat the dried meat into a powder called ruhiggan. James Isham described the method of preparing caribou ruhiggan:

The Leg's and thigh's they cure otherways, they cutting all the flesh of the bones, and Cutt itt in slices, which is to be Dryd. in the same manner as aforementioned'd [meat hung on poles over a fire until dried], this meet when Dry'd they take and pound, or beat between two Stones, till some of itt is as small as Dust, which they styl (Ruhiggan) being Dryd. so much that their is Little moisture in itt; - when pounded they putt itt into a bag and will Keep for Several Years.¹⁰⁷

Caribou ruhiggan was prepared for consumption by mixing caribou fat, fish oil, or bear fat with the powdered meat.¹⁰⁸ Andrew Graham observed that polar bear fat mixed with cranberries and caribou ruhiggan was "one of their [Lowland Cree's] greatest dainties."¹⁰⁹ Moose fat was also used to mix with the ruhiggan, as was bison fat, suggesting a trade in this product between the Indians of the prairie parklands and the

¹⁰⁶Food preservation was generally done by women. See, for example, Van Kirk, 1980: 56. William Falconer observed that: "The women[']s work is to do all the domestick duty of the tent, make and mend the tent, make shoes, make their birch rind victualling vessels (called by them thogans) dress skins and sew them together for cloathing, unpitch and pitch the tent, and in winter they draw all their goods on sleds as also the children that are not able to walk, and nimakeg (to ornament the cloathing with glass beads or quills etc.) their cloathing etc. etc. and indeed their task is never finished" (Falconer, n.d.: 38).

¹⁰⁷Isham, 1949: 155-56.

¹⁰⁸Isham, 1949: 166.

¹⁰⁹Graham, 1969: 31.

Lowland Cree.¹¹⁰ Other food stuffs were added to ruhiggan for flavour and substance. These included lichen¹¹¹ and dried fish.¹¹² Caribou pemmican (also spelled pimmeggan) was produced by mixing ruhiggan with fat and cranberries.¹¹³ It was sometimes called finished venison.¹¹⁴

Preserved caribou meat was stored for later use in underground caches and above ground stages. The importance of caches was noted by HBC fur traders. For example, on December 19, 1736, Thomas White reported the arrival at York Factory of three families of Lowland Cree. White observed that:

the said Indians have been to the Northwd. about halfe way to Churchill, expecting to Sight of beaver and deer, but were much disappointed, not having kill'd one deer, nor but very few furs, but just what would pay their fall Debt, and had itt not been for a stage of meat they had Laid up the Latter part of the Summer, they would have been near Starving, they are Desighn'd to go to the South'd to Look for beaver, in a short time, as soon as they have made Sleds.¹¹⁵

Although caches were designed to keep the meat safe from animals, they sometimes failed and the consequences could be severe for the Lowland Cree. Such was the case

¹¹⁰Isham, 1949: 156.

¹¹¹Isham, 1949: 132.

¹¹²Graham, 1969: 15.

¹¹³Isham, 1949: 156. The difference between ruhiggan and pemmican was also observed by Ferdinand Jacobs who was Chief Factor at York Factory. On September 26, 1762, Jacobs recorded a trading transaction that included: "6 bundles of Thuhiggan and pemmican" (HBCA, B.239/a/50, fo. 6).

¹¹⁴HBCA, B.239/a/86, fo. 48.

¹¹⁵HBCA, B.239/a/19, fo. 12d.

for one group who arrived at York Factory on December 16, 1744. Thomas White reported that: "three families of home Indians came from ye north [Nelson] river, for relief, 18 in number, the cause of their coming in so soon is they have met with no deer, and another misfortune is they had laid up 3 stages of dry'd meat in ye fall but the vermin got foul of itt and destroyed itt all."¹¹⁶

Some Lowland Cree found it more convenient to store their dried provisions at the trading posts. For example, on October 3, 1737, four Indian women came to York Factory from their camp located several days journey up the Nelson River with, "Bundles of dry'd meat to Lye up against they comes in, in ye Spring."¹¹⁷ On October 10, 1742, two "home Indians" who had spent the fall in the south hunting caribou, returned to York Factory unsuccessful and took "some bundles of dry'd meate they left here when they went away."¹¹⁸

Canada Geese and Brant Geese remained in the Lowlands to breed during the summer, and were available to the Indians as a food and commercial resource. Canada Geese preferred breeding grounds in the coastal plains. Although dispersed over a large area,

¹¹⁶HBCA, B.239/a/26, fo. 8d. John Work, who explored the Winisk River for the HBC in the summer of 1819, noted that the Indians who accompanied the expedition buried 15 to 20 "bits of pemmican" near the mouth of the Winisk River for provisions on their return journey (HBCA, B.198/a/58b, June 21, 1819, fo. 13).

¹¹⁷HBCA, B.239/a/20, fo. 10.

¹¹⁸HBCA, B.239/a/24, fo. 7. See also, HBCA, B.239/a/25, October 19, 1743; and B.239/a/26, February 14, 1745, fo. 11d).

the geese were hunted successfully by the Lowland Cree. This was especially true during the summer moult. Andrew Graham observed that: "In July they moult, at which season a great many are knocked on the head by the Indians."¹¹⁹ Brant Geese were also available during the summer near the coast. Despite their "fishy taste," Brant Geese were hunted by the Lowland Cree and occasionally traded to the HBC posts.¹²⁰

Ducks were also plentiful in the Lowlands during the summer. The Whistling Duck, or Mimmnick (Graham), bred in the marshes and plains near the coast.¹²¹ According to Graham, the most valuable species was the Mallard Duck, which he described as a "beautiful duck [is] of great service, being good food both to Indians and Europeans."¹²² The Lowland Cree usually traded numbers of ducks every summer at the coastal trading posts, including mature and newborn ducks. Most often, ducks were brought in together with caribou meat after the caribou hunt.

Passenger pigeons visited the southern James Bay region during the summer. On July 2, Richard Staunton, Chief Factor at Albany Fort, remarked that his men had killed 26

¹¹⁹Graham, 1969: 41.

¹²⁰For example, at Albany Fort in the summer of 1768, 118 Brant Geese were traded from Indians in three days between June 3 and June 6 (HBCA, B.3/a/60, fo. 24).

¹²¹Glyndwr Williams, who edited Graham's work, offered three possible species as the Whistling Duck. These included: the Shoveler Duck (*Spatula clypeata*), American Scoter (*Oidemia nigra*), or Pintail Duck (*Anas acuta*). Graham, 1969: 45.

¹²²Graham, 1969: 47.

"pidgeons."¹²³ Andrew Graham received one at Severn House in 1771, but considered it rare in that area. Graham observed that: "They are numerous inland and often visit our southern settlements in summer. They are about Moose Fort and inland, where they breed choosing an arboreous situation."¹²⁴ Graham recalled that passenger pigeons had migrated as far north as York Factory in the summer of 1750, and many were killed by the Lowland Cree and HBC men. Passenger pigeons were considered to be "among the many delicacies [of] Hudson's Bay."¹²⁵

Fishing during the summer months was generally not as productive as other seasons. After the spring spawning runs, sturgeon and suckers moved to deeper waters and were less active. Other fish such as whitefish and trout (brook trout and lake trout) spawned in the fall, and were also more difficult to catch in the summer.¹²⁶ Some fish such as northern pike continued to be caught throughout the summer and quantities were

¹²³HBCA, B.3/a/13, fo. 36.

¹²⁴Graham, 1969: 83.

¹²⁵Graham, 1969: 83. In 1804, Duncan Cameron, a North West Company trader, who worked in the Upland country bordering the Lowlands, observed that: "Some years there are many pigeons, which are very fat and palatable" (Cameron, 1960: 241).

¹²⁶Occasionally, large numbers of fish, particularly "trout" were traded by the Lowland Indians during the summer, suggesting that certain fishing stations were productive during that season. For example, on June 17, 1769, several Lowland Indians brought 120 trout to trade at Albany Fort (HBCA, B.3/a/61, fo. 37). During the summer of 1771, Humphrey Marten, Chief Factor at Albany Fort, recorded many transactions involving fish, including 200 whitefish and 60 pounds of northern pike on July 15, and 260 pounds of sturgeon on July 15, 1771 (HBCA, B.3/a/63, fo. 36d, 37).

regularly traded by the Lowland Cree at the coastal posts.¹²⁷

Summer encampments at fishing stations, as they were sometimes called by HBC traders, attracted large numbers of Lowland Cree in advance of the fall caribou and goose hunts. Samuel Skrimsher, who was in charge of York Factory on July 3, 1750, noted that: "three of our home Indians with their families went for the North River in order to Lay wate for Deer and catch fish."¹²⁸ Skrimsher also reported that fishing stations were located on the Hayes River, upstream from York Factory. On July 15, 1750, he remarked that: "one family of home Indians went up the [Hayes] River to catch fish to support on and to Lay wate for the Deer." Two days later, Skrimsher noted that four more families of Indians set off upriver to set up a camp to catch fish while waiting for the caribou herds to cross the river.¹²⁹ Like the York Factory Lowland Cree, those at Severn combined fishing and gathering activities at their caribou hunt camps. The summer whitefish fishery was noted to be especially productive at Ouaouiastine.¹³⁰

White Whales (Delphinapterus leucas), also known as Beluga Whales, and Wapameg

¹²⁷Although many HBC employees came from the Orkney Islands with a tradition of fishing, they were not as proficient as Indian fishermen. This point was made clear on a number of occasions in HBC journals. For example, on July 19, 1768, Humphrey Marten, Chief Factor at Albany Fort noted that: "an Indian came in with Fish, altho I have had a Net down some time yet cannot get a Fish" (HBCA, B.3/a/60, fo. 29).

¹²⁸HBCA, B.239/a/33, fo. 37d.

¹²⁹Ibid, fos. 39d-40.

¹³⁰HBCA, B.239/a/20, July 5, 1776, fo. 39d.

(Graham) or Wap po meg (Isham) by the Lowland Cree, visited the estuaries of large coastal rivers each summer.¹³¹ Andrew Graham commented that: "They are very numerous in the rivers immediately after the breaking up of the ice, and many are killed annually which supply the Factories with oil, and furnish several tons to be imported into England."¹³² The Lowland Cree did not usually eat the flesh or fat of White Whales, but they were commonly used for dog food and for sale to the European traders. The seal, or Athkeek (Graham), was also hunted mainly for dog food or as a trade item.¹³³

The Lowland Cree employed several techniques to capture White Whales. Harpoons were used effectively at times, despite the fact that the Lowland Cree used only small canoes to go after the whales. A good description of the Indian harpooning technique was made by Samuel Skrimsher at York Factory on July 22, 1750. Skrimsher reported

¹³¹The reasons why White Whales visited river estuaries in summer is not well understood. Randall Reeves and Edward Mitchell, who studied the history of the White Whale fishery along the eastern coast of Hudson and James Bay, concluded that: "The inducement for white whales to visit estuaries during summer has yet to be satisfactorily explained" (Reeves and Mitchell, 1987: 37). There is no apparent connection with reproductive biology because White Whales usually breed during April and May. HBC whalers who worked on the Eastmain believed that the White Whales moved into these areas because they craved access to fresh water (*Ibid*: 39). This compares well with an observation made by Andrew Graham, who stated that: "In spring they are so desirous to get into the rivers that we observe them playing in the Bay close to the entrance of them: nay, they swim under the ice, and play in open holes in the river, before the ice takes its departure" (Graham, 1969: 116).

¹³²Graham was probably referring to the White Whale fishery that was established by the Company at the Little Whale and Great Whale Rivers on the Eastmain coast of Hudson Bay. Whales were also caught near Fort Churchill to the north of York Factory (*Ibid*: 115-116).

¹³³The Lowland Cree continue to hunt seals as a valuable source of dog food (Macfie and Johnston, 1991: 46).

that:

An Indian man had killed [White Whales] with an Enstrument of his one makeing fasend to a stafe and a Leather thong with a small Boye at the End of it which he heaves over Board as Sune as he Strikes the fish and follows it till such time as the fish Dyes, he commonly goes in two or three Cannoes Lashed to Gather for fear of over Seting. Should have encouraged him on the Same head but [he] was gone to look for Deer.¹³⁴

In addition to harpooning, White Whales were sometimes captured by driving them into shallow water and beaching them on the tidal flats. This method was employed by the Indians at the mouth of the Severn River. On June 28, 1815, several HBC men were sent "to the marsh to bring home the blubber of a white whale which has been driven on shore."¹³⁵

White Whales were very abundant in the Nelson, Hayes and Severn Rivers during the summer, and often damaged fish nets. For example, at York Factory on May 26, 1725, Thomas Macklish observed that his men: "took the net up, being much broak with the

¹³⁴HBCA, B.239/a/33, fo. 41. The HBC whale fishery that developed later was similar to the Indian method described Skrimsher. Andrew Graham noted that: "They [White Whales] are caught in the following manner, having boats for that purpose built after the form of the Greenland whale fishing boats, only larger. They are manned with four men and a harpooner who rows out on the river where the fish is, then lay in their oars and drives with the tide amongst the fish, and when one comes up to blow alongside it is struck with a harpoon; and a large fish will run out one hundred fathoms of line, and haul the boat after it above a quarter of an hour before they can shorten in any line, always minding to play with the fish, hauling in and veering out line according as the fish swims to or fro from the boat; for if it were to be brought up all at once the harpoon would lose its hold, which is often the case. When its strength fails he gathers in the line with judgement, until he gets it within reach, then gives it another harpoon and lances it to death" (Graham, 1969:116).

¹³⁵HBCA, B.198/a/57, fo. 4d.

White Whales."¹³⁶ Near Severn House, the White Whales came into the Severn River in great numbers shortly after the ice broke in the estuary. Humphrey Marten remarked on June 17, 1760: "the Whales are so thick, Obliged to take up the Netts."¹³⁷ Marten also noted many White Whales on July 3, 1760, but his fascination with the whales turned to anger on July 9, when he wrote that: "We cant get a Single Fishe for the Dam'd Whales, they break the Netts and have carryed one entirely away."¹³⁸ The HBC traders at Albany Fort also occasionally purchased whales, or whale blubber from the Lowland Cree. For example, on August 6, 1739, George Spence, Chief Factor at Albany Fort, noted that: "an Indian killed a white whale in this River, and I satisfied him for ye Blubber."¹³⁹

The relatively short growing season in the Lowlands produced an extraordinary profusion of plant life. William Falconer remarked that:

In this short liv'd summer, grass grows in and about the plains and swamps to a surprizing length, having observed it to grow 16 inches in 6 weeks, and goose-berries, cran-berries, straw-berries, rasp-berries and corron berries with many other berries grows in plenty in the woods, and to full perfection.¹⁴⁰

Many different types plants were used for food, medicinal and other purposes by the

¹³⁶HBCA, B.239/a/8, fo. 54d.

¹³⁷HBCA, B.198/a/1, fos. 27d-28.

¹³⁸HBCA, B.198/a/1, fo. 29d, 30.

¹³⁹HBCA, B.3/a/28, fo. 49.

¹⁴⁰Falconer, n.d.: 13.

Lowland Cree, and small quantities were sold to the European fur traders.

A large variety of edible berries were available in the Lowlands. These included cranberries, Wusiskumenuck (Graham) or we sa ke ma nuck (Isham); strawberries, Skesheckamenuck (Graham) or U ske she co me nuc (Isham); raspberries or yellowberries, brackatuminack (Falconer) or Bo ro ca to me nuck (Isham); gooseberries, Shapomenuck (Graham) or Shap po me nuck (Isham); crowberries or mawsberries, Askemenuck (Graham) or as ke ma nah (Isham); willowberries, Neneekamenuck (Graham); partridge berries, Pethaymenuck (Graham); dewberries, Outamenuck (Graham); huckleberries, Mis ke ma na (Isham); juniperberries, Kawkawimenuck (Graham) or wur sus qua tu uc (Isham); blackcurrants, Mantoomenuck (Graham); redcurrants, Atheekimenuck (Graham) or A tha kim mi nuck (Isham); and whitecurrants, Wapectumenuck (Graham).

Berries were often dried and stored for later consumption, and added to flavour dried meat and fish. The Lowland Cree also subsisted on berries during times when other resources were scarce. For example, in the summer of 1750, few caribou were killed by the Lowland Cree who lived near York Factory and James Skrimsher remarked that: "two cannoes of our home Indians with their familys came in, in order to hunt geese, being no Deer to be got, haveing liv'd on Beryes and fish, the Latter of which having been scarcest this Summer I ever knew."¹⁴¹

¹⁴¹HBCA, B.239/a/33, August 6, 1750, fo. 43.

The Lowland Cree lived north of the range of maple trees, but they likely had access to maple sugar through trade contacts with their southern Indian neighbours. During the fur trade period, maple sugar was carried north by Indian fur traders to the coastal trading posts. For example, on July 5, 1720, Thomas Macklish, Chief Factor at Albany Fort observed that:

One of the [Upland] Indians that came last night presented me with 12 pounds of very good sugar of their own making, which is as follows. In the spring of the year they go to a Lake where grows a plenty of large birch [maple] trees. In those trees they cut a hole and put a tap and out of one they get 7 or 8 gallons of sweet liquor which they boil 12 hours after which, when cold, turns to sugar, then they dry it in the sun or over the fire in their tents.¹⁴²

Wild Rice (*Zizania aquatica*), known as Nicoshemín (Graham) by the Lowland Cree,¹⁴³ was not indigenous to the Hudson Bay Lowlands, but it is evident that a trade in this product had developed between the Lowland Cree and Upland Indians. An aboriginal trade in wild rice was hinted by Andrew Graham, who noted: "I have seen several samples of Indian corn [wild rice] brought to the Factories by some of the distant trading Indians. They report that it does not grow in their country, but farther to the southward, where they barter it from other nations."¹⁴⁴

¹⁴²HBCA, B.3/a/9, fo. 58d.

¹⁴³Wild rice was known as manomin in the Ojibway language.

¹⁴⁴Graham, 1969: 133.

6.4 Fall:

By early fall, caribou were in prime physical condition after feeding all summer on coastal grasses and other vegetation.¹⁴⁵ Humphrey Marten, who was in charge of York Factory on September 3, 1775, observed that: "venison is now in its highest perfection."¹⁴⁶ Mature male caribou were particularly good food in early fall, prior to the rut. They had built up reserves of fat for the strenuous rutting season; including a layer of back fat up to four inches thick and over one foot in length.¹⁴⁷ Thomas Macklish, Chief Factor at York Factory, noted the quality of male caribou meat in the fall season when he reported on September 24, 1723, that: "four Cannoes of home Indians came down the River, brought twelve Noble, fatt Buck Deer."¹⁴⁸

HBC traders tried to encourage Indian hunters to kill caribou in late fall or winter when the skins were in prime condition. However, the early fall caribou hunt was more important as a source of food for both Lowland Cree and Europeans, and large numbers were killed when the skins were not acceptable for trade purposes. Humphrey Marten, Chief Factor at York Factory, noted this situation on September 3, 1775, but he

¹⁴⁵The vegetation of the Hudson Bay Lowlands and the significance of the region's resources as habitat for caribou is discussed in detail by Peter A.J. Brokx (1965).

¹⁴⁶HBCA, B.239/a/73, fo. 3d.

¹⁴⁷Isham, 1949: 155. On August 11, 1717, Thomas Macklish, Chief Factor at Albany Fort noted that: "an Indian brought me a Rump of a Buck Deer, weighed 40 pounds and cut 3 inches deep of fat" (HBCA, B.3/a/9, fo. 13d).

¹⁴⁸HBCA, B.239/a/8, fo. 23.

explained that the fall was: "one of the deers grand crossing seasons, consequently be they fatt or lean, are killed in great numbers, now as the weather is very fine and warm consequently the skins are not in season, and yet this inconveniency cannot be helped, for should we slip this opportunity or oppose the Indians hunting them, we should get no venison and the Indians be disgusted."¹⁴⁹

During the fall hunt, many caribou were killed while crossing rivers, and Andrew Graham observed that:

When the deer are pretty far advanced into the river, the canoes are all manned, and paddle after them, one party surrounding them and preventing their landing on the opposite shore; whilst the women, children and dogs by making a noise and throwing stones, hinder them from returning. The men in the other canoes immediately approach the unhappy victims, and stab them with spears, bayonets, knives, arrows, or even a stick sharpened at the point and hardened in the fire.¹⁵⁰

The Lowland Cree purchased metal spear tips specially made for caribou hunting. The HBC blacksmiths at York Factory furnished extra spear tips by re-working other metal goods. At times, even the Chief Factors were recruited to keep up a supply of spear points. For example, Humphrey Marten, Chief Factor at York Factory, wrote on April 6, 1776, that: "the smith and me making deer spears."¹⁵¹

Caribou killed in the rivers were easy to transport to the trading posts. Large quantities

¹⁴⁹HBCA, B.239/a/73, fo. 3d.

¹⁵⁰Graham, 1969: 15.

¹⁵¹HBCA, B.239/a/73, fo. 36d.

of caribou flesh, tongues, fat and skins could be easily floated downriver on wooden rafts. At York Factory, James Isham reported on August 10, 1753, that: "one canoe came Down the River with a float of 19 Deer."¹⁵² Isham described the construction of these rafts or floats as follows:

...they oft'n make floats of wood, by falling severall trees, and tying them together with the bark of willow, interwoven with the Branches of the tree, which Carry's them safe over such Rivers &c, or will go downe River's on such floats some miles...¹⁵³

Rafts were also employed by Indians on the Severn River to bring caribou down to Severn House. For example, on October 18, 1772, several Indians came down the river with "ten Deer unskinned on a float of wood."¹⁵⁴

The caribou herds usually crossed the Severn and Hayes Rivers several weeks before the onset of the fall goose hunt. The Lowland Cree hunters set up camps in advance of the caribou herds at crossing places, and subsisted on fish until the arrival of the caribou. Samuel Skrimsher, who was in charge of York Factory, made note of a typical camp on July 3, 1750, when he wrote that: "three of our home Indians with their families went

¹⁵²HBCA, B.239/a/36, fo. 38.

¹⁵³Isham, 1949: 102. Andrew Graham observed that: "When the Indians are travelling and have no canoe, yet have occasion to cross a river, they make a float of wood three tier deep, securing the ground-floor of this curious conveyance with the fibrous roots of trees, shrubs etc. Upon this they place themselves and baggage, and with a long pole push themselves over" (Graham, 1969: 172).

¹⁵⁴HBCA, B.198/a/17, fo. 11.

for the North [Nelson] River in order to Lay wate for Deer and catch fish."¹⁵⁵ Similar caribou hunt camps were also set up along the Hayes River. For example, Skrimsher noted on July 15, 1750, that: "one family of home Indians went up the [Hayes] River to catch fish to support on and to Lay wate for the Deer." Two days later, Skrimsher remarked that four more families went upriver to set up a camp and catch fish while waiting for the caribou herds to cross the river.¹⁵⁶

Like the spring hunt, the fall caribou hunt was conducted about 20 to 60 miles inland from the coast, near traditional crossing places. In 1716, a "great herd" was reported crossing the Nelson River at a location about two days paddling upriver. The Indians who were camped nearby killed 60 caribou.¹⁵⁷ In the fall of 1717, Indians told Henry Kelsey that: "the Deer pass very brief about thirty miles up this River."¹⁵⁸ Small herds sometimes passed within view of York Factory. For example, on August 15, 1720, Kelsey counted 32 caribou in a herd that crossed the Hayes River in sight of the factory.¹⁵⁹

If the caribou failed to pass nearby, the hunters removed to alternate places, sometimes

¹⁵⁵HBCA, B.239/a/33, fo. 37d.

¹⁵⁶Ibid, fos. 39d, 40.

¹⁵⁷HBCA, B.239/a/2, August 6, 1716, fo. 51d.

¹⁵⁸HBCA, B.239/a/4, September 13, 1717, fo. 2.

¹⁵⁹HBCA, B.239/a/5, fo. 81.

at great distances from the factory. Speed was essential at these times in order to intercept the caribou at other passes along the rivers. Old and disabled people were left at the original camps to subsist mainly on fish while the others went in search of caribou.

The locations of fall caribou hunting camps on the Severn River were similar to the spring camps. A favourite site was Ouaouiastine, or White Seal Falls. For example, on June 20, 1773, Andrew Graham at Severn House reported: "the Deer crossing in many thousands twenty miles up this river, going northwards."¹⁶⁰ On June 16, 1774, Andrew Graham noted the arrival of: "the deer hunters from the great fall 22 miles up the river, [they] brought upwards of 300 dried deers tongues and some fatt."¹⁶¹

Some of the Lowland Cree shifted their focus toward geese soon after the caribou finished crossing the rivers. Near York Factory, the caribou sometimes migrated to the westward before the fall goose hunt. This prompted many Lowland Cree to repair to the factory to wait for the geese to arrive. For example, Thomas White recorded the following in his journal on August 2, 1745: "severall familys of home Indians who had been a deer hunting came to waite ye flying of ye geese, ye Deer being all gone."¹⁶²

The fall goose hunt was preceded by duck hunting that often produced large quantities

¹⁶⁰HBCA, B.198/a/16, fo. 43. The HBC men at Severn House also called this place the "Great Fall."

¹⁶¹HBCA, B.198/a/18, fo. 29d.

¹⁶²HBCA, B.239/a/27, fo.2.

of food and trade resources for the Lowland Cree. In the coastal marshes around the mouth of the Albany River, duck hunting usually began in early August. By the end of August or early September, geese arrived in the marshes around Albany Fort. Goose hunting continued for three or four weeks, and by early October the geese had usually left the Albany Fort area. The timing of the fall geese migrations in the Severn House and York Factory areas was similar, except that the geese arrived and departed several weeks earlier.

During certain years, the fall migration of geese failed to produce the usual numbers of geese. These occasions were often blamed on unusual weather patterns. Cold, wet and windy weather were often cited as factors in limiting the numbers of geese that were available to the hunters. Sometimes, unusual weather during the summer was blamed for reducing the number of young geese. For example, the summer of 1770 had been unusually wet near Albany Fort, and Humphrey Marten noted that: "no young geese [are] to be seen, their eggs being spoiled by the wetness of the hatching season."¹⁶³

The fall fishery was also important to the Lowland Cree and European fur traders. The Lowland Cree who lived near Severn House operated a weir to catch whitefish during the fall. The weir was located about 20 miles upriver from the post, probably near Ouaouiastine. Andrew Graham, who was in charge of Severn House in 1766, reported on October 3, that Indians had traded "230 fine fish called tikomeg from a Lock, or

¹⁶³HBCA, B.3/a/63, October 1, 1770, fo. 6d.

Wear, made by the Indians 20 miles up the River."¹⁶⁴ The weir produced hundreds of fish that were traded to the HBC, in addition to the fish that were consumed and stored for use by the Indians.

6.5 Winter:

Caribou were not plentiful near the coast during the winter, but Lowland Cree hunted caribou successfully in the upper regions of the Hudson Bay Lowlands. The winter caribou hunt focused on Woodland Caribou that frequented the wooded river valleys. Occasionally, Lowland Cree brought large quantities of caribou meat to trade at Albany Fort near the end of winter as hunting groups moved closer to the coast to prepare for the goose hunting season.¹⁶⁵ For example, on March 14, 1707, three families of Lowland Cree arrived at Albany Fort and presented Chief Factor Anthony Beale with a gift of 36 caribou tongues.¹⁶⁶ Caribou tongues were traded more often than other parts of the animal because they were easier to transport and they fetched a higher price. This was noted by Richard Staunton, Chief Factor at Albany Fort, on March 11, 1724. Staunton reported that Indians had "killed 6 deer in their coming [to Albany Fort] about

¹⁶⁴HBCA, B.198/a/8, fo. 6d.

¹⁶⁵Occasionally, Woodland Caribou were killed near Albany Fort. For example, on April 17, 1753, three caribou were killed about seven miles upriver from the fort (HBCA, B.3/a/45, fo. 18).

¹⁶⁶HBCA, B.3/a/2, fo. 24.

3 days journey from the factory, [but] left them all behind but the tongues."¹⁶⁷

Occasionally, the Albany Fort records noted that Lowland Cree hunted caribou on Akimiski Island in winter. For example, on February 16, 1747, Joseph Isbister, Chief Factor at Albany Fort, reported that three Lowland Cree had been hunting on Akimiski Island, and they had killed more than 30 caribou but did not bring any to trade with the HBC. Isbister was insulted, and commented that: "what devouring Creatures they must be."¹⁶⁸ The next winter, George Spence, Chief Factor at Albany Fort, observed that many Lowland Cree had camped on the island because there was "plenty of Deer on that Island." On February 13, 1748, nine Lowland Cree hunters came from Akimiski Island to Albany Fort and traded 108 caribou tongues and 31 rumps.¹⁶⁹ It is difficult to ascertain whether these accounts refer to migratory Barren-Ground Caribou that had remained on the island, or to an indigenous Woodland Caribou population. Since winter hunting on the island was not reported in most years, it would appear that the former was more likely.

Snow conditions played a significant role in determining the success of winter caribou hunting. For example, on December 24, 1728, Joseph Myatt, Chief Factor at Albany Fort remarked that: "there is so little snow on the ground they [Lowland Cree] cannot

¹⁶⁷HBCA, B.3/a/12, fo. 18.

¹⁶⁸HBCA, B.3/a/38, fo. 18d.

¹⁶⁹HBCA, B.3/a/39, fo. 22d. See also, HBCA, B.3/a/41, February 26, 1750, fo. 25d; B.3/a/46, January 26, 1754, fo. 19d; B.3/a/48, January 4, 1756, fo. 13d.

possibly come up with any Beast."¹⁷⁰

Very little caribou meat was traded by the Lowland Cree during the winter months. On occasion, when hunting groups were near the trading posts, the Indians would bring in caribou flesh. However, it is apparent that winter caribou hunting was usually done at a considerable distance from the posts, and this precluded much trade in caribou meat during the winter.

Fur bearing animals were harvested during the winter for their pelts, but hunting and trapping these animals for food took place year-round. Beaver (Castor canadensis), or Au misk (Isham) in the Lowland Cree language, were valuable as commercial and subsistence resources. Beaver pelts worn as clothing by the Lowland Indians could be sold to the fur traders in the spring. This kind of beaver pelt, called coat beaver, was generally preferred to unused skins, called parchment beaver, because the long guard hairs were worn away in the coats. The removal of the longer hair was desirable because the soft underhair, called beaver wool, was used in manufacturing felt for the hat industry in Europe.¹⁷¹ Beaver also produced a substance called castoreum, or castor, which the Lowland Cree called weshenow (Isham). Castoreum was valued by

¹⁷⁰HBCA, B.3/a/17, fo. 10d.

¹⁷¹Parchment beaver gradually replaced coat beaver as the type of beaver fur that was desired by the traders. This was largely the result of changes in the English hatting industry that made it easier to remove the guard hairs from parchment skins. Parchment beaver skins were also easier to grade and transport, and these factors combined to make coat beaver less desirable by the end of the 18th century.

Europeans for its musky scent and it was used in making perfumes. The Lowland Cree valued castoreum as a bait for trapping lynx, wolverine, marten and other small fur bearers.¹⁷²

According to Andrew Graham, beaver hunting was a group effort, with several families, including women, children and the elderly usually participating together. However, Graham noted that while the flesh was distributed among the group, the beaver skins were "the sole property of the person who first discovered the house."¹⁷³ Graham also observed that any small, or so-called half beaver skins belonged to the women.¹⁷⁴

Winter hunting and trapping of beaver was a difficult and laborious task.¹⁷⁵ During

¹⁷²Andrew Graham noted that the Lowland Indians made traps for lynx that were baited with sticks rubbed over with castoreum (Graham, 1969: 22). James Isham commented that: "the Natives usses [castoreum] in trapping Rubbing the baits with itt, being Extrodinary good for martins and other Vermin, Espetially Quequahatches [wolverine], itt having a Very strong cent (Isham, 1949: 144).

¹⁷³Graham, 1969: 11.

¹⁷⁴Ibid. According to Graham, the same rules applied to Upland Indian women. Graham observed that: "The cub beaver, musquashes and the like are esteemed the women's property, who barter them for beads, vermilion, bracelets and other trinkets" (Ibid: 276).

¹⁷⁵Summer hunting for beaver was easier than in winter, especially after the introduction of the gun. Andrew Graham noted that: "The natives frequently lie in wait for them [beaver] in summer, and kill them with the gun" (Graham, 1969: 10). The HBC found it difficult to persuade the Indians from killing beaver in the summer. The Company's London directors advised their traders to burn the summer beaver skins before the eyes of the Indians, but the traders found it difficult to use such tactics (Isham, 1949: xxi). Gradually, summer beaver skins were weaned out of the trade, but the Indians continued to hunt beaver in the summer for their own use. Despite the protests of the HBC, fresh beaver flesh was occasionally brought in as a trade item in the

winter the common method of capturing beaver involved a complex system of traps and barriers placed around the beaver lodge. Central to the task of hunting beaver in winter was breaking into the lodge, which was difficult because the walls of the lodge, built of branches, twigs and mud, were usually two feet thick.¹⁷⁶ Andrew Graham accompanied a group of Lowland Cree on a beaver hunt, and he described the activity as follows:

There were eight of us in company including women. We set out early in the morning and in a few hours arrived at the place of action, which had previously been narrowly examined by an old and experienced Indian. Our first care was to stake the creek across both above and below the house to prevent the beaver from escaping. Afterwards we endeavoured to discover all the holes or cells about the creek, by thrusting a long hoop-stick under the ice; all these retreats were likewise barricaded by driving down stakes. Our next business was to cut a large hole in the ice near the mouth of the house, and set a net made of leather-thong, which is constantly watched by one of the oldest and most experienced men, who knows when the beaver approaches by the undulation of the water, whilst others make a noise, and beat upon the house, when out jumps the beaver, and it is caught in the net, which is immediately replaced. The women then break up the house with their hatchets and if any beavers are in the house they knock them on the head, and carefully watch the return of others. They are extremely shy, and seldom hampered a second time in a net, and will almost drown themselves before they will return to their house when they have once been disturbed. We caught all that were in that house, which amounted to only two....The flesh of the beaver is equally distributed, but the skins are the sole property of the person who first discovered the house. We [HBC] divide the beaver into three sizes. Firstly the whole or full-grown beaver, which is the standard. Secondly the three-quarter. Thirdly the half or young beaver, which last size generally belongs to the women.¹⁷⁷

summer, an indication that beaver hunting was not exclusively an activity directed by the fur trade.

¹⁷⁶Graham, 1969: 9.

¹⁷⁷Ibid: 11.

Beaver were hunted for food as well as their fur and castoreum. Mature beaver weighed about 45 pounds, and the amount of meat and fat obtained from each animal comprised a significant food resource. Both Europeans and Indians relished the taste of beaver. James Isham observed that: "they are Extrodinary good Eating if young and the tail which is of a Different taste from the other part of the body, I think is the finest eating in the Country, Cutting firm, itt's all fat Except a bone in the midle and Very Lucious food."¹⁷⁸ Beaver flesh was also preserved by drying, and occasionally dried beaver meat was traded by the Lowland Cree.¹⁷⁹

The flesh of most fur bearing animals was consumed by the Lowland Cree. These included the Otter (*Lontra canadensis*), called Neekeek (Graham) or Ne Kick (Isham) by the Lowland Cree¹⁸⁰; Marten (*Martes americana*), Wappestan (Graham) or Wap pa stan (Isham)¹⁸¹; Mink (*Mustela vison*), Jakash, Shakweshue (Graham) or Au cha Karsh (Isham)¹⁸²; Wolverine (*Gulo gulo*), Quiquahack (Graham) or Qui qua ha ku

¹⁷⁸Isham, 1949: 144.

¹⁷⁹See, for example, HBCA, B.3/a/66, January 23, 1774, fo. 12d.

¹⁸⁰Andrew Graham and James Isham differed in their views about the consumption of otters by the Indians. Graham noted that the Indians ate otter flesh, while Isham held that they were not eaten (Graham, 1969: 12; Isham, 1949: 165).

¹⁸¹Both Graham and Isham agreed that marten were eaten by the Lowland Indians. Isham noted that: "the Natives eat them frequently" (Graham, 1969: 13; Isham, 1949: 164).

¹⁸²Graham, 1969: 14.

(Isham)¹⁸³; Lynx (Lynx lynx), Pisshu (Graham) or Pir shuee (Isham)¹⁸⁴; Red Fox (Vulpes vulpes), Makeshu (Graham) or Me ke shue (Isham)¹⁸⁵; Arctic Fox (Alopex lagopus), Wappekeseu (Graham) or wap pa ke shue (Isham)¹⁸⁶; Skunk (Mephitis mephitis), Shicauk (Graham) or She cow wuck (Isham)¹⁸⁷; Porcupine (Erethizon dorsatum), Caqua (Graham) or Caw qua (Isham)¹⁸⁸; Black Bear (Ursus americanus), Musqua (Graham) or Mus qua (Isham)¹⁸⁹; Polar Bear (Ursus maritimus), Wapusk (Graham) or Wap pusk (Isham)¹⁹⁰; and Snowshoe Hare (Lepus americanus), Wapuss (Graham)¹⁹¹.

In contrast, very few species of fur bearers were not esteemed as food resources by the Lowland Cree. However, even these fur bearers were eaten when other subsistence

¹⁸³Graham, 1969: 21; Isham, 1949: 141.

¹⁸⁴Graham, 1969, 22; Isham, 1949: 142. According to George Simpson, Governor of the HBC, the flesh of the lynx was the most highly esteemed food among the Indians around Island Lake. Simpson noted a large number of lynx in the fur returns from Island Lake in 1829-30, and remarked that: "the natives...consider the flesh of that animal a delicacy of the highest order" (HBCA, D.4/97, August 26, 1830, fo. 36).

¹⁸⁵Isham, 1949: 157.

¹⁸⁶Graham, 1969: 25.

¹⁸⁷Graham, 1969: 13; Isham, 1949: 166.

¹⁸⁸Graham, 1969: 24; Isham, 1949: 143.

¹⁸⁹Graham, 1969: 28.

¹⁹⁰Graham, 1969: 31; Isham, 1949: 166.

¹⁹¹Graham, 1969: 27; Isham, 1949: 129.

resources were unavailable. These included the Fisher (Martes pennanti), Wejack (Graham) or Shar qua she wuck (Isham)¹⁹²; Badger (Taxidea taxus), Nanaspacheneskesesewick (Graham)¹⁹³; Marmot (Marmota monax), Wenusk (Graham)¹⁹⁴; and Wolf (Canis lupus), Mahigan (Graham) or Me hi gan (Isham)¹⁹⁵.

Small fur bearers were usually caught in dead-fall traps or snare mechanisms. These traps worked best under certain types of snow and weather conditions. Joseph Myatt, Chief Factor of Albany Fort in 1721, explained that:

I have oftentimes observed whenever the winter sets in so extraordinary early, and attended with such great flights of snow it generally proves a year of great scarcity among the Natives, but on the contrary when the fall proves long with hard frosty weather, and but little snow upon the ground, they [Lowland Indians] seldom fail of catching good quantities of small furs.¹⁹⁶

Among the small fur bearers, marten were the most valuable in the fur trade. The marten trade by the Lowland Cree was more valuable than the beaver trade, most of which was brought in by Upland Indians. The significance of the Lowland Cree marten trade was noted by George Spence, who was in charge of Albany Fort in 1745. Spence

¹⁹²According to Andrew Graham, the fisher was not abundant in the Hudson Bay Lowlands (Graham, 1969: 12).

¹⁹³Badgers were rare in the Hudson Bay Lowlands (Ibid: 26).

¹⁹⁴Ibid: 26.

¹⁹⁵Ibid: 20. James Isham also included the Muskrat as a species of fur bearing animal that was not eaten by the Indians (Isham, 1949: 167). However, other sources contradict this assertion.

¹⁹⁶HBCA, B.3/a/10, October 9, 1721, fo. 8.

reported that: "Our settlement at Kitchimatawan [Henley House] answers our intention, which prevents the French Pedlars drawing the Sea Side Indians from us, who catch that valuable commodity, vz. Martins."¹⁹⁷

Among the fur bearers, the Black Bear and Polar Bear were significant food resources because of their large size. Polar Bears were unique to the coastal environment, and valued by the Lowland Cree for their flesh and fat. Andrew Graham observed that: "The Indians likewise eat the flesh of all [polar bears] they kill, and mix the fat with cranberries, pounded venison [ruhiggan] etc. which constitutes one of their greatest dainties."¹⁹⁸

Around the coastal factories, bears were seasonally abundant. Near York Factory, polar bears were hunted during the fall before they migrated farther north. In the fall of 1747, James Isham noted that: "more [Polar] Bears about this fort this fall than ever was knowne."¹⁹⁹ Polar bears were also abundant near Severn House in the fall. On October, 10, 1783, William Falconer at Severn House reported that he had great difficulty in persuading several York Factory Lowland Cree who had delivered a packet of correspondence to return to York. Falconer complained that: "they hung about [Severn House] ever since eating Bears flesh, which it seems our Natives have plenty

¹⁹⁷HBCA, B.3/b/2, May 22, 1745, fo. 18d.

¹⁹⁸Graham, 1969: 31.

¹⁹⁹HBCA, B.239/a/30, fo. 10.

of."²⁰⁰

Among the smaller fur bearers, the Snowshoe Hare was generally the most important subsistence resource available to the Lowland Cree. Although usually very abundant and easily caught throughout the Lowlands, Snowshoe Hare populations were subject to extreme cyclical fluctuations. Every nine or ten years the population reached a peak and then suddenly crashed.²⁰¹ The Snowshoe Hare furnished the Lowland Cree with food and clothing; the "rabbit-skin" blanket being a common article of winter clothing. They were caught with snares set across runways that were easy to find in the winter snow cover. The introduction of European wire probably increased the efficiency of the snare traps.

Several species of birds indigenous to the Hudson Bay Lowlands provided important subsistence and commercial resources for the Lowland Cree during the winter. Foremost among these was the Willow Ptarmigan (Lagopus lagopus), known commonly by the HBC men as partridges, and Wapethew (Graham) in the Lowland Cree language. Large flocks of Willow Ptarmigan gathered together during the winter months, and they were easily hunted by the Lowland Cree who used a number of techniques to capture and kill these birds. Nets were employed effectively to capture thousands of Willow Ptarmigan

²⁰⁰HBCA, B.198/a/29, fo. 3d.

²⁰¹Banfield suggested that these population cycles may be due to migration patterns of the Snowshoe Hare (Banfield, 1974: 82).

near the coastal trading posts.²⁰² During the winter of 1743-44, a total of 2,086 ptarmigan were caught with nets for the HBC at Albany Fort.²⁰³ When conditions were unfavourable for netting ptarmigan, hunting was done with guns. Such was the case in the winter of 1758-59 around Albany Fort, when 3,666 ptarmigan were shot and only 1,612 were netted for the HBC.²⁰⁴ In most seasons, ptarmigan were available in large flocks near the coastal posts, but periodically they failed to appear in their accustomed winter grounds. Such was the case in the winter of 1777-78, near York Factory. Humphrey Marten remarked that: "The North Side of the North River, that used to be swarming with partridges every year, is now destitute of a single bird and indeed our eastern shore, except at Stoney River, is in the same condition nearly."²⁰⁵

The use of bows and arrows to kill ptarmigan in winter was also noted in the HBC records. For example, on April 10, 1769, Andrew Graham, who was Chief Factor at Severn House, noted that Indian boys had killed over 100 ptarmigan with bows and arrows.²⁰⁶ It appears that the gun had replaced the bow and arrow in the hunting

²⁰²Andrew Graham noted that more than 10,000 ptarmigan were captured by nets in the vicinity of Severn House (Graham, 1969: 109).

²⁰³HBCA, B.3/a/35, fo. 1d.

²⁰⁴HBCA, B.3/a/51, April 23, 1759, fo. 26d. In 1776, Humphrey Marten, who was in charge of York Factory, noted that: "I pay the Indians for beaver for every hundred birds [ptarmigan] they bring to the fort" (HBCA, B.239/a/73, February 3, 1776, fo. 28d).

²⁰⁵HBCA, B.239/a/75, April 7, 1778, fo. 35d.

²⁰⁶HBCA, B.198/a/11, fo. 23d.

equipment of men who could afford to purchase them, but boys continued to use traditional technology quite effectively. The HBC records indicated that the Lowland Cree did not hunt ptarmigan during the breeding season in late winter. Joseph Colen, who was in charge of York Factory in 1790, noted that: "The Indian hunters returned from the Northward, much tired with sleds loaded with partridges, say it is useless to go out more as the Birds are pairing, and by killing of one, many are destroyed."²⁰⁷

Sharp-tailed Grouse (Tympanuchus phasianellus), or Aukuskow (Graham); Spruce Grouse (Dendragapus canadensis), or Mistic Apethou (Graham); and Ruffed Grouse (Bonasa umbellus), or Uscathachish (Graham), were known commonly as pheasants by the HBC men. These birds contributed to the winter subsistence and commercial needs of the Lowland Cree, although to a lesser degree than ptarmigan. Large numbers were easily caught with simple technology. For example, the Spruce Grouse could be caught by hand, and Andrew Graham explained that: "The Indians frequently fasten a noose to the end of a stick, and slipping it over the head of the bird haul it down at once."²⁰⁸

Fishing during winter was an activity that involved specialized technology and skills. The HBC traders learned from the Indians how to set nets under the ice in winter. Andrew Graham noted the HBC's dependence on the Lowland Cree for teaching the Company men how to survive in the country. Graham observed that: "we endeavour to

²⁰⁷HBCA, B.239/a/90, April 12, 1790, fo. 34.

²⁰⁸Graham, 1969: 106.

imitate the customs of the natives who are inured to the climate, and extremely dextrous at every kind of business in their way."²⁰⁹ Winter fishing was sometimes critical for the support of the men employed at the coastal posts, especially if the fall fishery failed to produce the required quantity of fish. Such was the case in 1705 at Albany Fort, when Anthony Beale remarked that: "I wish with all my hart [sic] it may frese hard that we may set our Netts under the ice for I have but 14500 fish in the Factory as yet."²¹⁰

Northern Pike were caught in winter by angling with lines and hooks through holes in the ice. They were also caught in gill nets set under the ice. One species of fish that was caught especially in the winter was the Burbot (Lota lota), which was called Mathy (Graham) or Mur thy (Isham) by the Lowland Cree. Burbot spawned in winter, usually between January and March.²¹¹ Andrew Graham noted that: "They are found in great plenty when the rivers are freezing over, which is in October."²¹² The bottom-feeding Burbot could be caught easiest with a baited hook and line. Pieces of caribou meat were often used as bait. The HBC men disliked the flesh of the Burbot, but they traded quantities from the Indians in times of need.²¹³ The liver and roe of the Burbot was

²⁰⁹Ibid: 294.

²¹⁰HBCA, B.3/a/1, October 21, 1705, fo. 10d.

²¹¹Scott and Crossman, 1979: 643.

²¹²Graham, 1969: 120.

²¹³See, for example, HBCA, B.3/a/60, December 23, 1767, fo. 10d.

considered to be a delicacy.²¹⁴

6.6: Coaster and Inlander Lowland Cree Seasonal Cycles:

The Lowland Cree who lived near the coast followed a seasonal cycle that was focused upon resources that were usually available within about 100 miles from the coast. Compared to the Inlander Lowland Cree the Coasters spent more time hunting geese and other migratory waterfowl that preferred coastal marshes for feeding and staging grounds. Coastal sloughs and offshore islands were also favoured breeding habitat for several species of ducks and geese. The best time for hunting migratory waterfowl was in the spring and fall, when huge flocks congregated along the major flyways that transected the Hudson Bay Lowlands. The Lowland Cree who lived inland were usually unable to travel to the coastal marshes in time for the spring hunt. The fall hunt was also a difficult event for the Inlander Lowland Cree because of the need to travel to their winter hunting grounds before the onset of freezing weather. Both Coaster and Inlander Lowland Cree were able to hunt migratory birds that spent the summer along the coast. The summer moult left the birds vulnerable to hunters who used nets, clubs and other aboriginal technology.

²¹⁴The liver of the Burbot contains a large amount of Vitamin D (Scott and Crossman, 1979: 645).

Until the beginning of the 19th century the hunting of migratory birds by both the Coaster and Inlander Lowland Cree was secondary to the caribou hunt. The Coasters preferred hunting caribou when they were available, and goose camps were usually quickly abandoned when caribou herds were sighted nearby. Since the caribou generally crossed the major rivers at traditional crossing places, the spring and fall caribou hunts brought both Coaster and Inlander groups to these well-known places. During the 18th century, Northern Ojibway caribou hunters also arrived at the crossing places in the Lowlands to join in the hunt. The location and timing of the spring and fall caribou migrations was usually predictable, and the hunting took place during a relatively short period. An important activity was preserving excess meat and fat for later consumption. The work of women at this time was critical to the future success of the Lowland Cree hunting groups. Preserved caribou products were cached at strategic places for use during the winter season when the supply of other food was sometimes less predictable. The availability of caribou meat and fat at other times of the year also served to add variety to the diet of the Lowland Cree.

Fisheries were also seasonally and spatially variable. The best fishing was usually conducted during the spring and fall when most species of fish congregated at spawning grounds. The Coaster Lowland Cree depended more upon the riverine fisheries near the coastal estuaries. The fall fishery was the most important for the Coasters because fall-spawning whitefish were the most valuable fish in the rivers near the coast. Fishing was relatively more important to the Inlander Lowland Cree. Sturgeon were more abundant

in the rivers at inland locations, especially near rapids and waterfalls that were favoured sturgeon spawning grounds. Lake whitefish were also more abundant in the larger lakes in the inland sections of the Hudson Bay Lowlands.

Fur bearing animals were more plentiful inland, especially beaver which was highly valued by the European fur traders. The Coaster Lowland Cree were relatively less productive fur hunters and trappers, but small fur bearers such as marten were generally available near the coast. The decline in beaver populations around 1800 was therefore a more significant set-back for the Inlander Lowland Cree. The loss in food value was probably as critical as the loss in commercial value resulting from the depletion of beaver.

Birch bark was more easily obtained by the Inlander Lowland Cree, and it is apparent that they made greater use of canoes than did the Coasters. The more complex drainage patterns inland also made the use of canoes more essential to the Inlanders for travel. The Coaster Lowland Cree depended more upon pedestrian travel along the coastal beach ridges. Rafts built of branches cut from locally available trees also served to facilitate river transport in the summer ice-free period. The HBC records indicate that Company owned vessels were often used to shuttle the Coasters across the major rivers. The Company also purchased birch-bark canoes from Upland Indians to supply the Coasters with additional water craft.

Although the Coaster Lowland Cree were more adapted to the resources that were available along the coastal strip, they were not especially focused on marine mammals such as the white whale and seals that frequented river estuaries. Although whales and seals were occasionally harvested for dog food or for sale to the European traders, the numbers were usually low and an industry in sea mammal products did not develop among the Coaster Lowland Cree.

In summary, the Coaster and Inlander groups of Lowland Cree developed distinctive strategies for living in their different ecological zones. The Coasters were more adapted to migratory bird hunting, riverine fisheries and, to a lesser extent marine mammal hunting. The Inlanders focused more of their activities on larger fur bearers such as beaver, and fish such as sturgeon that preferred upriver habitat. However, Coasters and Inlanders came together during the seasonal caribou hunts. Caribou was a focal resource for most Lowland Cree until the decline in caribou populations that took place around 1800.

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August, 1993

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CHAPTER 7: THE LOWLAND CREE IN THE FUR TRADE BEFORE 1713

7.1: Indian Middleman Traders from the St. Lawrence River Valley:

Prior to the arrival of European fur traders, the Lowland Cree were involved in an extensive aboriginal trade with Upland Indians. The commerce between the Lowland Cree and their Upland Indian neighbours may have involved products such as copper, silica, obsidian and pottery in return for furs, food and other country produce.¹

The Lowland Cree acquired European goods through these aboriginal trading connections shortly after the beginning of the European fur trade with Indians who lived in the St. Lawrence valley in the late 16th century. By the early 17th century, Indian middlemen based in the St. Lawrence valley were supplying European goods to the Lowland Cree in exchange for furs.

French fur traders and missionaries learned about the trading routes between the St.

¹Carlson and Wright, 1987: plate 14. The aboriginal trade routes mapped by Carlson and Wright did not extend into the Hudson Bay Lowlands because of the lack of archaeological evidence, but recent archaeological investigations by Pilon and Julig have indicated that similar trade patterns may have existed for the Lowlands region.

Lawrence River and James Bay from Indian informants. Samuel de Champlain was the first to record information about the James Bay trading connection in 1603, seven years prior to the "discovery" of the bay by Henry Hudson. Champlain visited Tadoussac, a trading post at mouth of the Saguenay River, and met with local Montagnais Indians who told him that they traded with other Indians who lived near a northern saltwater sea. The Montagnais, so-called because of the hilly terrain near Tadoussac, acted as middlemen in this exchange; bringing French merchandise to trade for furs procured by other Indians. Champlain learned that the Montagnais travelled to a trading rendezvous located near the headwaters of the Saguenay River, and met with Indians who came from the James Bay region. Champlain reported that:

On the banks of the said rivers [headwaters of the Saguenay River] are many lodges, where other tribes come from the north, to barter beaver and marten skins with the Montagnais for other merchandise, which the French ships bring to the said Montagnais. These said savages from the north say they are in sight of a sea which is salt.²

In 1608, Champlain visited Tadoussac again, and learned more about the trading connection between the Montagnais and the Lowland Cree. On this occasion, the Montagnais reported that they made trading trips to the "northern sea" which took 40 to 50 days. Champlain was eager to accompany the Montagnais on their northern trading trips, but they refused to take him or any other Frenchman. Champlain observed that: "I have often desired to explore it [the route to James Bay], but have been unable to do so without the natives, who have been unwilling that I or any of our people should go

²Champlain, 1922-36, vol. 1: 123-24.

with them."³ The reluctance of the Montagnais to take the French to James Bay was motivated by a desire to protect their position as middlemen in the fur trade with the Lowland Cree.

Champlain learned later that other groups of Indians who lived along the St. Lawrence River also traded with the Lowland Cree. In 1609, Champlain visited the area near the mouth of the St. Maurice River known as Trois Rivieres (see figure 7.1.1) and the local Indians, known as Algonquin, reported that their trading trips to James Bay took 40 days.⁴ Other Indian groups who lived along the Ottawa River and the upper Great Lakes also traded with the Lowland Cree. In 1615, Champlain visited the Nipissing who lived around Lake Nipissing (see figure 7.1.1), and they also reported that their trading journeys to James Bay took 40 days.⁵

7.2 European Explorations into Hudson Bay, 1610 - 1632:

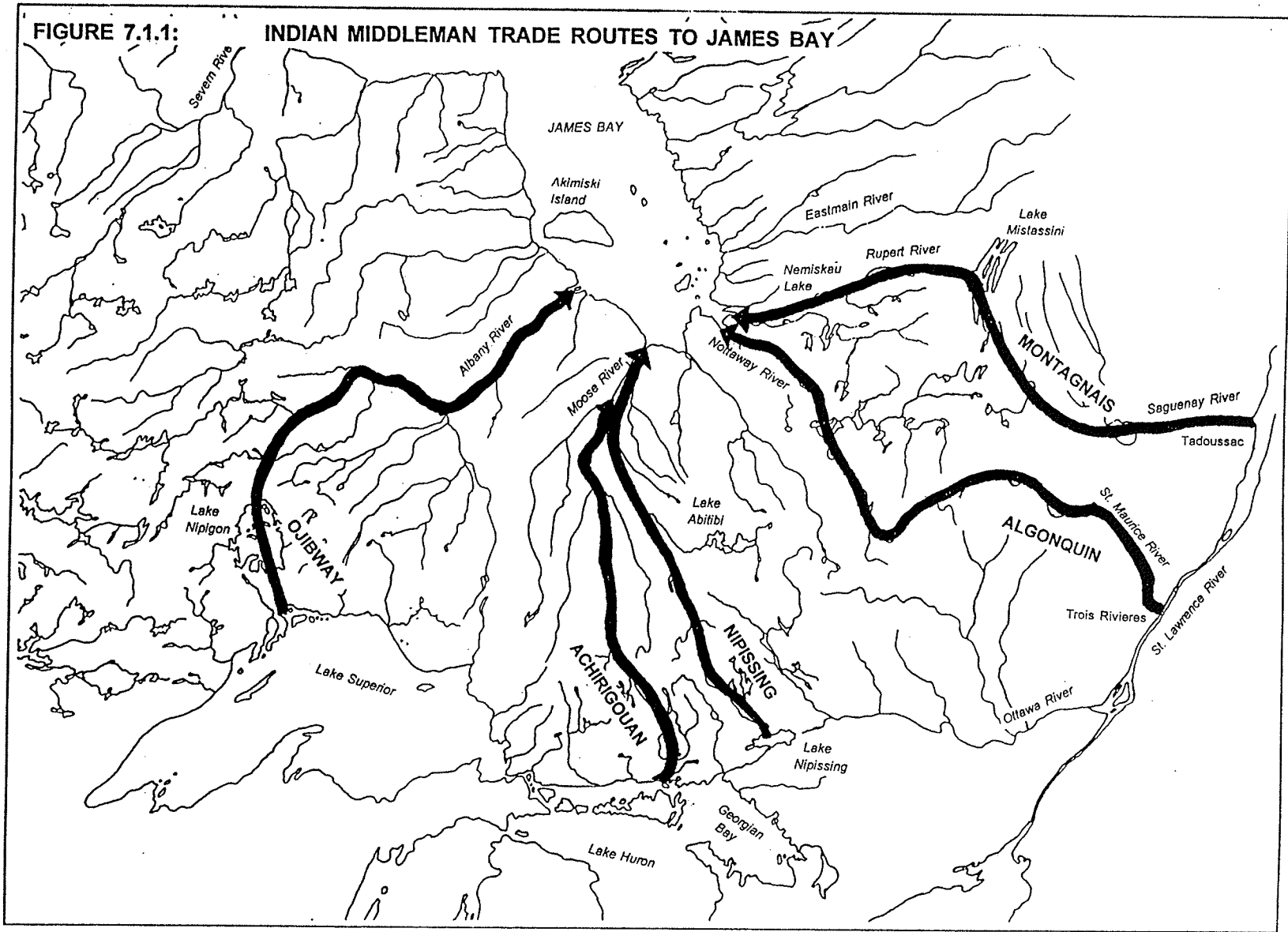
Five European exploring expeditions seeking a northwestern sea passage to the Pacific Ocean ventured into Hudson and James Bay between 1610 and 1632. Only one face-to-

³Ibid, vol. 2: 19.

⁴Ibid: 74.

⁵Ibid, vol. 3: 105.

FIGURE 7.1.1: INDIAN MIDDLEMAN TRADE ROUTES TO JAMES BAY



face encounter with an Indian was recorded by the European explorers, but other evidence such as abandoned campsites and sightings of distant campfires clearly indicated that the Indians who lived in the region purposely avoided contact with these strange seafaring newcomers.

Henry Hudson was the first European to command an exploring party into Hudson Bay in 1610. Hudson piloted his ship, the Discovery, from London across the Atlantic Ocean and into the bay, exploring its eastern and southern coastlines. When winter began to set in, Hudson and his crew hauled their ship ashore in the southern part of James Bay, probably in the vicinity of Point Comfort.⁶ The winter was long and difficult, and dissent among the crew turned to mutiny shortly after the ship set sail again the following summer. On June 23, 1611, Hudson and eight of his men were cast adrift in a boat near Charlton Island, and the others returned to England in the Discovery.

The only written account of Hudson's ill-fated voyage came from the testimony of Abacuck Pricket, one of the mutineers who was interrogated by English officials shortly after his return. Pricket's brief account mentioned only one encounter with an Indian. This occurred in the spring of 1611, "about the time the Ice began to breake out of the bayes."⁷ Pricket observed that "there came a Salvage to their Ship, as it were to see

⁶Kenyon, 1986: 1.

⁷Fox, 1965: 100.

and to be seen, and was the first, that they had seen all that time."⁸ Hudson communicated with this lone person in sign language, and gave him a knife, looking glass and buttons. He must have been camped nearby because he returned the next day with two beaver skins and two "deere skins" (probably caribou). His actions indicated a familiarity with trading animal skins for European goods. In sign language, he communicated that there were other Indians who lived to the north and south and that he would return, presumably with others, to trade more furs. Hudson soon tired of waiting for their arrival, and he sent some of his men to search for them in the neighbouring woods. Pricket reported that other Indians were nearby and "set the woods on fire before him, yet they would not come to him."⁹ According to Pricket, no other Indians were encountered by Hudson or his men during the remainder of their stay in the James Bay region.

Although Hudson's voyage ended in failure and mishap, a follow-up expedition was quickly organized. In the spring of 1612, Thomas Button set sail with two ships to venture into Hudson Bay. Button wintered near the mouth of the "Port Nelson River," which was named after Robert Nelson, one of the ship's masters who died there.¹⁰ Button lost many men through sickness during the winter, but there appears to have been an abundance of game and fish nearby. It was reported that Button's men killed over

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid: 101.

¹⁰Ibid: 118.

20,000 "Partridges [ptarmigan] and other Fowle," as well as a number of "Deare [caribou]" and plenty of "Fish, as bigge as Mackrils [probably whitefish]."¹¹ Fox's brief account of Button's stay at Port Nelson mentioned no encounters with Indians. However, the written account of Button's expedition is so sketchy that it is not possible to assess with certainty whether any Lowland Cree were encountered by Button or his men during their stay at the mouth of the Nelson River in 1612-13.

In 1619, Jens Munk led a Danish exploring party in two vessels into Hudson Bay, and they wintered near the mouth of the Churchill River. On October 7, 1619, Munk and several of his men made a short exploration upriver. Although they did not meet with Indians, the signs of previous human activity were abundant. Munk noted: "Although we did not see any natives, we saw traces of their summer camps in a number of different spots."¹² These traces included piles of stones that Munk believed to be religious sites, and a pictograph drawn with charcoal that Munk likened to the shape of a devil. Munk and his men were ill-prepared for the winter at the mouth of the Churchill River, and sixty-two of his sixty-four crew members died at their winter camp. No Indians came to the camp, and Munk's men were too weak to venture far afield to search for the people who had made the curious stone structures and pictograph nearby. Munk and two other survivors managed to sail one of the ships out of Hudson Bay and returned to Denmark in the fall of 1620.

¹¹Ibid: 119.

¹²Munk, 1980: 20.

In 1631, two English explorers, Thomas James and Luke Fox set off on separate expeditions into Hudson Bay. Fox set his course toward the western shore of Hudson Bay and then worked his way south toward the Nelson River. Fox and several crew members made a quick exploration of the river mouth area and found the remains of Button's encampment. They also saw signs of an Indian camp that had been recently abandoned. Fox's journal entry on August 17, 1631, noted that: "upon the shore we found, the broad footing of Deere, and hard by them, the frame of a Tent standing, which had lately been made, with the studdle of the fire, the haire of Deere, and bones of fowle, left here."¹³ Fox continued his voyage southeastward along the coast of the bay and met Thomas James near the mouth of the Winisk River. After a brief exchange of information about their respective journeys, the two explorers parted ways. Fox continued to sail eastward along the coast to the cape which James had named Henrietta Maria after his ship. With winter fast approaching, and with the spectre of an ominous winter season ahead of him, Fox headed north and then home to England.

Thomas James also explored the western coastline of Hudson Bay before meeting with Fox near the mouth of the Winisk River. Unlike Fox, James decided to spend the winter in the bay. He headed south into James Bay and searched for a safe harbour and wintering site. On October 4, 1631, James and several crew members went ashore on Danby Island. A cursory exploration of part of the island revealed signs that Indians had

¹³Fox, 1965: 216.

recently been on the island. James noted: "I found that the Savages had been upon it."¹⁴ James finally settled on nearby Charlton Island and spent the long winter months struggling to keep his men healthy and alive. No signs of Indians were evident on Charlton Island during the winter. In the summer, before setting sail for England, James made a second brief exploration of Danby Island and he noted again that Indians had been on the island. On July 2, 1632, James observed:

When we came ashore, whilst some gather'd Wood, I went to the Place; where I found two Stakes, drove into the Ground a Foot and half, and Firebrands, where a Fire had been made by them. I pull'd up the Stakes, which were about the Bigness of my Arm; and they had been cut sharp at the Ends, with a Hatchet, or some other good Iron Tool, and driven in as it were with the Head of it.¹⁵

James's impression that the wooden stakes had been sharpened by a hatchet or other tool made of iron could have been attributed to tools that had been lost or stolen from Hudson's party more than twenty years earlier. However, it is more likely that European iron goods were available to the local Indians through trade with Upland Indian middlemen who had access to these items from Europeans who had been trading with Indians in the St. Lawrence valley for at least fifty years.

James's departure from Hudson Bay in 1632¹⁶ ended the initial brief flurry of European

¹⁴James, 1973: 44.

¹⁵Ibid: 102.

¹⁶James returned to England, stopping only briefly at Cape Henrietta Maria on July 22, 1632, where he erected a cross in honour of the king. No Indians were seen, but James noted that caribou and geese were numerous in the vicinity (James, 1973: 104).

exploration in the region, and thirty-six years would pass before the next European visit to the bay. However, events to the south, in the St. Lawrence valley and Great Lakes basin, would continue to shed significant light on the region and the Lowland Cree. In particular, the written accounts of French fur traders and missionaries incorporated evidence from Indian oral accounts that provided information about the participation of the Lowland Cree in the fur trade through southern Indian middlemen.

7.3 The James Bay Trading Connection:

Beginning in the 1630s, Jesuit missionaries visited various Indian groups who lived in the St. Lawrence valley and Great Lakes basin, and learned more about the James Bay trading connection. In 1637, the Jesuit missionary Paul Le Jeune reported that the Nipissing carried "divers wares from New France" to James Bay to trade with the "nations of the North."¹⁷ In 1640, Le Jeune was the first person to record the name of the Indians who lived in the James Bay region. Le Jeune noted that the "Kiristinon who live on the North Sea whither the Nipisiriniens go to trade."¹⁸

The name Kiristinon, first recorded by Le Jeune in 1640, became the common term used by the French to describe the Lowland Cree who lived in the James Bay area. However,

¹⁷Thwaites, 1896-1901, vol. 11: 197, 199.

¹⁸Ibid, vol. 18: 229.

it is quite evident that the French also applied the name Kiristinon more generally to include the Upland Cree and perhaps other Indian groups who visited the James Bay region to trade each summer. A Jesuit report for 1660-61 noted that:

We have long known that we have the North Sea behind [to the north of] us, its shores occupied by hosts of Savages entirely unacquainted with Europeans....Upon this bay are found, at certain seasons of the year, many surrounding Nations embraced under the general name of Killistinons.¹⁹

In 1641, the Jesuit missionary Claude Pijart reported that: "our Nipisiriniens, returning not long since from the Kyristinons, who trade on the Northern sea."²⁰ The Nipissing told Pijart that the trip to James Bay took 30 days, and ten more days of travel along the coast of the bay was needed to reach the place where the Kiristinon had gathered for trade.²¹ According to the Nipissing, 400 Kiristinon men were gathered at the trading place and they spoke the same language as the Montagnais who lived near Tadoussac.²²

By the 1640s, the annual summer trade on James Bay had attracted a number of Indian groups. The Attikamegue, who occupied the area around the headwaters of the St. Maurice River, had developed close trading connections with the Kiristinon on James

¹⁹Ibid, vol. 46: 249.

²⁰Ibid, vol. 21: 123.

²¹Ibid, vol. 21: 239.

²²Ibid: 123.

Bay.²³ The Achirigouan who occupied the region near the mouth of the French River also made trading trips to James Bay. In 1658, Jesuit missionaries visited the "Achirigouans" and noted that some of them were prepared to "go in a few days to trade with the Ataouabouskatouk Kilistinons."²⁴ A number of other Indian groups who lived near the Achirigouan also made trading trips to James Bay. In 1648, a Jesuit report noted that "there are various Algonquin Tribes to the north of the Huron who roam as far as the North Sea."²⁵ These Nations likely included the Ouasouarini, Outchougai, Amikouai and Oumisagi who lived along the north shore of Lake Huron, and the Saulteur Nation who lived near Baouitchigouian or Sault Ste. Marie (see figure 7.1.1).²⁶ Later Jesuit accounts indicated that the Huron also visited James Bay to trade.²⁷

In his report of Jesuit missionary work in 1657-58, Gabriel Druillettes described five routes to the "Bay of the Kilistinons," or James Bay.²⁸ From east to west, these included the Montagnais trade route from Tadoussac up the Saguenay River. The second

²³Ibid, vol. 43: 51.

²⁴Ibid, vol. 44: 243.

²⁵Ibid, vol. 33: 67.

²⁶Ibid, vol. 18: 229.

²⁷Ibid, vol. 45: 229.

²⁸Druillettes explained that he had obtained his information "partly from two Frenchmen who have made their way far inland [probably Groseilliers and Radisson], and partly from several Savages who are eye-witnesses." (Ibid, vol. 44: 237). For a detailed examination of the locations of these and other trade routes see Crouse, 1924: 139-168.

route was used by the Algonquin at Trois Rivieres who ascended the St. Maurice River and passed through the territory of the Attikamegue. The third route was used by the Nipissing who departed from Lake Nipissing and ascended the Sturgeon River.²⁹ The fourth route, used by the Achirigouan, probably followed the Spanish River. Finally, the fifth route which was used by the "Upper Algonquins," or Ojibway, began at "Lake Alimibeg [Lake Nipigon]."³⁰ These five routes are shown in figure 7.1.1.

Druillettes's account of the trading routes to James Bay also provided information about the Indian groups who were encountered along the shores of the bay by the Indian traders from the south. All of these people were embraced under the name "Kilistinon," but four specific "Nations" were recorded. These included the "Alimibigouek Kilistinons," "Kilistinons of Ataouabouscatouek Bay," "Kilistinons of the Nipisiriniens" and "Nisibourounik Kilistinons."³¹ Druillettes remarked that these four Nations comprised about 600 men who were "not very stationary."³² The names of these Nations appear to be derived from their association with southern-based trading partners. For example, the Kilistinons of the Nipisiriniens referred to the people who traded with the Nipissing; probably near the mouth of the Moose River. The Kilistinons of Ataouabouscatouek Bay traded with the Achirigouans. Their trading rendezvous may have also been near the

²⁹According to Gabriel Druillettes's account of 1659-60, the Huron traders also used this route to reach James Bay (Thwaites, 1896-1901, vol. 45: 229).

³⁰*Ibid*, vol. 44: 237-243.

³¹*Ibid*: 249.

³²*Ibid*.

mouth of the Moose River. The Alimibigouek Kilistinons traded with the Upper Algonquins of the Lake Superior region who travelled to James Bay by way of Lake Nipigon [Alimibig]. These trading activities probably took place near the mouth of the Albany River. The Nisibourounik Kilistinons traded with the Montagnais, and their summer meeting place appears to have been near the mouth of the Rupert River.

In the summer of 1660, Druillettes obtained important new information about the James Bay trading connection from a Nipissing Chief named Awatanik. The Nipissing had been temporarily driven away from their homelands around Lake Nipissing by Iroquois attacks in the early 1650s. Some Nipissing sought refuge in the area around Lake Nipigon, but it is apparent that they continued their trading contacts with people on James Bay through new routes. Druillettes met Awatanik about 100 miles up the Saguenay River. Awatanik was among a group of 80 people in canoes who were bringing furs from James Bay to trade at Tadoussac. Awatanik told Druillettes that his trip had begun when he moved with his family from Green Bay on Lake Michigan to Chequamegon on the south shore of Lake Superior. From Chequamegon, they eventually journeyed on a river flowing north of Lake Superior to James Bay. Although Awatanik's route cannot be precisely determined, it is likely that the river flowing to the bay was the Albany River which can be reached from a number of points to the north and west of Lake Superior. Awatanik described a large island in the middle of the bay that: "takes its name from the white Bears inhabiting it," which accurately describes Akimiski Island located about 45

kilometres north of the mouth of the Albany River.³³

On his route to James Bay, Awatanik met various Indian groups, but he "noticed especially the Kilistinons, who are divided among nine different residences, some of a thousand, others of fifteen hundred men; they are settled in large villages where they leave their wives and children while they chase the Moose and hunt the Beaver."³⁴ The locations of these large villages is unclear, but it is unlikely that they refer to places near James Bay. Awatanik's description of moose and beaver hunting would seem to refer to places farther south and west, closer to Lake Superior where beaver and moose were more plentiful. The villages likely referred to Upland Cree settlements, a view that is supported by later European accounts of large gatherings of Upland Cree.

The only Indian group on James Bay specifically mentioned by Awatanik was called the "Pitchibourenik." These may have been the same people Druillettes called the Nisibourounik Kilistinons. Awatanik reported that the Pitchibourenik were "dwelling at the entrance to the Bay, whither the Hurons and Nipisiriniens formerly were wont to go for trade."³⁵ This "entrance to the Bay" may have referred to the mouth of the Rupert River since Awatanik travelled to the mouth of the Rupert and then ascended the river

³³Ibid, vol. 45: 225.

³⁴Ibid: 227.

³⁵Ibid: 229.

on his route to the Saguenay River.³⁶

Awatanik visited "all the Nations surrounding the Bay" and obtained furs which he was transporting to Tadoussac when he met Druillettes. Awatanik's account of his trip from the western end of Lake Superior to Tadoussac confirmed that a vast Aboriginal trading network existed that focused on James Bay. The spokes of this trading network radiated in many directions from James Bay, some of which have been described above. During the period of intensified Iroquois warfare in the Great Lakes region during the 1650s and 1660s, these northern trading corridors focusing on James Bay became essential for moving furs and European goods.

Awatanik's account of his journey from Lake Superior to Tadoussac through the northern routes sparked interest among missionaries as well as fur traders. The Jesuits were anxious to visit James Bay to spread the Christian faith to the many Indian Nations who congregated there each summer. In the spring of 1661 Druillettes and Claude Dablon accompanied a group of Indians from Quebec and Tadoussac who intended to travel north to trade at a "general fair" on James Bay. At the same time, a group of French fur traders set off from Trois Rivieres with a party of Indian traders who were also headed north toward James Bay. The Jesuits proceeded up the Saguenay to Lake St. Jean, where they met eight Indian people who were described as "stranger Savages, natives of the

³⁶In 1673, the Jesuit missionary Charles Albanel visited the mouth of the Rupert River and reported that a Nation called "Pitchiboutounibuek" lived to northeast (*Ibid*, vol. 56: 203).

country whither we were going - some of them having wintered at Kebec, and others having wandered among the Lakes of these regions during the past winter, with no fixed abode."³⁷ On July 2, 1661, they reached Nekouba near the height of land that separated St. Lawrence River drainage from waters flowing north into James Bay (see figure 7.1.1). Nekouba was described as "a place noted for a Market that is held there every year, to which all the Savages from the surrounding country resort for the purpose of conducting their petty traffic."³⁸ At Nekouba they also received news that the French and Indian traders who had left Trois Rivieres had been ambushed by an Iroquois war party. Other reports indicated that Iroquois warriors had "destroyed the Squirrel nation" who were located "several days' journey hence."³⁹ These reports caused panic among the Indians who travelled with the Jesuits, and since other reports indicated that the Iroquois intended to attack the people who gathered at James Bay, the mission was cut short and the party returned to Quebec without reaching the bay.

Iroquois warriors continued their attacks in the northern regions throughout the winter of 1661-62, causing a significant disruption in the fur trade of the French colony. A Jesuit observed: "the fountainhead of Beaver-Skins is dried up with the ruin of those who bring them to our settlers."⁴⁰ The Iroquois attacks in the north were short-lived, but

³⁷Ibid, vol. 46: 265.

³⁸Ibid: 275.

³⁹Ibid: 287, 289.

⁴⁰Ibid, vol. 47: 153.

they continued to plague the region between the upper Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence valley. The Iroquois wars motivated the French to search for alternative ways to secure furs. The routes to James Bay had previously been well-guarded by Indian middlemen, but the disruptions caused by Iroquois attacks forced new strategies of co-operation between Indian and French fur traders.

In 1659, two French traders; Medard Chouart, sieur des Groseilliers and Pierre Esprit Radisson, who had gained previous success in bringing furs from the Lake Superior region down to the French settlements in the St. Lawrence valley, attempted to break into the northern trading network. Like Champlain and the Jesuits, Radisson noted that the route from Tadoussac to James Bay was well known to the French, but access was prevented because the Montagnais and other Indian middlemen traders "would have hindered them because they make a livelihood of that trade."⁴¹ However, Groseilliers and Radisson felt that they could succeed by gaining access to the western source of furs and bringing them to the St. Lawrence by the route to James Bay and down the Saguenay River.

Groseilliers and Radisson travelled to Lake Superior by way of the Ottawa River and Lake Huron route. Along the southern shore of Lake Superior near Chequamegon Bay,

⁴¹Radisson explained that the furs which were brought from James Bay to the French at Tadoussac passed through the hands of three Indian Nations. These were, from north to south, the Nation of the Squirrel, the Nation of the Porcupine and the Montagnais Nation (Radisson, 1961: 111).

they met a camp of "Christinos" (Upland Cree) who the French traders had seen in their previous trips.⁴² They spent the winter at Chequamegon, and in the spring Radisson described a trip to the country of the "Nadouceronons" or Sioux. The Sioux were at war with the Upland Cree, and Groseilliers and Radisson were anxious to facilitate a peace treaty between them. A grand council was held which attracted 500 people from eighteen different Nations. Groseilliers and Radisson spoke on behalf of the Upland Cree, who were described as "brethren, and [we] have frequented them many winters; and we adopted them for our children and took them under our protection."⁴³ Following the peace treaty, Radisson went with 50 Indians to visit a large fortified Upland Cree village. The trip took only three days, and Radisson reported that more than 600 Cree warriors in the village. This appears to have been similar to the large Upland Cree villages described by Awatanik. The Upland Cree were obviously well established in the fur trade in the western Lake Superior region. They had with them a large quantity of beaver skins and gave Radisson a present of 500 skins.

According to Radisson, the two French traders crossed Lake Superior during the summer at a place which was 15 leagues (about 45 miles) across. The most likely place for this crossing was from the vicinity of the Apostle Islands to the north shore of Lake Superior near Silver Bay. Near a deep bay, they were met by a large party of Upland Cree who

⁴²Ibid: 124.

⁴³Ibid: 140.

guided them to their camp. From that point Radisson's route is difficult to follow.⁴⁴ His narrative explained that: "We went away with all haste possible to arrive the sooner at the great river. We came to the seaside, where we find an old house all demolished and battered with bullets."⁴⁵ Perhaps this was a house built by Henry Hudson in 1610-11, or Thomas James in 1631-32. A more remote possibility is the remains of a structure built by Thomas Button in 1612-13 at the mouth of the Nelson River. Radisson's party coasted along the shore of the bay and they visited a number of islands before coming to the mouth of a river (probably the Rupert River) that led to Tadoussac. By this time, winter was setting in, and the French traders decided to head back toward Lake Superior. Radisson noted that: "We went up another river to the Upper Lake."⁴⁶

Radisson's report, whether obtained through first-hand experience or reconstructed from Indian accounts, confirmed what Indian people had told the Jesuits about the fur trade in the James Bay region. The rivers draining into James Bay from all directions drew in Indian traders who met and exchanged goods. Thus, the Lowland Cree who lived in the James Bay region were exposed to a large number of Indian groups, and had access to European goods through Indian middlemen traders long before European traders established posts in the area.

⁴⁴Radisson's claim that he reached James Bay has been rejected by some scholars. Grace Lee Nute claimed that there was insufficient time during the journey to allow Radisson to travel to James Bay (Nute, 1943: 66).

⁴⁵Radisson, 1961: 146.

⁴⁶Ibid: 147.

7.4 Lowland Cree Relations with European Traders, 1668-1713:

In 1668, Medard Chouart, sieur des Groseilliers led a company of English fur traders by ship into Hudson Bay and established the first European fur trade post on the eastern coast of James Bay at the mouth of the Rupert River.⁴⁷ In its first year of operation about 300 Indians traded at the post.⁴⁸ By 1670, the English fur trade company, thereafter called the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC), was sending men to the mouth of the Moose River to trade directly with the Lowland Cree. In the summer of 1674, a party of HBC traders at the mouth of the Moose River met a group of "Shechittawams," or Albany River Lowland Cree, who traded about 1500 skins.⁴⁹ That meeting was followed up by a visit to the mouth of the Albany River by Charles Bailey, the governor of the HBC. Bailey met with a group of Albany River Lowland Cree, including their leader who was called the "King" and his son.

⁴⁷Two ships sailed from England in 1668. Pierre Esprit Radisson travelled in the *Eaglet*, but the ship was damaged in the voyage and returned to England. Groseilliers sailed on the *Nonsuch*, which succeeded in reaching James Bay. The trading post was built at the mouth of the Rupert River, so-named in honour of their English patron, Prince Rupert. The trading post was named Rupert Fort. The decision to locate the post at the mouth of the Rupert River may have been guided by Groseilliers's familiarity with the aboriginal trade route between Tadoussac and James Bay.

⁴⁸The Indian traders were not specifically identified, but it is likely that some were Lowland Cree (Nute, 1943: 118).

⁴⁹*Ibid*: 390. Upland Indians, including the "Captain of the Tabitsee [Abitibi] Indians" were also among the Indians who met the HBC traders. The leader of the Abitibi Indians traded about 250 skins, but promised to bring more if the HBC built a permanent post at the mouth of the Moose River.

Guided by a "Washahoe Indian," or Severn River Lowland Cree, Bailey sailed north to "Viner's [Akimiski] Island," and met a small group of Indians who guided them to the mouth of the "Equon [Ekwan] River." Upon surveying the area, Bailey commented that: "There had been a great Mortality among them, and several were starv'd to Death for want of Food; this Country being such a miserable Wilderness, that it affords not sufficient Sustenance for the wretched Inhabitants."⁵⁰ He added that: "The Indians on New Severn River are as poor as the Eiskimoes; and indeed all the Northward Indians are more beggardly and brutal than the Southward."⁵¹ Although Bailey attributed the impoverished condition of the Lowland Cree near the mouth of the Ekwan River to the lack of food resources in the area, other factors were undoubtedly involved. Death by starvation in the summer season seems unlikely given the availability of fish, waterfowl, caribou and other resources in the Lowlands at that time of year. It was more likely that the deaths were caused by a disease transmitted by the European fur traders.⁵²

Bailey's expedition in 1674 signalled the beginning of expansion of the HBC's settlements in the western James Bay area. A trading post was built at the mouth of the Moose River shortly after Bailey's visit there in the summer of 1674.⁵³ The Company's

⁵⁰Ibid: 392.

⁵¹Ibid: 392.

⁵²Charles Bishop noted that an epidemic disease may have been responsible for the mortality noted by Bailey (Bishop, 1984: 28).

⁵³Bailey apparently spent the winter of 1674-75 at the post which came to be known as Moose Fort (Kenyon, 1986: 59).

next trading post was built at the mouth of the Albany River sometime between 1675 and 1679.⁵⁴ Thus, by 1679, the European fur trade was well established in the James Bay region. The building of trading posts at the mouths of the Moose and Albany Rivers marked the beginning of continuous interaction between Europeans and the Lowland Cree who lived along the westmain of James Bay.

European fur trade contacts in the northern parts of the Hudson Bay Lowlands developed shortly after the James Bay posts were settled. In the 1670s, the HBC traders made several trips to the mouth of the Nelson River, but these produced few results. For example, in the fall of 1670, Radisson led a party of HBC traders on a brief visit to the mouth of the Nelson River. No Indians were seen, but the remains of a recently inhabited camp was described:

[T]here is a very fine Marsh land, and great plenty of wood about a mile beyond the Marshes, yet not very large. There were ye remaines of some of ye Natives Wigwams and Sweating houses and some peeces of dresd Beaver skins, and they supposed the Indians had not long been gone from that place further Southward or higher into the Country.⁵⁵

In August, 1673, the HBC sent Groseilliers on a brief exploration of the area near the mouth of the Nelson River. His report contained a similar description of "several Wigwams, where they [Indians] had lately been, and suppos'd them to be gone up the

⁵⁴Ibid: 59.

⁵⁵This account was reported by a crew member named Paul Mercer. Radisson's party reached the mouth of the Nelson River on September 14, 1670 (Nute, 1943: 291-292).

Country."⁵⁶

In 1682, three trading posts were built near the mouth of the Nelson and Hayes Rivers by different European traders. Groseilliers and Radisson, who had temporarily left the employ of the HBC, returned to Hudson Bay in 1682 with a French ship and crew. They landed at the mouth of the Hayes River about the same time as a ship from New England under the command of Benjamin Gillam landed at the mouth of the Nelson River. Shortly after, John Bridgar arrived in a HBC ship to build a third trading post in the vicinity.⁵⁷

Radisson's account of the events in 1682-83 provided the first eye-witness account of the Lowland Cree in the vicinity of the Hayes and Nelson Rivers. Radisson arrived at the mouth of the Hayes River on September 27, 1682.⁵⁸ The next day Radisson and two men embarked in a canoe and explored 40 leagues (about 100-120 miles) upriver. At the end of their journey, on October 5, they encountered an Indian who had been hunting caribou. Radisson called out to him, and he responded in a language that Radisson

⁵⁶Ibid: 384.

⁵⁷Bridgar had previously established Albany Fort for the HBC.

⁵⁸According to Radisson, the Lowland Cree called this river "Ka Kirva-Kiouay" which he translated as: "who goes, who comes." The nearby Nelson River, called the "Grand River" by Radisson, was called "Karoringaw" by the Lowland Cree, which meant "the wicked" (Radisson, 1896: 11, 13).

"understood very well."⁵⁹ The next day the hunter returned with 26 men in nine canoes. They were well prepared to trade furs with Radisson and his men, for they traded their beaver robes and "all the peltry" they had in their canoes for tobacco, pipes, and knives. These men were knowledgeable about iron goods, and one used a small piece of iron to cut his tobacco. Radisson later learned that they had previously traded at Albany Fort. Radisson also gave a musket, gunpowder, shot and a blanket to their leader who adopted Radisson as his son. The leader, an elderly man, was described as "the chief of the nation who inhabited the place where the fort was building [the mouth of the Hayes River]."⁶⁰

Radisson's nephew, Jean Baptiste Chouart, and another French trader spent the winter of 1682-83 with the Lowland Cree. At the beginning of April, before the break-up of river ice, Chouart and his companion returned with several Lowland Cree who brought provisions and furs. Radisson confirmed that these Lowland Cree had previous dealings with the English traders in James Bay. They evidenced a keen familiarity with European goods, and complained about the poor quality of the French goods.⁶¹

Later in the spring, Radisson noted the arrival of "the captain of the Indians of the river

⁵⁹Ibid. Radisson was familiar with several Aboriginal languages, including Ojibway and Upland Cree.

⁶⁰Ibid: 77. Radisson repeated this point later, and indicated that the chief had allowed Radisson to build a trading post in his country.

⁶¹Ibid: 35.

New Severn."⁶² The leader of the Severn River Lowland Cree, known as "The Bearded" was also familiar with the English traders at Albany Fort, and appears to have come to the mouth of the Hayes River to trade specifically with the HBC. The leader of the Hayes River Lowland Cree (Radisson's adopted father), arrived shortly after the Severn River group. A ceremony preceded the business of trading, and began with a display of gifts that included: "beavers' tails, smoked Caribou tongues, and bladders of the fat of bears, elk and deer."⁶³ Radisson reciprocated with a feast and presents, and afterward the Lowland Cree traded furs for other European goods. Radisson observed that the Lowland Cree expected the French "to trade with them on the same footing as the English did at the head of the bay [James Bay]."⁶⁴ When Radisson refused to lower the price of his goods, one of the Indians (possibly the Bearded Chief) remarked that: "you know what beaver is worth and the trouble we have to take it, you call yourselves our brothers and you will not give us what those give who are not so [HBC traders]. Accept our presents, or we will come no more to pay you a visit and will go to the others [HBC]."⁶⁵

Radisson's adopted father, the old Hayes River Chief, remained near the coast until the departure of the ships. Radisson learned that the chief had killed a man who belonged

⁶²Ibid: 39.

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴Ibid.

⁶⁵Ibid.

to another Indian nation led by a chief known as the Marten. After learning that the Marten planned to exact revenge by killing the old chief and his family, Radisson attempted to reach a peaceful settlement by sending gifts inland to the Marten. This significance of this affair was evidenced by the package of gifts that included a musket, two large kettles, three coats, four sword blades, four chisels, six garters, six dozen knives, ten axes, ten fathoms of tobacco, two blankets, three caps, gunpowder and shot. Radisson further pledged military support to the Lowland Cree if the Marten did not accept the gifts and make peace. Unfortunately, Radisson left the region before hearing about the outcome of this peace initiative.

Shortly after Radisson's departure on July 27, 1683, the Bearded Chief and 14 or 15 followers from Severn River visited the French post with a load of furs.⁶⁶ They had traded earlier with the HBC, probably at Albany Fort, but seemed prepared to trade the rest with the French. However, during the pre-trade ceremony, the Bearded Chief demanded that the French traders pay him for allowing them to build their post on his land. Chouart reported that the chief stated that: "I [Chouart] was worthless because I did not love the English and that I had not paid by presents for the country I inhabited to him who was chief of all the nations and the friend of the English."⁶⁷ Despite a warning from one of the Hayes River Lowland Cree that the French would "be avenged

⁶⁶The Bearded Chief was a relative of the old chief of the Hayes River Lowland Cree.

⁶⁷Ibid: 67.

by the upper nations on all our families," insults turned into a brief scuffle in which Chouart was slightly wounded by the Bearded Chief.

Although the Severn River Lowland Cree left the French post without further incident, the event caused general alarm among the Hayes River Lowland Cree.⁶⁸ They sent messengers after the Severn River people and convinced them to return to the post for a feast and council to resolve the matter. During the council the Bearded Chief repeated his disdain and contempt for the French, and this enraged one of the Hayes River Lowland Cree (Chouart's adopted brother-in-law) who attacked the Bearded Chief and killed him. The other Severn River Lowland Cree departed after hearing that "if they intended to avenge the death of their chief they had only to say so and that war would be declared on them."⁶⁹

According to Chouart's report, the killing of the Bearded Chief also incited the Hayes River Lowland Cree to attack the English traders at their nearby post. Several English traders were killed, and the French, although reluctant to condone further acts of aggression, gave a feast in honour of their Indian allies. Following these killings, the French traders feared attacks from both the English and Indians. As a measure of security, they persuaded some of their Lowland Cree allies to "spend the winter with us

⁶⁸Radisson referred to these Indians as "our allies and good friends," and they may have included his adopted father who was Chief of the Hayes River Indians.

⁶⁹Ibid: 67.

on condition of feeding them."⁷⁰ The winter passed uneventful except that "the Indians performed several acts of jugglery, to learn from their Manitou, who is a familiar spirit among them, if my father and uncle [Groseilliers and Radisson] would come in spring."⁷¹

At the beginning of April, 1684, a group of Lowland Cree "from the south coast," or James Bay, arrived at the mouth of the Hayes River. They traded with the English and obtained gifts of muskets. According to Chouart, the English provoked these Lowland Cree to attack the French. In a brief skirmish, one of the French traders was wounded by a gunshot. Significantly, this incident occurred at a place where the Hayes River Lowland Cree were preparing and smoking caribou meat. The James Bay Lowland Cree fled after this incident, but the local Lowland Cree were determined to avenge the attack and Chouart noted that couriers were "sent to solicit all the nations who had sworn friendship to my father and uncle [Groseilliers and Radisson] to come down and make war on the English and on the Indians of the south coast."⁷²

One of the first to arrive was the Hayes River Chief who had adopted Radisson the previous year. Chouart remarked that this elderly man was "one of their most

⁷⁰Ibid: 69.

⁷¹Ibid. This may refer to the "shaking tent" ceremony, which was used frequently by Lowland Cree and Ojibway people to divine future events (see, for example, Nelson, 1988: 29-34).

⁷²Ibid: 69.

considerable chiefs," and "one of the best friends of the French."⁷³ The elderly chief played the role of peacemaker by convening a feast of friendship between the French and English. After the break-up of ice in the river, other groups of "friendly nations" arrived at the French post. Chouart noted particularly the "Assinipoets" who were described as "descendants of the great Cristionaux, old acquaintances of my uncle [Radisson]."⁷⁴ The Assinipoets, or Assiniboine, included more than 400 men and an unidentified number of women. After learning about the events of the past winter, the chief of the Assiniboine declared war against the English and their southern Lowland Cree allies. Despite the Assiniboine chief's call to arms, the Upland Indians soon dispersed and eventually all of them left without facing their enemies.

When Radisson returned to the mouth of the Hayes River in the summer of 1685 he was again employed by the HBC. Considering the alliances that had been made between the Indians and the French and English, Radisson faced a formidable task in keeping peace between all of the parties. Radisson's peace council began with a feast for the English, French and the Indians. At the feast, the Hayes River chief received presents from both the English and French, and he promised to "speak of my name [Radisson] to all the nations to invite them to smoke the pipe of peace."⁷⁵ Following the feast⁷⁶ and

⁷³Ibid: 69.

⁷⁴Ibid: 71.

⁷⁵Ibid: 59.

speeches, beaver skins were traded for European goods. Radisson established a standard of trade that was higher than the previous rate and this caused some discontent. One of the Upland Indian chiefs named Bear's Grease refused to trade with Radisson despite the attempted intercession of the Hayes River Chief. Apart from this incident, the fur trade was successful. Over 12,00 skins had been purchased before Radisson's arrival, and more were expected before the ship returned to England.

In 1712, seven French traders were killed by a group of Lowland Cree near Fort Bourbon at the mouth of the Hayes River. According to E.E. Rich, the killings were motivated by starvation among the Lowland Cree because the French traders ran out of gunpowder and shot. Rich indicated that the French traders reported: "their Indians dying round them for lack of powder and shot." A re-examination of this particular incident reveals that the murders were not motivated by a shortage of gunpowder and shot. In fact, the killings were caused by the refusal of the French traders to share food with the Lowland Cree. Nicolas Jeremie explained that: "These natives, considering themselves dared by the reckless way my men were shooting every kind of game, and feasting before their eyes without sharing anything made a plot to kill them, and seize

⁷⁶Radisson's description of a feast prepared by the Lowland Cree is noteworthy. The feast was attended by men, women, children and elders. The food included: "beavers' tails, bladders of the marrow of deer [caribou], several tongues of the same animal smoked, which is among them the most exquisite food...[and] two large boilers full of smoked and boiled meat" (*Ibid*: 75).

what they had."⁷⁷ James Knight, a HBC trader at York Factory, who learned about the incident later, possibly from both the French and the Lowland Cree, provided additional details that cast serious doubt on Rich's assessment that the killings were motivated by the need to obtain French goods. Knight reported that: "after they killd them they broke open their warehouse and to show them they did not value their Goods for they broke and tore what they found and throwd and Scattered 7 Barrells of Powder in the Water so that their design by that was to show that they could Live without their Goods and discourage them from comeing here any more."⁷⁸

The written accounts from the period of French and English fur trade rivalry on the bayside indicate that the Lowland Cree were involved in a complex web of relationships with Upland Indians and European traders. The competition between French and English traders also promoted rivalry between regional groups of Lowland Cree. Those who lived in the southern Lowlands, near James Bay, were closely allied to the English HBC traders. The northern groups of Lowland Cree who lived in the vicinity of the Nelson and Hayes Rivers were more closely allied with the French traders. The fur trade within the Lowlands operated within a framework of delicate political alliances in which

⁷⁷Jeremie, 1926: 39. While it is also true that Jeremie stated that the Indians had lost their skill with the bow and arrow and many died of hunger when French powder was unavailable, other statements contradict this explanation. For example, Jeremie described caribou hunting with aboriginal technology such as snare-fences and by spearing. Jeremie also remarked that geese, ducks, ptarmigan, hare and fish were plentiful near Fort Bourbon and could be easily obtained with aboriginal hunting equipment.

⁷⁸HBCA, B.239/a/2, August 22, 1716, fo. 55.

ceremonies, feasts and gift-giving were important factors. The French traders withdrew from the Hudson Bay Lowland region in 1713, but the customs of gift-giving and other rituals continued to be important elements in the HBC's fur trade.

CHAPTER 8 THE LOWLAND CREE IN THE FUR TRADE, 1713 to 1782:

8.1 Lowland Cree Fur Trade Patterns, 1713-1782:

Following the withdrawal of the French traders from the bayside in 1713, the HBC maintained a monopoly in the Hudson Bay Lowlands fur trade throughout the entire period of this study. Although the HBC kept detailed records of the furs purchased from and the goods sold to Indians, it is difficult to assess the involvement of the Lowland Cree in the trade before 1782 because the accounts included the trade with Upland Indians. Large numbers of Upland Indians travelled each summer to the coastal HBC posts and, according to HBC reports, brought in most of the furs. The volume of furs received at the coastal posts in large measure reflected the numbers of Upland Indians who visited the trading posts.¹

The HBC daily post journals usually enumerated the numbers of Upland Indians by recording the number of canoes that arrived at each post. The records from Albany Fort

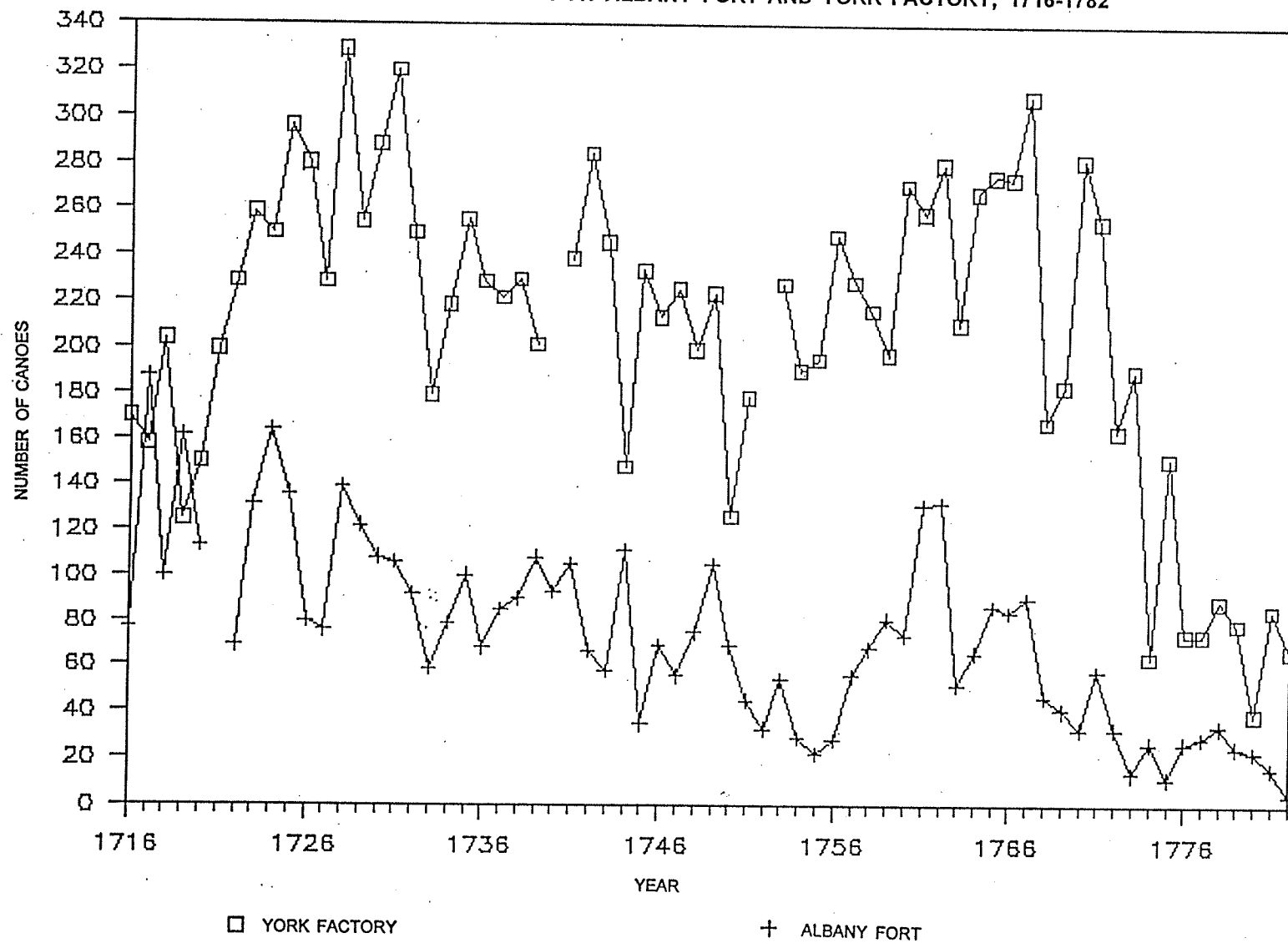
¹The composition of the fur returns in the pre-1782 period also reflected the inland origin of many furs. For example, the presence of fisher, badger and raccoon in the fur returns indicated an upland origin since these animals were rare in the Hudson Bay Lowlands. Upland Indians also brought in the great majority of wolf and lynx skins. Other animals that were absent from the Lowlands, but which appeared in the HBC fur returns included elk, bison, swift fox and grizzly bear.

and York Factory serve to illustrate that the numbers of Upland Indians who visited the coastal trading posts closely reflected the volume of furs traded each year. Figure 8.1.1 shows the numbers of canoes of Upland Indians who visited Albany Fort and York Factory from 1716 to 1782.² Since most trading canoes carried at least two individuals, and sometimes three or four, a reasonable estimate of the numbers of Upland Indians can be obtained by multiplying the canoes by a factor of three. It can be seen that the numbers of Upland Indians trading at Albany Fort declined gradually over this period, except for a brief increase in the early 1760s when the St. Lawrence-based fur trade competition was suspended because of war. By 1782, the HBC traders had begun to establish inland trading posts and the numbers of Upland Indians visiting Albany Fort dwindled to a few canoes. At York Factory, the inland trade was not immediately affected by competition from St. Lawrence-based fur traders. However, the trend was similar, and by 1782 the numbers of Upland Indians visiting York Factory had decreased significantly. The establishment of inland trading posts from York Factory beginning in 1774 precluded the necessity for Upland Indians to make long annual trading trips to the bay.

While the exact numbers of furs brought in by the Lowland Cree can not be deduced from the HBC records, it is evident that relatively few furs were obtained from the Lowland Cree as compared to the volume of furs brought in by the Upland Indians.

²The year 1716 was selected because it is the earliest year for which detailed records are available for York Factory.

FIGURE 8.1.1: UPLAND INDIAN CANOES AT ALBANY FORT AND YORK FACTORY, 1716-1782



Andrew Graham noted that: "There are Indians always coming to the settlements, but the main body which make up the bulk of the trade arrives in the months of June and July [ie. Upland Indians]."³ According to Graham, each canoe of Upland Indians usually brought 80 to 100 made beaver in various furs.⁴

Andrew Graham explained that each Lowland Cree hunter received an advance, or debt, in the fall that amounted to 20 or 30 made beaver.⁵ While more furs may have been traded after the debt was repaid, it is apparent that the contribution of the Lowland Cree to the total HBC fur returns was relatively insignificant in the pre-1782 period.

8.2 The Lowland Cree in the Provision Trade:

In addition to furs, the Lowland Cree provided food to the European traders in exchange for European goods. The role of the Lowland Cree as provisioners was slow to develop,

³Graham, 1969: 315.

⁴Graham, 1969: 276.

⁵The term "made beaver" was employed as a standard of currency in the fur trade. It was equivalent in value to one beaver skin. The value of all other furs and goods were measured against the made beaver standard. The "debt" system, or advancing credit to the Lowland Cree was introduced very early in the HBC fur trade. Joseph Isbister, who was in charge of Albany Fort in 1741, explained that: "as to our Home Indians, it [debt system] was introduced att first as a bridle to bring them more dependent on the settlement for our necessary subsistence" (HBCA, A.11/2, September 6, 1741, fo. 106d).

but by the mid-18th century a significant population of Homeguard Cree were involved in supplying geese, caribou, fish and other country foods to the European traders. Geese and caribou were the most important food resources, and the spring and fall migration seasons were the busiest periods for the Lowland Cree who became involved in the provision trade.

Many European fur traders commented on the important role of the Lowland Cree, and especially the Homeguard Cree, as provisioners. Local food resources were necessary to supplement the limited supplies of imported European foodstuffs. In addition, local foods were more healthful and apparently more palatable than pickled and salted European provisions.⁶ Joseph Isbister, who was in charge of Albany Fort in 1755 pointed out the dependence of the HBC on the Homeguard Cree goose hunters. Isbister observed that:

Here is nothing but trouble and plague with these home Indians on account of their hunting, that is shooting geese for the factory and yet we cannot help ourselves in present condition, but do think, had we a good breed of cattle and hogs, might soon shake off our dependence on ye Indians for Country provision.⁷

Despite many attempts by the HBC to promote animal husbandry and agriculture at the coastal trading posts, dependence on country provisions remained high. In his study of

⁶Andrew Graham commented that: "The Company's servants lives like Princes. Seldom a week passes but they have fresh provisions of different kinds, and the Factors and officers lives in so grand a manner beyond description" (Graham, 1969: 299).

⁷HBCA, B.3/a/47, February 18, 1755, fo. 20.

the social history at York Factory from 1788 to 1870, Michael Payne commented that: "Overall neither gardening nor-stock-rearing produced more than a tiny fraction of the food consumed at York."⁸

Among the regional food resources, geese, ducks and other migratory birds came to comprise a significant portion of the provision trade at the coastal trading posts. The potential value of migratory waterfowl as a source of food was appreciated very early by the European fur traders. Gabriel Marest noted that: "In spring and autumn, there are also found a prodigious number of wavys [Lesser Snow Geese], Canada geese, ducks, brants, and other river birds."⁹ Bacqueville de la Potherie wrote that: "The wild geese and ducks are so plentiful in spring and autumn that the banks of the river Ste. Therese [Hayes River] are all covered with them."¹⁰

Despite the large numbers of waterfowl that were available near the coastal trading posts, the involvement of the Lowland Cree in hunting migratory waterfowl for the European traders was slow to develop. The earliest HBC records indicated that very few Lowland Cree were employed as "goose hunters"¹¹ for the Company. For example, at Albany

⁸Payne, 1989: 136.

⁹Marest, 1931: 127.

¹⁰Bacqueville de la Potherie, 1931: 221.

¹¹The term goose hunter will be used to include all migratory waterfowl.

Fort in 1693-94, only two Indians hunted geese for the Company.¹² During the 1698-99 season at Albany Fort, the total expenditure on geese amounted to only three pounds of gunpowder and nine pounds of shot.¹³ In 1699-1700, only one Indian was employed as a goose hunter at Albany Fort.¹⁴ At Moose Fort, the close proximity of French traders made it difficult for the HBC to attract Homeguard Cree to hunt geese. William Bevan, who was in charge of Moose Fort in 1734, remarked that: "we have not above four Indians that will hunt for us they are so much linkt in with the french and we have no dependence on them."¹⁵

In part, the reluctance of the Lowland Cree to hunt geese for the HBC can be attributed to the dangers of hunting in the coastal marshes during the spring season. The annual spring floods during the break-up of river ice often inundated the coastal marshes, and made the spring goose hunt an uncomfortable and sometimes dangerous activity. For example, in the spring of 1725, a large flood of the Albany River took place, and the water rose to five feet above the ground around the fort.¹⁶ The Homeguard Cree goose hunters regularly built stages above ground level as places of refuge from the spring torrents. At York Factory the spring break-up of the Hayes and Nelson Rivers

¹²HBCA, B.3/d/2, fo. 12d.

¹³HBCA, B.3/d/9, fo. 23.

¹⁴The total expenditure on the goose hunt amounted to only four pounds of Brazil tobacco and a pair of yarn gloves (HBCA, B.3/d/11, fo. 17).

¹⁵HBCA, B.135/a/4, May 9, 1734, fo. 16d.

¹⁶HBCA, B.3/a/13, May 3, 1725, fo. 24.

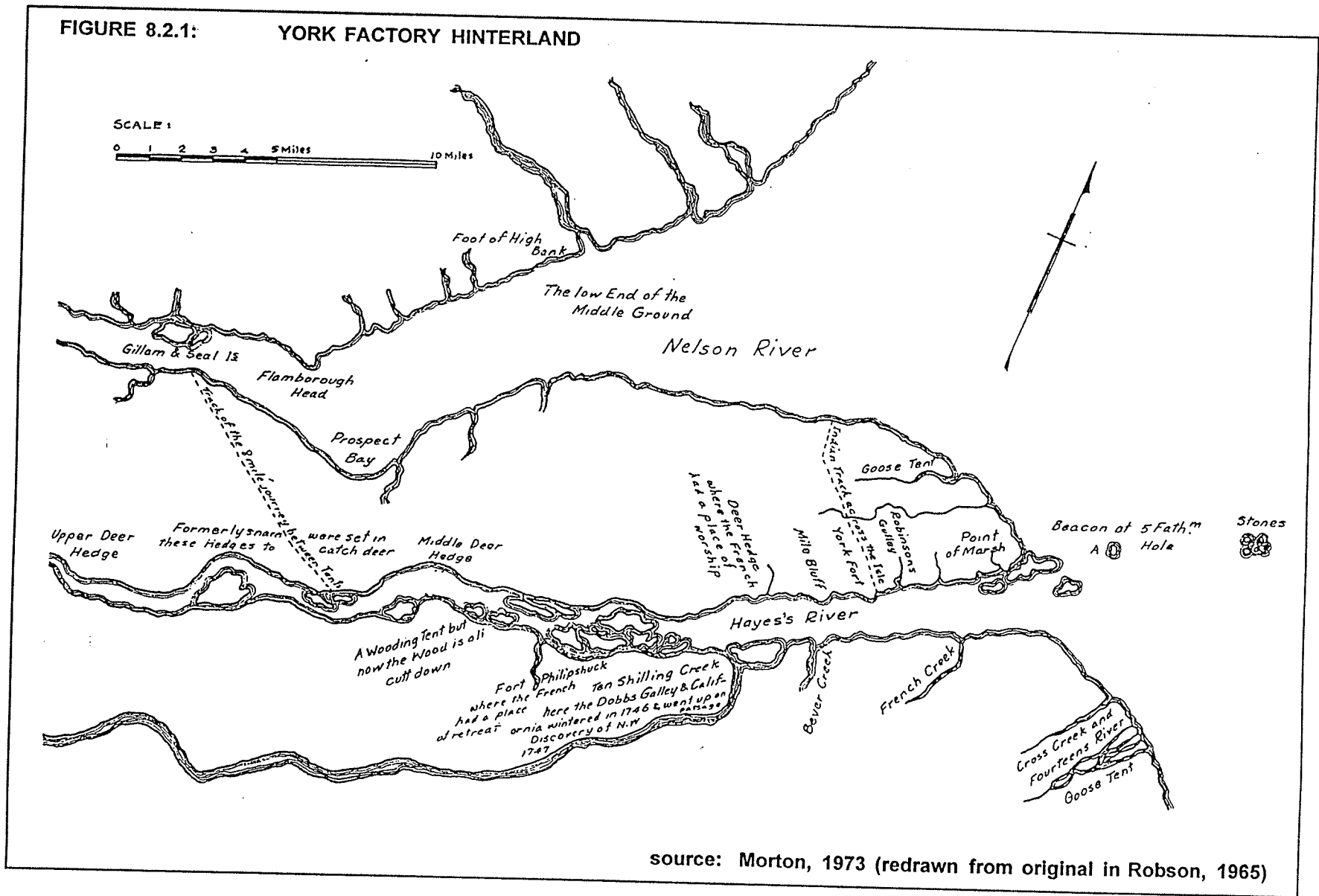
occasionally caused dangerous flooding that threatened the safety of the goose hunters and disrupted the hunt (see figure 8.2.1). During the spring break-up in 1797, Joseph Colen reported that: "the high water yesterday filled the Marsh with heavy ice, drove the Geese from their feeding ground, and that it was with difficulty the Hunters saved themselves, the water rose so suddenly on them."¹⁷

The numbers of Homeguard Cree employed in the goose hunts gradually increased during the 18th century. Encouraged by gifts and other rewards, the Homeguard Cree populations around coalesced into relatively large seasonal concentrations each spring and fall. The numbers of Homeguard Cree who participated in the spring goose hunts were occasionally enumerated by the HBC traders, and figure 8.2.2 provides a summary of the population of Homeguard Cree at Albany Fort, York Factory and Severn House before 1782. At Albany Fort the total population ranged from a few families to about 130 men, women and children by the end of the period. At York Factory the numbers of goose hunters and their families appears to have been more variable, with very few in some years and as many as 149 people in the spring of 1753. Very few Lowland Cree participated in the goose hunt at Severn House in the pre-1782 period.

The goose hunters and their families usually arrived at the coastal posts in the spring and

¹⁷HBCA, B.239/a/100, June 6, 1797, fo. 21d.

FIGURE 8.2.1: YORK FACTORY HINTERLAND



source: Morton, 1973 (redrawn from original in Robson, 1965)

**FIGURE 8.2.2: POPULATION OF HOMEGUARD CREE GOOSE HUNTERS AT
ALBANY FORT, YORK FACTORY AND SEVERN HOUSE, pre-1782**
(*denotes families)

YEAR	ALBANY FORT hunters/population		YORK FACTORY hunters/population		SEVERN HOUSE hunters/population	
1706		50				
1717		90				
1718			40			
1719		95				
1723			8	40		
1728			5*			
1731				122		
1733				80		
1735			20			
1737			12*			
1738			19*	92		
1739			30	112		
1741	6	36	26*	130		
1744			20*			
1746		70				
1747			25*			
1751			21*	130		
1752			35*			
1753				149		
1754				126		
1755			34*			
1756			30*			
1757				157		
1758		93	24*			
1759			37*			
1761	30	118			10*	
1762		100		97		
1763		139				
1764		138	30			
1765		94		98		

**FIGURE 8.2.2: POPULATION OF HOMEGUARD CREE GOOSE HUNTERS AT
ALBANY FORT, YORK FACTORY AND SEVERN HOUSE, pré-1782**
(*denotes families)

YEAR	ALBANY FORT hunters/population		YORK FACTORY hunters/population		SEVERN HOUSE hunters/population	
1766		109				
1767		116				
1768			24			
1772			19*	78		
1773		135	24	108		
1774		117				
1775				106		
1776				92	7	48
1777				90		
1778				98		
1779				110		
1780				113		
1781				122		

fall in small groups of several families.¹⁸ They encamped on the clearing, or plantation¹⁹, near the trading post until the geese arrived in the marshes. If the usual arrival of geese was delayed, the HBC traders were forced to support the Homeguard Cree with food from the Company's storehouse. The importance of providing food to support the goose hunters at that time was noted by Richard Staunton who was in charge of Albany Fort in the spring of 1725. Staunton reported that some of the goose hunters and their families were forced to evacuate the marshes during an unusually high flood and came to the fort for relief. Staunton observed that:

Here is 30 Indians, men, women and children which lay in ye Factory last night, and must remain until we see further, they being come over on our account to hunt us provisions, soe I am double duty bound to take care of them in case the factory should meet with ye like misfortune of a ships company wintering in ye country, the natives should be the more ready to assist our necessity, in case it should happen more than we are at present not.²⁰

In addition to providing emergency food supplies to the Homeguard Cree, the Company attracted Indian goose hunters by offering feasts and gifts. The spring goose hunting

¹⁸Sometimes larger groups arrived at the coastal trading posts for the goose hunt. For example, on May 1, 1757, twelve families numbering 42 individuals came to York Factory to participate in the hunt (HBCA, B.239/a/42, fo. 29).

¹⁹The plantation was a clearing near each trading post that was used as a camping place for Indians who came to visit and trade. Jennifer Brown provided a good description of the HBC plantation: "Eighteenth-century post officers typically described the cleared and open area around a fort or factory as 'the plantation'; here the Indians lived while they were trading, hunting locally, or depending on post supplies in times of hardship" (Brown, 1980: 180).

²⁰HBCA, B.3/a/13, May 4, 1725, fo. 24.

feast was especially important, and it was attended with considerable ceremony.²¹ This feast was sponsored by the Company, and held prior to the departure of the Indian goose hunters to the marshes.²² It was held on the plantation, and the European foods usually included oatmeal, peas and salted fish. Tobacco and liquor was also distributed by the HBC, and English brandy became indispensable in the annual feasts. In 1742, Joseph Isbister, Chief Factor at Albany Fort, attempted to implement a change in the tradition

²¹The Lowland Cree also held their own ceremonies and feasts in connection with the goose hunt. The Goose Dance, or Niskisimowin, was an important Lowland Cree spiritual ceremony and feast. David Meyer has described the Goose Dance as "a major religious ceremony of the Swampy Crees and of some neighbouring Crees as well" (Meyer, 1991: 107). The Goose Dance was held to show respect for the geese, and to maintain a spiritual link between geese and humans (Meyer, 1975: 437). Drawing upon James Isham's account of a ceremonial goose feast near York Factory in the 1730s and other later ethnographic accounts, Meyer concluded that: "The Goose Dance was simply the most elaborate of those ceremonies dedicated to the spirits of the food animals. The elaboration of this ceremony reflects the high esteem for waterfowl, and especially geese, held by the Cree. To some extent this may relate to the fact that the geese returned each spring at a critical point in the lives of those Cree" (Meyer, 1991: 118). However, the Goose Dance appears to have been quite distinct from the HBC's goose hunting feast. The Goose Dance was celebrated upon the arrival of the geese, and feasting on geese was a central focus of the ceremony. In contrast, the HBC goose hunting ceremony was a preparatory feast in which other foods, especially European provisions, were provided as an encouragement to the Lowland Cree goose hunters prior to the arrival of the geese.

²²James Isham provided an account of a goose feast that took place away from the HBC post. Isham reported that: "[there] was about 30 Indians very merry Dispos'd with two old men, one Drumming on a piece of parchment tied on an op'n Kettle, - the other with a ste'k Like a Rattle, with a parchmt. on both sides, and shott or stones on the inside to make itt Rattle, asking the Reason of all this seeming mirth, - one made answer itt was a goose feast as they styl' itt, when I was immediately ask'd by the Chief of the tent to take part, - accordingly being willing to Satisfie my Curiosity, I sitti downe upon a Bundle of Ruhiggan which was handed to me; when looking round me I see them all sett to work, some a picking, and some a trussing of Geese, downe they went to the fire, - some Roasted, some Boyl'd &c. when in two or three hour's, singing, Dancing, and talking, Every one took their seat, round the inside of the tent, when the feast was serv'd up, - Each had his goose to Devou'r" (Isham, 1949: 76-77).

by withholding brandy and substituting extra oatmeal.²³ However, the Homeguard Cree resisted this change in tradition, and the following spring the Company was forced to reinstate the custom of giving brandy "as an encouragement to hunt."²⁴

Another ritual that developed in regard to the goose hunt was the presentation of a gift, or prize, of a bottle of brandy for the first goose killed. Although first recorded in the HBC journals in 1728, Joseph Myatt observed that it was by then already a customary practice.²⁵ In the spring of 1732, Richard White described the gift of brandy for the first goose as an "Old Custome."²⁶

Special gifts were presented to the Homeguard Cree leaders who participated in the goose hunts. These men, called captains of the goose hunt, were usually expert hunters and

²³Staunton remarked that this change in policy was undertaken because it was "better for their health" (HBCA, B.3/a/33, September 24, 1742, fo. 4d).

²⁴HBCA, B.3/a/33, April 21, 1742, fo. 30.

²⁵HBCA, B.3/a/16, fo. 15, April 19, 1728. The custom still continues, but other prizes are substituted for the bottle of brandy. In the spring of 1992 the prize for the first goose killed near the Lowland Cree community of Fort Severn (formerly Severn House) was a .22 rifle, three boxes of shells and \$100 cash (Wawatay, 1992: 16).

²⁶HBCA, B.3/a/20, fo. 20, April 10, 1732. Other goose hunting customs developed at the HBC posts. For example, liquor was given to the Indian goose hunters as well as Company employees to celebrate St. George's Day (April 23). Joseph Isbister, Chief Factor at Albany Fort, commented that he gave "a little strong beer as an Encouragement for them to hunt being an old Custom" (HBCA, B.3/a/30, April 23, 1741, fo. 40). The use of liquor as an inducement for Indians to hunt geese was not confined to the spring season. Thomas Bird, Chief Factor of Albany Fort, gave brandy and tobacco for that purpose to an Indian who visited the post on January 29, 1739. Bird noted that he was "one of our Chief goose hunters," and explained that these gifts were intended to "encourage him to come in to kill geese for us in ye spring" (HBCA, B.3/a/28, fo. 19).

also possessed considerable influence over other Homeguard Cree hunters.²⁷ Although these leaders were rewarded by the HBC for their service as goose hunters, many received gifts from the Company long after they had reached old age and were no longer productive hunters. At Albany Fort, a number of successive leaders among the goose hunters lived to old age and retained their rank as captains until death. For example, a man known as the "Indian Doctor" received gifts from the Company for 30 years between 1711 and 1741. In his latter years he hunted very little, but the Company continued to give him presents equal to the rank of captain in recognition of his influence over the other Homeguard Cree goose hunters.²⁸ Another Albany Fort Homeguard Cree goose hunt captain named Pinnitakie collected gifts from the Company after he had lost his sight.²⁹ The captains received coats, hats and other fancy clothing signifying their rank, and they also obtained extra supplies of brandy, tobacco and other goods which they often re-distributed among their followers.

Shortly after the feast, most Homeguard Cree left the plantation and entered the marshes

²⁷Brian Craik's study of the social and political organization of the goose hunt by Indians on the east coast of James Bay included the following comments about leadership patterns: "The hunters appeal to particular men among them to suggest where they should hunt. Men of families who have roots on the coast are relied upon to fill the role of *goose boss*. These men not only suggest *where* the hunt is to be, but provide the knowledge of *how* to hunt there [italics in original]" (Craik, 1975: 454).

²⁸For example, in 1740, the Albany Fort accountant reported that presents were given to the Indian Doctor "to encourage his sons to come and kill geese for us" (HBCA, B.3/d/48, fo. 9).

²⁹The Albany Fort district report identified Pinnitakie as "the old Northern leader, nearly blind, has a good deal of influence among the Indians - hunts but little himself" (HBCA, B.3/e/12, fo. 7).

where they set up camps, or goose tents as they were called by the HBC. The goose tents were located in places that were traditionally productive staging areas. Around York Factory goose tents were usually pitched near Fourteens River, Cross Creek, French Creek, and the Point of Marsh (see figure 8.2.1). In the vicinity of Albany Fort goose tents were generally established at the marshes on either side of the mouth of the Albany River. Around Severn House goose tents were also set up on both sides of the river, and they were known as the North and South Goose Tents.

The HBC usually sent some of their own men to the goose tents to help with the hunt. Although a few actually shot geese, most of the Company men were engaged in salting the geese and packing them into wooden casks or barrels. Women, children and elderly people accompanied the hunters to the goose tents. The role of women was especially important in preparing geese for future use by drying and smoking. Women also took care of feathers and quills that were later sold to the Company or used to decorate clothing and other items. Women also assisted in transporting the geese from the marsh to the HBC posts.³⁰

Henry Ellis, who visited York Factory in 1746-47, provided a good description of the Lowland Cree goose hunt. Ellis observed that:

³⁰At Albany Fort, Indian women were usually responsible for transporting the geese from the hunting tents to the fort. In the spring of 1772, many women were sick or lame, and Chief Factor Humphrey Marten was forced to employ eight of his men on that duty (HBCA, B.3/a/64, May 14, 1772, fo. 32).

There is a certain Season when these Birds are expected on their Journey Northward, and they are expected at York Fort and Churchill near at the same time, for which Reason, at both Places they call the New-Moon nearest the twenty-fifth of March, or the Spring Moon with us, the Goose Moon. To kill the Geese both Factory Servants and Indians go out to the Swamps, and there build themselves what they call a Stand, which is a Parcel of Bows stuck up, and they sit within them waiting for the Geese, never going in Pursuit of them; when the Geese come near they call to them, imitating the Cackle of the Geese so well, that the Geese will answer, and on the continuing to Call them, the Geese will wheel and come nearer the Stand. There is usually but one in a Stand, and while he is luring the Geese, he keeps motionless the whole Time, and on his Knees with his Gun cock'd, but does not fire until he can plainly see the Eyes of the Geese, and the Geese are going from him; when the first Gun is discharg'd, he dexterously picks up another Gun, that lies ready, and fires that also: What Geese he kills, he usually puts up with Sticks in such a Manner as to represent them like alive, for a Decoy to others; they also make sometimes sham Decoys, about their Stands. As there are some Days in every Season, in which there are greater Flights of Geese, than what they are on other Days, a single Indian will on one of those Days kill two Hundred. They also decoy the Ducks to shoot them, but that is done by whistling.

The Factories have a great Dependence upon the Geese for their Subsistance; when the Season is approaching, they send their Servants out in several Parties to Places where the Geese most frequent: A Number of Indians also going with each Party, who come down to be hired for that Purpose. These Servants stay out from the Factories all the Season; and being provided with Salt and Casks, shall in some favourable Years, salt up three or four thousand Geese.³¹

James Isham also provided a detailed account of the Homeguard Cree goose hunt. Isham

³¹Ellis, 1968, vol. 2: 30-31. George Barnston recorded the following description of a Homeguard Cree goose hunter: "the hunter is stationed in what is called a stand - a space from four to five feet square, enclosed by willow twigs and long grass stalks - from which he fires, with forms of geese or 'decoys' set up a short distance in his front. The geese fly toward these, when he gives out their peculiar call, and frequently he has his wife, or son, or grown-up daughter, to load the discharged gun for him, while he fires with the loaded" (Barnston, 1861: 341).

observed that:

These Natives are good Mark's men with their Gun, tho not to Compare to Some of our own Country men, their antient way being only Bow's and Spear's - Knowing nothing of the Effects of a fowling piece tell the English settled in these parts; - their game is Chiefly Running, or Standing, Excep't those Indians that Keep's constant attendance to the factory's in the Seasons, who Kils most flying Killing 100 Geese and upwards of a Day Each man in a Stand, - Which stand is a little Brush or wood put round Breast high wherein they sitt, and as the geese fly's by in Ranges they Call them within a shott if a mile of and having two Guns by them, will as they come towards them Kill oft'n 3 or a 4 at a Shott, and so as they go from them Kill as many more with the other gunn, at the same time Keep calling and Loading that if the flock Consists of 20 Geese hee'l besure to have them all, - they will oft'n Kill a Great many at a Shott Rising, Creeping along with their gun at their Shoulder, thro woods and Swamp's, tell they think they are nigh a Nuff then start foreward which occations the Geese to Rise upon the wing, when he watches the time, takes them as they rise killing 20 or 30 at a shott and Sometimes more.³²

Isham's assertion that some of the Company men were better goose hunters than the Homeguard Cree is not supported by HBC records.³³ As early as 1713, Anthony Beale, Chief Factor at Albany Fort commented on his dependence on the Homeguard Cree to hunt geese for the Company. Beale was forced to give the Indian hunters extra presents to encourage them to hunt geese, because none of his men were able to kill geese.³⁴

³²Isham, 1949: 117-119.

³³Andrew Graham emphasized the skill of the Lowland Cree in hunting with European firearms. Graham remarked that: "they surpass us in the use of the gun, which is a European accomplishment" (Graham, 1969: 294). In later years, some HBC men became proficient goose hunters. For example, at York Factory in the spring of 1791, two Company men named Thomas and Sutherland killed 630 geese (HBCA, B.239/a/91, May 28, 1791, fo. 23).

³⁴HBCA, B.3/a/4, April 6, 1713, fo. 27d.

Edward Umfreville noted that: "They shoot them flying, and are so very dexterous at this sport, that a good hunter will kill, in times of plenty, fifty or sixty in a day."³⁵

The HBC tried occasionally to train its own men to hunt geese, but these experiments met with limited success. For example, in the spring of 1749, George Spence, Chief Factor at Albany Fort reported on such an experiment. On April 8, 149, Spence noted:

Our Indian Hunters pitched their tents in ye North and South Marshes, and agreeable to Your Honours Orders contained in ye 4th paragraph of your general letter of 1748, I have sent 9 of our men along with ye Indians in order to learn to kill geese.³⁶

Nine days later, Spence reported that: "3 of our men who were along with ye Indians learning to kill geese, desired to return home, having fired away all their powder and shot, and killed nothing."³⁷

The HBC provided all of the essential hardware to the Indian goose hunters. The guns, called fowling pieces by Isham, were loaned to the Homeguard Cree who agreed to hunt for the Company.³⁸ These may have been of a different type than the ordinary trade

³⁵Umfreville, 1954: 20.

³⁶HBCA, B.3/a/40, fo. 19d.

³⁷HBCA, B.3/a/40, fo. 20.

³⁸Each Homeguard Cree goose hunter used at least two firearms according to contemporary descriptions of the hunt. When Henry Ellis visited York Factory in 1746-47, Indian goose hunters were employed to hunt geese for the ship's company. Firearms were provided free of charge to several Homeguard Cree hunters, who returned them after the spring hunt (Ellis, 1968, vol. 2: 29).

guns, and perhaps they were specially made for the goose hunt. The Company's armourers were kept busy cleaning and repairing these guns before, during and after each hunt. The HBC also supplied the Indian hunters with other necessary items such as gunpowder, powder horns, shot, gunflints and gunworms. The Homeguard Cree quickly became expert marksmen with European firearms. In 1716, James Knight, who was in charge of York Factory, observed that: "there is no man knows how to use guns better than the Indians."³⁹

The HBC account books recorded the Company's expenditures on the goose hunts, and these data provide an insight into the growing importance of the provision trade. The amount of gunpowder, shot and flints given each spring and fall to the Homeguard Cree goose hunters at Albany Fort, Severn House and York Factory before 1782 is summarized in figures 8.2.3 and 8.2.4.⁴⁰ It can be seen from these figures that the fall goose hunt at Albany Fort and Severn House was more important than the spring hunt. At York Factory, there was no significant difference in expenditures during the seasonal

³⁹HBCA, B.239/a/2, fo. 62.

⁴⁰Nicolas Jeremie reported that the French traders "send out the natives to hunt, giving them a pound of powder and four pounds of lead [shot] for twenty ducks or brant, and these they have to bring to the fort" (Jeremie, 1926: 38). The HBC expected a certain number of geese for every measure of powder and shot that was given to the goose hunters, but accepted less if the geese were scarce. Such was the case in the fall of 1769 near Albany Fort. Humphrey Marten, Chief Factor, explained that: "the geese being not so plenty this fall as usual, the Indians could not bring in the usual numbers for the powder and shot" (HBCA, B.3/a/62, October 17, 1769, fo. 6d).

FIGURE 8.2.3: HBC SPRING GOOSE HUNT EXPENSES AT ALBANY FORT, YORK FACTORY AND SEVERN HOUSE, pre-1782.

YEARS (5-year avg.)	ALBANY FORT			YORK FACTORY			SEVERN HOUSE		
	P	S	F	P	S	F	P	S	F
1700-04	118	418	149						
1705-09	150	611	196						
1710-14	110	516	121						
1715-19	112	462	115						
1720-24	105	406	109	242	1210	462			
1725-29	137	448	137	170	634	302			
1730-34	116	464	115	166	613	299			
1735-39	120	430	213	208	814	432			
1740-44	111	365	194	184	630	308			
1745-49	136	575	244	247	1081	466			
1750-54	155	620	238	284	1068	496			
1755-59	247	829	502	302	1169	503			
1760-64	215	779	432	147	483	288	65	261	127
1765-69	240	998	444	209	613	480	83	268	123
1770-74	209	741	398	247	666	520	41	147	137
1775-79	502	840	508	184	518	404	51	189	110
1780-82	215	760	430	76	353	272	85	208	184

(P=powder (lbs); S=shot (lbs); F=flints)

FIGURE 8.2.4: HBC FALL GOOSE HUNT EXPENSES AT ALBANY FORT, YORK FACTORY AND SEVERN HOUSE, pre-1782.

YEARS (5-year avg.)	ALBANY FORT			YORK FACTORY			SEVERN HOUSE		
	P	S	F	P	S	F	P	S	F
1700-04	360	493	124						
1705-09	160	640	608						
1710-14	148	463	123						
1715-19	168	594	156						
1720-24	281	877	229	201	975	386			
1725-29	169	686	168	180	737	374			
1730-34	254	977	250	150	543	284			
1735-39	168	660	266	186	711	392			
1740-44	345	1117	440	307	987	614			
1745-49	518	1910	648	305	1154	604			
1750-54	426	1758	725	421	1486	778			
1755-59	419	1576	749	307	1409	631			
1760-64	441	1782	890	213	737	433	124	456	220
1765-69	619	2194	1150	160	521	393	97	387	211
1770-74	499	1583	978	120	454	285	105	351	180
1775-79	574	1862	1282	57	173	115	90	263	176
1780-82	676	1975	851	102	224	187	100	284	240

(P=powder (lbs); S=shot (lbs); F=flints)

hunts.⁴¹ The expenditures on the goose hunts at Albany Fort show a steady growth, but those at York Factory peaked in the 1750s before declining toward 1782.

Nicolas Jeremie reported that the French traders gave one pound of gunpowder and four pounds of shot for 20 geese or ducks.⁴² According to Andrew Graham, the HBC gave one pound of gunpowder and one pound of shot for 20 geese. In addition, the Homeguard Cree hunters were paid the equivalent of one made beaver in value of other trade goods for every 20 geese they gave to the Company.⁴³ Edward Umfreville reported that the payment for geese was one made beaver for every 10 geese.⁴⁴ The HBC account books indicated that the value was much higher near the end of the pre-1782 period. For example, the Albany Fort account books reported that one made

⁴¹Dale Russell asserted that the spring goose hunt was more important than the fall goose hunt (Russell, 1975: 422). However, the HBC records indicated that the fall hunt was usually more important. Geese killed in the fall were needed to provision the fur traders during the long winter period when other food resources, especially caribou, were less reliable. Edward Jarvis, who was in charge of Albany Fort in 1786, explained that: "the spring is not the season for an advantageous goose hunt, but the Autumn [underlined in original]" (HBCA, B.3/a/87, fo. 4d).

⁴²Jeremie, 1926: 38.

⁴³Edward Umfreville stated that the HBC paid one made beaver for ten geese. The actual rate appears to have varied over time and between posts. Unfortunately, the HBC account books did not consistently record this type of information. Several account books that provided detailed information on the provision trade indicated that the value paid for migratory waterfowl was variable, and likely represented differences in the quality of the birds. For example the Albany Fort account books in the 1770s indicate that one made beaver was paid for 10 to 24 ducks, and 6 to 8 geese (HBCA, B.3/d/81, fos. 12-12d; B.3/d/85, fo. 14).

⁴⁴Umfreville, 1954: 20.

beaver was paid for six to eight geese in the 1770s.⁴⁵ At York Factory the rate was about 5 geese for one made beaver in goods.⁴⁶ At Severn House, the rate was even higher. Between 1779 and 1781, the value of one made beaver in goods was paid for two to three geese.⁴⁷

The trade goods obtained by the Homeguard Cree goose hunters included brandy, tobacco, cloth, blankets and many other goods. A comparison of the amounts of essential (ie. gunpowder, gunshot, flints, etc.) and non-essential items expended by the HBC on the goose hunts reveals the growing importance of the non-essential items. Figure 8.2.5 shows the data from the HBC account books on the values of essential and non-essential goods expended at Albany Fort and York Factory. By 1782, the value of non-essential goods expended on the fall goose hunt at Albany Fort had risen to 33 per cent, and at York Factory to more than 50 per cent. Although brandy and tobacco accounted for much of the increase, other goods such as cloth and hardware had also become necessary goose hunt expenditures.

Compared to the goose hunt data from the 19th century (see chapter 9), the harvest levels before 1782 were low. Figure 8.2.6 shows the numbers of geese harvested at Albany Fort, York Factory and Severn House during the spring hunting season. Comparable

⁴⁵HBCA, B.3/d/81, fos. 12-12d; B.3/d/85, fo. 14.

⁴⁶HBCA, B.239/d/71, (1780-81), fo. 12; B.239/d/72, (1781-82) fo. 14.

⁴⁷HBCA, B.198/d/30, fos. 7d and 8d; B.198/d/32, fos. 9 and 10.

FIGURE 8.2.5: GOOSE HUNT EXPENSES AT ALBANY FORT AND YORK FACTORY
 (value in made beaver; E=essential, N=non-essential, T=total)

5-year averages	ALBANY FORT			YORK FACTORY		
	E	N	T	E	N	T
1710-14	373	28	401			
1715-19	419	48	467			
1720-24	498	90	578	697	80	777
1725-29	444	111	555	542	59	601
1730-34	515	126	641	471	67	538
1735-39	450	134	584	606	119	725
1740-44	623	92	715	677	425	1102
1745-49	1036	113	1149	861	569	1430
1750-54	892	180	1072	1045	759	1804
1755-59	1017	426	1443	978	873	1851
1760-64	1015	375	1390	500	645	1145
1765-69	1271	483	1754	470	873	1343
1770-74	1020	482	1502	509	844	1353
1775-79	1126	531	1657	289	529	818
1780-82	1365	741	2106	240	398	638

FIGURE 8.2.6: SPRING GOOSE HUNT HARVEST DATA FROM ALBANY FORT, YORK FACTORY AND SEVERN HOUSE, pre-1782 (numbers of geese obtained by the HBC)

YEAR	ALBANY FORT	YORK FACTORY	SEVERN HOUSE	YEAR	ALBANY FORT	YORK FACTORY	SEVERN HOUSE
1706	1,981			1706	1,981		
1715		1,824		1756	1,523+	5,656	
1718		900		1757		390	
1719		1,300+		1758		2,000	
1720	1,391	1,400+		1759		3,187	
1721		4,100		1760		2,000	490
1722	912*	271		1761	1,840+	300+	304
1723	1,437			1762		771+	1,120*
1728	850+	900+		1763		2,459	600
1729		300+		1764		540	
1733		256		1765		1,642	600
1734	1,000	1,170+		1767		2,630	
1735	896	185		1768		2,830	400
1736	4,360	1,873+		1769		803	400
1737		2,423		1770		5,964	350
1738		300		1771		4,105	1,000
1739	2,350	2,600+		1772			260
1741	2,103	700+		1773		4,197	480*
1742		600		1774	1,853	682	160*
1743		560		1775		5,313	
1745		200		1776		3,225	858
1746		3,500		1777		3,230	941
1747		2,350		1778		5,943	460
1748		460		1779		540	735
1750		2,689		1780			288
1751		998		1781			
1753		3,547		1782		1,269	
1755		1,100					

* estimated from numbers of casks + partial figure

figures for the fall goose hunt were not recorded by the HBC, but probably reflected the expenditures noted above. Thus, total goose harvests of 4,000 to 5,000 were generally obtained at Albany Fort and York Factory, and less than half that amount procured at Severn House.⁴⁸

The relatively low numbers of geese killed by the Homeguard Cree for the Company before 1782 can be explained by a number of factors. A significant factor was the availability of other food and commercial resources during the goose hunting seasons. Caribou, especially in the areas around York Factory and Severn House attracted the attention of many Lowland Cree. Another factor was the relatively low numbers of HBC men employed at the coastal trading posts before 1782. For example, the average workforce at York Factory was about 40, at Albany Fort about 35 men were employed, and at Severn House there were usually nine men stationed at the post.⁴⁹

The goose hunts also generated other products that were traded to the HBC. Andrew Graham observed that feathers and quills were traded by the women.⁵⁰ Goose feathers

⁴⁸Arthur Dobbs's critique of the HBC included information on the goose hunt at Albany Fort. According to testimony from former Company employees who had worked in the area during the 1730s, the average spring goose hunt at Albany produced about 1,300 geese for the Company and about 3,000 geese were obtained in the fall (Dobbs, 1967: 53).

⁴⁹In 1727-28, 3,023 salted and fresh geese were consumed by 24 men stationed at York Factory, an average of 126 geese per man (HBCA, B.239/a/10, fos. 29d-36d). At Albany Fort in 1717-18, a total of 3,066 geese were consumed by 27 HBC men, or an average of 114 geese per individual (HBCA, B.3/a/26, fo. 8d).

⁵⁰Graham, 1969: 192.

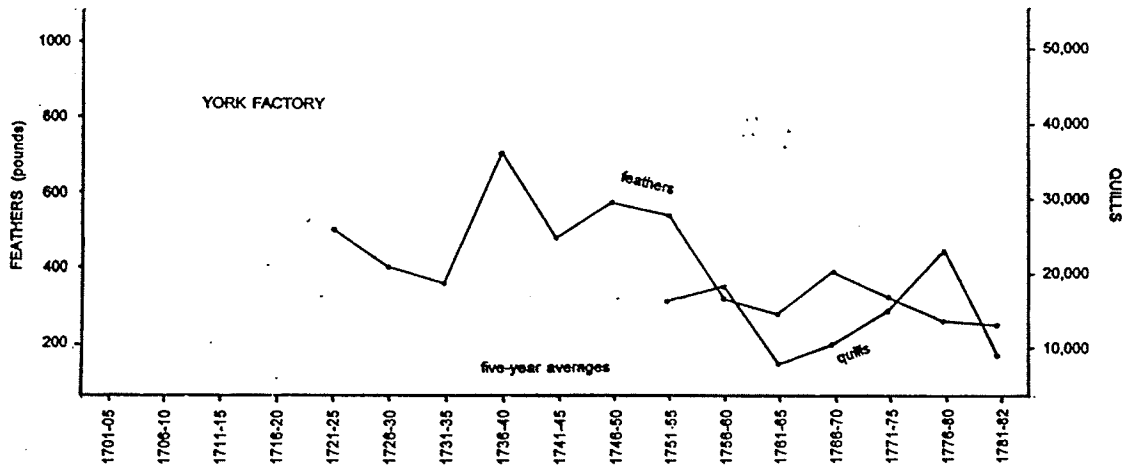
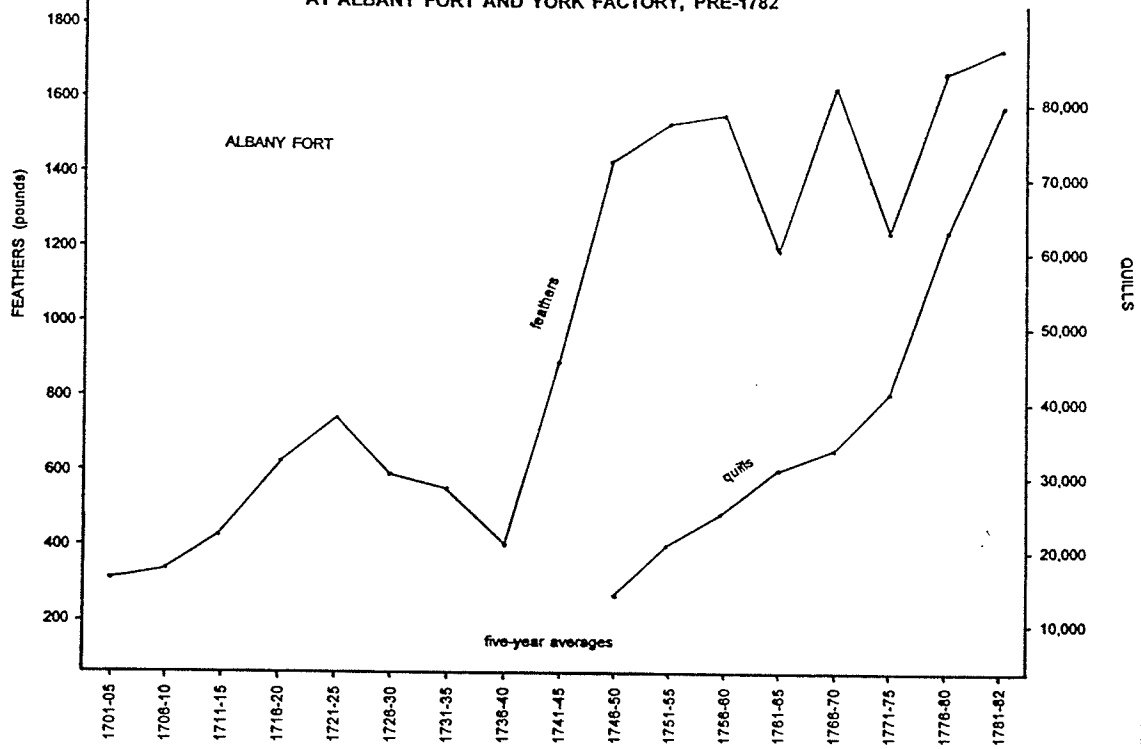
were valued at one made beaver for ten pounds of feathers⁵¹. The value of goose quills varied from post to post. At York Factory and Severn House, one made beaver was paid for 2,000 goose quills. At Albany Fort the rate was 500 quills for one made beaver. Figure 8.2.7 shows the trade in feathers and quills at Albany Fort, York Factory and Severn House in the pre-1782 period. Like the trade in geese, the trade in quills and feathers was far below that which developed in the 19th century.

In addition to migratory waterfowl, caribou became a major resource in the Lowland Cree provision trade. However, commercial caribou hunting, like the goose hunt, was slow to develop. In the early fur trade period, the Lowland Cree contributed mainly by building fences for the European traders to snare caribou that migrated near the posts. Large scale commercial hunting developed in the latter half of the 18th century, in response to the expansion of the HBC's inland fur trade operations.

Caribou fences, or hedges, were built by the Lowland Cree along the migration routes of the caribou. Nicolas Jeremie recorded an early description of caribou hedges built by the Lowland Cree near the mouth of the Hayes River. Jeremie observed that: "The natives make barriers of trees, heaped one on the other, leaving openings at intervals,

⁵¹Joseph Isbister, who was in charge of Albany Fort in 1756, noted that the weight of feathers was often difficult to measure. Isbister remarked that: "we packed some fall feathers and took as much care as possible to pick out all dirt and pieces of goose skins, cloded and wet feathers which ye Indians put amongst them to make them weighty for they are great cheats" (HBCA, B.3/a/48, April 12, 1756, fo. 24).

FIGURE 8.2.7: HBC TRADE IN GOOSE FEATHERS AND QUILLS AT ALBANY FORT AND YORK FACTORY, PRE-1782



and across these they stretch snares, and in this way they catch many."⁵²

Near York Factory, most caribou hedges were built along the edge of the Hayes River, to take advantage of the thicker tree growth that camouflaged the hedge and snares. One hedge, known as the upper hedge, was located on the left bank of the Hayes River about sixteen miles above York Factory.⁵³ The middle hedge was also located on the left bank, mid-way between the upper hedge and the factory. Joseph Robson's sketch map of the York Factory area identified these two caribou hedges (see figure 8.2.1). Another fence, known as the lower hedge, was built on the right bank of the Hayes River between Ten Shilling Creek and French Creek.⁵⁴

The Lowland Cree who built caribou hedges for the HBC were paid small wages for their efforts. For example, in 1718, a group of Homeguard Cree who built a hedge near York Factory were paid three pounds of Brazil tobacco, five pounds of shot and one pound of decorative glass beads.⁵⁵ However, many participated in these projects when other pursuits were unavailable, or at times when sick, old, widowed or orphaned Indians were temporarily dependent on the Company. For example, a caribou hedge that was built in the fall of 1751 about three miles upriver from York Factory and one quarter of

⁵²Jeremie, 1926: 22.

⁵³HBCA, B.239/a/4, April 2, 1718, fo. 18d.

⁵⁴HBCA, B.239/a/2, March 17, 1716, fo. 18.

⁵⁵HBCA, B.239/a/4, August 3, 1718, fo. 33.

a mile in length, employed the "lame Indian men, widows and children who has none to look after them."⁵⁶ Two years later, the hedge was lengthened by a work party composed of 10 HBC men and "some Indians" who also set 30 snares in the hedge.⁵⁷ In the summer of 1763. Ferdinand Jacobs, Chief Factor at York Factory, employed 13 Homeguard Cree for four days rebuilding a caribou hedge. They built 1,150 yards of new hedge for which they were paid one made beaver each per day. Jacobs also reported that he had to provide food and tobacco for them and their families and give the men a "drink of liquor" after each day's work.⁵⁸ In the summer of 1770, Indians were once again employed to repair the caribou hedge. Ferdinand Jacobs noted that:

I have now Six Indian men at work to repair our Deer Hedge and put our Deer Snares in good Order against the Deer crosses, as I can not spare our own men for that Service, the Indians being better acquainted with that kind of work, and for which I Pay Each man a beaver a day.⁵⁹

The caribou hedges were usually employed during the spring migration and occasionally caught large numbers of caribou, but most caribou were harvested during the fall migration by spearing them in river crossings. Nicolas Jeremie noted that: "These animals return to the north in the months of July and August and, when they are crossing

⁵⁶HBCA, B.239/a/35, September 24, 1751, fo. 8.

⁵⁷HBCA, B.239/a/37, September 18, 1753, fo. 3.

⁵⁸HBCA, B.239/a/50, July 19, 1763, fo. 42.

⁵⁹HBCA, B.239/a/62, July 16, 1770, fo. 48.

the rivers, the natives in their canoes spear as many of them as they please."⁶⁰ Henry Ellis remarked that the Lowland Cree near York Factory "attack them [caribou] in the Water, and kill prodigious Numbers, which they bring down on Floats to the Factories."⁶¹ Thomas Pennant commented that: "The Indians also kill great numbers during the seasons of migration, watching in their canoes, and spearing them while passing over the rivers of the country, or from island to island; for they swim most admirably well."⁶² Pennant added that: "They often kill multitudes for the sake of their tongues only; but generally they separate the flesh from the bones, and preserve it by drying it in the smoke: they also save the fat, and sell it to the English in bladders, who use it instead of butter. The skins are also an article of commerce, and used in London by the Breeches-makers."⁶³

The commercial trade in caribou products began with sales of caribou tongues. Caribou tongues were prized year-round because they contained rich reserves of fat when other parts of the caribou were lean.⁶⁴ The Lowland Cree also preferred to trade caribou tongues because they were easy to transport to the posts, and they could be quickly cured to prevent them from spoiling. Humphrey Marten, who was in charge of York Factory

⁶⁰Jeremie, 1926: 22.

⁶¹Ellis, 1748: 182-183.

⁶²Pennant, 1974: 26-27.

⁶³Ibid: 26-27.

⁶⁴John Kelsall noted that: "in the late spring and early summer caribou have little fat save in the tongue and marrow" (Kelsall, 1968: 211).

in 1776, stated that the HBC paid one made beaver for 10 caribou tongues, and three made beaver for a whole caribou. Since it was much easier to transport 30 tongues compared with a whole caribou carcass, the Lowland Cree preferred to trade the former item.⁶⁵

Although caribou tongues figured prominently in feasts and gift-giving ceremonies in the early European fur trade period, a large-scale commercial trade in caribou tongues began to develop at York Factory in the 1740s. Figure 8.2.8 shows the data on the numbers of caribou tongues traded by the HBC at York Factory between 1747 and 1782.⁶⁶

The York Factory records from 1768 to 1770 provided a detailed daily enumeration of the numbers of tongues traded. These data have been summarized in figure 8.2.9. Most tongues were traded during the fall hunt in the months of August and September.⁶⁷ Occasionally, Indians brought hundreds of tongues in a single visit to York Factory. For example, on August 10, 1769, Ferdinand Jacobs, Chief Factor at York Factory, reported that: "Several Canoos of Indians came here to Trade Parchment Deer Skins and from

⁶⁵HBCA, B.239/a/73, August 14, 1776, fo. 64.

⁶⁶There was a trade in caribou tongues at Severn House beginning in 1759-60, when the post was re-established by the HBC. Unfortunately, the records at Severn House do not provide a detailed accounting of the quantity of caribou tongues traded except for the first three years, when 185 (1759-60), 345 (1760-61) and 798 (1761-62) tongues were recorded.

⁶⁷Large numbers of caribou tongues were occasionally brought in to York Factory by Indians in the summer. For example, in the month of July, 1741, 135 tongues were traded at the factory, and in July, 1749, 132 tongues were traded (HBCA, B.239/a/22 and 32).

FIGURE 8.2.8: YORK FACTORY CARIBOU TONGUE TRADE, 1747 - 1782

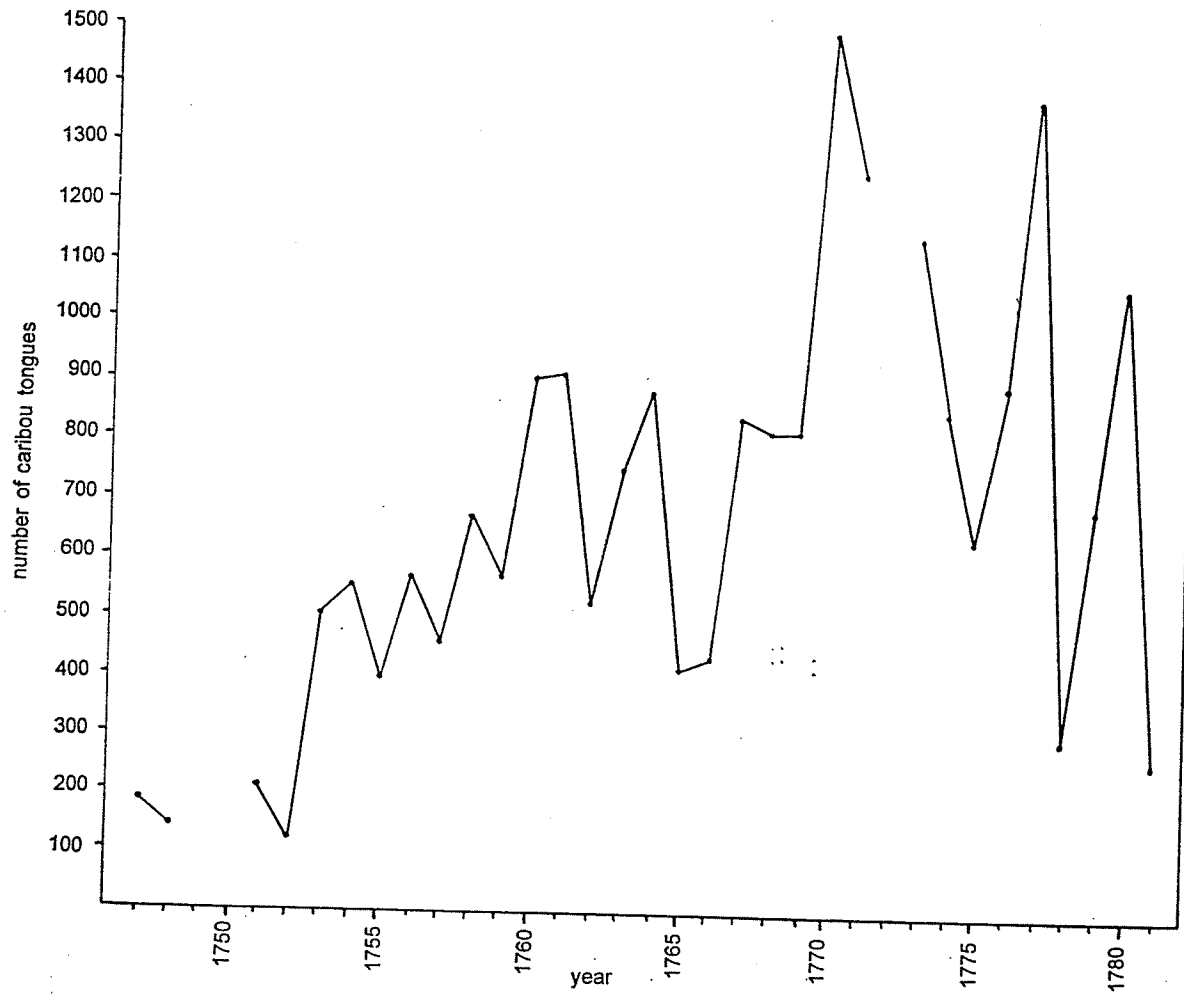


FIGURE 8.2.9: MONTHLY RECORD OF CARIBOU TONGUES TRADED AT YORK FACTORY, 1768-1770

MONTH	1768	1769	1770
January	0	0	0
February	0	2	0
March	0	0	0
April	18	0	0
May	38	17	180
June	86	111	0
July	40	0	50
August	333	751	139
September	359	431	804
October	2	73	53
November	0	0	0
December	0	0	0
TOTAL	876	1,385	1,226

whom I Received 390 Dried Deers Tongues, 30 bladders of Fatt, 30 Young Geese, 2 Sides of Dried Venison and 4 Bundles of Pemmycon for which I Paid them."⁶⁸

The trade in other caribou products was slower to develop because of the difficulty in transporting heavy loads of meat to the posts. One of the best places to hunt caribou in the fall was along the lower Nelson River. However, the Lowland Cree found it difficult to transport the products of their hunt to York Factory because of the often dangerous water conditions along the coast between the Nelson and Hayes Rivers. During the early years at York Factory the HBC men were aware of the caribou resource that was seasonally available in the vicinity of the lower Nelson River, but they also understood the difficulty of obtaining caribou from that area. On March 15, 1720, Henry Kelsey reported that: "3 Indians came from the North Side of Port Nelson to have men go for meat but our men are all imployed and they are to farr off."⁶⁹ James Isham also noted that many Homeguard Cree hunted caribou in and along the Nelson River, but would not bring the meat to York Factory because of the difficulty in transporting the meat. On August 17, 1740, Isham noted that:

Several familys of Indians came from ye North River to trade Deer skins, fatt and tongues, having kill'd a pretty many Deer, But ye Northw. wind making such a surf along port nelson shore that they can not bring itt to ye factory before itt spoil'd. I can not spare 2 men to go to port nelson to salt Deers flesh; if I could I might gett a great quantity of ye best meat.⁷⁰

⁶⁸HBCA, B.239/a/61, fo. 50.

⁶⁹HBCA, B.239/a/5, fo. 70.

⁷⁰HBCA, B.239/a/22, fo. 4d.

The HBC traders at York Factory made several attempts to develop a caribou trade directly with the Lowland Cree along the lower Nelson River. The first attempt was initiated by James Isham on July 21, 1748, when he sent John Hughes and two Homeguard Cree families in the Company's sloop to the Nelson River with a tent and instructions to collect country provisions. Hughes was provided with casks, salt and fishing nets, and he established a camp at Flamborough Head on the lower Nelson River (see figure 8.2.1). Hughes was able to collect only one cask of salted caribou flesh, but that was lost when the boat that had been sent to pick up the cargo hit a rock "coming over the flatts" and sank.⁷¹

Isham persisted in his plan to develop a caribou trade and, in 1749, his men erected a log building at Flamborough Head which was named Cumberland Fort.⁷² E.E. Rich has suggested that the post was built in response to the British Parliamentary Enquiry of 1749, which was critical of the HBC's lack of exploration and settlement inland from Hudson Bay.⁷³ However, Cumberland House, which was re-named Flamborough House, served as a seasonally occupied provision collection depot and not as a springboard to further interior developments.

In 1750, the HBC men stationed at Flamborough House procured 5 casks of salted

⁷¹HBCA, B.239/a/32, fo. 2.

⁷²HBCA, B.239/a/33, April 25, 1749, fo. 28.

⁷³Rich, 1960, vol. 1: 583-85.

venison and a quantity of caribou fat.⁷⁴ In 1751, one cask of salted venison and three casks of salted geese was collected.⁷⁵ In 1759, Flamborough House reached its peak production of three hogsheads (a large cask containing 63 to 140 gallons) of salted venison.⁷⁶ However, even this amount was well below the Company's expectations, and could not justify the expense of maintaining the provision post. Thus, in November of 1759, Flamborough House was abandoned.⁷⁷

In the 1760s, the HBC traders at York Factory began to pursue a more active campaign to obtain caribou from the Indian hunters. Small parties of Company men were sent to the Lowland Cree camps for the specific purpose of trading caribou. For example, on January 27, 1761, James Isham sent two men with trade goods and enough provisions to last two months to camp at the mouth of the Steel River "to wait the Crossing [of] the Deer."⁷⁸

⁷⁴HBCA, B.239/a/34, fo. 5d.

⁷⁵HBCA, B.239/a/35, fo. 3.

⁷⁶HBCA, B.239/a/41, August 5, 1759, fo. 41.

⁷⁷A rumour that French forces planned to attack York Factory was cited as a reason for abandoning Flamborough House. All of the men and goods were removed from the post, but it was not demolished. This is curious since there was an apparent fear that the French might use it as a base of operation (Graham, 1969: 251n). The structure stood until the summer of 1766, when it burned to the ground. Andrew Graham speculated that some of the local Lowland Cree were to blame (HBCA, B.239/a/54, July 27, 1766, fo. 42).

⁷⁸HBCA, B.239/a/48, fo. 16d. James Isham measured the distance between York Factory and the Steel River and found it to be 52 miles and one furlong.

A summary of the caribou trade at York Factory between 1747 and 1782 is shown in figure 8.2.10. As that figure illustrates, the caribou provision trade grew into a productive enterprise for the Lowland Cree and groups of Northern Ojibway who began to participate in this trade in the 1760s. Annually, upwards of 300 whole caribou, 1,300 tongues and quantities of other products such as sides, briskets, rumps, heads, hearts, ruhiggan and pemmican were purchased by the Company.

In the vicinity of Albany Fort, the caribou hunt was focused on Akimiski Island. The HBC traders at Albany Fort tried on a number of occasions to open up a commercial trade with the Lowland Cree hunters on the island. The first record of such a venture was made on June 12, 1727, when Joseph Adams was sent from Albany Fort to explore Akimiski Island with a group of Homeguard Cree.⁷⁹ Adams was impressed with the caribou resource on the island, and in 1733 he attempted to develop a summer caribou trade. On July 3, 1733, Adams sent some men in the Company's sloop to trade caribou meat from the Lowland Cree hunters on the island. That venture proved unfruitful, and the HBC men returned two weeks later with only two casks of venison. In the summer of 1746, Joseph Isbister tried again to develop a caribou trade on the island. He sent some men in the sloop to Akimiski Island, but nine days later they returned frustrated, having traded only "ye quantity of two deers of fresh meat and five deers dried."⁸⁰

⁷⁹Joseph Myatt, Chief Factor at Albany Fort, noted that there was "a great number of Dear upon that Island and fish and fowl in plenty" (HBCA, B.3/a/15, fo. 18).

⁸⁰HBCA, B.3/a/37, July 21, 1746, fo. 51.

FIGURE 8.2.10: YORK FACTORY CARIBOU TRADE, 1747-1782

Year	Caribou (whole)	Tongues	Heads	Hearts	Sides	Briskets	Joints	Fat (bladders)	Pemmican (bundles)	Ruhiggan (bundles)	Dried Venison
1747	122	185	28		251					1	
1748	14	148									
1749	n.d.										
1750	n.d.										
1751	106	279	129		120			23			
1752	29	126	39		20				2		
1753	78	508	65		96				3	1	
1754	71	548	174		38			44		7	
1755	59	399	11		136			30		12	
1756	45	565	4		77			16		30	
1757	87	457	55		168			58		36	
1758	104	678	147		72					4	
1759	94	565	227		63			88		8	
1760	89	916	0	16	318			326	2	29	
1761	59	920	42	2	186					66	
1762	84	516	20	5	271			121		3	
1763	93	754	37	57	300			53	10	35	30
1764	125	880	33	16	611			24	44		
1765	191	412	142	70	470			161	2		

FIGURE 8.2.10: YORK FACTORY CARIBOU TRADE, 1747-1782

Year	Caribou (whole)	Tongues	Heads	Hearts	Sides	Briskets	Joints	Fat (bladders)	Pemmican (bundles)	Ruhiggan (bundles)	Dried Venison
1766	258	430	254	123				50			
1767	380	856	188	182	382			145			
1768	324	825	100	128	446			258			
1769	249	827	192	12	108			225		2	
1770	112	1492	243	33	195			347	16	2	11
1771	273	1254	271	59	123			290	2		
1772	n.d.										
1773	111	1150	60	0	194			288			
1774	150	850	98	0	85			0			
1775	203	620	364	12	200			236			
1776	114	897	250	34	157			362			
1777	124	1370	88	18	274			70	304		
1778	99	299	23	25	28			14			
1779	312	688	452	191	69			10		2	
1780	385	1090	120	41	77			240			
1781	98	259	110	34	49		65	660	60	60	600
1782	n.d.										

Isbister persisted, and sent a sloop there again in the summer of 1747. This time the HBC men succeeded, and Isbister noted on their return to Albany Fort on July 16, 1747, that: "they brought a great quantity of venison from ye Indians on Viner's [Akimiski] Island."⁸¹ Despite this success, the caribou trade did not become a major enterprise for the Albany Fort traders. In the future, the Albany traders limited their involvement to encouraging the Indian hunters to bring a share of their bounty to trade at the fort.

An indirect measure of the growing participation of the Lowland Cree in the caribou provision trade can be found in the number of caribou skins traded at the coastal posts. Figure 8.2.11 shows the data on the caribou skin trade at York Factory, Albany Fort and Severn House between 1739 (the first year caribou skins were purchased by the HBC) and 1782. By 1760, the total caribou skin trade amounted to nearly 2,000 skins. Most of the trade took place at York Factory and, to a lesser extent, at Severn House. Since caribou skins were prime in the fall, most of the trade took place during and after the fall migration of the caribou.

The Lowland Cree also traded substantial quantities of fish to the European traders. When the HBC re-established Albany Fort in 1692 an elderly Lowland Cree was employed as a fisherman. James Knight, who was in charge of Albany Fort in 1693,

⁸¹HBCA, B.3/a/38, fo. 32d.

FIGURE 8.2.11: HBC CARIBOU SKIN TRADE, 1739-82

Year	York Factory	Severn House	Albany Fort	TOTAL
1739	58	0	30	88
1740	107	0	0	107
1741	360	0	46	406
1742	859	0	0	859
1743	360	0	0	360
1744	242	0	0	242
1745	320	0	0	320
1746	190	0	0	190
1747	72	0	0	72
1748	208	0	0	208
1749	122	0	5	127
1750	374	0	6	380
1751	226	0	4	230
1752	398	0	2	400
1753	309	0	18	327
1754	544	0	0	544
1755	244	0	2	246
1756	90	0	7	97
1757	790	0	7	797
1758	784	0	6	790
1759	486	0	16	502
1760	1560	256	14	1830
1761	1447	413	3	1863
1762	1065	830	1	1896
1763	1344	665	3	2012
1764	583	528	3	1114
1765	452	1102	62	1616
1766	248	701	173	1122

FIGURE 8.2.11: HBC CARIBOU SKIN TRADE, 1739-82

Year	York Factory	Severn House	Albany Fort	TOTAL
1767	860	354	165	1379
1768	1091	1085	69	2245
1769	1075	503	12	1590
1770	1140	345	0	1485
1771	1478	454	11	1943
1772	1458	293	5	1756
1773	1469	575	0	2044
1774	1634	899	6	2539
1775	1084	969	0	2053
1776	952	465	12	1429
1777	1294	792	32	2118
1778	837	548	17	1402
1779	1318	548	56	1922
1780	1528	620	29	2177
1781	1814	369	22	2205
1782	1434	432	26	1892

reported that: "an old Indian caught all our fish last fall."⁸² However, the HBC traders came to rely less on the Indians for fish, as their own men became proficient in seining and setting nets in the vicinity of the posts.

The HBC attempted on several occasions to develop a trade in a product derived from the air bladder of sturgeon that was known as isinglass. The inner membrane of the air bladder contained a gelatinous substance that was used in the production of high-quality glue and as a fining agent for beer, wine and liquor.⁸³ In 1694, the HBC's governing committee in London wrote to Chief Factor James Knight at Albany Fort, urging him to develop a trade in isinglass. The committee stated that: "We should be glad you could procure us some Isinglass being only the sound [air bladder] of sturgeon dried, wee are Informed great quantities may be had, that Comodity is also very currant here."⁸⁴ Despite the Company's persistent attempts to stimulate an isinglass trade, the Lowland Cree could not be persuaded to bring sturgeon bladders for trade.⁸⁵

⁸²HBCA, B.3/d/2, fo. 13. Knight paid one coat, 3 skeins of twine, 2 nets and one worn hatchet for the fish.

⁸³Isinglass was used by the Lowland Cree as a glue and a binding agent for paint. James Isham observed that: "the Glue the Natives saves out of the Sturgeon is Very strong and good, they use itt in mixing with their paint, which fixes the Colours' so they never rub out" (Isham, 1949: 168-69).

⁸⁴Rich, 1957: 231-32.

⁸⁵The processing of sturgeon bladders into isinglass required considerable care and effort. The delicate inner membranes had to be carefully peeled away and sun-dried before packing them and transporting them to the posts. The low price offered by the HBC for isinglass may have been a factor in preventing a trade in that product. In the 19th century, low prices were identified as deterrent in obtaining isinglass from Indians. For example, in 1815, George Holdsworth's report on the Berens River district

Sturgeon eggs, or caviar, was also a product much in demand in Europe, but the HBC was unable to discover the appropriate technology for preparing the sturgeon eggs. The caviar trade in Europe was a closely guarded industry, and the HBC did not develop the necessary contacts or partnerships with caviar merchants to make the trade in sturgeon eggs a profitable venture. Sturgeon and other fish eggs were consumed by Lowland Cree who considered them to be a great delicacy.⁸⁶

Sturgeon fisheries in the Hudson Bay Lowlands were generally located in upper sections of the rivers, out of the reach of the HBC fishermen. Most sturgeon that were traded at the coastal posts were brought by half-Homeguard Cree or Upland Indians who caught them on their way down to trade at the posts.⁸⁷ Sturgeon represented an additional item

concluded that: "Another class of productions is Isinglass which might be procured in considerable quantities if its value could allow more liberal encouragement to be given to the Indians for procuring it" (HBCA, B.16/e/1, fo. 4). James Sutherland, who was in charge of the HBC's Jack River (Norway House) District in 1815, offered a similar view of the isinglass trade. Sutherland wrote that: "A quantity of isinglass might be got but it is doubtful whether it would pay the expense of procuring it. The price we can afford to pay for it will not induce the Natives to clean and cure it as it ought to be" (HBCA, B.154/e/1, fo. 3d). For more information about isinglass, see Holzkamm, Lytwyn and Waisberg, 1988.

⁸⁶David Masty, an Eastmain Cree, commented that: "Fish eggs are considered a delicacy to Native people. They are mixed with flour, lard, salt and baking powder, called Wa-koy-kunow, in Cree. Fish eggs are dried and, in times of need, they are soaked in water until they are soft and used to make Wa-koy-kunow. Dried fish can also be boiled and eaten" (Masty, 1991: 14).

⁸⁷HBC inland travellers such as Matthew Cocking reported that Indians caught sturgeon on their way to and from York Factory. Spears were commonly used, but nets and guns were also employed to catch these fish. Sturgeon were also brought to York Factory for trade by Lowland Cree from the Nelson River. In 1717, James Knight was informed by several Indians about a sturgeon fishing station that was located about 50 miles up the Nelson River (HBCA, B.239/a/3, February 2, 1717, fo. 22). Knight

of trade, and also a supply of fresh provisions for the Upland Indian traders. Most of the sturgeon were traded at York Factory from late May to early July, which coincided with the sturgeon spawning runs. The arrival of Indians with a supply of fresh sturgeon to trade was greeted with considerable enthusiasm by the HBC traders. For example, at York Factory on July 29, 1781, Humphrey Marten traded 25 sturgeon from two canoes of "Bungeeze [Northern Ojibway]," and commented that it was: "a noble supply of fresh provisions as both English and Indians are tired of salt food."⁸⁸

The Lowland Cree occasionally hunted and sold Beluga, or White Whales to the European fur traders, but this trade did not develop into a major industry. On August 31, 1715, James Knight reported from York Factory that he had traded a "white whale that the Indians had kill'd"⁸⁹, and on May 25, 1718, Henry Kelsey paid the value of four Made Beaver for a White Whale that had been killed by the Homeguard Cree.⁹⁰ HBC personnel encouraged the Lowland Cree to trade White Whales for domestic purposes because oil rendered from these animals was needed to keep lamps burning in the posts. The HBC also attempted to develop a commercial trade in whale oil near York Factory, but Indian fishermen could not be persuaded to harvest sufficient

wanted to send some of his men to fish at that location, but a HBC sturgeon fishery did not develop at York Factory, or indeed at any of the other coastal trading posts.

⁸⁸HBCA, B.239/a/79, fo. 48.

⁸⁹HBCA, B.239/a/1, August 31, 1715, fo. 52d.

⁹⁰HBCA, B.239/a/4, fo. 23d.

quantities to make the trade profitable.⁹¹ The danger and difficulty involved in hunting White Whales may have been a deterrent to Indian participation in whaling. Alternative forms of employment in subsistence and commercial harvesting activities would have made the prospect of hunting White Whales a marginal concern.

Like the White Whale, seals were occasionally bought by the fur traders for their blubber which was used as a fuel for the lamps in the coastal posts. The demand for whale or seal blubber was relatively moderate, but it was a necessary trade item.⁹² For example, on October 22, 1772, a large seal was traded by the Homeguard Cree at Albany Fort and Humphrey Marten noted that it was: "very acceptable as we have not a drop of lamp oil

⁹¹The HBC made plans as early as 1742 to develop a commercial whale fishery at York Factory (Rich, 1960, vol. 1: 540). The whale fishery actually began in 1750, when the HBC hired a whale harpooner and commissioned a whaling sloop named the "Whale" (HBCA, B.239/a/33, May 24, 1750, fo. 32d). However the first attempt at whale fishing by the HBC proved unproductive. In the summer of 1752, only 22 whales were caught and the harpooner was subsequently relieved of his duties (HBCA, B.239/a/35, July 24, 1752, fo. 40d; Rich 1960, vol. 1: 621). A second whale fishery at York Factory was organized in 1766. A harpooner was hired who had previously worked in the Greenland whale fishery, but once again the numbers of whales caught failed to live up to the Company's expectations (HBCA, A.11/115, fo. 96). In the period after 1766, whale fishing was attempted periodically by the HBC in the Hayes and Nelson Rivers, but these ventures produced limited results. Andrew Graham believed that the failure of the commercial White Whale fishery near York Factory was due to poor organization. Graham noted that the harpooners who were hired by the Company spent too much time in: "building unnecessary out-houses, and scheming daily fruitless and wild undertakings" (Graham, 1969: 260).

⁹²Statistics on the numbers of seals traded by the HBC were not regularly kept in the account books. The post journals recorded some of the transactions involving seals. For example, in the fall of 1723, eight seals were traded at Albany Fort (HBCA, B.3/a/12, September 15, 23, 25, October 15, 1723, fos. 5, 5d and 8).

in the fort."⁹³

The involvement of the Lowland Cree in the provision trade gradually increased during the pre-1782 period. By 1781, Humphrey Marten, who was in charge of York Factory, remarked that: "I Humbly inform your Honours [HBC Board of Governors in London] that the homeguard hunting indians have brought to this Fort since last August a large quantity of very good provisions and that they are in general very willing to oblige and assist an englishman."⁹⁴

8.3 Transportation:

Prior to the establishment of inland trading posts, the opportunities for employment in transport related activities were limited to carrying letters and other correspondence between the coastal posts. According to Andrew Graham, the payment for carrying these packets varied roughly with the distance between the posts. Figure 8.3.1 shows the rates paid by the HBC to Lowland Indians for this packet service.

⁹³HBCA, B.3/a/65, fo. 15d.

⁹⁴HBCA, B.239/a/79, May 2, 1781, fo. 31.

Figure 8.3.1: HBC Prices for Packet Service

Trading Posts	Distance	Rate (MB)
Churchill Fort to York Factory	132 miles	24 MB
York Factory to Severn House	150 miles	30 MB
Severn House to Albany Fort	384 miles	50 MB
Albany Fort to Moose Fort	76 miles	15 MB
Moose Fort to Eastmain House	62 miles	15 MB

These rates reflected the average prices paid for these packet services during Andrew Graham's term of employment with the HBC (1749-750). In earlier times, the prices paid by the HBC to the Homeguard Cree for these services were considerably lower. For example, a packet that was carried from Albany Fort to York Factory in 1720 cost the Company only 21 made beaver.⁹⁵

The delivery of packets between trading posts, and especially the long-distance trips between Albany Fort and York Factory were generally conducted by Homeguard Cree who were travelling between the posts for other purposes. In delivering these packets the Lowland Indians followed a route known as "kayash iskinow," or the ancient path⁹⁶.

⁹⁵HBCA, B.3/d/28, fo. 12d. The goods received in payment amounted to one gun (9 MB), six pounds of gunpowder (3 MB), one blanket (6 MB) and one and one-half yards of cloth (3 MB). In the summer of 1742 an Albany River Lowland Cree was paid only 18 made beaver for carrying a packet to York Factory (HBCA, B.3/d/50, fo. 10).

⁹⁶ Macfie, 1989: 62.

This path followed stranded beach ridges that paralleled the coast of Hudson Bay. The European fur traders often noted that the Indians who carried the packets were already heading to the intended destination to visit friends or relatives.⁹⁷ Usually the Homeguard Cree packetmen moved slowly between the posts, taking their families and sometimes larger groups along with them. Many packets between Albany and York took several months or longer to deliver. For example, an Albany River Homeguard Cree named Blind Jack set off with a packet from Albany Fort on May 18, 1727, and delivered it three months later to York Fort on August 20, 1727. Blind Jack apparently wintered near York Factory and took a return packet to Albany Fort the next summer. The return trip also took three months⁹⁸. The trip between Albany and York could be accomplished in far less time⁹⁹, but it is evident that the journey was usually performed at a leisurely pace, with hunting, fishing and gathering being the main pursuits.

⁹⁷For example, on June 10, 1739, James Isham reported that: "severall familys of Indians that hunted for ye factory this spring is gone for Albany to see their relations" (HBCA, B.239/a/21, fo. 35d).

⁹⁸HBCA, B.239/a/10, fos. 2d and 23d, B.3/a/17, fo. 3d. Sometimes packets were carried by Upland Indians who traded alternatively at Albany Fort and York Factory. For example, a packet was given to a group of Upland Indians who left York Factory on August 10, 1729. This packet was delivered to Albany Fort the following summer, on May 26, 1730, by a group of "Sturgeon Indians" (HBCA, B.239/a/12, fo. 2, B.3/a/18, fo. 17d). Sturgeon Indians were also involved in delivering a packet from York Factory on July 28, 1730, that reached Albany Fort the next year on May 27, 1731 (HBCA, B.239/a/12, fo. 27, B.3/a/19, fo. 20). As late as 1751, Upland Indians delivered packets between York Factory and Albany Fort (HBCA, B.3/a/43, May 24, 1751, fo. 21d).

⁹⁹A Lowland Cree man and his wife took a packet from York Fort to Albany Fort in less than seven weeks in the summer of 1735 (HBCA, B.239/a/18, August 11, 1735, fo. 1d, B.3/a/24, September 25, 1735, fo. 4d). In 1770, an urgent trip from Severn House to Albany Fort was performed in 18 days by William Tomison and a Lowland Cree guide (Macfie, 1989: 69).

The delivery of packets, although relatively infrequent in the pre-1782 period, was a service that the HBC traders depended upon for important information from fellow traders. For example, when Andrew Graham found out that some Lowland Cree had not received full payment for delivering packets between Severn House and York Factory, he wrote: "I apologized to them as a mistake and directly made up the Defficiency. Let us always deal equitably with the Natives which must tend to the Companys interests and our own credit."¹⁰⁰

The first post inland from the coast of Hudson Bay was Henley House, located about 150 miles upriver from Albany Fort near the confluence of the Kenogami River. Built in 1743, Henley House served mainly as a watch post until 1775.¹⁰¹ Despite its limited role and small complement of employees (an average of 7-8 men were stationed at Henley House), a transportation system developed to supply the post with provisions and other necessary goods. The transport link offered employment opportunities to the Lowland Indians who lived near Albany Fort.

During much of the pre-1782 period, employment opportunities for the Lowland Cree in transporting goods were limited. Beginning in 1774, with the establishment of Cumberland House inland from York Factory, the participation of the Lowland Cree in

¹⁰⁰HBCA, B.198/a/15, March 5, 1772, fo. 22.

¹⁰¹Henley House was destroyed twice; in 1755 and 1759. It was rebuilt in 1766 (see Lytwyn, 1986: 7-8, 22-23).

the annual boat brigades increased. As early as 1778, the dependency of the HBC traders on Indian labour to transport goods between York Factory and Cumberland House created problems for Humphrey Marten who was in charge of York Factory. Marten summarized his difficulties as follows:

[T]he Indians excessively troublesome for brandy, notwithstanding they have had two large feasts already, they say they will not assist in carrying goods or bringing them down, except their demands are complied with, what to do I know not, I strive to do my best yet I fear with feasts and payment for carrying goods up, also for hunting for our men in coming down, a thousand beaver in goods will not satisfy them, this joyned to the great quantity of bread, prunes and other provisions they consume, as they must all be fed, and well fed too (and they eat not a little) makes it exceedingly expensive.¹⁰²

8.4 European Diseases:

Before 1782, most European observers noted that the Lowland Cree were remarkably healthy and relatively free from diseases. For example, Andrew Graham remarked that: "Their constitutions is strong and healthy; their disorders few."¹⁰³ James Isham wrote that: "The Natives in these parts are of an incredible strong constitution both men and women."¹⁰⁴ T. Kue Young postulated that, prior to European contact, the Lowland Cree rarely suffered from chronic malnutrition, and that infectious diseases such as

¹⁰²HBCA, B.239/a/75, July 23, 1778, fo. 54.

¹⁰³Graham, 1969: 143. Edward Umfreville wrote almost the same account, but he likely copied directly from Graham (Umfreville 1954: 18-19).

¹⁰⁴Isham, 1949: 96.

measles, smallpox and influenza were probably absent.¹⁰⁵ Infectious diseases introduced by Europeans, known as "virgin soil epidemics," had the potential for devastating impact on the Lowland Cree population.

A review of the HBC records from the period of initial settlement to 1782 indicates that the Lowland Cree suffered from occasional outbreaks of infectious diseases transmitted by European traders. Although relatively few Lowland Cree died from diseases before 1782, significant negative effects were recorded by the HBC traders. In general, diseases that were transmitted during the winter were less widespread because of the dispersed distribution of the population. In summer, when Indians were engaged in long-distance travel for trade, and populations were more concentrated at communal fishing or hunting camps, the epidemic diseases were able to spread over large areas and affect greater numbers of people.¹⁰⁶

The diseases that affected the Lowland Cree were transmitted by infected Europeans who landed at the coastal trading posts, or by Upland Indians who brought diseases from the interior on their trading trips to the coast. Among the diseases, smallpox was the most virulent and deadly among the Lowland Cree. The first report of smallpox among the Lowland Cree was made by Henry Kelsey who was in charge of York Factory in 1720-

¹⁰⁵Young, 1988: 32-33.

¹⁰⁶See, for example, Arthur Ray's analysis of the diffusion of diseases in the period 1830-1850 (Ray, 1976: 156-157).

21.¹⁰⁷ In the fall of 1720, Kelsey remarked that the "Old Captain" and his family was very ill. They were cared for near the factory throughout the winter, and Kelsey reported that the old leader was "very bad and vomits blood continually."¹⁰⁸ On March 23, 1721, Kelsey stated that smallpox had been the cause of their misfortune. He reported that: "2 of the Captain's family came here for food and say he and some others are very ill, altho most of the Indians that have lain here all Winter have had the Small Pox which I never saw among the home Indians before."¹⁰⁹ The Captain's group was relatively large. On May 1, 1721, he led a party of 60 Indians who visited York Factory. By November 26, 1721, the Captain's condition had deteriorated, and Kelsey reported that: "the Captain is overspread with a leperousy and that his leggs and arms are wasted very much."¹¹⁰ Finally, on January 29, 1722, the Captain died.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷An unknown disease may have been transmitted by Europeans to the Lowland Cree as early as 1674. In the summer of 1674, Charles Bailey visited the Lowland Cree near the mouth of the Ekwan River and reported that: "There had been a great mortality among them" (Oldmixon, 1931: 392). Unfortunately, Bailèy provided no other details and the exact cause of the deaths, but it is unlikely that the mortality could have been caused by anything other than a virulent disease.

¹⁰⁸HBCA, B.239/a/6, December 28, 1720, fo. 9d.

¹⁰⁹HBCA, B.239/a/6, fo. 15.

¹¹⁰HBCA, B.239/a/7, fo. 7d.

¹¹¹HBCA, B.239/a/7, fo. 11d. Paul Hackett suggested that the lingering illness that led to the death of the Captain may have been caused by a disease other than smallpox. It would have been unusual for someone suffering from the Haemorrhagic form of smallpox to survive for over a year. It is possible that more than one disease afflicted the Captain, or that he was suffering from pulmonary Tuberculosis (Hackett, personal communication, May 12, 1993).

Negative consequences of the disease that afflicted the Lowland Cree near York Factory in 1720-21, continued to be noted by HBC traders throughout the summer and fall of 1722. Thomas Macklish noted on November 29, 1722, that: "two Indian women came here down the River having left 22 Indians young and old a coming to the Factory almost starved having mist of the Deer passing in the Fall, likewise a sickness amongst them."¹¹² Although the HBC traders reported few deaths directly attributed to the disease outbreak, the debilitating affects caused widespread suffering among the Lowland Cree near York Factory. Traditional subsistence patterns were disrupted by the sickness in many groups, and reports of starvation were noted by the HBC traders.¹¹³ The epidemic did not reach the Albany River area, but some Albany River Lowland Cree who visited the York Factory area were affected. Joseph Myatt, who was in charge of Albany Fort, reported on March 26, 1723, that: "a home Indian called Mothoskatucky went to Port Nelson last June, was twelve months, hath buried his wife and children."¹¹⁴

Although the HBC tried to screen out employees who were infected with disease, these precautions were not always successful. This was particularly true for HBC men who were infected with venereal disease. For example, in the fall of 1732, Robert Tomlins died at York Factory. Thomas Macklish noted that: "he had been 26 days under a

¹¹²HBCA, B.239/a/8, fo. 7d.

¹¹³On February 19, 1722, Kelsey remarked that an Indian and his wife had killed two of their children for food (HBCA, B.239/a/7, fo. 13d).

¹¹⁴HBCA, B.3/a/11, fo. 19.

salivation, had been under the care of severall in England for cure of the Pox, before he came unto York Fort."¹¹⁵ In the fall of 1764 at York Factory one HBC man died of "the Pox" and another was sick but recovered.¹¹⁶

In many cases, the source and type of disease that afflicted the Lowland Cree can not be deduced from the HBC reports. Often the HBC traders were not eyewitnesses to the events, but noted the effects of the disease from Indian information. For example, on November 19, 1732, three Lowland Cree arrived at Albany Fort and informed Joseph Adams that there was "a great sickness among them."¹¹⁷ Many Lowland Cree near York Factory were sick in the winter of 1738-39. James Isham observed that: "a very Remarkable sickness and casualty is very much [among] our Indian hunters this year."¹¹⁸ Reports of starvation were common in the aftermath of these disease outbreaks, and it is apparent that mortality rates were enlarged by after-effects such as starvation.

In the summer of 1751 a disease epidemic that was remarkably severe was detected in the York Factory area. The disease was first reported by James Isham on June 13, when he wrote that: "14 Indians very bad upon the plantation of a sort of measells, they are

¹¹⁵HBCA, B.239/a/14, October 17, 1731, fo. 8d. The term "pox" was commonly used to describe various forms of venereal disease.

¹¹⁶HBCA, B.239/a/53, October 8, 1764, fo. 8d; October 15, 1764, fo. 9.

¹¹⁷HBCA, B.3/a/21, fo. 8.

¹¹⁸HBCA, B.239/a/21, February 26, 1739, fo. 23d.

taking at first with violent colds, coughs, sore throats, swell faces, and very full of spots."¹¹⁹ Two days later, Isham remarked that 20 Indians were immobilized by the disorder. By June 17th, most of the "home Indians" were so sick that they were not able to pitch away from the plantation. The sickness cleared quickly (most Lowland Cree had recovered by June 24) and no deaths were reported near York Factory, but the epidemic appears to have persisted inland. On July 2, a large group of "Misineepee" [Churchill River Cree] and "Stone Indians" [Assiniboine] arrived at York Factory and informed Isham that many more were forced to turn back because of sickness.¹²⁰ As in the case of the 1720-21 disease outbreak, the sickness was not transmitted to the Lowland Cree who lived near Albany Fort.

Although colds and influenza were rarely lethal among the HBC traders, the Lowland Cree often succumbed to these common European diseases. For example, on January 6, 1741, a "Hective Fever" among the Lowland Cree was responsible for the death of at least one child.¹²¹ At York Factory on June 30, 1752, James Isham remarked that:

¹¹⁹HBCA, B.239/a/34, fo. 38d.

¹²⁰HBCA, B.239/a/34, fo. 40d.

¹²¹HBCA, B.3/a/31, fo. 20. Percy Mathews, who was employed as a medical doctor at York Factory from 1864-84, remarked that pneumonia sometimes spread among the Lowland Cree as an epidemic disease. Mathews noted that: "This may instance the epidemic form that disease assumes in small isolated places like York. When the surroundings, mode of living, and nature of food are very much the same, individual susceptibilities seem to be done away with, and disease then takes a generally aggressive character" (Mathews, 1885: 451).

"most of ye home Indian men, women and children bad of a cough and sore throats."¹²² For example, on July 27, 1753, James Isham reported that two women and a child had died from colds near Flamboro House (Nelson River), and that many Upland Indians had died from the same sickness.¹²³ On March 12, 1754, James Isham recorded the deaths of six Lowland Cree near York Factory which he attributed to "a consumption or Hective fever."¹²⁴ A similar disease outbreak was noted in the Albany Fort records in 1753-54. In the fall of 1753, Joseph Isbister noted that: "many of our Indians are laid up with a great Cold which has put them off from shooting [geese] and also creates a slow fever."¹²⁵ Between September 22 and October 1, 1753, five Lowland Cree died near Albany Fort. In the summer of 1757, reports of sickness and mortality abounded near York Factory. In a two day period in June, 15 Indians died near the factory. The sickness apparently spread upland as James Isham noted on August 19, 1757: "sad news, Indians inland dropping off surprizingly."¹²⁶ The sickness continued throughout the winter of 1757-58, and in the summer of 1758 Isham reported that six men and 12 women and children had died among the Nelson River Cree.¹²⁷

¹²²HBCA, B.239/a/35, fo. 35d. The sickness probably spread from the HBC men stationed at York Factory. On July 1, 1752, James Isham reported that John Hughes was "very bad of a cold" (*Ibid.*).

¹²³HBCA, B.239/a/36, fo. 37.

¹²⁴HBCA, B.239/a/37, fo. 17d. Another Indian died of the same disorder near York Factory on March 31, 1754.

¹²⁵HBCA, B.3/a/46, September 21, 1753, fo. 6d.

¹²⁶HBCA, B.239/a/42, fo. 41.

¹²⁷HBCA, B.239/a/44, June 9, 1758, fo. 31.

In the summer of 1777, Humphrey Marten, who was in charge of York Factory, reported that: "many of the English and Indians bad with sore throats, violent coughs and difficulty of breathing."¹²⁸

By far the most deadly disease in the recorded history of the Lowland Cree was the smallpox epidemic of 1782-83. Unlike most of the previous disease outbreaks which appear to have originated from the European traders who were stationed at the coastal posts, this smallpox epidemic was transmitted from the south by Upland Indian traders who visited the coastal region. It is generally believed that the smallpox epidemic began in 1779 in the south, possibly originating as far south as Mexico, and spread northward along Indian trade routes¹²⁹.

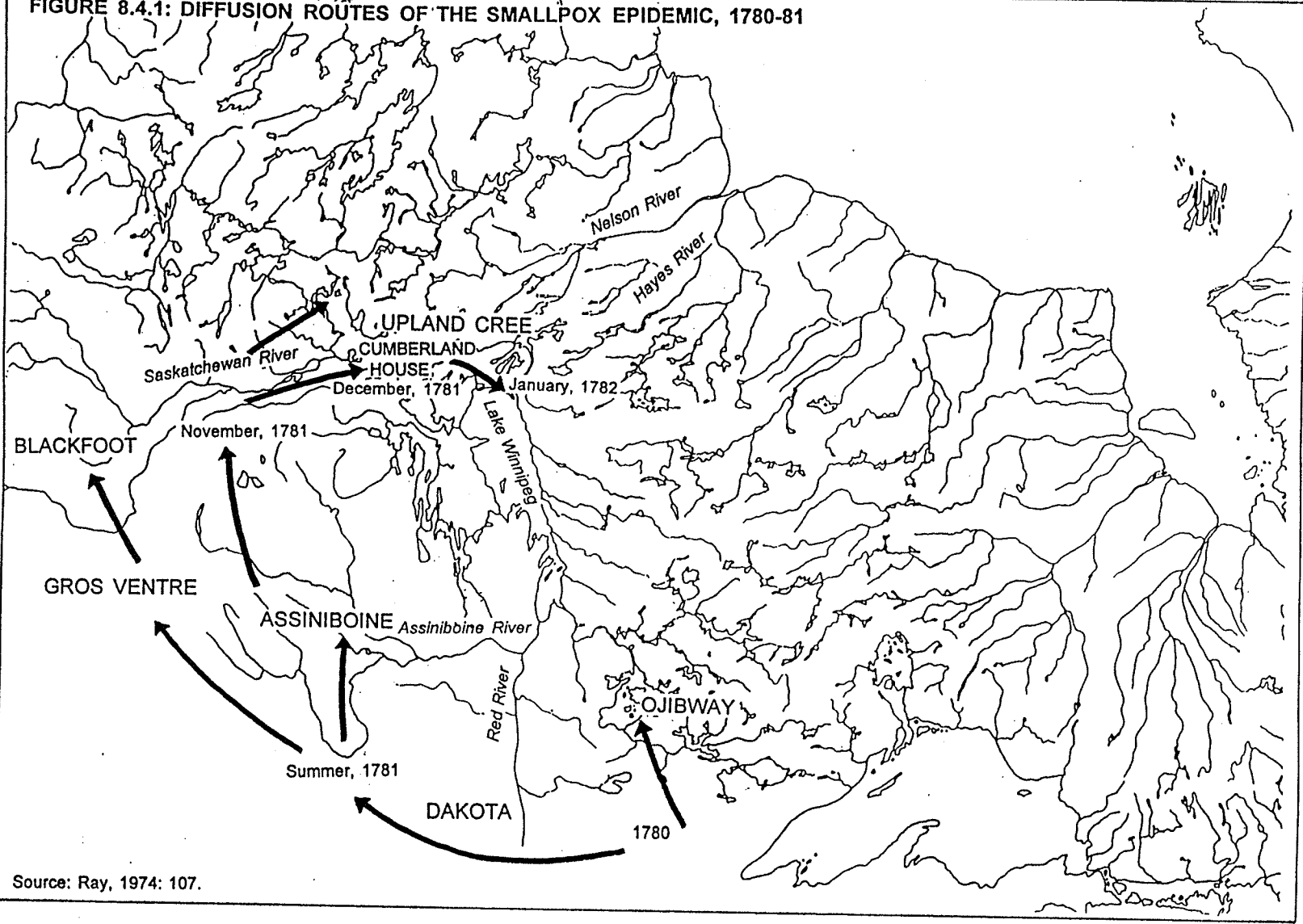
Arthur Ray has traced the transmission routes of the epidemic northward through the prairie region to the Saskatchewan River (see figure 8.4.1). On December 11, 1781, HBC traders at Cumberland House on the lower Saskatchewan River reported that some Indians had been infected with smallpox. Throughout the winter of 1781-82, the smallpox epidemic continued to spread among the Indian people who lived in the hinterland of Cumberland House.

A group of Northern Ojibway who traded at Cumberland House in the winter of 1781-82

¹²⁸HBCA, B.239/a/74, August 7, 1777, fo. 37.

¹²⁹Decker, 1989: 73.

FIGURE 8.4.1: DIFFUSION ROUTES OF THE SMALLPOX EPIDEMIC, 1780-81



Source: Ray, 1974: 107.

were the first to carry the disease into the Hudson Bay Lowlands. On June 10, 1782, a group of Northern Ojibway in 16 canoes arrived at York Factory. They informed Matthew Cocking that: "a violent disorder has raged among their people which they describe as an eruption on the skin."¹³⁰ Several of their leaders had died and many others were dangerously ill. They explained that they were infected shortly after one of their people had visited Cumberland House in the winter. This particular party probably became infected after the initial outbreak since it is doubtful that the smallpox virus could have persisted throughout the cold winter months.¹³¹ William Tomison met a few of the same Northern Ojibway on his trip down to York Factory from Cumberland House, and he reported that most of the group (14 of 16 canoes) had died from smallpox. Tomison brought two of the survivors back to York Factory on July 2, 1782, and Cocking confirmed that they were pock-marked and suffering from the disease.

On June 23, a small group of Nelson River Cree arrived at York Factory. They were three women and three children, who reported that among five families who wintered together, all of the others except one other woman and four children had died. One of the women told Cocking that she and her husband had gone to Cumberland House during the winter accompanied by four Northern Ojibway who belonged to the group noted above. Like the Northern Ojibway, the Nelson River Cree women provided a similar

¹³⁰HBCA, B.239/a/80, fo. 63.

¹³¹Steadman Upham reported that the "lower limit of survivability" of the smallpox virus is reached at about zero degree celsius (Upham, 1986: 120).

description of the disease outbreak, confirming that it was a smallpox epidemic. They reported that: "their Husbands that died of a violent breaking out upon them all over their bodies and within the mouth and throat."¹³² The women also became sick, but were able to recover.

During the rest of the summer of 1782, most of the Upland Indians who arrived at York Factory were either sick or had been infected with smallpox. Many related shocking accounts of the deaths of most of their relatives and friends. Matthew Cocking took measures to prevent the smallpox from spreading to the Lowland Cree. The sick Indians were immediately quarantined in tents set apart from the others. The buildings and compound around the factory were meticulously cleaned. Cocking sent his own Native family and a lame Indian who had been staying at York Factory over the river to shield them from the disease and to keep any other Lowland Cree from crossing over the river to the factory. He also sent word to his men who were whaling near the mouth of the Nelson River to warn the Lowland Cree nearby to stay away from the factory.

Despite these efforts by the HBC at York Factory, smallpox was easily transmitted to the Lowland Cree. For example, several infected Northern Ojibway were allowed into the factory on June 11, when Cocking was away for a brief visit with his family. Other infected Northern Ojibway were inadvertently allowed into the factory during the summer. Cocking sent letters to Severn House, Albany Fort and Moose Factory,

¹³²HBCA, B.239/a/80, June 23, 1782, fo. 69.

warning the HBC men to "keep their Home Indians out of the way of any strangers," but these letters were sent on August 13, more than two months after the disease had been detected.¹³³ By the time the letters reached Albany Fort the smallpox epidemic had already been transmitted to the Albany River Lowland Cree.

The smallpox epidemic spread toward the southern Hudson Bay Lowlands along the Albany River trade route. The first news of the epidemic reached Gloucester House on May 25, 1782.¹³⁴ Three Northern Ojibway leaders named Captain Abbitwabino and Lieutenants Netawekemisack and Countisque arrived at Gloucester House with a group of followers in ten canoes. Captain Abbitwabino reported that many of his people had already died from the disease.¹³⁵ On June 22, 1782, a group of Ojibway from Rainy Lake visited Gloucester House and confirmed that: "there is a great mortality among the Indians and that most of the Indians in and near the raney Lake is dead, and that the assineybols country is depopulated."¹³⁶ These long distance visitors may have helped to spread the smallpox epidemic into the Albany River basin.¹³⁷

¹³³HBCA, B.239/a/80, fo. 94.

¹³⁴Thomas Hutchins, who was in charge of Albany Fort in the summer of 1782, reported that: "a universal famine and sickness prevailing amongst the Natives during the whole winter [1781-82]" (HBCA, A.11/4, June 22, 1774, fos. 154d-155).

¹³⁵HBCA, B.78/a/7, fo. 21.

¹³⁶HBCA, B.78/a/7, fo. 24.

¹³⁷The smallpox spread widely in the region known as the Little North. By the spring of 1783, most of the Indians who lived near Sturgeon Lake, east of Lake Nipigon, were reported dead. Among the dead was Captain Abbitwabino, who had visited Gloucester House in the summer of 1782. Many deaths were reported among the Indians

The smallpox epidemic reached Albany Fort before the Rainy Lake Ojibway arrived at Gloucester House. The first Upland Indians arrived at Albany Fort on May 2, 1782. Although nothing unusual was noted about these visitors¹³⁸, Thomas Hutchins reported on the same day that sickness and death afflicted the Lowland Cree near the fort.¹³⁹ On May 24, 1782, Hutchins noted that: "a poor child died on the plantation, this is the 7th of the Natives who have died this spring and several are still very ill."¹⁴⁰ By June 5, 1782, the 12th Indian had died near Albany Fort. During the rest of the summer other sick Indians arrived at Albany Fort, increasing the probability that the epidemic was spread to other Lowland Cree.

The busy summer trading period at Albany Fort attracted Indians from all directions, thereby increasing the risk of widespread transmission of the smallpox to neighbouring Lowland Cree. However, the records at Moose Fort indicate that the disease did not

around Gloucester House in the summer of 1783. On June 3, 1783, John Kipling, who was in charge of Gloucester House, noted that: "there has hardly been an Indian in but what has lost some part of their family in that Cruel Disorder" (HBCA, B.78/a/8, fo. 25d).

¹³⁸Hutchins noted the death of one of the Upland Indians named Lieutenant Caupishwacathou on May 13, 1782, but he attributed it to "old age and infirmities" (HBCA, B.3/a/80, fo. 18).

¹³⁹Hutchins wrote a letter to Edward Jarvis who was in charge of Moose Fort, and he noted that: "there is a great Sickness and Mortality amongst them particularly the children which quite disheartens the whole" (HBCA, B.135/b/12, May, 2, 1782, fos. 26d-27).

¹⁴⁰HBCA, B.3/a/80, fo. 20d. On May 23, 1782, Hutchins wrote a letter to John Hodgson at Henley House and reported that: "A general sickness is amongst the Indians" (HBCA, B.86/a/35, fo. 54).

reach the Lowland Cree who lived in the vicinity of that post. The cause of the abrupt termination of the smallpox epidemic around the Albany Fort area may have been due to previous exposure to smallpox among the Moose River Lowland Cree population. Earlier documented smallpox outbreaks among the Indian population in the St. Lawrence valley and Great Lakes basin may have reached into the Moose River basin.¹⁴¹

Unfortunately, details about the spread of smallpox among the Lowland Cree near York Factory are unavailable because of the French capture and destruction of the post on September 1, 1782. However, York Factory was rebuilt the following year and subsequent records indicate that the smallpox caused significant mortality among the Lowland Cree. Although exact figures were not recorded, the HBC traders noted the deadly consequences of the epidemic. For example, in the summer of 1786, Humphrey Marten commented that: "we have now 15 Indians to feed, the greatest number of whom are thriving boys and girls and bid fair to repopulate this dismally depopulated country."¹⁴² In the spring of 1786, Marten provided greater details about the mortality among the Lowland Cree. Marten observed that:

I gave the usual presents to 45 Indians, great and small for the goose hunt. In the above number of Indians are no more than 5 real hunters; and ten grown women, such havoc hath death made amongst the elderly Indians, for I well remember when we could number 16 good men hunters besides stout boys. Consequently the ravages made by death are much

¹⁴¹Conrad Heidenreich postulated that the smallpox epidemic in 1639-41 was transmitted as far north as the mouth of the Moose River (Heidenreich, 1987: plate 35).

¹⁴²HBCA, B.239/a/86, June 18, 1786, fo. 41d.

more detrimental to your Honours interest than those made by the Enemy.¹⁴³

To the north of York Factory, the smallpox epidemic probably reached Churchill Fort by Upper Churchill River and Nelson River Cree who traded there in the summer of 1782. It is also likely that the Chipewyan were also agents of transmission of the smallpox epidemic to the Churchill Fort area. Alexander Mackenzie reported that the Indians who lived north of Lac la Ronge (probably Chipewyan) carried the disease eastward to the area near Churchill Fort in the spring of 1782.¹⁴⁴ Although details of the transmission of the disease were not recorded by the HBC traders at Churchill Fort before the French destroyed the fort, the after-effects were described by Samuel Hearne when he re-established Churchill in the fall of 1783. Hearne stated that more than half the Homeguard Cree near Churchill Fort died during the epidemic, reducing the population from 69 to 32.¹⁴⁵

The smallpox epidemic was late in reaching Severn House. The first record of the disease was noted on April 14, 1783, almost a year after the epidemic reached York Factory and Albany Fort. Two families of Indians (probably Northern Ojibway) arrived at Severn House, and William Falconer stated that: "they tell me they have seen but one

¹⁴³HBCA, B.239/a/86, April 17, 1786, fo. 30.

¹⁴⁴Mackenzie, 1970: 76.

¹⁴⁵HBCA, B.42/b/26, December 20, 1783, fo. 3d (quoted in McCarthy, 1985: 83).

Indian during the winter, that they are all dead inland, these are very deeply marked with the small pox, one of them has lost all his children by it except one poor boy, which is both blind and lame, and they have been obliged to haul him all the winter."¹⁴⁶ The number of deaths reported at Severn House were few, but other reports suggested that the rate of mortality was also high among the Severn River Lowland Cree. For example, the 1784 spring goose hunt was attended by very few Indians, and Falconer observed that: "we have but 5 or 6 men that can be called Hunters, but loaded with swarms of widdows, orphans and infirm creatures."¹⁴⁷

The smallpox epidemic continued to take its toll in the coastal area near Albany Fort in the fall and winter of 1782. Unlike York Factory and Churchill Fort which were destroyed by the French, Albany Fort was spared and a continuous record of events is available to shed light on the effects of the epidemic in the area around Albany Fort. On September 12, 1782, two Indians died on the plantation near the fort. One week later, another Indian died and Edward Jarvis, who was in charge of Albany Fort, wrote that: "the Natives who are much disheartened by the mortality which still rages among them: a fine young Indian having died this night, which makes 3 since my arrival and several more are taken sick."¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶HBCA, B.198/a/28, fo. 15.

¹⁴⁷HBCA, B.198/a/29, July 12, 1784, fo. 44d.

¹⁴⁸HBCA, B.3/a/81, fo. 1.

During the winter of 1782-83 many Lowland Cree arrived at Albany Fort accompanied by sick and dying people. Many traded for medicine from the Company in desperate efforts to save family members and others. Captain Questach, the leader of the Albany River Lowland Indians was among those who were affected by the epidemic, and his son died after a lingering illness. The mortality also spread among the Lowland Cree who lived along the Attawapiskat and Ekwan Rivers. On May 11, 1783, Jarvis reported that: "Lt. Earchyekeshick, Saquot and their gangs came in 13 canoes, but poorly gooded having had many deaths in their families."¹⁴⁹ The epidemic also affected the HBC employees because the usual supplies of country provisions were unavailable. Jarvis reflected that: "two men sick, five convalescent, ye scurvy begins to make its appearance. Unfortunate country, once so healthy and abounding in provisions even in my remembrance is now quite contrary having not a single days partridges been served to the men ye whole winter."¹⁵⁰

The effects of the smallpox epidemic continued to be felt near Albany Fort throughout the 1783-84 season. Many suffered from food shortages as sickness and death disrupted the usual activities of the Lowland Cree. Grief was also a factor in reducing the Albany River Lowland Cree to a state of starvation. On March 8, 1784, Edward Jarvis observed that: "Captain Questach and family came in without a single fur of any kind in a most pitiable condition, he fairly cried with joy at having reached the fort which he never

¹⁴⁹HBCA, B.3/a/81, fo. 24.

¹⁵⁰HBCA, B.3/a/81, March 19, 1783, fo. 21.

expected."¹⁵¹ Several weeks later, Jarvis received news of similar conditions among the Lowland Cree who lived north of the Albany River. He wrote in his journal: "I have received the disagreeable news of several deaths among some of the best Indians; Lt. Earchyekeshick having lost his eldest son is inconsolable and cannot even pay his debt, and Saquot's family were all starving."¹⁵² On August 9, 1784, Jarvis noted that: "Captain Assup came in so poor that many of his young fellows could not even pay their debts; they tell of numerous deaths among the Indians around them by an epidemical disorder which from their description should seem to be the smallpox,; which I fear has made its way from the northward."¹⁵³ On June 15, 1784, Captain Questach died after a long illness. In his journal, Jarvis noted: "departed this life Captain Questach, Captain of our Goose hunters, he has been declining ever since the famine he underwent in the winter."¹⁵⁴

By the fall of 1784, the epidemic seems to have run its course near Albany Fort, but the Lowland Cree had not yet recovered from the psychological damage that had resulted from so many deaths. They concluded that "God was angry with their country," in

¹⁵¹HBCA, B.3/a/82, fo. 21.

¹⁵²HBCA, B.3/a/82, March 23, 1784, fo. 23.

¹⁵³HBCA, B.3/a/82, fo. 46d.

¹⁵⁴On June 16, 1784, Captain Questach was buried near Albany Fort. Jarvis observed that: "Myself with all the Indians on the plantation attended the remains of old Captain Questach to a wooden tomb built in a very permanent manner; he was buried with more solemnity and ceremony than ever I saw upon like occasion; Gave him the colour half mast high; In the evening the Indians made a grand feast upon the occasion and kept their guns firing all night" (HBCA, B.3/a/82, fo. 38).

attempting to explain the tragic sequence of events triggered by the smallpox epidemic.¹⁵⁵ The effects of the epidemic continued to be felt by the Albany River Lowland Cree as late as 1785. On March 13, 1785, Edward Jarvis noted that: "this is the third year of famine at Albany."¹⁵⁶

Figure 8.4.2 depicts the transmission of the smallpox epidemic as reported in the HBC documents. The spread of the disease to York Factory and Albany Fort in the summer of 1782 was fairly rapid, and it was facilitated by the movement of numbers of Upland Indians along the major transportation routes. The disease did not reach Severn House until the summer of 1783, probably due to its more remote location in relation to the main fur trade transport corridors.

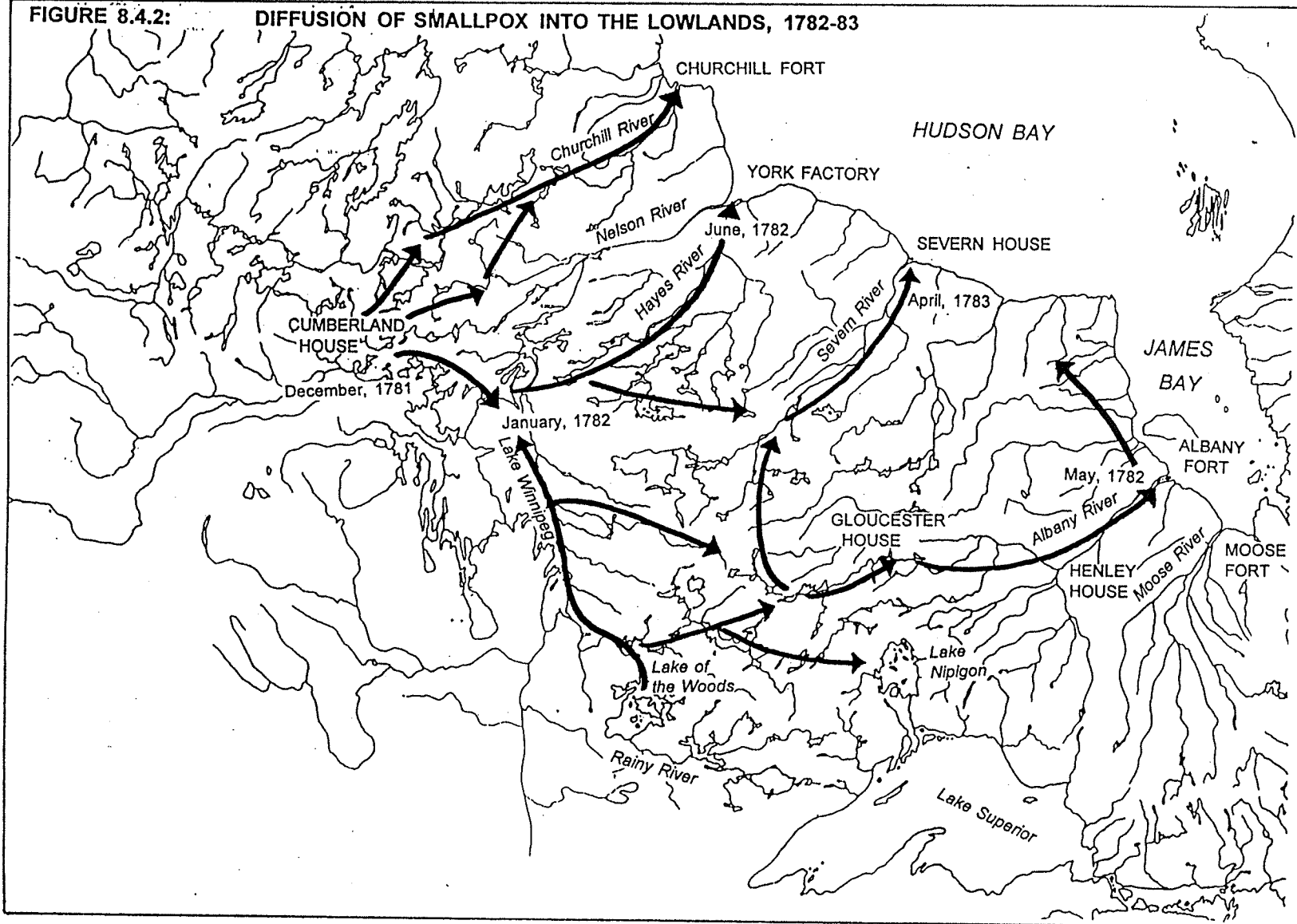
By the winter of 1783-84, the smallpox epidemic had run its course in the Lowlands and adjacent Uplands. Decker estimated that 50 to 75 per cent of the population of Lowland Indians near York Factory died during the epidemic.¹⁵⁷ Samuel Hearne estimated that about 54 per cent of the Lowland Cree near Churchill Fort died from smallpox. Humphrey Marten's enumeration of Lowland Indian goose hunters at York Factory in the spring of 1786 indicated that 11 of 16 men, about two-thirds, had died from

¹⁵⁵HBCA, B.3/a/83, fo. 2. On June 5, 1784, Hutchins wrote a letter to William Falconer at Severn House, and reported that: "the Indians have universally either been obliged to eat them [beaver skins] or throw them away, the effects of their grief for many deaths among them" (HBCA, B.198/a/29, fo. 42d).

¹⁵⁶HBCA, B.3/a/84, fo. 27d.

¹⁵⁷Decker, 1989: 86.

FIGURE 8.4.2: DIFFUSION OF SMALLPOX INTO THE LOWLANDS, 1782-83



smallpox. In addition to the high mortality during the epidemic, the survivors faced many hardships in procuring, food, clothing, shelter and trade goods.

Calvin Martin has suggested that Indians generally attributed the cause of the smallpox epidemic to a "conspiracy of the beasts."¹⁵⁸ In other words, animals were the cause of the sickness and death, and Indians retaliated by killing them in numbers exceeding sustainable harvest levels. A closer examination of the fur trade records indicates that the smallpox epidemic coincided with a major transformation in the European fur trade. It was this economic transformation, rather than a holy war of extermination in the wake of the epidemic, that led to faunal depletions in the homeland of the Hudson Bay Lowland Cree.

Beginning in 1774, the HBC initiated a programme of building inland outposts in an attempt to compete with rival traders from the St. Lawrence River valley. The establishment of Cumberland House on the lower Saskatchewan River in 1774 signalled the beginning of the HBC inland expansion. However, the Company's inland expansion was initially tentative, and by 1782 only a few outposts were operating upriver from York Factory and Albany Fort. The major thrust of the HBC inland programme developed after 1782, and the consequences of that development for the Lowland Cree and their resource base will be discussed in chapter nine.

¹⁵⁸Martin, 1978: 108.

CHAPTER 9: THE LOWLAND CREE IN THE FUR TRADE, 1783-1821

9.1 Fur Trade:

The smallpox epidemic of 1782-83 had a significant negative impact on the involvement of the Lowland Cree in the fur trade. The negative impact was widespread throughout the area affected by the disease, and the HBC account books reported the magnitude of the reduction in furs for several years after the smallpox epidemic. For example, the total Albany Fort fur returns (including inland posts) dropped from 9,052 made beaver in 1782-83, to 6,975 made beaver in 1783-84.¹ At York Factory the decline was more precipitous, with the total value of furs dropping from 12,837 made beaver in 1781-82, to 2,832 made beaver in 1783-84.² The Severn House fur returns fell from 4,066 made beaver in 1781-82, to 2,418 made beaver in 1783-84.

¹In the summer of 1782, Thomas Hutchins, who was in charge of Albany Fort, already noted the decline in the fur trade. Hutchins commented that: "they [Lowland Cree] flocked to the factory for support and assistance inasmuch that the Albany home Tribe produced 1200 Made Beaver less than in former years" (HBCA, A.11/4, June 22, 1782, fo. 155).

²York Factory and Severn House were abandoned for the 1782-83 season because of an attack by a French naval force in the fall of 1782.

The decline in the fur trade caused directly by the deaths of Lowland Cree fur trappers and hunters was amplified by the common practice of throwing away possessions, including furs, by grieving relatives.³ Edward Jarvis, who was in charge of Albany Fort in 1784, explained that: "I have not now 3000 MBeaver in the Fort, and I believe not 200 Beaver skins in the whole, the Indians having universally either been obliged to eat them or throw them away, the effects of their grief for many deaths among them."⁴ High mortality rates and lingering sickness because of malnutrition and other after-effects among Lowland Cree hunting groups necessitated adaptive strategies, and the role of women became critical to the survival of some groups. For example, in 1790, three Severn River Lowland Cree families who had wintered together, arrived at Severn House with several sick people, including the principal hunters. The HBC trader noted that they

³Many other similar accounts can be found in the HBC records. For example, on October 7, 1797, two Lowland Cree arrived at Severn House, and Thomas Thomas observed that they "had, in consequence of the death of their brother, thrown away every article which they had taken in debt (this is their common manner of showing sorrow at the loss of a friend or relation) they were now wholly destitute of necessaries" (HBCA, B.198/a/49, fo. 11). In the summer of 1799, a large group of Lowland Cree in 20 canoes arrived at York Factory with no furs to trade. Joseph Colen explained that: "the death of a son of the Chief who was the principal hunter, early in the fall, stopped the whole party from killing furs - this is too frequently the case with Indians" (HBCA, B.239/a/101, June 11, 1799, fo. 33). On January 15, 1810, William Cook, who was in charge of York Factory noted that: "3 Natives [arrived at the factory] from a party of homeguards tenting in Foxes Lake...very little exertion appears to have gone forwards in this family owing to the Death of their Leader" (HBCA, B.239/a/116, fo. 10). In 1821, Thomas Vincent, who was in charge of Albany Fort, noted that a Homeguard Cree named Sheshequon had brought in a poor trade, and Vincent commented that: "according to the Indian custom when a Death takes place amongst em, a gloom remains for a considerable time; this has been the case with him last winter, his wife paid the Debt of Nature last summer" (HBCA, B.3/e/7, fo. 8).

⁴HBCA, B.198/a/29, June 5, 1784, fo. 42d.

brought only 75 made beaver in furs, and these were "chiefly trapt by the women."⁵

The smallpox epidemic temporarily interrupted the HBC's inland operations, but within a few years after the epidemic the network of inland trading posts rapidly expanded. As a result, few Upland Indians visited the coastal trading posts after 1782. The establishment of a network of inland trading posts made the long, difficult trips by canoe to the bay unnecessary to obtain HBC trade goods. John McNab, who was in charge of Albany Fort in 1795, recalled that the last "real uplander" to visit the fort was a man named Muscownatauga, who made the trip in 1782. McNab observed that since Muscownatauga's visit, "not a single beaver has been brought to the Fort by an uplander."⁶

In addition to reducing the volume of furs, the inland expansion of the HBC also affected the composition of the furs received at the coastal posts since only locally available animals were harvested for the coastal trade. The HBC records at Albany Fort in the post-1782 period provided a break-down of the furs traded at each of the posts, and this information sheds light on the Lowland Cree fur trade in that period. The Lowland Cree traded mainly at Albany Fort, Henley House and Martins Fall. The Homeguard Cree contributed most of the furs at Albany Fort, and the Half-Homeguard Cree were major

⁵HBCA, B.198/a/38, April 20, 1789, fo. 28d.

⁶HBCA, B.3/a/96, June 13, 1795, fo. 45d.

suppliers at Henley House and, to a lesser extent, Martins Fall.⁷ Figure 9.1.1 shows the fur returns at Albany Fort from 1783 to 1800. These data relate specifically to the furs and other country produce brought in by the Lowland Cree in the Albany Fort district.

The fur trade during the period 1783 to 1821 throughout the northwestern interior of the continent was affected by extreme competition between the HBC and various fur companies based in the St. Lawrence River valley that eventually amalgamated to form the North West Company (NWC). The peak period of fur trade activity occurred between 1790 and 1810, when record numbers of fur traders and trading posts were in operation.⁸ The fur trade in the Hudson Bay Lowlands was not immune from the intensive competition that developed between the HBC and NWC in that period.

Although French and later Canadian fur traders from the St. Lawrence River valley made periodic forays into the Hudson Bay Lowlands before 1782, there was little sustained competition within the region (except in the hinterland of Moose Factory) until after 1783. In 1784, Canadian fur traders began to intercept Lowland Cree hunters as far north as the Nelson River. On September 5, 1784, a large group of Nelson River Cree

⁷As noted in chapter four, the Northern Ojibway had migrated into the Martins Fall area before the HBC built inland trading posts, and by the early 19th century they were more numerous in the area than the Lowland Cree.

⁸See, Moodie, Lytwyn, Kaye and Ray, 1987: plate 61; Moodie, Lytwyn and Kaye, 1987: plate 62; and Moodie, Kaye, Lytwyn and Ray, 1987: plate 65.

Year	Bear	Beaver	Caribou	Castoreum	Fisher	Fox	Goose down	Goose feathers	Goose quills	Lynx	Marmot	Marten	Mink	Muskrat	Oiler	Rabbit	Skunk	Squirrel	Wolf	Wolverine
1783	17	1636	10	48	0	134	0	1346	75000	38	9	5244	5	177	213	960	0	44	0	4
1784	17	1119	0	30	0	81	0	1200	40500	18	0	5101	0	60	211	700	7	0	7	7
1785	7	1610	0	46	0	60	0	923	32500	11	2	3967	3	120	196	510	0	0	3	2
1786	12	914	0	28	0	45	0	876	32000	13	0	5360	6	103	106	580	0	0	2	4
1787	23	1891	6	67	0	152	0	1092	40000	8	2	4866	15	274	277	1380	0	0	2	4
1788	9	2199	9	66	0	236	0	1810	56000	12	9	5045	13	6	111	940	0	0	2	2
1789	36	1608	0	43	0	155	24	1020	42000	29	20	4572	28	63	129	855	10	0	1	10
1790	18	1618	0	44	0	119	20	1843	56500	21	29	4310	10	314	172	1630	0	0	4	14
1791	7	1476	2	38	0	202	30	504	39000	44	14	4729	14	282	191	2548	49	0	2	2
1792	14	1429	0	18	1	159	0	570	46900	59	27	2945	8	48	170	1046	3	0	4	8
1793	18	1511	0	42	2	80	12	1395	43000	35	5	1608	15	86	269	90	4	0	2	4
1794	25	1732	0	26	0	82	23	1177	54100	12	22	726	15	251	428	240	29	0	3	7
1795	33	2781	110	62	0	123	30	1103	41700	19	82	1967	36	459	644	3600	35	0	3	7
1796	12	1722	2	19	0	335	10	627	34000	30	36	3429	92	262	387	1797	87	0	10	10
1797	5	1170	94	30	1	312	31	669	28700	24	13	2984	19	49	376	1720	133	90	9	3
1798	18	1726	0	60	1	189	36	900	47000	34	22	1116	18	170	506	580	73	190	1	12
1799	24	1622	0	52	8	178	60	1022	63300	18	43	2832	28	214	419	1680	165	91	4	6
1800	20	1910	130	75	0	67	27	715	32300	18	70	2639	35	0	340	1455	182	115	9	9

FIGURE 9.1.1: ALBANY FORT FUR RETURNS, 1783 to 1800

arrived at York Factory with very few furs. They told Humphrey Marten that they had been forced to trade with the "Pedlars."⁹ On June 2, 1786, a group of Homeguard Cree who traded at York Factory acknowledged that they had previously traded with the Canadians.¹⁰ The Canadian trading post was located a few days journey upriver from York Factory, in the middle track.¹¹ The exact location of this post is uncertain, but it may have been situated on Cross Lake (see figure 9.1.2). In 1789-90, a Canadian post operated on Gull Lake, about 120 miles inland from York Factory.¹² In 1791, several Nelson River Cree arrived at York Factory with more information about the Canadian competition. They reported that: "the Canadian traders are so numerous, no Indian can rest with his family without having one or more of these people continually visiting them and collecting their furs as soon as killed."¹³

In 1793, the Canadian traders built a post near "Pathepow neepce," or Deep Water Lake (Oxford Lake). Joseph Colen was especially concerned about the impact of this post

⁹HBCA, B.239/a/82, fo. 48d.

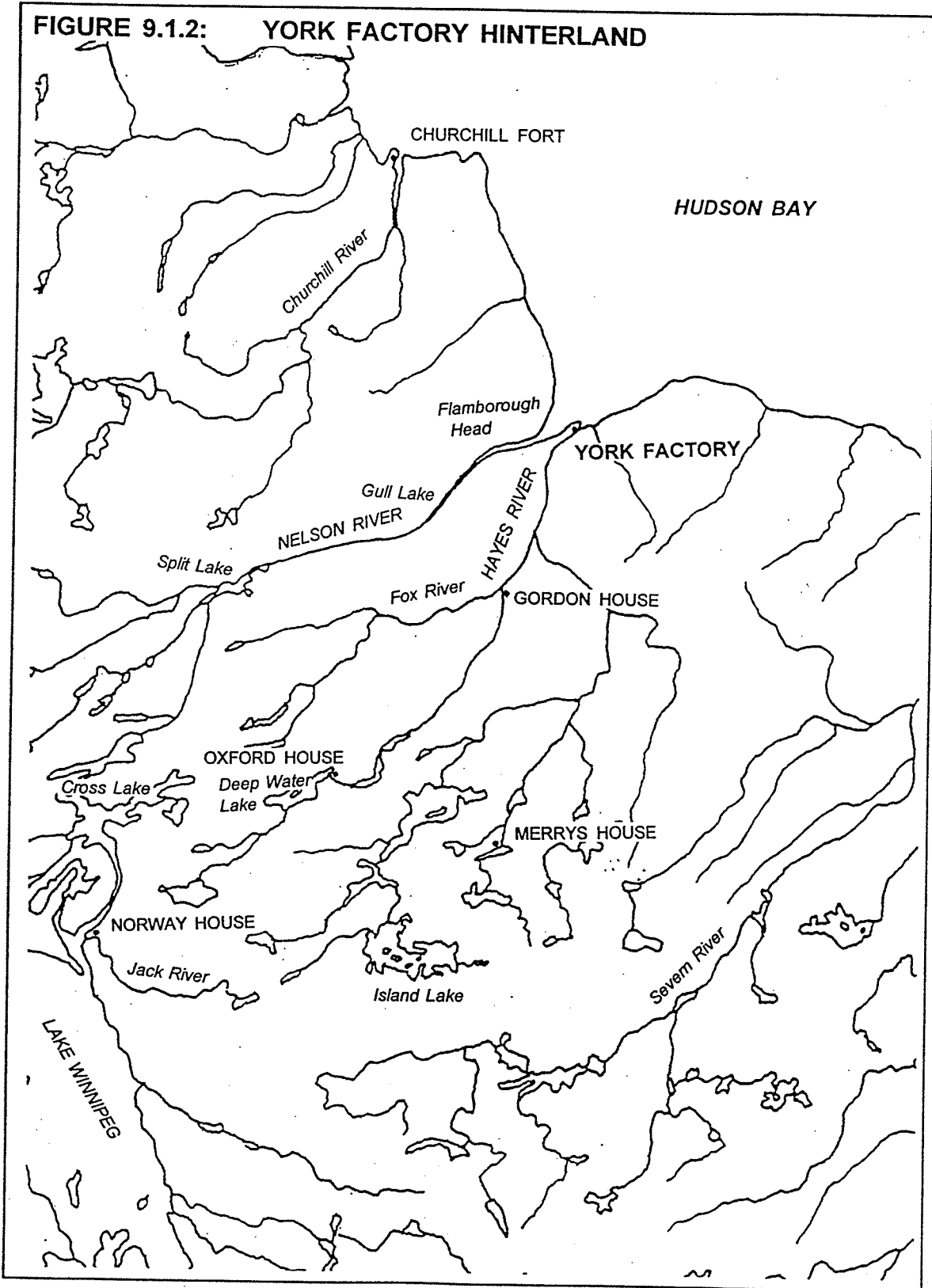
¹⁰HBCA, B.239/a/86, fo. 38d.

¹¹The middle track was the route from the Saskatchewan River that followed Cross Lake, Bigstone River and Fox River to the Hayes River (Morse, 1979: 38).

¹²This was probably Gull Lake on the lower Nelson River. This lake was depicted on Philip Turnor's map of the Churchill, Nelson and Hayes Rivers in 1779 (HBCA, G.2/11, reproduced in Ruggles, 1991: plate 12).

¹³HBCA, B.239/a/91, June 19, 1791, fo. 25.

FIGURE 9.1.2: YORK FACTORY HINTERLAND



because it was "in the centre of the wintering grounds of my Home Guard up this river."¹⁴ In 1796, the HBC traders at York Factory learned about a Canadian trading post on the Jack River (near present Norway House). Joseph Colen remarked that it was "almost in the Centre of York Fort Home Guard Hunters."¹⁵

The strategy of the Canadian traders was designed to keep the York Factory men pinned down to the lower country to prevent the HBC from establishing posts in more profitable places like the Athabasca country. Along the Nelson River, Canadian traders were very active in 1792-93. Joseph Colen observed that: "the Canadian masters declare that their expenditure of goods last season has been double the value of the Furr's collected by them. They are liberal in distributing their Liquor among the Natives below to keep the Honourable Company's servants in action, and to prevent their being employed in places where greater profit arises, which enables them to do much in opposing the lower settlements."¹⁶

As a result of intensive competition, HBC and Canadian traders urged the Lowland Cree and other subarctic Indians to kill as many fur bearers as possible, especially beaver.

¹⁴HBCA, B.239/a/95, March 17, 1793, fo. 22d. S.J.C. Cumming, a HBC trader who was in charge of Oxford House in 1929, explained the meaning of the Lowland Cree name for Oxford Lake. Cumming observed that: "The lake is known to the Indians as *Pinapowinapheek Sagahagin*, meaning Deep Hole Lake. This name is derived from a small inlet off the northwest end of the lake, which is so deep as to be popularly supposed to be bottomless by the Indians of the district" (Cumming, 1929: 225).

¹⁵HBCA, B.239/a/99, May 31, 1796, fo. 14.

¹⁶HBCA, B.239/a/95, June 3, 1793, fo. 32.

By 1805, the fur trade competition in the upper country had reached its peak, and the stress on the fur resources was clearly evident. On the borders of the Lowlands, new techniques were employed to maximize fur returns. For example, Canadian fur traders employed Indians from the St. Lawrence valley to hunt and trap furs. These Indians, mainly Iroquois from the Montreal region, were employed specifically to hunt beaver. On May 16, 1805, Lowland Cree from the Martins Fall area reported that Iroquois employed by the Canadian traders "hunt up all the Beaver."¹⁷ Upriver from Martins Fall, the HBC traders noted the extreme competition for furs. John Hodgson commented that: "there is now such an increase in Traders from Canada, that it is with great difficulty to get a skin from the Natives, unless a man is constantly with them to take the Beaver out of the hole."¹⁸

¹⁷HBCA, B.3/a/107, May 16, 1805, fo. 14d. HBC traders reported the impact of Iroquois trappers as early as 1802-03. John McNab, who was in charge of York Factory, learned about these matters from HBC inland traders. McNab related that: "these Iroquois are adding greatly to the failure of our exertions inland, they are now some hundreds who winter and summer in the best beaver grounds, are regularly agreed to the Canadian masters who pay them 10 livres for every pound of beaver skin and have them bound not to trade one with us under a penalty of them giving them 10 skins (for nothing) for every one they barter with us" (HBCA, B.239/a/107, July 6, 1803, fo. 33).

¹⁸HBCA, B.3/a/107, July 3, 1805, fo. 28d. After the amalgamation of the X,Y. Company with the North West Company in 1805, numbers of Canadian traders were left unemployed. Some of these so-called freemen remained to hunt and trap furs on their own. In 1808, Peter Fidler, a HBC inland trader, reported on the growing numbers of freemen in the country. According to his account, he met "a number of Canadians, between 20 and 30, under the denomination of free men; they had all served the NWCo, after leaving their service had gone down to Canada and being free of their former masters had agreed among themselves to return to the interior country to hunt (chiefly Beaver) for themselves" (HBCA, B.239/a/114, June 25, 1808, fo. 27). A number of freemen were active in the Lowlands. For example, on August 1, 1809, a man named George Brown who was described as a "half Canadian" arrived at Albany Fort to trade furs (HBCA, B.3/a/111, fo. 19d). Another Canadian freeman who hunted near Albany

As beaver populations dwindled in the early 1800s, Canadian traders encouraged neighbouring Upland Indians to hunt in the Lowlands. For example, in 1815-16, the HBC traders reported that numbers of Northern Ojibway who lived near Lake Nipigon had hunted beaver near Martins Fall. William Thomas, who was in charge of the Martins Fall trading post, remarked that: "it is the policy in the Canadians sending their Indians into this part to hunt for were they to remain on their own lands their hunts would be trifling."¹⁹ John Davis, who was in charge of Martins Fall post in 1819, observed that the local Indians complained of the encroachment of Indians from the south on their hunting grounds. He wrote that: "the Canadian Indians had come down on their grounds in the fall of the year and had since left them and carried off all the Beaver in these parts."²⁰

By the early 1800s, the beaver resource in the Hudson Bay Lowlands had declined to very low numbers. In 1810, William Cook, who was in charge of York Factory, remarked that he had received "very few Beaver skins - indeed these animals are nearly extirpated in the low country."²¹ Cook noted that the Lowland Cree who lived in the

Fort with his family was Jean Baptiste Rousseau (HBCA, B.3/a/113, January 20, 1810, fo. 7d).

¹⁹HBCA, B.78/e/2, fo. 4.

²⁰HBCA, B.123/e/1, fos. 3-3d.

²¹HBCA, B.239/a/116, May 9, 1810, fo. 17d. According to retrospective comments made by HBC traders, beaver were once relatively abundant in the Hudson Bay Lowlands. Alexander Kennedy, who was in charge of Albany Fort in 1826-27, observed

area between York Factory and Oxford House traded very few beaver skins, and he explained that: "This proves the poverty of the latter country at the same time that it assures us of the truth of the Indians assertion that the Beaver being annihilated."²² In 1812, Cook remarked that: "the scarcity of furs in all directions around the Factory is without a parallel."²³

The Albany Fort district report for 1815-16 listed the names of the Lowland Cree who traded at the post (see figure 9.1.3). That report also enumerated the value of the furs brought by each hunter, and the proportion of beaver skins in the returns. These figures indicate that the total value of furs in 1815-16 amounted to 3,189 made beaver. The value of beaver skins was 1,004 made beaver, or less than one-third of the total returns. As figure 9.1.3 shows, some Lowland Cree Hunters brought in relatively large quantities of beaver skins while others brought in few or none. For example, Missiscape (n.ward) traded 107 beaver skins from a total of 147 made beaver value in furs. Others, such as Weemeshoes, brought in very few beaver skins (11) with the rest of the furs that amounted to 102 made beaver. It is evident that the hunters who brought in greater

that: "Beavers have been once numerous throughout this District" (HBCA, B.3/e/13, fo. 2). George Barnston, who was in charge of the HBC post at Martins Fall in 1839, remarked that the nearby "swamps" were "rich in Beaver in days of Yor" (HBCA, B.123/e/14, fo. 5).

²²HBCA, B.239/a/117, June 5, 1811, fo. 7d. Steel beaver traps came into use in the York Factory area after the beaver populations had declined. The first evidence of these traps in the HBC journals was noted in the winter of 1814-15 (HBCA, B.239/a/121, December 23, 1814, fo. 11d).

²³HBCA, B.239/a/118, April 9, 1812, fo. 10d.

FIGURE 9.1.3: ALBANY FORT LOWLAND CREE HUNTERS, 1815-16

NAME	MB	COMMENTS
Abokay	119	9 beaver skins; the rest are marten, a few otter, feathers and quills
" son	89	9 beaver skins; the rest are marten and a few feathers and quills
Annaquachass	58	3 1/2 beaver skins; the rest are marten except 1 otter, 1 fox and a few feathers and quills
Athamacash	55	36 1/2 beaver skins; the rest are marten, otter, rabbit, feathers and quills
Cocketicoose	100	20 beaver skins; the rest are marten, feathers, quills and castoreum
Cooper	94	65 beaver skins; the rest are marten, otter, feathers and quills
Coppeepunicawe	37	9 beaver skins; the rest are marten
Coppipuck	43	8 1/2 beaver skins; the rest are marten, a few otter and quills
Footrecob	1	took debt at Moose Fort; old debt is 50 1/2 MB
George Sutherland	84	26 1/2 beaver skins; the rest are otter, marten, feathers and quills
Hookemawkeeshick	n/a	has not been in yet; old debt is 52 MB
Itisquakeeshick	138	61 1/2 beaver skins; the rest are marten, a few otter and castoreum
Iass	102	12 1/2 beaver skins; the rest are marten and a few otter
Jack Kipling	12	3 1/2 beaver skins; the rest are marten
Jack Spence + sons	n/a	have not been in yet
Kettamoack	110	53 1/2 beaver skins; the rest are marten
Kitcheeogumaw	30	11 beaver skins; the rest are muskrat; transferred him and his debt to Albany Inland
Missiscape (s.ward)	86	4 1/2 beaver skins; the rest are small furs, feathers and quills
Missiscape (n.ward)	146	107 beaver skins; the rest are marten, quills, feathers and castoreum
Mistun	n/a	has not been in yet
Missawayquon	58	33 beaver skins; the rest are marten, feathers and quills
Missinahagen	57	1 1/2 beaver skins; the rest are quills, feathers, marten and rabbit
" son	83	marten, fox, feathers and quills
Mistappy (Erch.k)	25	3 beaver skins; the rest are marten, feathers and quills
Mistappy (Erch.k) " son	14	7 beaver skins; he traded at Attawapiscat in winter
Mistappy (Amoe)	94	49 beaver skins; the rest are marten, otter, muskrat and castoreum
" son	68	31 1/2 beaver skins; the rest are marten, feathers and quills
Old Monk	25	chiefly marten
Neepeenucase	67	9 1/2 beaver skins; the rest are marten, a few otter, feathers and quills

FIGURE 9.1.3: ALBANY FORT LOWLAND CREE HUNTERS, 1815-16

Nequee	120	marten, fox, feathers, quills, otter and mink
Pimmisitty	163	64 1/2 beaver skins, the rest are marten, otter, castoreum, feathers and quills
Palesheesk	63	33 1/2 beaver skins; the rest are otter, marten, feathers and quills
Pinnatakay	131	20 beaver skins; the rest are marten; feathers and quills
Puckistiquon	73	18 beaver skins; the rest are marten; feathers and quills
Shanquace	109	70 1/2 beaver skins; the rest are marten, castoreum, feathers and quills
Sheshequon	111	79 1/2 beaver skins; the rest are marten, muskrat, castoreum, otter, feathers and quills
Skoota	61	50 beaver skins; the rest are chiefly marten
Shenap	97	16 1/2 beaver skins; the rest are marten, otter, fox, quills, feathers and castoreum
" brother	40	4 beaver skins; the rest are marten, otter, quills and feathers
Tacacappo	n/a	debt is 86 MB; has not been in since the fall of 1814
" son	n/a	has not yet come in
Tokeeegee	84	37 1/2 beaver skins; the rest are marten, feathers and quills
Wauchusk	31	1 1/2 beaver skins
Wapastue	72	7 beaver skins; the rest are marten, feathers and quills
Weekaw	72	7 beaver skins; the rest are marten, feathers and quills
Weemeshoes	102	11 beaver skins; the rest are marten, fox, otter, muskrat and quills
Weewaasaise	14	1 beaver skin; the rest are marten, quills and feathers
" son	51	7 1/2 beaver skins; the rest are chiefly marten

numbers of beaver skins were Half-Homeguard Cree who lived farther away from the coast. This was pointed out by Jacob Corrigal in 1818, when he reported that the "Beaver Hunters" were "Inland Indians." In contrast, the coastal Homeguard Cree who lived near Albany Fort brought in mainly marten skins, which Corrigal noted were "the principal fur animal near the coast."²⁴ Figure 9.1.3 also indicates the importance of goose quills and feathers in the Albany Fort trade in 1815-16.

The fur returns at Albany Fort continued to decline through the 1817-18 season, as many Albany River Lowland Cree traded at Severn House. Figure 9.1.4 shows the Albany Fort fur returns by individual hunter, and illustrates the downward trend in the total value of furs between 1815 and 1818. These data also show the variability in the value of furs traded by individual Lowland Cree hunters. A number of the hunters were enumerated with sons or brothers, which affirms the patrilocal configuration of Lowland Cree hunting groups. Some of the hunters who traded furs at Albany Fort were women, an indication that the role of women in Lowland Cree society was more complex than their portrayal in the existing literature. In 1819-20, the Albany Fort fur returns began to increase, which reflected in large measure the return of Lowland Cree hunters who had previously traded at Severn House.

In 1819, John Work, who was in charge of Severn House, observed that: "The beaver are decreasing in number annually. The Indians complain that few beaver are to be got

²⁴B.145/e/6, fo. 4d.

FIGURE 9.1.4: ALBANY FORT LOWLAND CREE HUNTERS, 1815-21

NAME OF HUNTER	1815-16 made beaver	1816-17 made beaver	1817-18 made beaver	1819-20 made beaver	1820-21 made beaver
ABOKAY	119				
" son	89				
ANNAQUCHASS	58			78	33
ATHAMACASH	55	26	75	64	91
COCKETICOOSE	100	42	65		
COOPER	94	96	20		
COPPEPUNICAWE	37	16	87	82	
COPPIPUCK (+2 brothers; ++2 sons)	43	16		196+	308++
FOOTRECOB	1	27	7	148	152
GEORGE SUTHERLAND (+sons)	84	150	92	214+	218
HOOKEEMAWKEESHICK	n.d.				
ITISQUOKEESHICK	138	72	94	184	196
IASS	102				
JACK KIPLING (+sons)	12	54	51	182+	151
JACK SPENCE + sons	n.d.				
JACKOBBISH		29	16		
" step-son				60	
JIMMY					60
KEEASH				93	163
KETTAMOACK	110				
KEESHEESHICK		11		29	15
KITCHEEOGUMAW	30				
MISSISCAPE s.ward	86	29	55		
MISSISCAPE n.ward	146	127	70		
MISTUN	n.d.				
MISSAWAYQUON (Jackobish's brother)	58	69		13	38
MISSINAHAGEN	57	25	11		
" son	83	67	11		
MISTAPPY (ERCH.K) (+wife)	25		51	108	108+

FIGURE 9.1.4: ALBANY FORT LOWLAND CREE HUNTERS, 1815-21

NAME OF HUNTER	1815-16 made beaver	1816-17 made beaver	1817-18 made beaver	1819-20 made beaver	1820-21 made beaver
" son	14		52	120	125
MISTAPPY (AMOE)	94	70			
" son	68	75			
OLD MONK	25				
MUCQUATOOM		18		90	168
NEEPEENUCASE	67	31	35	155	224
NEEPEENUCASE'S son					16
NEEOTABUN				21	
NEQUEE	120	28			
PIMMISITTY (+sons)	163	263+	39+	295+	401+
PALESHEESK	63		12	120	150
PINNATAKAY	131				
PUCKISTIQUON	73		27	94	151
SHANQUACE	109	118	52	110	134
" son					46
SHEEAMOE (+brother)				144	255+
SHAWEWETUM					40
SHESHEQUON	111		42	180	67
SKOOTA	61	55			118
" brother				100	
SHENAP	97				
" brother	40				
SHEEWEENAPPO				185	95
" brother + mother					72
" brother's son				68	
TACACAPPO	n.d.				
" son	n.d.				
TAPASEE				22	32
TOKEEGEE	84	55			
WAUCHUSK	31	33	44	56	34
WAPASTUE	72	48			89

FIGURE 9.1.4: ALBANY FORT LOWLAND CREE HUNTERS, 1815-21

NAME OF HUNTER	1815-16 made beaver	1816-17 made beaver	1817-18 made beaver	1819-20 made beaver	1820-21 made beaver
" sons					41
WEECOWASS'S mother + brother					67
WEEKAW	72				65
" sons					90
WEEMESHOES	102				
WESAW				17	36
WEESHASHUSK (Annakuchass's son)					19
WEEWEESAIS	14				
" son	51	47			91
TOTAL	3,189	1,697	1,008	3,228	4,159

anywhere near the sea coast."²⁵ The beaver population near Henley House was reported to have declined greatly by 1821. John Davis remarked that: "the great decrease of the beaver, formerly the principle fur procured from here [Henley House]."²⁶ In the area around Martins Fall, the HBC traders also noted the decline in beaver. Jacob Corrigan, who was in charge of Martins Fall post in 1824, observed that: "Beaver are now very much exhausted in this quarter."²⁷ Corrigan compared the beaver returns in 1812, 1823 and 1824 to illustrate the substantive decline in beaver in the area (see figure 9.1.5).

FIGURE 9.1.5: HBC BEAVER TRADE AT MARTINS FALL POST, 1812, 1823 and 1824.			
skin type	1812	1823	1824
large beaver	1,684	750	257
small beaver	900	409	75
total	2,584	1,159	332

The decline in beaver in the Hudson Bay Lowlands was noticed by the HBC traders

²⁵HBCA, B.198/e/2, fo. 2d. Work noted that: "The Indians assign two reasons for the deficiency in beaver, some say that the country is entirely hunted up, which I believe is the case in some places near the coast. Others again affirm that in some parts of the District [inland] beaver are still pretty numerous, but on the account of the great quantity of snow which entirely filled up the small rivers and creeks so that the haunts of the beaver could not be found" (*ibid*: fo. 3).

²⁶HBCA, B.123/e/5, fo. 1.

²⁷HBCA, B.123/e/8, fo. 4.

because of the impact on its commercial business, but the Lowland Cree were also deprived of a significant food resource. In 1815, James Swain, who was in charge of Severn House, observed that: "Formerly when the Beaver were numerous the natives easily obtained a considerable supply of their most favourite food by hunting them, but since they became so scarce their means of subsistence is much more precarious."²⁸

The HBC and Canadian traders escalated their use of liquor as an incentive to increase the production of furs. The use of liquor increased substantially in the period between 1783 and 1821. Spurred on by growing competition inland and the dependence on the Lowland Cree for provisions, the quantity of liquor traded and given away by the HBC increased rapidly. In 1786, Humphrey Marten, who was in charge of York Factory, explained that: "It is impossible for me to prevent them from getting liquor....Indeed your Honours servants are obliged to give them a little occasionally to form a friendship with them or keep an old one up."²⁹

In 1793, Joseph Colen, who was in charge of York Factory, wrote extensively about the rising liquor trade that was spurred on by competition with Canadian traders. Colen remarked that:

These Canadian Traders are so artful, it is impossible to keep the few skins the Indians procure from them, as they attend their tents with liquor, and collect the produce of their hunt almost immediately on animals being

²⁸HBCA, B.198/e/1, fo. 8d.

²⁹HBCA, B.239/a/86, July 17, 1786, fo. 47d.

killed. This induced the Indians to remove their Tents to a greater distance from these enterprising Traders and nearer the to the Factory, while others who cannot refrain from liquor employ their young men hunting to purchase a supply, by which many are kept almost in a continual state of intoxication.³⁰

Colen continued:

I am in hopes they are now convinced that it is not in their interest to trade their Winter furs with the Canadians for liquor. But their liberality to Indians in this article has made them a depraved race, and their whole time is taken up in drinking. The number of Natives who have fallen victims to intoxication within these two years past are many, and should the Natives [Canadians] continue their practice of carrying their strong spirits to the tents of Natives I much fear the whole country will soon be depopulated.³¹

The rapid increase in the use of liquor by fur traders in the Hudson Bay Lowlands paralleled the liquor trade in the upland region.³² Most of the liquor was given to the Lowland Cree free, in the form of gifts. Very little liquor was traded directly for furs. Figure 9.1.6 shows the volume of liquor used by the HBC traders at Albany Fort between 1783 and 1806. It can be seen that the liquor trade peaked in 1794-95, when 1,237 gallons of brandy used in the Albany Fort hinterland. By comparison, the total amount of liquor used before 1763, when large numbers of Upland Indians were involved

³⁰HBCA, B.239/a/95, March 17, 1793, fo. 22d.

³¹HBCA, B.239/a/95, August 7, 1793, fos. 44d-45.

³²There was a rapid increase in the liquor trade by Albany Fort upland traders in the Little North. At its peak, in 1798-99, the volume of brandy exceeded 2,500 gallons (Lytwyn, 1987: 124).

FIGURE 9.1.6: HBC LIQUOR TRADE AT ALBANY FORT, 1783-1806

YEAR	GIFTS gallons of brandy	TRADE gallons of brandy	TOTAL gallons of brandy
1783-84	796	61	857
1784-85	783	25	808
1785-86	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.
1786-87	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.
1787-88	890	162	1052
1788-89	909	54	963
1789-90	936	47	983
1790-91	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.
1791-92	1106	20	1126
1792-93	836	6	842
1793-94	963	29	992
1794-95	1198	39	1237
1795-96	607	33	640
1796-97	771	3	774
1797-98	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.
1798-99	243	123	365
1799-1800	377	56	433
1800-01	402	0	402
1801-02	474	50	524
1802-03	337	72	409
1803-04	326	33	359
1804-05	353	117	470
1805-06	386	156	542
1806-07	261	114	375

in the fur trade at Albany Fort, never exceeded 400 gallons per year.³³

Although over-hunting was a major cause of the depletion of beaver and other fur bearers, unusual weather patterns in the period between 1783 and 1821 contributed to the stress on animal populations. According to HBC fur traders³⁴, fluctuations in climate and precipitation played an important role in reducing the beaver population in the Hudson Bay Lowlands. William Falconer, who was in charge of Severn House in 1784-85, noted an extremely mild and dry winter. He observed that: "we have had the mildest weather and least snow ever known by the oldest Native living."³⁵ According to Lowland Cree reports at York Factory in 1793, many beaver were killed during widespread flooding that occurred during the spring of 1792.³⁶ In the fall of 1793, a prolonged drought was blamed for killing many beaver near York Factory. Joseph Colen reported that: "all the Natives complain this winter of a scarcity of Beaver, which they impute to the shoalness of the water in the Rivers in the Fall of the year which drained the water from their Houses that on opening them it has not been infrequent this winter to find all the Beaver it contained dead."³⁷ Colen recognized that prolonged drought could be more devastating to the beaver population than over-hunting. Colen observed

³³Ray and Freeman, 1978: 132-135.

³⁴Many of these observations were obtained from or confirmed by Lowland Cree informants.

³⁵HBCA, B.198/a/31, February 26, 1785, fo. 26d.

³⁶HBCA, B.239/a/95, March 17, 1793, fo. 22d.

³⁷HBCA, B.239/a/96, March 6, 1794, fo. 17d.

that:

Should this calamity prove universal over this extensive country, which God prevent, it is to be feared many of those valuable animals will fall victim to want more than by the hand of the hunter - instinct teaches them to avoid the snares of the latter, as it rarely happens that the whole family of a Beaver House is destroyed, their subteranious communications being so artfully contrived as to baffel the most experienced hunter; one or more generally escape, by which its species has been hitherto preserved, but a few seasons of Drought would entirely destroy the whole race. "³⁸

Fire was another factor contributing to the reduction in the numbers of animals in the region. Fuelled by drought, fires swept through the area near York Factory in the summer of 1794. On July 28, 1794, Joseph Colen reported that fires had been burning for five weeks, and he commented that: "great indeed must have been the destruction of animals by this devouring element and many score miles of woodland laid waste."³⁹ The drought that began in the fall of 1793, continued for several years. George Sutherland, who was in charge of York Factory in the summer of 1795, noted that the water level in the Hayes River was extremely low and commented that: "an Instance of this kind was never known before at this place."⁴⁰ Massive fires also burned near York Factory in the summer of 1799.⁴¹

³⁸HBCA, B.239/a/96, March 6, 1794, fo. 17d.

³⁹HBCA, B.239/a/96, July 28, 1794, fo. 48d. On July 9, 1794, Colen observed that: "the fire upwards continue with unabated violence. The Factory and for miles below is surrounded by clouds of smoak, and the sun appears thro' it like unto a Ball of fire" (HBCA, B.239/a/96, fo. 44).

⁴⁰HBCA, B.239/a/97, June 9, 1795, fo. 24d.

⁴¹HBCA, B.239/a/101, July 19, 1799, fo. 40d.

Unusual weather conditions continued to prevail in the early 1800s.⁴² For example, in the winter of 1806-07, remarkably mild temperatures were experienced near York Factory. On November 23, 1806, John McNab observed that: "so mild weather at so late a period was never before witnessed by the oldest native about the Factory, and there are two now on the plantation who well remember two vessels sent on discovery wintering in Ten Shilling Creek."⁴³ Severe drought was noted again in the summer of 1808 near York Factory. The HBC men who worked the boat brigades on the Hayes River noted the low water levels, and James Halcro reported that: "he has been 18 years going up and down the river, and never saw it so shoal."⁴⁴

By 1795, the combination of drought, fires and competition from nearby Canadian traders had reduced the beaver population around York Factory to very low numbers.⁴⁵ The Lowland Cree who traded at York Factory brought very few beaver skins, and George Sutherland commented that many had not hunted beaver. In 1796, many of the

⁴²Unusual weather patterns were also reported in the interior of the Little North. In 1804-05, a widespread drought occurred, which lowered water levels and made canoe travel difficult (Lytwyn, 1986: 109; Kemp, 1982: 34-41).

⁴³HBCA, B.239/a/113, fo. 6. The first Europeans to spend the winter in the area did so in 1682-83. The Lowland Cree who provided this information to McNab could not have witnessed the arrival of the Europeans, but appear to have related an oral tradition of that event.

⁴⁴HBCA, B.239/a/114, June 24, 1808, fo. 26d.

⁴⁵Calvin Martin suggested that epidemic diseases were responsible for the decline in beaver populations throughout the subarctic region of North America (Martin, 1976). However, the HBC documents from the Hudson Bay Lowlands provide no evidence that disease may have contributed to the decline in beaver populations.

Lowland Indians reported that beaver were very scarce throughout their hunting grounds. The unusually dry weather, and related fires, appear to have had a disruptive effect on the entire ecosystem of the Lowlands. In 1799, the Lowland Cree near York Factory reported that: "the coast is so impoverished they cannot provide food for their families and wish to get into a more plentiful country."⁴⁶ In the winter of 1799-1800, animals of all kinds were scarce near York Factory. John Ballanden remarked that: "a scarcity of provisions prevails in every direction this winter."⁴⁷

9.2 The Lowland Cree Provision Trade, 1783-1821:

The 1782-83 smallpox epidemic also caused a significant disruption in the provision trade at the coastal posts. At Albany Fort, many Homeguard Cree goose hunters were reluctant to hunt for the Company in the aftermath of the epidemic. Edward Jarvis, who was in charge of Albany Fort, noted this situation in the fall of 1784. Jarvis observed

⁴⁶HBCA, B.239/a/101, July 8, 1799, fo. 39.

⁴⁷HBCA, B.239/a/104, December 8, 1799, fo. 14. Despite the general decline in animal resources in the Lowlands, a few areas continued to support healthy animal populations. These were remote from the main areas of competition. For example, caribou and moose were reported to be plentiful in the Attawapiskat area in 1820. John Davis, who was in charge of Martins Fall trading post, noted that: "At Athowipiscat the Indians have had an abundant year the snow being deep they killed Deer and Moose which are plentiful in that quarter" (HBCA, B.123/e/4, fo. 9).

that: "eight canoes of Indians came in to the hunt, among the rest Old Wittituckye to take debt, having left his family and sons behind in a plentiful country terrified at the remembrance of the last years famine; so that we need to try every means for provisions they being without dispute the best goose hunters at Albany."⁴⁸ Jarvis later confirmed that Wittituckeye's family, along with several others decided to remain far away from Albany Fort, about half way to Severn House in the so-called Deer Country.⁴⁹ Wittituckeye explained that he would not hunt geese because he wished to remain in a "more plentiful country."⁵⁰ This was undoubtedly a reference to the caribou resource that was more plentiful along the northern coast near Cape Henrietta Maria.

The rapid expansion of the HBC inland fur trade after 1783 increased the Company's dependency on country provisions. The large increases in resident labourers, the expansion of the HBC transport network and the seasonal influx of inland traders required substantially greater quantities of provisions.⁵¹ The caribou provision trade in the northern parts of the Hudson Bay Lowlands increased rapidly as the HBC expanded its fur trade operations inland. In 1791, Joseph Colen, who was in charge of York Factory, commented that: "the large number of men at this Factory consume a vast

⁴⁸HBCA, B.3/a/82, August 21, 1784, fo. 48.

⁴⁹HBCA, B.3/a/118, September 5, 1715, fo. 38.

⁵⁰HBCA, B.3/a/83, fo. 6.

⁵¹The size of the HBC labour force increased substantially after 1783. The pre-epidemic labour force was about 200 men, and by 1795 that figure had tripled to about 600 men (Moodie, Kaye, Lytwyn and Ray, 1987: plate 65).

quantity of meat."⁵² The HBC traders encouraged the Lowland Cree to hunt caribou, and offered increasingly large rewards to obtain more caribou meat. These activities also drew in numbers of Lowland Cree from the Albany River area.⁵³

In a move to expedite the collection of caribou meat, fat, tongues and skins, the HBC traders at York Factory re-established a caribou provision post in 1790 at Flamborough Head on the Nelson River.⁵⁴ Joseph Colen noted that the post was rebuilt to "serve as a store room to receive venison from the Natives in the summer."⁵⁵ By the end of the summer, the HBC had collected 10,338 pounds of caribou meat at that post. In 1793, the York Factory traders stepped up their efforts to obtain caribou meat by posting several men at the Fourteens Goose Tent to remain all summer and trade caribou meat from the Lowland Cree. In 1794 the York Factory men built Gordon House at a place on the Hayes River (along a stretch of the river known then as the Hill River) called The Rock. That post functioned as a provision collection depot and as a forward supply post

⁵²HBCA, B.239/a/92, November 19, 1791, fo. 8d.

⁵³The Northern Ojibway who survived the smallpox epidemic also continued to hunt caribou near York Factory. In the fall of 1814, William Cook reported that Bungee Indians hunted caribou along the Pennycutaway River, about 30 miles above the factory (HBCA, B.239/a/121, October 7, 1815, fo. 3). Cook explained that name Pennycutaway was an anglicized version of the Indian name, Oo-pootha-cah-to-way, meaning the gnawing of beavers.

⁵⁴Joseph Colen described the post as "a substantial log tent about a mile beyond where the old Factory stood" (HBCA, B.239/a/90, May 7, 1790, fo. 41).

⁵⁵HBCA, B.239/a/90, April 25, 1790, fo. 38.

for the boat brigades on the Hayes River.

In the fall of 1809, the HBC sent men to a number of caribou crossing places along the Nelson River to trade caribou meat from the Lowland Cree hunters. In the fall of 1810, the York Factory traders built a provision post at the Deers Island in the Nelson River.⁵⁶ It was established to procure caribou meat in the fall and early winter. William Cook observed that: "our attention is chiefly directed to the Winter Deer which never fail to migrate to these parts in the month of November."⁵⁷ Procuring caribou meat at that time of the year was advantageous because it could be frozen for later use.

By 1800, the intense hunting pressure made the movements of the caribou herds less predictable, and hunting efforts less successful. John Ballanden, who was in charge of York Factory in 1800-01, observed that: "During my residence now in your Honours Service for 30 years, I have never observed the Indians so distressed for snow shoes as this, the poor creatures that arrived this day had snow shoes entirely made of boards, without the least netting in them, the first instance of this kind I have seen."⁵⁸ In 1807, the scarcity of caribou near York Factory was a major cause for concern by both the Lowland Cree and HBC traders. John McNab remarked that: "the oldest [Indian] among

⁵⁶The Deers Island was located near the mouth of the Nelson River, about 20 miles above the Seal Islands. The Deers Island was also known as the first crossing place on the Nelson River (HBCA, B.239/a/117, September 22, 1810, fo. 2).

⁵⁷HBCA, B.239/a/117, September 22, 1810, fo. 2d.

⁵⁸HBCA, B.239/a/105, December 16, 1800, fo. 18.

them saying they never saw such a summer of scarcity, or the deer to fail so long and so universally."⁵⁹ The unpredictability of the caribou migrations was noted again by McNab in 1807. He observed that: "last year [1806] coming down the [Hayes] river its banks were strewed with the carcasses of deer - now one cannot be got for the maintenance of their former destroyers."⁶⁰

Caribou continued to be scarce near York Factory in the summer of 1808. Many Lowland Cree sought relief at the factory, and John McNab was concerned about his ability to feed the Indians and his men. He wrote that: "last summer they [Indians] said was the scarcest ever known at York - what may they now say of this?"⁶¹ In 1813, the situation near York Factory had grown worse. Cook noted "the prevailing scarcity of last winter both as to provisions and furs, the like of which was never known."⁶²

⁵⁹HBCA, B.239/a/113, July 17, 1807, fo. 15.

⁶⁰HBCA, B.239/a/113, July 13, 1807, fo. 28d. While the migrations of the caribou became less predictable, herd sizes remained large into the first decade of the 19th century. William Cook described large herds of caribou crossing the Nelson River in the spring of 1812, and noted that some of the "stragglng herds" numbered 500 to 600 caribou (HBCA, B.239/a/118, April 3, 1812, fo. 9d).

⁶¹HBCA, B.239/a/114, August 16, 1808, fo. 17.

⁶²HBCA, B.239/a/120, August 17, 1813, fo. 28. Large kills of caribou were reported near York Factory in 1811-12. The wintering over of a large group of Red River settlers at the mouth of the Nelson River greatly increased the demand for caribou meat. In addition, the settlers were willing to pay more than the HBC, and this competition fuelled the caribou hunt by the Lowland Indians.

The magnitude of the caribou hunt in the Lowlands during the 1783-1821 period can be measured by examining the HBC's caribou skin trade. The impact of the smallpox epidemic temporarily dampened the upward trend in the caribou trade that had begun before 1782 (see chapter eight). However, the post-smallpox readjustment was rapid, and by the 1790s, the trade in caribou skins had increased to record levels.

The number of caribou skins traded at Severn House and York Factory between 1783-84 and 1811-12 is shown in figures 9.2.1 and 9.2.2. respectively. The caribou skin trade at Severn House peaked in 1792-93, with a total of 2,666 skins. The decline in the caribou skin trade thereafter was fairly rapid, and after 1811-12, no caribou skins were received at Severn House. The pattern at York Factory was similar, but the trade peaked about a decade later with 3,417 skins traded in 1804-05. The decline in the caribou skin trade at York Factory was even more precipitous than that at Severn House. By 1811-12, the caribou skin trade at York Factory had also reached its nadir.

The tactics employed by the HBC traders to obtain greater supplies of caribou put pressure on Lowland Cree hunters to harvest caribou far in excess of the numbers killed before 1783. In addition to supplying caribou during the spring and fall migrations, the Lowland Cree were recruited to hunt caribou year-round for the HBC posts. The change toward year-round hunting of caribou for the HBC can be seen in the amounts of venison traded at York Factory. Before 1783, very little venison or other caribou products were traded in the middle of summer or during the winter months. This pattern began to

FIGURE 9.2.1: HBC CARIBOU SKIN TRADE AT SEVERN HOUSE, 1784-1812

YEAR	BUCK	DOE	FAWN	TOTAL
1783-84	2	24	0	26
1784-85	59	408	10	477
1785-86	268	657	4	929
1786-87	220	400	0	620
1787-88	403	735	0	1138
1788-89	477	333	68	878
1789-90	607	561	32	1200
1790-91	738	559	31	1328
1791-92	1327	754	58	2139
1792-93	1580	884	202	2666
1793-94	662	570	65	1297
1794-95	1000	524	28	1552
1795-96	1690	762	67	2519
1796-97	695	827	44	1566
1797-98	590	331	0	921
1798-99	371	457	64	892
1799-1800	633	962	140	1735
1800-01	295	364	60	719
1801-02	265	670	40	975
1802-03	100	539	100	739
1803-04	90	364	120	574
1804-05	278	90	80	448
1805-06	32	17	0	49
1806-07	0	160	0	160
1807-08	77	226	80	383
1808-09	53	304	0	357
1809-10	0	0	0	0
1810-11	0	0	0	0
1811-12	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	46

FIGURE 9.2.2: HBC CARIBOU SKIN TRADE AT YORK FACTORY, 1784-1812

YEAR	BUCK	DOE	FAWN	TOTAL
1783-84	143	93	0	236
1784-85	188	213	0	401
1785-86	430	330	10	770
1786-87	1015	719	36	1770
1787-88	560	750	40	1350
1788-89	590	426	100	1116
1789-90	786	540	0	1326
1790-91	592	420	176	1188
1791-92	481	514	60	1055
1792-93	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	200
1793-94	290	570	0	860
1794-95	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
1795-96	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
1796-97	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
1797-98	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
1798-99	418	1080	0	1498
1799-1800	845	710	0	1555
1800-01	226	322	0	548
1801-02	862	439	0	1301
1802-03	489	616	0	1105
1803-04	905	1170	0	2075
1804-05	1759	1698	0	3417
1805-06	1540	1480	0	3020
1806-07	1324	1418	0	2742
1807-08	1150	1208	0	2358
1808-09	1472	340	0	1812
1809-10	230	258	0	488
1810-11	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
1811-12	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	264

change after 1783 and, at the height of the caribou trade in the early 1800s, the Lowland Cree supplied these products year-round to the HBC traders at York Factory. Figure 9.2.3 shows the quantity of venison traded at York Factory monthly from 1787 to 1809.

By 1815, the caribou herds had been reduced to such low numbers that the Lowland Cree found it difficult to secure enough for their own food requirements. William Cook, who was in charge of York Factory in 1815, observed that: "No dependence can be placed upon supplies of meat [caribou]. The Indians tho good Hunters can scarcely support themselves."⁶³ In 1827, Simon McGillivray jr., who was in charge of Severn House, reported that caribou were generally unavailable near the post. He noted that: "The means of procuring subsistence is very limited at Severn House, and were it not for the Wild Fowl, that are killed Spring and Autumn, it would be impossible to maintain a post there."⁶⁴

The over-exploitation of caribou by the Lowland Cree (and Northern Ojibway) appears to have been contrary to their respect for animals that can be found in many historical accounts.⁶⁵ However, it is also apparent that the Lowland Cree did not associate their increasing harvest of the caribou resource to be responsible for the decline in the caribou

⁶³HBCA, B.239/e/1, fo. 4d.

⁶⁴HBCA, B.198/e/7, fo. 1. McGillivray noted that only seven caribou tongues, 590 pounds of venison, 117 pounds of "half-dry meat" and nine pounds of dried venison was traded at Severn House in 1826-27 (*ibid*: fo. 6).

⁶⁵See, for example, Nelson, 1988.

FIGURE 9.2.3: HBC CARIBOU PROVISION TRADE (venison, lbs) AT YORK FACTORY, 1787-1809

YEAR	August	September	October	November	December	January	February	March	April	May	June	July
1787-88	2,353	260						60		7,315	2,007	2,511
1788-89	4,694	1,885		262						311	2,630	241
1789-90	4,607	262	164							3,557	3,661	875
1790-91	6,754	4,338	53							2,200	2,083	3,969
1791-92	1,532	250	86					84	719	179	4,448	2,348
1792-93	760	136							84	844	887	5,762
1793-94	188	124	48	96				126		851	3,043	1,827
1794-95	332	245	140						91	276	5,851	169
1795-96	225	117						124		1,459	7,320	126
1796-97	360	126	156	490	317				108	2,460	1,953	1,520
1797-98	4,860	1,953	260	210	50	163				180	672	489
1798-99	2,668	3,985	30	2,027	969	403				320	218	960
1799-1800	2,384	1,384	209	370	178	778	673	456	377	266	1,413	516
1800-01	1,838	1,457	220	82	151	351	343	162		3,087	1,365	794
1801-02	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.
1802-03	2,284	711	847	567	1,224	573	244	119	194	88	1,812	701
1803-04	1,398	640	1,065	491	570	208	56	140	62	411	590	594
1804-05	2,796	1,887	623	277	200	42	14	82	309	941	1,337	110
1805-06	1,293	1,018	656	134	218	128	100	54	212	749	1,348	713
1806-07	1,934	902	548	16	8	10	76	36	100	1,476	522	102
1807-08	2,325	2,491	795	56	72	50	61	113	40	426	125	106
1808-09	328	1,836	425		186	70	80	184	770	134	167	210

population. In fact, there is ample evidence to suggest that the opposite was true. The widespread belief among the Lowland Cree that killing more caribou would result in larger numbers returning in the future was recorded by several European observers. For example, in 1720, the HBC trader at Churchill Fort remarked that: "it being a Superstition amongst them the more [caribou] they kill, the plentier they are."⁶⁶ Robert Brightman has recently documented other historical references to the same belief system among the Lowland Cree and neighbouring subarctic Indian groups. Brightman observed that:

The availability of animals to hunters and trappers was understood as subject to ritual influence, but the idea that hunting pressure could reduce species populations in the long term and on a large scale was absent. Instead, when killed, butchered, consumed, and disposed of with "respect," animals were understood to regenerate or to be reborn in proportion to the numbers killed.⁶⁷

Although the Lowland Cree believed that the caribou they killed would return to replenish the stock, the hunting of caribou beyond the limit of sustainable harvest was also linked to the HBC's policy of exerting pressure on the Lowland Cree to supply increasing quantities of skins and meat. By 1821, the massive caribou herds had been thinned to the point of near extinction, and a major Lowland Cree resource was no longer available.

⁶⁶HBCA, B.42/a/1, April 30, 1720, fo. 76.

⁶⁷Brightman, 1987: 131-132.

In the southern parts of the Hudson Bay Lowlands, near Albany Fort and Moose Fort, the HBC came to depend on greater production from the Lowland Cree goose hunts in order to facilitate inland expansion. In 1784, Edward Jarvis at Albany Fort noted the importance of the goose hunt in the business plans of the Company. Jarvis observed that the goose hunt was "the very hinge [upon which] our upland business must turn."⁶⁸

A major problem in attracting the Lowland Cree to hunt geese for the HBC was the growing inability of the Company to provide reciprocal supplies of food to the Indians in times of need. Edward Jarvis recorded the following speech made by an Albany River Lowland Cree hunter in 1784: "To be sure we will [not] exert ourselves in killing you plover when you will not give us flour, and if you will not let us have your english provisions we wont hunt for you."⁶⁹ The Lowland Cree realized that the HBC needed more supplies of country provisions to develop their inland trading networks, and used this to gain more from the Company. Jarvis concluded that: "they seem to be fully sensible of their own importance."⁷⁰

⁶⁸HBCA, B.3/a/83, fo. 6. Production figures are available for some years at Albany Fort. For example, in 1786-87, the HBC received 9,539 geese (HBCA, B.3/z/2, fo. 303); in 1795-96 the HBC harvest was 7,832 geese (HBCA, B.3/d/106, fo. 68d); and in 1805-06 the production was 7,848 geese (HBCA, B.3/d/117, fo. 59d). Salted geese were also used to provision some of the inland trading posts. For example, in the spring of 1790, 1,000 geese were sent to Henley House (HBCA, B.3/a/91, May 15, 1790, fo. 26d).

⁶⁹HBCA, B.3/a/83, fo. 7.

⁷⁰HBCA, B.3/a/83, fo. 7d.

The Albany River Lowland Cree who hunted geese for the HBC demanded more goods from the Company in return for their services. Liquor was an item that became indispensable in conducting the Albany goose hunts. In the fall of 1785, Edward Jarvis commented that: "it is a pity we had not more hunters or those few we have would refrain from drinking while they fly, but I find it impossible to prevent it as they say Brandy is the chief inducement for their hunting at all."⁷¹

The HBC employed significantly greater resources in the goose hunts near Albany Fort during the 1783-1821 period. In 1812, the HBC traders at Albany Fort built a post at the mouth of Capusco Creek. Called the Capusco Goose Tent, it was described as a "log tent" and it was designed to increase the number of geese, feathers and quills obtained by the Company. By 1815 the HBC traders had redoubled their efforts by building a second Goose Tent at the mouth of Chickney Creek.

Although Albany Fort's inland trade was significantly reduced after 1810⁷², demand for country provisions remained high. The establishment of a timber operation at Moose Factory required substantial supplies of country provisions, especially geese. In the summer of 1814, 27 casks of salted geese were shipped from Albany Fort to Moose Factory.⁷³ In 1815, 4,000 geese were supplied to Moose Factory.⁷⁴

⁷¹HBCA, B.3/a/86, October 4, 1785, fo. 2d.

⁷²Lytwyn, 1986: 129-139.

⁷³HBCA, B.3/a/117a, July 4, 1814, fo. 18d.

The growing importance of geese in the provision requirements of the HBC can be seen in the Company's expenditures on the goose hunts. At Albany Fort, the annual expenditure more than doubled from 623 made beaver in 1781-82, to 1,400 made beaver in 1797-98. The trade in goose quills and feathers provided another indicator of the increased emphasis on the goose hunt at Albany Fort. The trade in goose quills grew from an average of 53,600 per year in the 1770s, to over 90,000 in the first decade of the 1800s. The increase in the feather trade rose from an average of 1,480 pounds in the 1770s to 1,822 pounds in the first decade of the 1800s. These increases are even more significant if the decrease in the Homeguard Cree population after the smallpox epidemic is taken into account.

Despite the growing demand for geese at the HBC posts, many of the Lowland Cree were uninterested in hunting geese while other resources, especially caribou, were abundant. In 1792, Joseph Colen tried unsuccessfully to persuade a group of Lowland Cree to hunt geese for the Company. The situation became critical in 1794, and 12 families of Churchill Homeguard Cree (formerly York Factory Homeguard Cree) were sent to York Factory to hunt geese.⁷⁵ These families had previously lived near York Factory and, after the spring goose hunt, refused to return to Churchill. The HBC was powerless to dictate where they should live. As Joseph Colen remarked, "[they] tell me if I attempt to force them, they have it in their power to prevail on many of their

⁷⁴HBCA, B.3/a/118, April 13, 1815, fo. 25.

⁷⁵HBCA, B.239/a/96, May 14, 1794, fo. 23d.

Relations (with whom they would wish to remain) to accompany them to Canadian settlements."⁷⁶

The significant decline in animal populations in the Hudson Bay Lowlands beginning in the early 1800s shifted a greater focus on the goose hunts as a means of subsistence and commerce. By 1821, the production of geese at the coastal trading posts was far greater than ever before. At Albany Fort, the average number of geese harvested by the Homeguard Cree goose hunters had reached 15,000 per year.⁷⁷

9.3 Transportation:

In addition to employment in the provision trade, many Lowland Cree became more deeply involved in the HBC's transportation system in the period between 1783 and 1821. The employment of Lowland Cree in the boat brigades was critical to the inland expansion of the HBC. On June 7, 1790, John McNab reported that three Lowland Cree men had deserted the boat brigade between Albany Fort and Henley House, but he noted that: "dependence on Indians is too precarious but cannot possibly be avoided."⁷⁸ At

⁷⁶HBCA, B.239/a/96, June 2, 1794, fo. 26.

⁷⁷HBCA, B.3/e/8, fo. 1.

⁷⁸HBCA, B.3/a/91, June 7, 1790, fo. 28d.

the peak of Albany Fort's inland trade in the 1790s, more than 80 Lowland Cree, including men women and children, were employed on the boat brigades.⁷⁹ However, the reduction of Albany's inland trading network reduced the opportunities for Lowland Cree to work on the boat brigades. By 1800, the number of Lowland Cree employed on the Albany River boats had declined to 23. The major retrenchment of the Albany inland trading posts in 1810 caused further reductions in the involvement of Lowland Cree in the boat brigades.

A network of inland trading posts from Severn House was slow to develop, and the HBC invested few resources to sustain the limited number of posts that were established upriver from Severn House. At York Factory, the boat brigades were a vital link in the HBC's competition with the NWC in the area known as the Great North. The Lowland Cree provided important labour for the development of the transport network between the coast and Lake Winnipeg which was the inland hub of the transportation system. Unlike the Albany River boat brigades that declined in the 1800s, the York Factory brigades continued to be active to 1821.

⁷⁹HBCA, B.3/a/97, May 24, 1796, fo. 24d. Payment for work on the boat brigades was almost entirely made up of liquor. At the height of Albany Fort's inland trading in 1796 the use of liquor was a necessary but evil requirement. John McNab, who was in charge of Albany Fort reported that the Lowland Cree who worked on the boat brigades were "drunk and troublesome," and added that it was "a sad circumstance where the Inland existence depends on their aid" (HBCA, B.3/a/97, May 18, 1796, fo. 23d).

The delivery of packets between the coastal trading posts became a more important service in the post-1782 period. With the expansion of inland trading posts, and increasing competition from Canadian fur traders, communication between the major coastal supply posts was essential. Correspondence between the coastal and inland posts also required a delivery service. The packet service provided year-round employment opportunities for a growing number of Lowland Cree. The payment for delivery services also increased after 1782. For example, the price for delivery between Albany Fort and Severn House in 1790 amounted to 44 made beaver.⁸⁰ In 1784, two Lowland Cree were paid 100 made beaver for delivering packets between York Factory and Cumberland House.⁸¹

The Lowland Cree also became more involved in providing other services and products to the fur traders in the period between 1783 and 1821. For example, the Lowland Cree were encouraged to bring in more fish, ptarmigan, snowshoe hare and other local food resources on a year-round basis. Products such as snowshoes, sleds and leather for shoes were all in greater demand in the period of inland fur trade expansion.

⁸⁰HBCA, B.3/d/100, fo. 16d.

⁸¹HBCA, B.239/a/82, June 5, 1784, fo. 36.

9.4 Epidemic Diseases:

After the smallpox epidemic of 1782-83, occasional disease outbreaks occurred among the Lowland Cree but none produced mortality rates that approached the magnitude of the smallpox epidemic.⁸² However, several significant disease outbreaks in the period between 1783 and 1821 were noted by the HBC traders. For example, during the winter of 1792-93, an unidentified disease caused a number of deaths among the Lowland Cree near York Factory. Joseph Colen reported that: "Death has made great havock among the Natives."⁸³ During the winter of 1794-95 many Albany River Lowland Cree suffered from an unidentified disease. John McNab remarked that the sickness had produced "an uncommon mortality among the Indians."⁸⁴

In the winter of 1795-96, an unidentified disease spread throughout the Homeguard Cree population near Severn House. Many came to the post for medicine and provisions. On February 2, 1796, there were 113 people who were described as "sick and starving" gathered at the plantation near Severn House.⁸⁵ An epidemic disease near Albany Fort in the fall of 1796 may have been connected with the sickness among the Severn River

⁸²William Ewart concluded that tuberculosis and influenza were the principal diseases causing mortality among the Lowland Cree near York Factory in the 19th century (Ewart, 1983: 573).

⁸³HBCA, B.239/a/95, March 17, 1793, fo. 22d,

⁸⁴HBCA, B.3/a/96, April 20, 1795, fo. 25d.

⁸⁵HBCA, B.198/a/47, fo. 25d.

Lowland Cree. On September 5, 1796, about 200 Lowland Cree were encamped near Albany Fort and John McNab noted that there was "an epidemical catarrh raging among us...many of the men [HBC] and natives in great affliction."⁸⁶ The disease outbreak claimed the lives of at least five Lowland Cree, and the sickness lingered among the people who stayed near the post until October 25, 1796.

Outbreaks of colds and influenza occasionally affected the Lowland Cree. For example, in the winter of 1797-98, many Lowland Cree complained of flu-like symptoms. On April 27, 1798, John McNab remarked that several Lowland Cree who visited the post were "affected with febrile complaints, by their account epidemical among them."⁸⁷ In the summer of 1801, an unusual sickness among the Lowland Cree and some of the HBC men at Albany Fort. John Hodgson described the disease as an "Epidemical disorder" that "appears to be like the yellow fever."⁸⁸ Although Hodgson reported that many Lowland Cree, especially children, were dangerously ill, only one death was recorded.

In 1819, a measles epidemic that caused significant mortality rates in the Upland region broke out among the Lowland Cree near York Factory. The disease originated in cities along the northeastern Atlantic seaboard and spread into the area north of Lake Superior

⁸⁶HBCA, B.3/a/97, fo. 33d. On September 7, 1796, McNab observed that: "many Indians affected with the catarrh and dangerously ill - such hot sultry weather [90 degrees fahrenheit] at this period is not remembered by the oldest Indian" (*Ibid*: fo. 34).

⁸⁷HBCA, B.3/a/101, fo. 18d.

⁸⁸HBCA, B.3/a/104, July 23, 1801, fo. 20d; July 30, 1801, fo. 24.

along major fur trade routes.⁸⁹ The measles epidemic was transmitted to the Lowland Cree who lived near York Factory by HBC employees who were infected in the Red River colony. These men worked on the transport brigades between the colony and York Factory, and probably transmitted the disease to Lowland Cree who were employed on the brigades who worked along the lower section of the transport route.

The disease was first reported by Sir John Franklin, who visited York Factory in the fall of 1819. Franklin noted that the Lowland Cree who lived in the vicinity of the factory were "suffering under the combined afflictions of hooping cough and measles."⁹⁰ He also reported the presence of the disease among the Lowland Cree near Oxford House which he visited on September 28, 1819. Franklin observed that: "a few Crees were at this time encamped in front of the fort. They were suffering under the combined maladies of hooping cough and measles, and looked miserably dejected."⁹¹ Robert Hood, who accompanied Franklin, noted that:

A number of Indian tents were pitched near the house [Oxford House], and the dreadful ravages of hooping cough, and the measles had filled them with lamentation and despair. The poor creatures felt so deeply the loss of their relations, that they forsook their hunting occupations and starvation brought them to the border of the lake, where without much trouble they obtained fish.⁹²

⁸⁹Hackett, 1991: 59-60.

⁹⁰Franklin, 1823: 25. Quoted in Hackett, 1991: 86.

⁹¹Franklin, 1823: 37. Also quoted in Hackett, 1991: 86.

⁹²Hood, 1974: 31.

The HBC traders at York Factory noted the effects of whooping cough, but did not specifically identify measles among the Lowland Cree. For example, on July 7, 1819, James Swain, who was in charge of York Factory, noted an outbreak of whooping cough among the Lowland Indians. Swain reported that: "a number of Natives and children afflicted with the Hooping cough, it has been brought from Red River and seems highly contagious."⁹³ On July 13th, the epidemic had spread, and Swain observed that: "All the Indian women and children about the place dangerously ill with the Hooping cough." As late as August 4, 1819, the epidemic was still raging. Swain noted that: "All the Indians and women and children seriously indisposed with Chincough."⁹⁴ Paul Hackett has recently pointed out that Franklin's identification of whooping cough and measles among the Lowland Cree at York Factory and Oxford House was probably a more accurate indication of the spread of the measles epidemic than the HBC reports.

Unlike the smallpox epidemic in 1782-83, the measles epidemic in 1819 did not diffuse through the entire Lowland Cree population. Infection appears to have been localized near York Factory which was the terminus for the Red River transport brigades. Although the measles epidemic spread widely throughout the Little North, the disease was not transmitted north into the lower Severn River or Albany River watersheds within the Hudson Bay Lowlands. Hackett has traced the diffusion of the measles epidemic along the fur trade transport routes in the Little North and he concluded that the travel

⁹³HBCA, B.239/a/126, fo. 31d.

⁹⁴HBCA, B.239/a/126, fos. 32d and 34d.

times between the point of origin of the disease (Fort William) and the northern outposts along the margins of the Hudson Bay Lowlands were too long to sustain and transmit the disease.⁹⁵

The measles epidemic among the Lowland Cree was localized along the York Factory transport link with the Red River Colony. As a result, the effects of the epidemic were limited to a relatively small population. In addition, mortality rates appear to have been much lower than those recorded for the earlier smallpox epidemic. Adam Snodie, who was in charge of York Factory in 1820, reported that the epidemic had "carried off several of our best hunters."⁹⁶ While the smallpox epidemic spread slowly among the Lowland Cree, the outbreak of measles was brief and recovery rates appeared to have been much higher than during the smallpox epidemic.

9.5 Lowland Cree Population Dynamics:

The depletion of caribou, beaver and other animals in the Hudson Bay Lowlands caused significant population movements of Lowland Cree within and outside of the region in the period between 1783 and 1821. Following the 1782-83 smallpox epidemic many

⁹⁵Hackett, 1991: 99.

⁹⁶HBCA, B.239/e/2, fo. 2.

Albany River Lowland Cree shifted their range farther northward toward Severn House. Although Edward Jarvis blamed this northward movement on the reduction in the standard of trade for goods at Severn House⁹⁷, he acknowledged the impact of the smallpox epidemic. Jarvis recorded the following speech made by an Indian who intended to move north: "Do not urge us to hunt geese when there are really none to kill, but let us have our debts and get as far as we can from the Factory to the northward where deer are plenty and we can live (underlined in original)."⁹⁸ Jarvis was concerned about the migration of many of the best goose hunters. In his journal, Jarvis outlined the negative impact of these developments:

Without we can procure Country provisions for the mother settlement [Albany Fort] and Henley, we can never keep the Europeans for Gloster and inland - these families [those who moved north] are beyond dispute the very best goose hunters belonging to Albany and seldom killed us less than 1400 sometimes 1600 nay more Geese - the loss of Furrs is nothing since whether at Albany or Severn the Company will assuredly get them, and tho' I am not totally imenible to pecuniary emoluments, would readily part with their furr hunts to Severn to get their goose hunts at Albany; for the loss of so much provisions is not to be remedied but by an extraordinary indent of provisions from Europe, which after we get it is neither so good for the men's health, so agreeable to their humour, nor probably so cheap to the Company - I repeat it that I would rather lose their furrs than have the apparently extensive rising prospects at Gloster

⁹⁷Beginning in 1783, the price of goods, called the standard of trade, was revised at Severn House to approximately the same level as the rate provided at Albany Fort. Prior to 1783, the price of trade goods at Severn House and York Factory had been significantly higher. For example, guns which had been selling at 14 made beaver each were reduced to 10 to 12 made beaver, and the price of blankets was cut from 7 to 6 made beaver. Most other trade goods including cloth, gunpowder and shot were also lowered to the rate that applied at Albany Fort (B.198/d/34, fos. 6-6d, B.198/d/36, fos. 6-7d). Edward Jarvis explained that: "the difference of standard before I believe was a great motive for their attachment here" (HBCA, B. 3/a/83, fo. 6d).

⁹⁸HBCA, B.3/a/83, fo. 2.

dispersed by the want of that sinew of expedition, Provision (underlined in original).⁹⁹

Another problem associated with the northward migration of Albany River Lowland Cree toward Severn was the reduction in leather traded at Albany Fort. Most of the leather traded at Albany Fort came from the so-called northern tribes who hunted caribou between Albany and Severn. With many of them trading at Severn after 1783, the loss of the caribou leather trade was also detrimental to the business at Albany Fort. Edward Jarvis noted that: "another great evil that arises from their going to Severn which is the scarcity of shoe leather without which the inland business cannot go on."¹⁰⁰ An examination of the Albany Fort account books confirms the reduction in the number of caribou skins after 1783. From 1775 to 1783, the shipments from Albany Fort to Europe contained 199 caribou skins. From 1784 to 1794, only 17 caribou skins were packed at Albany Fort.

The attraction of the caribou hunt in the area near Cape Henrietta Maria was confirmed by George Sutherland who delivered a packet between Albany Fort and Severn House in the summer of 1785. Sutherland reported that many Albany River Lowland Cree were "all wallowing among deer's flesh much nigher Albany than this place [Severn

⁹⁹HBCA, B.3/a/83, fo. 6d.

¹⁰⁰HBCA, B.3/a/87, fo. 4d.

House]."¹⁰¹ In 1788, Edward Jarvis explained that the reason Albany River Lowland Cree had shifted their range northward was "because the Deer are so numerous and easy come at the Northward which they prefer to hunting geese in our cold marshes."¹⁰²

By 1815, growing numbers of Albany River Lowland Cree had moved north toward Cape Henrietta Maria. By that time the caribou had been depleted, but the movement of these Albany River Lowland Cree was motivated by better fishing grounds in that area. Jacob Corrigal, who was in charge of Albany Fort in 1815, reported that:

I'm apprehensive that none or very few of the Northern Indians will attend the Goose Hunt this fall, George Sutherland [an Indian] and Missiseepe has come in, who tells me that they left them all to the Northward of the Cape [Henrietta Maria] in the Deer Country at a fine Lake for fishing where they intend to pass the Fall and winter.¹⁰³

The migration of Albany River Lowland Cree toward Severn caused some Severn River Lowland Cree to shift their range farther north, toward York Factory. Several families of Severn River Lowland Cree moved to the York Factory area in 1790. In 1796, a number of Severn Homeguard Cree joined the York Factory Homeguard Cree during the fall goose hunt. In the spring of 1797, six families who formerly hunted near Severn House and Albany Fort hunted geese near York Factory. In 1803, a mixed group of Severn and Albany Homeguard Cree arrived at York Factory, intending to live in the

¹⁰¹HBCA, B.198/a/31, July 17, 1785, fo. 54d.

¹⁰²HBCA, B.198/a/37, June 26, 1788, fo. 43.

¹⁰³HBCA, B.3/a/118, September 5, 1815, fo. 38.

area. John McNab, who was in charge of York Factory and had previously worked at Albany Fort, remarked that: "among them 6 of Albany Choice hunters, old acquaintances, several of them requests to stay here, say they have wintered at Severn with many more of their Albany companions now there."¹⁰⁴ In the fall of 1803, several Albany River Lowland Cree traded at York Factory and spent the winter in the area.¹⁰⁵

In the spring of 1799, 30 Indian goose hunters were identified by name in the York Factory records. Of these, 15 were Severn River Homeguard Cree, who killed 815, or 63 per cent, of the 1297 geese harvested. By 1807, some Severn River Lowland Cree had become prominent leaders at York Factory. On October 16, 1807, John McNab reported that: "2 Indians came down the river for medicine to the oldest Indian belonging to York - they say he is very ill...his progeny are numerous and consequential, he was a hunter at Severn when first founded [1759] by the late Mr. Marten."¹⁰⁶

There was also a shift in Lowland Cree population away from Churchill Fort and toward York Factory in the period between 1783 and 1821. Some were attracted back to their former homelands to become goose hunters in place of the York Factory Homeguard Cree goose hunters who died during the smallpox epidemic. There was also pressure to

¹⁰⁴HBCA, B.239/a/107, July 11, 1803, fo. 22. McNab convinced them to return to Severn House.

¹⁰⁵HBCA, B.239/a/109, September 6, 1803, fo. 1d.

¹⁰⁶HBCA, B.239/a/114, fo. 8d.

move away from the Churchill River area after 1782 because of the influx of Chipewyan who moved closer to Churchill Fort. By 1821, all but a few of the Lowland Cree had moved away from Churchill to the York Factory area.¹⁰⁷

In the 1790s, some groups of Lowland Cree in the hinterland of York Factory began to migrate out of the Lowlands. The establishment of inland trading posts along the transport route between York Factory and Lake Winnipeg attracted Lowland Cree, especially those who were regarded as Half-Homeguard Cree at York Factory. The employment of Lowland Cree on the boat brigades also promoted an inland population shift for families who were involved in that business.¹⁰⁸

The southward drift of Lowland Cree along the Nelson and Hayes Rivers into the Upland region was noted by several HBC fur traders. In 1793, some of the Half-Homeguard Cree who previously traded at York Factory had moved farther inland and wintered near Chatham House on the upper Nelson River.¹⁰⁹ In 1794, the combination of declining resources near York Factory and the lure of Canadian traders caused some of the York Factory Homeguard Cree to move farther inland. Joseph Colen reported that: "They say that the scarcity of animals on the coast of late years has distressed their families - when

¹⁰⁷In 1820, the Lowland Cree male population near Churchill Fort included two elderly men, eight young men and youths, and two or three boys (McCarthy, 1985: 85).

¹⁰⁸Raymond Beaumont remarked that the southward movement of Lowland Cree was "in response to privation at York Factory and the promise of a better life elsewhere" (Beaumont, 1992: 179-180).

¹⁰⁹HBCA, B.239/a/95, June 3, 1793, fo. 32.

they were here during the summer, which obliged them to remove to a more plentiful country, a great distance from the factory, that bringing their families with them would prevent the conveyance of furs. Therefore the men intend in future to come down in turns, while others remain to kill supplies for their families."¹¹⁰ On December 17, 1796, Colen expressed his concern about the migration of Indians away from York Factory. Colen remarked that: "Indeed Natives who have been long in habits of hunting near the factory, have told me in plain terms that these risks [food shortages] would be avoided in future, by disposing of their skins near their Hunting Ground."¹¹¹

The Lowland Cree who moved near the inland trading posts came to be identified as Homeguards for each particular post. For example, the Lowland Cree who coalesced near Henley House at the confluence of the Albany and Kenogami Rivers were usually called Henley House Homeguards. The establishment of Oxford House in 1798 attracted a number of Lowland Cree who were formerly known as York Factory Homeguard Cree. Christopher Hanks observed that: "The formation of the Oxford House Band was the result of the depot requiring natives to provide provisions and labor for transporting goods to and from the interior....Therefore, the Oxford House Band is the result of the historic late 18th and early 19th century interaction between the fur trade and native groups and was not an *in situ* development of the aboriginal population."¹¹²

¹¹⁰HBCA, B.239/a/96, May 27, 1794, fo. 25.

¹¹¹HBCA, B.239/a//100, fo. 9d.

¹¹²Hanks, 1982: 103.

By 1812, the migration of Lowland Cree away from York Factory was in full swing. William Cook reported that a group of so-called Eastern Indians planned to move farther inland in the fall.¹¹³ Cook also noted that some of the Nelson River Lowland Cree intended to give up their "Old Haunts" to "go inland in the Fall and to winter about the Lakes in the mid Country."¹¹⁴ By 1815, some of the Hayes River Lowland Cree who formerly resided near York Factory were living near Lake Winnipeg. James Sutherland, who was in charge of the HBC's Norway House District (then called Jack River), made the following observations:

This last year there were 26 families who traded at this post, among them 34 men and lads capable of Hunting, but their numbers always vary as they wander from one district to another as their capricious fancy leads them. Part of these Indians are from the sea coast about York Factory and the other from the headwaters of the Severn River. The original inhabitants of this place seem to have all emigrated to the Westward within this few years back, several families have left this place and gone to Swan River and Cumberland House, the poverty of the country for animals induce them to leave their native soil.¹¹⁵

Some Lowland Cree migrated as far away as the Cumberland House district near the upper Saskatchewan River. In 1815, Alexander Kennedy, who was in charge of Cumberland House noted that:

There are about one hundred and ten families on this District at present, nearly half of whom are newcomers from York Factory, North River, and what we call the Rat Country being to the northward of Cumberland

¹¹³HBCA, B.239/a/118, July 24, 1812, fo. 20.

¹¹⁴HBCA, B.239/a/118, June 12, 1812, fo. 16.

¹¹⁵HBCA, B.154/e/1, fo. 5d.

where the lands are getting so poor as to induce the Indians to leave it.¹¹⁶

The conditions that forced many Lowland Cree to migrate also affected the Northern Ojibway who lived along the margins of the Hudson Bay Lowlands. J.F. Wright, who conducted a geological survey around Island Lake in 1927, learned about the history of the area from the local HBC fur trader, S.J.C. Cumming. Wright reported some of this historical information in his report. He noted that:

This post [Island Lake] was outfitted from Severn and was in operation in 1824, but a few years later was abandoned on account of the scarcity of fur-bearing animals, fish and game. The Indians were forced to leave the lake and migrated to Oxford House, Trout Lake, and Little Grand Rapids.¹¹⁷

The movement of Lowland Cree between coastal posts and from the coast to inland trading posts was a practice that the HBC tried to discourage. HBC traders were advised to not trade with Indians who received debts from other posts. However this strategy had its shortcomings because the traders were often unaware of the extent of the debts that individual Indians had incurred at other posts. In 1790, Joseph Colen, who was in charge of York Factory, attempted to establish this strategy and encouraged his fellow traders to do the same. Colen wrote that: "Would every master follow the same plan it

¹¹⁶HBCA, B.49/e/1, fo. 4d.

¹¹⁷Wright, 1927: 56.

would be a considerable saving annually to the Honourable Company and prevent the low Country Natives from rambling."¹¹⁸ Despite Colen's determination to stop the Lowland Cree from "rambling," he was unable to dictate where they should live. On April 6, 1790, Colen was unable to convince a group of Severn House Homeguard Cree to return to that post. Colen observed that: "if I did not agree to their visiting York, in future, there were other places they could carry their furs, and where they would be acceptable - said they were free and have liberty to go ware they pleased, and were they used well, they would stay."¹¹⁹

9.6 Epilogue:

In 1821 the HBC merged with the North West Company (NWC), and ushered in a new

¹¹⁸HBCA, B.239/a/90, February 12, 1790, fo. 22d.

¹¹⁹HBCA, B.239/a/90, April 6, 1790, fos. 32d-33. The competition that developed between coastal trading posts was exploited by the Lowland Cree. As fur trade competition increased, attracting Indians to trade at each post became more difficult. HBC traders offered increasingly large gifts to Lowland Cree leaders who could bring more followers to trade at their posts. Some Lowland Cree leaders attracted followers by giving gifts to encourage other Indians to leave their usual post. For example, in 1786 a Severn River Lowland Cree leader named Waukescicoat gave gifts to Albany River Lowland Cree to attract them to trade at Severn. These gifts included a gun, two blankets, a coat and brandy (HBCA, B.3/a/86, April 1, 1786, fo. 20d). Edward Jarvis, who was in charge of Albany Fort, observed that: "the Severn Indian Captain [Waukescicoat] would be glad to increase his consequence by gaining the Albany [Indians] to trade at Severn even supposing he was not desired [by William Falconer] to do it" (HBCA, B.3/a/87, fo. 5).

era of monopoly trading that lasted for many years in the northern subarctic. Although the NWC did not establish a foothold in the Hudson Bay Lowlands, the competition between the two companies had an impact on the Lowland Cree. Some Lowland Cree were attracted to trade at NWC posts outside of the region, and others benefitted from the competition by obtaining goods at cheaper prices and extra gifts to keep them loyal to the HBC. The competition also spurred on the inland expansion of the HBC, and this required extra supplies of country provisions to fuel the inland programme.

The most notable impact of the increased fur trade pressures was the decline in the caribou that migrated seasonally into the Hudson Bay Lowlands. The once massive caribou herds were practically extinguished from the Hudson Bay Lowlands by 1821, but a few straggling herds occasionally came near the Nelson and Hayes Rivers in the 1820s. For example, in 1823, over 500 caribou were traded by the Lowland Cree at York Factory.¹²⁰ In the fall of 1825, HBC men from York Factory set up camps along the Nelson River and built scaffolds to store caribou meat that was traded from the Lowland Cree. By October 7, 1825, 130 caribou had been traded from the Lowland Cree caribou hunters.¹²¹ In the fall of 1827, nearly 700 caribou were procured at the Nelson River caribou depots.¹²² The 1829 fall hunt netted only 13 caribou, and thereafter very few

¹²⁰HBCA, B.239/a/131, July 5, 1823, fo. 22.

¹²¹HBCA, B.239/a/134, fo. 4.

¹²²HBCA, B.239/a/135, October 5, 1826, fo. 2.

caribou were mentioned in the York Factory records.¹²³

Several visitors to the York Factory region after 1830 made note of the remarkable decline in the caribou. John McLean, who visited York Factory in 1837, offered the following account of the demise of the caribou:

Not many years ago this immense part of the country was periodically visited by immense herds of rein-deer; at present there is scarcely one to be found. Whether their disappearance is owing to their having changed the course of their migrations, or to their destruction by the natives, who waylaid them on their passage, and killed them by hundreds, is a question not easily determined. It may be they have only forsaken this part of the country for a time, and may yet return in as great numbers as ever: be that as it may, the present want to which the Indians are subject, arises from the extreme scarcity of those animals, whose flesh and skins afforded them food and clothing. Their subsistence is now very precarious; derived principally from snaring rabbits and fishing; and rabbits also fail periodically.¹²⁴

Thomas Simpson, who resided at York Factory from 1836 to 1839, blamed over-hunting by the Lowland Cree for the decline in caribou. Simpson recorded the following story:

[N]ear York Factory, in 1831, this propensity [over-hunting by Indians], contrary to all the remonstrances of the gentlemen of that place, led to the indiscriminate destruction of a countless herd of reindeer, while crossing the broad stream of the Haye's River, in the height of summer. The natives took some of the meat for present use, but thousands of carcasses were abandoned to the current, and infected the river banks, or floated out into Hudson's Bay, there to feed the sea-fowl and the Polar bear. As if

¹²³The quantity of caribou meat traded at York Factory began to increase in the latter part of the 19th century. For example, in 1873-74, 24,675 pounds of fresh venison (equivalent to 300 caribou) was traded at York Factory, and in 1878-79 the amount was 27,348 pounds (341 caribou) (HBCA, B.239/a/182, fos. 10 and 121d).

¹²⁴McLean, 1932: 195.

it were a judgement for this barbarous slaughter, in which women and even children participated, the deer have never since visited that part of the country in similar numbers.¹²⁵

Sir John Richardson later recounted a similar story, but he gave the year 1833 as the year of the reputed slaughter:

The reindeer that visit Hudson's Bay travel southward toward James's Bay in spring. In the year 1833, vast numbers of them were killed by the Cree Indians at a noted pass three or four days march above York Factory. They were on their return northward, and were crossing Hayes River in incredible multitudes. The Indians, excited by the view of so many animals thronging into the river, committed the most unwarranted slaughter; man, woman, and child rushed into the water and stabbed the poor deer wantonly, letting most of the carcasses float down the stream or putrify on the beach, for they could use only a small number of those they slew. From that date the deer did not use the pass until last year [1848], when a few resumed their old route, and were suffered to go unmolested, the Indians not being prepared for their coming.¹²⁶

Simpson and Richardson attributed the disappearance of the caribou to a single massive slaughter. It is more likely that these accounts referred to the last large-scale caribou hunt that took place near York Factory. As this study has shown, the demise of the caribou in the Hudson Bay Lowlands was rooted in the 18th century, when the caribou provision and skin trade was initiated by the HBC. The actual disappearance of the caribou took place over decades, with much of the damage occurring in the 1790s, at the

¹²⁵Simpson, 1843: 76.

¹²⁶Richardson, 1969: 290.

peak of fur trade activity in the Lowlands.¹²⁷

After 1821, the HBC attempted to prohibit the killing of beaver in order to allow the beaver population to replenish. The imposition of bans on the trade in beaver skins did not have the desired effect because the Lowland Cree continued to kill beaver for food.

In 1827, the HBC trader at Island Lake reported the following:

When conversing with the natives on this subject they at once admitted the advantages to be derived from preserving the Beaver, but an old man acutely observed "would you allow beaver to live and your children to starve, is it not hard to see one swimming before your canoe while your son is crying for something to eat - but since it is your desire to preserve the Beaver, says old Eganescum, I will make a bargain with you; I last summer found eight Beaver Houses, and I have taken from you thirty skins in debt, now the beaver in these lodges will pay my debt, and feed my children, part of the winter, but since you wish to preserve them, throw away [my] debt, and support my family for the winter, and on these conditions I will allow the Beaver to live." This was a kind of reasoning I was not prepared to answer, and for which our minutes of council had made no provisions.¹²⁸

HBC conservation measures slowly nursed the beaver populations in the Hudson Bay Lowlands to their former levels. In the winter of 1827, an unnamed HBC trader made

¹²⁷The caribou did not actually disappear from the region, but their numbers were reduced to such low numbers that few were available for trade to the HBC. By the latter part of the 19th century the numbers of caribou began to increase as evidenced by the HBC records of caribou meat traded at York Factory. The caribou have continued to increase in the twentieth century, and one herd known as the Pen Island herd currently migrates to the Severn River area each summer. The Pen Island herd numbers about 4,000 animals, and their annual movements approximate the migration routes of the great herds of earlier times (Dadds, 1988: 12).

¹²⁸HBCA, B.283/e/1, fos. 4d-5.

a tour through the York Factory district and he enumerated the numbers of beaver lodges belonging to individual hunters. Three Lowland Cree hunting groups were encountered during the tour. The first, consisted of four hunters: Withawacappo (4 lodges), Patchithat (1 lodge), Patahatub (1 lodge) and Papisk (1 lodge). The second hunting group also numbered four hunters: Pew-dan-na-ba-oo (7 lodges), See-way-oo-kis-cum (1 beaver lodge), Saw-quith-e-mow (1 lodge), and The-aboue's son, a youth who owned no beaver lodges. The third hunting group included nine hunters led by Jack Stevenson, but the report did not record the beaver lodges that were owned by the hunters.¹²⁹ The HBC report emphasized the importance of conserving the beaver population to both the Company and the Lowland Cree.

The spring and fall goose hunts became more important as a source of subsistence and commerce for the Lowland Cree after the beaver and caribou populations declined. In 1820, Adam Snodie, who was in charge at York Factory, commented on the importance of encouraging the Lowland Cree to hunt geese for the Company. Snodie remarked that: "an Indian that may kill but a few furs is often of considerable value on the sea side by procuring provisions. Without Country provisions the Company could not continue."¹³⁰ The numbers of geese annually traded by the Lowland Cree to the HBC at the coastal posts continued to rise after 1821. In 1823, Angus Bethune, who was in charge of Albany Fort, remarked that 10,000 to 15,000 geese per year was considered a good

¹²⁹HBCA, B.239/a/139, fos. 1-8d.

¹³⁰HBCA, B.239/e/2, fo. 3.

trade.¹³¹ By the mid-19th century that number had doubled. George Barnston estimated that the average annual harvest of geese by the Lowland Cree at Albany Fort was about 30,000 geese. At Moose Factory, about 10,000 geese were procured by the HBC each year, and the combined annual goose harvest at Severn House, York Factory and Churchill Fort was about 20,000 geese.¹³²

The trade in goose feathers and quills also continued to increase in the post 1821 period. The increase was especially large at Albany Fort, where the trade in feathers and quills came to represent a significant portion of the overall trade. For example, the average trade in feathers and quills at Albany Fort in the 1860s was about six times higher than the trade figures for the 1790s.

After 1821, the depleted beaver and caribou resources in the Hudson Bay Lowlands, provided limited opportunities for the Lowland Cree to participate in the fur and provision trade. The increased importance of the goose hunts somewhat counter-balanced the declining fur and game resources in the Lowlands, but the overall range of fur-trade related opportunities was significantly reduced in the post-1821 period.

After 1821, some Lowland Cree opted to live relatively independently of the HBC fur traders. HBC traders reported that some Lowland Cree did not trade regularly with the

¹³¹HBCA, B.3/e/8, fo. 1.

¹³²Barnston, 1861: 343.

Company, but preferred living off the resources of the land. In 1828, Thomas Corcoran, who was in charge of Martins Fall House, described an Indian named Jacob as "a young roaming vagabond, he has not been here, nor do I believe at any other place these two years past."¹³³

It is evident that some Lowland Cree were able to live comfortably without European goods. In his 1825 Albany District report, Thomas Vincent reported that:

Of the possibility of their being able to subsist without supplies from us we have convincing proof as there is now in the Weenusk Country three Indians and their families, who through some disgust has not been here at the house [Severn House] for the last 3 years and live idly and easy at fishing stations, seldom are in want of food and warmly apparelled in Furs.¹³⁴

Thomas Corcoran, who was in charge of Martins Fall Post in 1828, reported that many of the local Indians: "go to a fishery where [they] could live with ease for the winter and cloathe [themselves] with the furs [they] might procure."¹³⁵ In 1834, George Barnston

¹³³HBCA, B.123/e/10, fo. 4d. Eleanor Blain observed that the Northern Ojibway were able to live independently from the HBC traders in the post-1821 period. Blain commented that: "the Ojibwa were capable of surviving on their own, which in turn suggests that they had not lost the traditional technology required for their subsistence and, of course, that they continued to have intimate knowledge of the resources of the land" (Blain, 1991: 100).

¹³⁴HBCA, B.3/e/10, fo. 4d.

¹³⁵HBCA, B.123/e/10, fo. 4d. The importance of fisheries in the post 1821 period was noted by many HBC traders. Thomas Corcoran, who was in charge of Martins Fall House in 1828, estimated that the 200 Indians who lived around the post subsisted on fish for three quarters of the year (HBCA, B.123/e/10, fo. 4d). George Barnston, who was in charge of Martins Fall House in 1839, noted the growing importance of fisheries for the Indian people who lived in the hinterland of the post. Barnston wrote that: "The best hunters, in this quarter, seldom construct fishing Baskets, and when they do so, these are

provided the following account of the Lowland Cree who lived in the Winisk River basin:

Having procured a blanket, an ax, and a hook, he becomes forthwith miserably independent. Day after day finds him seated at a hole in the Ice, angling for pike, to the full gratification of all that is indolent in his disposition, but in perfect mocking of the Trader's wishes.¹³⁶

In 1839, Barnston reaffirmed the self-sufficiency of the Winisk River Lowland Cree. Barnston noted that they "content themselves with dragging out an existence, either fishing by means of a Basket, or angling Pike, covering themselves with Rabbit skins in winter, and visiting the post, sometimes only once in the two years, to procure a piece of cloth, an ax, a blanket, whichever they may most require."¹³⁷

While some Lowland Cree became less involved in the European fur trade in the post-1821 period, others moved out of the Lowlands in search of more plentiful subsistence and commercial resources. The migration of Lowland Cree away from the York Factory area that began in the 1790s, continued after 1821. Some of the Lowland Cree who settled in the Norway House area around 1800 moved farther south and west. By 1831, the first wave of migrants to the Norway House area had moved farther afield. Donald Ross, who was in charge of Norway House, remarked that:

frequently broken down by the Fall Floods. Last winter's privations however, have induced many of them, to determine upon making Dams for fish, this coming Fall" (HBCA, B.123/a/14, fo. 1d).

¹³⁶HBCA, B.234/e/1, fo. 2d.

¹³⁷HBCA, B.123/e/14, fo. 3d.

The Indians attached to this place, are now reduced to four or five families - they have for some years past been gradually moving off towards Moose Lake, Swan River and Red River, countries that have of late abounded in Muskrats, and where at all times the means of living are easier acquired and a better quality than in this quarter which produces scarcely any other than fish.¹³⁸

In 1836, Ross added the following observations:

Our close vicinity to Red River has of late years rendered it a matter of no small difficulty to prevent the whole native population from emigrating to that settlement, the encouragement held out by the missions is so very enticing a character, that I believe a very few years hence, will find this section of the country entirely depopulated.¹³⁹

HBC Governor George Simpson blamed the settlers in the Red River colony for enticing the Lowland Cree to migrate southward to the Red River valley. In 1835, Simpson commented that:

[T]he happy tidings of cheap ale and civilization at Red River have quite unhinged their minds, and occasioned their migrating thither in large bodies, where they find employment from the Settlers, which is chiefly paid in ale. This migration of Indians to Red River is now going on to an alarming extent, not from Island Lake only, but from York, Norway House, Severn and Cumberland likewise. While they were few in number, they were mild, timid and inoffensive, but now that they begin to feel their strength, they assume a very different tone, and are disposed

¹³⁸HBCA, B.154/e/4, fo. 1d. By 1831, muskrat skins had replaced beaver skins as the most important fur in the HBC trade. Although worth only a fraction of a beaver skin (the rate varied from 8 to 12 muskrats per made beaver), the widespread decline in beaver populations made muskrat skins more sought after by the HBC. In 1831, the Norway House District produced only 1,983 muskrat skins. By comparison, the Cumberland House District procured 23,040 muskrat skins, and the number traded in the Red River District amounted to 17,450 (HBCA, B.239/h/4, fos. 22d-23).

¹³⁹HBCA, B.154/e/10, fo. 1d.

to rule over the Saulteaux, the original proprietors of the river, and will in a very short time consider themselves on a footing with the half breeds [Metis], and treat the whites as intruders.¹⁴⁰

The migration of Lowland Cree away from the York Factory area was also influenced by the decline in traditional subsistence and commercial resources in the Hudson Bay Lowlands. Caribou and beaver populations in the Hudson Bay Lowlands remained low for many years after 1821. The depletion of these significant food and commercial resources may have influenced the rise of a Lowland Cree spiritual revival movement in 1842-43. The movement was led by Abishabis, a Lowland Cree from the Severn River area. Abishabis, who proclaimed himself a prophet and advocated a return to aboriginal ways of life, adapted aboriginal spiritual beliefs with Christian ideas obtained from missionaries who were active in the area around Norway House. However, Jennifer Brown has pointed out that the depletion of traditional resources in the Hudson Bay Lowlands was a significant factor in spreading the views of Abishabis widely throughout the region. Brown concluded that the rise of this spiritual movement was "surely related to current ecological and fur trade conditions."¹⁴¹ Drawing upon HBC records, Brown was able to show that food and commercial resources continued to be in short supply at

¹⁴⁰HBCA, D.4/102, fos. 42d-43. Governor Simpson also blamed the Red River missionaries for the migration of Lowland Cree to the settlement, and attributed losses in fur trade profits to these movements. Simpson's observations clearly indicate his personal feelings toward Indians. He wrote that: "I hold the natives of this country to be the worst specimens of humanity on the face of the earth" *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹Brown, 1982: 56.

the time of this Lowland Cree spiritual revival.¹⁴² John Long noted that part of the prophecy contained references to caribou that were described as "innumerable, amazingly fat, gigantic and delicious beyond conception."¹⁴³ This prophetic belief suggested a return to earlier times when caribou were abundant in the Hudson Bay Lowlands.

The Lowland Cree continued to supply geese, ptarmigan, fish, snowshoe hare and other locally available provision resources to the HBC traders after 1821. The Lowland Cree also continued to trade furs with the HBC, especially marten and other small fur bearers. However, the decline in traditionally important resources such as caribou and beaver meant that more effort needed to be spent on subsistence activities, and comparatively less time was available for commercial pursuits. As a result, many of the Lowland Cree returned to a more limited involvement in the European fur trade that was similar in some respects to the pre-1782 period.

Until the latter part of the 19th century, the HBC held a monopoly in the fur trade throughout much of the Canadian subarctic. Company traders were discouraged from extending credit to "strange Indians" who lived outside the district boundaries of each trading post. The HBC also attempted to implement other business practices designed to keep Indian hunters and their families from moving into new territories. Monopoly

¹⁴²Abishabis's influence as a prophet was short-lived, and he was killed near Severn House in the fall of 1843.

¹⁴³Long, 1989: 4.

conditions also served to increase the profits obtained by the HBC traders. In his study of the fur trade in northern Manitoba, Frank Tough observed that: "the Company could 'whipsaw' the Indian trapper by reducing the buying price of furs and increasing the selling price of trade goods."¹⁴⁴ Tough also concluded that: "Monopoly prices were central to a debt system which served to maintain both the marginal and dutiful trappers as fur producers."¹⁴⁵ The northward expansion of "free traders" in the late 19th century provided alternative markets, and Tough pointed out that the Lowland Cree quickly adapted to the new fur trade conditions.

Arthur Ray calculated that the population of the Lowland Cree in the vicinity of York Factory reached a low point about 1835, when only 25 adult male hunters were enumerated in the district.¹⁴⁶ The population of the Lowland Cree increased rapidly thereafter until 1880 when there were 66 hunters in the York Factory district. However, Ray also pointed out that the population increase caused further stresses on the subsistence and commercial resources in the hinterland of the factory, and the Lowland Cree became increasingly dependent on the Company for relief. Ray observed that the difficult conditions facing the Lowland Cree in the 1880s made it easy for the government of Canada to negotiate treaties and obtain huge tracts of land and resources

¹⁴⁴Tough, 1990: 389.

¹⁴⁵Ibid: 389-390.

¹⁴⁶Ray, 1982: 31.

in return for relatively little.¹⁴⁷ In the aftermath, government welfare payments came to replace HBC credit as a means of contributing to the sustenance of the Lowland Cree.

¹⁴⁷Ray, 1984: 14. Peter George and Richard Preston observed that the intrusion of non-Aboriginal trappers in the southern Hudson Bay Lowlands near Albany Fort and Moose Factory was an important factor in treaty negotiations in that area (George and Preston, 1987: 450-451).

CHAPTER 10: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS:

This study in regional historical geography has provided new insights into the way of life of the Lowland Cree during the fur trade period. Central to this study has been the relationship between the Lowland Cree and the natural environment of the Hudson Bay Lowlands. This approach has led to revisions of many previous assumptions in the literature relating to the Lowland Cree. The examination of basic elements of the human/land interface in the Hudson Bay Lowlands has shown that these people adapted successfully to developments in the fur trade until major transformations to the natural resource base occurred in the late 18th and early 19th century.

This study has also shown that the Lowland Cree during the fur trade period were involved in complex relationships with the European fur traders and Indian neighbours. Contrary to the prevailing view in the literature, most Lowland Cree did not become quickly dependent on the European fur traders. Until the late 18th century many Lowland Cree favoured traditional pursuits over involvement in the commercial trade and wage labour activities at the coastal trading posts. The smallpox epidemic in 1782-83 was a major factor in bringing the Lowland Cree into a more intensive involvement in the fur and provision trade, and in the wage labour market of the HBC. Contributing to the post-smallpox adaptations among the Lowland Cree was the rapid expansion of the

HBC's inland trading networks. Unusual climatic conditions in the late 18th and early 19th century throughout the Hudson Bay Lowlands also played a role in reducing the availability of traditional subsistence and commercial resources. The rapid decline in caribou and beaver populations was especially critical in prompting many Lowland Cree to migrate to new areas within and outside of their traditional homelands. By 1821, the intensive fur trade period had ended throughout much of the Canadian subarctic, and monopoly conditions provided a check against major fur trade developments.

A review of the archaeological literature has shown that the Lowland Cree occupied the Hudson Bay Lowlands before Europeans arrived in the region in the 17th century. These findings have helped to discredit long-standing views in the literature that the Hudson Bay Lowlands region was incapable of supporting an aboriginal population. The oral traditions of the Lowland Cree suggest that they lived in the region for a very long time, and recent archaeological studies have confirmed that Aboriginal people moved into the Lowlands long before European contact. The earliest artifacts have been found in sites along the lower Severn River valley which are about 2,000 years old. A burial site at Wapekeka, located on the edge of the Hudson Bay Lowlands has been found to be about 7,000 years old. This finding has confirmed that human settlement in the region followed closely after the retreat of the glaciers and the disappearance of meltwater associated with the last ice age.

The Lowland Cree exploited a wide range of seasonally available natural resources, of

which caribou was a focal resource. Although some groups of people may have shifted seasonally between the Hudson Bay Lowlands and the adjacent upland Canadian Shield region, the archaeological evidence indicates that others remained in the Lowlands year-round.

The Lowland Cree were part of a larger grouping of people who spoke the same language and who were known as the Keishkatchewan or Cree Nation. The Cree Nation was geographically widespread and included groups who lived as far away as the prairie region of the western interior. Each Cree group, or tribe, occupied different territories, and each regional group may have possessed distinct dialects. From the perspective of the records written by Europeans who were stationed at posts in the Hudson Bay Lowlands, groups other than the Lowland Cree were known collectively as Upland Cree.

When Europeans arrived in the Hudson Bay Lowlands they noted that the Lowland Cree were divided into sub-regional groups. Most notable was the division between the people who occupied the coastal zone and those who lived in the interior of the Lowlands. The so-called coasters were more adapted to the unique coastal resources such as marine mammals, estuarine fish and migratory birds. The so-called inlanders were seasonal visitors to the coast, and spent more time exploiting the inland resources that were relatively more plentiful in large game animals and fur bearers.

River basins also provided territorial boundaries for groups of Lowland Cree. Such

spatial organization was important in ordering the hunting activities of the Lowland Cree, especially during the winter when resources were more dispersed than at other times of the year. The spring and fall seasons were times when larger concentrations of Lowland Cree gathered at traditional hunting camps and fishing stations. Communal efforts were especially important in caribou hunting with snare-fences and at river crossings.

During the fur trade period other group names were used to identify the Lowland Cree. The most common names were Homeguard and Half-Homeguard. The name Homeguard was applied to those who lived close to the fur trade post, usually within about 100 miles from the post, and who regularly provided food and other country produce to the European traders. The Homeguard Cree were usually recruited from the coaster population, and they became especially involved in the seasonal goose hunts for the HBC. The Half-Homeguard Cree were inlanders or coasters who usually lived more than 100 miles away from the trading post, and did not participate regularly in the goose hunts. A small group of people spent considerably more time near the trading post. These included sick, elderly and orphans who depended on the trading post for temporary refuge. A few families spent more time near the trading posts as seasonal employees, and performed such duties as hunting, making snow-shoes and delivering packets to other posts.

Leadership patterns among the Lowland Cree were well developed at the time of initial European fur trade settlement. Lowland Cree leaders derived their authority from life

skills, experience and wisdom. Many leaders were old men, and heredity from father to son or close male relative was an important aspect of the social organization of the Lowland Cree. Leaders were usually associated with river basin groups, but certain individuals appear to have possessed wider-ranging status of leadership. The HBC recognized the authority of traditional leaders, but also cultivated other individuals who were able to organize the goose hunts and other important Company-related subsistence and commercial activities. Both Company-appointed and traditional Lowland Cree leaders were known as captains or lieutenants, and they received special gifts from the HBC in recognition of their status.

The population of the Lowland Cree was small in comparison to the vast territory of the Hudson Bay Lowlands. The total population prior to the smallpox epidemic in 1782-83 was about 2,000 people. The Homeguard Cree numbered about 150 to 200 people at York Factory and Albany Fort, and about 75 to 100 people at Severn House, Moose Factory and Churchill Fort. About twice as many Half-Homeguard Cree lived in the hinterland of each trading post.

Along most of the upland margins of the Lowland Cree territory were groups of people called the Nakawawuck or Bungee. They are more commonly known as the Northern Ojibway, and they occupied the upland boreal forest region from the Moose River to the Hayes River. They were distinct from the Lowland Cree because of their different language and cultural traditions. It is apparent that the Northern Ojibway migrated

northward into the region from homelands near the Great Lakes prior to European fur trade settlement. The northward movement of the Northern Ojibway continued during the fur trade period. The northernmost groups spread along the headwaters of the Severn River and reached into the middle reaches of the Hayes River by about 1770.

The European fur traders noted that the Northern Ojibway were divided into animal-named groups. A group known as the Suckers occupied the northern margins of the Northern Ojibway territory, and other groups such as the Pelicans, Moose and Kingfishers lived in adjacent areas. These animal-named groups appear to have been organized along clan lineages that were identified with mythical totemic symbols. Lowland Cree groups were not usually identified with animal names, and this was a significant difference in the social organization between the Lowland Cree and the Northern Ojibway. Along the territorial boundary between the two groups there were considerable overlaps, and by the 1770s a mixed Lowland Cree-Northern Ojibway population was recognized in those areas. The union of Lowland Cree and Northern Ojibway people produced a mixed dialect that was also noted by European fur traders. However, in other areas conflicts and feuds between the Lowland Cree and Northern Ojibway preserved the distinct linguistic and cultural characteristics of the two groups.

In the northwestern margins of Lowland Cree territory, the neighbouring groups were Upland Cree who lived in the upper Hayes, Nelson and Churchill River valleys. Some of the Upland Cree appear to have moved in a northwestern direction from the territory

east of Lake Winnipeg in the wake of the expansion of the Northern Ojibway in the 18th century. Relations between the Lowland Cree and the Upland Cree were usually amicable. However, the arrival of large flotillas of Upland Cree and other Upland Indians who come to trade at the coastal trading posts each summer sometimes led to conflict with the Lowland Cree. This was most problematic near York Factory, and the Lowland Cree of this region often avoided meeting with the Upland trading Indians.

The eastern neighbours of the Lowland Cree were known as the Eastmain Cree. They occupied the area east of James Bay, and spoke a dialect that was quite different from that of the Lowland Cree. Relations between the Eastmain Cree and the Lowland Cree were not close during the fur trade period. Groups of Lowland Cree warriors sometimes traversed through the Eastmain Cree territory to raid against the Eastern Hudson Bay Inuit. Occasionally, Lowland Cree warriors attacked Eastmain Cree people if their forays against the Inuit were unsuccessful.

At the time of first European fur trade settlement the Lowland Cree were involved in warfare against the Inuit who lived on the eastern and western coasts of Hudson Bay. Raids against the Western Hudson Bay Inuit ceased soon after the HBC built Churchill Fort in 1717, but the warfare against the Eastern Hudson Bay Inuit continued until 1793. Revenge for former Inuit attacks against the Lowland Cree appears to have been an important motivating factor in these raids. The Inuit were also blamed for sickness or other calamities that affected the Lowland Cree. Inuit women and children were captured

and became slaves among the Lowland Cree. Some of these so-called slaves appear to have been adopted into Lowland Cree families, and others were sold to the HBC or neighbouring Upland Indian groups.

Similar warfare patterns existed between the Lowland Cree and the Chipewyan in the early fur trade period. The motivating factors appear to have been similar to those in their warfare with the Inuit, and the Lowland Cree held the upper hand when European fur traders first reported the warfare with the Chipewyan. The Hayes River Lowland Cree were most prominent in the raids against the Chipewyan. The leader of the Hayes River Lowland Cree facilitated a peace treaty in 1716, and subsequent Lowland Cree peace delegations to the Chipewyan cemented peaceful relations. The establishment of Churchill Fort in 1717 also contributed to peaceful relations between the two groups as greater numbers of Chipewyan were attracted to trade at that post.

Prior to the establishment of European fur trade settlements in the Hudson Bay Lowlands, Iroquois warriors made several raids near the periphery of the region. These long distance raids were the outgrowth of warfare in the area around the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River. Iroquois war parties used the Nottaway River to reach James Bay, and some Iroquois warriors may have raided as far as the Albany River. Although the last documented Iroquois raid in the direction of the Lowlands occurred in 1674, fear of the Iroquois continued to be current among the Lowland Cree in the James Bay area for generations afterward.

The Lowland Cree way of life depended upon the seasonal availability of natural resources in the region. The changing seasons shaped the locale and concentration of important animals and plants. Migratory animals such as caribou and geese were significant resources that sustained the Lowland Cree. Aboriginal technology and harvesting strategies enabled the Lowland Cree to survive in a land that was periodically inhospitable. Fisheries provided dependable sources of food throughout most of the year. The preservation of foods was also an important aspect of aboriginal subsistence strategies.

The settlement of European fur traders in the Hudson Bay Lowlands was preceded by indirect contact with European goods carried into the region by Upland Indian middleman traders. These middlemen operated from the St. Lawrence River valley and Great Lakes basin, and carried European wares northward in exchange for furs procured by the Lowland Cree and other northern Indian groups. This trade was operating as early as 1603 when Samuel de Champlain first made note of the northern route from Tadoussac to James Bay. The James Bay area developed into an important hub for a trading network that radiated in many directions. Warfare with the Iroquois in the mid-17th century increased the importance of the James Bay connection to get furs to French traders stationed in the St. Lawrence River valley.

When European fur traders arrived in the Hudson Bay Lowlands they encountered people who were already knowledgeable about European goods. The Lowland Cree were also

involved in complex political and military alliances with neighbouring Indian groups. The European traders adapted to these pre-existing patterns, and new alliances were forged with the Lowland Cree and other Upland Indians who seasonally visited the coastal area. The importance of gift giving was appreciated by the early European traders, and signified the respect for traditional trading relations.

Before 1782, the Lowland Cree were involved in the fur and provision trade to a relatively minor extent. Many Lowland Cree groups continued to pursue traditional activities in favour of intensive involvement in the European fur trade. The continuation of warfare against the Inuit is an example of the persistence of a traditional activity that was incompatible with the European fur trade.

The smallpox epidemic in 1782-83 was a watershed event in the history of the Lowland Cree during the European fur trade period. Roughly half of the Lowland Cree population near the coastal trading posts died during the epidemic, and the survivors faced several years of difficult recuperation as social and economic adjustments were implemented. The smallpox epidemic also coincided with a major reorganization of the European fur trade in the subarctic regions of North America. The HBC fur trade in the Hudson Bay Lowlands changed from an exclusively bayside enterprise to a vast inland network of trading posts. The involvement of the Lowland Cree in the provision trade was especially critical in the development of the HBC's inland trading empire.

The pressure on the Lowland Cree from the HBC to provide greater quantities of country foods led to an increase in the exploitation of animal resources beyond sustainable harvest levels. The depletion of caribou was especially critical because these animals provided significant food, clothing and other products to the Lowland Cree. The decline in the numbers of caribou led to population movements of Lowland Cree both within and outside of the Hudson Bay Lowlands. The depletion of animal resources in the Lowlands was exacerbated by unusually severe weather conditions in the 1790s and early 1800s. Extremely cold and dry weather patterns led to drought and massive forest fires that periodically raged in parts of the Lowlands. By the early 1800s subsistence was precarious and many Lowland Cree, especially in the York Factory area migrated out of the region.

In 1821 the HBC merged with the North West Company (NWC) and monopolized the fur trade in the northern subarctic. The impact on the Lowland Cree was not significant because the NWC did not develop a strong foothold in the Hudson Bay Lowlands. Moreover, fur and food animals had been severely depleted in the Lowlands for more than a decade, so that the administrative changes in the HBC after 1821 did not promote radical changes for the Lowland Cree. In the post-1821 period some Lowland Cree withdrew from their involvement in the fur trade while others came to depend more on trapping small fur bearers and the annual goose hunts for their sustenance.

This study has shown that knowledge about the relationship between the Hudson Bay

Lowland Cree and their environment is central to an understanding of their involvement in the Euro-Canadian fur trade. This, in turn, has given rise to revisions of many of the existing views in the literature relating to the Lowland Cree. Foremost in this regard has been the dispelling of the view that the Hudson Bay Lowlands was a region incapable of supporting an Aboriginal population without aid from the Euro-Canadian fur traders. This study has shown that the availability of subsistence resources in the region was sufficient to maintain the Lowland Cree without help from outsiders. These findings are consistent with recent archaeological evidence from sites within the Lowlands.

The investigation of the human/land relationship has yielded interesting new information about the resources that were used by the Lowland Cree. The detailed examination of records relating to the caribou hunt compiled from HBC and other fur trade documents have shown that the caribou was a very important subsistence and commercial resource until the great herds were depleted by the early decades of the 19th century. On the other hand, migratory bird hunting, which has been linked by some scholars to Lowland Cree dependency on the Euro-Canadian fur traders, was much less important. The focus on migratory birds for subsistence and commerce did not occur until after the demise of the caribou herds.

These new insights have challenged the views of scholars such as E.E. Rich, A.S. Morton and Charles Bishop who argued that the Lowland Cree quickly became dependent on the Euro-Canadian fur traders. The early fur trade records suggest that the reverse

was much more accurate. The handful of fur traders who were stationed at the coastal posts were much more dependent upon country provisions supplied by the Lowland Cree. The magnitude of the impact of the early European fur trade on the way of life of the Lowland Cree has been greatly exaggerated in the literature. Although some Lowland Cree gravitated more frequently to the trading posts to trade furs, provisions and other goods and services, the majority spent little time at the posts. The early experiences of Lowland Cree with the Euro-Canadian fur traders indicated that social, political and military alliances or treaties were more important than economic motivations.

The theory that the Lowland Cree quickly over-harvested subsistence resources such as caribou and beaver is not supported by a careful examination of the fur trade records. The depletion of faunal resources did not take place until the late 18th and early 19th century, over 100 years after the beginning of Euro-Canadian fur trade settlement in the region.

The Lowland Cree did not quickly over-harvest traditional subsistence resources, nor did they become immediately dependent on the Euro-Canadian fur traders, but it is evident that major transformations in their way of life began to take place after the smallpox epidemic in 1782-83. This study has provided new insights into the geographic distribution of the epidemic and the affects of the sickness among the Lowland Cree. Previous studies have focused on the transmission of the disease in the western interior. This study has shown that there were high rates of mortality among Lowland Cree groups

both during and immediately after the transmission of the disease.

The intensive involvement of the Lowland Cree in the fur trade during the latter part of the 18th and early 19th century is a significant addition to the existing literature. The relatively late timing of their intensive involvement in the fur trade has already been discussed, but this study has also shown that effect of these developments caused major changes to the way of life of the Lowland Cree. These findings depart significantly from the conclusions drawn by Toby Morantz in her study of the neighbouring Eastmain Cree in the fur trade period. Morantz found that the Eastmain Cree were relatively unaffected during the peak period of fur trade competition that occurred between about 1790 and 1810. This study, however, has shown that the Lowland Cree became much more intensively involved in trading furs, provisions and other goods and services during that period. These changes contributed to the depletion of caribou and beaver and caused dislocations among many groups of Lowland Cree and necessitated changes to traditional ways of living.

In many aspects, the way of life of the Lowland Cree in the post-1821 period was a return to earlier times when there was only limited involvement with the European fur traders. However, the decline in traditionally important animal populations such as caribou and beaver prevented a complete return to aboriginal conditions and limited the options for subsistence strategies among the Lowland Cree. The limited opportunities in the commercial sector also contributed to a restriction in the quality of life that had

been evident in earlier times.

Despite the negative developments in the late 18th and early 19th century, the Lowland Cree population has grown rapidly in the 20th century. Although Lowland Cree communities have become mainly sedentary and dependent on support from outside sources, many of the Lowland Cree, or Nishnawbe-Aski (people of the land) Nation¹, remain strongly committed to aboriginal values and traditions.

¹The term Nishnawbe-Aski Nation is currently used to describe the political organization of Lowland Cree and Northern Ojibway people who live within the territory covered by Treaty Number 9 in northern Ontario.

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