

THE PERCEIVED FACTORS AFFECTING THE SURVIVAL OF TRADITIONAL MOOSE  
SKIN PREPARATION PROCEDURES BY THE NELSON HOUSE ROCKY CREE

by  
BRET NICKELS

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in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
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At The University of Manitoba

Departments of Native Studies, Economics, and Zoology  
University of Manitoba  
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**BY**

**BRET NICKELS**

**A Thesis/Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of The University  
of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree**

**of**

**MASTER OF ARTS**

**Bret Nickels**

**1997 (c)**

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### Abstract

This study describes historical and contemporary Rocky Cree skin preparation procedures used for moccasin production and articulates the difficulties and prospects of maintaining traditional approaches to moose skin preparation procedures by the inhabitants of Nelson House, Manitoba. The research involves the analysis of the various socioeconomic and environmental factors which impact the maintenance and development of a sustainable traditional moccasin economy.

The objectives of this study are to identify and describe the various steps involved in the moose skin preparation process, and then to analyze the various factors that influence or inhibit the survival of such processes in order to assess the prospects for a viable traditional Rocky Cree moccasin economy.

Skin preparation techniques are collected through participant-observation and interviews in order to discover what factors or influences either preserve or discourage each stage of traditional Rocky Cree skin preparation. Experienced skin preparers are identified and used as key informants. They provide details on the entire skin preparation process including information on scraping techniques, tools, materials, environmental and resource problems and prospects, and smoke tanning concerns.

An analysis of skin preparation procedures reveal social, economic, and environmental factors influencing the sustainability of Rocky Cree skin preparation methods which have far reaching implications for the Rocky Cree traditional moccasin craft economy. The results provide additional implications for Rocky

Cree cultural evolution, economic development, and land-use. In addition, this study clarifies the cultural value and the socioeconomic role and importance of the traditional Rocky Cree moccasin craft economy to the overall Nelson House economy. This study may provide valuable information to anthropologists, ethnologists, folklorists, curators, northern educators, zoologists, and those interested in the economics and processes of northern craft industries.

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I would like to dedicate this thesis to my parents Dr. James Bradley Nickels, Hildegard (Hutzi) Elizabeth Nickels, my son Dakota (Cody) Rendon Nickels, and to the Asiniskawithiniwak people

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## CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Overview

Until the 1950's, the Rocky Cree of Nelson House, Manitoba lived a relatively isolated lifestyle with few ties to the provincial economy and cultures (Social & Economic Impact Study Team, 1974, pp.33). They depended on local forest and river resources using few trade goods. This stability was reflected in the lack of change in traditional Rocky Cree skin preparation techniques and the resulting traditional skin clothing. As Spence (Pers. Comm. August 18, 1995) recounted, "Everyone used traditionally tanned clothing when I was a young man. There were no running shoes and not too many boots. Everyone wore moccasins tanned from moose hides." During the last two decades, a large array of external forces altered the Rocky Cree traditional economy. The Cree people of Manitoba were subjected to a bewildering procession of outside interests as a result of the impacts of non-Aboriginal influence, particularly hydro flooding, and the construction of all weather roads into the community. These non-Aboriginal influences altered the Rocky Cree traditional economy, lifestyle and material culture (Social & Economic Impact Study Team, 1974; Hull, 1984). The Rocky Cree were forced to respond to these changing externalities and influences brought on by a permanent Euro-Canadian presence by adopting and adapting to new technology, and a dramatically changed physical environment. As a result, the Rocky Cree modified their social, political, economic, spiritual and cultural institutions (Rupert's Land

Research Center, 1992). Many researchers, including Mason (1967), Smith (1981), and Honigmann (1956, 1981) believed that the demand for a traditionally prepared Cree clothing disintegrated in the face of Euro-Canadian clothing competition, the lure of wage labor, movement into permanent communities, and devastating environmental changes caused by economic development such as hydro flooding, mining and lumbering. Today, similar influences have placed a great deal of pressure on the survival of a variety of material culture components including traditional skin preparation processes. This study examines the affects of these contemporary changes on the historical variations of traditional skin preparation processes used to prepare hides for clothing and craft items.

The continuation of rapidly changing social structures, environments, lifestyles, and economies makes it critical to study these issues while the people with the skills are still living. Despite the fact that the technique of preparing skins is still practiced, the people knowledgeable about skin preparation techniques are passing away at an alarming rate. Today, for instance, only a few Cree skin preparers from Nelson House prepare traditional skins on a regular basis, while others, influenced by economic and laborsaving benefits, have decided to have their skins commercially tanned in Winnipeg (Moore, Pers. Comm., 1995; Dumas, Pers. Comm., 1996). These and other influences are also evident in some of the contemporary modifications to the traditional materials and processes used to prepare skins for clothing or other crafts.

It is important that these factors be documented and

described at this time. The importance of such studies contributes to the cross-cultural understanding of Rocky Cree life. This study may also help botanists to understand plant use in Native skin craft and to include these descriptions in future plant identification books. In addition, preserving the technical and behavioral details of this endangered craft and art form would enable further analysis by future generations documenting the entire skin preparation production activities of the Rocky Cree. Such documentation would preserve a component of traditional Rocky Cree life and would protect an aspect of indigenous knowledge embedded in the remaining moccasin producers in Nelson House society.

### 1.1 Background of Investigator

I became interested in traditionally prepared skin clothing during my involvement in field research at Cross lake First Nation and Nelson House First Nation, Manitoba, under the direction of Dr. Jill Oakes. During the course of my fieldwork, I became aware of the many techniques, problems and prospects involved in traditional moose skin preparation procedures in the moccasin production process. As I further investigated the intricacies, technology, and dilemmas surrounding this craft, it became evident that the various steps involved in the skin preparation process of the Nelson House Cree were never examined due to the fact that the Rocky Cree have simply never been described in any rigorous way by ethnographers (Burch, 1979; Smith, 1981). King (1991) attributes this deficit of Rocky Cree ethnographic research to the problem of

studying subarctic material culture which is often perceived as an extension of the material culture of other areas of North America, such as the Northeast or Woodlands. In addition, the crafts and the artwork of many subarctic groups such as the Cree, Dene and Naskapi are often overshadowed by collections from the Arctic and Northwest Coast in terms of supposed beauty, ingenuity and interest. This has meant that even the unique features of subarctic material culture have tended to be deemphasized and given subordinate status to the materials of other cultural groups (King, 1991). However, Conn (1991), and Thompson (1990) have attempted to alter this imbalance with recent research on traditional subarctic clothing.

Therefore, the value and benefits of such a study seemed to me both important and obvious; researchers would find merit in the examination of a traditional craft industry which has been inadequately documented; and the community of Nelson House would acquire the benefit of a thorough analysis of the many factors effecting this important traditional craft. More specifically, this research would help fill the knowledge gaps in the techniques, decision-making, information processing, and the Indigenous knowledge base of traditional Rocky Cree moccasin production.

## 1.2 Purpose of the Investigation

The purpose of this investigation is to record and analyze the various environmental, sociocultural, and economic factors influencing traditional moose skin preparation procedures used in

traditional moccasin production by the Rocky Cree of Nelson House, Manitoba. This study determines the hurdles that hinder the sustainability of a traditional moose skin preparation process for the production of moccasins in Nelson House.

### 1.3 Objectives of the Investigation

My overall research objectives are to: a) identify and describe the various technical aspects of the many historical and contemporary steps involved in the moose preparation process in order that all factors and influences at each stage of skin preparation can be determined;

b) to analyze the various factors that either influence the maintenance and development or that inhibit and pose threats at each step in the traditional Rocky Cree moose skin preparation process;

c) to survey and identify those within the community who are interested in maintaining and developing traditional moose skin preparation processes in order to assess the prospects for a sustainable traditional Rocky Cree moose skin preparation economy; and,

d) to discuss the implications that the perceived challenges to skin preparation have on cultural evolution, economic development, and land use.

### 1.4 Justification for the Investigation

Source material and ethnographic research for many Cree

groups has been extremely limited (Burch, 1979; Smith, 1981). Most research into Cree skin preparation procedures has been completed on either the Swampy Cree by Rogers (1967), Skinner (1911) and Honigmann (1953, 1956, 1962), or the Plains Cree by Jenness (1932), Mandelbaum (1979), Buck and Ahenakew (1972), and the Saskatchewan Indian Arts and Crafts Advisory Committee (1974). There is little documented on Rocky Cree material culture (Burch, 1979) except by Brightman (1989). However, Brightman does not document Rocky Cree skin preparation procedures. In addition, the Nelson House Rocky Cree skin preparation procedures have never been documented.

As a result, this study is the first definitive research completed on Rocky Cree moose tanning techniques. This analysis of traditional moose skin preparation procedures will allow for future reconstruction and preservation of this endangered craft, and will allow researchers to address questions of culture change, information processing and decision-making among the Rocky Cree. This research will contribute to a number of areas of Cree skin clothing inquiry, and will improve our understanding of the differences and similarities of how traditional tanning is approached and conducted by Manitoba's different Cree communities. This study will also add new components to the Rocky Cree narratives provided by Brightman (1989) and will build on the work of King (1991) and Tracy (1991) studying the economic activity of traditional craft economies.

Questions which may be answered by this proposal include: How does traditional Rocky Cree moose skin preparation techniques

persist in the continuing transformation of culture traditions? How has the environment affected the sustainability of skin preparation? What is the value of the traditional clothing production in relation to the overall economy of the Nelson House region and can these values be discussed in terms of sustainable development planning. What is the effect of both renewable and non-renewable resource-based activities and locally administered services on traditional Rocky Cree skin preparation procedures? Will initiatives to regain authority over land management counter some of the cumulatively destructive environmental, political, and economic effects on traditional skin preparation? Are the stages of the Rocky Cree skin preparation process dependent on the successful completion of each previous stage? How does skin preparation utilize the resources of the land and to what degree?

Nelson House Band Council, and Cree elders have stated the importance of recording detailed descriptions of traditional moose skin preparation procedures used by the Rocky Cree (Primrose, 1995). However, many moccasin producers are no longer practicing their crafts due to old age or ill health. Many elders have expressed serious concern over the current lack of knowledge and interest in skin preparation procedures used for moccasin production by the community's young people (Moore, Pers. Comm. 1995; Dumas, Pers. Comm. 1995). As a result, the Band Council and many Cree elders feel that documenting this visible portion of Cree heritage will be invaluable to future generations of Cree who may want to learn about their ancestors' clothing production methods in the future. Therefore, one of the main justifications for this study is that this thesis will be of value to many

Aboriginal groups, agencies, bands and cultural centers concerned with traditional skills, knowledge and economic development. This will be of particular benefit to those residents of Nelson House interested in the social and environmental impacts of hydroelectric development and other resource developments in the Nelson River Basin on traditional livelihoods such as tanning. Such research may also be a source of valuable reference for cultural anthropologists, economists, northern human ecologists, folklorists, educators, historians, curators, and subarctic researchers.

Band Council members, specifically Pat Linklater (Pers. Comm., 1995) have expressed that the long term survival of the Nelson House Cree depends upon their ability to adapt to changing social, physical, and economic environments. These changes have placed new demands on traditional moose skin preparation. If future challenges to Rocky Cree economic, political and social development are to be met effectively, a strong base in traditional pursuits such as skin preparation production, may play a significant role in those solutions. Cree communities such as Nelson House may depend on the generation of employment and income from resource-based activities which draw on the strength of traditional knowledge and cultural norms kept alive by continuing or revitalizing traditional crafts and artforms such as skin preparation. Just as many land use studies have established the importance of subsistence hunting and gathering economies to the social and economic fabric of a number of northern Aboriginal regions (George and Berkes, 1995; Berkes, et al., 1994; Wolfe and Walker, 1987; Feit, 1991; Freeman, 1993), this study documents the

importance of craft-based economies to Aboriginal communities.

Furthermore, detailed documentation of skin preparation stages and processes, and the reconstruction of production grammars in a variety of situations with different craft persons as suggested by Young, et al. (1991) could also lead to a better understanding of the relationship between Cree cognitive processes and behavior.

Ultimately, verification of the challenging factors affecting the survival of traditional Rocky Cree skin preparation methods could point out the various impediments affecting the sustainability of these techniques. As a result, it might be possible to strengthen Rocky Cree traditional moccasin production within the informal-domestic economy of Nelson House by illuminating the various difficulties faced by those who practice skin preparation.

Finally, the Nelson House community will benefit by having this important aspect of skin preparation historically documented as a reference for future generations. Documentation of the challenges to and prospects for traditional Rocky Cree skin clothing production may be important for Aboriginal<sup>1</sup> economic well-being as the sustainability of a traditional moccasin economy could then be used as an economic and social component in the building of new, ecological sustainable Native<sup>1</sup> cultures and communities.

The next chapter reviews the history, environment, residents and fauna of Nelson House. Chapter three outlines the methods which will be used to collect information. In Chapter four, a

description of the results collected from field data on historical and current skin preparation procedures and the factors affecting those skin preparation procedures will be discussed. Chapter five contains a discussion of the data which will include sections on the implications of the findings on the factors affecting Rocky Cree skin preparation procedures and implications on cultural evolution, economic development, and land use. Finally, chapter six provides a summary, conclusions from the data, and suggestions for future research.

### 1.5 Definitions

**Babiche:** strips of unsmoked hide used as webbing for snowshoes

**Buckskin:** Chambers Etymological English Dictionary (1949) defines buckskin as a "soft leather usually made of deerskin or sheep skin." However, the New Merriam-Webster Dictionary (1989:108) describes buckskin as a soft usually suede-finished leather. The Rocky Cree rarely ever refer to their finished hides as 'buckskin' though in many research papers on the skin preparation process do refer to the final smoke prepared product as buckskin.

**Commercial Tanning:** Hides can be commercially processed as well which also prepares the hide for clothing assembly. Commercial tanning is mostly a chemical process using elements that are generally poisonous and must be handled with care. The skin is fleshed and dehaired by machine and is split to a thickness of about 2mm (Porter & Ellis, 1956). The actual curing uses a chrome,

sulfuric acid or oxalic acid solutions which penetrate the skin as the tanning agent.

However, the Rocky Cree do not consider commercially prepared hides as "traditional" (K. Spence, Pers. Comm., 1996). Traditional skin preparation, to the Rocky Cree, refers to those techniques which follow historical methods of tanning which have been handed down for generations. This historical or traditional Rocky Cree skin preparation process consists of a variety of time-honoured steps which include such techniques as fleshing, dehairing, stretching, scraping, softening and smoking as discussed in Honigman (1956), Mason (1967), Skinner (1911), Cross Lake Education (1994), the Native Education Branch (1977). The sequence of these steps may vary from family to family, but all are, nevertheless required (Dumas, Pers. Comm., 1996).

**Craft:** Chambers Etymological English Dictionary (1949) defines craft as an occupation requiring skill and artistic talent. This term is used interchangeably with the term art. I consider the craft of Cree skin preparation techniques and moccasin production to be an artform.

**Hide:** Chambers Etymological English Dictionary (1949) defines "hide" as, "The skin of an animal." The term "hide" is used to refer exclusively to moose skin that has been removed from the body of the moose. The words hide and skin are used interchangeably.

**Indigenous (Traditional) Knowledge:** defined by Legat (1991:

1) as "knowledge that derives from or is root in the traditional way of life of Native people." Hart (1995) defines traditional knowledge as:

Knowledge that has passed from one generation to the next through the oral or written traditions... Aboriginal traditional knowledge refers to aspects of traditional Aboriginal life, such as knowledge of the land and its resources, or traditional spirituality and medicine. However, all cultures change, and as they do new knowledge is lost. This means that traditional knowledge changes over time. (p. 4).

**Leather:** The Chambers Etymological English Dictionary (1949) describes leather as "the prepared skin of an animal dressed for use." The Rocky Cree rarely use the word leather to describe a finished skin usually using the words "smoked hide" (Moore, Pers. Comm., 1995).

**Skin:** Used interchangeably with the word "hide." The Rocky Cree often refer to a moose hide as a skin whether tanned or not.

**Tan, Tanning:** The Chambers Etymological English Dictionary (1949) refers to the tanning process as a "method to convert skins and hides into leather." The Rocky Cree also refer to 'tanning' "as a way to prepare the hide for clothing construction" (Dumas. Pers. Comm., 1996). The words tan or tanning are used to describe the entire skin preparation process and therefore can be used interchangeably with the words 'skin preparation'. As a result, 'tan' or 'tanning' are used as other words to describe the complete skin preparation process.

**Tanner:** The Rocky Cree refer to someone who prepares traditional

hides as a tanner. This word is used interchangeably with the word "skin preparer."

**Tibia:** The larger bone between the knee and ankle. It is used to describe the particular bone of a moose.

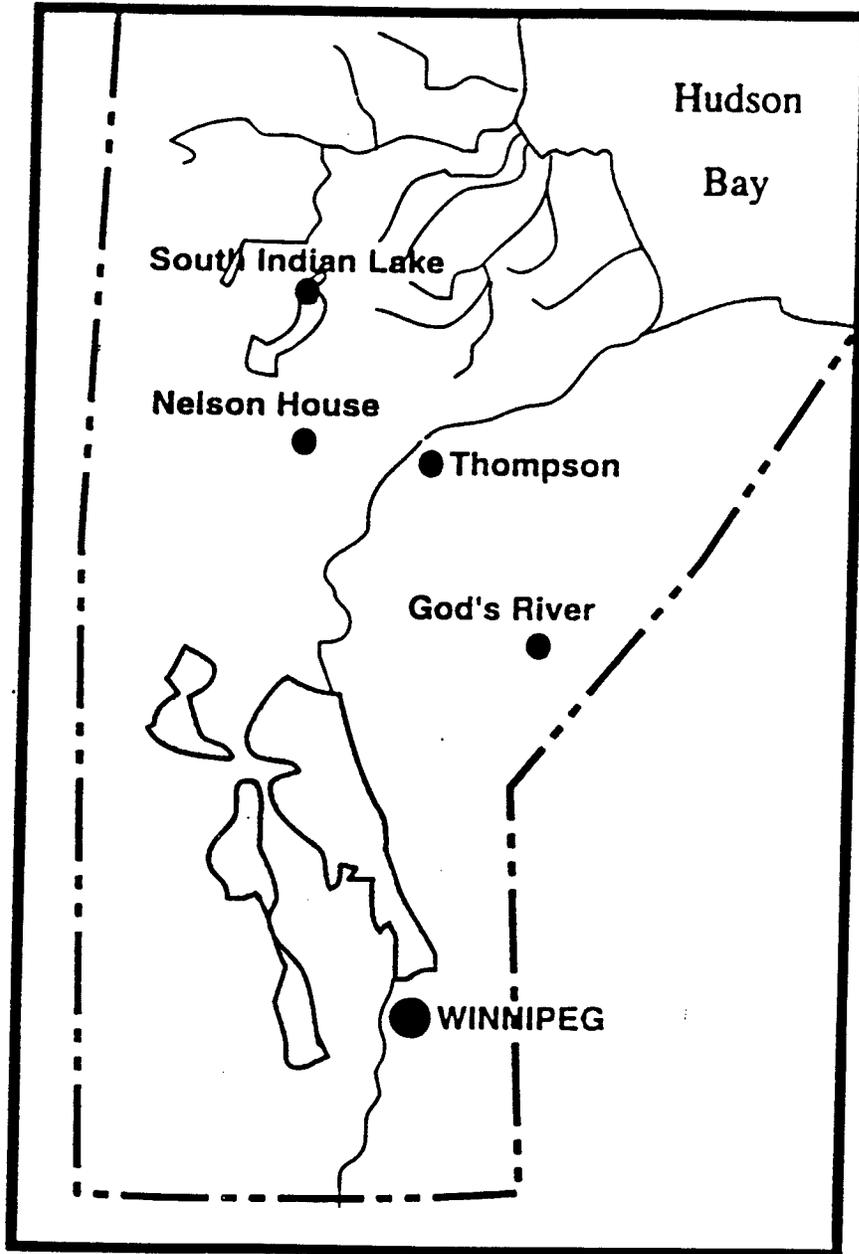
## CHAPTER II. STUDY SITE: NELSON HOUSE

A review of the study site will provide a deeper understanding of the social, historical and physical environment where Rocky Cree skin preparation occurs. The following sections discuss the physical environment, economic history and material culture development of the Cree living in Nelson House, as well as a brief overview and general description of moose habitat, populations, life cycles, and historic/contemporary uses by the Cree.

### 2.1 Nelson House Environment

The community of Nelson House is located in a glacial lake plain of the Precambrian Shield of northern Manitoba's Footprint River Basin on Footprint Lake. The community and surrounding camps are 64 kilometers west of Thompson (Figure 1 & 2) and 10 Kilometers south of Provincial Highway 391. The drainage basin is part of the Rat-Burntwood and Nelson River systems (Social and Economic Impact Study Team, 1974).

This area is considered to be a "belt of semi-arctic lands" (Wissler, 1967) or a part of the subarctic transitional forest zone (Rupert's Land Research Center, 1992, p.45). It is a region characterized by the thick timber cover of the boreal forest which is generously interspersed with "low-lying grassy bogs or swamplike areas traversed by numerous rivers and lakes" (Trenton and Houlihan, 1989, p. 69). The area of the Cree is forested with black and white spruce (see Appendix A) , white birch, tamarack,



**Figure 1.** *Map of Manitoba showing the location of Nelson House*

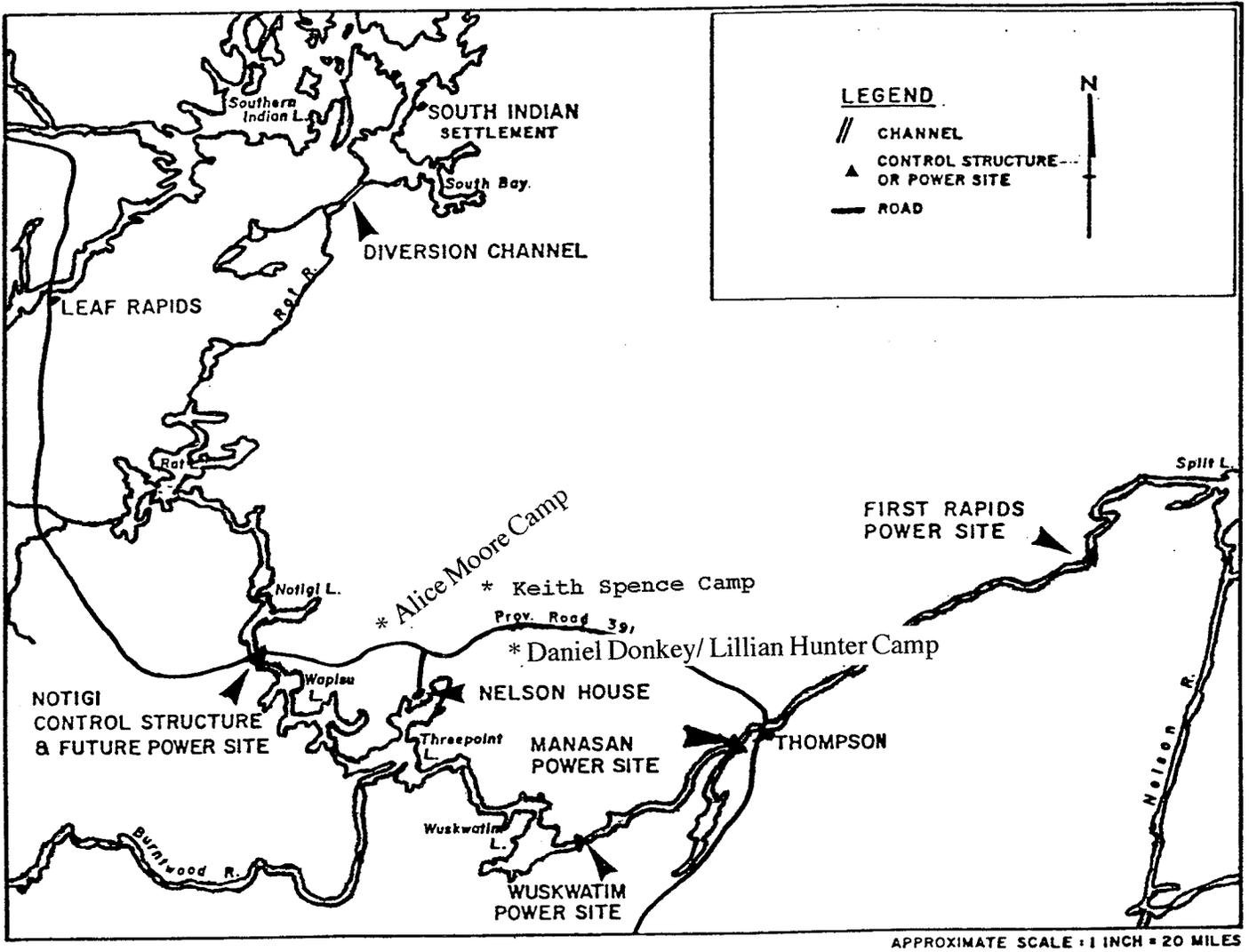


Fig. 2 Map showing Nelson House vicinity  
 (Source: Social and Economic Impact Study, 1974:14)

and poplar, and in drier localities, jack pine (Rogers, 1963). The area occupied by the Cree of Nelson House is primarily Precambrian Shield country which is a region highlighted by low, rolling hills lying little more than 300 m above sea level (Smith, 1981; Rogers, 1963). The region is considered by Knight (1965) to have a harsh climate, with short, warm summers and long, cold winters (Rogers, 1963).

The Cree environment is ill-suited to agriculture but is favorable to the hunting of wild animals, the collecting of wild plants and berries, and fishing in the network of lakes and streams (Mason, 1967). The major large animal species of importance for food and skin clothing products include the woodland caribou, white-tailed deer, and particularly, moose. These animals provide both food and raw materials in the form of bone, antler and hide to produce articles such as beamers, fleshers and clothing skins (Smith, 1981; Rogers and Smith, 1981). However, clothing made from moose skins is preferred by the Rocky Cree. Although moose is thick and requires extra effort to prepare, it responds well to the traditional tanning process and can be made into soft pliant leathers. In addition, moose provide larger skins than caribou or deer which requires less piecing when making large garments such as vests and jackets. The hides of deer and caribou are thinner than moose hide making them especially appropriate for summer garments. However, as a result of its comparative thinness, garments made of these materials have been said not to "last more than a few years and are easier to tear than moose skin" (Moore, Pers. Comm., 1995). Other mammals utilized for food and skin clothing products

included the hare, beaver, and muskrat. Of these, Smith (1981) and Rogers (1963) describes the hare as the most important source of subsistence, while Skinner (1911) calls the hare the "staff of life" furnishing "both food and clothing" (p. 25). Fishskin was also used, though more infrequently. One example is the sturgeon skin bottles made by the Cree (Manitoba Museum, H4.11-36ab). Although, all the skins from these animals were used in the production of clothing materials, this thesis is founded on the preparation of moose hides because this is the animal of choice for most skin preparers, particularly in the production of moccasins which is the focus of this thesis.

## 2.2 The Rocky Cree

Since there has been very little written on the Rocky Cree, there is often a great amount of confusion as to the origins and classifications of the Rocky Cree. One approach to classification has resulted in all Cree peoples being identified with three major cultural groups: the Eastern Woodlands, Plains and Subarctic cultures (Wissler, 1967; Harris 1987; Francis et. al. 1988). The Rocky Cree have typically been identified by this classification as belonging to the subarctic cultural group. As well, all Cree groups have been classified into the Algonquian language group and divided by dialect into five distinct groups (Figure 3); Moose, Swampy, Plains, Woods and "R" Cree (Ellis, 1983). The Cree of Nelson House belong to the Woods dialect in this classification. Researchers have further subdivided the Cree into a confusing number of divisions and designated names based on geographical

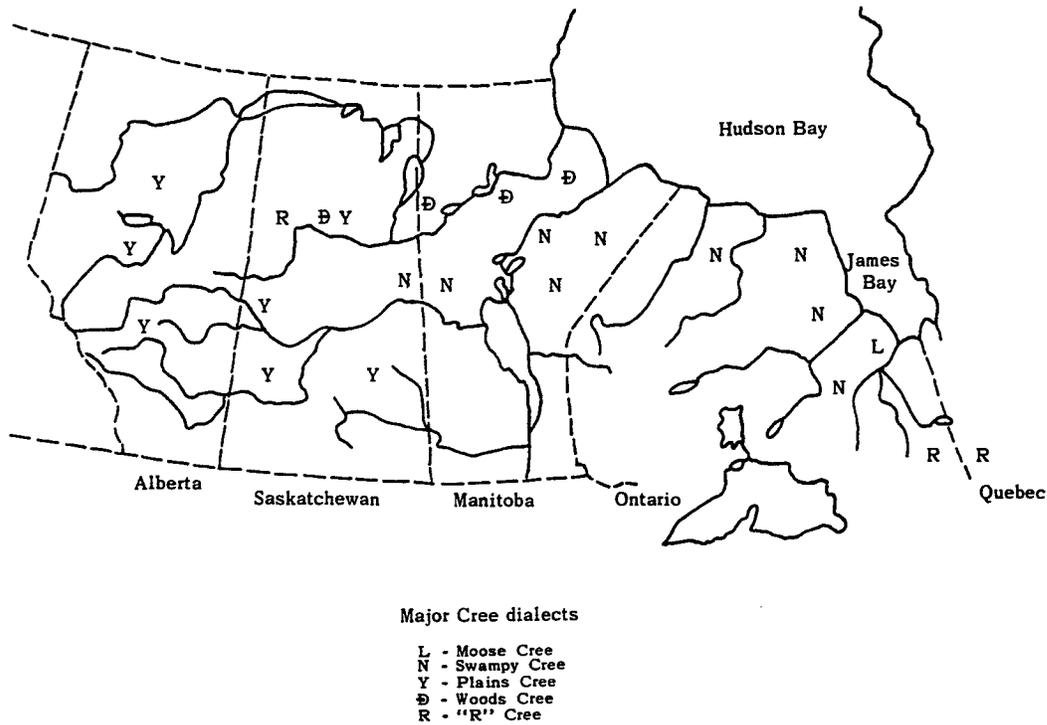


Fig.3 Map showing different Cree linguistic groups

(Source: Ellis, 1983: 13)

territory. Like cultural and linguistic categories, geographical area taxonomies are often artificial, tentative and unrealistic. As a result, "no specific indigenous society fits exactly into any of the categories created by anthropologists and historians" (Rupert's Land Research Center, 1992, p. 42), however they provide a starting place for discussion.

For instance, Honigmann (1956;1981), refers to the Cree peoples who occupy the area west of James Bay to the Churchill River in northern Manitoba as the West Main Cree (Figure 4). Mandelbaum (1979) and Smith (1981), on the other hand, use the term "Western Woods Cree" (Figure 4) to describe the Cree who occupy the forested portions of Hudson and James Bays, including the northern portions of Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. However, Smith (1981) divides these people into Swampy, Strongwoods, and Rocky Cree (Figure 5) with the latter "residing in the region from James Bay, westward to Cumberland House, Saskatchewan" (p. 256). The term Wood or Woodland Cree is used interchangeably with Swampy Cree, Muskegon or Maskegon by both Skinner (1911) and Jenness (1932) and includes "not only those bands around the southern part of Hudson Bay, but those living on the Peace, Athabaska, and Slave Rivers" (Jenness, 1932, p. 284). However, Mason (1941;1967) divides the Wood and Swampy Cree into separate divisions. To Mason (1967) "the Hudson Bay lowlands are inhabited by *maskekowak* ('swamp people') while the forested areas of northern Saskatchewan and Manitoba are occupied by the *sakawiyiniwak* ('woods people')" (p. 1). Nevertheless, the Native Education Branch (1977) insists that all "Cree people in present day Manitoba are referred to as Swampy Cree, [although] at one time the Cree were sub-divided into the Woods Cree group who occupied the northern Shield area around Hudson Bay, and the Swamp Cree who lived around the interlakes" (p. 1). The Native Education Branch insists that "the culture of these two groups was basically similar, but their life-style contrasted greatly with that of a third group, the Plains Cree" (p. 1). The Plains Cree "differ in

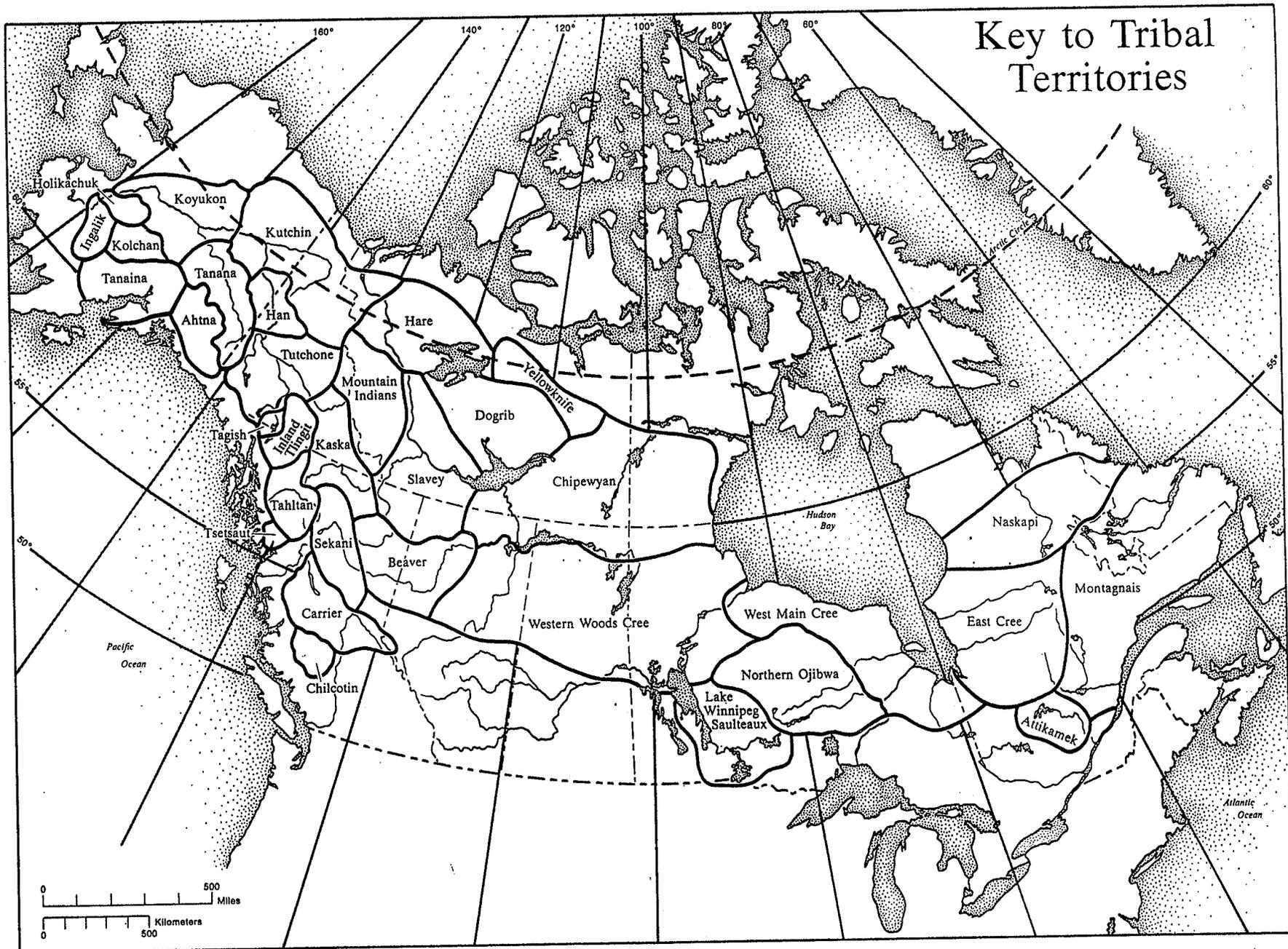


Fig.4 Map showing different Cree culture groups  
(Source: Helm, 1981:9)

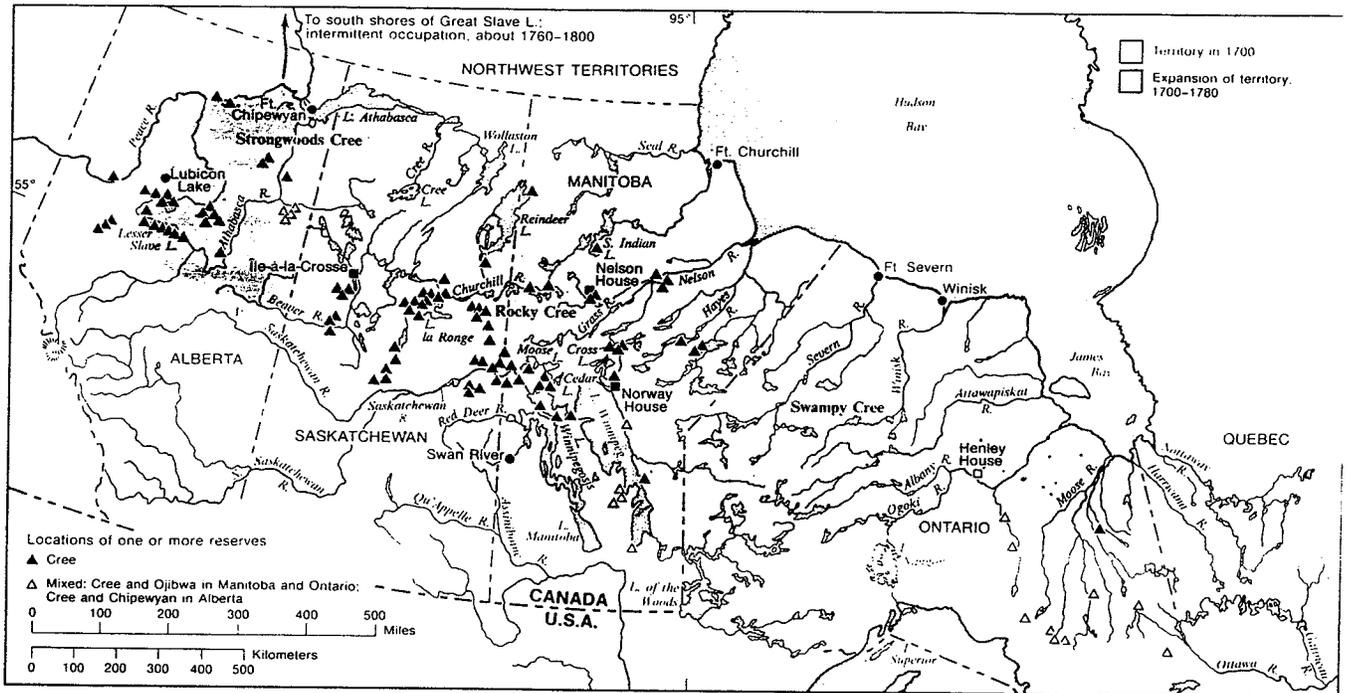


Fig. 1. Territory in the 18th century with locations of modern reserves.

### Fig.5 Map showing Rocky Cree Territory

(Source: Helm, 1981:257)

their methods of life and material culture but are linguistically related" (Skinner, 1911, p.8).

The Cree residents of Nelson House identify themselves as *asiniskawithiniwak*, a term analyzed as "people of the country with abundant rock" (Smith 1975; Brightman, 1989; Dumas, Pers. Comm., 1996). When speaking English, Crees from this area use the phrases "Rocky Cree," "Rock Cree," or "Rock People" (Brightman, 1989: p. 1).

### 2.3 Economic History and Material Culture Development

Smith (1981) feels that the history of the Cree "has not yet

been adequately pursued by scholars, but accumulating evidence indicates that earlier interpretations of territorial movements are incorrect" (p. 257). Until recently, it was considered that the Cree of northern Manitoba were the descendants of a late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century westward migration which was thought to have occurred due to the depletion of game and fur-bearing animals in the traditional Cree areas east of Lake Winnipeg. However there is both archaeological and historical evidence to suggest that the Cree had long occupied the Nelson House area from at least A. D. 900 (Smith, 1976; Wright, 1971; Rupert's Land Research Center, 1992).

Both material and non-material perspectives of northern Manitoba Aboriginal societies have determined that Aboriginal people once maintained a close link with their surroundings (Native Education Branch, 1977, p. 1; Payne & Nepinak, 1996). Food, housing, clothing, tools and weapons were mostly made from natural sources within their immediate environment, and the Cree's social structure was influenced by the yearly cycle of plant growth and animal activity (Native Education Branch, 1977, p. 1). As a result, the Cree people developed a self-sufficient, nomadic way of life "which evolved from the constant search for food, clothing, and shelter, and which revolved around the resources provided by the rivers and streams" (Manitoba Department of Mines, Resources and Environmental Management [hereafter, Manitoba DMREM], 1974, p. 13).

The division of labor was simply carried out according to age and sex. For instance, the men were concerned chiefly with hunting, fishing, trapping and the manufacturing of equipment

while the women had the task of sewing the family's clothing, preparing the skins and pelts, pitching the tent, cutting firewood, cooking, hunting small game such as rabbits, and gathering berries (Skinner, 1911; Native Education Branch, 1977; Smith, 1981).

For most of the eighteenth century, traditional Cree clothing was made from tanned animal hides. Nevertheless, Smith (1981) reports that the material culture of the Cree west of the Nelson River was already being modified by the early eighteenth-century with the introduction of trade goods. This occurred first through intermediaries involved with the French Great Lakes trading system and later through the Hudson Bay system. By the end of the century, woven cloth, initially used as blankets and shawls, slowly began to replace dressed hides in clothing construction. In addition, ready made, European-styled clothing eventually became popular contact-traditional apparel and many Aboriginal clothing tools were rapidly being replaced by metal implements. However, Smith (1981) insists that some traditional articles persisted and reports that items such as bone fleshers and skin scrapers were preferred to those of iron. Rogers and Smith (1981) and Smith (1981) also specify that there were no effective European replacements for hide moccasins and mittens which were more suitable to Cree activities though metal knives, and sewing needles were standard equipment.

Following the merging of the North West Company and the Hudson's Bay Company into an established trading monopoly in 1821, Euro-Canadian influence on material goods and technology of many Aboriginal groups was so great that many native-made implements

and processes were replaced in whole or in part by ready-made equipment purchased at the trading post store. These manufactured garments and cloth changed traditional Cree apparel in almost every respect (Honigmann, 1981). Throughout the 1870-1900 period, Hudson's Bay Company records show Aboriginal people withdrawing from the fur trade for greater participation in other economies (Tough, 1987). By the end of World War II, most Native communities came into existence in locations oriented to a trading post-mission complex and the material culture was almost entirely Euro-Canadian (Smith, 1981). Mason (1967) concurs and believes that "material culture survivals in the 20th century only hint at the former self-sufficiency of the traditional culture" (p.10).

However, until the 1950's, Nelson House remained an isolated community with few ties to the Manitoba economy and southern cultures. The main contacts of Nelson House residents were with the members of other remote communities in the surrounding area (Social and Economic Impact Study Team, 1974). Most residents depended upon the products of forests and rivers for their livelihoods. Traditional pursuits were the norm and this included widespread use of traditional skin preparation techniques (Spence, Pers. Comm., 1995).

After World War II, the expanding need for power, wood materials, mining products and recreation by the inhabitants in the south caused industrialized communities to encroach upon the land. Changes in settlement patterns, lifestyles, the opening of all weather roads, environmental affects from hydro development and the subsequent 1974 flooding of the Rat and Burntwood Rivers by the Churchill River Diversion project caused the community to

gradually move away from a lifestyle dictated by the requirements of fishing, hunting, and trapping. Other significant changes included radio and later television services. As government services expanded, social programs began to replace traditional methods of providing mutual support. In addition, the Social & Economic Impact Study Team (1974) states that younger Native residents were reluctant to submit to the long hours and hard work associated with traditional pursuits as long as alternative employment opportunities were available. New job opportunities created lifestyles which were heavily dependent on a wage economy.

As a result, the Social & Economic Impact Study Team (1974) feels that by 1974 the community of Nelson House was moving away from a life-style dictated by traditional pursuits such as fishing, hunting and trapping. Since the 1970's northern Manitoba has undergone a variety of resource development changes stimulated by northern resource development companies and the federal and provincial governments. Such activities as the construction of hydroelectric facilities and the development of mining operations in nearby Thompson have been the economic basis for other activities, including further road construction, and human resource development activities such as training and employment stimulation programs. The Social and Economic Impact Study Team (1974: 33) believed that the hydroelectric project which diverted water from the Churchill River at Southern Indian Lake into the Nelson River via the Rat-Burntwood system would "accelerate the rate of change through its effect on both the physical resource base and the employment opportunities" (p. 8). Initially these influences reduced the number of moose used in skin preparation

(Dumas, Pers. Comm., 1995) and the ever-increasing availability of commercial manufactured goods reduced even further the Cree's need for skin clothing (Smith, 1981). The reduction of moose populations, however, was only temporary. The clearing of bush for hydro lines and roads actually helped create habitat attractive to moose. Many hunters claim that the moose populations have "come back alot from the days just after the flood though they are often found in different areas from where they used to be" (M. Spence, Per. Comm., 1995).

Today, Nelson House has a nursing station, a Northern Store, three corner stores, a taxi-van service, a pool hall/canteen, a restaurant, two fast-food outlets, a Hunters and Trappers Association, a telecommunications network, a school (up to grade 12 including college and university courses offered by Inter-Universities North) and a local police unit (augmented by an RCMP detachment located in Thompson). The reserve is accessible by an all weather road via Provincial Road No. 391 from Thompson.

As a result of the conveniently located Northern store and the accessible transportation link to Thompson and the south, many residents have access to the same clothes available in southern stores. Contemporary clothing is often bought or is sometimes made using cloth fabrics or commercially prepared skins. Today, many residents no longer prepare and tan their own skins because of the extremely low financial return as is the case in many other Native communities (King, 1991).

Nevertheless, skin clothing prepared by non-commercial techniques is still in demand by the Nelson House Cree, particularly by hunters and trappers who maintain that such

clothing is far superior for the severe winter conditions of the area (Dumas, Pers. Comm. 1995, September 1). The contemporary social importance of traditionally made winter skin clothing of the Nelson house Cree is similar to that experienced by the Inuit of the Belcher Islands described by Oakes (1991a, 1991b, 1991c). King (1991) also points out the practical significance of traditionally prepared winter skin clothing and suggests that the importance of winter skin clothing is underrepresented by material culture researchers. Skin clothing is also cherished by those who attend special occasions such as traditional weddings and it is very common in Nelson House to see non-commercially prepared moccasins worn in the home or at work. As a result, there are still a number of individuals, mostly elderly people, who know and practice traditional skin preparation. However, its long-term survival is in no way assured.

#### 2.4 Moose: General Description

Since this study involves the use of moose skins, it is necessary to give a background on the moose in order to better understand why it is used in the tanning process. This section provides an overview of the characteristics, demography, habitat, feeding habits, and historic/contemporary uses of moose by the Cree.

Moose are common across the study region. Moose are considered by the Cree to be quite plentiful in the Nelson House area since the region is considered to be prime habitat (Dumas, Pers. Comm., 1996). Historically, moose appear to have been

reduced by hunting and settlement in the European period (18th and 19th centuries), and more recently by hydro development which flooded a great amount of moose habitat. The Rupert's Land Research Centre (1992) reports that moose populations also "appear to have suffered from the introduction of guns, but have made significant recovery in the 20th century." Ironically, clearing of the bush for roads, seismic testing, and hydro lines created habitat and pathways attractive to the moose (W. Spence, Pers. Comm., 1995). This has significantly helped to offset the negative impacts of hydro development on moose populations in the area around Nelson House (Rupert's Land Research Center, 1992). Populations of 4 per square mile (259 ha) are considered high in other areas of the Canada (Burt and Grossenheider, 1976). However, this is the figure that many Nelson House hunters have quoted for the area (Dumas, Pers. Comm., 1996; Spence, Pers. Comm., 1996). A normal population in a forest region is usually one moose per square mile (1.6 km<sup>2</sup>) - or at the most two per square mile (3.2 km<sup>2</sup>) (Peterson, 1955). Therefore, moose populations in the Nelson House area are very high. These same hunters conclude that the Nelson House environment possesses the perfect habitat for moose. Nelson House hunters seem to have little trouble procuring moose in most years which usually ensures a steady supply of moose skins for tanners. Of course this number depends on the frequency of hunters to go out and actually hunt moose and their ability to find moose.

Moose is the largest of the American deer, whose members also include elk (wapiti), woodland caribou, barren ground caribou,

mule deer, and white-tailed deer. Males generally measure 5 to 6 1/2 feet (152-198cm) in height, weighing up to 1,180 pounds (531 kg) (Burt and Grossenheider, 1976). Females reach about three quarters the size of the male. This is another reason why moose are preferred for tanning because the large skins necessitate less piecing when making large garments, and they provide enough material to make many moccasins from one hide.

In color the moose varies from dark brown, almost black, to reddish or grayish brown, with brownish-grey or white leg "stockings". Males have massive, palmate, mahogany-colored flat antlers which may extend up to 190 cm between the widest tips. The heavy main beams of the antlers broaden into large palms which are fringed with a series of spikes usually less than 30 cm long (Burt and Grossenheider, 1976). In the winter months, the moose lives solely on twigs, bark and shrubs, such as balsam fir, poplar, red osier dogwood, birch, and alder. In summer, moose tend to gather around low-lying areas of stagnant, mineral-rich water where they vary their diet with leaves, some upland plants and aquatic vegetation in great quantities. An adult moose up to 50 pounds (2,300 grams.) of twigs and bark each day in winter. In summer, moose eat up to 50 pounds (2,300 grams) of forage - twigs, leaves, shrubs, upland plants, and water plants (Cahalane, 1958).

Moose (Figure 6) are extremely well-adapted to traversing through difficult terrain full of fallen trees and thick bush cover. Its legs are long enough to carry it easily over deadfall trees or through snow that would stop deer or wolf. Its cloven hooves spread widely to support when it wades through muskeg or over soft surfaces. The dew claws (sometimes referred to as the

dew hoof or accessory hoof), located below the fetlock joint, provide additional support. This fact means that moose are a difficult animal to hunt since they can move very freely over the terrain.

Historically, moose skins and materials provided the Cree with much of their raw essentials, particularly cover material for conical lodge structures, blankets and bedding materials (Skinner, 1911; Smith, 1981: 262), cords and lines made from rawhide, sinew



*Fig.6 Moose in typical habitat, Nelson House area, 1996*

for garment sewing (Honigmann, 1981), bags and containers made

from skins and internal organs, and bone and antler for producing articles such as awls, beamers, needles, fleshers, spear points and fish hooks (Rogers & Smith, 1981).

Today, moose are primarily used for their meat and the skins are utilized in the skin preparation process. In addition, some tools such as fleshing tools are procured from the leg bone of moose. Moose hides are the preferred choice for making moccasins because "moose possesses a thick skin which is ideal for making strong, soft, supple skin clothing items such as moccasins, gauntlets, fur hats and jackets, which can last many years" according to Dumas (Pers. Comm., 1996).

## CHAPTER III. METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

## 3.1 Overview

This thesis is founded on the concept of community-based participatory research methodology. As a result, the methods used in this study will involve some of the pragmatic aspects of participatory research such as involving those who are traditionally the researched in the formulation of the purpose, problems, objectives, and intent of the research, the collection of data, and the interpretation, use, and control of the findings/results.

The methodology and methods chosen to develop the study, collect, analyze and synthesize the data into a concise, useful document are outlined and compared with the ways other studies applied the same methods and methodology.

## 3.2 Methodology: Community-Based Participatory Research

Community-based participatory research is a tool used to promote economic and social change in Native communities (SSHRC Task Force, 1983). This methodology seeks "to empower and elevate the 'researched' to participate in and steer the research process... and empower community groups by facilitating participation in decision-making and developing 'partnerships' in the research process" (Ward, 1996; also see: Lather, 1986; Maguire, 1987; Ryan and Robinson, 1990). Community-based participatory research is a qualitative methodology that emphasizes respect for the individual and a commitment to social

change in order to enable research to empower First Nations communities (Maquire, 1987; Hall, 1979; Tandon, 1981 & 1988; VioGrossi, 1981; Campbell, 1987; and St. Denis, 1992).

According to Maquire (1987), community-based participatory research aims at three primary objectives: 1) to develop critical consciousness of both researcher and participant; 2) to improve the lives of participants in the research process; and 3) to transform fundamental societal structures and relationships.

According to Ward (1996), community-based participatory research methodological approaches have evolved from a "wide variety of areas, most notably from adult education, literacy theory and international development theory. These methodologies have their origins in the social movements of the 1960's, and to theorists such as Frier (1970) and Hall (1979) in adult education, Gunder Frank (1973) in dependency theory, and Tandon (1985) in international development (Maquire, 1987).

A number of academics have successfully used this methodology in their research. Ward (1996), for instance, used such a methodology in a project on community attitudes towards Territorial Park development on Mallikjuak Island described in her Master's thesis. Ward informed the community of her interest in helping them develop a community-based research project. The Community Development Committee approved the proposal. The research was worked on by a team of local research trainees and ownership of the project remained entirely with the community (Ward, 1996).

Campbell et. al.(1996) also used a great deal of community involvement in their dietary surveys study. Initially, they

obtained the approval and cooperation of the local authority -the Chief, tribal council, and health service providers employed by the government or the band. However, funding arrangements prevented additional community involvement at the outset of the study. Campbell et. al. (1996) also recognized the importance of community involvement in all aspects of the study because "it contributes to community action on recommendations resulting from the study."

Kurelek (1992) used community-based participatory research methodology in her study of the Innu of Labrador. The adoption of this methodology had the important goal of involving community members in the research process, and the more questionable aim of raising the consciousness of the community. She concludes by maintaining that good participatory research allows community members to raise the consciousness of the researcher.

Bopp and Bopp (1985) employed community-based participatory research in their research. Bopp maintains that community-based participatory research enables Native communities to use the "knowledge which is an essential part of their culture to develop community programs appropriate to the community" (Bopp and Bopp, 1985). Bopp and Bopp also characterize community-based participatory research as being able to help "create a mirror by which a community can see its own eyes, that is, its own wisdom and knowledge," and it can help a "community integrate cultural wisdom with academic knowledge." This enables community-based participatory research to become a tool through which the community can act upon its constituents' lives in an informed collaborative manner.

St. Denis (1992) also used community-based participatory research in her study on community human services organizations. She identified four aspects of community-based research that is central to its practice: first, the intent and purpose of the research which must be related to community needs; second, the nature of human relationships in the research process where the aim is for so called "subjects" to become co-researchers; third, data analysis and interpretation which involves the need to collaborate with the people in the research context on the interpretation of data; and fourth, the use of findings and results whereby some of the harm caused by the disseminating or publishing of findings can be prevented if the research results are reviewed by the group or community prior to publication. Though St, Denis feels that community-based participatory research has enormous potential she also contends that community-based participatory research is a difficult, demanding and time consuming process in which the fact of community participation is not easily achieved.

Oakes (1985; 1991a;1991b;1991c) and Oakes and Riewe (1996) who have used aspects of this methodology in their many studies of circumpolar people (particularly the Inuit) have also discussed the importance of community feedback when conducting community-based research projects (Oakes & Riewe, 1996). In their studies they include a community review of their research which "enables members to correct misinterpretations, share information, and review the research prior to it being published...[which] ensures reliability, validity, and respect for original knowledge" (Oakes and Riewe, 1996, 76). They have also gone to great lengths to hire

local residents in research projects which ensures that residents are able to participate in the research project and allows them to take a role in planning and implementing research. They insist that residents should not only participate in the research design and methodology, and in the collection and analysis of the data, but that they should also have equal control over the dissemination of the research findings (Oakes & Riewe, 1996).

### 3.3 Methodology: Used in This Study

Following community-based participatory research methodology, community members and the Band Council were consulted at every step of this research. For instance, much of the title, purpose, objectives and methods of this proposal were extracted in conversations with community members who freely discussed what they would want to see in a study on Rocky Cree skin preparation techniques. Therefore, those who are affected by the research were organized into a loose collaborative group directly involved in the research process. For example, preliminary contacts with community members of Nelson House strongly recognized the need to have the study conducted at Nelson House. As a result, field research was believed to be the most appropriate approach to fulfilling the objectives of this thesis. First hand experience at all stages of traditional moose skin preparation is believed to be necessary in order to comprehend and interpret the perceived factors which affect each step of the skin preparation process and to determine the prospects for a sustainable Rocky Cree

traditional skin preparation economy.

Scientists currently working with community-based participatory research with Aboriginal people are constantly faced with a number of challenges which better reflect the applied aspects of their work. As a result, I have included a number of personal reflections on this methodology (See Appendix C), which will illustrate the growth which I experienced (and am still experiencing) as a non-Native male academic trying to make sense of my place in the university environment doing applied community-based participatory research in the subarctic regions of Manitoba.

### 3.4 Methods

Within the community-based participatory research methodological framework, I used a wide range of research methods. These included doing a literature search, examining photographs, and gathering *Indigenous knowledge* (See Definitions, Section 1.5). Further methods included informal and formal interviews, observing numerous skin preparation sessions in and around the community of Nelson House, discussions with academics familiar with Cree skin preparation methods, and an experiential method known as participant-observation. Participant-observation allowed me to participate as a skin preparer in many skin preparation sessions between August 1995 to September 1996.

Preliminary research conducted in 1995 identified a number of Nelson House residents possessing skills as skin preparers (all gave me their permission to use their names) (Figure 7). These people were selected as interviewees. Residents were chosen due to

their talents or combination of talents, willingness to volunteer their time, and concern for research accuracy, and were selected with the help of the Chief, Band Council, elders and interested community members.

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Fig.7 Skin preparation participants in study

Camps Outside Nelson House

In Nelson House

Full-time Tanners:

Alice Moore  
Madeline Spence

Full-time Tanner:

Nancy Swanson

Part-time tanners:

Daniel Donkey  
Keith Spence  
Lillian Hunter

Part-time tanner:

Dolly Hart

Elders Knowledgeable About Skin Tanning

William Dumas  
Jack Moore  
Wellington Spence  
Elijah Swanson

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With respect to gathering information from Nelson House residents, the methodology entailed the use of site visits to outlining camps within the Nelson House area (refer to figure 2) as well as from within the community itself. Site visitations to these camps took place with separate families or groups of families designated by other tanners as groups who conducted moose hide tanning on a frequent basis. All members of these camps were band members of Nelson House. Visits to both Nelson House and the camps were conducted with the families using participant-

observation and an open and flexible interview format which precludes the rigidity of questionnaires. Seven tanners were identified, two which did their tanning within the community while the others did their tanning in outlining camps (Figure 7). Of those seven, three considered their skin preparation activities to be on a full-time basis while the others considered their tanning activities as part-time or were retired from tanning. In addition, four elders also provided information on tanning techniques and historical considerations. Many other people within the community were contacted in regards to marketing activities of the products made from tanning, particularly members of the Band Council and officials of the Nelson House Economic Development Corporation, as well as a teacher in the Nelson House school and community members familiar with skin preparation activities. A number of young students were also contacted in order to get their impressions of skin preparation as a possible future pursuit.

Many families spoke only Cree, therefore, at least one interpreter was present at most site visits. Interpreters played an important role in the interview process and were carefully selected. I am fortunate to have worked with a number of very capable individuals who have had much experience in this regard.

In addition, people who were directly involved with the skin preparation process such as members of the Nelson House Community Development Corporation, spiritual elders, and officials at the local Nelson House School were interviewed in order to collect further perceived challenges and prospects influencing Cree skin preparation techniques.

Informants were encouraged to give valuable opinions,

judgments, and assumptions at each stage of the skin preparation process. Field notes, videotape, audiotape, photographs, sketches and samples were made at each stage. The following sections discuss the methods I used in more detail and also discuss how others have used such methods.

#### 3.4.1 Interviews: Use in Other Studies

Another method of investigation used in this study is the detailed or conversational interview referred to by Blythe (1969) and Haring et. al. (1992) as the unstructured, undirected or informal interview. This form of interviewing which is defined by the *Shorter Oxford Dictionary* as a "meeting of persons face to face, especially for the purpose of formal conference on some point," and by Becker and Geer (1957) as a method of research in which the "interviewer explores many facets of his interviewer's concerns, treating subjects as they come up in conversation, pursuing interesting leads, allowing his imagination and ingenuity full rein as he tries to develop new hypotheses and test them in the course of the interview" (p. 28). Festinger and Katz (1953) refer to the interview method as a process of reporting data by individuals out of their own experience. The term "interview" is used here to designate a type of interview in which there is an appreciable amount of control exercised over both the presentation of the questions and the recording of the answers, but allows the informant to dictate the subsequent situation.

A technique such as this was used by Blythe (1969) in his well-known village study of *Akenfield*. The problem of how to

record all of what the informant said was best dealt with by using a tape recorder so that the complete verbatim record could be kept and referred to when needed later. Mann (1985) points out that this method requires some form of selective recording (i.e. shorthand or individual abbreviations) in order to be successful. However, there are many advantages to this type of interviewing method. For instance, informal interviewing is advantageous when a researcher has limited knowledge of the kind of answer a particular question will provoke (Haring et. al., 1992). Other advantages include when a researcher anticipates a great range of responses. Mann (1985) also points out that one of the main advantages of the informal interview is that it can set the groundwork for a more formal, structured or fixed stimulus-response situation which can then be standardized for a number of different interviewers. Research using this more formal interview method can then be analyzed in tabular form for statistical presentation.

Though this method has many inherent advantages, there are also a number of disadvantages. For instance, Becker and Geer (1957) insist that the informal interview method provides little opportunity of recognizing or rectifying errors in interpretation. Becker and Geer (1957) as well as Festinger and Katz (1953) point out that other problems with the interview method is that there is a high probability of errors if the respondent does not understand the question or when the researcher does not understand the answer. As well, they and McCall (1969) point out that there is a great possibility of error due to the observer intentionally or unintentionally responding with misleading or biased data. In

other words, there is a chance that "an interviewer may misunderstand common English words when interviewees use them in some more or less esoteric way and not know that he is misunderstanding them, because there will be little chance to check his understanding against either further examples of their use in conversation or instances of the object to which they are applied" (Becker and Geer, 1957: p. 29). This danger is particularly possible when researching aspects of a different culture as this study is doing. Oakes (1985) in her research on Inuit Kamik production also comments on another disadvantage by pointing out that the interviewing method in some Native societies, such as the Inuit, is considered a disrespectful way to collect information from elders.

#### 3.4.2 Interviews: Use in This Study

Interviews were recorded using videocameras, audiotapes, written notes and journals. The majority of interviews used to collect information on the various aspects of skin preparation were mostly unstructured and informal. This was due to the fact that many participants felt ill at ease with formal questions and it is known that questioning elders in Nelson House is often considered disrespectful (Oakes, 1985; K. Spence, Pers. Comm. 1996). Therefore, most interviews were held at unscheduled times such as during work sessions, meals, car rides and social visits.

In this method only the general theme of the discussion was set, and apart from focusing the discussion on this theme, the interviewer's role was to encourage the individual being

interviewed to speak freely about those aspects that he/she felt to be most relevant. Most interviews were taped using C90 cassettes for later analysis. The remaining interviews were noted in field notes and journals.

### 3.4.3 Participant-Observation: Use in Other Studies

Participant-observation, which has been described by Berreman (1968) as a "process of social interaction similar to the interactions of everyday life" (p. 340), is one of the methods I used to satisfy the objectives of this study. Schwartz and Schwartz (1969) further state that participant-observation is a process in which the observer maintains a face-to-face social relationship with the observed, and, participates with them in their natural life setting for the purpose of scientific investigation and data gathering. McCall (1969) further defines participant observation as a particular style of research which makes use of a characteristic blend of methods and techniques, such as observation, informant interviewing, document analysis, respondent interviewing, and participation with self-analysis.

Oakes (1988) selected participant-observation as a data collecting method in order to record the clothing production procedures of the Copper and Caribou Inuit. This method was chosen in order to lessen the anticipated confusion caused by cultural and language barriers and also allowed Oakes to "increase the amount of detailed information collected throughout the less obvious stages of each procedure" (p. 5). Because the field worker directly observes and also participates in this method, even

casual expressions and attitudes of ordinary social life can be uncovered. Becker and Geer (1957) also used participant-observation in their research on medical students because it provided them with a yardstick against which to measure the completeness of data gathered in other ways" (p. 28). In their view, one of the advantages of participant-observation is that it gives a complete picture about social events and can therefore be used as a benchmark to make a researcher aware of what data may be lost by using another method. Becker and Geer (1957) even claim that participant-observation is more successful than any other method in gathering data on the complex richness, the subtlety and infinite variety, of social life which allows field workers to look at a social system as an organic whole or what Becker and Geer refer to as the "cultural esoterica" (p.30). Other examples of the use of participant observation in research can be found in Littrell (1980), Pelto & Pelto (1981), Pannabecker (1990), and Oakes (1991a, 1991b, 1991c).

Nevertheless, there are disadvantages to participant-observation. For instance, Daly (1984) stresses that the quality of the data obtained from participant-observation "depends on a number of factors such as the degree of formality, the familiarity and rapport between the individuals, the social role established in the community of residence and the amount of time spent in the field" (p. 358). This method has the capability of causing a great deal of problems for researchers because it is a data collecting procedure where the researcher is the principal research instrument (Pelto and Pelto, 1981). Participant-observation, therefore, depends a great deal on the personal communication

skills of the researcher; and, therefore, the degree of success of a research project using this method can vary according to the social role established and the personality and of the fieldworker (Daly, 1984). Participant-observation can also amass a great deal of criticism on field workers for slipshod sampling, for failing to document assertions quantitatively, and for accepting impressionistic accounts (McCall, 1969). McCall (1969) further contends that one of the major limitations of participant-observation derives from the researchers use of the relationships he establishes in the field which has the potential to cause high degrees of bias. McCall (1969) also attests that a further limitation of participant-observation is that it is not generally useful for statistical treatments due to the non-standardized way the data are collected.

#### 3.4.4 Participant-Observation: Use in This Study

In this study, data was collected using participant-observation methods in order to provide a substantial understanding and in-depth range of the processes and influencing factors in skin preparation techniques, moccasin production and marketing techniques. This methodology reduced misunderstandings caused by cultural and language barriers as suggested by Becker and Geer (1956, 1957) and Oakes (1985, 1988) and increased the amount of detailed information collected through the less obvious stages of each technique and procedure which was of concern to the Nelson House community partners. In fact, Nelson House Band Council members and community residents preferred participant-

observation methods as this method was considered to be more culturally sensitive. In fact, participant-observation techniques are very similar to the methods used by many traditional Cree in their child-rearing practices. For instance, traditional Cree parents often do not teach their children by either words, special demonstrations, or lectures (Dumas, Pers. Comm., 1996). Instead, children learn on their own, by watching and by emulating what they see. This type of teaching, which Ross (1992) calls "modeling," means that it is up to the child to observe carefully, and to study entirely on their own. In the case of tanning, a child, after considerable observation of specific tanning techniques, is often told that it is his/her turn to attempt the techniques. The children are expected to have learned merely by observing, and then to be ready to execute the task with excellence. This method of learning falls within the parameters of participant-observation and enabled the application of this method to be surprisingly useful. In addition, the Cree tanners preferred this method of research as it fell within Cree cultural norms for passing on knowledge. Cree tanners felt far more comfortable with this method of research than with others used such as interviews, whether formal or informal.

Participant-observation techniques also allowed the researcher to determine whether statements and procedures were realistic or idealistic representations of skin preparation challenges and prospects. This required energetic participation in such activities as skinning, fleshing, dehairing, stretching, scraping, lubricating, softening and smoking.

Following within the parameters of community-based

participatory research, the words of the skin preparers themselves are used to retain their own perspectives and ownership of the knowledge. My words are used only to link the ideas together for the sake of analysis which I believe gives this study more credibility and validity. Therefore, the results of this skin preparation study, found in Chapter Five, are presented in quote format wherever possible.

Finally, informants and interpreters were remunerated with small gifts, tobacco and food. Informants and the community will benefit by receiving a copy of an informative video documenting Nelson House skin preparation techniques. A booklet designed for the Nelson House school has recently been suggested by the school's Native Studies teacher, and a copy of this thesis for the Nelson House Community Development Corporation Library has been mutually agreed upon by the community and Band Council as remuneration to the people who will make this research possible.

## CHAPTER IV. DESCRIPTION OF HISTORICAL AND CURRENT SKIN PREPARATION PROCEDURES

### 4.1. Introduction

This chapter describes current skin preparation procedures and the factors which affect them. The Traditional Rocky Cree skin preparation process consists of a variety of steps which include such processes as preparing the skins (preparing the location, soaking, collecting poles for the stretcher), flesh and hair removal (scraping, and stretching), lubricating and softening (resoaking, greasing, wringing and drying), and smoking. These steps are described in this chapter. In addition, this chapter will provide a brief overview of historical Cree skin preparation culled from the literature and Nelson House elders in order to highlight and compare traditional procedures from the past with current tanning procedures. This section also examines decisions made at each stage of the skin preparation process. Skin preparation involves a series of decisions made at various times depending on the influences from environmental factors such as weather, and insects; geographic factors such as camp location and availability of water; cultural factors such as exposure to traditional ways, as well as age and physical health of the tanner; and, finally, economic influences such as cost of tools and materials, and transportation costs to material gathering sites.

Commercial methods require the use of chemicals (generally poisonous that must be handled with care) and result in a skin that is arguably not as strong or with as good insulation as a

traditionally prepared skin (See section 3.1). Lillian Hunter (Pers. Comm., 1996) comments that "commercially prepared hides are also very hard to sew with. It's harder to punch a needle through the hide. I work with the hides I have tanned because the hide is stronger and lasts longer yet it is easier to sew with." Keith Spence (Pers. Comm., 1996) also adds that "commercial tanning strips the life out of a hide. Commercial hides tear more easily, and are harder to sew with." Schneider (1972:67) adds that when sewing with commercial-tanned hides, "a special 'glover's needle' with a triangular cross-section and sharp cutting edges must be used, for a regular round needle seems to get caught or bound in its own hole.

A great amount of preparation must be made by a skin preparer in order to decide where to prepare the skin, the time of year and day to best begin work on the skin, soaking times, and the collection of poles needed for the stretcher. Before deciding to proceed with the skin preparation process, such considerations must be arranged before work can begin. The following describes how historical and contemporary Cree prepare their hides for the skin preparation process.

#### 4.1.1 Historical Considerations

There is very little detailed literature on West Main or Western Woods Cree (which encompasses all Cree groups in northern Manitoba including the Rocky Cree) skin preparation procedures (Rogers, 1967; Skinner, 1911; Burch, 1979; Smith, 1981; King, 1991). However, literature on historical skin preparation from

Native groups contiguous with the West Main or Western Woods Cree of northern Manitoba is both numerous and detailed. For instance, Young et. al. (1991) describes, in detail, the skin preparation methods used by the Cree of northern Alberta; Rogers (1967, 1973) describes skin preparation techniques of the Mistassini Cree of northern Quebec; Jenness (1932), Koch (1977), Mandelbaum (1979), Buck and Ahenakew (1972), and the Saskatchewan Indian Arts and Crafts Advisory Committee (1974) describe Plains Cree skin techniques; Rogers (1960; 1963), Hunt (1973), Schneider (1972), Lyford (1982), and Steinbring (1966) describe Ojibway skin preparation techniques; and Honigmann (1946, 1949, 1954), Mason (1946), Osgood (1936, 1937), McKennan (1965), and McClellan (1975) examine the skin preparation processes of the various Athapaskan-speaking groups of the Yukon and Northwest Territories (Figure 8).

Some historical methods of traditional West Main or Western Woods Cree tanning techniques have been documented, particularly by Skinner (1911), Rogers (1967) and Honigmann (1956). These traditional methods have been further augmented with historical information provided by a number of experienced skin preparers and elders from the community of Nelson House.

#### 4.1.2 Gender Roles and Decision-Making

Today, it is recognized that Cree skin preparation in Nelson House is no longer the specific domain of women as it once was (W. Spence, Pers. Comm., 1995). Some men, particularly the husbands of established skin preparers, now share in the skin preparation workload (Dumas, pers comm., 1995). Dumas (Pers. Comm., 1996)

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Fig.8 Skin preparation researchers and culture groups

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Plains Cree

Jenness (1932)  
Koch (1977)  
Mandelbaum (1979)  
Buck/Ahenakew (1972)  
Sask. Indian Arts & Crafts Advisory Committee (1974)

Ojibwa

Steinbring (1966)  
Schneider (1972)  
Hunt (1973)  
Lyford (1982)  
Rogers (1960,1963)

Northern Alberta Cree

Young et. al.(1991)

Athapaskan Groups

McKenna (1965)  
McClellan (1975)

West Main/Western Woods Cree

Skinner (1911)  
Rogers (1967)  
Honigmann (1956)

Mistassini Cree

Rogers (1967;1973)

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states that some of the reasons men are helping more with skin preparation are due to the fact that, "men hunt less today than they used to so they have more time to help, while others are simply interested in the process or see that there is some money to be made preparing moose skin."

However, male skin preparers are still a minority, and appear to play a predominantly supportive role within many of the processes of skin preparation such as gathering materials and producing tools. The gathering of materials such as poles for the stretching frame (discussed in section 4.2.5 Collecting Poles for Stretcher) or diamond willow for the smoking of the hide (discussed in section 4.6.2 Smudging Hide) were considered male pursuits within the tanning process. It was felt that the menial demands of gathering these materials were better suited to males as they were the ones often more knowledgeable of the land, and because of the physical demands of such activities were more befitting of males. Nonetheless, men are far more involved in the overall process of skin preparation than they were only decades ago. As Elijah Swanson (Pers. Comm., 1995) clearly stated in regards to skin preparation, "men help out with the skins alot more now than they did in my days, but the women are still boss!" (Pers. Comm., 1995).

Despite the involvement of men, women are still considered to be the final decision-makers on all aspects of the skin preparation process. Establishing who was the principal preparer was considered to be of primary importance to many of the women as this "makes it easier to work on all the steps with as little trouble (read:interference) as possible." (Hunter, Pers. Comm.,

1996). As Moore (Pers. Comm., 1995) claimed, "people (referring to the men) who don't know all there is to know about each hide only get in the way and cause confusion. My husband does only what I ask him to do and this a great help." The Rocky Cree, through gender considerations, have established a process of authority within the skin preparation process which seems to work smoothly and efficiently.

#### 4.1.3 Decisions on Individual Hides

Nelson House tanners often work on many hides at a time. It was observed throughout the field season that tanners often had many hides in different stages of preparation. This allowed the tanners the choice to work on at least one hide if the others could not be worked on due to environmental or economic reasons. I have many hides in different stages. If the weather isn't right to do one stage then I can always work on another. I can never just sit around doing nothing. There is always a hide that needs work done on it" (Moore, Pers. Comm., 1995).

It is also acknowledged by many of the tanners that the preparation of moose hides is not always accomplished using the same specific steps. Decisions made throughout the tanning process are not predetermined like a manual or a recipe from a cook book. A variety of decisions are made depending on the state of each individual hide and the many environmental, cultural, geographic and economic influences that affect each stage of tanning. As Alice Moore (Pers. Comm., 1995) states,

the cleaning and preparation of the hide isn't done just one way... No one does their tasks in just one way when

working on a hide. There are many steps in hide tanning, but some hides need different steps and others need more steps. The hide and things such as the weather, the [condition] of my tools, and other things tell me what I must do and how I must do it.

Decisions on what tasks should be completed and when they should be completed are highly influenced by the individual moose hide and certain environmental impacts such as weather (which will be explained in later sections).

K. Spence (Pers. Comm., 1996) adds that "certain moose hides are easier to tan than others. A fall or winter hide is thicker and harder to tan than a summer hide (due to its excessive need for scraping, and because the hair is thicker making the dehairing process a longer, more arduous task)...a male moose is harder to tan than a female (usually because the skin is thicker and needs more scraping), and a hide from an old animal is harder to tan than from a young one (again because the skin is tougher and harder to scrape)" (Spence, Pers. Comm., 1996).

#### 4.2 Preparing Skins

Before deciding to proceed with the tanning process, the following must be considered: where to prepare the skin, the time of year and day to best begin work on the skin, soaking times, and the collection of poles needed for the stretcher.

Today, as in the past, men did all the skinning of the moose they killed, usually at the kill site and usually within a short time of killing them or the heat and sun would ruin the skin. After the animal had been skinned, the hide was soaked in water for a few days to continue the bacterial action which loosens the

remaining meat and hair from the skin.

#### 4.2.1 Historical Preparation of Skins

Historically the moose skin was first removed from the animal in order that it could be tanned as soon as possible. The hide was soaked before working. If a hide was stored for any length of time it was reconstituted by soaking in water before it was worked. In the past, moose hides were soaked in a mixture of water and fireweed root which was boiled and then cooled. "The hides were soaked in this tea for a few days to loosen the meat and sinew on the hide, just as downy is used today" (W. Spence, Pers. Comm., 1996).

#### 4.2.2 Selecting Where to Start Skin Preparation

One of the first decisions for Nelson House skin preparers is to decide on the location for the skin preparation process. Some preparers work on their hides at their homes in the community, while others, such as Alice Moore (Pers, Comm., 1995), decided to do their skin work at outlying camps (Figure 9) surrounding the community. Alice recounts her reasons for choosing to do her work at her camp.

I prefer to do my work here at my camp because Nelson House has too many wild dogs. These dogs are attracted to the hides and they can quickly wreck a hide, even if it is up on a stretcher. Those dogs are alot of trouble for a tanner. I don't have as much trouble with wolves or other animals out here. My dogs don't touch my hides. They know better.



*Figure 9. Daniel Donkey's camp.  
June, 1996*

During my field work I was faced with this reality when a hide that was soaking in a seemingly secure bucket was destroyed by a local pack of dogs (Figure 10). The dogs were able to pry the skin out of the container despite the fact that the container's lid was protected by heavy logs and and concrete cinder blocks. The hide was totally digested by the dogs leaving only a pile of hair to mark the hide's demise.

This advantage of outlying camps is offset with environmental problems. For instance, Alice Moore (Pers, Comm. August 28, 1995) also reveals that one of the problems of outlying camps is the threat of fire. "We had a fire a few years back that came within a quarter of a mile to here. Nelson House is much safer from fires than we are way out here. If that fire had come into my camp I

would have lost alot of hides. I guess I take that chance because I would much rather do my hides here than in Nelson House."



*Fig.10 Dog circling hide storage area,  
Nelson House May, 1996*

In determining a suitable site to prepare skins, skin workers must locate a cleared area with suitable water (for soaking purposes), a bucket or stream (for soaking purposes), a nearby ample supply of appropriate wood (for the stretching frame), a cleared working area, a cabin or structure (for eating and sleeping purposes), a nearby abundant stockpile of Diamond willow (for smoking the hide) and, ideally, a smokehouse. These considerations must be made in advance before work on a hide can

begin.

#### 4.2.3 Selecting When to Start Skin Preparation

Tanning can be performed year round. K. Spence (Pers. Comm., 1996) reports that "I have prepared hides during all parts of the year, but it is best to work on a hide in the early spring or late fall because it is not too cold and not too hot... it is easier to scrape the hide in cooler weather...there is less chance of the hide spoiling... and there are no bugs." In addition, hides can be stored frozen in the early spring or late fall until the preparer is ready to work on the hides. Processing hides between late spring and early fall seasons means that work must be done soon after the animal is butchered in order to prevent the summer heat and sun from causing the hide to deteriorate. "In the past, hides were strung up in the summer on stretchers right away to prevent shrinkage and rotting" (W. Spence, pers. comm., 1995). The constant torment of black flies and mosquitoes in the summer also contributes to the preference of working on hides at other times of the year.

However, Alice Moore (Pers. Comm., 1995) mentioned that she rarely worked on hides in the winter months as it was "far too cold to work on hides when the temperature is lower than 20 below [Celsius]. Instead, I work on my sewing during the winter." Keith Spence (Pers. Comm., 1996) also recounted that he would rarely work on a hide during the winter months: "I prefer to work on hides in the spring or fall. I will also work on hides in the summer, but it is much harder... I don't work on hides in the

winter very much."

Today, some people have access to freezers which allows them to keep their hides over extended periods of time in the summer without rotting until they are ready to be worked on. For instance, Dumas (Pers. Comm., 1996) reports that, "Today, hides don't have to be worked on right away because of refrigerators or freezers. A hide can be stored in a freezer for many months allowing the tanner to work on the hide when she is ready." If it is decided to work on moose hides at a later date, the hides are folded with the flesh side in, wrapped in a plastic garbage bag to prevent freezer burn, and stored in a refrigerator or freezer, when available. Of course, not all skin preparers have access to refrigeration. The decisions on when to work on a hide by those who do not have access to refrigeration are more immediate. K. Spence (Pers. Comm., 1996), for instance, states that " I don't have a freezer, so I have to work on my hide when the hide is ready to be worked on. I usually begin work on the hide after it has been soaking for no more than one week. So, in the summer, I must be prepared quickly to begin tanning. If I don't work on the hide quickly, then it may start to spoil and this means it will be useless."

Working on hides in the winter also has its problems. For instance, K. Spence (Pers. Comm., 1996) relates that "working on hides in the winter is difficult unless you have a large heated building to work in. "Alice [Moore] had such a building and this was heated. It made it easier to work on the hides when it was very cold outside."

All hides, whether fresh, cooled or frozen are soaked in

water, usually with a few capfuls of Downy fabric softener to soften the remaining meat on the hide and to minimize the smell before working. Hides are then placed in a metal or plastic tub of clean water with the hair side down for no more than one week and usually only a few days or until ready to be strung up on a stretching frame. The hide is kept from floating by a wooden pole or paddle. This process reconstitutes the hide if previously frozen or cooled.

#### 4.2.4 Time of Day

Most skin preparers who worked on summer hides preferred to work on their hides in the early morning when it was cooler and the insect harassment was not as great. "The best time to work on a hide at this time of year [summer] is very early in the morning when it is cooler. Sometimes I work on my hides later in the day for the same reason" (Spence, Pers. Comm., 1996). In the winter, early spring or late fall, most tanners showed a desire to work on their hides at midday when it was warmest. "In the fall and spring, I work on my hides whenever I can , but I prefer to work on them just after lunch. The sun is higher and it is a little warmer then" (Moore Pers. Comm., 1995) The weather was the main deciding factor on the time of day to perform the skin preparation process.

#### 4.2.5 Soaking Duration

One of the first decisions that a tanner must make is

whether to continue soaking the hide in water, and if so, for how long. After the animal is skinned, the hide is soaked in water for a few days to continue the bacterial action in the skin. The weather has a great deal of influence on such a decision.

In the bush, I saw the skin of the moose immediately immersed in water soon after it was skinned. If the weather was cold enough that the hide could freeze then the hide would be folded with the meat side in. If the weather was too warm, then I would have to decide to soak the hide. I would then have to be ready to work on the hide very soon as you can't soak the hide for too long or the skin gets very difficult to work on. It tends to rip easily and is no good for making moccasins. Moore (Pers. Comm., 1995)

Lillian Hunter (Pers. Comm., 1996) adds that "those who get me the hide have to do it right away in the summer so that the hide will not rot." However, there are certain advantages to leaving a hide soaking for extreme periods of time. Excessive soaking permits the hair to literally rot off the hide. This means that a tanner can almost skip the dehairing stage as the hair can be literally peeled off by hand as was experienced with two hides left to soak in a slough (Figure 11) filled with extremely cold meltwater for up to two weeks. This method though, is fraught with danger as the rest of the hide could easily rot away as well rendering the hide useless. Careful attention to the condition of the hide is necessary if a tanner is going to leave a hide for more than a week to aid in hair removal. Despite the fact that this method makes defleshing easier, few tanners let their hides soak for the length of time needed to rot the hair off the hide. This process is considered to be too risky to attempt since it can jeopardize the quality of the skin. Most skin preparers would much rather attempt the laborious task of cutting the hair off the hide after



*Fig.11 Hide soaking in slough outside Nelson House  
May, 1996*

defleshing rather than attempt the easier task of pulling the rotting hair off the skin after excessive soaking. The possible risk of loosing the hide to rot is perceived to be too much of a gamble. "I would be too scared to do my hide that way (referring to excessive soaking) because there is too much danger of rotting the skin too much. The hide won't scrape well and there will be trouble smoking it too. We were lucky with these hides" (referring to the two hides which had been soaked long enough to rot the hair

off) (Hunter, Pers. Comm. June 20, 1996).



*Fig.12 Nelson House after a sudden snow storm  
May 24, 1996*

Other soaking considerations must also be made. For instance, "If the weather is too cold, the hide may be frozen in the bucket or stream that it is being stored in. Then it is too difficult to unfold the hide. The hide could also break because it is frozen" (K. Spence Pers., 1996). This problem was encountered during late spring field work on a hide which was stored in a pail. The temperature dropped and it began to snow (Fig 12) causing the pail to freeze which delayed work on the hide for a week. As a result, the hide was never completed during the summer field season. If

the weather is too cold, the tanner will be forced to delay work on the hide and just let it stay frozen until the weather changes.

All tanners agreed that the weather was the most apparent factor delaying this stage of work on a hide. Hunter (Pers. Comm., 1996) for instance, concluded that "the weather will tell me when it is right to string up a hide after it has been soaking. If it is a clear day and not too cold or hot I can then string up the hide with little difficulty. If the weather is not right, you won't be able to work on the hide." Usually hides are placed in a metal or plastic tub of clean water with the hair side down for no more than one week and usually only a few days or until it is decided that a hide is ready to be either strung up on a stretching frame for defleshing (the removal of the remaining flesh left on the hide after skinning by the hunter).

#### 4.2.6 Collecting Poles For Stretcher

Frames are usually made from poles of spruce cut from previously burned areas near the community. These spruce are very straight because of the age of the forest, and are cured by the fire which prevents the frame from warping. There are a number of burn areas found outside the community on Crown land. The preferred burns are twenty years old where the bark has been charred off and the branches have fallen away.

Tanners usually cut down only the number of trees they need for a specific hide. Most of the tanners either do not own or have regular access to a vehicle and many do not know how to drive. Because the closest burn sites are far from Nelson House

and many of the outlying camps, it is necessary to obtain the use of a truck in order to obtain the required poles. Vehicles are not always available at needed times, so this must be factored in to the decision-making process of skin preparation.

As a result, the proximity of burn sites to the skin preparation location is an important factor in determining decisions on when to gather the required poles which enables the skin production process to continue. Fortunately, for Nelson House tanners, there has been an adequate number of forest fires in the area so there is an adequate supply of wood to use for framing purposes. Nevertheless, the proximity of burn areas to a tanner's preparation site is a factor in the decision of when to set up a stretching frame. As a result, skin preparers must make adequate plans in relation to location, time of day, soaking times, and pole collection before deciding to proceed with the skin preparation process.

#### 4.3 Tools

Skin workers in Nelson House use a variety of tools and materials in their skin preparation activities. These include a variety of scrapers, fleshers, rope, beaming tools, and stretching frames. The following inventory lists the many tools and materials used in the skin preparation process.

##### 4.3.1 Historical Tool Use

The Cree used a number of bone beamers, bone fleshers and

semilunar knives in the skin preparation process. Honigmann (1956), claimed that the Swampy Cree of Attawapiskat, Ontario cut meat with a knife made from the rib bones of caribou, moose and bear. Skinner (1911) illustrates a chisel-shaped scraper with or without teeth and a semilunar metal knife with a handle used for fleshing after contact. He also describes the use of a beaming tool made of the shin bone of a deer (p. 34).

Mason (1967) states that the Swampy Cree of Oxford House used a "scraping tool made by breaking a moose tibia in half and filing the broken part to a chisel-like edge" (p. 36). Cross Lake Education (1994), the Native Education Branch (1977) and the elders of Nelson House also maintain that a moose bone tool was used to scrape off all the remaining flesh and fat. The top section of the bone, immediately below the joint, was wrapped with rawhide or a smoked skin band which increased the leverage of the tool. Steel knives to cut off flesh and fat and scissors to clip the hair were also used after contact (Mason, 1967: 36). W. Spence (Pers. Comm., 1995) reports that "in the past, I was told that some people used tools made of slate or obsidian to cut moose hairs, but these tools were hard to make and very hard to get."

Rogers and Smith (1991) report that moose hides were stretched on frame stretchers of various sizes. The frames consisted of a number of "poles within which the hide was stretched open" (p. 141). Mason (1967) mentions that the nearby Swampy Cree of Oxford House, Manitoba stretched their animal skins on a rectangular frame made of wooden poles procured from the surrounding forest. Historical references by Nelson House elders (W. Spence, Pers. Comm., 1996; Dumas, Pers. Comm., 1996;

Donkey, Pers. Comm., 1996) revealed similar rectangular frames made from Jack pine or spruce trees in the surrounding forests. These frames were lashed together with either sinew line originating from the tendons situated alongside the spine of the caribou or from smoked skin line of caribou, deer or moose skin.

#### 4.3.2 Fisherman's Sideline

Sinew or smoked skin line used to tie the hide to the stretching frame is no longer used in the skin preparation process because of the time involved in fabricating such line (Dumas, Pers. Comm., 1996). Despite the fact that smoked line is a by-products of the tanning process, most preparers feel that fisherman's sideline is more economical to use because "it is stronger and more durable"(Dumas, Pers. Comm., 1996), "and it doesn't stretch... and can be reused more often" (Hunter, Pers. Comm., 1996). Fisherman's sideline comes in 25 pound (11.5 Kg) spools which contain 50 feet (15.2 m) of line. Fisherman's sideline is sometimes available at the local Northern store. However, it was this researchers experience that sideline was a rather difficult commodity to come by. Repeated frustrating attempts to locate sideline in Thompson and Nelson House often came up empty-handed. One spool was eventually located at the local Northern Store in Nelson House, but the cost (\$50 for a 15.2 m spool) often made such a purchase prohibitive to many tanners.

A great deal of sideline is used to string up one moose hide. For instance, I have witnessed many tanners use up to half a spool of fisherman's sideline (minimum of 7.6 m or 25 ft) for a medium

sized moose. This can quickly use up a spool of sideline if more than one moose is to be tanned which is often the case.

#### 4.3.3 Knives

Sharp metal knives (often referred to in Cree as *mohkoman* by tanners) are used to cut away flesh to create a clean area on the hide. A No. 2 beaver fleshing knife was the preferred choice among most skin preparers, but again, the availability of such knives was rare in the local stores and many skin preparers had to purchase such knives in Thompson or from people taking trips to Winnipeg. I made many such purchases for a number of tanners while in Winnipeg. It was observed that many tanners used old 8 inch (20.4cm) kitchen knives which were very difficult to keep sharp and difficult to use because their blades were too long and narrow (unlike the No. 2 beaver skinning knife which has a rounded tip which provides an easy way to gently cut under the folds of meat). Despite the fact that most tanners did not have the beaver skinning knife, most indicated that they preferred to use such a knife if it were available. The same knives were often used to remove the hair from the hide. Some preparers clip the hair short with scissors and then use knives to complete the process of hair removal. This process was more necessary for hides secured in the winter as explained by Keith Spence (K. Spence, Pers. Comm., 1996 see section 4.1.2 Decisions on Individual Hides). Metal dehairing tools, such as knives and scissors, are preferred over bone tools because their blades are far sharper and, therefore, more efficient at cutting away the hair.

#### 4.3.4 Flesher

Further fleshing is accomplished with a tool made from the leg bone of a moose (called a *mekekwan* in Cree) (Figure 13). This was accomplished by breaking a moose tibia in half and filing the broken part at an angle and fashioning the end to a chisel-like notched edge. Often bone fleshers are braced with a leather strap at the top to give better support to the user. "Bone scrapers are better because they are cheaper, and I can get one from my relatives who go hunting" (Hunter, Pers. Comm., 1996). Such tools are also considered to be more gentle and efficient at skin removal on the delicate hides than metal implements. "They don't beat up the skin or put holes in the skin if worked correctly" (K. Spence, Pers. Comm., 1996). In addition, a bone scraper did not require much time or energy to fabricate. "Bone meat scrappers are not difficult to make and an experienced person can make many very quickly" (Dumas, Pers. Comm., 1996).

#### 4.3.5 Scraper

Scraping tools (called a *matahekan* in Cree) with curved metal blades screwed into wooden handles (often wrapped with duct tape) are used to remove all final traces of epidermal layer and hair stubble (Figure 13). "Scraping tools also thin the hide to an even thickness, because that is what you want in a good hide" (K. Spence, Pers. Comm., 1996). "Metal blades are used because they are strong and can be sharpened alot and because they hold that sharpness a long time" (Spence, Pers. Comm., 1996).



*Fig.13. Alice Moore's tanning tools (L to R) Scraper, moose bone flesher, beaming scraper and duct-tape handled scraper.*

Scrapers are made out of just about any local metal material available that can be fashioned into a strong, flat, broad blade with a curved sharp edge. It is imperative that the metal used to fashion a scraper not be burned or heated in any way. As K. Spence (Pers. Comm., 1996) explains, "If the metal used for a scraper has been heated it will loose its sharpened edge must faster. You will always be sharpening that thing." The runners of toboggans are often used because they are the desired thickness and can be

fashioned easily into a scraper. One enterprising tool-maker even fashioned a scraper out of a chain saw blade.

#### 4.3.6 Beamer

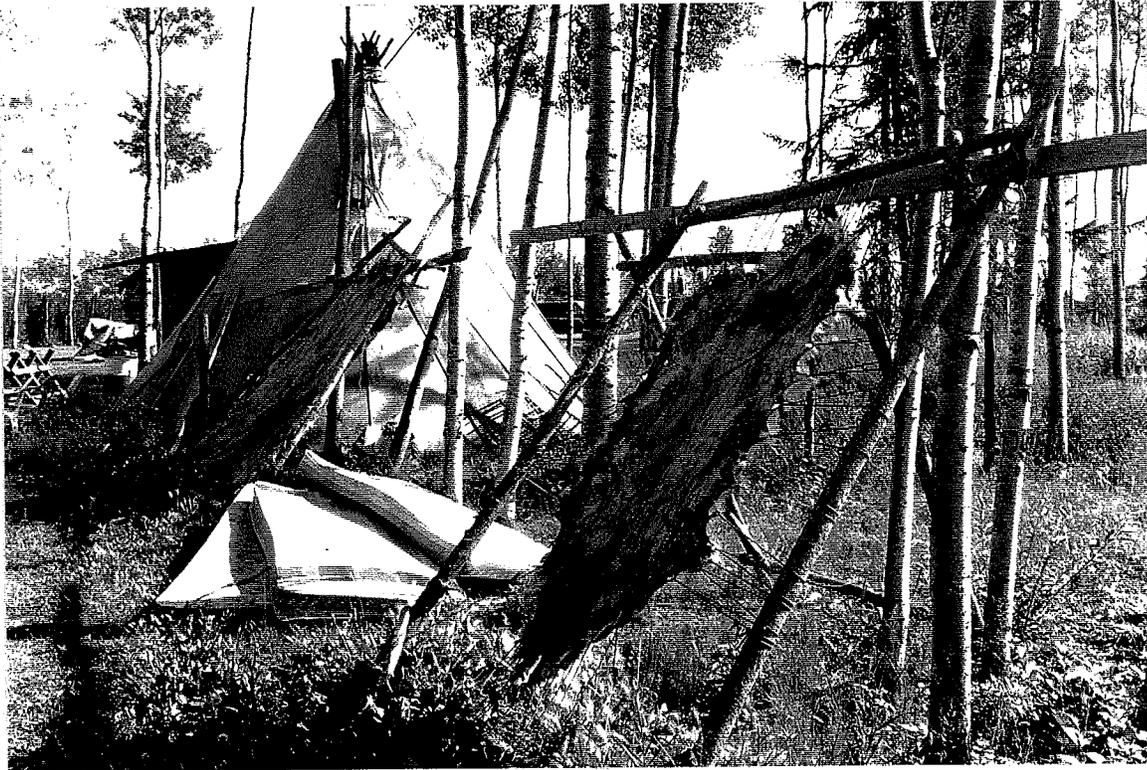
Finally, a variety of chafing or beaming tools (often referred to as *paskwachekan* in Cree) (See Figure 13) are used to scrape any loose pieces of skin (often referred to as defluffing) remaining on the hide after lubricants are utilized. Some preparers use a deer leg bone for this purpose, rubbing the thick end-joint of the bone against the skin surface in a scouring motion. Others use a curved metal scraper attached to a wooden handle. One preparer even uses sand paper to burnish the skin insisting that "this creates the smoothest skin surface" (K. Spence Pers. Comm., 1996).

#### 4.3.7 Stretching Frames

Today, skin workers in Nelson House mount their moose hides on square or rectangular frames in order to remove flesh and hair (Figure 14). Frames are usually made from 16 foot (5 m) poles of spruce cleared from previously burned areas near the community ( See Section 4.2.6).

Frames are made larger than the hide and are held together with 4 inch (10 cm) Hardox nails, fisherman's sideline and small cross-bracing poles. Poles are cut into approximately two 10-14 foot (3-4.5 m) lengths at the base and two 10-11 foot (3-3.4 m) lengths at the uprights for a large moose measuring 6 feet

(2 metre) by 6 feet (2 m), and two 6-10 foot (2-3 m) lengths at the base and two 6-10 foot (2-3 m) lengths at the uprights for a medium to small moose measuring 5 feet ( 1.8 m) by 5 feet (1.8 m) or less.



*Fig.14. Hides mounted on frames at the Alice Moore camp  
August, 1995*

Once built, the frame is leaned up against a house, fence, or cross-bracing pole that has been nailed between two trees. The frame is then leaned at an approximate 60-80 degree angle against the house, fence or cross-bracing pole. "Poles held together with nails can be put together more quickly and are far stronger than

poles lashed together with either sideline or traditional leather skin straps" (Dumas, Pers. Comm., 1996).

#### 4.3.8 Files

Files are used almost exclusively to keep the scrapers sharp. The constant need to sharpen scrapers required the use of good strong files. Scrapers tend to dull easily against the dry hide of a moose. Scrapers work best when their blades are kept very sharp. A sharp scraper lessens the exertion of the process. Most skin preparers usually had a number of files at their disposal. Favorite files were 20 cm flat half round "Bastards" which sell for approximately \$15-\$20 at the local Northern Store. However, Two tanners at one camp were observed using an old metal scissor to sharpen the blade of scrapper. They would press the inside edge of the one scissor blade against the scraper blade and run it lengthwise against the scraper blade in one fluid motion. This method of filling was surprisingly effective in sharpening the scrapper. Though few tanners used this method of sharpening, all were aware of the technique. "It works very well when you don't have a file" (Hunter, Pers. Comm., 1996).

#### 4.4 Flesh and Hair Removal

The first steps in Rocky Cree skin preparation following skinning, meat removal and soaking involved cutting the remaining particles of meat and fat from the inner surface and removing the hair. This process is referred to by the Rocky Cree as "fleshing"

and "dehairing" (Dumas Pers. Comm., 1995). The following sections describe when to construct the frame, the processes involved in the fleshing and dehairing procedures, as well as historical methods of flesh and hair removal.

#### 4.4.1 Historical Flesh and Hair Removal

Historically, women sometimes fleshed the hide as it lay on the ground and shaved the hairs while holding the skin against a log (W. Spence Pers. Comm., 1995). Mason (1967), on the other hand, describes that once an animal had been skinned, its warm hide was stretched on a rectangular frame and its hair clipped close with a knife or scissors (p. 36). Cross Lake Education (1994) states that a square frame of four sturdy spruce trees were constructed large enough to spread and loop the hide into the frame with a smoked skin rope. Two poles were then placed vertically and the other two horizontally joining at the end of each pole with the corners tied tightly together so that the flesh and the fur of the moose hide could be scraped off.

#### 4.4.2 When to Construct Frame

In order to flesh and dehair a moose hide it is necessary to construct a stretching frame which will keep the hide stretched tight to ease the fleshing and dehairing process (See Figure 14). It is considered "much easier to flesh and dehair a hide when it is mounted on a frame because you can get better leverage and the hide won't slip away from you" (M. Spence, Pers. Comm., 1996). If

the hide is defleshed on the ground or against a fleshing log, as some other Cree groups do (See Young et. al., 1991)<sup>2</sup> the chopping motion must be more gentle as both the ground and a fleshing log offers more resistance. "This can cause the hide to be easily cut or sliced with the fleshing tool" (M. Spence, Pers. Comm., 1995). As a result, most Rocky Cree tanners use only the stretching frame to deflesh the hide.

The decision of when to construct a frame is usually decided when the preparer has collected the necessary poles and rope needed to stretch the hide and when the preparer has the required two to four hours necessary to string up a medium sized moose hide. "Usually, I make sure I have plenty of time in my day to string up the hide before taking the hide out of the water. Once you take the hide out of the water it must be strung up on a stretcher or it may begin to rot and shrink as it dries, especially in the summer" (Hunter, Pers. Comm., 1996). Because of the lengthy time involved in stringing up a hide, decisions to place a hide on a frame usually preclude any other activity for that day. As Lillian Hunter (Pers. Comm., 1996) stated, "I do not cook or make any plans on the day I string up the hide. I don't have time."

#### 4.4.3 Attaching Hide to Frame

After a hide has been soaked, it is either placed on a log or on the ground with the hair side down. Approximate 1/2 inch (1cm) slits are cut with a sharp knife roughly every 4 inches (10cm) around the edge of the hide (Figure 15). A medium-sized moose may



*Fig.15 Lillian Hunter cuts slits around the edge of the hide  
June, 1996*

have up to 60 slits cut into the perimeter of the hide. On a large moose this often requires the laborious task of cutting up to 100

slits into the edges of the hide.

Weather considerations determine when the hide is to be attached to the frame as cold or wet days hinder the cutting of slits on the the skin. "On cold days it is difficult to cut holes because my fingers get numb...on wet days it is hard to get good leverage because the hide and the knife become too slippery" (K. Spence, Pers. Comm., 1996).

"The rope should always pull up and down (at a vertical angle) to the slit. On the corners, the hole should be cut sideways (at a diagonal angle) to prevent the rope from ripping through the hide when it is strung up" (Hunter, Pers. Comm., 1996)

The rope is then looped around the center of the cross-braced pole. "This must be done exactly in the center or the hide will be pulled unevenly" (Hunter, Pers. Comm., 1996). The hide is then laced with the tail at the top center of the frame. Then the corners are laced (Figure 16) ensuring that the rope is kept tight at all times. Then you lace the bottom right corner and leg and the bottom left corner and leg. This squares the hide nicely between the poles" (M. Spence, Pers. Comm., 1995). "It is important to always keep the tension even on all sides of the stretching frame" (Hunter, Pers. Comm., 1996).

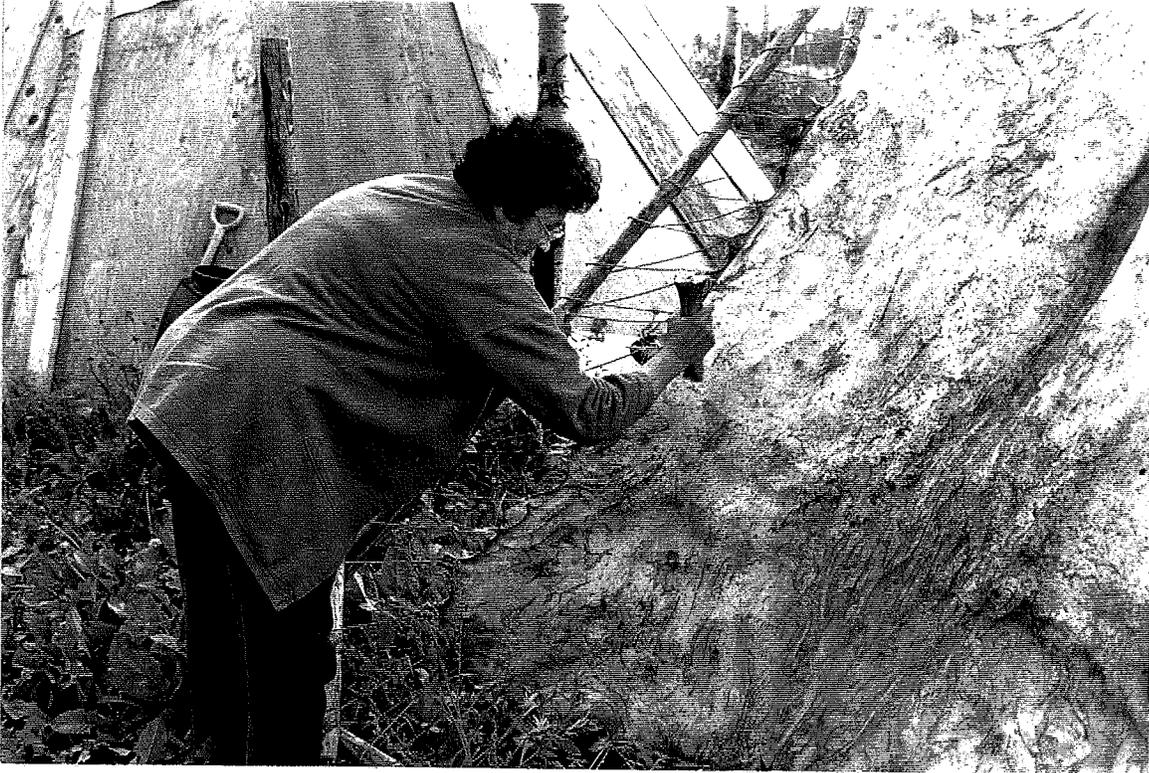
The entire process consists of constant tightening and re-tightening until the tension is considered even around the entire frame. There should be at least 5-6 inches (12.5-15cm) between the hide and the poles to allow room for re-tightening as the hide dries. If the hide has dried during the frame attachment procedure, a small amount of warm water is spread on the hide. The hide is then ready for fleshing, dehairing and later scraping.



*Fig.16 Kevin Brownlee attaches hide to frame  
June, 1996*

#### 4.4.4 Fleshing

After attaching the hide to the frame, the next step involves cutting the remaining particles of meat and fat from the inner surface (fleshing) (Figure 17). Sharp number 2 metal beaver fleshing knives are then used to cut away any remaining flesh to create a clean area. Care must be exercised as it is very easy to put a hole into the hide while removing excess meat. Further fleshing is accomplished with a fleshing tool (*mekekwan*) (See Fig.



*Fig.17 Alice Moore fleshing a moose hide with a moose bone flesher  
September, 1995*

13) Fleshing with a mekekwan is accomplished using short, vigorous downward chopping motions onto the hide and towards the body. Once again, care should be employed as it is very easy to punch a hole into the hide during this process.

"This task takes alot of energy and takes a very long time depending on the size of the hide and time of year" (Hunter Pers. Comm., 1996). "Fleshing is more easily accomplished on a frozen skin which also decreases the chance of damage to the hide" (K. Spence, Pers. Comm., 1996). The amount of time it took to complete this and other skin preparation phases was difficult to determine as most skin preparers did not keep a formal track of

the time and none wear watches. Lillian Hunter explained this best when she said, "I don't know how long this takes to do. When I am working on a moose, I don't look at a clock when I work" (Pers. Comm., 1996). It took me an entire day to remove the meat from a large hide. An experienced person could probably finish fleshing a large hide in roughly two to three hours.

#### 4.4.5 Removing Hair

K. Spence (Pers. Comm., 1996) reports, "When the skin has been defleshed, the frame is turned around so that the hair side is up and the neck area of the hide is at the top. The hair and the first layer of epidermal skin are then removed. "This process can take many days to complete depending on the size and thickness of the moose skin" (Dumas Pers. Comm., 1996). Dehairing tools are used with a cutting motion away from the body. "I work from the edges towards the center of the hide either with or against the grain of the hair, whichever is the easiest" (N. Swanson Pers. Comm., 1995). One tanner was observed using a very sharp axe to cut away the hair but this was not considered usual as it is very easy to put a hole in the hide using such a tool.

The decision to use metal dehairing tools over bone tools is made "because their blades are far sharper" (K. Spence, pers. comm., 1996). The hair and the first layer of skin are then removed. As with decisions on when to flesh the hide, weather concerns affect when a hide is to be dehaired. All skin preparers considered it undesirable in the summer to dehair a hide in the rain or under the intense heat of the afternoon sun. Similarly, if

it is too cold in the spring or fall, skin preparers consider dehairing an arduous chore and usually decide to wait for warmer weather. "Dehairing is rarely done in the winter" (K. Spence Pers. Comm. July 26, 1996).

In addition, "The hide must not be completely dry for the removal of hair. A little bit of wetness helps to remove the hair. It also won't harm the hide when you scrape if it is a little wet" (M. Spence, Pers. Comm., 1995). As a result, hides are often dehaired immediately (sometimes before fleshing, see section 5.2.4) before the hide has a chance to dry out completely. This is a difficult task in the summer as hides (depending on the size) tend to dry out quickly in the summer heat. This is another reason why most preparers prefer to work on their hides in the spring or fall. In the summer, Preparers tend to choose cool (but not too cold), cloudy days to flesh and dehair their hides so the skins won't dry so quickly.

#### 4.4.6 Scraping

At this stage "you can leave the skin up on the frame for a very long time, even in the summer" (Spence, Pers. Comm., 1996) (Figure 18). Once the hide has reached this stage the tanner has a choice whether to continue working on the hide or leaving the hide until such time as she or he can return to work on it. When visiting tanning sites, it is typical to see hides left up on frames for months on end. "If it is a hot summer, I can leave the hides up until fall when it is better to work on them" (Moore, Pers. Comm., 1995). Spence (Pers. Comm., 1996) adds, "if something

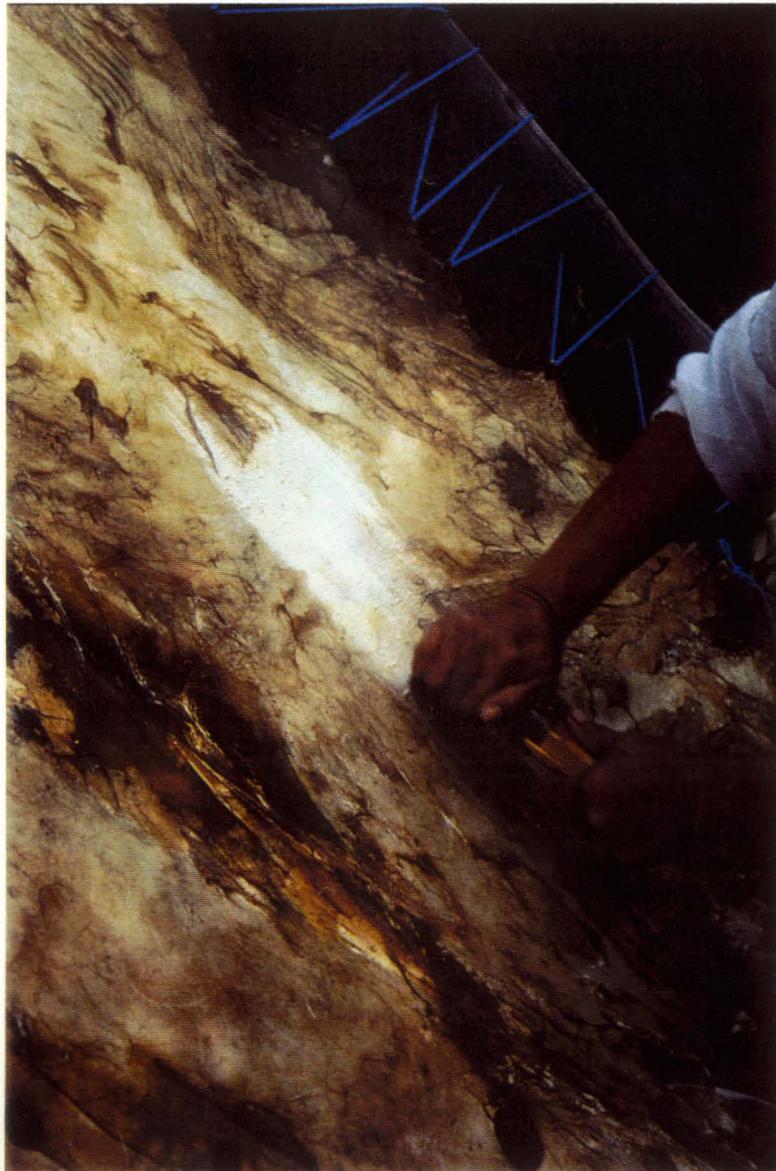
else comes up, then I can leave the hide when it gets to this stage. Or I can begin work on another hide if I have one. Then I can leave all the hides until fall. In the fall it is easier to work on them when the all the bugs are gone."



*Fig. 18. Author with fleshed moose hide.  
July, 1996*

Once the hide has dried on the frame scraping can commence (Figure 19). Scraping tools (Sometimes called by the Cree *matahekan*) are used to remove all final traces of meat, epidermal layer and hair stubble. "Scraping tools also thin the hide to an even thickness, because that is what you want in a good hide" (K. Spence, pers. comm., July 26, 1996). Home crafted metal tools are

usually chosen for the scraping process. "Metal blades are used because they are strong and can be sharpened alot and because they hold that sharpness a long time" (K. Spence, pers. comm., 1996). Daniel Donkey (Pers. Comm., 1996) recounts that, "It is easy and cheap to find the right kind of metal to make tools from." I sometimes make tools out of old toboggan runners or any metal scrap lying around."



*Fig.19 Lillian Hunter scrapes a hide  
June, 1996*

In fact, Daniel Donkey constructed a very usable scraper out of an old chain saw frame.

"The dark skin (epidermis) of the hide on the hair side should be completely removed when scraped or else the grease used to soften the hide won't go through" (Hunter Pers. Comm., 1996). This will affect the flexibility and softness of the hide and could render the hide useless for garments as Madeline Spence (Pers. Comm., 1996) recounts, " If the hide is not scraped properly and some of the epidermis is left on, then the hide will not fully stretch and this is not good for making moccasins. It is alright for making snowshoes, but not moccasins."

At this point the product is referred to by the Rocky Cree as 'rawhide' and can be stored or used as babiche lines for snowshoe filling, or for rattles and drums. "If one is making rattles and drums, the hide must be soaked for up to two days, making it easier to work with the hide and to hold its shape once it's dry" (Dumas Pers. Comm., 1996).

#### 4.5 Lubricating and Softening Skins

After all meat, hair and excess connective tissue is removed, the skin is detached from the frame and is put through a number of lubricating or greasing and softening steps in order to make the skin pliable. "After all scraping, the hide is very stiff and brittle and can easily break. It needs to be greased and softened so it can be continued to be worked on without damage to the hide." The lubrication stage regenerates the collagen bundles located just under the moose skin (Oakes, Pers. Comm., 1997;

Pruitt, Pers. Comm., 1997). These bundles lose some of their collagen when scraped and this is why the skin loses some of its pliability and elastic characteristics. Lubrication regenerates the bundles enabling the skin to regain its elasticity (Pruitt, Pers. Comm., 1997). A number of decisions on how to resoak the hide, drying methods and what materials to use as greasing agents must be made in order to soften the hide and prepare it for the final smoking step.

#### 4.5.1 Historical Lubricating and Softening

Historically, after all superfluous tissue and hair had been removed and scraped, the skin was washed in a container or "put in the middle of a creek or river, tied to a stake driven into the river bottom" (Donkey, Pers Comm., 1996) after a few days it was taken out of the water and hung out to dry (Skinner, 1911; Mason, 1967; Native Education Branch, 1977; Indian Affairs And Northern Development, 1974; and Cross Lake Education, 1994.) After drying, a mixture of warmed animal grease (usually bear) or brains and water was worked thoroughly into the skin (Donkey, Pers Comm., 1996). This process was performed in order to soften the skin. Honigmann (1956) concurs, but adds that "the worker applied a mixture of brains and water, or pike livers, to both surfaces of the skin and left it in place for about three days" (p. 27). Mason (1967) and Spence (Pers. Comm., 1995) claim that the skin was soaked in a mixture of water and grease, soap, or oatmeal which was alleged to soften skins as successfully as any commercial or traditional animal greases. Cross Lake Education (1994) reveals

that fish oil or melted lard or any kind of commercial grease was used to soften the hide. However, W. Spence (Pers. Comm., 1995) recounts that, " in the old days there wasn't much lard around so people just used the brains and scrubbed soap into the hide." Nancy Swanson (Pers. Comm., 1995) stated that "in the old days in Nelson House, people used mostly fish oil or bear grease...and only sometimes brains were used if a hunter brought some in from a kill."

Swanson (Pers. Comm., 1995) maintains, "that in the old days, what I saw done was that the place was made hot with fire or wood stove and the brain water was heated this way which made the brain water sink into and dry into the hide." When this process was concluded, the skin was again hung out to dry. It was then taken down and soaked and the brains and grease washed out. The wet skin was then worked and stretched with the hands while it dried, until it became pliable (Skinner, 1911 34). Honigmann (1956) recounts the "scraping and beating" of skins that had been soaked in brain or liver mixtures" was apparently a substitute for pulling and stretching (p. 27). Cross Lake Education (1994) provides a somewhat detailed description of how the Cree stretched and wrung out their hides after being soaked:

"To wring out the hide it needs to be folded in a certain way; first you spread the hide on a flat surface and fold the two corners opposite from each other to the center... roll the folded ends to the center, this will leave you the two other corners free to tie a long stick to them. You put the folded hide around the stump and tie the stick onto the hide using the free corners... turning clockwise, squeezing and twisting the water out of the hide" (p. 1).

The hide was then stretched tautly across a rectangular or square frame to restore it to its original size to compensate for

shrinkage (Indian Affairs And Northern Development, 1974: 5). If there was any remaining flesh or fluff left on the hide, the hide was scraped one last time.

#### 4.5.2 Resoaking Hide

Today, moose hides are placed either in a barrel or positioned in the middle of a creek or river, tied to a stake driven into the river bottom so the hide will not float away (Figure 20). The presence of dogs and the availability of a nearby river or slough are the main factors influencing this choice.

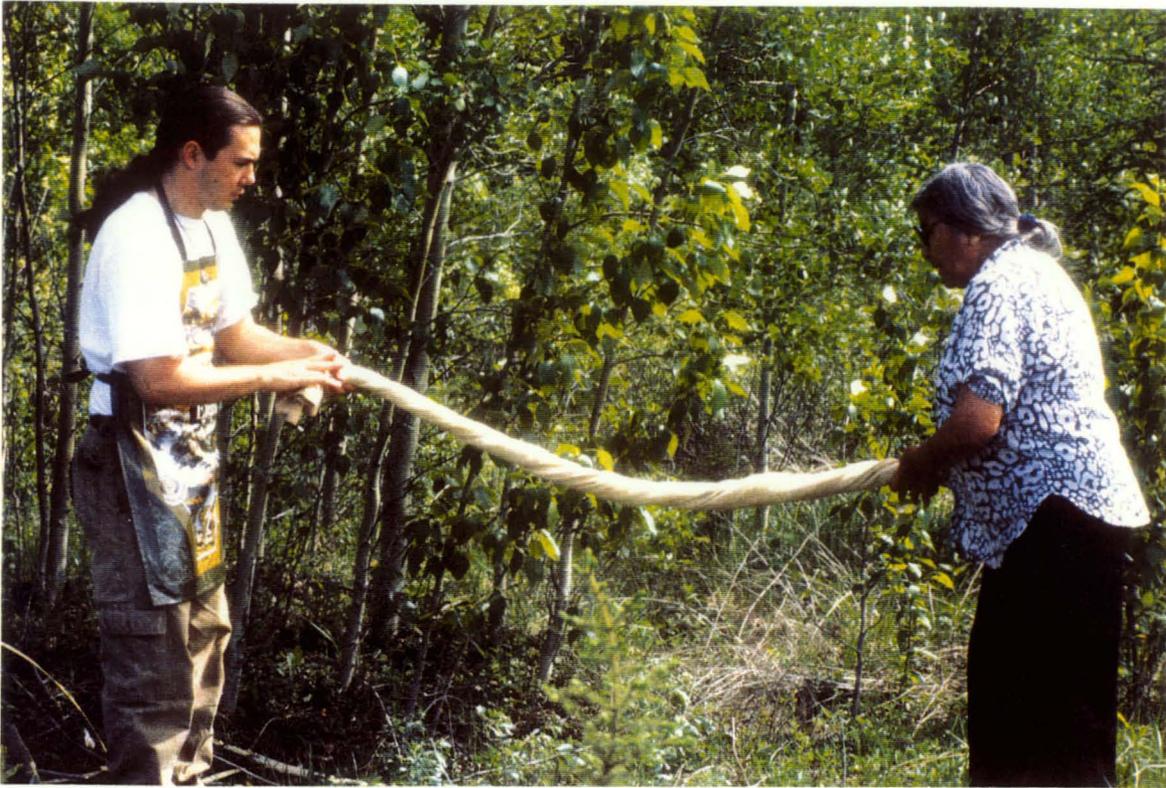


*Fig.20 Daniel Donkey and Kieth Spence prepare to soak moose hide  
August, 1996*

"I usually put Lillian's [Hunter] hide in the middle of the river, tied to a stake driven into the river bottom so it won't float away. This keeps the hide safe from animals and wild dogs" (Donkey, Pers. Comm., 1996). As Nancy Swanson (Pers. Comm., 1995) states, "It would be better to place my hides in the middle of a river to soak rather than soaking in this bucket. Animals are always a threat, but I don't have a nearby river to place my hide in. So I just put it in a bucket in my smokehouse and hope for the best." After a few days the hide is taken out of the water and hung out to dry on an elevated pole or tree.

#### 4.5.3 Wringing, Stretching and Drying

After the third day the skin is rinsed in fresh lukewarm water and removed for wringing and drying. The hide is folded so that it is eventually in one long strip. It is then wrapped around a pole, debarked and delimbed tree or fence post with the ends tied around a short stick which is anywhere from 24 inches (61cm) to 39 inches (1m) long, and at least 2 inches (5 cm) in diameter. "The preparer slowly twists the hide by turning the short stick which places pressure on the hide allowing the water to drain (Figure 21). The stick is then untwisted, its position slightly shifted, and then the hide is wrung out once again (Dumas, Pers. Comm., 1995). "This is done many times until as much water is wrung from the hide as possible" (M. Spence Pers. Comm., 1996).



*Fig.21 Kevin Brownlee and Lillian Hunter slowly wring the hide  
June, 1996*

"After this step is completed, the hide is straightened out on the pole, tree or fence post and stretched by hand to smooth out the wrinkles and break down the tissues to make the skin soft and flexible" (Dumas, Pers. Comm., 1996). Alice Moore had a steel rod suspended from the roof of her cabin for this purpose. "This stretching process sometimes takes hours to finish properly" (Hunter Pers. Comm., 1996). Another slight variation of this step involves two people (Figure 22). "Both preparers will grasp the hide, one at each end, and pull until the hide is considered elastic" (K. Spence Pers. Comm., 1996). "If the hide is not stretched enough, it will dry stiff and I would have to do it over

again" (M. Spence, Pers. Comm. August 19, 1995).



*Fig.22 Lillian Hunter and Kevin Brownlee stretch hide  
June, 1996*

#### 4.5.4 Contemporary Lubricating

Today, once the scraping and dehairing process is completed, tanners melt grease in the form of fish oil, lard, bear grease, or even vegetable oil (rare) and then "sprinkle the warmed grease with a spruce bough over both sides of the whole hide" (Spence, pers. comm., 1996). "The grease should not be very hot because

moose hides burn easily. The grease is heated and then chilled a little so it is just warm to the touch. You don't rub the grease into the hide. It will just soak into the hide" (Hunter Pers. Comm., 1996).

"Fish oil is still the most popular greasing material used by most Nelson House skin preparers" (M. Spence pers. comm., 1996). "Today, I don't use the brains at all, I just use lard or fish oil when I can get it. I don't think anyone uses brains anymore. The hunters just don't bring back the brains anymore. There is little demand for moose brains. There are many other materials to use that work just as good and are easier to get"(K. Spence, Pers. Comm., 1996). In the past, many tanners preferred to use fish oil as it was inexpensive to acquire or make, and was readily available. Today, the entire fishing economy in the area has been adversely burdened by hydro flooding which has significantly affected Cree access to fish and the accompanying by-products. "This has caused some skin preparers to abandon fish grease and switch to commercial grease products or bear grease when available" (Dumas, Pers. Comm., 1996). However, everyone contacted felt there was little difference between the quality of fish oil and other greasing products. As Alice Moore (Pers. Comm., 1995) stated, "I prefer fish oil because it is cheap, but any oil will do. Sometimes I use Crisco oil if I run out of fish oil, but I have to pick that up in Nelson House at the store and that costs too much money." Therefore, decisions involving this step appear to have more to do with cost and availability of greasing agents than any environmental concerns.

The skin is then placed over a rack, single pole or tripod of

poles with a small fire or stove underneath which gently warms the skin. "The skin is left over the fire from two to three days" (Spence, Pers. Comm., 1996). "This process allows the grease to soak into the skin softening and lubricating the fibers" (Dumas, Pers. Comm. June 21, 1996). The hide is then placed in a tub or barrel of lukewarm water with approximately half a bar of grated soap (usually Sunlight brand). The hide is left to soak in the soap mixture for up to two days. The soap takes the grease out and aids the water in penetrating the hide. Often a log or rock is placed on the hide while it rests in the soap solution so that the hide is completely immersed. Some tanners replace the water many times to rinse the hide. "The hide is then wrung one last time, but not as much as before because you want it to remain a little wet" (Hunter, Pers. Comm. June 20, 1996) (drying techniques are the same as described in section 4.5.2 Wringing, Stretching and Drying).

#### 4.5.5 Beaming (Final Scraping)

When the skin has been sufficiently wrung, the skin is once again scraped, this time against a smooth log or while hanging from suspended horizontal debarked aspen pole with a beaming tool (K. Spence pers. comm., 1996). This stage can be omitted depending on how thoroughly the original scraping was done. "This scraping process further softens the skin which begins to turn white" (K. Spence, Pers. Comm. July 24, 1996). This process loosens any final pieces of skin fluff that may remain.

## 4.6 Smoking Skins

The contemporary smoking of skins in the traditional moose skin preparation process begins after the hide is inspected, to determine whether all areas are equally pliable and soft. It is important that the hide is not stiff in any spots as this means the finished hide "will be stiff and weak in that spot, even after smoking. The hide will not sew well in that spot when making moccasins" (Hunter Pers. Comm. June 20, 1996).

### 4.6.1 Historical Smoking

At this stage the skin was white in color and had to be smoked to prevent hardening when wet. Such pre-smoked skin was once used for babiche line for snowshoe filling. Nelson Linklater (Pers. Comm., 1995) mentioned that "some women used to color their skins by soaking them in a red willow bark tea." Honigmann (1956) also mentions that unsmoked skins were dyed by soaking in a solution of red willow bark. Nancy Swanson (Pers. Comm., 1995) mentions similar historical uses for red willow bark as well as the inner bark of river alder. Leighton (1986) also mentions the historical use of the reddish inner bark of river alder to soften and color hides. In fact, Johnson et. al. (1995) claims that historically, river alder was boiled by the Cree to make a red-brown dye which "shortened the smoking time required for tanning hides and reconditioning the leather of old moccasins" (p. 41). A black dye used in skin preparation which was extracted by boiling the berry of an unidentified tree is revealed by Wellington

Linklater (Pers. Comm., 1995). Honigmann (1956) also mentions a black dye extracted from the fruit of a willow-like plant, identified only as *waatcaskweetiw*.

Mason (1967) then states that the:

"softened skin is made into a rough envelope and suspended by thongs from a rack or tripod, the open end hanging above a smudge-fire that is fed with 'punk' or rotted wood. After two hours, the skin is reversed and smoked on the other side to a dark brown color" (p. 37). Rotting Jack Pine, aspen wood, crushed cedar bark or pine cones were used to obtain a smudge (Indian Affairs and Northern Development, 1974: 5).

The tanning process was then complete unless it was desired to make the leather waterproof. This was accomplished, according to Skinner (1911) by soaking the skin in a solution of boiled and then cooled willow bark (34). Skinner claimed that skins were seldom tanned with the fur left on, but stipulated that the method was similar except that the dehairing process was omitted. A few Nelson House skin preparers, however, disagreed with a portion of this assessment. M. Spence (Pers. Comm., 1996), for instance, felt that "a great number of winter skin clothing were once tanned with the fur left on" though the process was admittedly the same.

#### 4.6.1 Coloring Hide

Today "most preparers dye their skins in a tea of heated and then cooled water and strained red willow or river alder chips" (K. Spence, Pers Comm., 1996). This gives the hide the desired dark reddish color favored by Nelson House skin preparers. It also "shortens the smoking time needed for the hides. It would take alot longer to smoke a hide if it wasn't soaked in the alder tea

(K. Spence, Pers. Comm., 1996). River alder is preferred by those who decided to soak their hides before smoking. Lillian Hunter (Pers. Comm. June 20, 1996) for instance, insisted that "alder is better. I prefer coloring my hides with alder because it just works better. It gets the skin just the color I want and makes smoking go faster."

#### 4.6.2 Smudging Hide

After drying the hide it is "trimmed to remove the lacing holes. This is done with a scissor and cut as close to the edge of the hide so you don't cut away too much of the hide (Swanson, Pers. Comm., 1995). "The hide is folded in half and all the edges are sewn together, except one which is left open at the center" (K. Spence, Pers Comm., 1996). "A cotton or canvas skirt is attached around the opening to form a channel for the smoke" (Hunter, Pers. Comm., 1996). The skirt and hide are then suspended between two or three stakes if smoked outside, or by a center beam if smoked inside a smokehouse.

The weather also plays a major role in the smoking stage of the skin preparation process. Nelson House skin preparers usually decide to begin smoking their hides on days of little wind. "If it is too windy outside, I can't smoke my hide...there is too much chance of the wind catching the coals and making a flame which can make the hide catch on fire" (Hunter, Pers. Comm., 1996). At one point in the field season, we waited for eight days for the wind conditions to be right before it was decided to smoke the hide. This delayed the smoking of some of the hides until the end

of the fall field season.

A pail containing smoldering diamond willow chips (Fig.23) is then placed under the skirt opening with the edges of the opening close to the top of the pail so that the smoke enters the bag and envelops the hide (Dumas, Pers. Comm., 1996). According to Elijah Swanson (Pers. Comm., 1995), "We have to search alot harder and alot farther for diamond willow because it is hard to find around here now"



*Fig.23 Kevin Brownlee Cuts diamond willow chips for the smudge.*

He believes this is due to both the adverse affects of hydro development on the Reserve lands which has flooded many prime diamond willow groves, and through general over-use by the

community on the few remaining groves close to the community. Sometimes, if it is too difficult to obtain diamond willow, skin preparers will decide to substitute red willow or rotting poplar wood. Alice Moore substantiates this point and adds that, "Sometimes I use red willow if I can't get any diamond willow. Sometimes it's not easy getting any diamond willow. Diamond willow is the best. I would rather use it than anything else."

"After one side is smoked sufficiently (usually from two to four hours), the hide is taken down, turned inside out, and the same thing is repeated" (M. Spence, Pers. Comm., 1996). If the hide is thin, the smoke goes right through so I only have to do one side" (Hunter, Pers. Comm., 1996). "I figure I have finished smoking my hide when it has the right color (dark red) and feels (pliable). This usually only takes about an hour or two" (M. Spence, Pers. Comm. August 19, 1995). When smoking is finished, the skirting is detached and the hide hung out to dry.

#### 4.7 Summary

The entire skin preparation process for a medium-sized hide "takes... about a week to two weeks if everything is right" (M. Spence, Pers. Comm., 1995). Of course such a statement depends on factors such as weather, health of the tanner, and other environmental, geographic, economic and cultural influences. If all goes perfectly, a skin can be finished in about a week. However, many hide tanning sessions that I participated in took many months to complete and some are not completed to this day. Therefore it is evident that the many factors affecting skin

preparation can and do influence tanning times to a great degree.

Fig.24 Flow Chart of Contemporary Rocky Cree Tanning Process

**Prepare Skin**(select where & when to start tanning)

1.procure Skin



2.soak



3. Collect poles for stretcher frame and construct frame



**Remove Flesh and Hair**

4.cut holes around edge



5.mount on frame



6.flesh



7.remove hair



8. Scrape



**Lubricate and Soften**

9.resoak hide



10. wring, stretch and dry



11. Lubricate (grease)



12. Beam (final scraping)



**Smoking**

13. color hide



14. smudge hide

## CHAPTER V. DISCUSSION

## 5.1 Factors Affecting Skin Preparation Procedures

Geographic, socio-cultural, environmental, and economic factors affect Rocky Cree skin preparation procedures. Although these factors are interrelated, they are discussed separately. These factors are all also affiliated with extensive, wide-ranging issues such as land-use studies, land claims, resource management, cultural evolution, and economic development initiatives.

## 5.1.1 Geographic Factors

A great deal of skin preparation is done outside Nelson House in what the Rocky Cree call "camps" (Dumas, Pers. Comm., 1996) (See section 5.2.1). These camps, which are often occupied year-round, offer the closest approximation to traditional lifestyles and are farther removed from the effects of southern influences than those who are located within Nelson House. People who occupy these camps partake in traditional pursuits such as hunting, trapping, fishing, berry picking, medicine gathering, and tanning and spend less time with southern pursuits such as gambling, drinking or wage labor. As a result, there is a higher degree of probability that the older people will practice traditional livelihoods and that the younger people who reside in the camps will learn the traditional ways. It is observed that many of the younger people who lived in such camps were very knowledgeable about skin preparation techniques since they were

expected to help and learn from their elders. There was also less chance of the children being influenced or occupied with watching TV or listening to music as none of the camps visited had electricity, TV's or stereos.

In addition, there has been a concerted effort by the Nelson House school to include traditional pursuits within its curriculum. William Dumas, the Native Studies teacher at the school, often took his students to visit Alice Moore's camp to learn skin preparation first-hand. However, the learning of skin preparation techniques was tragically impeded by the death of Mrs. Moore in 1996. As of this time, it is unknown if Mr. Dumas's program will continue with another skin preparer.

As a result, the further one is away from Nelson House, the more knowledgeable one is about traditional pursuits such as skin preparation. Likewise, the more time spent away from Nelson House in one of the outside camps, the more likely one is to be skilled in traditional pursuits such as skin preparation.

#### 5.1.2 Socio-Cultural Factors

The skin preparer's personality, age, education, family, role models, exposure to traditional ways, and exposure to southern role models influences traditional tanning steps. In addition, community involvement, age and physical health of the tanner also affect skin preparation.

Skin preparation is usually learned from relatives (generally from mothers or grandmothers), yet each preparer finishes hides with a certain distinctiveness and individualized quality.

Community members could often determine the preparer of a hide by scrutinizing the look and feel of the finished product. Each skin preparer creates a finished skin by blending techniques borrowed from several other skin preparers and then adding his/her own personalized procedures to produce a unique hide ready to be assembled into moccasins or other finished artwork.

Similarly, if a potential skin preparer is influenced heavily by someone who had their hides commercially tanned then there was a greater likelihood that that tanner would also send their hides out to be commercially tanned. Those who learned their tanning techniques from people who regularly took advantage of commercial tanning companies were less likely to attempt traditional tanning.

Women's roles, men's roles and family composition affect the number of finished hides. Gender roles among the Rocky Cree is well established. A balance of roles was usually achieved which means the tanning process is an efficient enterprise.

Traditionally, the female role consisted of directing the tanning process, and doing most of the primary work on the hide.

Traditionally, men gathered and made the tools, gathered the various materials such as poles used for stretching frames, and helped with some of the more physically demanding steps such as stretching the hide, constructing the frame, and scraping the hide. Conflicts or arguments between men and women were kept to a minimum through this division of labor (Moore, Pers. Comm., 1995).

However, today, male partners of female tanners are far more involved in skin preparation. Any failure in this balance would upset both the number of hides produced and the time spent

to prepare a hide.

Gender also affected general interest in skin preparation. An increase in interest of traditional tanning techniques is very apparent among Cree men. Despite the fact that traditional tanning is still seen as a woman's pursuit, many men have expressed a desire to tan their own hides. This was most apparent among those men who periodically hunt moose. Reasons have been provided by William Dumas for why this sudden curiosity to try traditional tanning techniques has become widespread among males. This interest in traditional tanning techniques is most apparent among males who are wage earners, who regularly take part in other traditional pursuits (such as fishing, trapping or gathering medicines) and who have the money to start such an enterprise. This interest seemed to be motivated most by both the attraction of extra income and a desire to learn another aspect of traditional Cree knowledge. Others were interested in traditional tanning purely on a recreational basis (Dumas, Pers. Comm. 1996).

Traditional skills such as skin preparation have been greatly affected by changing role models. Women and men who grew up "on the land often patterned themselves after their elders" (Dumas, Pers. Comm., 1996) . Those who grew up in the community often tended to be removed from traditional pursuits and were exposed to southern role models such as teachers, nurses, TV heroes, sports stars, and music personalities who were unfamiliar with traditional Rocky Cree lifestyles. Young people do not see traditional tanning as a part of their role models' lives. Therefore there is little encouragement to develop the skills needed to prepare skins. This has deterred many young people from

becoming potential young skin preparers because of their attempts to model the southern lifestyles of their role models.

New education values have affected traditional skin preparation and the value placed on the process. People who were educated in off reserve communities such as Thompson or Winnipeg, found that they did not always learn traditional pursuits such as how to prepare hides until they returned to Nelson House and became re-established in the community. Urban off-reserve environments do not provide the teachers or materials needed for a Nelson House member to learn traditional tanning techniques. It is often difficult to locate anyone with the necessary skills who could teach them skin preparation procedures nor is there enough time to learn the skills.

In Nelson House there is greater chance to locate a tanner who can teach the youths skin preparation techniques than in the southern urban centers. The Nelson House school has also attempted to include skin preparation techniques in their curriculum. Though this program was well received by the children and provided a useful preamble to traditional skin preparation techniques, this program was considered only an introductory exercise and in no way assured that a participant would be able to tan hides on their own. In addition, (as explained in section 4.1.1), the future of this program is presently in doubt. As a result, the teaching of traditional skin preparation techniques to the young in Nelson House is tenuous at best. However, its effectiveness in providing youths with an understanding and an interest in traditional tanning techniques has never been measured. The school hopes that perhaps, at a later date, some of the students may begin to either

practice tanning hides on their own or become interested enough to apprentice with an established tanner. In the summer, many students return to Nelson House. However, skin preparation is not always completed in the summer so students rarely get an opportunity to learn the techniques.

Another plan to teach traditional lifestyles has been designed by two community members. This project consists of creating a camp close to the community that would be open year-round to both tourists and residents of Nelson House. The idea behind this camp is to offer hands-on experience with a variety of traditional skills which includes moose skin preparation. This would provide Cree students with yet another chance to learn tanning procedures based on traditional teaching methods using experiential techniques. Experiential techniques are considered by many tanners to be the best way to learn traditional skin preparation. At the moment of this study, the camp is not operating, but cost estimates and property has been considered for the venture. The hope is to "have the camp open within a few years" (Dumas, Pers. Comm., 1996).

The method of teaching tanning techniques has also changed. Traditionally, girls were taught to prepare skins by their mothers, grandmothers or an experienced relative. Elders waited until the girl was interested in learning the techniques. Girls would then be expected to watch the tanning of a number of skins. Once it was felt that a student had observed and learned the basic techniques the elders would have the girl try a moose skin of her own to tan. If a student ran into problems or obstacles, the teacher would then work on the difficult area and then expect the

girl to continue. As a result, the first tanned hide was often good enough to be used in the assembly of moccasins.

Today, most students are taught skin preparation techniques in their Native Studies courses. Students are brought to the camp of an experienced person who demonstrates each step. The students then get a chance to work on each step. William Dumas (Pers. Comm., 1996) admits that "it would be better if we had enough hides... and time to allow each student to work on their own hides." It is felt that this technique better teaches skin preparation procedures and enables each student to feel a sense of pride and ownership.

Social events, such as Nelson House Otowhowin Summer Festivals and the Cross Lake and Norway House Indian Days, have made traditional skin preparation competitive. These festivals often include moccasin competitions. Women from Nelson House often enter their finest articles into these competitions. Moccasins entered into these competitions are prepared using traditional tanning techniques. This has created a big incentive for traditional tanning among many Nelson House skin preparers. In addition, craft shows are a part of these festivals and many Nelson House tanners set up booths to sell their traditional moccasins. The festivals often represent one of the biggest outlets for the sale of traditionally prepared moccasins.

A tanner's age also appears to contribute to whether or not he or she prepares hides. People between their 30's up to age 60 are active tanners today. Very few young people prepare hides. Generally, people born before the 1970's were old enough to learn skin preparation from family members. Those born during the 1970's

or later rarely saw skin preparation performed. In addition, some women contacted expressed concern about the smell and dirt associated with skin preparation. Of course, many may pick up the skills when they get older whether or not they participated as a child. It may be that skills such as tanning are just not of interest to the young - just as family trees and history are rarely of interest to children or young adults. Often, not until people with the skills pass away do people desire to learn the information. This is evident with many adults, particularly men, who have expressed an interest in tanning long after relatives who participated in tanning had passed away.

Strong arms, agile hands, and energy are needed to prepare moose skins. Tanners with low physical strength, low energy, failing eyesight, and general poor health often find it difficult to traditionally tan skins. Those suffering from ill-health tend to have their hides sent to Winnipeg to be commercially tanned. Even though this method is sometimes more expensive, it saves them the arduous task of tanning the hides themselves.

### 5.1.3 Environmental Factors

Rocky Cree skin preparation is directly affected by weather, terrain, availability of moose skins, availability of work area, and the availability of required forest materials, temperature, precipitation, sunlight, wind, humidity, and time of year. The interrelationships of these factors affect many of the skin preparation processes. These factors determine soaking durations, drying times and skin conditions. In addition, these agents

influence decisions on when to begin or complete certain steps as well as tool choices.

The age, availability, and condition of moose skins are factors considered along with the size and intended use of each hide. For example, tanners who intend to tan skin for moccasins prefer young moose skins. Older skins were considered to be harder to scrape. In addition, smaller skins were often preferred over large ones because they were perceived to be easier to work on. They required smaller frames and were not so heavy to lift when stretching and drying.

Skin preparation depends on the tanner's ability to procure or make tools, gather materials such as poles for the stretching frame, deflesh, dehair, scrape the skins evenly, stretch and dry the skins carefully, and smoke the skins without scorching the hide. Physical space and strength are needed in order to accomplish these tasks .

A suitable flat working area, adequate storage facilities and the availability of water are environmental factors which influence the feasibility of skin preparation. In addition, the availability of materials such as, previously burned forests, old toboggans, old chain saws and other scrap metals, and moose bones influence the tools used in skin preparation. Many difficult to make and use stone and bone tools are substituted by steel tools which makes tanning easier.

The availability of procuring moose skins is an environmental factor which influences the feasibility of skin preparation. Not all tanners have relatives who are hunters. In addition, those who hunt, even on a regular basis do not always get moose every year.

Some hunters are more proficient than others. In addition, moose populations fluctuate from year to year. As a result, skin preparers are at the mercy of the relative skills of hunters, as well as the yearly rise and fall of moose populations in procuring skins for the tanning process. Some skin preparers have steady access to moose hides while others have only occasional access or are very dependent on the distribution of hides by hunters. Consequently, tanners are never really sure how many hides they will be able to work on in a year. As a result, long-term planning is almost an impossibility due to the uncertainty of how many moose hides will be available any given year.

#### 5.1.4 Economic Factors

Wage jobs, changing prices for traditionally tanned items, cost of tanning tools and materials, competition presented by commercial tanning companies, conflicts with resource-extraction companies, changing prices and variable demand for traditionally tanned items, and friction with foreign industry have influenced traditional Rocky Cree skin preparation.

Wage jobs have influenced the time available to devote to tanning. Many potential tanners are now involved in wage-related work. This affects both the interest level and time available to dedicate to tanning activities. In addition, there is often more money to be made from wage-related work which often affects the monetary motivation of doing skin preparation. Comments like "I make more money doing my secretarial duties at the Band office than I would tanning, so why would I tan hides" (Wood, Pers.

Comm., 1996), are common reasons given why those in wage related work do not tan hides.

However the inverse of this scenario is also true. Many women suppliers of tanned materials have few opportunities to earn money at wage related endeavors (due to a lack of wage-related work on the Reserve) and therefore prepare skins to obtain even a little economic advantage for themselves. As a result, those people who have few marketable skills in wage-related work as well as those who are unable to find work in wage-related activities do find some economic advantage to learning and acquiring the tanning skills.

Because skin preparation is a difficult, time consuming, and labor intensive process, it has been suggested that if one were to break down the process into an hourly wage scenario, "it would only be a few cents an hour" (Moore, Pers. Comm., 1995). As a result, tanning is not always looked upon as being a very lucrative economic endeavor. Despite the fact that a non-smoked scraped hide can get up to \$1000 with dealers in the states (Dumas, Pers. Comm., 1996), many people do not look at skin preparation as worth the effort. As a result, the incentive does not seem to be enough to attract many new tanners.

The cost of tools and materials for skin preparation is also a factor. Some tools such as the flesher are cheap and easy to manufacture. Others such as knives and sideline are very expensive and not always easy to procure. This affects the efficiency and economic possibility of completing the work, especially for those wishing to become first time tanners.

Another factor is the changing prices and variable demand for

traditionally tanned items. In short, Dumas (Pers. Comm., 1996) has stated that "traditionally tanned articles (of the Rocky Cree) are priced, in a manner typical of homemade piecework throughout the world, at a point on the demand curve expressed by a very inelastic supply and a very elastic demand." This is substantiated by King (1991) who maintains that this is true for many Aboriginal clothing producers in the subarctic regions of Canada. Moose harvesting by the hunters is variable throughout the year which means that a tanner cannot count on a steady supply of skins. In fact, the supply of moose to a tanner can vary greatly throughout a year. This affects planning and pricing. However, the demand for traditionally tanned hides is fairly constant throughout the year. As a result, a tanner cannot make any long term plans in relation to skin preparation. This fact also affects the cost of any finished product such as moccasins.

Finished hides which are later sewn into moccasins must compete in the market with moccasins produced from southern manufacturers and foreign moccasin producers. Often, because of cheaper labor and the fact that most industrial produced moccasins utilize cheaper commercial tanning techniques, moccasins produced by southern manufacturers or foreign companies tend to be cheaper and, as a result, more widely available. In addition, most Nelson House moccasin assemblers who use traditionally prepared hides do not sell their finished products to stores. Most are sold, bartered or traded with other Aboriginal people from surrounding communities or to non-Aboriginal people visiting Nelson House

Resource-extraction companies have affected the environment that many tanners depend on to get materials and tools. Proposed

forest extraction by Repap threatens to disrupt moose populations and forest fire management also threatens to interrupt the vital 20 year fire cycle necessary to create the ideal poles used in frame construction. Hydro development has also destroyed a number of diamond willow groves which has made it more difficult for a tanner to procure an easy, steady supply of wood used in the smoking process.

Probably the greatest economic effect on traditional Rocky Cree skin preparation techniques comes from commercial tanning companies based in Winnipeg. Though these companies are unable to produce hides which compare in quality or durability with traditionally tanned hides, these companies can nevertheless, create a finished product which is cheaper and adequate enough for sewing into garments such as moccasins. Though most seamstresses prefer traditionally prepared skins, the attraction of procuring a hide which is cheaper and does not need to go through the time consuming, arduous traditional process is attractive to many potential tanners and established seamstresses. This affects a tanner's motivation to produce traditional tanned hides. It also affects the pricing structure as moccasins made from commercial hides are cheaper to make and, therefore, can be priced at a lower cost. Many seamstresses who make hides exclusively out of traditionally prepared hides often attempt to compete with those made from commercial skins by lowering their cost. Seamstresses who prepare with traditional skins often lose money in the process and this also has set an artificially low price for traditionally prepared moccasins which many seamstresses find difficult to justify and meet. Cree materials such as moccasins are acquired

from retail outlets at a number of levels of specialization. As outlined by King (1991), the greatest level of volume but least level of specialization are shops found in urban metropolitan centers. These shops sell large quantities of moccasins (often made by unidentified individuals from unidentified communities.) Examples of these type of shops would be the Arctic Trading Post in the Hudson's Bay Co. (Winnipeg), the Winnipeg Fur Exchange, St Regis Hotel Craft Shop (Winnipeg), Shagnapi (Winnipeg), and those identified by King (1991), mainly Snow Goose on Spark street (Ottawa), and a number of shops on Fort Street (Victoria), and in Gas Town (Vancouver). Many of these shops do not specialize in moccasins made from traditionally prepared hides. In addition, it is extremely rare to find Nelson House moccasins made from traditionally prepared hides for sale at these outlets as there is no organized marketing carried out between these shops and the community. Nelson House has no coop for traditional craft items or marketing center for traditional Rocky Cree moccasins. There is also no program to aid tanners and seamstresses through the Nelson House Economic Development Corporation as there is with fishermen and trappers. In fact, the only external markets typically open to goods made from traditionally prepared hides from Nelson House are the Northern Store Trading Post and the Arctic Trading Post in Thompson (which supply traditional craft materials to both local people and tourists), and the local Northern Store in Nelson House. The only other outlets are through craft shows at the local festivals (See section 6.1.2), family or community individuals or through word of mouth to tourists, researchers, workers from the south, and other outsiders. As a result, there are few commercial

networks open to traditional skin prepared objects. Often, Nelson House tanners and seamstresses find that only local markets are open to goods made from traditionally prepared hides. This limits the demand for materials made from traditionally prepared moose skins and affects the production of traditionally produced moose skins.

## 5.2 Implications of Findings on Perceived Challenges to Skin Preparation Procedures

Rocky Cree skin preparation is a labor intensive, time consuming, and sometimes costly endeavor that is greatly impacted by a variety of geographic, socio-cultural, environmental, and economic factors. These factors have important implications for Rocky Cree cultural evolution, economic development, resource management, and land-use studies.

### 5.2.1 Implications for Cultural Evolution

Traditional knowledge (TK) has been a part of Aboriginal culture for as long as these groups have existed. Traditional knowledge helped maintain Aboriginal people's survival and subsistence. Traditional knowledge is often transmitted orally from one generation to the next. However, with the influx of western knowledge upon Aboriginal youth, a great deal of traditional knowledge is in danger of being lost. The elders, who are the possessors of traditional knowledge, have a wealth of information to share. Nonetheless, many aboriginal youth have rejected traditional knowledge or are unable to learn from their

elders due to schooling or other similar considerations. As a result, much traditional knowledge is in danger of being lost.

Despite the rejection of traditional knowledge by some Aboriginals, there has been a recent resurgence by many Aboriginal people to secure and publicize many aspects of traditional knowledge due to land claim issues and the need for traditional cultural survival. The importance of TK is gradually being understood by Aboriginal people and academics alike. Clarkson et. al. (1992) recognize TK as a precious resource for knowledge about how to live on the land in an ecologically and socially sustainable way. TK is also being acknowledged and stimulated by Aboriginal leaders as a means of returning to traditional values and culture. Payne and Nepinak (1996) describe that when traditional knowledge began to disappear, cultural extinction began to take hold, only to be replaced by a new culture - one characterized by poverty and dependence. Everywhere, Aboriginal people are holding on to TK to provide insight and direction into environmental, economic and cultural issues. The quantity and quality of TK, however, varies among community members depending on gender, age, social status, intellectual capability, and profession (hunter/trapper, spiritual leader, healer etc.).

Given these considerations, it is imperative that the traditional knowledge of skin preparation be understood and expanded so that this important aspect of indigenous knowledge is not lost. Traditional skin preparation is the basis for the production of a sustainable craft and clothing economy. Without traditional Rocky Cree skin preparation, there can be no

traditional Rocky Cree clothing items which can culturally denote a Rocky Cree "way of doing things" (Dumas, Pers. Comm., 1996). Therefore, the traditional knowledge inherent in Rocky Cree skin preparation is equally important to the continuation of indigenous methods of learning, This aspect can help the young to find their place within the world. Without this connection to traditional ways, many of the youth in Nelson House will be in danger of falling into the cultural morass that many Aboriginal people find themselves.

Presently there is great desire among some people in Nelson House to learn traditional ways in order to fully understand their cultural identity, history, and 'way of doing things.' Perhaps these same people will discover that skin preparation is one way to accomplish this task.

### 5.2.2 Implications for Economic Development

Traditional knowledge has also benefited economic development agencies in providing more realistic evaluations of production systems, natural resources, and the environment (Rogers, 1995). Traditional belief systems and practices of many Indigenous peoples contain ideals, values and technologies which are increasingly relevant to modern concepts of sustainable development and the maintenance of subsistence economies (Jackson, 1987). Processes such as skin preparation can be important for the maintenance of a subsistence economy. Skin preparation and other similar pursuits can also be significant to some economic endeavors which depend on renewable resources. As a result, Rocky

Cree skin preparation techniques have important implications for economic development within Nelson House. The potential economic rewards of skin preparation are admittedly small, however the economic impact of skin preparation for many individuals is great. Without the benefits and economic rewards of skin preparation, many individuals within the community would be economically destitute. In addition, there could be many members of the community who could benefit financially from the economic support skin preparation offers.

### 5.2.3 Implications for Land-Use Studies & resource management

The importance of preserving Aboriginal traditional knowledge lies in the need for cultural identity, economic development and biological and ecological insight. Comprehension about different aspects of the environment can be derived from perceptive investigations of traditional knowledge systems such as skin preparation. Nelson House tanners have a practical knowledge of many aspects and areas of their environment which have yet to be fully documented in resource management schemes or in land use studies. Many items used in the skin preparation process are derived from the forests and lakes of the area. This gives tanners a unique insight into the environments they inhabit and use. The knowledge they possess of these environments is often ignored or grossly underutilized by resource managers or land use specialists. This can have important implications for land claims, particularly with respect to the input of women on issues they are normally not consulted about. Usually, land that is claimed by a

band encompasses good hunting or trapping territories which are traditional male pursuits (Moore, Pers. Comm., 1995). Rarely are areas of land utilized by typical women's pursuits such as good berry-picking spots, rabbit snaring areas or lands used in the skin preparation process considered in the land claims process. "The men just don't consider the lands that we tanners need to do our work as very important" (Moore, Pers. Comm., 1995). Skin preparation allows women to have an understanding about the environment that can have important impacts on their livelihood if resource schemes or land claims do not consult or include them. This concept may be promoted to allow tanners to continue their traditional harvesting activities with the benefits of conservation or resource management accruing to them.

### 6.1 Summary

Traditional knowledge of skin preparation techniques has been a part of Rocky Cree life since they first inhabited the Nelson House region of northern Manitoba. Traditional knowledge of skin preparation is one of many components that has contributed to Rocky Cree survival and subsistence. There has been some renewed interest in recent years of traditional knowledge components by both researchers and the indigenous population due to the need for cultural survival, and the need to symbolically re-identify with Mother Earth. Interest in skin preparation has not necessarily been given the same interest and emphasis that other traditional knowledge component have, such as traditional plant use, music or traditional dancing. However, there is a need to recognize and secure many components of traditional knowledge, including skin preparation techniques, to ensure that they are available for future generations. This study has shown that Rocky Cree traditional skin preparation techniques are always in danger of being lost or marginalized in the future if interest is not generated among its population. There is a desperate need to protect and stimulate these processes as they offer a number of economic, cultural, and environmental benefits for the entire community of Nelson House.

### 6.2 Conclusions

The Native people of the subarctic regions discovered within

their environment raw materials well suited for the manufacture of adequate cold and insect resistant clothing (Conn, 1991) through traditional skin preparation techniques which provided the basis for such clothing. However, since first contact with Europeans, many aspects of Rocky Cree material culture have disappeared or been heavily impacted by non-Native influences. These expressions of material culture have faded due to a variety of geographic, economic, environmental and sociocultural reasons.

For instance, over the last one hundred and fifty years, the migratory lifestyles have become obsolete. Today, most Nelson House residents now live sedentary lifestyles with easy access to commercial goods via catalogs and the reserve Northern store. As a result, many traditionally prepared skin clothes have been replaced by clothing commercially manufactured off-reserve. The shift to sedentarism and wage-related work has also reduced the number of people spending extended periods outside in the winter hunting and trapping which has further reduced the need for traditionally prepared skin clothing. This means there is less demand for traditional clothing to keep people protected from the harsh elements encountered when taking part in outdoor activities over extended periods of time. Commercial jackets made from synthetic materials such as Gore Tex treated nylon are available to Nelson House residents at the local Northern store and are considered very practical alternatives to traditional tanned skins. However, the high cost of such commercial items often make traditional tanned clothing very attractive to Nelson House residents on a fixed budget.

As a result, skin clothing, such as gloves, gauntlets, and

beaded jackets, and particularly moccasins are still in demand, often by visiting tourists or researchers, and community members, particularly those who still partake in hunting and trapping or dog mushing activities. This enables a handful of preparers to make, at least, a partial living tanning hides. However, what is most striking about Nelson House skin preparation is that, for the most part, traditional methods of skin preparation have persisted over time. Despite the onslaught of new technology, lifestyle changes, and environmental degradation, traditional techniques of skin production have continued with little change. Except for the substitution of some metal tools for bone or stone, commercial greases for animal or fish oils, commercial soaps for brain mixtures, and the inclusion of nails and commercial ropes, the processes are remarkably similar to those described by the elders in the community. Rocky Cree tanners have no problem including new methods or materials in their tanning procedures, but only if it makes the tanning process less strenuous, cheaper or of better quality.

However, future negative influences on the viability of these traditional skin techniques are more than evident. For instance, skin preparation is practiced by older people within the community. Despite the community's efforts, particularly in school classes, the tradition has not been adopted by the young mostly because many of the young do not see tanning as a lucrative endeavor, or find tanning less than desirable. This may not bode well for the continuing tradition of skin preparation in Nelson House. Of course this could also indicate that tanning is more likely a skill that fits into the lifestyle of an older person who

is less interested in the "action" in urban areas or in the pursuit of southern lifestyles (Dumas Pers. Comm., 1996). If this is so, then there may be a glimmer of hope for the continued tradition of tanning as the next generation approaches their adult years.

Furthermore, the destruction by outside hunters, hydro development, and pollution of both the flora and fauna required for skin production is a very real threat. To prevent this destruction and to enable the Cree to continue using the needed resources for skin production will require future strategies for harvesting management.

Economic considerations are also important to the continuation of a viable traditional tanning process. For instance, inexpensive price structures make it attractive to have skins commercially tanned in Winnipeg. In addition, prices and markets are not well defined and competition from commercial leather clothing manufacturers is also a threat as they move into specialty areas such as beaded jackets, moccasins and gauntlets - once the exclusive domain of Native preparers.

Finally, the sheer exhaustive work involved in preparing a hide is sometimes felt by certain members of the community, particularly the young, to be "frustrating and not worth the time and money" (Moore Per. Comm., 1995).

In the last two decades, one has seen many changes in physical, social and economic environments in the Nelson House region. Skin preparation methods have adapted alongside these environmental, cultural, and economic changes.

There are a number of environmental, geographic, cultural and

economic factors influencing traditional moose skin preparation procedures used in traditional moccasin production by the Rocky Cree of Nelson House. These, influences hinder the sustainability of a traditional moose skin preparation process within the moccasin production in Nelson House which, if alleviated, could provide the basis for a small economy based on moccasin production.

### 6.3 Suggestions for Future Research

Additional research on traditional skin preparation methods should be expanded to other Rocky Cree communities in order to obtain a more detailed picture of the geographic, economic, environmental and sociocultural factors influencing traditional skin preparation in the Rocky Cree region of Manitoba. Comparisons of skin preparation methods could also be made with Rocky Cree neighbors such as the Sayisi Dene or the Swampy Cree. This research needs to be conducted in other communities in the near future, while the elders with the knowledge are still alive.

Rocky Cree skin preparation methods for other animals such as beaver, hare, woodland caribou, fox, wolf, and other wildlife indigenous to northern Manitoba could also be documented in a similar manner to this study. Other areas of future study include the documentation of traditional Cree clothing construction techniques and the factors affecting the viability of a traditional clothing market, particularly the social-psychological and economic determinants effecting contemporary and traditional

clothing choices. For instance, the documentation of the entire Cree traditional skin clothing economy, from skin procurement methods (hunting and skinning), skin preparation (tanning), assembly (sewing and construction), and marketing techniques (bartering, trading and selling) for a particular commodity (i.e. moccasins), could be done similar to the study undertaken by Oakes (1988) for the Inuit. Documenting the entire production of moccasins, for example, would preserve technical and behavioral details of this endangered craft and artform, enabling further analysis by future generations if traditional Rocky Cree clothing production were to die out. Such documentation would preserve a component of traditional Rocky Cree life and would protect an aspect of indigenous knowledge embedded in the remaining clothing producers in Nelson House society. In addition, such a study could verify the perceived challenges to traditional Rocky Cree clothing production methods and could point out the various impediments affecting the sustainability of the traditional Rocky Cree clothing production economy. As a result, it might be possible to strengthen the Rocky Cree traditional clothing production economy by illuminating the various difficulties faced by skin clothing producers.

Finally, a study assessing the development of markets for traditionally tanned moose and deer hides with the many black powder groups and reenactment groups in Canada, the U.S., and Europe as suggested by Riewe (Pers. Comm., 1997). The possibilities of developing lucrative markets for tanned hides warrants future research.

## ENDNOTES

1. There are many arguments as to the usage of the word "Native" used to describe individuals (or mixed groups) of Indian, Metis or Inuit people. Other terms, such as "Aboriginal", "Indigenous", or "First Nations", are also used with equal controversy. For instance, Brian Maracle, journalist, former radio host and member of the Mohawk Nation, feels that the terms "Native" and "Aboriginal" have been wrongly used by the media as nouns (as in: "John Smith, a native, said..." or: "the Aborigines are..."). Instead, Maracle feels that the terms should only be used as adjectives (as in John Smith, a native man, said..." or: "the aboriginal people are..."). (Reference: Brian Maracle, Crazy Water: Native Voices on Addiction and Recovery (Toronto: Penguin Books, 1994).

Others, such as Stan McKay, author and member of Manitoba's Fisher Reserve, and George Erasmus, former National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, have used the terms freely and interchangeably. (Reference: Diane Engelstad and John Bird Ed., Nation to Nation: Aboriginal Sovereignty and the Future of Canada (Concord, Ontario: House of Anansi Press, 1992).

This reviewer has adopted the latter opinion, and has chosen to utilize the word "Native" (with a capital 'N'), and "Aboriginal" (with a capital 'A') throughout the report. This reviewer has also chosen to use "Native" and "Aboriginal" as both a noun and adjective. The term is used in a broad sense to describe the descendants of the original inhabitants of this land as opposed to the term "First Nations", which is felt to be more of a narrow legal term used to describe people with government-recognized Indian status under the Indian Act and Bill C-31. The word "Indian" has not been used due to its unpopular colonist origins and overtones. The reviewer wishes to apologize for any confusion or inevitable inconsistencies that may seem offensive to some.

2. Some skin preparers flesh their hides on a log or pole or even against the ground. This technique is only used for small moose

hides. The hide is draped over the log which allows the skinworker to kneel while moving the hide around the pole. Large hides require a frame. They are mounted on the frame in order to remove the flesh and hair and also to keep the hide stretched while it dries. (For further information see section 5.4.1 or refer to Young et. al., 1991).

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## Appendix A

## Common and Scientific Names

**PLANTS**

<u>Common Name</u>	<u>Scientific Name</u>
Alder	( <i>Alnus rugosa</i> )
Aspen	( <i>Populus tremuloides</i> )
Balsam fir	( <i>Abies balsamea</i> )
Balsam poplar	( <i>Populus balsamifera</i> )
Birch	( <i>Betula papyrifera</i> )
Cedar	( <i>Thuja occidentalis</i> )
Diamond willow	( <i>Salix bebbiana</i> )
Dogwood	( <i>Cornus stolonifera</i> )
Fireweed	( <i>Epilobium angustifolium</i> )
Jack pine	( <i>Pinus banksiana</i> )
Spruce	( <i>Picea mariana - Picea glauca</i> )
Tamarack	( <i>Larix laricina</i> )
White Birch	( <i>Betula papyrifera</i> )

**ANIMALS**

<u>Common Name</u>	<u>Scientific Name</u>
Barren Ground Caribou	( <i>Rangifer arcticus</i> )
Beaver	( <i>Castor canadensis</i> )
Elk (Wapiti)	( <i>Cervus canadensis</i> )
Moose	( <i>Alces alces</i> )
Mule Deer	( <i>Odocoileus hemionus</i> )
muskrat	( <i>Ondatra zibethicus</i> )
White-Tailed Deer	( <i>Odocoileus virginianus</i> )
Wolf	( <i>Canis lupus</i> )
Woodland Caribou	( <i>Rangifer tarandus caribou</i> )

**Appendix B**

# Research Ethics

Name of principal investigator  
**Bret Nickels**

This section is to be completed by the institution's committee for the surveillance and monitoring of standards of ethics for research in which human subjects are involved. The term "subject", for purposes of this review, refers to any person who is used as a source of raw or unformulated data in the conduct of research and who is not acting in the capacity of principal investigator or assisting such an individual.

The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada supports the principle that, in any research undertaking, the rights and integrity of human subjects take precedence over the need to conduct research. The Council recognizes that it is not itself vested with any authority to decide, on behalf of the public, when an individual's right may be superseded by the need for research. However, as a trustee of public funds, the Council has a responsibility to ensure that the activities it supports respect the rights of the public it serves.

Accordingly, the Council requires that all research involving human subjects be approved by the ethics review committee of the institution by which the principal is employed.

The committee will be expected to monitor the research program in order to ensure that, over its duration, it continues to meet appropriate standards of ethics. Membership of the ethics review committee is expected to be broadly based and should include individuals from both within and without the applicant's department and discipline who have no association with the research.

In the space below, the composition of the committee should be indicated (though not necessarily the names of the members). This section should be dated and signed by 1) the committee chairperson, and 2) the applicant's department head or a representative of the institution.

The Council provides a set of guidelines on ethics for research with human subjects which should form the basis of the ethics review. (See *Guide for applicants*, articles 35-37 and Annex B.)

This form must be submitted to the Council no later than **February 1**. Receipt of this completed form will be interpreted as confirmation that the proposed research meets the necessary standards of ethics. However, the Council reserves the right of final judgment where circumstances warrant.

**Certification of Institutional Ethics Review Committee** SSHRC File No. (if known) \_\_\_\_\_

This is to certify that the Institutional Ethics Review Committee of

**The Faculty of Arts, University of Manitoba** \_\_\_\_\_ (name of institution)

has examined the research proposal by **Bret Nickels, graduate student, Department of Native Studies** \_\_\_\_\_ (name of applicant)

entitled **Perceived Challenges to the Sustainability of Traditional Moccasin Production of the Rocky Cree in Nelson House, Manitoba** \_\_\_\_\_ (title of research)

and concludes that, in all respects, the proposed research meets appropriate standards of ethics as outlined by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

## Composition of the committee

Name (Optional)	Position held	Department or discipline
Grant, Karen R.	Chair	Associate Dean, Faculty of Arts
Heller, H.		History
Johnson, M.		Psychology
McCance, D.		Religion
Oakes, J.		Native Studies
Reinholtz, C.		Linguistics
Schafer, A.		Philosophy
Smith, G.		Geography

May 16, 1996  
Date

[Signature]  
Committee chairperson

[Signature]  
Department head or institutional representative



# Nelson House First Nation

NELSON HOUSE, MANITOBA, ROB 1A0  
Telephone (204) 484-2332 Fax (204) 484-2392

May 16th, 1996.

Bret Nickels  
Native Studies Major  
Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Dear Sir;

RE: *Authorization for Native Studies Research*

As per your request, please accept this letter as an official go-ahead to proceed with the intended research.

We are pleased to accomodate your request without hesitance, realizing that it will benefit our children and future generation to come.

If we can be of further assistance, please do not hesitate ask. Thank -you.

Yours in Cultural Awareness,

Pat Linklater  
Deputy Chief

## Letter of Informed Consent

The purpose of this project is to collect information on skin preparation and clothing production procedures used in Nelson House today or in the past. You can have your traditional knowledge on this topic documented by telling me or by showing me. You can spend as much or as little time as you want on this project. Also, you are free to stop participating in the project at any time. You will be able to review the rough draft to ensure it is accurate. You will be reimbursed with a copy of the finished video and/or book. Copies will also be given to the Nelson House school. If you have any problems please contact Dr. Jill Oakes, Department of Native Studies, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, MB, R3T 5V5 or phone

Yes, I want to have my traditional knowledge on skin preparation and traditional clothing production procedures documented by video, tape recording or written notes.

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Printed Name	Signature	Date
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Yes, I want my name and photograph included with the documentation.

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Printed Name	Signature	Date
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Appendix C

Methods & Methodology  
Reflections & Personal Perspectives

Personal knowledge has defined the way in which I comprehend my surroundings and create concepts. The following perspectives describe the growth which I experienced (and am still experiencing) as a non-Aboriginal academic involved in community-based Native Studies research in northern Manitoba. This research acquainted me with the everyday realities of conducting community-based research - including its strengths and weaknesses, particularly in relation to research methodologies.

Despite the fact that this type of qualitative research represents a method of social investigation which attempts to actively and meaningfully involve full participation of the community resulting in research which both empowers the community and serves the needs of those who are participating in the research, it is painfully evident that community-based participatory research is a difficult process in which the reality of community participation is not always easily achieved. Though it has enormous potential, my experiences with community-based participatory research indicates the complexity of such research efforts and the many unseen consequences that unfold as a result of its implementation.

As a result, the following reflections attempt to describe some of the solutions to many of the difficulties and problems one may experience in the application of participatory research methods and methodology, and makes a number of personal recommendations on research methodologies for doing community-based participatory research in Nelson House First Nation and

other similar First Nation communities. It is hoped that these recommendations may be useful to those who are conducting community-based participatory research within First Nation communities (particularly those who are first time researchers), as well as to those First Nations who have been approached by researchers who wish to investigate some aspect of their community.

Although there are a number of scholarly papers which discuss how the methodology of community-based participatory research can be particularly effective in empowering First Nation communities, I have found, much to my regret, that community-based participatory research is not simply a matter of going from theory into practice! I believe that Ward's (1996) thesis on collaborative research in Nunavut clearly states this premise. I also believe that Ward's thesis is a good place to start any inquiry into this methodology including its problems and advantages. However, I will extract my recommendations based upon my own experiences as a person doing participatory research with a First Nations community rather than on an evaluation of the concepts and theorems found in reviews of the literature.

It should be noted that these reflections are a result of my interpretations of experiences in Nelson House and Cross Lake First Nations. It should be noted that my frustrations, awkwardness, biases and sometimes apprehensive feelings about being a non-Aboriginal person working in an Aboriginal culture have fashioned these reflections.

## Methodology

This study was founded on community-based participatory research principles. This methodology seeks "to empower and elevate the 'researched' to participate in and steer the research process" (Ward, 1996; also see: Lather, 1986; Maguire, 1987; Ryan and Robinson, 1990).

Making community-based participatory research a reality in and for the community is the focus of such research. However, it is imperative that a great deal of care and attention must be devoted to the often mundane specifics of protocol in order for both the researcher and the First Nation community to save enormous amounts of time, energy and money and to take full advantage of the research opportunities. With that in mind, I would like to summarize some possible recommendations for using such methodology.

**1. Researchers who are constructing research proposals and grant applications that deal with First Nations communities should be prepared to spend a great deal of time within the community.** This enables the participants of those communities to thoroughly understand every aspect of the study and to become familiar and comfortable with the researcher. It has been my experience that community-based research does not follow a standard formula and must not be viewed as an efficient way of conducting research. In fact, my research with the Rocky Cree depended largely on the interpersonal dynamics of all the research participants and required that both the

research associates and I learn new roles as research companions. This process took a great deal of time, particularly for the community since they were the least familiar with doing this type of research.

It also took time to develop trustworthy and dependable relationships between all members in the study. Community-based participatory research is a process of human exchange which involves developing relationships between people. Time must be set aside for this process of getting to know one another. Time is also needed to allow all conflicting opinions to be heard and considered. Any democratic committee meetings or other type of consensus driven collaborative process can slow down the research process as conflicts between research partners arises.

In my case, I was restricted by my obligations as a university student which put limitations on the time I could spend in the community. Each delay in the collaborative research process and the general slow pace of collaborative research affected my time commitment and made me wonder whether university-based research, in which the researcher is only in the community for a very short duration, and collaborative research processes are congruent. I found that spending as much time in the community as possible was valuable to the project. Most university-based field work is conducted during the short summer seasons which places time constraints on the research. I discovered that visiting the community simply to spend some quality 'social' time (i.e. meeting for tea, taking part in social events such as festivals or simply dropping by to say "hi") with the inhabitants during all parts of the year (particularly during the long winter months) helped

later when I began the collaborative research design and collecting data. At first, I felt guilty that I was spending so much time in the community without doing anything constructive towards the research project. However, I later found that the social time spent in the community was actually helping to formulate the foundation from which a healthy research design could be built. As a result of my social visits to the community, friendships were formed, connections were made, and trust was reinforced. I was showing the community that I was prepared to offer a long-term commitment and this helped to develop trust between the community and myself. I found that personal interaction with the associates was desired by the community. This helped in formulating the research design and in collecting the necessary information in a comfortable, respectful, and collaborative manner. In short, more time spent in the community (both socially and academically) is always an asset. In addition, successful participatory research in Nelson House requires commitment and obligation on behalf of the outside researcher.

**2. Researchers should spend a great deal of time collecting background information on the particular First Nation community to be studied before venturing into the field.** The researcher should complete a significant amount of groundwork before the fieldwork - the formal research project - even begins. This includes an extensive literature review on the research community in order to understand the geographical, political, economic, cultural and social dynamics of the community as is done in most methodologies. However, I found it useful to

seek out other researchers (even in diverse disciplines) who had completed or were currently doing work in Nelson House. From these individuals I was able to get the names of contact people within the community. I discovered that contact people within the community were often the lifeline to a successful research project. They can introduce you to other people (particularly relatives), acquaint you to the surrounding environment - particularly places you would not have found on your own. Besides being able to advise, inform and communicate your needs to others within the community, I often found contacts within the community to be inspirational and energy-giving. I also believe that it is imperative to get someone from the community to be a "community representative" This community representative could even be included in the academic process by being a part of the thesis committee as is the case for the University of Manitoba Interdisciplinary Native Studies Masters Degree. This degree requires a community representative to sit on the thesis committee. I cannot stress how invaluable my community representative was to my research. I firmly believe that the participatory methodology is enhanced by the inclusion of a community representative.

**3. I believe it should be stressed in all correspondence with any First Nation community under study that the research must involve a partnership or collaboration with those in research and those affected by the research. Community-based participatory research is based on the inclusion of those who are traditionally the researched in the formulation**

of the research problems, the procedures for collecting data, the assessment of the data and the application or use of the findings and it has been my experience that this fact should be repeatedly stressed to First Nation communities. For the researcher, I believe this even involves the inclusion of such seemingly simplistic details as giving new names to those individuals involved in the study. Instead of using paternalistic words such as "research subjects," "hired hands," "aides," "assistants" or "helpers" when referring to research participants, words such as "collaborators," "associates," "members," "companions," "colleagues," or "partners" should be used. This is a team effort and I feel this will enhance the success of any participatory research design.

**4. First Nations elected political representatives (i.e., Chief and Band Council), Elders, and/or traditional leaders of the community should review and approve the research proposal.** Often, researchers obtain their permission to conduct research from one individual or a group of individuals not affiliated with the administrative structure of the First Nation community. During my research in Cross lake and Nelson House it has come to my attention that many researchers conduct their studies without permission from anyone within the community. This type of conduct is both unethical and disrespectful, and possesses many inherent problems. For instance, because traditional and progressive elements exist in almost every community, some members may not be knowledgeable about certain traditional/spiritual customs and may not be able to provide factual information. On the

other hand, elders or traditional leaders may give their blessing to a project which may not be acceptable to the Chief or Band Council. Therefore, it is in the researchers best interest to consult, as best as possible, all elected political and traditional leaders on the project, or a variety of situations may arise to complicate the study.

Of course, even the best prepared researcher can run into difficulties, and not all problems can be anticipated. For instance, difficulties can arise when there are Chief and Band elections where new elected officials may halt the research process - even one that has been previously approved. I have heard many stories of researchers who, after consulting and receiving permission from all the perceived political representatives and councils, were suddenly told to terminate their research as a result of a new Chief and Band Council. Therefore, it may be wise to note when Band elections are scheduled and wait to have a project approved until after an election (if an election is scheduled during the field season).

A set of research guidelines, licenses and a standardized formal research consent form (Provided by a number of agencies, councils and universities such as the ACUNS Ethical Guidelines, SSHERC & NSERC, and the Science Institute of the Northwest Territories) could help to alleviate such problems. However, it is still imperative that all political representatives and community councils be consulted about the research and that every attempt should be made to cooperate with the host society. Otherwise, a failure to follow such processes could hamper the plans of future researchers.

**5. Community-based participatory research works best when it is responsive and sensitive to a variety of voices within the community, including those outside the immediate research partners.** My research in Nelson House worked best when communication and understanding were fostered with as many members of the community as was feasible in order to prevent misunderstanding, ambiguity, jealousy, or conflict which could harm the research. I discovered that the needs of the community as an entirety (as opposed to a few individuals within the community) had to be considered in order to better facilitated the research project.

**6. Regular scheduled research meetings are an integral part of any community-based participatory research design.** In my research, I found that it was important that all research partners have an official forum for their complaints, desires, and ideas. Regular scheduled meetings will allow research assistants to know when and how they can express their thoughts during the entire life of the project. Meetings can be publicized by radio, Post Office bulletin, bulletin board notices at restaurants or Band offices, or other public channels throughout the community and must be open to everyone, including those not actively involved in the study. In fact, I often discovered that those who were not actively involved in the study often provided some of the most useful ideas and information. For instance, if my study had involved only active tanners I would have lost some key data and research design ideas which was often provided by those within the community who were perceived to have limited knowledge of hide

tanning. The study was often enhanced by the input of those who were not actively involved in the framework of the study. As a result, an open meeting was beneficial to the design of this study.

**7. Research associates should be provided with adequate and equitable compensation for their contributions.** This can be accomplished by providing the associate with an honorarium. This can consist of a small gift of money. However, some people will not accept money. In Nelson House, many associates preferred gifts of thanks such as practical food essentials (coffee, tea, sugar, milk, lard, bacon and flour were the most appreciated), clothing materials (cloth, fur hats, mitts, socks), or household items (cups, pots & pans, dish towels, plates). I discovered which items would be best for each associate by talking with members of the Band Council and the Nelson House Economic Development Corporation who were always willing to help in such instances. I also informed the associates that I would provide them with a copy of any and all publications that use information provided from the associate, and/or an acknowledgment (for those who wish to be acknowledged), depending on the agreement between the researcher and the associate. The offer to provide the community education authority, library or Band Office with copies of any published materials was also extremely well received in Nelson House.

**8. It is best if an individual "Participant Consent Form" is signed and dated by the research associate before any recording of data may take place.** The participant consent

letter which I used (see Appendix B) contained the purpose of the project, the methods to be used for recording the associates information (film, video, notes, etc.), a promise that the associate will be able to review a rough draft of any materials planned for publication, and the method of reimbursement. In addition, the participant consent form contained a clause allowing the associate to stop participating in the project at any time and a name, address, and phone number of the researchers contact person or superior. It is also important that all children have the signature of a parent or legal guardian included and that all information in the participant consent form be written in a manner understandable to all, which often can mean writing it in the language understandable to the research associates. Though I realize that most researchers are required to provide consent forms by their university or research institution, I was surprised to find a number of researchers who did not follow this procedure in the communities where I was participating in research. Though it is a time consuming and often perplexing procedure for the research associate, I found that most associates appreciated this system once it was explained to them. It also helped to create trust and goodwill between the researcher and the associate which is imperative if this type of methodology is to be successful.

**9. First Nations elected political representatives (i.e., Chief and Band Council), Elders, and/or traditional leaders must be given the opportunity to review any report, publication, film, video, exhibition and other work or materials that result from work undertaken in the**

**community.** Many social science researchers frown upon non-scholars critiquing their work. However, it has been my experience that this step is essential as it ensures that sensitive material will remain confidential and that the researcher will publish acceptable information correctly. This process also helps to create an atmosphere of trust and ensures that the community retains ownership over their shared knowledge. From my experience this is one of the most important and appreciated tenants of participatory research.

In addition, once all reports have been completed, it may be useful to present your results to the community. There may be people who cannot, or may not, read your report. I had the opportunity in Nelson House to conduct a number of slide show presentations to the Nelson House school. These presentations were well received and have allowed me a chance to share the results of a participatory project with the community. This, in turn, fosters an atmosphere of trust, and ensures that I may become involved in future research endeavors with Nelson House.

**10. The outside researcher must be prepared to learn a great deal about him or herself, and to learn along with the community about constructing a project based on community participatory methodology.** My work with Nelson House has shown me that participatory approaches require a researcher to be flexible, patient and adaptable. These traits can help the outside researcher to develop an understanding about his or her social status in the research process. In addition, I learned how my involvements as an outside researcher effect the

conduct of research associates. I also discovered how my influences as an outside researcher affected the events which occurred during the research process. In Nelson House, I learned that patience is definitely a virtue. Things happen at different speeds in the community than what I was used to. It was necessary, at times to pull away and let events and decisions unfold at their own speed and let the associates themselves work out the details. This aspect of removing oneself from certain decision-making aspects of the research was difficult, time consuming and 'ego-reducing'. However, it was necessary at times. I had to learn what my place was in the research design. After all, this was not my study any longer, but one that belonged to the community.

**11. The outside researcher must be prepared to wear a number of different "hats" and to take on a multitude of roles during the research process.** In my experience taking on various roles seems to be the reality of conducting participatory research. In the case of Nelson House, I often found myself taking on multiple roles. I would become the organizer, facilitator and sometimes even a trainer (with the interpreter). This multiple role process involved a great amount of energy, control and patience. In some cases I felt that my roles came into conflict with the methodology. For instance, the training of the interpreter made me wonder if I was removing the collaborative part of the process by taking too much control. Clarification of these many roles at the beginning of the process may negate confusion or animosity.

In addition, outside influences also shape the dimensions and

implementation of the participatory process and may effect the roles of the outside researcher. For instance, the tragic death of one of the principle associates in the community during data collection brought the entire process to a halt. All research was stopped for a considerable length of time, out of respect for the family. This unforeseen tragedy influenced the timeline of the research, leaving little time to complete the project before the end of my field season. I ended up discarding the participatory process in the data analysis and report writing stages in order to meet my own deadlines.

This illustrates the difficulty in maintaining methodological purity in regards to participatory research. Unrealistic time frames, unforeseen constraints or developments in the community, and group dynamics all effect the abilities of the researcher to follow and support the principles of community-based participatory research.

**12. It should be stressed in all correspondence with any First Nation community under study that the research must involve a partnership or collaboration with those in research and those affected by the research. As has been already stated, community-based participatory research is based on the inclusion of those who are traditionally the researched in the formulation of all research problems and procedures which even involves the inclusion of such details as giving new "team-specific" names to those individuals being studied.**

However, regardless of what terminology is used to convey that participatory research is a partnership, it is obvious that

such research is still perceived by many First Nation communities as simply serving the needs of those who paid for the research rather than those who are participating in the research, and is therefore viewed as being more manipulative than liberating.

However, this problem can be overcome by allowing research associates to be involved in the actual formulation of the research topic or idea rather than the researcher stating his or her intent and asking the community if they are interested in having something like that done. My research in Nelson House was conducted in such a manner. I had a meeting with both the Nelson House Band Council and Community Economic Development Corporation to discuss my areas of expertise and let them tell me what they would like to see accomplished. This approach seem to negate the often held view that research simply serves the needs of those who conduct the research rather than those who are participating in the research. I believe the community viewed this study as being more liberating than manipulative, since I was conducting research which they created and wanted to see completed.

In this sense, the community-based research I participated in was not necessarily used to raise the consciousness of Aboriginal peoples, but to raise that of the non-Aboriginal world. This also removed me from the self-serving fate of blithely extolling the virtues of what my research could do for Aboriginal people. It also prevented me from imposing my own methods, structures and data collection procedures (without ever explaining why they were conducted in such a manner), and how they were perceived to produce positive results. This paternalistic process operates on the assumption that researchers are the custodians of

Aboriginal histories and cultural knowledge. Instead, I am able to accentuate that the research I was a participant in was part of a larger social agenda which had the ability to empower the Nelson House community by gaining additional public support for their particular goals and way of life. Aboriginal communities, by using the knowledge and empowerment that community-based participatory research reveals, can educate the world and rally support to their issues and causes. This, in turn, can help to reaffirm pride and faith in their culture.

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After having been given the chance to explore the quality of community-based participatory research with the community colleagues in Nelson House, I believe firmly that scientific investigation by outside researchers is only beneficial to Aboriginal communities if, over time, Aboriginal communities can profit from both the process as well as the results. I am certain that some of my thoughts and recommendations mentioned here may anger those researchers who are dedicated subscribers to the manifesto of academic freedom or positivist approaches. However, in my brief experience as a researcher working with Aboriginal people it has come to my attention that if one wishes to successfully conduct cross-cultural research with Aboriginal people, then the ideals of scholarship must be balanced with the needs of the people being studied. Likewise, in addition to the

realization that we have responsibilities to those we study, it is more than apparent that academic excellence depends on the respect and the utilization of the *critical* abilities Native people naturally possess in regards to research which intends to document Native perspectives. Without this understanding, researchers will lose their most valued experts and evaluators and possibly the privilege of conducting studies in Aboriginal communities.

### Methods

Conducting studies based on community-based participatory research principals often determines the methods used to gather the information needed to successfully collect the necessary data. My experience has shown that certain methods do not work for myself or the community, while other methods must be altered in order to adapt to a given situation.

The following offers some personal insights and, hopefully, some helpful hints in using certain methods within community-based participatory research. I strongly caution the reader to approach the following recommendations with two qualifications in mind. First, my research experience with Native people has been primarily with the Rocky and Swampy Cree of Northern Manitoba. The relevance of such experience may not be applicable to other Canadian Aboriginal groups such as the Coastal Tribes of B.C., the Inuit, or those who occupy the prairie regions. Second, each of the communities and every individual within those communities have had different kinds and degrees of contact with the outside world. As a result, the following recommendations are unlikely to

describe with accuracy any one Native Community or any one situation that may arise with members of that Native community. The generalizations that follow, then, are no more than that. That being said, however, it remains critical, in my view, that we continue to collect other "recommendations" and "reflections" from researchers who are conducting studies within Native communities as well as from members of those Native communities who have been exposed to or who have participated in community-based participatory research. I sincerely believe that a published collection of recommendations gathered from both researchers and Native peoples from across Canada would be an invaluable guide for those planning future field research in Native communities. Therefore, to build on the process, I would like to offer my own insights and recommendations to researchers based on my experiences with the Rocky Cree of Nelson House and the Swampy Cree of Cross Lake.

1. It is critical that non-Aboriginal researchers realize, understand and accept that the realities of Aboriginal world view are, for the most part, remarkably different from their own. It is also essential that researchers respect these differences as being part of a viable, articulate, highly developed and entirely valid reality which has helped sustain them for thousands of years. Though Native people share with non-Natives a universal desire to live healthy, happy and peaceful lives, it has been my experience that we seldom share common notions on how to implement or arrive at those desires. As a result, it should not be surprising that researchers and First

Nations communities often have profound difficulties communicating with each other.

Therefore, it is imperative that researchers approach Aboriginal people with an expectation of considerable difference. In addition, researchers must possess a sincere determination to learn and accommodate aspects of Aboriginal spirituality and world view. This, I believe is essential if the communication and understanding between researchers and First Nation communities is to begin.

**2. It is unrealistic to expect homogeneity within any First Nation community.** Researchers should not expect or assume that all the inhabitants of a particular Native community share the same perceptions, understandings or opinions. Instead, Aboriginal communities reflect the multiple realities experienced by different parties within the community. Many Aboriginal communities display political, social, religious, geographic, and economic divisions and to ignore these differences may complicate the researchers study. For example, researchers should not assume that all Native people follow traditional/spiritual ways. Such an oversight could anger those in the community who are members of other denominations. Similarly, there exists significant differences in intra-cultural variability and degrees of orientation to non-Aboriginal culture, which, if not taken into consideration, could offend an individual, group or entire community. At the same time, it is important that researchers learn to develop a satisfactory rapport with the many different elements within Aboriginal communities.

3. **The researcher must acknowledge the inevitability of spending large amounts of time facilitating the participation of diverse and possibly polarized groups of people.** Community-based participatory research depends on researchers who have the insight, sensitivity, and the diplomatic skills to bring together participants who may differ in ideology, livelihood and cultural orientations. In addition, researchers should be prepared to facilitate open discussions in order to find common ground between opposing viewpoints. As a result, it may be necessary to have some background in conflict resolution and be willing to negotiate dissension.

4. **Professional research terminology and scientific expressions should be avoided in all meetings, non-professional reports and other community interactions.** This is not meant to imply an aura of superiority or disrespect on the part of the researcher towards the intelligence of the community. On the contrary, it is meant to facilitate an easier way of understanding each other without the need for unnecessary technical verbiage. It must be kept in mind that the principle language of many northern First Nation communities is not English, and it is still typical to find many individuals (particularly Elders) who do not speak any English. Therefore, it is desirable for researchers, when corresponding or interacting with community individuals, to keep their technical language to a minimum to prevent misunderstandings or confusion which could result in rifts or barriers being formed between researchers and research associates. Such considerations will also enable translations to

be more proficiently transcribed to non-English speakers.

**5. Researchers should not expect nor take for granted Aboriginal participation in a research project.** Aboriginal people, due to a variety of reasons, are often unwilling to take part in research studies. It is quite common for many potential participants to feel they lack either the expertise or the authority to take part in such studies. Some simply do not understand why a person from one culture needs to collect information from a person of another culture merely out of curiosity. Others, especially those who have endured quantitative research, questionnaires (which from this author's experience are not well received in Nelson House or Cross Lake), may expect to be treated as a typical research subject presuming that the researcher will do most of the work. Still others are or simply become too busy to participate in any research.

However, despite the possibility of changing the minds of those who decline to participate, it is not a good idea to pester potential research associates or to bother those who drop out. In addition, it is not advisable to ask other members of the community to attempt to coerce those unwilling to take part in the research into altering their decisions. If they wish to take part or return to the study, they will!

Similarly, one should keep in mind that in some Native cultures it is not polite to talk about others within the community when they are not present. This realization was brought to light during many of my interviews. Often I would approach a participant and ask him/her a direct question such as "So and so

tells me that it is difficult to tan a hide in the summer because of the bugs and heat." Most of the time such questions were met with either indifference or outright agreement. Later in the field season I sometimes would find that the same person would counter what he had agreed with initially. Worried that I was getting conflicting data from the tanners I decided to ask William Dumas about this predicament. He kindly informed me that it was the way I was asking the question. By stating the opinion of another persons when asking a question I was putting the interviewee in a difficult conundrum. It is not considered polite for a person being interviewed (particularly by a stranger) to publicly disagree with another person about a particular subject, particularly if that person is considered more knowledgeable, lest it get back via rumor to the person. Small communities such as Nelson House have to be very aware of keeping group solidarity and of conducting good interpersonal relationships because rumors and innuendoes can "get around town with amazing speed in such a community" (Dumas, Pers. Comm., 1996). Therefore a question such as "I hear from so and so that it is going to be a wet summer?" would be better asked, "I wonder if it is going to be a wet summer?" As petty as this example may seem to some, it was an important revelation that helped my research methods and therefore benefited my overall study. It should be noted that there are many other probable related issues yet to be pointed out as they are very subtle or completely overlooked.

**6. Upon arrival in the community, the researcher should immediately visit the band offices and make certain that**

the Chief, Band Counselors, and other necessary staff members are notified about the researchers presence within the community. A personal introduction is not only a polite and respectful courtesy, but it also can provide the researcher with an instant update on research conditions within the community. It also allows the researcher an opportunity to fix any problems that may require urgent attention. In addition, the Chief, Council and Band office staff can be a researchers best resource and guide to the intricacies of the community. It is always a good idea to become personally familiar with the representatives of the community and to allow them an immediate chance to try and understand you.

7. Researchers should not use cameras, video or tape recorders to record ceremonies such as Sweat lodges, Sun dances, tobacco offerings, Medicine Wheels, Pow Wows or other sensitive spiritual traditions unless it is allowed by the actual person or persons conducting the rituals. Participant consent forms should be signed by those conducting the ceremonies as well as those participating in the ceremonies. It is also inadvisable to take photos or videos, or to physically inspect ceremonial structures, even if the actual ceremony is not in progress. Keep in mind that these ceremonies and structures are sacred, and this includes the ground they stand on. Any photos or physical inspection can be considered a desecration of spiritual artifacts. Because sites and structures should be respected, ask and get written permission before approaching them.

**8. Do not cloister yourself off from the community or spend all your time at one location in the community.** It is most important to become visible within the community by visiting the band offices, committee meetings (when invited), communications, postal outlet, commercial businesses, and restaurants. Interaction with the population can help break the often cool reception many researchers initially experience upon arrival in the community, and can help to make certain individuals less suspicious of your research motives. In addition, constant visibility will increase your knowledge of the community and can create situations which will aid your research. For instance, I have found that "hanging around" the local coffee shop or restaurant can provide a valuable source of information and contacts. Such chance meetings have been important to my research.

At the same time, do not expect to be treated or viewed as a member of the community. It must always be remembered that you are a visitor. However, by remaining visible, you will become less threatening to the population at large which will make your stay more enjoyable and fruitful.

**9. Do not expect Aboriginal people to give you advice, even when it is asked for.** It is often the regular practice of researchers arriving in Nelson House to ask people for advice, especially that pertaining to the proposed study. However, more often than not, they are met with indifference and noninvolvement. This situation even occurs with research associates and can cause no end of frustration and difficulty for the researcher.

Therefore, it is advisable to attempt a different approach.

Without going into the reasons why I feel Native people seem to dislike the idea of giving advice, let me simply suggest a new course of action. Instead of asking an individual for an evaluation or recommendation on a particular subject, it may be advisable to merely summarize the various problems or components which must be studied in order to come to a decision. In this sense, the researcher expresses the problems indirectly and then remains silent until the individual feels comfortable enough to reveal his/her view on the various problems to be considered. In a way, this process is akin to discovering opinions and recommendations through consensus. This method can also be used in decision-making situations. Nevertheless, such an approach does involve some obvious time consuming problems, though, I have found in my field research that this approach is far more productive and naturally comfortable for many Aboriginal people.

An example of this from my own research involved the process of asking questions in an interview. Since I was a non-Native, outsider coming into a remote Native community to conduct research, I was always conscious of how little I really knew about my subject. For that reason, I often attempted to ask advice, especially concerning what factors affected the tanning process. More often than not, I would be confronted by blank stares or responses of "I don't know." Sometimes, I would even be answered by long seemingly incoherent stories which often didn't appear to have anything to do with tanning. Many times I felt myself slipping into a frustrate state of confusion resulting from what appeared to be indifference or what Ross (1992) refers to as "the ethic of non-involvement." I puzzled over this for some time.

Eventually I realized that if I asked direct questions such as "is it best to do X?" or "Do you think X is better than Y?" the response was always the same; "You could" or "that might be good" or even "maybe." Occasionally I would even ask "is technique X better than Y" which would elicit a "yes" response. I would then ask the opposite to the question "is technique Y better than X." Many times I would receive another "yes" answer which would cause great confusion and frustration. Eventually I realized that it was the way I was asking the question that was at fault, not the Aboriginal response. I therefore took a different approach borrowed from Rupert Ross (1992) and "did not ask for advice, or even for a recommendation. Instead, I spoke out loud about the various factors which had to be considered in coming to a decision, as if I were reviewing them for my own benefit." (p.21) I merely let the questions pose themselves, without ever directly suggesting them. Eventually, people began to offer their opinions often after long silences which I would simply have to endure. I ultimately learned that if I jumped into the discussion that the conversation would end. The discourse could not be rushed, nor could anyone be interrupted as they thought out loud.

In this way, I became a better listener and I realized that from my listening the people became more talkative. I would often have to endure long narrations and stories which seemed totally disconnected from what we were originally talking about. Over time I began to understand that their recitations often revealed certain facts that the speaker thought were more significant than others. If I concentrated enough on those facts, they often led me towards one sort of conclusion and showed me an entirely new way

to view a particular topic. Typically, I could not sort out the meaning of things I had been told until some time had passed. Nothing was immediate!

This example of how the cultural realities of an Aboriginal group can affect the methods one has chosen to do research. However, with slight modifications one can overcome these 'barriers.' I feel that the method of participatory-observation lends itself to modifications which overcome such cultural obstacles such as described above and therefore validates this choice as a method in this particular study.

**10. Do not expect Aboriginal people to keep to your expected pace or to follow your strict schedules.** Many seasoned researchers are familiar with the often misused and misinterpreted term "Indian time" when referring to the Native approach to time. To many researchers, this time concept alludes to the Native communities seemingly relaxed and casual indifference to deadlines and schedules. However, I believe researchers should look at time-frames with more practical insight. For instance, I believe that this time orientation is an example of the process by which Native people prepare for new tasks or situations by thoroughly thinking things through and refusing to act until the moment is absolutely right.

This desire to anticipate, adjust, and act only when the situations or conditions are appropriate is very foreign to most non-Native researchers who will attend a meeting at eight o'clock sharp despite the fact that they may be entirely unprepared. With this in mind, it becomes imperative that researchers refrain from

being pushy and accept the fact that some things may not happen quickly. The key to success is to curb impatience and adjust your schedule to theirs.

**11. Any time a traditional or spiritual elder shares his/her insights with a researcher, it is customary in many Cree communities, out of respect and appreciation, to offer that elder tobacco.** In many Cree communities, tobacco is considered to be one of the sacred herbs of their world. Elders, healers and medicinemen use tobacco in a number of spiritual ceremonies as well as to treat disease, to seal agreements and for enjoyment. As a result, it is most advantageous for researchers to carry pouches of tobacco or packs of cigarettes with them at all times, since it is sometimes impossible to know when one will meet an elder during the course of research.

Of course, not all Aboriginal elders use or smoke tobacco so it is advisable to ask if the elder is a traditional who uses tobacco. In those circumstances it is wise to bring other items such as socks, scarfs, cups, knives or other practical materials to present to the elder. In addition, it may be useful for researchers to become familiar with Native Spirituality by reviewing the literature before beginning data collection.

**12. Do not rely on the goodwill of the local inhabitants to provide you with both accommodation and transportation.** It is acceptable to utilize local room and board if it is offered. However, it is wise to have a back-up plan in case the accommodations fall through or become unavailable. For instance,

the reliance on taxi cabs (in those communities that have them) is less than desirable for researchers. My personal experience with cabs in Native communities has been that they are notoriously expensive, often unreliable and usually unavailable when needed. This has the potential to bog down any research project and can seriously effect its outcome. Therefore, the inclusion of either a personal or rental vehicle (and its various and sundry expenses) should be factored into many research or grant proposals.

The same is true for accommodations such as hotels, motels, trailers or rental units. For the most part, these types of lodging are extremely expensive. Staying with someone in the community is far more advantageous. However, it is not uncommon for these types of accommodations to fall through during the course of a research project. Therefore, it is always desirable to have a backup residence (perhaps even a tent) for emergencies.

**13. Always arrive in a community with sufficient funds to cover anticipated expenses as well as unexpected emergencies.** On the surface this statement may seem to be rather obvious. However, all too often researchers have run into unforeseen expenses and embarrassing cash flow problems that can effect the outcome of the research. Even with the advent of bank "interac" cards and credit cards, access to emergency funds is far more difficult in Aboriginal communities than what many researchers are used to. For instance, I was recently surprised to learn that in one particular community the usage of my credit card was impossible because all the local businesses, retail stores, and the towns solitary bank only accepted its competitor. This

development could have been devastating if the bank hadn't been a branch of my particular financial institution. As a result, it is wise to get in touch with the area's financial establishments and set up arrangements for possible emergency scenarios.

**14. Conducting research during certain parts of the year can be both frustrating and unproductive.** In Nelson House the summer months are the times when festivals, Pow wows, weddings, and spiritual ceremonies proliferate. It is not uncommon for researchers to lose momentum and have their research seriously delayed as research assistants and their families partake in the various events of the summer. If it is at all possible, research conducted over the months of April, May and early June should be considered.

In addition, hunting seasons should be noted. In my research, fall was a difficult time to get people to conduct interviews as this is the traditional time to hunt moose. Often, entire families move out to camps while the men hunt. This makes locating families difficult and arduous. In Nelson House, as in other Aboriginal communities, a researcher should be aware that all times of the year are busy times and he or she should simply factor in delays to any research design. In addition, hunting, trapping, fishing, and berry-picking times should be immediately noted before a researcher ventures into the field.

**15. Methods such as participant-observation seem to be far more accepted and preferred in Nelson House over other methods of research such as interviews and questionnaires,**

and should be seriously considered in any research that involves Native human subjects in this community. It has been my experience with the Rocky Cree of Nelson House that participant-observation is less intrusive than many other methods of field research. As a result, far more data is able to be collected because the individuals being studied will be more comfortable, responsive and willing to share their knowledge. This method is akin to traditional teaching techniques. As a result, it is a familiar way for the Cree to impart knowledge to those interested in learning since many Cree use a similar method to teach their young. I gained most of my useful data using this method and eventually ceased doing interviews altogether. I believe that researchers doing field studies on the people of Nelson House, and possibly other Cree groups, should seriously consider this method of data collection if applicable.

**16. Dating Aboriginal community members should be avoided while doing research in First Nations communities.** There are too many problems (for both the community and the researcher) in attempting to date people from First Nation communities while doing research. I have witnessed researchers attempt to date Aboriginal members of the opposite sex only to have members of the community or jealous boyfriends or girlfriends become upset with the motives of the researcher. In one case, a jealous girlfriend of an Aboriginal male who was being courted by a female researcher actually physically threatened the researcher which nearly put an abrupt end to the researchers fieldwork. The RCMP was called in but there was nothing they really could do. It was suggested,

however, that the researcher leave the community as a safety precaution. These type of situations are unnecessary and put unnecessary strains on both the researcher and the community. This difficult situation could have been avoided if the researcher had kept her hormones in check! Not only does such a situation make it difficult for the researcher to conduct her field studies, but it can also make it difficult for other researchers who are conducting work in the same communities.

### Concluding Comments

From the perspective of the researcher, First Nation communities can benefit greatly from their participation in research studies. They can with little expense to themselves learn much that will be valuable to the preservation and enhancement of their way of life.

Conversely, from the communities perspective, researchers must recognize that they are invited guests. It is important for researchers to keep in mind that it is a privilege to be able to conduct research in First Nation communities. Therefore, it is always advisable for researchers to judge all of their actions and research methods and methodologies through this consideration.

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