

THE CANADIAN NORTHWEST IN 1811

A Study in the Historical Geography of  
the Old Northwest of the Fur Trade on the  
Eve of the First Agricultural Settlement

by

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## PREFACE

The method of approach to this as, indeed, to any problem in historical geography was largely dictated by the nature of the historical and geographical evidence available for study. Before detailed research was begun, the materials were carefully assessed and an approach decided upon. For the early period of the Canadian Northwest, evidence was found to be mostly in the form of journals, reports, and letters, and letters of contemporary observers. It seemed that these could be most effectively used, as demonstrated by Ralph Brown with similar materials relating to the eastern seaboard of North America, by confining the study to a survey of the geography of a particular period and avoiding the use of a time sequence. In doing this, Brown had followed Hettner's dictum that "historical geography takes a limited cross section through reality at one particular point of time and utilizes temporal development only in order to explain the conditions at the time chosen".

Since the choice of time for the cross section had to be based on the amount and type of contemporary evidence available, as well as upon its significance historically and geographically, the source materials had to be considered first. For the Canadian Northwest, the earliest period for which a substantial amount of material was available is the last two decades of the eighteenth century through the first two of the nineteenth. This was the golden age of Canadian exploration, the time of



Pond, Hearne, Mackenzie, Turnor, Fidler, and Thompson. The last three could be called geographers, and their observations were especially useful. Many of their notes, journals, and maps have come down to us in both printed and manuscript form. The greatest single source of the latter is the archives of the Hudson's Bay Company in London. Here also are the daily jottings in the journals of the traders which tell so much of their lives and of the land they lived in. Another important source of contemporary evidence is found in the material collected by Roderick Mackenzie, of the Northwest Company, who had planned to incorporate it in a book. He requested the bourgeois of the company to send him information about the natural productions, animals and birds, climate, natives, etc., of the areas in which they lived. Many of them responded with quite remarkable reports, and in considerable detail. Two members of the North West Company, who apparently did not send in their reports, are nevertheless worthy of special mention. These are Daniel Harmon and Alexander Henry, the younger, whose journals are among the most valuable now available. Other useful information may be found in contemporary pamphlets, newspapers, and magazines, and in the publications of the Royal Society, which had taken an interest in the Northwest from a very early time.

Thompson and his great contemporaries passed from the western scene in the early years of the nineteenth century. Their places remained unfilled until Hind, Palliser, and the other scientific observers began their explorations some two generations later.

Material for the years between these two groups is probably too scattered and too thin to be of much use to the student of historical geography.

The period at the turn of the nineteenth century, so rich in material, is also of considerable historical and geographical interest. It is the time when the traders from Montreal merged and met the Hudson's Bay Company's monopoly with a united front. These were exciting times, and they have captured the attention of many historians who have told their story well. But the fur trade also had a geography, the study of which so far, has been largely overlooked. For most of the trading posts can be located geographically, and the routes between them mapped. Much can be told about the elaborate transportation system, upon which the trade depended; about the goods carried, and about the Europeans and natives who manned the canoes, pulled the toboggans, and carried the huge packs on their backs. Less reliably, perhaps, something may be added about the ranges of animals, the distribution of vegetation, and about the climatic regime.

The year of the arrival of the first agricultural settlers in the Northwest, 1811, was chosen as a suitable date for taking a geographical cross section. For it marked the beginning of the end of the era of the fur trade, and the start of the period of settlement which was soon to change the face of the west, a face which had remained, for many centuries, virtually unscarred by the hand of man. The Northwest of 1811, still in its "natural state" is well worth knowing today, not only as a back-drop against

which to project the fur trade during its most exciting period, but as a starting point for modern studies of the geography and history of that area.

The style of writing and cartography are both designed to evoke a feeling of the period. As far as possible, contemporary observers have been allowed to describe the scene. Modern geographical terminology has either been avoided, or enclosed in square brackets or relegated to the footnotes. To avoid confusion, however, modern spelling has been used for place-names.

The study was made possible by a generous fellowship from the Canada Council. It was supervised by Professor J. Wreford Watson, Mr. G.A. Shepperson and Mr. A. MacPherson to whom thanks are given. Helpful advice was also given by Professor G.S. Graham, London, Professor E.E. Rich, Cambridge, and Dr W.K. Lamb, Dominion Archivist, Ottawa. Thanks are also due the Governor and Committee of the Hudson's Bay Company for permission to use the company archives which are ably run by a helpful staff headed by Miss Alice Johnson.

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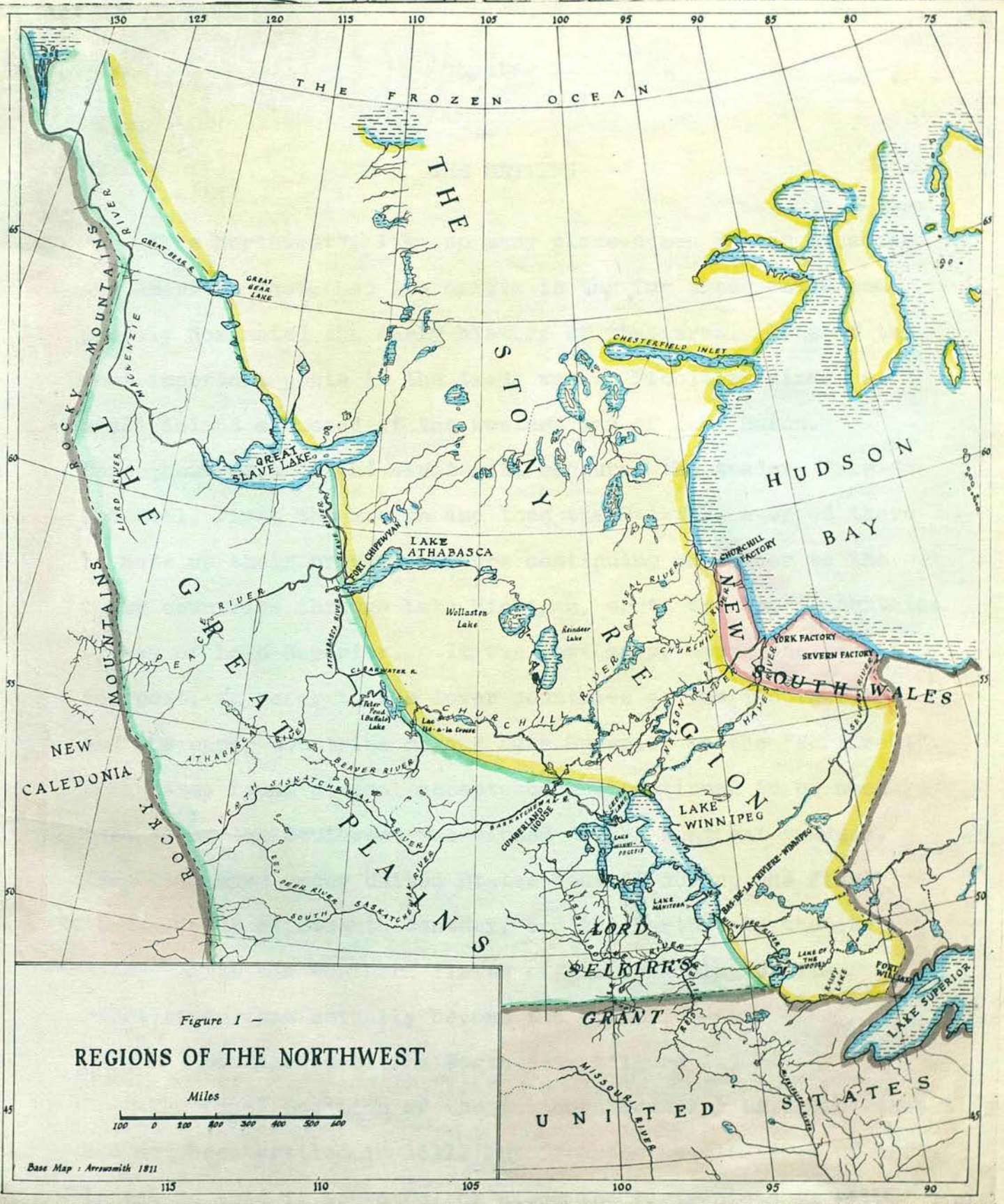


Figure 1 -

REGIONS OF THE NORTHWEST

Miles



Base Map : Arrissmith 1871



## Chapter 1

### THE SETTING

"The Northwest", like so many place-names in the Canadian and American west, had its origin in the fur trade which completely dominated the early history of that area. One of the most important posts in the trade was on Michilimackinac, a small island situated at the western end of Lake Huron. Throughout most of the eighteenth century, the traders from Montreal, first the French and then the British, stopped there to make up their brigades before continuing on either to the lower countries through Lake Michigan, or to the upper countries by way of Lake Superior. It was customary, among the men at the post, to refer to the lower countries as the "Southwest", and the upper countries beyond Lake Superior as the "Northwest". Both names found general acceptance and continued to be used even after the Southwest was closed to the Montreal traders, when it passed under United States control during the final years of the eighteenth century, and the Northwest, thereby extending to the southern limits of the remaining British territories, had actually become the "west".

Boundaries of The Northwest. (figure 1.)

The final position of the southern boundary of the Northwest had not been settled in 1811, but from the negotiations of 1807 it seemed that it would follow along the forty-ninth parallel

of latitude from Lake of the Woods to the Rocky Mountains. Eastward from Lake of the Woods to Lake Superior, the boundary would probably follow a line through several lakes and rivers including Rainy River, Rainy Lake and Pigeon River. From Lake Superior to Hudson Bay there was no real boundary dividing the Northwest from the remainder of the British territories but, for convenience, it may be taken to have corresponded with the border between the Northern and Southern Departments of the Hudson's Bay Company which ran along the eastern limits of the English-Winnipeg and Severn River basins. North and west of Hudson Bay, the Northwest was thought to have been bordered by the "Frozen Ocean" although the actual position of the Ocean was known at only two points - at the mouth of the Coppermine River and at the mouth of the Mackenzie River. West of the Mackenzie, the Rocky Mountains were thought to have extended to the Frozen Ocean. From there the border may be said to have run along the mountains to the United States boundary. Beyond the Rockies was the little known New Caledonia, then being explored by David Thompson for the North West Company.

#### Regions of The Northwest (figure 1.)

One of the most striking geographical features of the Northwest was the "Valley of the Lakes" which extended from Lake Superior to Great Bear Lake and encompassed Winnipeg, Reindeer, Athabasca and Great Bear Lakes. It was considered to mark the boundary between the two principal regions of the Northwest - the "Great Plains" to the southwest and the "Stony



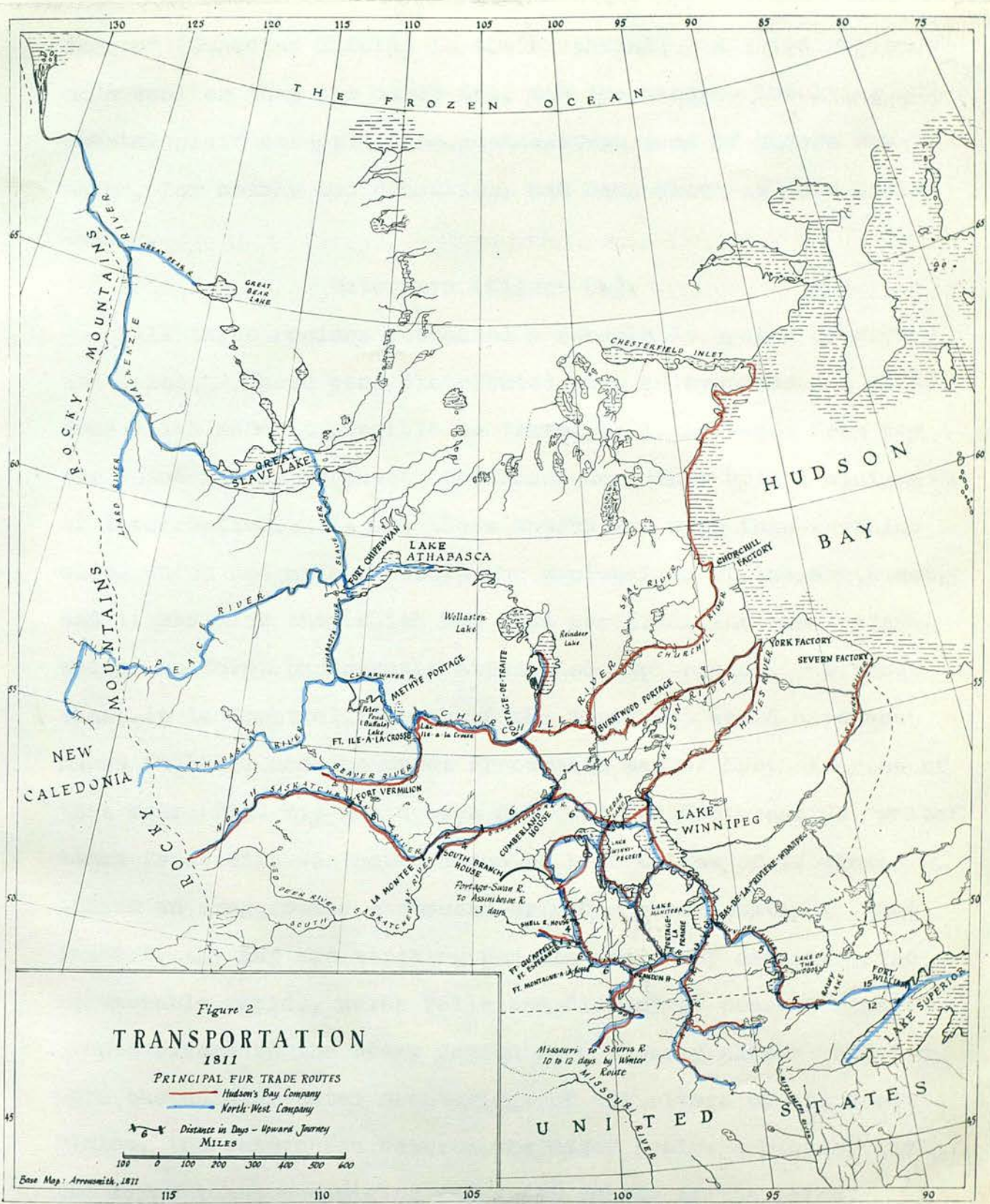


Figure 2  
**TRANSPORTATION**  
 1811

PRINCIPAL FUR TRADE ROUTES  
 — Hudson's Bay Company  
 — North-West Company

Distance in Days - Upward Journey  
 MILES

Base Map: Arransmith, 1811

Region" [Canadian Shield] to the northeast. A third region, much smaller than the other two, was the swampy, low-lying coastal plain bordering the southwestern side of Hudson Bay which, for nearly two centuries, had been known as "New South Wales".

#### Waterways (figure 2.)

All three regions possessed a remarkable system of rivers and lakes. These were distributed with an evenness and closeness which made it possible to travel by light canoe from any one point in the Northwest to almost any other with a minimum of interruption. It was these waterways, more than anything else, which had made possible the exploration of the Northwest, and it was also they which had made practical the fur trade which, in turn, had greatly stimulated exploration. Without them, it is doubtful if much of the Northwest would have been known in 1811, and the great Arrowsmith map of North America of that year (fig. 4.) would have depicted the Northwest as "white" since Arrowsmith was never a man to hide a lack of knowledge behind an exaggerated cartouche or other ornamentation. But instead, the map was striking for its wealth of detail. The innumerable rapids, water falls and "lakes" so characteristic of the rivers of the Stony Region were clearly shown; so, too, were the uninterrupted meanderings of the rivers of the Great Plains, the watersheds between the major drainage basins, and the large lakes comprising the great Valley of the Lakes.

Most of the rivers of the Northwest flowed in a northerly



or northeasterly direction. That is, they flowed from severe to an even more severe climate. This meant that the spring thaw came to their upper reaches before their lower, and that frequently the headwaters of the rivers were in spate when the mouths were still frozen solid. Whenever this happened a great deal of flooding inevitably resulted, particularly along rivers with low banks. The most notorious of these was the Red which, in the spring of 1811, was flooded throughout its entire length. Above its junction with the Assiniboine, the waters rose fifty feet above the normal five foot level, and spread to a width of eight miles instead of the usual eighty or one hundred yards.<sup>1</sup> The spring was very late in 1811, and the flooding was worse than usual. In all parts of the Northwest, rivers and lakes overflowed their banks and many of the innumerable swamps, for a few defiant weeks, returned once more to their former state as lakes.

A number of travellers in the Northwest commented on how quickly the lakes were disappearing. "Many lakes" wrote Mackenzie, "are draining and filling up by the earth which is carried into them from higher lands by the rivers".<sup>2</sup> He mentioned particularly Cedar Lake, near the mouth of the Saskatchewan, whose increasingly shallow waters were well known to the canoe-men who were forced to pole their way through its dense grasses.

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1. HBC Archives, A.11/16, f 15).

2. Alexander Mackenzie, *Voyages from Montreal through the Continent of North America*, pp.405-6.



In the course of time, Mackenzie predicted, the lake would be converted into a pine forest.<sup>3</sup> Lake Winnipeg was also becoming more shallow but not, it would seem, entirely from the effects of silting, for the water appeared to be receding from the former shorelines. When Alexander Henry visited the lake in 1808, he noticed that the woods in many places were nearly a mile from the beach, and that the intervening space was low-lying with many small lakes, marshes and stagnant ponds. The waters of the lake appeared to have washed the foot of the woods many years before, and then to have gradually receded.<sup>4</sup> Similar observations had frequently been made at the posts on Hudson Bay which led Superintendent Auld of the Northern Department to speculate in 1811, that either the water of the bay was receding or that the land was rising. As proof, he pointed out that since 1790, the grass immediately under the windows of Churchill Factory had grown upwards of 120 yards towards the channel.<sup>5</sup>

#### Climate

The decreasing area of fresh water resulting from the shrinking and disappearing lakes was thought by Mackenzie to be having a moderating effect on the climate of the Northwest.<sup>6</sup> He arrived at this conjecture while searching for the reason why

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3. Mackenzie, *Voyages*, p. lxviii.

4. Elliott Coues, *New Light on the Early History of the Great Northwest*, II, pp.456-7.

5. HBC Archives A.11/18, f 28d.

6. Mackenzie, *Voyages*, pp.405-6.

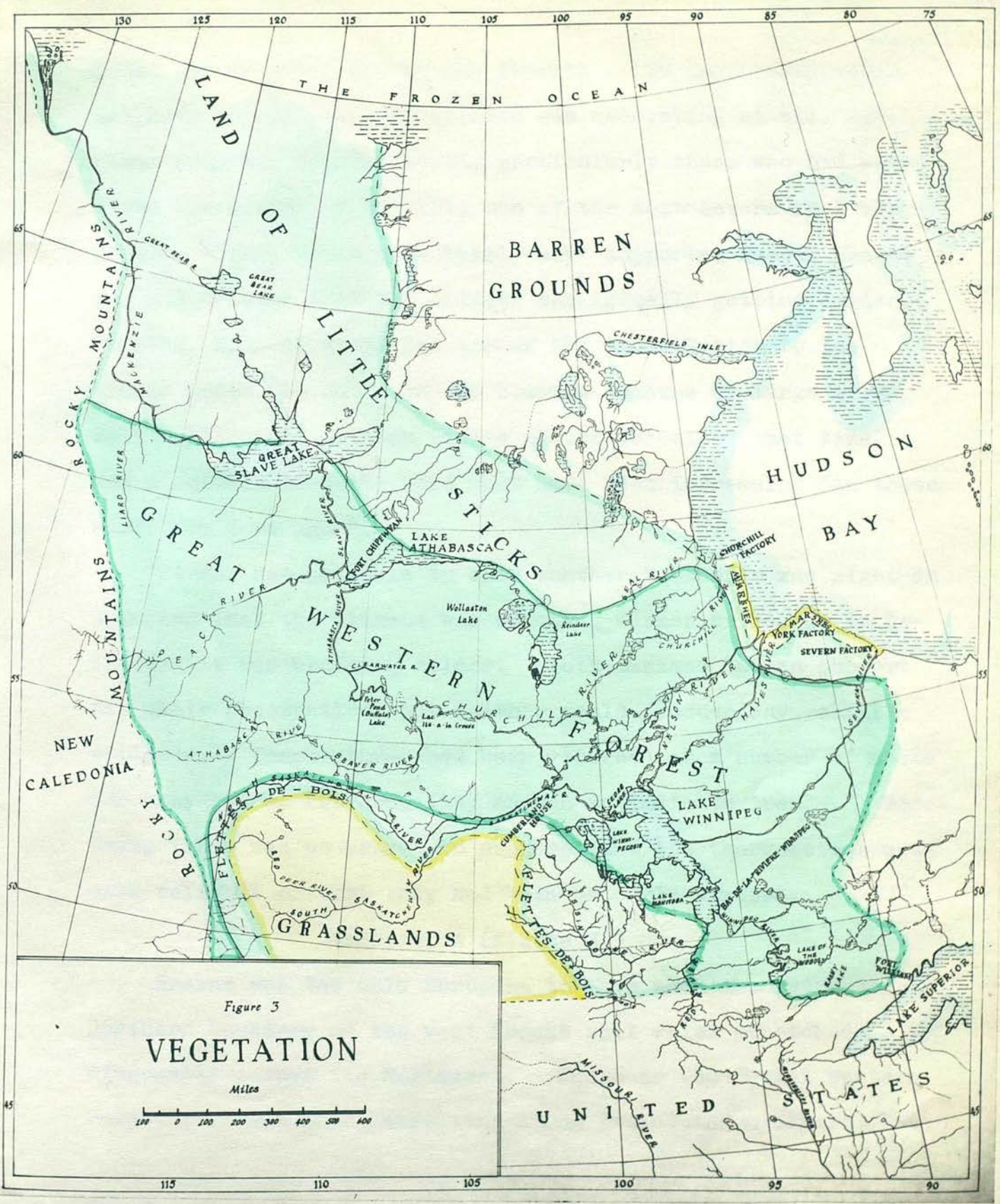
winters of the new world were so much more severe than those in comparable latitudes of the old. The topic had long been debated. Probably the most popular theory was that the clearing away of the woods had had a moderating effect on the climate in Europe and that now North America, as a result of more and more land being opened up, was beginning to enjoy a similar change. This theory found a strong supporter in Richard Kirwen who, in attempting to explain why the temperatures of eastern North America were lower than those in similar latitudes in Europe, argued that "living Vegetables alter their temperature very slowly and with difficulty, but the evaporation from their numerous surfaces, is much greater, than from the same space of land uncovered with vegetables; if they are tall, and close as forests, they prevent the sun's rays from reaching to, and warming the earth, besides protecting the Winter's snow for several months. Hence wooded countries are much colder than those that are open and cultivated ..."<sup>7</sup>. Mackenzie thought the amount of land cleared was too trifling in proportion to the whole to have had much, if any, effect on the climate and thought the change must "proceed from some predominating operation in the system of the globe which is beyond my conjecture", but suggested that the fact that many lakes were draining and filling up with earth "may have some partial effect".<sup>8</sup> Mackenzie's suggestion would not have

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7. Richard Kirwen, *An Estimate of the Temperature of Different Latitudes*, p.39.

8. Mackenzie, *Voyages*, p.405.





found favour among all of the traders. In fact, many would not have agreed that the climate was moderating at all, let alone with the reason for it, particularly those who had survived the winter of 1810-11, one of the most severe in living memory. They would more likely have supported Samuel Hearne who had written that the climate was actually getting colder. In 1772, when he travelled across the Stony Region to the Arctic Ocean, he had seen the blasted remains of large trees well beyond the northern limits of the forest at that time, and concluded that the cold must have been increasing "in those parts for some ages".<sup>9</sup>

It was not possible to show whether Mackenzie was right in thinking that the climate was becoming warmer or Hearne in believing it was becoming colder. Both claimed Indian support for their observations but neither could produce any reliable evidence. Temperatures had been recorded at a number of posts for many years, but none long enough to indicate trends. Moreover, there was no reason to suppose that the thermometers used were reliable or that they had been properly exposed.

#### Vegetation (figure 3.)

Hearne was the only European to have seen the retreating northern boundary of the vast forest belt which stretched diagonally across the Northwest. Known as the "Great Western Forest", it was also retreating along its southern edge. But

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9. Samuel Hearne, A Journey from Prince of Wales's Fort in Hudson's Bay to the Northern Ocean, p.65.



while Hearne could only guess that a climatic variation was responsible for the change in the north, the reason for the alteration in the south was all too obvious. Man was clearly responsible. Year after year, through carelessness<sup>10</sup> and by design,<sup>11</sup> the Indians set fire to the long grasses of the plains. The flames frequently spread into the forest, killing the trees along its southern flank. Before new trees could replace them, the flames would come again. Only the grasses could survive the fires, and before long they flourished where once the trees had stood. In this way, the grasses gained an easy victory over the retreating forest.

The forest did not present a united front to the advancing grasslands. In most places along its flank, detached patches of trees were scattered far out into the grasslands. To the French, these seemed like so many ships floating on a sea of grass, and so they called them the "flôts [flettes] de bois",<sup>12</sup> or barges of trees. To the north, the thick spruces of the forest gradually thinned into the dwarfed clumps of the "Land of Little Sticks", before giving way grudgingly to the windswept stumps seen by Hearne, and finally to an endless, rolling, treeless land of sedges and mosses - the "Barren Grounds".

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10. David Thompson's Narrative, ed. J.B. Tyrrell, p.137.

11. Cumberland and Hudson House Journals, ed. E.E. Rich, I, p.xxxiii.

12. L.-R. Masson, Les Bourgeois de la Compagnie du Nord-Ouest, I, p.269.

### Animals

Each area had its own particular animals: the grasslands had the buffalo and wolf; the Great Western Forest, the moose, deer and beaver; the Barren Grounds, the caribou and muskox; and New South Wales, seals, white whales and waterfowl. These animals, more than anything else, determined the way of life of the natives of each area. On the grasslands the buffalo outranked all other animals in importance. They congregated in vast herds, and enabled the Indians who followed them to enjoy a life of ease and luxury unknown elsewhere in the Northwest. In the forest the moose occupied a position similar to the buffalo in the native economy, but it was by no means as numerous or gregarious. It tended to live a solitary life which forced the natives who depended upon it to dwell in small bands, scattered throughout the forest. In the Land of Little Sticks and on the Barren Grounds, the caribou took the place of the buffalo and the moose. Unlike the moose, the caribou was extremely sociable and travelled in huge herds, which were always on the move between the forest belt and the Arctic Ocean. Several tribes of Indians and Eskimos depended upon its annual migrations for food, but they were always in danger of starvation, for in some years the caribou did not come. Unlike their southern neighbours, these tribes were familiar with fishing and on many occasions turned to the lakes and rivers when the caribou failed. Fish were plentiful throughout much of the Northwest, but most of the southern Indians considered it below their dignity to



catch them. It was a tragic fact that many of them died of starvation rather than degrade themselves by fishing in some nearby lake or river.

It is strange that so few Indians condescended to supplement their meat diet with fish, for they knew all too well that no species of animal could always be depended upon. Years of plenty were suddenly followed by years of scarcity, and even during periods of plenty, the animals often mysteriously disappeared for weeks, and even months, at a time. Apart from these periodic variations in the animal population, it was generally believed by Indian and white alike that all animals had been more plentiful in the past, and that their numbers had been suddenly reduced at the time of the great smallpox epidemic which killed off most of the natives back in 1782. How they were reduced, remained a complete mystery. Even David Thompson, who had been in the Northwest since 1784, could offer no explanation. Before the epidemic, he said, the Indians were numerous "and the Bison, Moose, Red and other Deer more so in proportion and Provisions of Meat, both dried and fresh in abundance. Of this all the Traders and Indians were fully sensible, and it was noted by the Traders and Natives, that at the death of the latter, and there being thus reduced to a small number, the numerous herds of Bison and Deer also disappeared both in the Woods and in the Plains, and the Indians about Cumberland House declared the same of the Moose, and the Swans, Geese and Ducks with the Gulls no longer frequented the Lakes in the same number

they used to do; and where they had abundance of eggs during the early part of the Summer, they had now to search about to find them."<sup>13</sup> It might have been supposed that some new disease or diseases (similar to the smallpox which decimated the Indians) had been inadvertently introduced into the animal population from Europe by means of the cattle and other animals which arrived regularly from Britain both in Canada and at the bayside posts. However, Thompson states elsewhere that "no disorder was known among the animals".<sup>14</sup>

Thompson took a keen interest in the native animals of the Northwest. He had expected to discover the remains of the "Elephant, Rhinoceros and other large Animals". Many remains had been found in Europe and Siberia, especially near the rivers and in their banks, which led Thompson to expect to make similar finds along the rivers of the Great Plains, but all his "steady researches" and all his enquiries led to nothing.<sup>15</sup> As late as 1811, however, Thompson must have had at least a momentary hope of seeing not the remains, but an actual live mammoth. In January, when crossing the Rockies along the banks of the Athabasca River, he was told by his men that they were in the haunt of the mammoth. Although clearly sceptical, he questioned

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13. Thompson's Narrative, p.323.

14. Ibid, p.110.

15. Ibid., p.190. The first known discovery of mammoth remains in the Northwest was made in 1816 on the banks of a small tributary of the Peace River. - Daniel Harmon, Sixteen Years, p.239.

them closely. None of them could positively say he had seen the beast, or even its tracks, but their belief was firm and Thompson was unable to shake it.<sup>16</sup>

#### Exploring and Mapping the Northwest (figure 4.)

David Thompson, astronomer and surveyor, shy, retiring, even secretive, was not fully appreciated by his contemporaries although he was almost certainly the most remarkable man then living in the Northwest. From 1784, until the end of 1811, he travelled some 50,000 miles by canoe, horseback and on foot,<sup>17</sup> and had accurately mapped the main travel routes through about 1,700,000 square miles of the Northwest, the Northern United States, and New Caledonia.<sup>18</sup> Until 1797, Thompson was employed by the Hudson's Bay Company and after that by the North West Company. It was during his stay with the English company that he learned surveying from Philip Turnor, the first man to be hired by that company specifically as a surveyor. Turnor also trained Peter Fidler, who became the chief surveyor of the Hudson's Bay Company in 1796, a position he still held in 1811. Fidler made surveys of the Saskatchewan and Assiniboine rivers,

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16. Thompson's Narrative, pp.444-5.

17. J.B. Tyrrell in David Thompson's Narrative, p.lix.

18. Enclopedia Canadiana, X, p.71. J.B. Tyrrell called him "the greatest practical land geographer that the world has produced". (Thompson's Narrative, p.xxxii) Tyrrell spoke from a position of authority for he, himself, from 1883 to 1898, had carried on similar explorations (also by canoe, horseback and on foot) over many of the same routes which Thompson had surveyed and explored a century earlier. - David Thompson's Narrative, pp. xviii-xix.

and of the northwest toward Lake Athabasca. His work, as well as that of Thompson and Turnor, was incorporated in the map of North America published by Arrowsmith in 1795. Later editions contained the results of further exploration by Thompson and Fidler. (Turnor had returned to England in 1792).

Arrowsmith also drew freely from the journals of Samuel Hearne and Alexander Mackenzie. Neither man had the knowledge of surveying possessed by Thompson, Turnor and Fidler. In fact, after descending the river which bears his name (when he was only 25 years old), Mackenzie admitted that he had been "deficient in the sciences of astronomy and navigation" and lacked the necessary books and instruments to make proper observations.<sup>19</sup> These deficiencies had not passed unnoticed by Turnor who had met Mackenzie at Cumberland House on his return from the Arctic. "Mr. McKenzie says he has been at the Sea, but thinks it the Hyperborean Sea but he does not seem acquainted with Observations which makes me think he is not well convinced where he has been."<sup>20</sup>

In the preface to his Voyages, Mackenzie described some of the difficulties which faced the explorers of the Northwest: "I do not possess the science of the naturalist; and even if the qualifications of that character had been attained by me, its curious spirit would not have been gratified. I could not stop to dig into the earth, over whose surface I was compelled

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19. Mackenzie, *Voyages*, p.v.

20. *Journals of Samuel Hearne and Philip Turnor*, ed. J.B.Tyrrell, p.317.



"to pass with rapid steps; nor could I turn aside to collect the plants which nature might have scattered on the way, when my thoughts were anxiously employed in making provision for the day that was passing over me. I had to encounter perils by land and perils by water; to watch the savage who was our guide, or to guard against those of his tribe who might meditate our destruction. I had, also, the passions and fears of others to control and subdue. Today I had to assuage the rising discontents, and on the morrow to cheer the fainting spirits, of the people who accompanied me. The toil of our navigation was incessant, and oftentimes extreme; and in our progress over land we had no protection from the severity of the elements, and possessed no accommodations or conveniences but such as could be contained in the burden on our shoulders, which aggravated the toils of our march, and added to the wearisomeness of our way."<sup>21</sup>

Mackenzie became famous with the publication, in 1801, of the journals of his two spectacular voyages, while Thompson and Fidler toiled on patiently, with scant recognition, against many frustrations. Like Turnor, Thompson and Fidler were employed as fur traders as well as surveyors and generally the exploration and surveying had to be subjugated to the demands of the trade. In all his years in the Northwest, Thompson was permitted to devote only one year to exploration alone.<sup>22</sup>

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21. Mackenzie, *Voyages*, pp.vi-vii (preface).

22. J.B. Tyrrell in *David Thompson's Narrative*, p.lx.

Considering the harsh circumstances under which it was conducted, and the lack of encouragement given by their employers, the work of these men was all the more remarkable.

All of the explorers owed a great deal to the Indians and Eskimoes. Without them as guides, it would have been virtually impossible to travel through the maze of lakes, rivers, carrying places and passes in much of the Northwest. Their maps, too, were often invaluable. In praise of them, Fidler wrote: "The Indian map conveys much information where the European Documents fail; and on some occasions are of much use, especially as they shew that such & such rivers & other remarkable places are, tho' they are utterly unacquainted with any proportion in drawing them."<sup>23</sup> Fidler meant proportion in the European sense. To the Indians, it was something quite different. To them, time and space were closely related and A was not so many miles from B but so many nights, or moons, on the road. This concept was carried over to their maps and time (rather than distance) was expressed according to scale; thus a difficult river route would occupy more space on the map than an easy one of the same length because it took more time to travel over it.<sup>24</sup>

The Indian generally knew his own particular country extremely well, but beyond it the rivers and lakes faded into the unknown - an unknown, as likely as not, filled with the terrors

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23. HBC Archives, A.11/52, f 1.

24. P.G. Downes, Sleeping Island, p.74.



of evil spirits and horrible beasts. The limits of the Northwest were far beyond his ken and so he could not begin to visualize the area as a whole. This remained to the European. With his knowledge of astronomy and surveying, and by following the native into the wilderness, he was able to reduce much of the wisdom of generations, to a number of scientific maps and notebooks.

Most of the maps and notes were the result of individual surveys carried out for a specific purpose with little thought for what had already been done or for what was likely to follow. Integrating them into a map of the whole area was extremely difficult, especially since the quality of the individual maps varied from the rudimentary surveys of Hearne to the highly sophisticated work of Turnor. No man was more skilled in collating these diverse sources than was Aaron Arrowsmith who even made use of three Indian maps in delineating the area north of Fort Churchill.<sup>25</sup> Thompson, alone of the explorers, conceived a plan for mapping the Northwest as a whole, and approached his work in a methodical way. Most of his surveys had been completed by 1811, but his maps had not yet been drawn.<sup>26</sup>

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25. G.R. Crone, *Maps and Their Makers*, p.149.

26. Thompson's great map of the Northwest, one of the most heroic efforts in the history of cartography, was not finished until 1814. For many years, it hung on the wall of the boardroom of the North West Company at Fort William. It was not published until a century later although the information contained in it had been sent to Arrowsmith who used it (without credit to Thompson) in later editions of his map of North America. (J.B. Tyrrell in Thompson's *Narrative*, p.lxiii).

The Arrowsmith map of 1811 gives a good representation of the Northwest as known to the European fur traders at that time. Even without making allowance for the time lag, between surveying and mapping, made necessary by the slow communication between the new world and the old, the map was remarkably complete since little important work had been carried out during the years immediately preceding publication. Turnor, now dead, had not returned to the Northwest after the first edition of the map in 1795.<sup>27</sup> Fidler, although now chief surveyor for the Hudson's Bay Company, was completely embroiled in fierce competition with the North West Company at Isle-a-la-Crosse, and had little time for exploration.<sup>28</sup> David Thompson, with other surveyors of the North West Company, was working outside the Northwest across the Rocky Mountains in New Caledonia, where the company's interest was then directed.<sup>29</sup> Lewis and Clark had passed below the southern boundary of the Northwest during their scientific expedition to Louisiana and the Oregon country in 1804-06. Their results were not available to Arrowsmith in 1811, but in any case, since their interest had been in the area south of the border, they would have added little to his knowledge of the Northwest.

Large areas remained unsurveyed, unexplored, and unknown; they were the white spaces on Arrowsmith's map. Here and there,

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27. Journals of Hearne and Turnor, pp.91-3.

28. HBC Archives B.89/a/2, Isle-a-la-Crosse Journal.

29. J.B. Tyrrell in Thompson's Narrative, pp.lxxxvi-xciv.

an Indian comment about a particular feature partly filled the blank; a great lake was only a short distance away, or it was necessary to sleep eight nights in descending a river to the sea. Neither the river, the lake, nor other unsurveyed feature was delineated but by adding the Indian account, Arrowsmith showed, in a very small way, how the land appeared to the Indian in the days when it was still his.

#### Summary

To the traders from Canada and Great Britain, the Northwest was a vast area stretching from the 49<sup>o</sup> parallel to the Frozen [Arctic] Ocean, and from Hudson Bay and Lake Superior to the Rocky Mountains. It was divided into three distinct physical regions: New South Wales [Hudson Bay Lowlands], the Stony Region [Canadian Shield], and the Great [Interior] Plains. Diagonally across these regions stretched the Great Western [Boreal] Forest, which was bounded on the north by the Land of Little Sticks [Subarctic Forest-Tundra Transition] and the Barren Grounds [Tundra], and on the south by the Flettes-de-Bois [Aspen Parkland], and the grasslands or prairies. The Great Plains were separated from the Stony Region by the Valley of the Lakes, which formed part of the remarkable system of waterways which had made possible the early exploration of the Northwest and the development of the fur trade.

## Chapter II

### POPULATION

Christopher Columbus was usually credited with the discovery of America. He had been searching for a short route to India and when he came upon the dusky inhabitants of the islands which later came to be known as the West Indies, he called them Indians. The name soon passed into the languages of the civilized world. But even as it did so, it was realized that Columbus had not discovered a new route to Asia, but a new world, and that the natives were not Indians, but a people unknown. Who they really were, and where they had come from, became a favourite topic of speculation (if not of investigation) on both sides of the Atlantic, and continued to be for the next three hundred years.

#### Who Were the Natives?

By the middle of the eighteenth century, it was generally agreed that all of the natives from the Northwest to Cape Horn were one people; the Eskimoes, however, were usually excepted.<sup>1</sup> But there was less agreement on their place of origin. Writing in 1797, Professor Benjamin Barton, of the University of Pennsylvania,

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1. Clark Wissler, *Ethnological Diversity in America and its Significance*, p.168.

said that the theories of all writers on the subject could be "distributed into two great classes". The first class embraced all those writers who supposed that the countries of America derived their inhabitants from Asia, from Europe, from Africa, or from the unknown Atlantis. The second class included those who thought that the Americans were in strict language the aborigines of the soil, and not emigrants from other parts of the world. The favourers of the first opinion were "much the most numerous" and, in general, were the "men of the most learning and research".<sup>2</sup> Among them, theories of trans-Siberian migrations were the most popular,<sup>3</sup> although other theories were also considered. James Adair (1775) had devoted over two hundred pages in an attempt to prove (by a comparison of languages, customs, and religions) that the natives were descended from the Jews,<sup>4</sup> while Hugh Williamson, as late as 1811, argued for a Hindu origin.<sup>5</sup>

Professor Barton had read much of what had been written on the Indians and, on the basis of similarities in language and appearance, came to the same conclusion as a majority of his colleagues, that the natives of America and Asia must have a

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2. Benjamin Smith Barton, *New Views of the Origin of the Tribes and Nations of America*, p.iv.

3. Wissler, *Ethnological Diversity*, p.169.

4. James Adair, *History of the American Indians*.

5. Wissler, *Ethnological Diversity*, p.169.



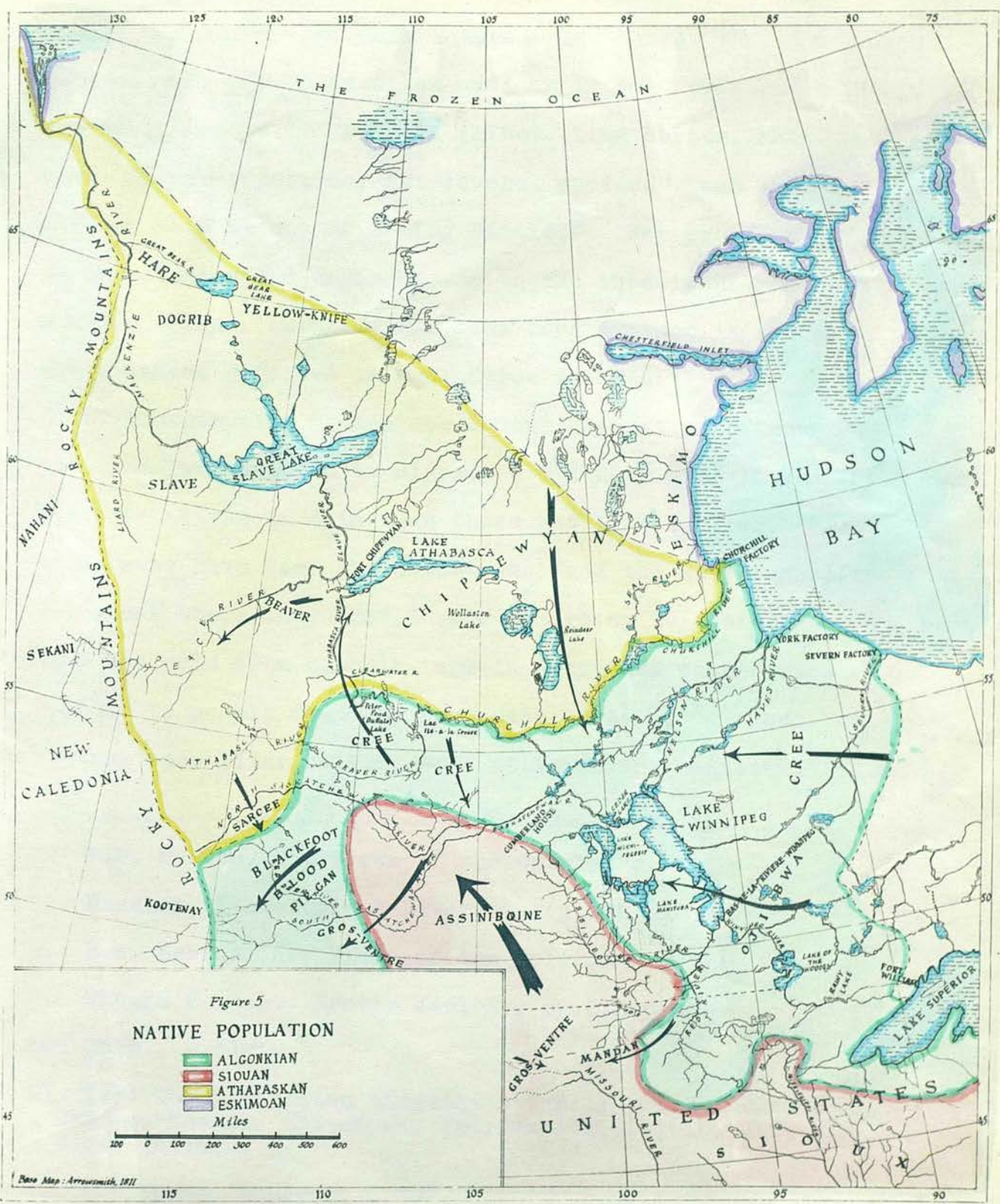


Figure 5

NATIVE POPULATION

- █ ALGONKIAN
- █ SIOUAN
- █ ATHAPASKAN
- █ ESKIMOAN

Miles  
 100 0 100 200 300 400 500 600

Base Map: Arrau Smith, 1877



common origin.<sup>6</sup> But unlike them,<sup>7</sup> he thought the establishment of many of the American nations in the new world to be extremely remote.<sup>8</sup> Pennant (1784), like Barton, believed that different peoples, "at several periods", had arrived from eastern Asia by way of Bering Strait.<sup>9</sup> For proof, he turned to the customs and dress common to the inhabitants of both worlds. Some, he said, had been long extinct in the old world, while others remained in full force in both.<sup>10</sup>

Distribution of the Aboriginal Population (figure 5.)

The last peoples to migrate would have more in common with their relatives in Asia than those who left earlier. Among these must have been the Chipewyans "and the numerous tribes who speak their language",<sup>11</sup> for according to their own tradition, they had come from Siberia, and in dress and manner were still similar to people found on the coast of Asia.<sup>12</sup> These Athapaskans, as they were later called, were still moving eastward.<sup>13</sup> South

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6. B.S. Barton, *New Views of the Origin*, p.cvi.

7. Wissler, *Ethnological Diversity*, p.168.

8. B.S. Barton, *New Views of the Origin*, p.cvi.

9. Thomas Pennant, *Arctic Zoology*, pp.clx-clxi.

10. *Ibid.*, p.clxi.

11. I.e. the Athapaskan linguistic family which included the Sarcee, Beaver, Chipewyan, Yellowknife, Dogrib, Hare and Slave Indians.

12. Mackenzie, *Voyages*, p.407.

13. *Ibid.*

of them were several tribes of the Algonkian linguistic family.<sup>14</sup> According to Mackenzie, they had been the inhabitants of the Atlantic coast but were then progressing westerly and had reached as far west and north as Athabasca.<sup>15</sup> South of the Algonkians, a Siouan people, the Assiniboine, were pushing in from the southeast. They were then inhabiting the plains on and about the source and banks of the Saskatchewan and Assiniboine rivers.<sup>16</sup> Far to the north were the Eskimoes. The extent of their lands was not known, although they were thought to extend along the coast (which Mackenzie said they never left) from Fort Churchill to the mouth of the Coppermine and on to the mouth of the Mackenzie. They probably extended westward of the Mackenzie as well.<sup>17</sup> Their origin was still the subject of a great deal of speculation. Captain W. Coats, who had spent many years in Hudson Bay between 1727 and 1751, thought them to be "of the lineage of the Chinese",<sup>18</sup> while Thompson, who had met a number of Eskimoes at Fort Churchill, was firmly convinced that they were of European descent.<sup>19</sup> Mackenzie observed that they were similar in appearance, manners, language, and habits

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14. The Algonkian family included the Cree, Ojibwa, Blackfoot, Blood, Piegan and Gros Ventre tribes.

15. Mackenzie, *Voyages*, p.406.

16. *Ibid.*, p.407.

17. *Ibid.*

18. W. Coats, *Geography of Hudson's Bay*, ed. John Barrow, pp.74-5.

19. Thompson's *Narrative*, p.22.

to the inhabitants of Greenland,<sup>20</sup> but he did not speculate on their origin, or the direction of their migration, or indeed, if they were moving at all.

The great sweeping migrations of the Athapaskans, Algonkians, Siouans and Eskimoes, reached far back into the ages, beyond memory. In the lifetime of a man, the movement was scarcely perceptible. But within each group, and even between two groups, there were smaller, more obvious migrations as one tribe pushed into the lands of another either through mutual agreement or, as was more likely, through force of arms. These were more easily recognized, although they too, often took place over long periods. In the early years of the nineteenth century, to give a few examples, the Ojibwa (having exhausted the furs in their own country between Lake Winnipeg and Lake Superior) were pushing into the beaver country of the upper Assiniboine, while the Chipewyan (then living in peace with their southern neighbours, the Cree) were slowly extending their hunting grounds southward from the Barren Grounds and the Land of Little Sticks. The Cree in turn were pushing still further south toward the open plains.<sup>21</sup> Some of the Cree had already adopted the easier way of life of their affluent neighbours, the Assiniboines of the plains, and had left forever, the lonely drudgery of life in the forest.

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20. Mackenzie, Voyages, p.407.

21. Thompson's Narrative, p.559.

Elsewhere in the Northwest, similar migrations were taking place. In the forested areas, where animals were few and far between, it had usually been found necessary to subdivide a tract of land belonging to a tribe, or nation, among the several families who made up the nation. Rivers, lakes and mountains marked the limits of the lands of each family and were respected by all members of the tribe. This encouraged a degree of nature conservation among the more prudent Indians, who killed only sufficient animals for their own needs and for trading for such articles as they could no longer get along without.<sup>22</sup> Yet in spite of their caution, by 1811, many hunting areas had been ruined. The beaver, particularly, had been destroyed. But the destruction had not been perpetrated by the native peoples, but by Indians from the east. These were the Iroquois, Nipissing [Ojibwa] and Algonquins who had pushed into the Northwest toward the close of the century, after exhausting the beaver in their own country through imprudent hunting with steel traps. They had followed the canoes of the fur traders from Canada, and had brought with them their steel traps, to extend their reckless exploitation of the fur lands from Lake Winnipeg, across the Northwest, to the Rocky Mountains, and even beyond them to the shores of the Pacific Ocean.<sup>23</sup> Resistance from the western

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22. Harmon, *Sixteen Years*, p.237.

23. Thompson's *Narrative*, pp.311, 312, 457.

tribes on whose lands they hunted, seems to have been remarkably slight,<sup>24</sup> probably because many of the intruders had contracts with the North West Company.<sup>25</sup> How many of these eastern Indians came into the Northwest is not known, but it is unlikely that Alexander Henry took them into account when compiling his Report of the Northwest Population in 1805:<sup>26</sup>

Departments	WHITES			INDIANS		
	Men	Women	Children	Men	Women	Children
Athabasca	208	48	84	(not given)		
Athabasca River	37	12	15	55	38	66
English River	78	40	63	211	380	1,100
Rat River	25	7	10	70	90	150
Ft. des Prairies	136	59	103	4,823	13,632	45,906
Fort Dauphin	45	22	18	19	17	31
Upper Red River	56	52	82	1,170	1,200	2,500
Lower Red River	75	40	60	160	190	250
Lake Winnipic	88	11	15	90	111	194
Lac la Pluie	46	10	10	103	141	195
Fond du Lac	128	29	50	449	784	1,944
Nepigon	90	20	20	238	283	299
Kamanistiquia, )	62	16	36	70	84	178
Mille Lacs and )						
Lac des Chiens )						
Le Pic	16	2	3	44	45	58
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
	1,090	368	569	7,502	16,995	52,871
AMKCo. Men & Co.	520	37	31			
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
	1,610	405	600	7,502	16,995	52,871

Aboriginal Population

Henry's estimates for the native population totalled 77,368. This was probably too high, since it was more than double the total of 38,000 given in 1809 by a fellow employee

24. Thompson's Narrative, p.205.

25. Milnes to Hobart, Quebec, 30 October 1802. Annual Report on the Canadian Archives, 1892, p.142 .

26. Elliot Coues, ed., New Light on the Early History of the Greater Northwest, I, 282 .



of the North West Company, Duncan McGillivray.<sup>27</sup> The bulk of the discrepancy came from the wide difference in their estimates of the number of plains Indians: Henry's figures for Fort des Prairies (which presumably included the whole of the Upper Saskatchewan) and the Upper Red [Assiniboine] River totalled 69,231 against McGillivray's 30,000 for the same area. Possibly Henry had made an error in copying his figures for Fort des Prairies, for they did not seem to agree with one another: it is most unlikely that there were nearly three times as many women as men. Neither Henry nor McGillivray appeared to have included the Indians around Hudson Bay and McGillivray omits the Indians in the territory ceded to the United States as well. However, both included the Indians north of Lake Superior. Henry did not attempt to estimate the number of natives in the Athabasca Department, but McGillivray, while admitting their numbers could not "be easily ascertained on account of their wandering mode of life", thought there must have been at least 10,000 souls. Both men ignored the Eskimo population altogether.

McGillivray also gave estimates of the population by tribe. These were expressed in three ways: by individuals, by families, and by tents. Unfortunately he did not always give the number of persons per family or per tent. The following table is based on his estimates:

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27. Duncan McGillivray, Some Account of the Trade Carried on by the North-West Company, pp.65-8.

POPULATION OF THE NORTHWEST BY TRIBE (1809)<sup>(a)</sup>

ALGONKIAN:

Ojibwa . . . . .	5,100 to 5,300 <sup>(b)</sup>
Cree . . . . .	3,800 <sup>(c)</sup>
Cree and Ojibwa (undifferentiated). . . . .	600 <sup>(d)</sup>
Blackfeet, Blood and Piegan . . . . .	5,700 <sup>(e)</sup>
Gros Ventre . . . . .	1,150 <sup>(f)</sup>

ATHAPASKAN:

Sarcee . . . . .	350 <sup>(g)</sup>
Other . . . . .	11,000 <sup>(h)</sup>

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- (a) Tribes have been grouped under linguistic families.
- (b) Figure includes 2,800 Ojibwas inhabiting the north shore of Lake Superior.
- (c) The number of Crees on the Missinippi [Churchill] River was given as 350 families or 2,000 souls. This ratio of persons per family was in calculating the population of the other Algonkian tribes.
- (d) No differentiation was made between the 600 Crees and Ojibwa who traded at Fort Dauphin.
- (e) McGillivray grouped these closely related tribes together and estimated that there were 700 tents or 1,000 families.
- (f) "The Fall Indians [Gros Ventre] consist of about 200 tents of families . . . ."
- (g) "The Cercies [Sarcee] are but a few in number of about 60 families . . . ." This number is low compared with Thompson's estimate of 650 persons or 90 tents. (Narrative, p.327) Henry also stated that there were 90 tents. (Coues, New Light, p.532).
- (h) The population of the Athabasca Department (consisting almost exclusively of Athapaskans) was given as more than 10,000. Another 150 Athapaskan families (Chipewyans) lived outside the Department along the banks of the Saskatchewan.

Population of the Northwest (contd.)

SIOUAN:

Assiniboine . . . . .	2,900 <sup>(i)</sup>
Total . . . . .	<u>30,600<sup>(j)</sup></u>

"Halfbreeds"

The women listed by Henry under "white" were undoubtedly the wives of the traders. But since there were no European women in the Northwest, they could not have been "white". They must have been either full-blooded Indians, or mixed-blooded "Halfbreeds", as persons of mixed European and Indian ancestry were called. How many Halfbreeds there were was impossible to say since some were brought up as Indians and others as Europeans. No less than 21 of the latter were employed by the Hudson's Bay Company in 1811.<sup>28</sup> Many more would have been employed by the North West Company.

White Population

To say that there were no white women in the Northwest was not quite true. For there were, in fact, two. One was the Canadian wife of Baptiste Lajimoniere, who had come to the Red

(i) McGillivray said that about 1,500 Assiniboines inhabited the plains north and west of the Mississippi. Another 230 families lived in the Saskatchewan country making a total of about 2,900 persons. This agrees with Thompson's estimate of 3,200 (Thompson's Narrative, p.327) but is much lower than Henry's 880 tents. (Coues, New Light, p.523). Probably Henry included many Indians south of the border as well.

(j) McGillivray does not explain why his estimates by tribe totalled considerably less than his estimates by area.

28. HBC Archives, A.30/11: Names of the Company's Servants at Hudson's Bay 1812, lists 21 servants as being born "in Hudson's Bay".

River from Trois Rivieres in 1806,<sup>29</sup> and the other was Mary Fubbestor, an Orcadian girl who, disguised as a man, had hired on with the Hudson's Bay Company at Stromness in the same year.<sup>30</sup> She had worked "at anything & well like the rest of the men" and her sex had remained unknown to anybody "except to one John Scart her paramour on whose account she came out",<sup>31</sup> until 29 December 1807, when she gave birth to a boy at Pembina River House.<sup>32</sup> Her son was probably the first white child to be born in the northwest.

Young Scart was almost certainly the only native wholly of European extraction then living in the Northwest. All other whites were new-comers and, with the possible exception of a handful of settlers then wintering near York Factory, all were engaged, directly or indirectly, in the fur trade. Their numbers fluctuated from year to year, and even from season to season, with the ever-changing demands of the trade. Virtually everyone worked for either the North West Company or the Hudson's Bay Company who together monopolized the trade, although there were also a number of "freemen", or independent traders, as well. However, their numbers were not significant and a combined list of the personnel of both companies would have given a fairly complete census of the white population of the Northwest.

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29. C.N. Bell, quoted by E. Coues, *New Light*, I, pp.426-7.

30. HBC Archives, E.3/3, f 58d.

31. HBC Archives, E.3/3, f 58d.

32. Coues, *New Light*, I, p.426.



At the end of 1811, after the ships had departed for Great Britain, the Hudson's Bay Company was left with 320 employees in the Northwest.<sup>33</sup> Of these, at least 21 were Halfbreeds,<sup>34</sup> leaving less than 300 whites. Eighty-three of the latter had come out that year and, because the ships had been unusually late, were wintering near York Factory at Seal Island.<sup>35</sup> In the spring, it was planned to send thirty-five of them to establish a colony on the banks of the Red River. The remainder were to be distributed among the five factories of the Northern Department.<sup>36</sup>

The rival company had about 1,200 men<sup>37</sup> in the Northwest in 1811. Possibly ten per cent of these would have been Halfbreeds or Indians, so the whites probably numbered less than 1,100 men. Outside the employ of the two companies were the freemen. Among these must be counted the Iroquois, Nipissing, and Algonquin intruders from the east, as well as a number of Canadians. Just how many of each there were, is impossible to say (their numbers fluctuated sharply from year to year) but it is unlikely that there were more than one or two hundred all told. These, together with the employees of the two companies,

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33. HBC Archives, B.42/b/57, f 5.

34. HBC Archives, A.30/11.

35. HBC Archives, B.42/b/57, f 5.

36. Ibid.

37. The number of North West Company men in the Northwest in 1811 can only be estimated. According to Henry (see table on p.25) there were 1,090 in 1805. But he includes a somewhat

along with the women and the child, brought the total white population of the Northwest up to about 1,500 men, two women and one child.

#### Origin of White Population

Most of the whites were Orcadian, Scots, English, or French-Canadian. The Orcadians were hired by the Hudson's Bay Company

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#### 37. (contd.)

larger area than the Hudson's Bay Company's Northern Department with which, for the purposes of this study, the boundaries of the Northwest are taken to coincide. By excluding the men employed outside the limits of the Northern Department, his total is reduced to about 850 men. By "AMK Co. Men & Co." Henry must have meant the XY Company, a sharp competitor of the North West Company until late in 1804, when it was absorbed by the North West Company. (Henry evidently compiled his list before news of the union reached him.) Since the policy of the XY Company had been to oppose the North West Company at as many places as possible, it is safe to assume that the distribution of its employees was similar to that of the company it opposed. The approximate number of XY Company men employed in the area of the Northern Department can, therefore, be arrived at by reducing the total number in proportion to the reduction in the total for the North West Company, i.e., from 520 to 400 men. Together, then, the two companies would have had about 1,250 men in 1805.

Henry's figures seem reasonable when compared with those issued in 1802 by McTavish, Frobisher & Co., Montreal agents for the North West Company (See Appendix A). Like Henry, they gave the population by department of the North West Company. For the area of the Hudson's Bay Company's Northern Department, their figures come to about 770 men. To this, they said, must be added another third to arrive at the total number of traders from Canada. That is, 260 must be added to 770, making a total of 1,030 "Canadians". An increase of 220 men in five years was not unreasonable in this period of keen competition and expansion. After freeing itself of its Canadian competitor by absorbing it, the greatly enlarged North West Company was more than a match for its remaining rival, the Hudson's Bay Company, which was then seriously handicapped by a man-power shortage caused by the Napoleonic wars. From the union until after 1811, the North West Company had little difficulty in keeping the English company at bay, and, with their greatly augmented numbers, were able to extend their activities not only in the North West but beyond the mountains and into New Caledonia as well. It is doubtful if a further increase in manpower was found necessary before 1811 and, with the expansion beyond the Rockies, it is possible that the number of men used in the Northwest, itself, actually decreased.

to fill the rank and file posts although many of them, in time, reached positions of considerable responsibility. Many of the better jobs, however, were held by the English minority in the company. The French-Canadians were the "Orcadians" of the North West Company although they seldom rose in the ranks, and consequently few French names ever appeared in the lists of the "bourgeois", or partners, of the company. These were mostly English and Scottish, and particularly Scottish.<sup>38</sup>

#### The Orcadian and the Hudson's Bay Company

The earliest employees of the Hudson's Bay Company came from England, Ireland and Shetland. Then, in 1741, a few Orcadians were hired. They were found to be "submissive and industrious" and soon the company began to hire virtually all its tradesmen and contracted servants in Orkney.<sup>39</sup> Other sources of men were largely neglected, as generation followed generation from Orkney to the Bay, until by 1811, the Orcadians had come to regard employment with the Hudson's Bay Company as their own exclusive right.<sup>40</sup> Most of the tradesmen came from Kirkwall and Stromness but some came from the country districts where they had combined farming

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38. See: Masson, *Les Bourgeois*, I, pp.395-413, for a partial list of the employees of the North West Company after the union in 1804.

39. *The Orkney Parishes*, J.B. Clouston, ed., p.13.

40. William Auld from Miles Macdonell, *Hudson's Bay Encampment*, 25 December 1811. Report on the Canadian Archives, 1886, pp.cc-cci.



with their trade.<sup>41</sup> The contracted servants were drawn from the common people who came under the acute observation of Murdoch Mackenzie, their fellow-countryman, in 1750: "The Commonalty are healthy, hardy, well-shaped, subject to few Diseases, and capable of an abstemious and laborious Life at the same Time; but, for want of profitable Employment, slow at Work, and many of them inclined to Idleness. In sagacity and natural Understanding, they are inferior to few of the Commons in Britain; sparing of their Words, reserved in their Sentiments, especially of what seems to have a Connection with their Interest; apt to aggravate or magnify their Losses, and studious to conceal or diminish their Gains; tenacious of old Customs tho' never so inconvenient, averse to new, till recommended by some successful Examples among their own Rank and Acquaintance, and then universally keen to imitate; Honest in their dealings with one another, but not so scrupulous with respect to the Master of the Ground; often running deeply in Arrears to him, while they punctually clear Credit with every one else ... Tho' in the Neighbourhood of the Highlands of Scotland, yet they have neither the Language, Dress, Custom of wearing Arms, clannish Adherence and Subjection to their Masters, or Violence of Resentments, for which the Highlanders are remarkable; Their Manners and Customs resemble those of the southern, rather than of the northern Parts of the Kingdom, their Traffic and Correspondence being with the former only ...

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41. George Barry, History of the Orkney Islands, pp.342-3.

"The Religion is Presbyterian as established in Scotland, without Bigotry, Enthusiasm, or Zeal; and without any Dissenters, excepting a very few of episcopal Persuasion. The Mirth, Diversions and reciprocal Entertainments of the Christmas, and other Holy-days, are still continued, tho' the Devotion of them is quite forgot."<sup>42</sup>

"Want of profitable Employment" at home was the main inducement for the Orcadian to foresake the smoky but familiar comfort of his peat-fire in some low, dark house on a rocky island,<sup>43</sup> to seek a connection with the Hudson's Bay Company in an unknown savage land. Other offers came his way as well. There was a steady demand for seamen for the Iceland and Greenland fisheries, for the coal trade, and for the Royal Navy.<sup>44</sup> But none of these was particularly attractive, least of all, perhaps, the navy. The navy, however, greatly admired the hardy Orcadians and, during the long years of the war with France, periodically sent press-gangs to the islands to force them into her service. No able-bodied man over five feet five inches tall<sup>45</sup> was safe from her insatiable demands. To get beyond her reach, many an Orcadian had rushed into the arms of the Hudson's Bay Company.<sup>46</sup> Thus

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42. Murdoch Mackenzie, *Orcades: or a Geographic and Hydrographic Survey of the Orkney and Lewis Islands in Eight Maps*, p.2.

43. Thompson's Narrative, pp. 6-7.

44. Barry, *History of Orkney Islands*, p.vi.

45. Thompson's Narrative, p.134.

46. *Orkney Parishes*, ed. Clouston, p.75.

the navy, initially at least, helped the Company's recruiting by stampeding men into its service. But as the war wore on, the supply of tall men dried up and only the short remained. Some of these were sent to the bay much to the bewilderment of the Indian wife of one of the traders. Sitting in a canoe with her husband, and watching the new arrivals disembark from the ship, she looked steadily at them and then at her man, and at length said, "James have you not always told me, that the people in your country are as numerous as the leaves on the trees, how can you speak such a falsehood, do not we all see plainly that the very last of them is come, if there were any more would these dwarfs have come here".<sup>47</sup> James Spence remained silent, for he knew there was much truth in what his wife had spoken.

In 1811, the connection between the Company and the Orkneys entered its seventieth year. The length of the relationship, together with the strain imposed upon it by the war, was beginning to tell on both parties. The islanders started to complain about the large number of men who went to the bay "instead of offering an honourable service to their King and country, or staying at home to cultivate their lands, and protect their wives, their children, and their parents ..."<sup>48</sup> There were also complaints about the low wages paid by the company.<sup>49</sup> However, these were

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47. Thompson's Narrative, p.135.

48. Orkney Parishes, ed. Clouston, p.75.

49. Ibid.

still higher than those offered by the farmers who, in turn, complained about the resulting shortage of servants. Of course, they knew that the company was not alone to blame, and that the Greenland and Iceland fisheries, the coal-trade, the navy (as well as the raising of 200 fencibles in the islands) all contributed to the man-power shortage, but the company, being the largest employer (and because it made an annual demand and at once, it was therefore the more noticeable) was made to bear most of the criticism.<sup>50</sup> The farmers (and would-be farmers) were further irritated by the number of men who, after eight or ten years on the bay, returned with their savings and over-bid them for farms.<sup>51</sup> However, some of the returning men had no interest in farming and preferred to be simply "idle and useless", but this trait had not necessarily been developed in the Northwest for, according to the minister of the united parishes of Sandwich and Stromness, "several of them are perhaps so before they go there, and that this is what often induces them to go".<sup>52</sup> His colleague in the parish of Ophir was far more definite about the corrupting influence of the Northwest. Many of these men, he said, "bring home with them all the vices, without any of the virtues of the savages, indolence, dissipation, irreligion, and at the same time a broken constitution".<sup>53</sup>

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50. Orkney Parishes, ed. Clouston, p.122.

51. Ibid., p.75.

52. Rev. William Clouston in The Orkney Parishes, ed. Clouston, p.122.

53. Rev. Francis Liddell in The Orkney Parishes, ed. Clouston, p.75.



The Hudson's Bay Company had been attracted to the Orcadians because they were more "sober and tractable" than the Irish or the English.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, unlike many of the Irish and Scots, they spoke the language of the company, English, and only English, their own language, Norn, having gone out of use by 1811.<sup>55</sup> Besides, their homeland made a convenient rendezvous on the voyage between London and Hudson Bay. But as the years wore on, the short-comings of the Orcadians became ever more apparent. Most annoying to the company was their tendency to take it for granted. No longer was it thought necessary to please with good service, and it seems never to have even occurred to them that the company might look elsewhere for its servants.<sup>56</sup> With scandalous disrespect, the Orcadians in the Northwest conspired with their relations and with former employees in the islands, to prevent the company from hiring the number of men it wanted, in order to force the factory chiefs on the bay to raise their wages.<sup>57</sup> In this, they were aided and abetted by the company's opponents who were employing "malicious tricks" in order to discredit its service and so prevent it from "getting the necessary annual supply of useful hands" to pursue its business with success.<sup>58</sup> The Orcadians

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54. Orkney Parishes, ed. Clouston, p.121.

55. Hugh Marwick, The Orkney Norn, pp.xxvi-xxvii.

56. Miles Macdonell to William Auld, Hudson's Bay Encampment, 25 December 1811, Report on the Canadian Archives, 1886, pp.cc-cci.

57. HBC Archives, A.6/17, f 63.

58. HBC Archives, A.6/17, f 63d.

further tried the patience of their masters by sometimes re-engaging for service in some new area of the Northwest after having been sent home as unfit or for misconduct.<sup>59</sup> By 1810, their vices had obscured their virtues, and the company finally decided to turn to other fields for its servants in addition to Orkney. Agents were to be posted in Glasgow, the Hebrides, and, for the purpose of hiring French Canadians, in Montreal.<sup>60</sup>

It was clear that the new policy would be met with hostility from the Orcadians. The lone Irishman who had earlier been sent out to Churchill had been so maliciously treated by the rest of the men that the governor, in order to protect him, had been forced to take him as his personal servant.<sup>61</sup> The three Highlanders sent out from Stornoway in 1810, fared no better and to screen them from similar treatment two of them had to be kept at the factory.<sup>62</sup> These incidents were the first clouds of a coming storm. For in 1811, the company sent out its first large contingent of non-Orcadians.<sup>63</sup> The Orcadians were furious. They felt that they had been betrayed and in a pique, many refused to renew their contracts.<sup>64</sup> There were also murmurings about

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59. Miles Macdonell to Lord Selkirk, Report on the Canadian Archives, 1886, p.ccxvii.

60.HBC Archives, A.1/50, f 11.

61.HBC Archives, A.11/18, f 24 d.

62.HBC Archives, A.11/18, f 24 d.

63.HBC Archives, C.1/323, C.1/295.

64.Miles Macdonell to William Auld, Nelson Encampment, 25 December 1811, Report on the Canadian Archives, 1886, pp.cc-cci.

quitting the country altogether.<sup>65</sup>

### Strangers on the Bay

The new-comers were from Glasgow, the Highlands and Ireland. To make matters worse, at least some of them were Roman Catholic and there was a priest with them.<sup>66</sup> Many of them had been engaged under a new plan put forward by the Earl of Selkirk in which he had agreed to supply the company with 200 men per annum for ten years in return for a large tract of land about the Red River for the purpose of establishing an agricultural settlement.<sup>67</sup> Superintendent Auld of the Northern Department foresaw "insurmountable difficulties in getting the Orkneymen to mingle with the Irishmen"; but he was more optimistic about the reaction of the company's French Canadians for, as he put it, "the Canadian servants being of the same religion will evalesce more readily with the Irish".<sup>68</sup>

### Religion in the Northwest

The priest was probably the first to enter the Northwest since the French period.<sup>69</sup> What effect he would have on the

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65. Miles Macdonell to William Auld, Nelson Encampment, 25 December 1811, Report on the Canadian Archives, 1886, p.cci.

66. HBC Archives, C.1/323, C.1/295.

67. HBC Archives, A.1/150, f 57.

68. HBC Archives, A.11/18, f 24 d.

69. Daniel Harmon wrote in 1805 at Fort Assiniboine that "it is now upwards of fifty years since a French Missionary left this [area] who had resided here a number of years to instruct the Natives in the Christian Religion. He taught them some short Prayers, the whole of which some of them have not yet forgotten". - Harmon, Sixteen Years, p.90.

French Canadian servants of the North West Company (who would all be Roman Catholics), Auld could not predict, but he ventured to speculate that were he an intriguing Jesuit, "he would find little difficulty in performing some severe strokes of retaliation on our pitiless oppressors".<sup>70</sup> Possibly Auld over-estimated the amount of control which the church had over the French Canadians for, although they came from devout families,<sup>71</sup> most of them set aside their religion when they entered the Northwest.<sup>72</sup> They were usually young when they came<sup>73</sup> and, because they were generally illiterate, they tended to forget the little religion they ever had when there was no church to remind them of it,<sup>74</sup> so that, after many years in the country, they did not seem to observe the Sabbath (or any manner of worship) any more than did the savages themselves.<sup>75</sup> On the whole, the savages seem to have taken their own rudimentary religion more seriously. But contact with the whites tended to weaken its hold. Referring to the Crees, who had been longest under European influence, Thompson said that he had "found many of the Men, especially those who had been much in company with white men, to be all half infidels,

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70. HBC Archives, A.11/18, f 24 d.

71. Harmon, Sixteen Years, p.198.

72. Ibid., pp.37-8.

73. Ibid., p.198.

74. Thompson's Narrative, p.235.

75. Harmon, Sixteen Years, p.198.



"but the Women kept them in order; for they fear the Manito's".<sup>76</sup> The "gloomy superstition of Calvinism", as Auld put it,<sup>77</sup> borne lightly by the Orcadians at home,<sup>78</sup> seems to have been even less demanding in the Northwest. For the most part then, religion (if practised at all) was practised without fervour which goes a long way towards explaining the absence, to date, of religious strife in the Northwest. Seldom, if ever, were there references in the traders' journals to disputes involving religion. But with the arrival of a more zealous Catholicism from Ireland, all this might change. Not only had it already brought out the latent bigotry of the Orcadians,<sup>79</sup> but it might, in future, cause the company to suffer a decline in favour with the natives should they think the company was swerving from their simple religion.<sup>80</sup> However, even if this should happen the effect need not be very serious since the traders could (as Auld optimistically pointed out) put the blame for the change on the comet<sup>81</sup> which had appeared in the sky about the same time as the Irish had appeared at York Factory.<sup>82</sup>

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76. Thompson's Narrative, p.92.

77. HBC Archives, A.11/18, f 22.

78. Mackenzie, Orcades, p.2.

79. HBC Archives, A.11/18, f 24d.

80. Ibid., f 22.

81. Ibid.

82. On 29 August 1811, a comet appeared which had not been predicted by the astronomers. It was still visible in December, although "much diminished in splendour". (Scots Magazine, 1812, p.14). In London, a field preacher, well known in the neighbourhood of Paddington, viewed the nightly appearance of the comet far more gravely than did Auld. In his opinion, it was "a manifest indication of the wrath of Heaven" and that the destruction of/

### The Orcadian and French Canadian

The Irish, as already mentioned, would probably get along better with the French Canadians than with the Orcadians. At any rate, the nature of the Canadians was, according to Auld, "as opposite to that of the Scotchmen or Orkneymen as black is to white".<sup>83</sup> The Orcadians, by nature cautious and careful, were prudent in managing their own property although they tended to be indifferent in their care of that belonging to other people.<sup>84</sup> They had a reputation for being sordidly avaricious<sup>85</sup> and only the pursuit of money would induce them to take the risks to life and limb which were a daily part of the fur trade. The volatile French Canadians, on the other hand, were as indifferent about themselves as they were about their masters and their property.<sup>86</sup> They delighted in the dangers in running rapids and cataracts in their frail canoes, caring little about their lives or their cargoes, with little thought of gain. For money meant nothing to them and, besides, they were usually in debt in advance to their employees anyway.<sup>87</sup> To the Orcadian, money was nearly everything and scarcely anything else would induce him to take similar risks.<sup>88</sup>

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82.(contd.) the world by fire was at hand. *The Observer*, 22 September 1811, number 1025.

83. HBC Archives, B.42.a/136a, f 18 d.

84. HBC Archives, A.11/18, f 23.

85. Edward Umfreville, *The Present State of Hudson's Bay*, p.109.

86. HBC Archives, A.11/18, f 23.

87. HBC Archives, B.42.a/136a, f 18 d.

88. HBC Archives, A.11/18, f 23.

For the most part, however, the cautious and prudent (if self-interested) nature of the Orcadians worked to the advantage of the company. For when they were scattered about the country in small parties among the Indians, the general tenor of their behaviour was such that it not only won the respect and protection of the natives, but it enabled them to enrich their employers as well as themselves.<sup>89</sup> Writing in 1790, in praise of the "prudent demeanor" of the Orcadians, Edward Umfreville, a disaffected former employee of the Hudson's Bay Company, observed that although "they have annually exposed themselves to all the dangers incident to the trade, for fifteen years past, they have not sustained the loss of a man; and the principal advantage of the Company over the Canadian traders, is more to be attributed to the laudable efforts of their servants, than even to the superior quality of their goods".<sup>90</sup> Umfreville, who claimed the honesty of the company's men to be incorruptible, went on to say that the Canadian servants were so "far from being actuated by the same principles" that few of them could be trusted with even a small assortment of goods to trade for their master's profit. For, ten to one, the master would find himself defrauded of everything through "commerce with Indian women, or some other species of speculation".<sup>91</sup> Many of the Canadians, he said, had spent the

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89. Umfreville, *Present State*, pp.109-110.

90. *Ibid.*

91. *Ibid.*, pp.108-110.

greater part of their lives among the savages and "being devoid of every social and benevolent tie" had become slaves to every vice which could corrupt and debase the human mind. The result was that most of them were held in contempt by the natives.<sup>92</sup> Nevertheless, Umfreville admitted, there were also many Canadians who were "possessed of abilities capable of aggrandizing their masters, and promoting their own welfare."<sup>93</sup> Moreover, they were very apt at learning the Indian languages, and in acquiring a knowledge of the necessary Indian ceremonies and customs to be observed in prosecuting the trade.<sup>94</sup> These talents were generally appreciated and made use of by their Scottish and English masters in the North West Company. In 1804, for example, not a single interpreter of the recently combined North West Company and XY Company bore other than a French name.<sup>95</sup>

#### The French Canadian Language

Although excellent linguists, the French Canadians were not brilliant conversationalists. "All their chat" moaned the loquacious Harmon who had been isolated among them for months at a time, "is about Horses, Dogs, Canoes, and Women, and strong Men who can fight a good battle",<sup>96</sup> Probably because they were without the least education (and appeared to set no value on it)<sup>97</sup>

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92. Umfreville, Present State, p.108.

93. Ibid., pp.109-110.

94. Ibid., pp.109-110.

95. Masson, Les Bourgeois, I, pp.394-413.

96. Harmon, Sixteen Years, p.55.

97. Thompson's Narrative, p.209.



their language seemed to be becoming corrupted. Before the conquest of their country by the British, it was said that they had spoken "as pure and correct French as in old France".<sup>98</sup> But an English visitor to Canada in 1806-8, noticed that already many Anglicisms had crept into their language and that several antiquated phrases were in use. He thought this might be due to their intercourse with the new settlers. "For froid (cold)" he said, "they pronounce fréte. For ici (here) they pronounce icíte. For prét (ready) they pronounce parré: besides several other obsolete words which I do not at present recollect."<sup>99</sup> Another common practice he observed was that of pronouncing the final letter of their words which, he added, was contrary to the custom of European French. This might also have been acquired in the course of fifty years of contact with the British settlers; if not, he concluded, "they never merited the praise of speaking pure French".<sup>100</sup>

The Canadian who could read was considered "a sort of phenomenon".<sup>101</sup> There were few schools in Canada and most of these were kept by nuns or other women. This led to a situation, perhaps unique in the whole world, where far more women than men could read.<sup>102</sup> Yet the men who went west were far from ignorant

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98. John Lambert in *Early Travellers in Canada*, ed., Gerald M. Craig, p.35.

99. *Ibid.*, pp.35-6.

100. *Ibid.*, p.36.

101. La Rochefoucauld Leancourt, F.A.F. Duc de, *Travels in Canada*, p.104.

102. *Ibid.*

for, according to Harmon, after they had been in the Northwest for a few years, they were more knowing or had a better knowledge of the world and human nature, than the lower class of people in most other countries.<sup>103</sup> Yet, as already seen, they usually preferred to put their knowledge at the service of others rather than to use it themselves. For unlike the Orcadians, few aspired to positions of leadership in the trade. In fact, they placed little confidence in one of themselves, and always preferred to work for an Englishman.<sup>104</sup>

#### Marriage in the Manner of the Country

Little is known about the French Canadians of the Northwest, except what is recorded in the journals of their English-speaking superiors, since few of them were able to write their own story. Men like Alexander Mackenzie and Alexander Henry, the younger, were more interested in the fur trade, itself, than in the men who conducted it. Nevertheless, their brief asides about the Canadians were often quite penetrating. Their colleague, David Thompson, a man of much wider interests, contributed a great deal more. But for the most complete portrait, it is necessary to turn to Daniel Harmon, the gossipy, gregarious clerk of the North West Company. For many years he kept a journal so that his people back home in Vermont might know how "their long absent Relative has been employed both as to Body & Mind while in this

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103. Harmon, *Sixteen Years*, p.198.

104. Thompson's *Narrative*, p.107.

Savage Country".<sup>105</sup> One of the early entries, written only a few months after his arrival in the Northwest, records a marriage "in the manner of the country" of one of his French Canadians. Harmon, still bearing the heavy conscience of New England, was obviously shocked. "In the evening" he wrote, "Monsr. Mayotte took a Woman of this Country for a Wife or rather Concubine, and all the ceremonies (as I am informed) attending such a circumstance is, when a person is desirous of having one of the Natives Daughters to live with him, he makes a present to the Parents of the Damsel, of such articles as he may suppose that will best please them, but Rum always forms a principal part of the donation, for this is what Savages in general are most fond of, and should they accept the articles offered, the Girl remains at the Fort with her lover, and is clothed after the fashion of the Canadians, with a Shirt, short Gown, Petticoats & Leggins &c. and the most of them I am told are better pleased to remain with the White People than with their own Relations. But should the newly joined couple not agree, they are at full liberty to separate whenever either chooses - however no part of the property that was given to the Girls Parents will be refunded."<sup>106</sup>

Life in the Northwest gradually changed Harmon and, two years later, when a Cree chief offered his daughter to Harmon, he was

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105. Harmon, Sixteen Years, p.185.

106. Ibid., p.29.

sorely tempted for, as he put it "I was sure that while I had the Daughter I should not only have the Fathers hunts but those of his relations also".<sup>107</sup> Such a connection would undoubtedly have promoted the interests of the company and, as a result, Harmon's as well. But, "thanks to God alone", Harmon managed to sidestep this snare "laid no doubt by the Devil himself".<sup>108</sup> Three more years passed and then temptation reared its ugly head again. One day in October 1805, a girl of about 14 years of age, the daughter of a Canadian father and a Snare [Interior Salish] Indian mother, was offered to the lonely trader who "after mature consideration" concluded that it would be best to accept her because (as he rationalized his actions at the time) "it is customary for all the Gentlemen who come in this Country to remain any length of time to have a fair Partner, with whom they can pass away their time at least more sociably if not more agreeably than to live a lonely, solitary life, as they must do if single".<sup>109</sup> If he found that they could live together in harmony (and there seemed to be no reason why they should not since the girl was said to be of a "mild disposition & even tempered") he intended to keep her as long as he remained in the Northwest. But when he returned to his native land, he would try to place her into the hands of "some good honest Man, with whom

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107. Harmon, Sixteen Years, p.62.

108. Ibid., pp.62-3.

109. Ibid., p.98.



she can pass the remainder of her Days in this Country much more agreeably, than it would be possible for her to do, were she to be taken down into the civilized world, where she would be a stranger to the People, their manners, customs & Language".<sup>110</sup>

Harmon's "marriage" illustrated well the difficulties which faced the unions between the traders and their dusky partners. No provision was made for former employees of either the North West Company or the Hudson's Bay Company to retire in the Northwest (at least, not by 1811) and so, sooner or later, it became necessary for the man to either abandon his "wife" in the country she knew, or to take her to a land where she would always be a stranger. If there were children from the union, they had to be separated from at least one of the parents. Most of the traders chose to abandon their women, although a few took their wives east,<sup>111</sup> usually to a farm where less adjustment for the wife was necessary and where the small savings of the couple could be made to go further. There seemed to be no record of any wives being taken to Orkney.

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110. Harmon, Sixteen Years, p.98.

111. Harmon did live in harmony with his wife and, far from abandoning her, was legally married (Harmon, Sixteen Years, p.xv.) when the opportunity arose. When the time came for him to leave the Northwest, he took her with him to his home in Vermont and later to Canada. David Thompson's "marriage" to a Halfbreed was also very successful and he, too, eventually retired to Canada with his wife.

Harmon's "fur trade marriage" was very different from the casual connections which were openly, even flagrantly, encouraged by the Indians (men and women alike) of most tribes. One reason for their lascivious behaviour was the belief that children borne by their women to Europeans were bolder warriors and better hunters than they were themselves.<sup>112</sup> Probably the most sought after women were the beguiling Crees whom Mackenzie described as the "most comely" he had seen in North America. "Their figure" he said, "is generally well proportioned, and the regularity of their features would be acknowledged by the more civilized people of Europe. Their complexion has less of that dark tinge which is common to those savages who have less cleanly habits."<sup>113</sup> But beauty was in the eye of the beholder and to the Chipewyan, the Cree woman held little appeal. Ask him what beauty is, and he would answer "a broad flat face, small eyes, high cheek-bones, three or four broad black lines a-cross each cheek, a low forehead, a large broad chin, a clumsy hook-nose, a tawny hide, and breasts hanging down to the belt. Those beauties are greatly heightened, or at least rendered more valuable, when the possessor is capable of dressing all kinds of skins, converting them into the different parts of their clothing, and able to carry eight or ten stone in Summer, or haul a much greater weight in Winter".<sup>114</sup>

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112. Alexander Henry (the elder), *Travels & Adventures in Canada and the Indian Territories*, ed. James Bain, pp.248, 333-4.

113. Mackenzie, *Voyages*, p.xcv.

114. Hearne, *A Journey to the Northern Ocean*, p.57.

The easier and relatively civilized way of life at the trading posts allowed the more ambitious women to develop their talents far more than they ever could have with their own people. For example, Icany, the wife of George Sutherland ( a great drunkard and when in his cups a perfect mad-man)<sup>115</sup> not only could speak English "tolerably well" but was said to be able to read and write it too. She could also speak Cree and Ojibwa.<sup>116</sup> For recreation, she played cribbage.<sup>117</sup>

By 1811, marriages in the manner of the country seemed to be on the way out - for members of the Hudson's Bay Company at least. With the founding of a colony, white women would soon be available and "for the sake of the rising Generation", as one official of the company expressed it, neither the officers nor men should be allowed to marry "unless with the Daughters of Englishmen & then only with the previous Concurrence of the Superintendent".<sup>118</sup> After spending the winter of 1811-12 near York Factory, Miles Macdonell, leader of the new colony, thought it was surprising that the company had never encouraged its men to bring their families to the Northwest. A few families could have been accommodated at each of the different factories, it seemed to him, and the women could have found sufficient employment in making and mending

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115. Harmon, Sixteen Years, p.40.

116. Ibid.

117. Journal of Norman McLeod (1800). HBC Archives 81 (b), f 9, from a photostat copy of the original in the McGill University Library.

118. HBC Archives, B.239/b/82.



clothes, washing, cooking, and so on. The men would have felt more attached to the country and the children growing up there would have been better suited to carrying on the trade than those imported.<sup>119</sup>

#### Education

As it was, several of the Halfbreed children (and a few Indians) were already being educated to become "useful Members of the Community",<sup>120</sup> at the "schools" opened by the Hudson's Bay Company in 1807. They were the first schools in the Northwest and had been founded in response to a request by parents (who had offered to contribute towards the expenses of establishing them),<sup>121</sup> as well as a desire on the part of the company to train the children to "become useful to themselves & the Company".<sup>122</sup> At first the surgeons at the factories, "who could not have their times busily occupied", were to undertake the teaching for a "proper remuneration" in addition to their existing salaries.<sup>123</sup> This, apparently, had been considered only as a temporary expediency for soon the company was looking for proper teachers.<sup>124</sup> At least some of the posts had requested clergymen as teachers, but

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119. Miles Macdonell to Lord Selkirk, Nelson Encampment, 29 May 1812. Report on the Canadian Archives, 1886, p.ccxvii.

120. HBC Archives, A.6/17, f 269 d.

121. Ibid.

122. Ibid., f 119.

123. Ibid., f 112.

124. Ibid., f 269.



none could be found who would leave Great Britain "on any terms" to promote the object which the company had in view.<sup>125</sup> The first teachers were sent out in 1808 and were "to be placed in a state of respectability" at the factories.<sup>126</sup>

It had been intended to have a school at each of the principal factories for the children of the factory and of its inland dependencies.<sup>127</sup> But it was soon decided to remove the school at York Factory to Cumberland House because of its more central location, its superior food supply, and because that part of the country afforded "the means of occupying the Attention of the Inhabitants by some useful Pursuits".<sup>128</sup>

Instruction was given in reading, writing, arithmetic and "the fundamental Principles of Religion".<sup>129</sup> Servants' children of five years of age were to be admitted "without distinction" but they had to be christened by the chief of the factory, or person acting in that capacity, at the time of admission. The children could remain in the school for seven years from the time they were admitted, or until they had completed their education and were fit to be employed in the service of the company, provided their father had not meanwhile quit the company

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125. HBC Archives, A.6/17, f 269.

126. HBC Archives, B. 42/b/51, f 15.

127. HBC Archives, A.6/17, f 119.

128. Ibid., f 170 d.

129. Ibid., f 119.

for other employment. In the beginning, older children would also be admitted to classes, but it was felt that early instruction would be a more successful means of implanting habits of industry, duty and utility.<sup>130</sup>

Before the establishment of the school, the only education available in the Northwest was that which the fathers could offer their children during odd moments of leisure. A few men, with better than average incomes, could afford to send at least some of their children to Great Britain to be educated. But it had been the fate of most of the children of the Hudson's Bay Company employees to remain in ignorance in the Northwest. Many had been brought up by well meaning fathers to be prepared for neither a civilized life, nor for life in their savage land, and when their fathers left them behind when they returned to Europe, they were unable to fend for themselves like the Indian children could.<sup>131</sup> An exception to this, were the children of Ferdinand Jacobs. Jacobs, for many years a chief at York Fort, realized that he could not bring all of his children to England when he retired there, and so had some of them brought up entirely among the natives, so that when he left the country they were fully capable of providing for themselves.<sup>132</sup>

No ocean separated the men of the North West Company from

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130. HBC Archives, A.6/17, f 119-119 d.

131. Hearne, A Journey to the Northern Ocean, p.82.

132. Ibid.

Canada, the home, or adopted home, of most of them. The children of their fur trade marriages could, in theory at least, always make their way to Canada; they were not dependent on a passage in a company ship as were those of the Orcadians. But in practice most of the Halfbreeds chose to remain in the familiar surroundings of the Northwest. The exceptions were the children of ambitious fathers, like Daniel Harmon and David Thompson, who sent their children to Canada or the eastern United States to be educated.<sup>133</sup> The North West Company apparently made no provision for educating the children of their employees within the country. According to Harmon, most of the children of the Northwest were blessed with "a retentive memory and apt to learn".<sup>134</sup> He mentions particularly a five year old boy to whom he taught English. The child, the son of a Gros Ventre mother and an English father, could already speak Cree and Ojibwa and could make himself understood in Assiniboine and French.<sup>135</sup> Another child, the year old daughter of a Hudson's Bay Company employee, was made to learn English by being isolated completely from the Indians, including her own mother.<sup>136</sup>

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133. In April, 1811, Harmon sent his three year old son, George, from New Caledonia to Vermont so "that he may be in time instructed in the Christian Religion". - Harmon, Sixteen Years, p.138.

134. Harmon, Sixteen Years, p.50.

135. Ibid.

136. HBC Archives, E.3/4, f 7 d.

European and Native Relations

The Hudson's Bay Company's schools were also available to the children of the chiefs of trading tribes friendly to the company. Should any of these chiefs "express a decided wish" to have any of their children educated at the factory, such children were to be admitted as a "means of cultivating the Friendship & Goodwill of the Parents & Children & thereby promote very essentially the objects the Committee have in view".<sup>137</sup> Here was another attempt to tighten the bonds uniting the Indians and fur traders. Already, they were closely allied (albeit unofficially) through marriage, and through an ever-growing economic interdependence. Increasingly, the Indians tended to gather about the trading posts as much as the demands of the hunt would allow. During the long periods when the chase made it necessary for them to be absent, they frequently left their aged and infirm behind at the posts.<sup>138</sup> Before the advent of the traders, such people could not have been looked after because of the necessity of almost constant travel, and would almost certainly have been doomed to perish when they could no longer keep up with the movements of the tribe.

The Indians and the traders mixed unexpectedly well socially. But perhaps this is not so surprising when it is remembered that a man of David Thompson's experience, considered the Indian to be

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137. HBC Archives, A.6/17, f 119-119 d.

138. Harmon, Sixteen Years, p.123.



"fully equal to those of his class in Europe". Thompson believed that those writers who expressed contrary opinions did so because they always compared the Indians with themselves, and since they were usually men of education, the Indians lost by comparison.<sup>139</sup> The Indians' capacity for drunkenness was legendary but Harmon, at least, considered them no more offensive when in their cups than intoxicated French-Canadians. In fact, he said that he would "rather have fifty drunken Indians in the fort, than five drunken Canadians".<sup>140</sup>

The Indians often joined in the various "social occasions" of the posts - especially at the balls which were frequently held to mark special events such as New Years, St. Andrew's Day, and Christmas,<sup>141</sup> as well as the gala affairs thrown during the annual meeting, at Grand Portage, (and after 1804 at Fort William) of the North West Company men from the Northwest with those from Montreal. These famous balls were held in the dining room of the fort. The gentlemen dressed for the occasion. Music was provided by any instrumentalists who happened to be present. This led to some oddly composed orchestras like the one in 1800 which consisted of a bagpipe, violin, flute and fife. On this occasion, as was usual, a number of native women attended. Harmon

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139. Thompson's Narrative, pp.108-9.

140. Harmon, Sixteen Years, p.65.

141. Ibid., pp.21, 22, 30, 31, 40, 41, 52, 53, 65, 88, 89.

who was attending his first Northwest Ball, was surprised to find that they could not only behave themselves, but that they "danced not amiss".<sup>142</sup>

Five years later, a more experienced Harmon, attended a dance at the North West Company's Fort Assiniboine. As was common when relations were good, the men from competing houses were also invited. The next day, Harmon described the event in his journal: "Last evening Mr. Chaboillez invited the People of the other two Forts to a Dance & we had a real North West Ball, for when three fourths of the People were so much intoxicated as not to be able to walk straight, the other fourth put an end to the Ball or rather Bawl! And this morning we were invited to breakfast at the Hudson's Bay House with a Mr. McKay & in the evening to a Ball, which however ended in a more decent manner than the one we had the preceding evening at our House - not that all were sober, but we had no fighting".<sup>143</sup>

#### The Sabbath

Sunday was little observed. The North West Company flew a flag on that day<sup>144</sup> and sometimes, at least, the men changed their clothes,<sup>145</sup> but otherwise, business was much as usual for the Indians came to trade regardless of the day, and it was frequently necessary to travel about the country on the Sabbath.<sup>146</sup>

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142. Harmon, Sixteen Years, p.22.

143. Ibid., pp.89-90.

144. Coues, New Light, p.121.

145. Sixteen Years, p.21.

146. Ibid., pp.37-8.

At the Hudson's Bay Company's factories, it was customary for a sermon to be read to the men.<sup>147</sup> During Hearne's time, the service at Fort Churchill, was read in his own room, "the only comfortable one in the factory".<sup>148</sup> One Sunday, after the service, Hearne ordered David Thompson, and his second in command, a Mr. Jefferson, to remain behind after the service. He then took down Voltaire's dictionary and said "here is my belief, and I have no other".<sup>149</sup> Thompson related the incident in a personal attack on Hearne, whom he appears to have disliked intensely.

#### Books

With Jefferson, Thompson seems to have been more friendly; he also appears to have been on good terms with the factory surgeon and the captain of the sloop; for all three men lent him their books freely and through them, Thompson discovered one of the greatest pleasures that the Northwest had to offer - reading. He paid most attention to their books on history and "animated nature" which he had found "most instructive".<sup>150</sup> Harmon shared Thompson's love of reading and during his long years in the Northwest appears to have read almost anything he could get his hands on from Camelia or the Picture of Youth to the Bible.<sup>151</sup> Alexander Henry

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147. Thompson's Narrative, pp.10-11.

148. Ibid.

149. Ibid.

150. Ibid., p.26.

151. Harmon, Sixteen Years, pp.27, 32, 47.

always of a practical turn of mind, was reading Gass's account of the Lewis and Clark expedition while thawing out some tongues at Fort Vermilion in 1810.<sup>152</sup> He referred to it as Gass' Journal Across the Rocky Mountains. This probably indicated that he was looking forward to new adventures west of the Rockies<sup>153</sup> rather than backward to his old haunts on the Red River, where he had been stationed during the winter of 1804-5, when Lewis and Clark wintered among the Mandans of the Missouri not far away. During that winter, several expeditions had been sent by the North West Company to the United States explorers to learn why they had come and to gain information about the change of government in Louisiana.<sup>154</sup> Henry, himself, visited the Missouri in 1806 and saw the remains of an iron corn mill<sup>155</sup> which Captain Lewis had given to the Mandans.<sup>156</sup> The "foolish fellows" had demolished it to make barbs for their arrows. The largest piece of it, which they had not been able to break or work up into any weapon, was fixed to a wooden handle and used to pound marrow-bones to make grease.<sup>157</sup>

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152. Coues, New Light, p.591.

153. Henry was drowned at Fort George on the Columbia River in 1814.

154. Patrick Gass, A Journal of the Voyages and Travels of a Corps of Discovery, under the Command of Capt. Lewis and Capt. Clarke of the Army of the United States, p.65.

155. Coues, New Light, p.211.

156. Gass, A Journal of the Voyages and Travels, p.60.

157. Coues, New Light, p.329.



## Science and the Northwest

The Lewis and Clark expedition had been organized and equipped by the government of the United States. It was far larger and more important than any previous scientific expedition to north-western North America, although it was by no means the first. As early as 1768, the Royal Society had sent William Wales to Fort Prince of Wales, on the shores of Hudson Bay at the mouth of Churchill River, to make observations on the transit of Venus.<sup>158</sup> Wales remained in the country for 13 months where he not only made his astronomical observations but also collected a number of scientific specimens which he presented to the society.<sup>159</sup> Many of these specimens had been given to him by Ferdinand Jacobs, chief, and Thomas Hutchins, surgeon, at York Factory.<sup>160</sup>

Wales would have messed at Prince of Wales with Samuel Hearne. Hearne, then in his early twenties, was assumed to have learned much about astronomical science from the distinguished visitor. In any event, shortly after Wales returned to England, Hearne set out on his famous journey to the mouth of the Coppermine and thereby made his own contributions to natural science. His geographical discoveries are well known. But he also contributed to biology as well as through "his liberal communication

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158. Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society, vol.LX.

159. On 8 November 1770, the Royal Society acknowledged receipt from William Wales, donor, of "several forms of pyrites, with ores, talcs, fungi, sparrs, and copper, from Hudson's Bay". Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society, Volume LX, p.xv.

160. Ibid., p.129.

of many zoological remarks"<sup>161</sup> to Pennant who used them in his Arctic Zoology, published in 1784. Pennant was also indebted to another Hudson's Bay employee, and friend of Hearne's, Andrew Graham, who not only provided him with many observations on the country but with many specimens of animals as well. These had been sent by Graham to the museum of the Royal Society.<sup>162</sup> Included among these were probably some of the birds described by John Reinhold Forster in his An Account of the Birds sent from Hudson's Bay ... , published in 1772.<sup>163</sup>

Hearne did not publish his own observations about the animals of the Northwest until 1795. These appeared in his A Journey from Prince of Wales's Fort, in Hudson's Bay, to the Northern Ocean and show the influence of Pennant. It is unfortunate that Hearne did not illustrate his observations with drawings for he was something of an artist as shown by the several sketches he did publish of various Indian implements, of a view of Great Slave Lake, and a view of Fort Prince of Wales. (see figs.11,14,20)

#### Buildings

Fort Prince of Wales was destroyed by the French in 1782, and replaced a year later by Fort Churchill. Alone among all of the fur trading posts of the Northwest, Prince of Wales was built of stone. All of the others were of wood. Spruce was

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161. Pennant, Arctic Zoology, Advertisement [preface].

162. Ibid.

163. Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society, Volume LXII, pp.382-433.

probably most used since it was usually the most readily available, but other woods (such as cottonwood, oak and cedar) were used when convenient. Oak had the advantage of being durable and was used in buildings on the Red River,<sup>164</sup> but its range was very limited and, according to Peter Fidler, was not found north of Swan River.<sup>165</sup> The oaks of the Swan River district seemed to have been very old with most of their branches dead. Some of them were about 18 inches in diameter at the root.<sup>166</sup> The spruce (usually called 'pine' by the traders) did not stand up well, and buildings made from it were in ruins in a few months after they ceased to be occupied "however dry the ground and the climate".<sup>167</sup>

Nearly all of the buildings had to be abandoned, sooner or later, because of the changing patterns of trade. Many were intended for only a season or two of use, while others were meant to be "permanent". But even these often had to be abandoned when they had used up all the nearby trees for fuel, and a new post was built a mile or so away. After a few years, the buildings tended to be full of fleas, woodlice and mice<sup>168</sup> often making it desirable to replace them with new ones. This problem never faced the Indians who did not build houses. They were content

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164. Coues, *New Light*, pp.122-3. (See Appendix B, for a list of the wood used in building the Park River Post in the Red River district in 1800).

165. HBC Archives, E.3/2, p.82.

166. *Ibid.*

167. Thompson's Narrative, p.433.

168. Coues, *New Light*, pp.155, 182, 210, 255.

to live in tents, tents which could be easily moved to a more convenient firewood supply or to a better source of food. When they had gone, little remained except the heaps of rotting rubbish, and perhaps a few rings of stones which had been used to hold down the borroms of the tents. Little more remained on the sites of the abandoned trading posts. New trees replaced those which had been burned, whether in a smoky fireplace of a trader's cabin or in the centre of an Indian's tent, and before long no trace of man remained to be seen.

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1. See figure 5.

2. Arthur G. Morison, *A History of the Canadian West to 1800*, pp. 10-11.

3. Ibid., p. 178.

4. Ibid., pp. 24, 25, 99-102, 103.

5. Ibid., pp. 79, 323, 324.

6. *The Hudson Bay Company 1670-1870*, II, p. 101.



## CHAPTER III

### THE FUR TRADE<sup>1</sup>

#### Hudson Bay versus the Saint Lawrence.

Two great waterways, the Saint Lawrence River-Great Lakes system, and Hudson Strait and Bay, led into the heart of North America to link the Northwest with the Atlantic Ocean and with Europe. Both routes provided easy access to the remarkable network of inter-connecting and near inter-connecting rivers and lakes which made travel practicable to nearly every part of the country. The Hudson Bay route was dominated by the Hudson's Bay Company which, by virtue of its Royal Charter of 1670, possessed exclusive right to trade through the bay.<sup>2</sup> This privilege, however, had been challenged many times, both at home and abroad. There had been a parliamentary enquiry in 1749,<sup>3</sup> several armed attacks by the French,<sup>4</sup> the last in 1782,<sup>5</sup> and, in 1803, an invasion of the bay by British traders from Canada.<sup>6</sup> During its early years of trading, the company

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1. See figure 6.

2. Arthur S. Morton, *A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71*, p.59.

3. *Ibid.*, p.218.

4. *Ibid.*, pp.84, 96, 99-102, 103.

5. *Ibid.*, pp.300, 333, 384.

6. E.E. Rich, *Hudson's Bay Company 1670-1870*, II, p.222.

had been content to establish posts near the mouths of the principal rivers which flowed into Hudson Bay. Among these were the Churchill, Nelson, Hayes, and Severn Rivers in the Northwest. Men were sent inland to persuade the natives to bring their furs down the rivers to the bay to be traded for the products of civilization. The Indians quickly saw how their harsh living conditions could be moderated with the guns, kettles, knives, and other tools available from the traders, and sent down large quantities of furs to the bay. Trade flourished. At first, most of the furs came from the tribes living near the bay, but before long many of the closer natives found it more profitable to become "middlemen", and developed an extensive trade with the more remote tribes, who in turn often traded with even more remote tribes. In this way, the Indians were usually familiar with the White man's goods long before they had ever actually seen a White man. For instance, Hearne found several long beads among the effects of some Eskimoes massacred by the Indians near the mouth of the Coppermine River. These must have made their way there from Davis Strait, where they had been originally traded by the Danes,<sup>7</sup> across a land whose very existence was unknown to the whites, let alone ever having been visited by them. Thus it was found, here as elsewhere in even the remotest regions of

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7. Hearne, Journey to the Northern Ocean, p.224.

the Northwest, that a demand for European goods existed long before the traders were able to reach those distant places themselves. Some of the remote tribes tried to avoid the middlemen, whose mark-up was often ten-fold, by making the long and dangerous journey to the bay themselves.<sup>8</sup> In this, they were often frustrated by the middlemen, who blocked their way (and frequently robbed them) in order to protect their own highly profitable position in the trade, as well as to prevent their inland neighbours from obtaining arms at the posts and thus becoming their equals in any future battles.

For many years the Hudson's Bay Company's technique worked well enough, until French traders from the Saint Lawrence began entering the Northwest by the southern waterway. By taking their goods directly to the trappers and middlemen, they saved the Indians a perilous journey to the bay, and thus cut heavily into the Hudson's Bay Company's trade. With the British conquest of Canada, the company had hoped for relief, but soon the French Canadians were back again, but this time with British leaders and with British trade goods, and before long competition was even more severe than it had ever been before. The situation worsened when the dreadful smallpox epidemic of 1782 wiped out most of the native middlemen and trappers

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8. Hearne, Journey to the Northern Ocean, pp.114-5.

although it left the Europeans untouched. Eight years earlier, competition had forced the Hudson's Bay Company to change its century old policy and to establish posts inland. The first of these was Cumberland House, built at Pine Island [Cumberland] Lake in 1774. Soon the Canadians built near by. This marked the beginning of face to face competition between the traders of the two waterways. Later it was to extend to nearly every part of the Northwest. Fur areas were exploited more quickly and recklessly than otherwise might have been the case. This resulted in a constant demand for new areas to exploit, and since these could be readily reached by means of the remarkable river system, an ever increasing extension of the geographical limits of the trade took place until, by 1811, it had reached to the Arctic circle on the Mackenzie River and to the mouth of the Columbia on the Pacific Ocean. As the distance increased, an elaborate transportation system had had to be developed. This had led to larger overheads and necessitated a far larger capital investment. Only a large, well capitalized organisation like the Hudson's Bay Company could hope to survive. Some of the small traders from the Saint Lawrence retired but most of them took part in a series of agreements or mergers, which led eventually to the emergence of a single monopoly in 1804, the North West Company. By 1811, it did not seem that even two companies, each based on one of the two waterways into the Northwest, could co-exist much longer.

The Hudson Bay route was shorter, easier, and more economic



than was the Saint Lawrence route.<sup>9</sup> Since both companies bought the bulk of their trade goods in England and sold most of their furs in the same markets, possession of the better trade route by the Hudson's Bay Company gave it an enormous advantage over its rival. Alexander Mackenzie recognized the economic advantages of the bay route at least as early as 1794,<sup>10</sup> and during successive years, tried several times to open it to the traders from Canada. In 1801, he sought popular support by stating his case in the last few pages of his published journals.<sup>11</sup> He advocated a "junction" between the Canadian traders and the Hudson's Bay Company which would enjoy "the privilege of the Company's charter".<sup>12</sup> At that time, most of the Canadians had merged their interests with one or other of two companies. These were the North West Company, and a smaller rival organization under the leadership of Mackenzie, himself, known variously as the XY Company, the

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9. The Saint Lawrence route cost the North West Company at least £10,000 a year more than the Hudson Bay route would have done. (G. de T. Glazebrook, *A History of Transportation in Canada*, p.57). Moreover, by shipping through Canada, the Nor'westers had to pay out an average of £20,000 a year in export duties. (Harold Innis, *Fur Trade in Canada*, p.181). Thus the use of the Saint Lawrence added about £30,000 a year to the expenses of the Canadian company, which their English rivals did not have to find.

10. Morton, *History of the Canadian West*, pp.419-20.

11. Mackenzie, *Voyages*, pp.407-412.

12. *Ibid.*, pp.408-9.

New North West Company, and later, as the Sir Alexander Mac-kenzie and Company. During the next few years, before the XY Company was absorbed by the North West Company late in 1804, both companies made separate attempts to get transit rights through the bay. Most ambitious of these was the XY Company's unsuccessful bid for control of the Hudson's Bay Company by attempting to buy a majority of its stock. While this was going on, the North West Company made a double approach to the English company. On the one hand, it attempted to reach an amicable agreement with the company, while at the same time it sent a ship into the bay to establish trading posts in defiance of the Hudson's Bay Company's charter.<sup>13</sup> Negotiations between the two companies continued until early 1806, when they were broken off without any agreement having been reached.<sup>14</sup>

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13. (E.E. Rich, Hudson's Bay Company, p.222). Fearing that the rights of its charter were about to be challenged, the Hudson's Bay Company sought legal advice in 1804. From its lawyers, it learned that the validity of the charter did not rest on an act of parliament but merely upon the royal prerogative and, in their opinion, the grant of a sole right to trade was beyond the power of the crown, though it had the right to grant land. (Rich, Hudson's Bay Company, pp.258-9). On the basis of this advice, the London committee did not consider it expedient to resort to legal proceedings against the North West Company for defying its charter. (Ibid.) The North West Company, for its own part, considered itself justified in trading in the Northwest on the grounds that it derived its rights from the formal cession of Canada by the French. (Davidson, North West Company, p.247).

14. Rich, Hudson's Bay Company p.263.

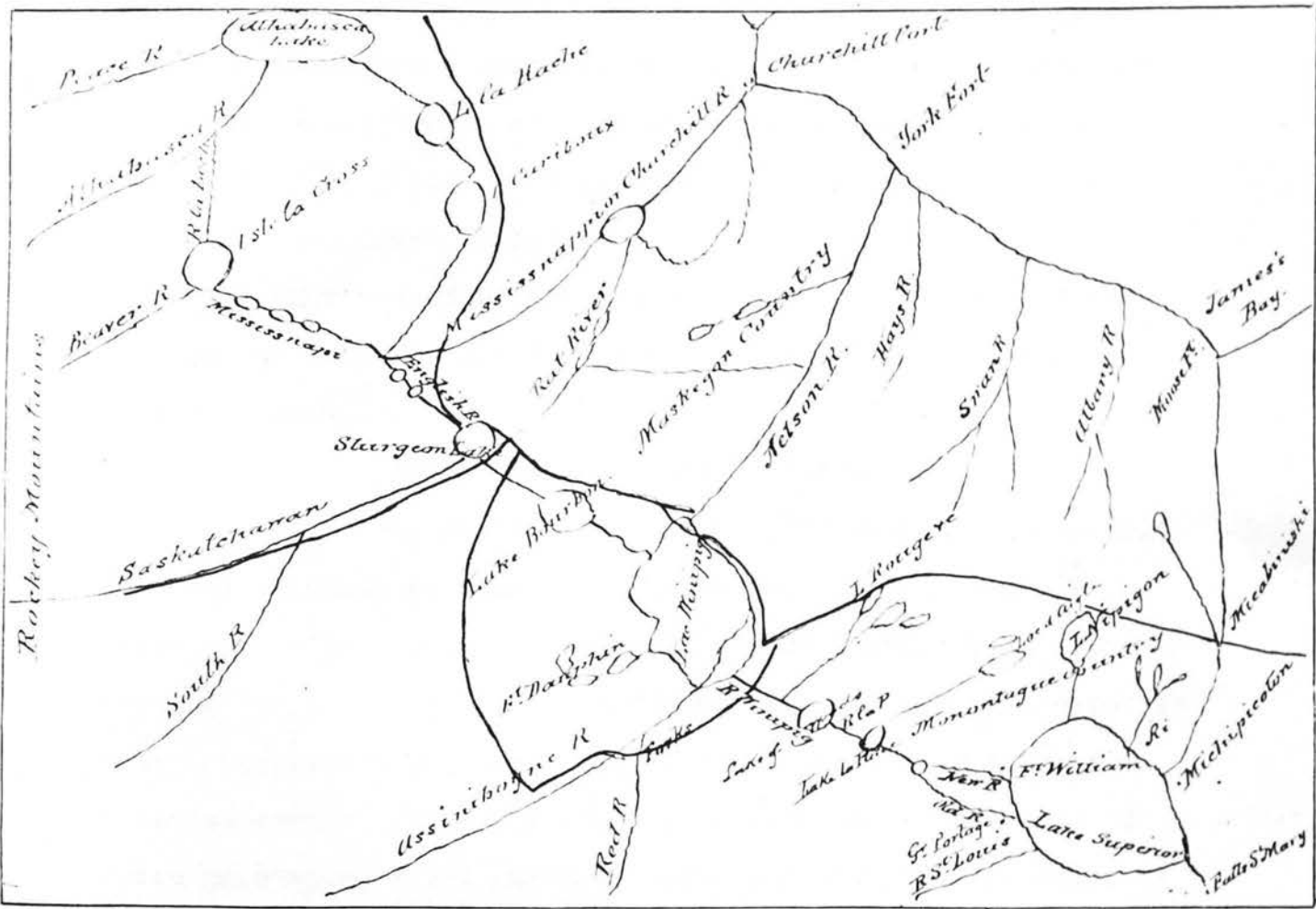


Figure 7.

Sketch-map Accompanying the North West Company's Proposal of 1810, for Establishing a Boundary Between Itself and the Hudson's Bay Company—

Public Archives of Canada, Selkirk Papers, M.G. 19, E1, Vol. 1 (1), p. 192

Meanwhile, the Canadian posts on Hudson Bay had not been a success, because the Indians had remained loyal to the old company, and in 1807, were quietly withdrawn.<sup>15</sup> The agreement by which the North West Company absorbed the XY Company in 1804, showed how confident the enlarged company had been of eventually coming to some sort of an agreement with the Hudson's Bay Company, for a clause was included to provide for the purchase of either the whole of the English company's rights or only the right of transit through the bay and its territories.<sup>16</sup>

Proposed Demarcation. (figure 7)

In 1810, the North West Company attempted unsuccessfully to buy controlling shares in the Hudson's Bay Company.<sup>17</sup> At the same time, it approached the English company with a proposal for partitioning the Northwest between the two companies. If an agreement were reached, it was to remain in force for twelve years. The Hudson's Bay Company was to have all of the country east and north of Lake Winnipeg from the mouth of the Winnipeg River to the mouth of the Saskatchewan, except for Lake Nipigon, the Monontague country, Red Lake, and the area bordering Winnipeg River, but including the Muskegon and Rat River regions. From the mouth of the Saskatchewan, the line of demarcation was to run along the usual canoe route via

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15. Rich, Hudson's Bay Company, p.258.

16. Ibid., p.231.

17. Ibid., p.302.



Grand Rapids, Cedar Lake, Sturgeon Weir River, etc., until the Churchill River was reached at Frog Portage. The Hudson's Bay Company was to have all of the area to the eastward, but it was not to establish any posts within three winter's days' march of this line. Neither company was to establish posts on Reindeer, Wollaston, or Black Lakes, but the Indians were to be free to trade with either. The North West Company was to have the country on the west side of Lake Winnipeg including Swan River, Fort Dauphin, and River la Biche, as far as the district opposite Cumberland House. From Cumberland House to the Rocky Mountains the boundary was to follow the channel of the Saskatchewan and its northern branch. The Hudson's Bay Company was to have all the country to the south and west of this, including the South Saskatchewan and Bow rivers. It was also to have the Assiniboine, except for two provision posts which were to be retained by the North West Company, and the Red River country.<sup>18</sup> The North West Company was to have the Athabasca country, the Churchill River above Frog Portage, the Beaver River, and all the country north and west of the Saskatchewan. Both companies were to retain their provision depots at Cumberland House. The Hudson's Bay Company was not to go beyond the Rocky Mountains. The

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18. According to the text of the proposal, the Hudson's Bay Company was to have the Upper Assiniboine and Lower Red rivers but the accompanying sketch map left the area from Lake Winnipeg to just above the forks to the North West Company.

North West Company said that it would be giving up lands in which it had 17 posts, and employed six partners, 25 to 27 canoes, and about 160 men. From this territory, it annually received from 330 to 390 packs of furs valued at £13,000.<sup>19</sup>

On the face of it, the proposed delimitation did not seem to be in any way connected with the North West Company's attempts to procure the right of transit through the territories of the Hudson's Bay Company. However, the Canadian Company undoubtedly regarded it as the first step toward a closer union between the two companies. Meanwhile, such an agreement would be extremely useful to them. First of all, it would eliminate the destructive competition between the two companies which was then debauching the natives, as both companies competed for their trade through an overly liberal use of rum. Secondly, it would confine the English company to the Hudson Bay drainage basin and prevent it from competing in the Athabasca country or west of the Rockies in New Caledonia. The Athabasca country, or Mackenzie basin, was the recognized eldorado of the fur trade. The Hudson's Bay Company had made several attempts to establish itself there but in 1811, it had not a single post beyond Ile-a-la-Crosse. Even there, the Hudson's Bay Company was being forced to retire under the relentless onslaught and abuse of the Canadians who forced it to abandon

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19. A copy of the proposal, which was dated Montreal, November 7, 1810, is in the Selkirk Papers, Public Archives of Canada, M.G. 19, E 1, Vol. (1) pp.188-93.

its post there in June 1811. The buildings were burned by the Canadians soon after the English had departed.<sup>20</sup>

New Caledonia was just being developed by the North West Company, which was anxious to prevent competition from spreading into this area. In June 1811, the Canadian company petitioned the British government for a charter which would give it exclusive rights to trade in the territories west of the Rockies claimed by Great Britain as well as in the Mackenzie basin. The petition was still under discussion at the end of 1811.<sup>21</sup> It was the extension of trade into these distant areas which increased the North West Company's desire for an outlet through the bay. Yet, the North West Company badly needed the Athabasca country and the new areas beyond the Rockies in which to expand. For a peculiar feature of the organization demanded constant expansion in order to provide for the promotion of clerks to the rank of partner. This was accentuated by the absorption of the XY Company in 1804, which meant that positions had to be found for many additional clerks and partners.

The North West Company had probably wished to retain the Swan River area and the two posts on the Assiniboine for gathering provisions to supply the depot at Bas-de-la-Riviere-Winnipeg and possibly Cumberland as well. Cumberland was to

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20. HBC Archives, 89/a/2, f 36d.

21. Davidson, North West Company, pp.124-6.

be retained as a supply depot for carrying on the trade to the north and west. The Hudson's Bay Company was also to keep its depot at Cumberland. However, should the delimitation take place, this post would be of relatively little use, since the fur areas it had been designed to serve, would be given to the North West Company. The Hudson's Bay Company was to have the area to the south and west of the Saskatchewan but this country produced little in the way of furs except wolves which were no longer in demand. It was rich in pemmican but procuring it was difficult since the Indians were generally hostile to the traders. So much so, in fact, that neither company had an active post there in 1810-11. Both companies were to have the use of the Saskatchewan, but the North West Company would undoubtedly benefit the more from it since it not only was to retain the rich forest area to the north but would continue to use the river to tap the wealth of New Caledonia. Correspondence on the proposed delimitation continued throughout 1811 with the Hudson's Bay Company holding out for its charter limits and refusing to debar its servants from the region west of the mountains.<sup>22</sup>

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22. Davidson, North West Company, p.132. The proposed delimitation was never adopted.



Re-organization of the Hudson's Bay Company  
(figures 8 and 9)

The North West Company's proposal must have seemed tempting to the Hudson's Bay Company. For by 1810-11, not only was its trade<sup>23</sup> only a fraction of that of its rival, but it was being forced to retreat geographically as well. However, having come through many storms in the past, it felt that it could survive this one as well, and even looked to the future with considerable optimism. The optimism was based largely on a number of decisions taken by the London committee of the company in 1810-11, which were designed to overcome many of the company's internal weaknesses so that it might in future function more efficiently, and thereby successfully withstand the onslaughts of the North West Company. For many years the company had relied on the Orkney Islands for most of its employees, but during the long years of the Napoleonic wars, it had had to compete for them with the press gangs of the Royal Navy. This had resulted in a serious personnel shortage which had greatly handicapped the company in its efforts to stand up to the North West Company. This shortage, together with a growing dissatisfaction with the Orcadians, led to a decision to

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23. Rich, Hudson's Bay Company, p.267.



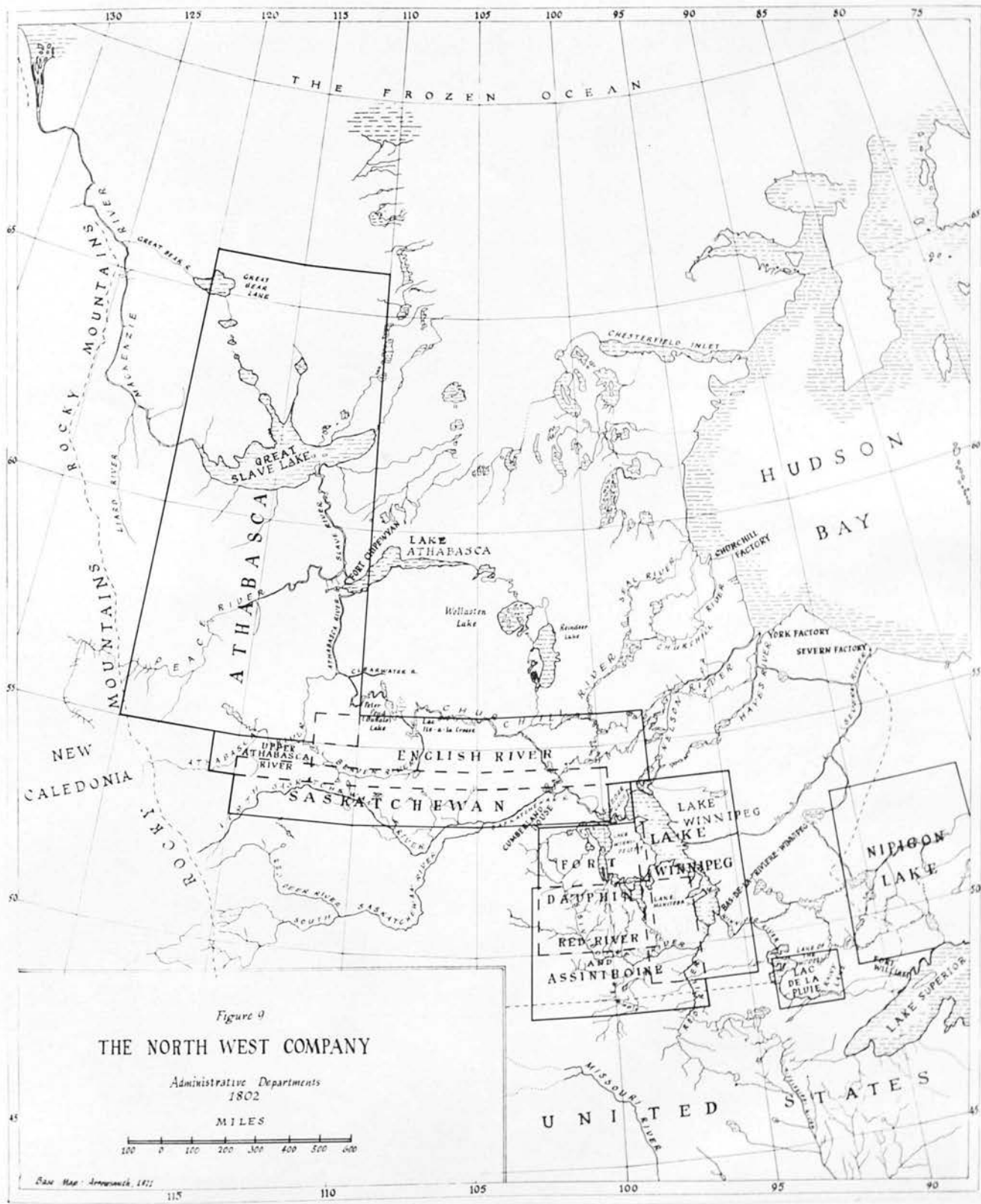


Figure 9

**THE NORTH WEST COMPANY**

Administrative Departments  
1802

MILES



Base Map: Arrowsmith, 1811

broaden the area of recruiting to include the Scottish Highlands and Canada. That is, to include the areas from which its rival drew most of its men. Many of these men were to be induced to enter the service not so much by salary as by a promise of land in a colony which the company had decided to establish under Lord Selkirk in the Red River area. In the years to come, the colony itself would be a source of manpower. In addition, it would provide an agricultural base for conducting the trade and greatly reduce the amount of expensive European provisions used in the Northwest.

A new system of payment based on the amount of furs traded was to be substituted for the rigid salary scale which had prevailed in the past.<sup>24</sup> The change was undoubtedly inspired by a somewhat similar system which was used by the North West Company to induce its employees to greater efforts. With this new emphasis on personal initiative it became more important than ever that any temptations for the employees of the company to compete with one another, rather than to cooperate for the common good, should be removed. In the past, competition between posts, particularly between those under the command of York and those under Churchill, had often been severe.<sup>25</sup> This was to be avoided in the future by dividing the whole of the Hudson's Bay territories into two great

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24. HBC Archives, A.1/49, f 123-123d.

25. HBC Archives, B.239/b/79, f 9d-10; B.239/b/68, f 24d-25.



districts for administrative purposes. One, to be known as the Northern Department, was to comprise all of the lands in the Northwest; the other, the Southern Department, was to include the remainder of the company's territories in British North America. Each was to be headed by a single superintendent with a great deal of local autonomy, who was to see that no intra-company rivalry developed.<sup>26</sup> The large amount of authority given to the superintendents also demonstrated the company's desire to overcome the rigidity of organization which had always characterized its operations in the past. All directions for pursuing the trade had had to come from the company's headquarters in London. These had almost invariably been drawn up by men with no local knowledge of conditions in the Northwest. Before any but the most insignificant changes could be made, approval had had to be obtained from London. This meant that nearly two years had had to pass from the time a proposal was made until a decision on it could reach the bay. In the past, this system of direction by remote control had proved increasingly unsatisfactory in enabling the company to meet the challenges of its opponents, and in coping with the rapid geographical shifts in the patterns of trade. Now, with all of these changes, the company hoped that before long it would be in a position to extend its activities beyond its

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26. HBC Archives, A.1/49, f 115d.

chartered limits into the Athabasca country and across the Rockies into New Caledonia.

#### Relations Between the Two Companies.

The first objective of the Hudson's Bay Company was the Athabasca country. It was closer to Hudson Bay than New Caledonia and accessible from both York Factory and Churchill Factory. However, the North West Company had no intention of allowing competition to enter this, the richest fur area of them all. For not only would competition lessen its harvest of furs but it would force up the prices of those it did get. To discourage their English rival, the Canadians worked havoc at their most distant post on the route to the Athabasca country, Fort Ile-a-la-Crosse. Men were sent out to follow the Indians to prevent them from trading with the Hudson's Bay Company. Any who succeeded in doing so were threatened with violence. At the same time, life for the English was made intolerable and in June 1811, Peter Fidler, who was in charge, decided to abandon the post. It was burned by the Canadians immediately after his departure.<sup>27</sup>

Two decades earlier, while accompanying Philip Turner on an exploratory expedition to Lake Athabasca, Fidler had wintered at Ile-a-la-Crosse where he had been treated "very

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27. HBC Archives, B.89/a/2.

kindly" by the Canadians.<sup>28</sup> Relations between the two companies had obviously deteriorated since then. The rate of deterioration had been greatly accelerated by the chaos which had reigned during the time of the XY Company when there were often three posts only a few yards apart competing for the furs and provisions of the natives. Nevertheless, as late as 1807, Harmon could write at Cumberland that "the greater part of the Northwest and Hudson Bay people, live on amicable terms; and when one can with propriety render a service to the other, it is done with cheerfulness".<sup>29</sup> However, most of Harmon's experience in the Northwest had been at posts on, or near, the open plains where the Indians tended to be difficult and often dangerous to deal with. Under these circumstances, the whites tended to band together in friendship and mutual defence. In the forested areas, where the natives were less of a threat, relations between the whites tended to be less cordial. Oddly enough, competition, which divided the whites from one another, also indirectly brought them together. For fierce competition tended to debauch the natives and make them unruly, which in turn forced the whites together for protection. Of course, the degree of coalescence depended a great deal upon the individuals concerned. Mention of

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28. Journals of Hearne and Turnor, p.474.

29. Harmon, Sixteen Years, p.103.

personal friendships are quite frequent in the journals and diaries of the traders. So are their animosities. Unfortunately the most serious disputes between them, seem to have taken their origin in mere trifles.<sup>30</sup>

#### Free Traders

Besides the employees of the two monopolies, there were still a number of "free traders" in the Northwest. These were mostly retired employees of the North West Company who preferred to remain in the west to returning to civilization.<sup>31</sup> Since they were dependent upon one or other of the large companies for buying their trading goods and selling their furs, they had to maintain good relations with at least one of them. Of course, most of their trade would have been with their former employers, but in 1809, the London committee, realizing the potential value of this commerce, gave instructions to its servants to entertain the connection with the free Canadians "to the utmost of your power".<sup>32</sup> The free traders tried to learn where the North West Company got the largest quantities of its furs by examining the marks on the bales sent down each year in order to find out where trading prospects were brightest. However, their efforts were frustrated by a practice of the agents at the Grand Portage (and later, at Fort William)

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30. Masson, *Les Bourgeois*, II, p.94.

31. Davidson, *North West Company*, p.232.

32. HBC Archives, B.198/c/1. f 9d.



who annually gave a sealed paper containing a code letter or letters to be put on the furs of each department, making it impossible to tell where the bales came from without the key.<sup>33</sup>

#### Additional Companies Unlikely

The days when a Canadian with a few packs of goods on credit could enter the Northwest to winter among the Indians and leave in the spring with a small fortune in furs were past. So were the times when a handful of Britishers could establish themselves at the mouth of a great river on Hudson Bay and wait for the natives to come down in the spring to trade the products of their winter's hunt. By 1811, the fur trade had become big business. To enter it now would have been virtually impossible. For even assuming a newcomer had access to the fur markets (and was not discouraged by the prevailing low prices), and sufficient capital to meet the huge expenditure now necessary to get established, a shortage of skilled manpower would almost certainly have frustrated his efforts. For unlike 1798, when the XY Company was formed, no pool of men<sup>34</sup> now existed outside the two monopolies who were skilled in handling canoes and boats, or who knew the languages, customs and ceremonies of the Indians, and the thousand and one other things so necessary

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33. HBC Archives, A.11/18, f 29d.

34. Much of the manpower of the XY Company had been made up of men from the Southwest who had been displaced as a result of the implementation of Jay's Treaty.

in successfully conducting this unique business.

### Learning the Trade

The North West Company trained its men by sending them among the Indians when they were still young enough to "acquire a perfect knowledge of their languages and habits".<sup>35</sup> Not until then were they entrusted with carrying on the business of the company.<sup>36</sup> The Hudson's Bay Company also tried to hire men young enough to learn the ways of the natives. For example, David Thompson was hired less than a month after his fourteenth birthday, and was sent on his first journey alone with the Indians (from Churchill to York on foot) when he was only 15 years old.<sup>37</sup> During the next 26 years he spent many months at a time with only the Indians for companions and in many ways became one of them. "I had always admired" he said, "the tact of the Indian in being able to guide himself through the darkest pine forests to exactly the place he intended to go, his keen, constant attention on every thing; the removal of the smallest stone, the bent or broken twig; a slight mark on the ground all spoke plain language to him. I was anxious to acquire this knowledge, and often being in company with them sometimes for several months, I paid attention to what they pointed out to me, and became almost equal to some

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35. Duncan McGillivray, Some Account of the Trade Carried on by the North West Company, p.60.

36. Ibid.

37. J.B. Tyrrell in David Thompson's Narrative, pp.xxiii-xxvi.

of them; which became of great use to me."<sup>38</sup> Thompson's fellow surveyor and employee of the Hudson's Bay Company, Peter Fidler, was 22 when he left to winter among the Chipewyans in 1792. He did not return to his base until the following April having been "absent from all European intercourse and alone with the Jepewyans ever since the 4th September last having acquired a sufficiency of their Language to transact any business with them. Upon the whole this has been rather an agreeable winter than otherwise . . ." <sup>39</sup>

#### Wintering Among the Natives

One of the main reasons why wintering with the natives was considered agreeable by some of the traders was because it removed them "from under the Eye of a Master" and the routine and discipline of life at the trading post. By living with the Indians, they expected to have nothing to do. In fact, they frequently seemed to be unwilling to help their hosts in any way at all. This attitude was believed by Matthew Cocking of the Hudson's Bay Company, to be the chief reason why their men did not get on well with the natives.<sup>40</sup> Peter Fidler, on the other hand, believed just as strongly that it was impolitic to help out in any way. "It is an invariable custom with all Indians . . ." he said,

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38. Thompson's Narrative, pp.105-6.

39. Journals of Hearne and Turnor, p.555.

40. Cumberland House Journals, I, pp.109-10.

"that the more an European does of work with them the worse he is respected by them and gets generally the worst victuals and frequently but little of it when he complys to do every thing they bid him whereas if he stiffly refuses from the first that he is with them they will be very kind to him and will give him a larger allowance of provisions than had he listened to every request of theirs."<sup>41</sup>

The promise of regular allowances of provisions provided the main incentive for sending men to winter among the natives, particularly when food was scarce at the trading posts. To pay for their keep, an assortment of trading goods was usually sent along with the winterers. Sometimes, the traders were sent to make sure that the Indians, who had been outfitted by the company, remembered to trade with it and not with its competitors when spring came. Others were dispatched merely to establish good relations with the natives.

#### Relations Between the Traders and the Natives

The good will of the natives was absolutely necessary not only to enable the traders to obtain their furs, but in order for them to preserve their very lives while living scattered among them, hopelessly outnumbered and completely at their mercy. The pallisaded trading posts, with their bastions and mounted

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41. Journals of Hearne and Turnor, p.535.



guards, were designed largely to intimidate the Indians and were effective only against the short impetuous attacks which were characteristic of the natives. In any long sieges, the posts would almost certainly have been taken. But long sieges were highly unlikely, since they would allow the Indians time to sober up, and to reflect how dependent they had become upon the White man for his goods, and to decide not to destroy their source. With few exceptions, this desire for European goods on the part of the Indians, and the European's desire for the Indians' furs, formed the only basis of "friendship" between the traders and the savages of the Northwest.<sup>42</sup>

To strengthen their hold on the natives, the traders made presents and advanced credits to the more important and reliable of them. For the same purpose, the Hudson's Bay Company in 1807, sent out badges "to be presented to the Chief Indian Officers according to their Rank", gilt ones for chiefs and silver for inferior officers.<sup>43</sup> But far more binding were the ties of marriage, particularly those between the daughters of chiefs and other important Indians, and the practice of both companies of supporting many aged and infirm Indians at their posts. These were usually the dependents of Indians who had gone off to hunt, and of the wives of traders. In the same spirit, the children of the chief Indians were to be admitted to the schools set up

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42. Harmon, Sixteen Years, p.55.

43. HBC Archives, A.6/17, f 114.

by the Hudson's Bay Company for the Halfbreed children of its employees.<sup>44</sup>

#### Relations Based on Need

Although the marriages, the gifts, the caring for of the sick, and other overtures of friendship tended to bring the two peoples together, the fact remained, that essentially the relationship which existed between them was based almost solely upon need. Consequently, relations were closest in the forested areas where mutual need was greatest and weakest on the open plains where it was least. In the forest, a steel axe for cutting wood for fuel, a copper kettle for cooking meat, or a gun for shooting the elusive moose, greatly eased the harsh life of the Indians. On the plains, an axe was not so valuable. Fuel usually consisted of dried buffalo dung, drift wood, or small trees. A kettle would be useful although meat was often dried in the sun, pounded into a powder and mixed with melted fat to make "pemmican" which was eaten uncooked. Guns, too, were less useful. For the plains tribes had devised many satisfactory methods of killing without guns the innumerable buffalo which inhabited their lands. The most common was to drive them into pounds where they could be easily and safely slaughtered with spears, and bows and arrows. Bows and arrows were also easier to handle on horse-back than were the cumbersome muzzle

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44. HBC Archives, A.6/17, f 119-119d.

loading guns of that time. And should the animal have been only wounded by the first shot, there might not have been time to reload before it turned on its attacker. Moreover, the noise of the guns often frightened the buffalo and sometimes stampeded them, greatly endangering the life of the hunter. In contrast, the Indians of the forest hunted on foot. Their chief object was the wary moose, a difficult animal to approach closely enough to kill with a bow and arrow. Since its habits were usually solitary, there was little danger of frightening away other moose in shooting at one of them. Other animals of the forest also tended to live scattered during much of the year, which meant that the tribes who depended upon them also had to scatter themselves thinly and widely. This contrasted sharply with the habits of the plains peoples who were enabled by the vast herds of buffalo to live in relatively large groups. This gave them a greater sense of community than their forest neighbours possessed, and also made them potentially a greater threat to the safety of the fur traders. And the fact that they were less dependent upon the traders, tended to make the plains Indians more reckless in their relations with them.

During the early years of the trade, the Europeans were far more dependent upon the forest tribes who produced furs and some provisions, than they were upon the plains Indians who produced mostly provisions and a few inferior furs. However, as the trade expanded to more and more distant parts of the Northwest, they became increasingly dependent upon the plains tribes for provisions

for the long supply routes. Meanwhile, the demand for wolves and other inferior furs produced by these tribes, fell off as a consequence of the wars with France. Thus the traders became increasingly dependent upon the plains for food, but less so for furs. This shift was reflected in the returns for the Lower Red River Department of the North West Company for the years 1800 to 1808. (See appendix C.)

By 1811, the traders had become so dependent upon the plains Indians for provisions that without them the North West Company, at least, would have had to abandon the most lucrative part of its trade.<sup>45</sup> Yet, if the traders had become vitally dependent upon the Indians for provisions, the Indians had not become dependent upon the traders' goods, for most of their trade was in luxuries, which they could easily do without, like rum, tobacco, and ornaments.

Trade with the forest tribes, in the beginning at least, was mostly in necessities. But instead of being satisfied with the few goods which would have made their lives easier, most of these Indians used the new leisure these articles gave them to hunt for more furs, often merely to provide the means of getting still more furs. Soon, with their acquisitive instincts discovered and developed, they began ruthlessly ransacking their fur lands. As the number of animals was reduced, they became more difficult to

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45. McGillivray, Some Account of the Trade, p.69.



kill, making it still more necessary to obtain the tools of their destruction. And so it went on. Thus the demand for European goods among the forest tribes tended to be cumulative even as the animal population was diminishing. On the plains this was also true, but to a far lesser extent. The number of buffalo had not decreased significantly and, apart from luxuries, there does not seem to have been the same demand for material goods. Collecting horses, often through stealing them, seems to have largely satisfied the acquisitive instinct of these tribes.

In the mad scramble for furs, the ancient skills of hunting were largely forgotten by the forest tribes. Guns almost completely replaced the bow and arrow, and steel traps took the place of the native kinds. The Crees, who had been longest in contact with the whites, admitted that they could no longer live without guns and marvelled at how their ancestors had survived with only bows and arrows since the beaver was wiser, and the bear stronger, than they.<sup>46</sup> The plains Indians, on the other hand, largely retained their traditional methods of hunting, through constant use.

The beaver, because of its stationary habits, became very vulnerable with the introduction of European weapons, particularly the steel trap. By the end of the eighteenth century they had been virtually destroyed in many of the more accessible areas.

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46. Thompson's Narrative, p.113.

David Thompson described how the Ojibwa, and other tribes using steel traps, became very wealthy during the 1790's and lived for a time in a type of fool's paradise. "For several years" he said, "all these Indians were rich, the Women and Children, as well as the Men, were covered with silver brooches, Ear Rings, Wampum, Beads and other trinkets. Their mantles were of fine scarlet cloth, and all was finery and dress. The Canoes of the Furr Traders were loaded with packs of Beaver, the abundance of the article lowered the London prices. Every intelligent Man saw the poverty that would follow the destruction of the Beaver, but there were no Chiefs to controul it; all was perfect liberty and equality. Four years afterwards (1797) almost the whole of these extensive countries were denuded of Beaver, the Natives became poor, and with difficulty procured the first necessaries of life, and in this state they remain, and probably for ever."<sup>47</sup>

The Ojibwa were a forest people. Like other forest tribes they had not only become dependent upon the whites for the necessities of life, but they had become addicted to their luxuries as well. The fact that the women and children shared in this affluent living probably reflected the influence of the women behind the scenes, for although they were in every respect servile to their husbands, they nevertheless exercised considerable control

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47. Thompson's Narrative, pp.205-6.

over them.<sup>48</sup> That the women should share in the rewards of the trade was only just, since they played an essential role in it by preparing all the skins and furs before they left the Northwest, so that they would not spoil on their long journeys to the markets of the world.

Guns, to a certain extent, might also be regarded as luxuries, particularly on the plains where they were not needed for producing the necessities of life. In fact, of so little use were they to the Plains Crees that if they procured one, it was instantly exchanged with an Assiniboine for a horse.<sup>49</sup> However, at that time, the Plains Crees were at peace with their neighbours and probably felt that they could safely afford to remain outside the arms race which then existed in most parts of the Northwest. With the first introduction of firearms, a tribe was given a tremendous advantage in battle over tribes which had not yet received them. Naturally, the unarmed tribes became anxious to enter the trade, in order to obtain the means of protecting themselves. At the same time, the armed tribes did their best to frustrate these efforts. This probably ended with some tribes entering the fur trade sooner than

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48. Referring to the Chipwyans, who treated their women more harshly than most Indians, Mackenzie wrote: "Though the women are as much in the power of the men, as other articles of their property, they are always consulted, and possess a very considerable influence in the traffic with Europeans, and other important concerns." (Mackenzie, Voyages, pp.cxxii-cxxiii.)

49. Coues, New Light, p.513.

they might have done otherwise, but the net result of the arms race was probably damaging to the trade since it encouraged the Indians to go to war, and Indians at war not only had little time to hunt furs, but tended to use up most of their provisions while on the war path, leaving little for trading. Once accustomed to guns, the warrior and hunter seldom returned to the bow and arrow. Guns had to be replaced from time to time and, once in the hands of the Indians, created a steady demand for shot and powder.

### Tobacco

In a similar way, tobacco stimulated a continued demand for more tobacco. Of course, it had been used by the Indians long before the Europeans came to the Northwest. In fact, it had been grown on the plains until the introduction of a superior product by the traders eliminated the demand for it.<sup>50</sup> Brazilian tobacco was the most prized by the natives. It came to the Northwest via Portugal and Great Britain. Tobacco played an important part in most Indian ceremonies when pipes were solemnly passed among those taking part.<sup>51</sup> It was also smoked for pleasure and for allaying hunger during frequent periods of want.

### Alcohol and the Fur Trade

Tobacco was often presented as a gift to the Indians before

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50. Thompson's Narrative, p.365.

51. Duncan McGillivray, The Journals of Duncan McGillivray of the North West Company at Fort George on the Saskatchewan, 1794-5, ed. A.S. Morton, p.47.



trading began in order to establish friendly relations. Rum was given in a similar way - but in a far more cynical spirit for the traders knew well that Indians under the influence of alcohol were easier to bargain with for their furs and provisions than were sober ones.<sup>52</sup> The custom of "giving" the rum to the natives had its origins far back in the French period when the traders were forbidden by their church, under threat of excommunication, to sell liquor to the Indians. Only a painful penance could restore the offender to the suspended rites of the sacrament.<sup>53</sup> It had also been said that the offence carried the penalty of being sent to the galleys as well.<sup>54</sup> In any case, the law which could have been so beneficial to the natives soon had the opposite effect when the traders decided to "give" rather than "sell" the liquor to them.<sup>55</sup> With the Indians, the taste for rum seemed to be an acquired one, and while they would not want to buy it, initially at least, they were quite happy to receive it as a gift. But once the taste was acquired, they were in the hands of the traders. "The love of Rum" said Duncan McGillivray, "is their first inducement to industry; they undergo every hardship and fatigue to procure a Skinfull of this delicious beverage, and when a Nation becomes addicted to drinking, it affords a strong presumption that they will

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52. La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, *Travels in Canada*, 113.

53. Mackenzie, *Voyages*, p.vi.

54. La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, *Travels in Canada*, 113.

55. *Ibid.*

soon become excellent hunters."<sup>56</sup>

Although still given away in 1811, liquor had been, for many years, sold as well. In fact, the Hudson's Bay Company (not being greatly concerned with the possibility of excommunication) had always sold it. In justice, however, it must be pointed out that during the quiet years before competition became fierce, liquor was used sparingly. "To prevent the Natives from hurting themselves with brandy and strong water;" wrote Andrew Graham, who had traded many years on the bay before retiring in 1775. "We at none of the settlements exchanges that commodity for any furs but the following viz. Martins, Cats, Foxes coloured, Wolves and Bears; this had been the case from the time the Company had the charter, and wisely done. If the Natives were to receive brandy for whatever kind of furs they bring down, they would trade little or nothing else; which would end in their ruin and the Company's affairs."<sup>57</sup> Graham's retirement coincided with the establishment of the Company's first inland post. From then on, it met its opposition face to face, and any scruples it had had about selling liquor to the Indians largely disappeared in the resulting mad scramble for furs and provisions. On many occasions, the English company had also found that liquor was very useful in breaking down the Indians' reluctance to do what it wanted them to do; a

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56. McGillivray, *The Journey of Duncan McGillivray*, p.47.

57. HBC Archives, E.2/8, Andrew Graham's "Observations on Hudson's Bay," ff 13d-14.

few grogs would soon make them part with their provisions, act as guides, or paddle canoes.<sup>58</sup> From the Indian point of view, holding out long enough usually meant getting what they wanted - rum. In areas where several posts were competing, the same applied in trading furs. If one post was unwilling or unable to supply liquor, another was. The Indians had young men constantly going from post to post to learn who was trading what.<sup>59</sup>

The demand for liquor varied from tribe to tribe. The Ojibwa had the reputation for being the worst drunkards in the Northwest, and the Chipewyans of being among the most sober.<sup>60</sup> Other tribes filled the spectrum between them. The more accustomed a tribe had become to drink, the stronger was the mixture sold to them. For the Blackfeet, who had been trading for a relatively short time, a nine-gallon keg contained only four or five quarts of high wine mixed with water. But for the western Crees and Assiniboines six quarts of high wine were added, and for the dipsomaniac Ojibways, eight or even nine quarts.<sup>61</sup>

Every trader was well aware that liquor was ruining the natives. He also knew that most of the quarrels between the natives and the whites, and among the natives themselves, were precipitated by

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58. Journals of Hearne and Turnor, p.159.  
Cumberland and Hudson House Journals, I, pp.5, 80.  
Journey to the Northern Ocean, p.175.

59. Journals of Hearne and Turnor, p.223.

60. Ibid., p.452.

61. Coues, New Light, p.542.

alcohol.<sup>62</sup> But as long as competition persisted he, and all his fellow traders, were powerless to stop the traffic in it even if they had wanted to. However, the officials of the North West Company, at least, regarded rum as an absolutely necessary ingredient of the trade. In a petition presented by the company in 1808, in opposition to a Bill prohibiting the use of liquor which was being brought before the British parliament by Wilberforce and other reformers, it was stated that the company would be compelled to abandon three-quarters of its trading territory if it could not give liquor to the plains Indians on whom it depended for food. Now that Louisiana was part of the United States, they pointed out, the Americans (who would not be affected by the prohibition) would be able to monopolize this trade.<sup>63</sup>

During the next three years, prohibition continued to be discussed but by the end of 1811, still no legislation had been passed. At the annual meeting of the North West Company at Fort William in July of that year, the amount of liquor used in all of the trade carried on by the company was examined "in order to ascertain the least possible quantity that might be made to Answer should the Saints in Parliament - in their mistaken notions of Philanthropy - persist in the Intention of abolishing the use of that Article wholely in the Trade".<sup>64</sup> It was generally agreed

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62. Coues, *New Light*, pp.209, 723.

63. Davidson, *North West Company*, p.224.

64. W. Stewart Wallace, ed., *Documents Relating to the North West Company*, p.268.



that half of the 10,000 gallons then used each year might serve the trade were "it found advisable to make any offer of that kind to Parliament, in order to prevent its total prohibition".<sup>65</sup>

The 10,000 gallons, itself, represented a considerable drop in the amount of rum and spirits used by the North West Company from the days when it was competing with the XY Company as well as with the Hudson's Bay Company. From 1793 to 1798, when there was relatively little competition from Canada, it expended an average of 9,600 gallons of rum and spirits annually. With the entry of the XY Company into the field, the figure began to rise until over 16,000 gallons were used in 1803. The XY Company added another 5,000 gallons to the trade making a total of well over 20,000 gallons in 1803, the peak year. After the union of the two companies in 1804, the figure dropped sharply - averaging 10,700 gallons annually for the period 1805-8.<sup>66</sup> All of these figures refer to the amounts used in the whole of the territories of the North West Company, from the Straits of Belle Isle to Great Bear Lake. Because the alcoholic strengths of the mixtures are not known, the figures are useful primarily for comparative purposes. No similar figures are available for the Hudson's Bay Company.

At least part of the reduction in the amount of spirits used

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65. Wallace, ed., Documents Relating to the North West Company, pp.268-9.

66. McGillivray, Some Account of the Trade, p.62.

was likely due to the high principles of some of the traders. David Thompson successfully defied his partners by refusing to allow alcohol west of the Rockies. As late as 1811, thanks to his efforts and the absence of competition, New Caledonia was still without drunken Indians.<sup>67</sup> In a similar spirit, William Auld, superintendent of the Hudson's Bay Company's Northern Department wrote to his principal traders in 1810 to be as "sparing" as possible in the use of liquor.<sup>68</sup>

Both Auld and Thompson were all too familiar with "the sad sight of drunkenness, and its many evils"<sup>69</sup> which resulted from the trading of spirits to the Indians. They also knew it was one of the main reasons underlying the decay of relations between the Indians and the whites. Early encounters between the two peoples had been cordial almost without exception for, as Daniel Harmon put it "all Savages pride themselves in being hospitable to Strangers until they have long been acquainted with Civilized People, when they adopt the manners and customs of the latter, but in many respects they are by no means the gainers!"<sup>70</sup> As the two peoples got to know one another better, disputes often broke out (frequently when the Indians were heated by drink) over such things as women, horses, or dissatisfaction with the results

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67. Thompson's Narrative, pp.lvii-lviii.

68. HBC Archives, B.42/b/53, f 3d.

69. Thompson's Narrative, p.lvii.

70. Harmon, Sixteen Years, p.73.

of the trade.

### Trading With the Natives

The low standard of many of the goods traded contributed to the dissatisfaction of the natives. Their poor quality was candidly described in 1811 in Guthrie's System of Modern Geography. "The commodities we [Great Britain] exchange with the Indians for their skins and furs, are all manufactured in Britain; and as the Indians are not very nice in their choice, those things are sent of which we have great plenty, and which, in the mercantile phrase, are drugs with us. Though the workmanship too happens to be in many respects so deficient, that no civilized people would take it off our hands, it may be admired among the Indians . . ."71 In the early days of the trade (when the northern tribes still cut up their guns to make knives and chissels)72 it is true that the Indians were "not very nice in their choice" of trade goods. But by 1811, most tribes had had sufficient experience to know what they wanted. This was well illustrated by the speeches made by the leaders of the bands of Indians when they came to the factories to trade which were generally to the following purport:

"You told me last year to bring many Indians to trade, which I promised to do; you see I have not lied; here are a great many young men come with me; use them kindly, I say; let them trade good goods; let them trade good goods, I say! We lived hard last winter and hungry, the powder being short measure and bad; being

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71. William Guthrie, A System of Modern Geography, p.872.

72. W. Coats, The Geography of Hudson's Bay, John Barrow, ed., p.33.

short measure and bad, I say! Tell your servants to fill the measure, and not to put their thumbs within the brim; take pity on us, take pity on us, I say! We paddle a long way to see you; we love the English. Let us trade good black tobacco, moist and hard twisted; let us see it before it is opened. Take pity on us; take pity on us, I say! The guns are bad, let us trade light guns, small in the hand, and well shaped, with locks that will not freeze in the winter, and red gun cases. Let the young men have more than measure of tobacco; cheap kettles, thick, and high. Give us good measure of cloth; let us see the old measure; do you mind me? The young men loves you, by coming so far to see you; take pity, take pity, I say; and give them good goods; they like to dress and be fine. Do you understand me?

As soon as the Captain has finished his speech, he with his followers, proceed to look at the guns and tobacco; the former they examine with the most minute attention. When this is over they trade their furs promiscuously . . ."73

There were many complaints about the poor quality of the guns sent out which frequently burst when fired because the barrels were too thin.<sup>74</sup> The thin barrels were probably intended for a light weapon which would be relatively easy to carry over long distances<sup>75</sup> although false economy and even fraud on the part of the manufacturer were probably factors as well. Fraud was also suspected in other goods offered to the Indians - not to mention the supplies sent out for the use of the traders, themselves.<sup>76</sup> Hatchets supplied to Cumberland, for example, were so poor that during the winter of 1780 the men had to "labour hard to keep the house in firing."<sup>77</sup>

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73. Edward Umfreville, Present State of Hudson's Bay pp.31-2.

74. Hearne, Journey to the Northern Ocean, p.36.  
Journals of Hearne and Turnor, pp.258, 375, etc.

75. Hearne, Journey to the Northern Ocean, p.36.

76. Cumberland and Hudson House Journals, Vol.II, pp.67, 72.  
Journals of Hearne and Turnor, p.359.

77. Cumberland and Hudson House Journals, II, p.85.



The main trouble with these and other edge tools was that the intense cold made them brittle. After receiving many complaints the Governor and Committee, in 1808, gave instructions that when this happened, the tools "may be softened by Fire and tempered so as to endure any degree of cold whatever," and added that the blacksmith and armourer at the factories could "easily remedy this defect when it occurs."<sup>78</sup>

The war in Europe was at least partly responsible for the faulty tools, inferior trading goods, and shortages. In 1809, for instance, as a direct result of the war, little merchandise was received on Hudson Bay, but fortunately there was a considerable supply on hand from the previous years.<sup>79</sup>

The war also depressed the fur markets and, indeed, there was little, if any, demand for several types of furs. None of these and other effects of the war could be explained to the Indians who had never understood what the whites had done with so many furs anyway, let alone why they were now so inconsistent in their demands for them.

To make bartering easier for the natives to understand, the traders early adopted the "beaver" as the basic unit of barter. All other furs bore a value in relation to it.<sup>80</sup> Thus, depending on its value in the London market, a given fur might be worth three

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78. HBC Archives, B.198/c/1, f 3d.

79. HBC Archives, B.42/b/52, f 14.

80. Hearne, Journey to the Northern Ocean, pp.114-5.

beaver or it might be worth only a half beaver. Until 1810, when sterling was adopted, the Hudson's Bay Company had also kept its books in "made beaver", as the unit was commonly expressed. However, beaver continued to be used when trading with the Indians "because they don't understand any thing of money."<sup>81</sup> In the Northwest, itself, competition among the traders affected the prices offered for the furs.<sup>82</sup> This was clearly understood by the Indians who often carried their furs from post to post looking for the best price.

#### Indian Middlemen

The Indians were hard bargainers - not only with the whites but among themselves as well. Tribes well placed geographically often succeeded in becoming "middlemen" and conducted a profitable trade between the posts and the more distant tribes. Their profits ranged up to one thousand per cent.<sup>83</sup> However, in some cases at least, this was not really exorbitant since the "carriers", as the middlemen were called, often ran the risk of death by starvation, or at the hands of their enemies, in carrying the goods and furs between the factory and the distant lands of their customers.<sup>84</sup> Thus, the Indians who arrived at the factories were not necessarily the same Indians who had trapped the furs which they carried or, indeed, even of the same tribe. Nor was the Indian in charge of the group necessarily their leader when in their homeland. Far

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81. HBC Archives, B.141a/4, f 3.

82. HBC Archives, A.11/118, f 10d.

83. Hearne, Journey to the Northern Ocean, p.114.

84. Ibid., p.51.

more likely, he was a nonentity who had succeeded in gathering together his companions on the way down to the post. The more he could gather around himself, the greater was his prestige, and hence his bargaining power at the factory. While there, it was his disagreeable duty not only to speak for his companions, but to beg for their friends and relations, and even for those whom they feared.<sup>85</sup> The arrival of one of the most famous leaders in the Northwest, "Captain" Matonabee, at Fort Prince of Wales in 1776 was astutely described by Samuel Hearne who was then in charge of the fort:

"When the usual ceremonies had passed, I dressed him out as a Captain of the first rank, and also clothed his six wives from top to toe: after which that is to say, during his stay at the Factory, which was ten days, he begged seven lieutenants' coats, fifteen common coats, eighteen hats, eighteen shirts, eight guns, one hundred and forty pounds weight of gunpowder, with shot, ball, and flints in proportion; together with many hatchets, ice chissels, files, bayonets, knives, and a great quantity of tobacco, cloth, blankets, combs, looking-glasses, stockings, handkerchiefs, etc., besides numberless small articles, such as awls, needles, paint, steels, etc., in all to the amount of upwards of seven hundred beaver in the way of trade, to give away among his followers. This was exclusive of his own present, which consisted of a variety of goods to the value of four hundred beaver more. But the most extraordinary of his demands was twelve pounds of powder, twenty-eight pounds of shot and ball four pounds of tobacco, some articles of clothing, and several pieces of iron-work, etc., to give two men who had hauled his tent and other lumber the preceding Winter. This demand was so very unreasonable, that I made some scruple, or at least hesitated to comply with it, hinting that he was the person who ought to satisfy those men for their services; but I was soon answered, that he did not expect to have been denied such a trifle as that was; and for the future he would carry his goods where he could get his own price for them. On my asking him where that was? he replied, in a very insolent tone, "To the Canadian Traders."<sup>86</sup>

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85. Hearne, Journey to the Northern Ocean, p.186.  
Umfreville, Present State, pp.28-9.

86. Hearne, Journey to the Northern Ocean, p.187.

### Indian Frauds

Dissatisfied bands transferred their trade to competing posts without the slightest compunction. Often they did so to get out of paying for goods which had been advanced to them on credit. In fact, they were not above travelling to another post of the same company to escape from their debts, and some were even bold enough to disguise themselves and change their names, and appear at the same post where they were owing.<sup>87</sup> With a change of governor at Churchill (and probably elsewhere as well) all outstanding debts were lost, for the Indians always declared before the new governor (and they brought plenty of witnesses to support them) that their debts had been paid long before and that it had been forgotten to remove their names from the book.<sup>88</sup>

During their stay at the posts, the Indians had to be watched constantly to prevent them from stealing - particularly things made from metal which could be manufactured into useful objects. Iron hoops, small bolts, spikes and carpenter's tools were all coveted by them - either for their own personal use or for sale to other Indians who did not make the journey to the posts to trade.<sup>89</sup> When posts were left unoccupied they were, of course, completely open to the depredations of the natives. But on at least one occasion, the Indians failed to loot an empty cabin although many

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87. Hearne, *Journey to the Northern Ocean*, p.199.

88. *Ibid.*,

89. *Ibid.*, p.213.



had passed near it. It belonged to the Canadians who had left some 900 pounds of goods in it. unguarded except by a wooden image, about the size of a small child, placed over the house on a red painted pole. Not a single Indian dared go near the place for fear that the Ben coz zy, as they called the image, should tell the Canadians.<sup>90</sup>

When a band of Indians approached a fort to trade, it was customary for them to send forward a few young men to announce their arrival and to procure a few small gifts - such as tobacco, paint, and powder - in accordance with a long standing practice introduced by the Canadian traders.<sup>91</sup> When they had come to within a few yards of the gate, the Indians saluted the traders with several discharges of their guns. This was answered by hoisting a flag and firing a few guns. On entering the house, the Indians were disarmed, treated to a few drams and a bit of tobacco. The pipe was then passed for some time and then the Indians related their news with great deliberation and ceremony relaxing from their usual taciturnity in proportion to the amount of rum they had drunk until at length their voices were drowned in a general clamour. After the lodges had been put up by the women, a gift of rum was made to the Indians; its size depending upon the amount of competition in the area and upon the importance of the leaders and of the nations concerned. Serious drinking then began. When it had at last subsided, trading would commence.<sup>92</sup>

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90. Journals of Hearne and Turnor, pp.553-4.

91. Cumberland and Hudson House Journals, II, pp.71, 77-78.

92. McGillivray, The Journal of Duncan McGillivray, p.30.

## Chapter IV

### TRANSPORTATION AND COMMUNICATION\*

The world had never before seen anything quite like the remarkable system of transportation and communication which had been developed by the fur trade in the Northwest. It had been made possible by the wonderful network of rivers and lakes which characterized most of the northern half of North America, and was based on the brilliant water-craft (and techniques for using them) which had been evolved over the centuries by the natives. Most important of these was the birch-bark canoe. It alone allowed the traders to penetrate to the most distant corners of the fur lands. But goods sent by canoe were not carried cheaply. In fact, so high were the costs that it was not economic to transport anything but goods of small bulk and weight in proportion to their value. Furs fitted this category admirably and for many years had been virtually the only export of the Northwest. From time to time, other potential exports had been investigated but as late as 1811, only furs were found to be able to bear the high cost of transportation.

#### Shipping into Hudson Bay

The goods brought into the Indian country in exchange for the furs also had to bear the high transportation costs. Consequently they tended to be chosen so as to yield the maximum amount of

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\* See figure 2.

furs and provisions for the least possible size and bulk. Strong rum and high wines (which were nearly always diluted with water before trading), tobacco, various small items of manufacture, and other luxuries were found to be most practicable. All of these goods entered the Northwest either via Hudson Bay or via the Saint Lawrence River and Great Lakes. The Hudson's Bay Company supplied its posts directly from London by means of two annual supply ships. One was bound for the "Bottom of the Bay" and the other for the Northwest. It was usually about the middle of August when the two ships entered Hudson Strait. In picking their way through the tricky, ice-choked, island-strewn strait, they tried to keep as close together as possible in order to be ready to render mutual assistance should any mishap occur. There were no charts to guide them for, in spite of having used the strait for nearly a century and a half, the company had still not made a survey of it.<sup>1</sup> The one bound for the Northwest usually sailed first to Churchill and then on to York, probably in order to take advantage of the Northwesterly winds which prevailed at that time of the year.<sup>2</sup> But in 1811, the company ship, the Eddystone, by-passed Churchill and sailed directly for York Factory

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1. Miles Macdonell to Lord Selkirk, York Factory, 1 October 1811, Report on the Canadian Archives, 1886, p.cxciii.
  2. According to Edward Umfreville, La Perouse (1782) attacked Fort Prince of Wales [Churchill] before going on to York Fort "on account of its Northern situation, and the general prevalency of winds from that quarter, thinking to take advantage of them in going to the Southward ... " Edward Umfreville, The Present State of Hudson's Bay, p.69.

where it finally arrived on 27 September, the latest arrival on record, after the longest voyage ever, two months from Stornoway.<sup>3</sup> Another ship, the Edward and Ann, had arrived two days earlier and was riding at anchor in "five fathom hole" at the mouth of the Hayes River, near the factory. The Eddystone, after exchanging the customary salutes with the factory, tied up beside her.<sup>4</sup> The Edward and Ann was a newcomer to the bay. She had been chartered<sup>5</sup> that season to provide the extra space necessary for sending a number of agricultural settlers and their effects to the Northwest. They were destined for the banks of the Red River where they would take up land in the vast tract which had been recently granted by the company to Lord Selkirk for the purpose of founding a colony. The colony would be the first in the Northwest. Near the factory the bay was very shallow. Between every tide the waters retreated towards the horizon, exposing vast areas of glistening mud flats. Only in five fathom hole did sufficient water remain for keeping the ships afloat, and so there they had to remain throughout their short stay at the factory. On every tide the tenders hastened to their sides to unload the supplies and goods of the old world and replace them with those of the new. Ship-time was always a time of confusion. There was so much to be done and so little time to do it. But with the extra ship and

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3. Macdonell to Selkirk, York Fort, 1 October 1811, Report on the Canadian Archives, 1886, p.cxcii.

4. HBC Archives, C.1/295, Eddystone log, f 46.

5. HBC Archives, Mss. "Ships on HBC Business Sailing between England and York Fort 1670-1900", f 35.



the lateness of the season, probably never before had there been such chaos as in 1811. Ice was already forming along the shores and snow was being whipped in on the northwest gale.<sup>6</sup> In the ensuing panic, goods for the various factories were landed "promiscuously" from the tenders onto the narrow wharf near the factory, only to get mixed up with the goods destined for the ships.<sup>7</sup>

Until 1807, when a long flat launch was substituted for the tenders, similar landing facilities existed at Churchill. The launch was some 28 feet long, from 14 to 16 feet wide and 3½ feet deep, and could carry about a third or two-fifths of the ship's cargo at one time. To enable the goods to be easily transferred to and from the ship, there was a crane at one end of the launch, while its low decks allowed the goods to be easily rolled ashore, after it had been floated in on the tide to a place near the store room of the factory.<sup>8</sup> The launch worked very well and eliminated the need for building a new jetty which would have had to have been 120 yards long and 10 feet wide.<sup>9</sup>

The furs were put on board the Eddystone on 5 October. By then so much ice was drifting about the ship that it was decided to leave without further delay. During the next 24 hours the

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6. HBC Archives, C.1/295, Eddystone log, ff 46-46d, 47.

7. Macdonell to Selkirk, York Factory, 5 October 1811, Report on the Canadian Archives, 1886, p.cxcvii.

8. HBC Archives, B.42a/132, f 18 d.

9. Ibid.

ship was put in order, and, accompanied by the Edward and Ann, sailed on the 26th at noon.<sup>10</sup> So hurried was the departure, that the Edward and Ann left without having completely unloaded her cargo,<sup>11</sup> while the Eddystone abandoned her ebb anchor and 75 fathoms of cable.<sup>12</sup>

The Edward and Ann had been scheduled on her return journey to call at Moose Factory at the bottom of the bay to pick up timber<sup>13</sup> for the British markets where supplies were short as a result of the Napoleonic blockade.<sup>14</sup> However, because of her late arrival at York, and the menacing appearance of the season, the ship returned directly to England with the Eddystone.<sup>15</sup>

#### Vessels in Use on Hudson Bay

The Edward and Ann was a "miserably manned" ship. This, together with a shortage of tenders at York, was largely responsible for her returning to England with part of her outward cargo still on board.<sup>16</sup> The factory had a schooner which was used as a tender but no longboat<sup>17</sup> while the Eddystone had on

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10. HBC Archives, C.1/295, Eddystone log, f 47.

11. HBC Archives, A.11/118, f 33.

12. HBC Archives, C.1/295, Eddystone log, f 47.

13. HBC Archives, Mss. "Ships on HBC Business Sailing between England and York Fort 1670-1900", f 35.

14. This essay into the timber industry was an attempt by the company to bolster its financial position at a time when the fur markets were depressed. It was also the harbinger of a trading pattern which became firmly established during the nineteenth century - immigrants on the outward journey, lumber on the return.

15. Ibid.

16. HBC Archives, A.11/118, f 33.

17. Ibid.

board both a longboat and a yawl which were used in unloading her.<sup>18</sup> Apparently no similar craft were carried by the Edward and Ann. The factory schooner was probably the Mainwaring, a vessel of 80 tons which had been built at Ipswich in 1807.<sup>19</sup> Her normal function would have been to supply Fort Severn, a dependency of York Factory, and to conduct other interpost business along the bay. The Mainwaring had probably replaced the Beaver, a brig which for many years had been stationed at York Factory. Built as a sloop in London in 1780, the Beaver had been converted to a brig in 1789 before being sent on an exploratory expedition to the northern part of Hudson Bay in 1791 and 1792. In 1811, she was probably in service at Moose Factory.<sup>20</sup> There was also at least one other small vessel in use along the bay, the Churchill sloop. She was used in the Eskimo trade along the coast north of Churchill.<sup>21</sup>

#### Shipping into Lake Superior

The North West Company also obtained most of its supplies from England. But unlike the Hudson's Bay Company, it was unable to have them shipped directly from London to its posts in the Northwest. Instead, they were first sent to Montreal, where they were sorted and made up into packages of 90 pounds, before

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18. HBC Archives, C.1/295, Eddystone log, ff 46-7.

19. HBC Archives, Mss. "Ships on HBC Business Sailing between England and York Fort, 1670-1900", f 21.

20. Ibid, f 20.

21. Hearne, Journey to the Northern Ocean, pp.217-8.

being sent on to Fort William, the North West Company's port of entry into the Northwest, more than a thousand miles away. The extra journey considerably increased the cost of the goods in the Northwest. In 1804, for example, an average of 23 per cent was added to their value at Montreal.<sup>22</sup>

The goods and supplies reached Fort William from Montreal either via the Ottawa River, Lake Nipissing, Georgian Bay and Lake Superior, or via the Saint Lawrence and lakes Ontario, Erie, Huron and Superior. The Ottawa route was the more used. It was reckoned to be 100 miles shorter than the other but its chief advantage was the comparative absence of fog and wind. This meant that starting dates and dates of arrival could be accurately set in advance. This was of the utmost importance to the Montreal agents who had to have their furs from the interior at a precise period and ready to ship from the St. Lawrence before it froze over.<sup>23</sup> Only six weeks were required for the upward journey<sup>24</sup> and probably even less time was needed for the downward trip when the current of the Ottawa would greatly shorten the last 250 miles to Montreal. A grave disadvantage of the Ottawa route was its 36 portages<sup>25</sup> because they restricted its use to light craft which could be easily carried. However, the

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22. Wayne Edson Stevens, *The Northwest Fur-trade, 1763-1800*, p.151.

23. La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, *Travels in Canada*, p.113.

24. *Ibid.*, p.112.

25. *Ibid.*



French early developed a vessel par excellence for this route. They called it the "canot-du-maitre". It was merely an adaptation of the brilliantly designed Algonkian canoe which consisted fundamentally of a light cedar frame covered with birch bark. The French canoe, considerably larger than its native prototype, was approximately 36 feet long and about six feet wide in the middle.<sup>26</sup> Possibly the inspiration for the large craft came from the Ojibwa, an Algonkian tribe who built canoes which could carry as many as twelve men.<sup>27</sup>

In the bottom of their canoes, the Canadians laid four poles, side by side. These were nearly as long as the canoe itself and about three or four inches in diameter at their thickest end. On this "grand-perch", as the poles were called, the cargo was arranged with great care so that nothing was allowed to press against the bare unprotected sides of the canoe.<sup>28</sup> For ease in handling, the cargo was made up into packages of ninety pounds each. According to Landmann, the canoes usually carried a weight of five tons. This included sufficient provisions to support ten men for from twenty to twenty-two days.<sup>29</sup> Each canoe was provided with a mast and a lug-sail. There was also a ten-foot setting pole for each man. These were used to assist in towing

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26. George Thomas Landmann, *Adventures and Recollections of Colonel Landmann, late of the Corps of Royal Engineers*, p.303.

27. Masson, *Les Bourgeois*, II, p.312.

28. Landmann, *Adventures and Recollections*, p.304.

29. *Ibid.*

the canoe up the rapids.<sup>30</sup> The eight or ten canoemen<sup>31</sup> had to bring along their own paddles and camp kettles, but each canoe was supplied with a few towing lines, a bundle of watap (roots of the pine tree for stitching up any seams which might burst), a parcel of resinous gum for patching leaky seams, and a piece of birch bark for repairing holes. There was also a hatchet, crooked knife, and a few other indispensable articles.<sup>32</sup>

The canoes were built at Trois Rivières and were brought up the Saint Lawrence to Lachine, nine miles above Montreal, as early in the spring as the departing ice would allow.<sup>33</sup> The reason they were taken to Lachine instead of to Montreal was because the very shallow rapids, which stretched for several miles immediately above the city, could only be navigated by the canoes when they were empty. The fully loaded canoes rode very low in the water, with the gunwales only six inches above the surface.<sup>34</sup> The goods and supplies for the Northwest were sent from Montreal to Lachine by road.<sup>35</sup> The carts were driven on the right side of the road in accordance with the custom in Canada. To the eye

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30. Landmann, *Adventures and Recollections*, p.304.

31. Mackenzie, *Voyages*, p.xxvii.

32. Landmann, *Adventures and Recollections*, p.306.

33. John Long. *John Long's Voyages and Travels in the Years 1768-1788*, ed. M.M. Quaife, p.50.

34. Mackenzie, *Voyages*, p.xxix.

35. Alexander Henry, the elder, *Travels and Adventures*, 1809 edition, pp.15-16.

of an Englishman, it presented "a very awkward appearance".<sup>36</sup>

### The Ottawa Route

Before leaving Lachine, the heavily-laden canoes were divided into brigades. The size of a brigade seems to have varied considerably. In 1761,<sup>37</sup> for example, it consisted of only three or four canoes, while in 1800,<sup>38</sup> it was made up of ten. Each brigade was in charge of one or two guides, or pilots, whose duty was not only to point out the best way to steer, but to take command of the men and to be responsible for the goods carried as well.<sup>39</sup> Shortly after departing from Lachine, the canoes reached the first obstacle to navigation, the rapids at Sainte-Anne, which were considered to mark the beginning proper of the long journey to the Northwest. Here the voyageurs took communion in the little Roman Catholic Church, dedicated to Saint Ann, the patroness of the Canadians in all their travels by water.<sup>40</sup>

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36. (John Lambert in *Early Travellers*, ed. G.M. Craig, p.33.)  
One English visitor, John Lambert, who was in Canada from 1806 to 1808, speculated on the origin of the custom. "I have observed", he wrote, "that in the winter season the driver frequently jumps out of the cariole on the right side, in order to prevent it from upsetting in places where the road is narrow and the snow uneven; this may possibly have given rise to their driving on the right side of the road, though I think the same thing might be accomplished as easily on the left!" Lambert added that the custom had by then been made law. - *ibid.*

37. Henry, the elder, *Travels and Adventures*, 1809 edition, p.14.

38. Harmon, *Sixteen Years*, p.11.

39. Henry, the elder, *Travels and Adventures*, 1809 edition, p.14;  
Harmon, *Sixteen Years*, p.11.

40. Henry, the elder, *Travels and Adventures*, 1809 edition, p.16.

Another custom observed on arriving at Sainte-Anne was the distributing of a gallon of rum to each canoeman for consumption during the journey. Moreover, it was also the custom to drink the rum on the spot so that saint, priest, and the relatives left behind were soon forgotten.<sup>41</sup> The next day, the carefree Canadians, somewhat the worse for wear, piled into their canoes and to the rhythm of a song left behind them the cares of civilization as they disappeared around the sweeping bend and into the Indian country. Before they reached Georgian Bay about 25 days later,<sup>42</sup> there were 35<sup>43</sup> back-breaking portages to cope with. But from there to Fort William, it was not necessary to again remove the canoes from the water. The only remaining obstacle to navigation, the Sault-Ste.-Marie, was now by-passed by a small set of locks built by the North West Company especially for its large canoes.<sup>44</sup>

The canoes from Lachine left the Ottawa River at Mattawa and proceeded to Georgian Bay by way of Lake Nipissing and French River.<sup>45</sup> At the mouth of French River they raised their sails and, if the winds were right, passed quickly through Georgian Bay and the North Channel to Saint Joseph Island. Here the North West

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41. Henry, the elder, *Travels and Adventures*, 1809 edition, pp.16-17.  
Harmon, *Sixteen Years*, p.12.

42. Henry, the elder, *Travels and Adventures*, 1809 edition, pp. 16-22;  
Harmon, *Sixteen Years*, pp.11-16.

43. La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, *Travels in Canada*, p.112.

44. Harmon, *Sixteen Years*, p.18.

45. *Ibid.*, pp.11-16; Henry, the elder, *Travels and Adventures*, 1809 edition, pp.16-22; Mackenzie, *Voyages*, pp.xxx-xxxvi.

Company had had a post since 1783. From 1796, its importance was greatly enhanced by the presence of a military post. The fort had been established by the British to replace their post at Michilimackinac [Mackinac] which had been turned over to the Americans.<sup>46</sup> The new fort was beautifully situated on a rise of ground and, since the soil was good, had a promising future.<sup>47</sup> It was the most westerly military position in the country.<sup>48</sup>

There were not many furs in this part of the country and consequently the local Indians were very poor.<sup>49</sup> Some of them, however, managed to enter the trade by building canoes to sell to the North West Company, and Saint Joseph Island became an important source not only of the large Montreal canoes but also of the smaller ones used in the Northwest, itself.<sup>50</sup> The area was rich in the necessary materials<sup>51</sup> and its natives were of the Ojibwa tribe, a people noted for their skill in making canoes.<sup>52</sup> All of the canoes were used only one season.<sup>53</sup> The reason a source of supply was needed at the western end of the route, as well as

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46. Harmon, *Sixteen Years*, p.18.

47. *Ibid.*

48. Mackenzie, *Voyages*, p.xxxvii.

49. *Ibid.*

50. Harmon, *Sixteen Years*, p.18.

51. Thompson's *Narrative*, p.298.

52. Masson, *Les Bourgeois*, II, p.312.

53. La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, p.112.



at the eastern, was because furs were more bulky than the goods traded for them, and consequently more canoes were required for the downward journey than for the upward one. Moreover, a considerable amount of trading goods (as well as supplies) came by boat and vessel by way of the Great Lakes,<sup>54</sup> while most of the furs were sent down to Montreal via the Ottawa route.<sup>55</sup>

#### The Great Lakes Route

It was cheaper to send goods by way of the Saint Lawrence and the lakes than by the Ottawa route, but it entailed greater risks and, because of the time involved and the shortness of the season, it was not possible to complete the journey in one season. To reach the Northwest in time to catch the brigades going into the interior, the supplies had to leave Montreal the previous autumn.<sup>56</sup> The goods went by boat from Montreal to Kingston where they were put on a vessel bound for Niagara.<sup>57</sup> Near Queenston, where additional supplies were sometimes picked up,<sup>58</sup> the goods were removed from the vessel for the portage around Niagara Falls. They were first carried ten miles by land and then at Chipewa Creek, a tributary of the Niagara River, put into boats which took them the remainder of the way to Lake Erie where they were

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54. Mackenzie, *Voyages*, p.xxxix.

55. John Macdonnell in *Five Fur-Traders of the Northwest*, ed. Charles M. Gates, p.94.

56. Mackenzie, *Voyages*, p.xxxix.

57. *Ibid.*

58. *Documents Relating to the North West Company*, ed. W.S. Wallace, p.263.

again put into a vessel. This vessel carried them the rest of the way to Sault-Ste.-Marie, possibly with stops for goods and supplies at Detroit, where the company got much of its flour and Indian corn, or at Mackinac, where it obtained maple sugar, tallow, gum and other goods.<sup>59</sup> Some of the Detroit and Mackinac goods were deposited at Saint Joseph Island along with part of the Montreal cargo, while the rest went through with the vessel to Sault-Ste.-Marie.

#### Vessels on Lake Superior

At Sault-Sainte-Marie the vessels tied up within 300 yards of the quay belonging to the North West Company's establishment there. It was built on the north side of the falls and consisted of several stores for the Montreal goods and a number of houses. There was also a sawmill, apparently driven by the waters of the Sault.<sup>60</sup> It was undoubtedly lumber from this mill which was used in building the 90 ton schooner Recovery which plied between the Sault and Fort William in 1811.<sup>61</sup> A short distance above the Sault post was Pointe-aux-Pins. Here Harmon saw a predecessor of the Recovery in 1800.<sup>62</sup> It was probably the Otter which had been built at Pointe-aux-Pins in 1793 to replace the Athabaska which had then been floated down the falls for use

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59. Mackenzie, Voyages, p.xxxix.

60. Masson, Les Bourgeois, II, p.145.

61. The Beaver, December, 1934, p.29.

62. Harmon, Sixteen Years, p.19.

on the lower lakes.<sup>63</sup> Apparently, the Lake Superior vessels did not actually call at the Sault but terminated their voyage at Pointe-aux-Pins. According to Harmon, they made four journeys per season between the Points and the Grand Portage. The post at Grand Portage was 35 miles south of Fort William, and, until replaced by Fort William in 1802-3, was for many years the North West Company's port of entry into the Northwest. Unlike Fort William, where the schooner tied up at the wharf beside the factory,<sup>64</sup> the post at Grand Portage had been located on the edge of a very shallow part of the lake, making it necessary for the vessels to anchor nearly a mile off shore.<sup>65</sup>

The Lake Superior schooner seemed to function primarily as the last link in the lake transportation system from Montreal. At least, its operations did not appear to be closely coordinated with the activities of the brigades from Lachine, since the canoes went right through to Fort William instead of terminating their journey at the Sault. As on the Ottawa route, the canoes, which depended mainly on paddling, were probably considered to be more reliable than the schooner. The huge lake was subject to severe storms and dense fogs.<sup>66</sup> The light canoes were more dependable under these conditions for, unlike the schooner, they

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63. The Beaver, December, 1934, p.29.

64. Gabriel Franchere, Narrative of a Voyage to the Northwest Coast of America in the Years 1811, 1812, 1813 and 1814, ed. R.G. Thwaites, pp.387-8.

65. Davidson, North West Company, p.213.

66. Masson, Les Bourgeois, II, p.307.

could always be removed from the water during a storm and, in all but the densest fogs, could pick their ways along the coast in places where the schooner would be in danger of running aground. An added advantage of the canoes over the schooner, during the days of the Grand Portage, was that they would bring their cargoes directly into the shore while the schooner had to anchor a mile off, At Fort William, this disadvantage of the schooner was eliminated, but the new route increased the usefulness of the canot-du-maitre as well, if in quite another way. For it was soon discovered that the large Montreal canoes could now be used to carry goods beyond Fort William and on into the Northwest itself. On the old Grand Portage, it had always been necessary to change to smaller canoes before proceeding into the interior.<sup>67</sup>

#### The Canot-du-Nord

The Grand Portage route, which led from Lake Superior to Rainy Lake, contained some of the most difficult carrying places in the whole of the Northwest, including the tortuous, nine-mile Grand Portage itself, as well as several exceedingly shallow rivers and lakes.<sup>68</sup> To traverse it with the large Montreal canoes was out of the question. Instead, smaller canoes of similar construction were used. Called the canot-du-nord, they were in their own way as brilliantly designed for the country in

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67. Public Record Office, C.O. 42, Vol.122, A Paper drawn up by the directors of the North West Company, sent to Lieut.-Gov. Robert Milnes, dated Montreal, 1 September 1803, signed: McTavish, Frobisher & Co. Directors of the North West Company.

68. Mackenzie, Voyages, pp.xlviii-lvi.

which they were used as was the canot-du-maitre for the Ottawa route. Originally developed for use in the eastern part of the Northwest, the canot-du-nord proved to be ideally suited to the needs of the fur trade; and it was this craft, more than any other, which enabled the trade to be extended to all parts of the country.

The northern canoes were from 24 to 27 feet long, 4 feet 8 inches to 5 feet wide, and 21 to 24 inches deep,<sup>69</sup> and had a carrying capacity of about 3,000 pounds of cargo plus a crew of five men.<sup>70</sup> Yet they could be carried by only two men.<sup>71</sup> In doing so, the men walked one behind the other with the canoe, upside-down, supported on their shoulders. This meant that the portage trails through the bush needed to be no wider than the width of a canoe, and that the track, itself, no more than a foot or so. Considering its large capacity, the draft of the canot-du-nord, seldom more than 18 inches, was extremely shallow, an invaluable asset in an area where the absence of rain for months at a time frequently reduced even great rivers to mere trickling streams.

The men who manned the canots-du-nord were the aristocrats of the canoemen. Because they remained in the Northwest throughout the year, they were known as the winterers, or hommes-du-nord.

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69. Journals of Hearne and Turnor, p.222.

70. Masson, Les Bourgeois, II, p.313.

71. Ibid.



They looked down on the "goers and comers" who manned the Montreal canoes, and derisively referred to them as the bangeurs-du-lard, or pork eaters, after their supposed diet.<sup>72</sup> The canots-du-nord came down each year to Fort William to exchange cargoes with the canots-du-maitre and the ship. An exception were the canoes from the distant Athabasca country which could come only as far as Rainy Lake if they were to return to their posts before the winter set in. Before the move to Fort William, some of the pork eaters were chosen to carry the goods destined for Athabasca, with northern canoes, over the Grand Portage route to Rainy Lake.<sup>73</sup> After the transfer it was possible to send some of the Montreal canoes right through to Rainy Lake to meet the winterers.<sup>74</sup>

Most of the canots-du-nord were built in the country between Saint Joseph Island and Lake Winnipeg, an area which not only produced the necessary raw materials, but which was inhabited by skilled Ojibwa canoe makers. However, since more canoes were needed for the downward than for the upward journey<sup>75</sup> (furs being more bulky than trading goods) and since many canoes were not in fit condition for a return trip, additional craft had to be built

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72. Davidson, *The North West Company*, p.230; Mackenzie, *Voyages*, pp.xxvii-xxviii.

73. Mackenzie, *Voyages*, p.lvi.

74. Harmon, *Sixteen Years*, p.92.

75. *Documents Relating to the North West Company*, p.251; *Journals of Hearne and Turnor*, p.452.

in the interior as well. These came mainly from the Athabasca and Peace rivers where birch and pine <sup>76</sup> (but not cedar) fir for large canoes was available. These canoes were used only once, probably because of the heavy pine frames. On the Red and Assiniboine rivers additional canoes were also required but the conventional materials for building them were not available. However, the North West Company solved this problem by making a frame of willows, nearly the shape of a canoe, and stretching over it a raw buffalo hide or two, depending on the size of the craft. If two hides were used they were cut square at the shoulders and sewn together with sinews. The sides were then brought over the largest willow, which served as the gunwale and lashed fast with leather cords. The hair was generally on the inside. These canoes were capable of carrying great loads, but it was necessary to unload them at least once a day, and dry them in the sun or over a fire - otherwise they would soon sink. They were only good for drifting down the current and so only made one journey.<sup>77</sup>

The canoes for the interior set off from Fort William in brigades, those bound for the most distant posts going first. Between each brigade a space of two days was allowed. This was to prevent a second brigade from reaching a carrying place before

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76. Harmon, Sixteen Years, p.120; Journals of Hearne and Turnor, p.452.

77. Coues, New Light, p.181.

the first had completed the several trips necessary, back and forth, across the narrow portage.<sup>78</sup> As it was, the portages were accomplished with "astonishing expedition".<sup>79</sup> When a canoe reached the beginning of a carrying place, the bowman instantly jumped into the water to prevent the frail craft from touching bottom. At the same time, the other members of the crew tied their slings to the packages and in an instant were on their way over the portage. The canoe, itself, was carried by the bowman and steersman. The middle men were exempt from this task.<sup>80</sup>

In calm weather the canoes generally travelled at about six miles per hour. To lighten their labours the men usually sang a simple melody, keeping perfect time to it with their paddles. When they arrived at a rapid, it was the guide's duty to determine whether it should be run with the full load, half load (the other half being carried by land), or not run at all. "It would be astonishing to a European observer" wrote a partner of the North West Company in 1804, "to witness the dexterity with which they manage their canoes in those dangerous rapids, carrying them down like lightening on the surface of the water. The bowman, supported by the steersman, dexterously avoids the stones and shoals which might touch the canoe and dash it to pieces,

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78. Thompson's Narrative, p.106.

79. Masson, Les Bourgeois, II, p.313.

80. Ibid.

"to the almost certain destruction of all on board. It often baffles their skill, when the water is very high, to avoid plunging in foaming swells on the very brink of the most tremendous precipices, yet, those bold adventurers, rather run this risk, for the sake of expedition, than lose a few hours by transporting the cargo over land.

"When they are obliged to stem the current in strong rapids, they haul up the canoe with a line, all hands pulling along shore and sometimes wading through the water up to their middle, except one man, who remains in the stern of the canoe, in order to keep it in the proper channel; this part of their duty is always accompanied with much labour."<sup>81</sup>

When the wind was favourable, sails were always used and, in a fresh gale, the canoes were carried along at eight or nine miles per hour.<sup>82</sup> However, care had to be taken not to carry too much sail for the canoes were quite unstable and could be easily overturned.

#### York Route Vs. Fort William Route

Of the 114 canots-du-nord which departed for the interior in 1805, no less than 70 (including 45 bound for the Athabasca country) were routed via the Saskatchewan River, the main artery of communication in the Northwest.<sup>83</sup> To enter the river from

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81. Masson, *Les Bourgeois*, II, p.314.

82. *Ibid.*, p.314.

83. Coues, *New Light*, p.280.

Lake Winnipeg, it was necessary for the canoes to be portaged around Grand Falls at its mouth. The carrying place was upwards of a mile long but the track was good. At least, it would have been good had the Hudson's Bay Company not strewn it with logs from one end to the other.<sup>84</sup> The logs were used by the English company for rolling its boats across the portage. The boats were from York Factory,<sup>85</sup> the company's principal factory in the Northwest. They travelled to Grand Falls by way of the Hayes and Hill rivers, and Lake Winnipeg. It was also possible to reach Lake Winnipeg from York via the Nelson River but this route was seldom used, largely because it was very shallow below Hell's Gate, and "full of Gravelly shoals" which were difficult to spot before the canoes or boats had run upon them.<sup>86</sup> Neither route, however, was considered as good as the one from Fort William.<sup>87</sup> Canoes travelling the latter, besides having a "much better" track, enjoyed the added advantage of entering Lake Winnipeg on the current during the upward journey when their cargo was heaviest.<sup>88</sup> But against this advantage must be reckoned the adverse effects

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84. Coues, *New Light*, p.463.

85. *Ibid.*

86. *Journal of Hearne and Turnor*, p.576.

87. *Ibid.*, p.222.

88. *Ibid.*, pp.222-3.



of the prevailing westerly winds since the cranky canoes could not use sail with a headwind. In order to lessen this disadvantage, the canoes picked their way from Winnipeg River along the eastern side of the lake to Dog's Head, at the Narrows, where the lake was "hardly a league wide". Here they crossed and then continued on a course up the western shores to the mouth of the Saskatchewan.<sup>89</sup> Care had to be exercised in travelling on Lake Winnipeg, however, for not only was the wind a problem, but the lake was very shallow, especially along the shores where the canoes went,<sup>90</sup> so that they were in constant danger of damaging their thin bottoms. Boats, of course, had stronger bottoms and could be used with relative safety not only in shallow places but also in the northern rivers where dangerous chunks of ice remained late into the short open season.

#### Boats and Canoes

The fact that boats could be used while there was still ice in the rivers undoubtedly influenced the Hudson's Bay Company in their decision to adopt them. But it was only a minor factor. Far more important was the lack of suitable materials near the northern factories for building canoes, together with the resulting absence of skilled Indian canoe makers in the area. Cedar was not available at either York or Churchill. In fact, according to Mackenzie, it was not found northwest of Cedar Lake.<sup>91</sup> There

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89. Coues, *New Light*, p.451.

90. Miles Macdonell to Lord Selkirk, 1 October 1811, Report on the Canadian Archives, 1886, p.cxcvi.

91. Mackenzie, *Voyages*, p. lxxviii.

was some birch, however, but trees large enough for canoes were very scarce and most of these had long ago been stripped of their bark. By 1809, so acute had the shortage become at Churchill, that an appeal was made to Moose Factory, at the bottom of the bay, to send a shipment of "birch rhind".<sup>92</sup> This meant that pine, which was considerably heavier than cedar, had to be substituted for the frame, and that either birch bark had to be brought to the factory or that the canoes had to be built some distance away. But whenever the latter course was taken, the company ran a considerable risk of losing its canoes to the Canadians,<sup>93</sup> who were at that time encroaching on the preserves of both factories.

Fort William, as already noted, was located in the lands of the Ojibwa Indians, a tribe which had long been accustomed to building canoes of many sizes, ranging from small two man craft to the large ones designed for Lake Superior which could carry twelve men.<sup>94</sup> Consequently, the Canadians had little difficulty in getting them to make the large canoes which they required. Moreover, many of the Canadians, themselves, became skilled canoe builders.<sup>95</sup> At York, on the other hand, the Indians were not only unfamiliar with large canoes but seemed incapable of

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92. HBC Archives, A.6/17, f 158.

93. Cumberland and Hudson House Journal, I, p.345.

94. Masson, Les Bourgeois, II, p.312.

95. Cumberland and Hudson House Journals, I, p.68.

comprehending what the Hudson's Bay Company men wanted when they tried to persuade them to build them.<sup>96</sup> Unlike their Canadian counterparts, few English traders learned to make canoes, in spite of attractive bonuses offered by their employers for every large canoe they constructed.<sup>97</sup> Realizing that they had little competition from white canoe builders, the Indians exploited their position by becoming reluctant to sell even small canoes.<sup>98</sup> For they knew that as long as the company was short of canoes, it must employ them to transport its goods and supplies in their own small canoes. Moreover, they also must have known that small canoes required more crew per pound of cargo carried than did large ones, and that to build large canoes would only result in less jobs being available. These jobs, in most cases, would go to themselves since few Hudson's Bay men, unlike their French Canadian rivals, could handle canoes. The company, on the other hand, was anxious to avoid using the Indians as much as possible since they were notorious pilferers (especially when rum was concerned), and would, whenever the opportunity arose, blackmail the company for higher wages. Moreover, Indians engaged in manning the canoes were prevented from hunting for as much as six months of the year, and as a result many valuable furs were lost.<sup>99</sup>

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96. Journals of Hearne and Turnor, pp.150,189.

97. Cumberland and Hudson House Journals, I, p.87.

98. Ibid., I, p.345.

99. Umfreville, Present State of Hudson's Bay, p.36.

The relatively few large canoes which the Hudson's Bay Company did procure, seemed to come mostly from Cumberland House where they were built from birch bark which had been brought down from the upper Saskatchewan.<sup>100</sup> But for the most part it was forced to use small canoes. These were very inefficient. In fact, it was said that ten men were required to carry the same cargo which could be transported with only five men in the large Canadian canoes.<sup>101</sup> This meant that the company either had to remain largely dependent upon the Indians, or it had to recruit twice the number of European canoemen, if it were to compete on equal terms with the Canadians for the inland trade. With the severe personnel shortage caused by the Napoleonic Wars, the latter course was out of the question. Moreover, the few recruits the company was able to get were nearly all, at best, reluctant canoemen. They had little of the spirit of the Northwest for which the French Canadians were renowned and which caused each to emulate his mates in skill, bravery and endurance. Generally speaking, the French Canadians spent the whole of their adult lives in the Northwest. Thus experienced canoemen were available to train the newcomers as they arrived from the east. The Hudson's Bay employees, on the other hand, contracted for definite periods, usually three years, and so were less likely to acquire much skill with a canoe even when they did

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100. Cumberland and Hudson House Journals, I, p.162.

101. Journals of Hearne and Turnor, p.222.

have the desire. And since not many of them became skilled, there were few to teach the new men as they arrived from Europe. Nor could the company look to the Indians to train its employees, for they would not take inexperienced men in their canoes.<sup>102</sup>

No similar personnel shortages faced the North West Company. On the contrary, the keen competition among rival Canadian factions at the turn of the century resulted in so many men going west that after it had absorbed the XY Company in 1804, the North West Company actually enjoyed a surplus of manpower.

If the French Canadians who usually went west when they were very young were brought up in canoes, so many of the Orcadians were from their early childhood accustomed to going out in boats in their native islands. Consequently, it was not surprising that boats were early tried as a substitute for canoes by the Hudson's Bay Company. These were heavy craft with keels, somewhat resembling whaleboats, which betrayed the Orcadian origins of their builders. Miles Macdonell, who had had previous experience with boats on the Saint Lawrence and in the United States, complained that the company's boats were "better calculated for sea service than that of shoal rivers".<sup>103</sup> The size of the boats built at York and in use in 1811, is not known but they were probably like the ones sent in that year from Churchill to York for use on the route to Lake Winnipeg. These could take six working

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102. Journals of Hearne and Turnor, p.250.

103. Miles Macdonell to William Auld, Nelson Encampment, 25 December 1811, Report on the Canadian Archives, 1886.



men with 30 pieces of goods, each weighing 90 pounds, as well as provisions for the voyage and probably one or two officers as passengers.<sup>104</sup> In handling, they were likely similar to the boats in use at Churchill in 1798, which were said to row faster than canoes and to be much superior in coming down rapids.<sup>105</sup> However, two experienced crews were required to manage one boat in descending the rapids.<sup>106</sup>

One great advantage of boats was that once built they could be used for several seasons whereas canoes were seldom serviceable a second year. This was a small consideration to the North West Company which always had an abundant and ready supply of new canoes, but an overriding one with the Hudson's Bay Company which did not. However, boats large enough to be practicable were much heavier than canoes and could not be portaged. Instead, they had to be dragged across the carrying placed on skids of green timber, like the ones cursed by the Canadians at Grand Falls.

By 1811, boats seem to have been used for the whole of the journey from York Factory to Lake Winnipeg<sup>107</sup> and on into the Saskatchewan country, although a few years earlier they were still used in conjunction with canoes. Boats had left the factory via

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104. HBC Archives, B.42/b/57, f 3d.

105. HBC Archives, B.239/b/66, f 66.

106. HBC Archives, B.42/b/57, f 3.

107. Ibid.

the Hayes River but had gone only as far as Rock Portage. Above the portage was a stretch of almost continuous rapids and falls.<sup>108</sup> From the beginning of the rapids to the head of Trout River canoes had been used. At Trout River, the goods had been transferred to boats destined for the Saskatchewan.<sup>109</sup>

#### Transportation on the Saskatchewan

Once the boats had been dragged across the Grand Falls portage, it was possible for them to travel all the way to the foothills of the Rockies without again leaving the water. In a sense they were now competing on at least equal terms with the canoes since their weight handicap was no longer a consideration. In many places, where poles and tow-lines were required, the boats may have been more difficult to handle, but in other places, where sails could be used, they gained an advantage over the cranky canoes. Moreover, the greater stability of the boats made it possible to transport bulky articles which would have been impossible by canoe. For instance in 1811, two calves were shipped inland from York (where they had been born) "in a small boat very deeply loaded with Goods besides".<sup>110</sup> On another occasion, two horses were sent across the Northwest by boat from Fort Vermilion on the upper Saskatchewan to York.<sup>111</sup>

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108. HBC Archives, B.42/b/57, f 3.

109. HBC Archives, B.239/b/79, f 26.

110. HBC Archives, B.42/b/55, f 17.

111. Coues, New Light, p.600.

When the Hudson's Bay Company first established itself on the Saskatchewan with the building of Cumberland House in 1774, it tried to adopt a transportation system similar to the eminently successful one which had been developed over the years by the traders from Canada. From the beginning, great efforts were made, with varying degrees of success, to procure as many large, Canadian-type canoes as possible. During the first few years, their efforts bore little fruit. Large canoes were scarce. But in 1780, when a sufficient number to meet the needs of the company were gathered together, it was soon discovered that there were "no men to man them".<sup>112</sup> Where the canoemen had been expected to spring from was never made clear. Meanwhile, however, serious thought was being given to other expedient forms of transportation, perhaps not so much as a substitute for the canoes, but as an alternative to them. As early as 1776, Samuel Hearne, the founder of Cumberland House, suggested that light canoes made of wood might be tried.<sup>113</sup> This idea was developed three years later by Philip Turnor, the company's newly-appointed surveyor, who believed that boats could save the canoes from much damage by being used instead of them during the autumn when there was a great deal of ice in the river which cut the canoes to pieces.<sup>114</sup> He called for a flat-bottomed craft that would

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112. Journals of Hearne and Turnor, p.47.

113. Hearne, Journey to the Northern Ocean, pp.188-9.

114. Journals of Hearne and Turnor, pp.254-5.

require from five to seven men to work, and suggested that a good boat-builder be sent to Cumberland where good pine and poplar was available for planking, as well as birch and hickory for knees and timbers. Only rudder irons, nails, and roves would need to be imported.<sup>115</sup>

Boats were gradually adopted, although they by no means entirely displaced the canoes. By the end of the century, they had proved their worth not only on the Saskatchewan, where the prospects of future trade were "very flattering", but on other rivers as well, including some which previously had been considered impassable.<sup>116</sup> Alexander Henry of the North West Company saw some of the English boats on the Assiniboine River. He described them as being neatly built and painted, and sharp at both ends. They carried about 45 packages averaging about 80 pounds each, and a crew of five consisting of four oarsmen and a steersman.<sup>117</sup>

By 1811, the Hudson's Bay Company generally preferred to use boats although, as already seen, canoes were used as well. Similarly, the North West Company, although its preference was for canoes, also employed boats, particularly for transporting bulky articles. In many ways, each company's preference symbolized its character. The solid English joint-stock company chose the sound,

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115. Journals of Hearne and Turnor, p.255.

116. HBC Archives, B.239/b/66, ff 18d, 19, 27d, 39.

117. Coues, New Light, p.46.

heavy boat. It could be used year after year and represented capital investment. The more transitory nature of the Canadian partnership was reflected in its choice of the dashing unstable canoe. It had to be replaced each year and could be charged under annual expenses. The boat, too, typified the stolidness of the Orcadians in the same way that the canoes characterized the gay abandon of the French Canadians.

### Provisions

The needs of the carefree Canadians were easily satisfied. As long as they had full stomachs, they were happy.<sup>118</sup> Some idea of the enormous quantity of food which they were capable of putting away may be gained from Alexander Henry's description of the provisions consumed by his men and himself during their upward journey in 1809:

"I arrived at Fort Vermillion, having been two months on my voyage from Fort William, with a brigade of 11 canoes, loaded with 28 pieces each, and manned by five men and one woman. Our expenditure of provisions for each canoe during this voyage was: Two bags of corn, 1½ bushel each, and 15 lbs. of grease, to Lac la Pluie; two bags of wild rice, 1½ bushel each, and 10 lbs. of grease, to Bas de la Rivière Winnipic; four bags of pemmican, 90 lbs. each, to Cumberland House; and two bags of pemmican, 90 lbs. each, to serve until we came among the buffalo - generally near the Montee, or at furthest the Elbow, of the Saskatchewan." 119

Obviously such large quantities of goods could not have been carried from Fort William without occupying a large part of the space necessary for cargo. For this reason, provision depots

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118. Thompson's Narrative, pp.209, 443.

119. Coues, New Light, p.539.



including those mentioned by Henry, had been established along the canoe and boat routes throughout the Northwest. Among the most important depots were those at Fort William, Lac-la-Pluie [Rainy Lake], Bas-de-la-Rivière-Winnipeg [mouth of Winnipeg River], and Cumberland House. Brigades proceeding northwest of Cumberland to the Athabasca country required an extra three or four bags of pemmican per canoe<sup>120</sup> to carry them to Fort Chipewyan, the great supply depot of that country. Bas-de-la-Rivière-Winnipeg received its pemmican from the Red and Assiniboine rivers, Cumberland from the Saskatchewan, and Chipewyan from the Peace River. All of it was collected with comparative ease from the huge herds of buffalo and deer which frequented the valleys of these rivers and, in each case, was floated down stream to the depots without encountering a single obstacle to navigation. For example, only two men and one boat were required to carry about three tons of pemmican from the Assiniboine to Bas-de-la-Rivière-Winnipeg,<sup>121</sup> while three men in a large canoe managed to carry two tons of dried provisions down the Peace to Fort Chipewyan.<sup>122</sup> Lac-la-Pluie was unique in that it supplied wild rice (gathered locally) rather than meat.

Canoes routed up the Saskatchewan from Cumberland carried only enough supplies to last until they "came among the buffalo".<sup>123</sup>

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120. Coues, New Light, p.539.

121. Ibid., p.213.

122. Journals of Hearne and Turnor, p.452.

123. Coues, New Light, p.539.

Here they were met by hunters who brought extra horses for the clerks and partners who then happily left their cramped quarters in the canoes and mounted for the buffalo hunt. This they regarded as the most pleasant time of their lives.<sup>124</sup> During the day, they galloped and raced across the sun-drenched plains, and in the evening, with the results of their hunt, they joined the crews of the slow moving canoes for a feast of fresh meat beside a roaring fire on the bank of the river. On the downward journey, however, there was no time to hunt. The canoes travelled too quickly. And, of course, less food was necessary. In 1809, for example, it required two months for Henry's brigade to travel from Fort William to Fort Vermilion,<sup>125</sup> while in the spring of the same year, it had made the journey from Vermilion to Fort William in just under a month.<sup>126</sup> There were more than 1,500 miles of rivers, lakes and portages between the two points. The incredible speed with which they were covered was only made possible by the fantastic endurance of the French Canadian voyageurs who were capable of working in a canoe, twenty hours out of every twenty-four, for two or three weeks at a time "without a day of rest or any diminution of labour".<sup>127</sup> During their paddling they smoked almost continuously, and sang the songs which had been passed down

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124. Masson, *Les Bourgeois*, II, p.22.

125. Coues, *New Light*, p.539.

126. *Ibid.*, p.509.

127. Landmann, *Adventures and Recollections*, p.309.

from their fathers and grandfathers. They rested from five to ten minutes every two hours when they refilled their pipes, and it was more common for them to describe distances as so many pipes then in any other way.<sup>128</sup>

#### Speed of Canoe Travel

The number of days required for the brigades to travel from place to place during the upward journey are shown in figure 2. Downward trips, of course, took much less time. So too, did the journeys performed by the partners of the North West Company who travelled in light canoes with picked crews and with only their personal baggage and provisions. Simon McTavish's seven and three-quarter days from Saint Joseph Island to Montreal was probably the record for the North West Company, although a 25 foot military canoe with a crew of 10 picked men did the same journey in half a day less.<sup>129</sup> The soldiers' baggage had been arranged so that everything could be portaged in one trip, and there had been a favouring wind on Lake Huron.<sup>130</sup> Another North West Company partner, Roderick McKenzie, made the trip from Rainy Lake to Fort Chipewyan in one month and four days in 1799. He used a light canoe with six men.<sup>131</sup> Similar craft were used by the Hudson's Bay Company to carry important persons and documents.

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128. Landmann, *Adventures and Recollections*, p.309.

129. Davidson, *North West Company*, pp.218-9.

130. *Ibid.*

131. *Ibid.*

For example, the 1809 instructions from the London Committee, not to buy any more wolf skins and as few small furs as was possible, were rushed from York Factory to Fort Vermilion as quickly as possible. When the canoe got stuck in the ice en route, Mr. Bird, who was in charge, came on by land on horseback, arriving 23rd October. He also brought with him, London newspapers dated as late as 13th June, which told of the progress of the war in Europe.<sup>132</sup>

### Expresses

Apart from the fast canoes, there was another form of rapid communication known as "expresses". These carried correspondence, reports, and news from post to post throughout the country. The North West Company had the more elaborate system. It operated two expresses annually. The winter express left Athabasca in December, travelled throughout the whole of the Northwest, and reached Sault-Ste.-Marie towards the end of March.<sup>133</sup> Thus the men coming up from Montreal in the spring were able to get news of the preceding summer much sooner than they otherwise would have done.<sup>134</sup> There was also a summer express which hurried down with news of the winter's hunt, apparently in advance of the canoes with the furs.<sup>135</sup> In a similar way, the Hudson's Bay Company operated a useful line of communication between its bayside factories.

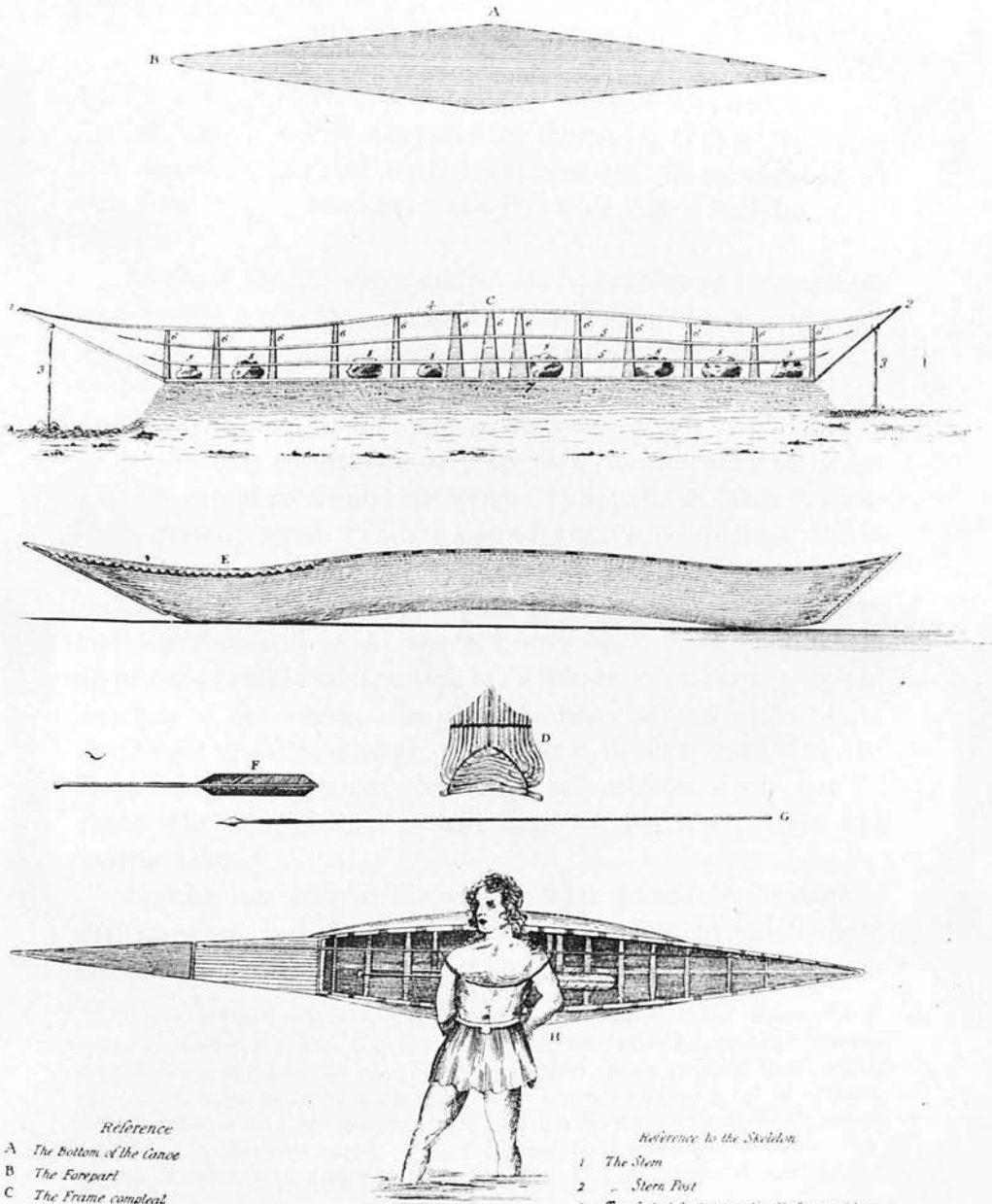
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132. Coues, *New Light*, pp.558-9.

133. Harmon, *Sixteen Years*, pp.41-2.

134. *Ibid.*

135. Masson, *Les Bourgeois*, II, p.387, footnote.



- Reference*
- A The Bottom of the Canoe
  - B The Forepart
  - C The Frame complete
  - D A set of Timbers bent and lashed in their proper shape for drying
  - E A Canoe complete
  - F A Paddle
  - G A spear to kill Deer with in the Water
  - H The method of carrying the Canoe in Summer

- Reference to the Skeleton*
- 1 The Stem
  - 2 Stern Post
  - 3 3 Two forked Sticks suspending the Stem and Stern
  - 4 The Gunwalls
  - 5 Small Posts placed between the Timbers and the backbone
  - 6 The Timbers
  - 7 The Kelson
  - 8 Large Stones to keep the Bottom steady, till the sides are sewed to

S. H. delin.

INDIAN IMPLEMENTS

Figure 10. Northern Indian Canoe



This consisted of sending out pairs of "packet Indians" on foot to the next factory. They carried letters and their departure was arranged so that they would arrive about the same time as the annual supply ship from England. In this way, news of the safe arrival of the ships, together with information about the state of the factories, was made known all along the bay, so that wherever necessary, assistance might be rendered.<sup>136</sup>

#### Northern Indian Canoes (see fig.10.)

The small canoes of the Athapaskan tribes, although seldom used by the traders themselves, nevertheless played an important role in the trade since they were often used by the Indians in transporting their furs to the posts. In shape, these canoes somewhat resembled a weaver's shuttle - flat-bottomed, with straight upright sides, and pointed at both ends. They seldom exceeded 12 or 13 feet in length and were from 20 to 24 inches wide at the stern which was by far the broadest part. It was here that the baggage was generally placed.<sup>137</sup> Although far less elegant in appearance than were the graceful Algonkian canoes, the northern craft were, in their own way, just as admirably designed for the prevailing conditions of the land in which they were used. For the most part, the broken rivers of the Stony Region proved to be more of an obstacle than an aid to transportation; they were generally unsuitable for navigation, and yet their cold, deep

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136. Thompson's Narrative, pp.30-1.

137. Hearne, Journey to the Northern Ocean, p.63.

waters blocked the way by land. Consequently, the northern Indian canoe had been developed not so much as a means of transport as a means of crossing the rivers and lakes which were encountered when travelling by land. On occasion, they had to be portaged 150 or even 200 miles and so were made light enough to be easily carried by one man. They were cranky and unstable and could carry only one person sitting upright. However, a second person could also be carried lying on the bottom. It was in this way that the Indians ferried one another across the rivers and narrow parts of the lakes.<sup>138</sup>

The northern Indian canoes were also used for chasing waterfowl during the moulting season and for pursuing deer as they swam across rivers and lakes. When they were used for this purpose, the single bladed paddle normally employed was exchanged for a double-bladed one.<sup>139</sup> This type of paddle was not usually used by the Indians of the Northwest and had probably been adopted by the Athapaskans from their northern neighbours, the Eskimo, who used a similar paddle with their own small hunting canoes, called kayaks.

#### The Kayak

The broad flat parts of the Eskimo paddles were generally inlaid with ivory in a very tasteful and imaginative way,<sup>140</sup>

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138. Hearne, *Journey to the Northern Ocean*, pp. 26, 62-3.

139. *Ibid.*, p.63.

140. Thomas McKeavor, *A Voyage to Hudson's Bay during the Summer of 1812*, p.33.

epitomizing the high level of craftsmanship which characterized everything these people did. Their kayaks were ingeniously constructed of pieces of wood and whalebone, fastened together by means of the sinews of animals, and covered with seal-skin parchment. Only a small central aperture was left, just large enough to admit the body of a man. Into this the Eskimo thrust himself up to his waist with his feet stretched out before him. To the central opening was fixed a flat hoop about two inches high. Attached to this was a skin fitted in such a way that it could be fastened tightly to the body of the Eskimo and so prevent any water from entering the kayak.<sup>141</sup>

The kayaks were generally about 20 feet long and 2 feet broad at the widest place.<sup>142</sup> The paddles were about 10 feet long,<sup>143</sup> and by dipping one blade and then the other, speeds of at least 16 miles an hour could be attained.<sup>144</sup> An English boat with 12 oars could not keep up with it.<sup>145</sup>

#### Trails

Supplementing the canoe routes in a number of places in the Northwest were overland trails. These usually ran between two fur trading posts, like the trail between Vermilion and the

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141. McKeevor, *A Voyage to Hudson's Bay*, pp.33-4.

142. *Ibid.*, p.33.

143. *Ibid.*

144. W. Coats, *The Geography of Hudson's Bay*, ed. John Barrow, p.74.

145. McKeevor, *A Voyage to Hudson's Bay*, p.34.

then defunct South Branch House, or they simply joined together two waterways, like the road between the two branches of the Saskatchewan at the Montee. Six days were required for the trip between Fort Vermilion and South Branch House;<sup>146</sup> less than a day was needed to cross at the Montee.<sup>147</sup>

When travelling on the trails through the buffalo country it was not customary for the traders to carry provisions since, with the aid of firearms, they could always "kill a sufficiency for a Day".<sup>148</sup> But while the almost limitless herds removed the threat of starvation, they added another hazard of their own, the danger of trampling. As the buffalo roved relentlessly across the vast prairies, they ignored almost everything in their way, especially when they were being driven onward by a raging storm or being pursued by the packs of wolves which always followed in the wake of their migrations. Because of the ever present danger of being trampled, as well as being attacked by the marauding wolves, it was not safe to camp on the plains without a fire.<sup>149</sup> In places where there was no wood, fires had to be made from Buffalo dung.<sup>150</sup> Guns, of course, were also used to drive off the buffalo; so, too, were dogs.<sup>151</sup>

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146. Harmon, Sixteen Years, p.99.

147. Coues, New Light, pp.490-1.

148. Harmon, Sixteen Years, p.78.

149. Ibid., p.74.

150. Henry, the elder, Travels & Adventures, ed. James Bain, p.303.

151. Ibid., p.286.

Dogs

The buffalo were terrified of the native dogs. However, this was to be expected since the dogs were descended from wolves. In fact, according to Pennant, they still betrayed their savage descent by uttering only a howl instead of the significant bark of the genuine dog.<sup>152</sup> Nevertheless, they were faithful to their masters<sup>153</sup> and useful in frightening wild beasts into snares or traps, although they lacked the "sagacity" of the European dog.<sup>154</sup>

There were several types of native dogs. The ones used for hunting were quite small but there were also larger breeds which were used by the Indians and Eskimoes as beasts of burden. Probably the largest of them all, was the breed introduced from Newfoundland by the Hudson's Bay Company which, by 1811, had spread to all parts of the Northwest.<sup>155</sup> These were used only as beasts of burden. In winter they drew their loads on sledges but in summer they carried them on their backs.<sup>156</sup> The weight was placed near the shoulders. An experienced dog could carry 60 or 70 pounds a distance of 25 or 30 miles in a day.<sup>157</sup>

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152. Pennant, Arctic Zoology, p.39.

153. Harmon, Sixteen Years, p.261.

154. Pennant, Arctic Zoology, p.39.

155. Harmon, Sixteen Years, pp.212,261.

156. Ibid., p.261.

157. Ibid., p.212.



## Horses

During the first half of the eighteenth century,<sup>158</sup> the dog was joined as a beast of burden by the horse. In fact, before the Indians learned to ride them, they were used exclusively for carrying baggage.<sup>159</sup> That is, they were regarded as dogs, an attitude reflected in the Cree word for horse, mistahtim, which meant "big dog".<sup>160</sup> Loads were carried by means of a travois, a device consisting of two poles. One end of each pole was attached to either side of the horse and the other ends were tied together and allowed to drag on the ground behind the animal. It was used mostly in winter.<sup>161</sup> The travois was undoubtedly derived from a similar device used with the small indigenous (as opposed to Newfoundland) dogs, which in turn probably developed from the practice of making the dogs carry the poles for the tent.

Once the Assiniboine Indians had mastered the art of riding their horses during the final decades of the eighteenth century, they tended to use them mostly for hunting buffalo, and most of their baggage was once again carried by the dogs.<sup>162</sup> However, these were probably not their own small dogs but rather the large Newfoundland breed which must have reached them about this time.

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158. Francis D. Haines, *The Northward Spread of Horses among the Plains Indians*, pp.433-6.

159. *Ibid.*; also Anthony Hendry, *The Journal of York Fort to the Blackfeet Country, 1754-1755*, ed. L.J. Burpee, p.351.

160. Coues, *New Light*, p.535.

161. *Ibid.*, p.518.

162. *Ibid.*

In any case, the Assiniboine most likely did not have enough horses for hunting as well as for use as pack animals. For they were chronically short of horses, probably as a result of rough usage.<sup>163</sup>

#### Women as Beasts of Burden

The use of the horse ensured the plains tribes of an abundant supply of buffalo meat which, in turn, enabled them to keep a large number of dogs. In other areas, where meat was less easy to get, and where horses could not be used,<sup>164</sup> the tasks of land transportation fell mostly upon the natives themselves - and particularly upon the women who were almost universally treated as beasts of burden. Matonabee, who had been Hearne's guide to the mouth of the Coppermine in the early 1770's, lived in an area where horses were unknown, and the rivers were generally unsuitable for cargo canoes, and where dogs were scarce and too small to carry heavy articles,<sup>165</sup> the Newfoundland dog not yet having reached them. He explained to Hearne why women made such useful beasts of burden. "When all the men are heavy-laden", he said, "they can neither hunt nor travel to any considerable distance; and in case they meet with success in hunting, who is to carry the produce of their labour? Women were

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163. Thompson's Narrative, p.367.

164. In the north where the ground was generally wet and swampy, horses were of little use except for dragging fire wood in winter. HBC Archives, E.3/2, p.93.

165. Hearne, Journey to the Northern Ocean, pp.207-8.

"made for labour; one of them can carry, or haul, as much as two men can do. They also pitch our tents, make and mend our clothing, keep us warm at night; and, in fact, there is no such thing as travelling any considerable distance, or for any length of time, in this country, without their assistance. Women, though they do every thing, are maintained at trifling expence; for as they always stand cook, the very licking of their fingers in scarce times, is sufficient for their subsistence."<sup>166</sup>

#### Sledges

Maronabee was a Chipewyan, a tribe noted for the harsh treatment of its women. Had more than a few of the men taken the trouble to make sledges, the work of the women could have been made much easier.<sup>167</sup> For they had several types of sledges well suited to their country. The simplest of these was made and used on the Barren Grounds. They consisted merely of the skins of deer legs sewn together. These were pulled over the snow, hair-side down, until the woods were reached and proper sledges could be made.

The wooden sledges (see fig.11) were called bafe-hoth by the Chipewyans and mo-co-toggan by the Crees. They were made from thin boards of larch, lashed together and turned up slightly at one end to form a vehicle from 12-14 inches wide and eight

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166. Hearne, Journey to the Northern Ocean, p.35.

167. Ibid, pp.207-8.

or nine feet long. The boards were fastened together with thongs of parchment deer-skin. Several cross-bars of wood were sewn onto the upper side which both strengthened the sledge and provided a means for attaching the load to it. The front was turned up so as to form a semi-circle of at least 15 or 20 inches in diameter. This prevented the toboggan, as it was later called, from driving into the light snow and enabled it to glide smoothly over the hard snow-drifts which were so characteristic of the Barren Grounds and open plains.<sup>168</sup>

The toboggan was early adopted by the traders. They often pulled them by hand but horses were also used in areas where the snow was not deep, particularly on the open plains. In places where the snow was generally deeper, dogs were employed since they were relatively light and tended not to sink far into the snow. The North West Company also used a Canadian sledge called a *carriole* which was likewise drawn by either horses or dogs, depending upon the condition of the snow.<sup>169</sup>

#### Travel on Horseback

On the open plains, where there was seldom much snow, horses could generally be used throughout the year. As a result, the natives of the area were becoming so dependent upon their mounts that they seldom travelled anywhere without them - even when going only a short distance from their tents.<sup>170</sup> On some occasions,

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168. Hearne, *Journey to the Northern Ocean*, pp.207-8.

169. Harmon, *Sixteen Years*, p.71.

170. *Ibid.*, p.212.

however, they rode as far as 70 miles in 12 hours, but 40 or 45 miles was a more common day's ride.<sup>171</sup> The Indians rarely used bridles, but rather guided their horses with halters made of strong, durable ropes manufactured from buffalo hair. On the horse's back was placed a dressed buffalo skin and over that a pad from which were suspended stirrups made of wood.<sup>172</sup> The Indians did not shoe their horses and so particular attention was paid to the colour of the horses' hooves. Since a yellow hoof with white hair was brittle and easily worn away, the natives placed a greater value on black hoofed animals, and only they were taken on war expeditions.<sup>173</sup>

#### Carts

The Indians did not have the wheel. The traders did, but until after 1811, they had found little use for it. The Hudson's Bay Company had made use of carts, during the building of Fort Prince of Wales, at least as early as 1754. These were pulled by oxen which had apparently been sent out the year before.<sup>174</sup> The French had used carts on the Red River and they were re-introduced by the North West Company early in the nineteenth century. The latter seem to have been first built at Pembina River House in 1801.<sup>175</sup> The wheels of the early North West Company models

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171. Harmon, *Sixteen Years*, p.212.

172. *Ibid.*, p.213.

173. Thompson's *Narrative*, p.214.

174. James Knight, *The Founding of Churchill*, ed. J.F. Kenney, pp. 94-5.

175. Coues, *New Light*, p.191.



were simply solid discs of wood, three feet in diameter, which had been sawn from the ends of trees,<sup>176</sup> but these were soon replaced with four-foot, four-spoked wheels.<sup>177</sup> In 1803, these were in turn replaced by proper wheels "on the plan of those in Canada".<sup>178</sup> The carts were particularly useful in the Red River area where the ground was so smooth and level that they could travel in any direction.<sup>179</sup>

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176. Coues, New Light, p.191.

177. Ibid., p.205.

178. Ibid., p.210.

179. Ibid., p.191.

Chapter V

SUBSIDIARY INDUSTRIES

The high wheels of the Red River carts creaked and rasped on their wooden axles as they lumbered across the plains. Tradition had it that a snake was sometimes wound around the axle to provide temporary lubrication. Certainly such bits of ingenuity were a common part of every day life in the Northwest, where local alternatives had to be constantly improvised to replace the familiar methods and techniques of civilization. It has already been seen how the Indian canoe was adapted to meet the peculiar needs of the fur trade. In a similar way, new types of food, clothing and shelter had to be devised which would be appropriate to the harsh and unfamiliar conditions which then prevailed in the Northwest. In providing these things, the fur trade, out of necessity, had developed a number of important subsidiary industries. Other industries, such as lumbering and whaling were also experimented with by the Hudson's Bay Company in an attempt to defray its heavy expenses at a time when the fur markets were depressed.

Food

Food had to be provided locally. Transportation costs were far too high to allow much of it to be imported from England or Canada. Moreover, it was known all too well that the only types of provisions which were practical to import, mostly dried and salted, were injurious to the health when they constituted a large

part of the diet over a considerable time. Consequently, the technique of living off the country was early adopted by the trade. This meant that the traders had to rely on local resources. This was done partly through their own efforts with the gun, the fishing net and the hoe; partly through the efforts of native hunters and fishermen who were hired by the traders; but mostly through the purchase of huge quantities of provisions from the Indians, particularly the Indians of the plains.

#### Country Provisions

Practically none of the Indians of the Northwest practised agriculture. An exception were the Ojibwas around Lake of the Woods,<sup>1</sup> who, finding their fur animals exhausted, turned to growing Indian corn and potatoes to supply the passing traders.<sup>2</sup> For their lands straddled the all-important Fort William to Lake Winnipeg route of the North West Company. These tribes also gathered large quantities of wild rice which grew along the waterways between Rainy Lake and Lake Winnipeg. This was mostly traded at the company's provision depot at Rainy Lake where it was later supplied to the canoes going into the interior. According to Harmon, wild rice was not produced anywhere else in the Northwest.<sup>3</sup>

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1. There were also four or five families of Ottawa Indians from Canada, settled about six miles up the Dead River from its junction with the Red, who raised Indian corn, potatoes and other garden stuff. - HBC Archives, E.3/3 f 58d; Coues, New Light, p.280.

2. Harmon, Sixteen Years, p.211.

3. Ibid., p.91.

It grew in water about two feet deep where the bottom was muddy. In appearance it resembled oats although it generally grew to a height of eight or more feet above the water. It was gathered towards the end of September by beating the heads of rice over canoes which were moved beneath them.<sup>4</sup> So much was gathered in this simple way that the North West Company was able to buy from twelve to fifteen hundred bushels annually, and it was "the principal article of food" at the posts in that area.<sup>5</sup>

Like Indian corn, rice was especially valued as food for the canoemen, and like corn, rice for the following day was usually put to boil after supper and taken from the fire (while still boiling) when the canoes departed at 4 o'clock in the morning.<sup>6</sup> Two hours later, it provided a hot breakfast. Rice had the advantage over corn of not going sour, as the latter tended to do, during the heat of summer.<sup>7</sup> The Hudson's Bay Company, which was not advantageously situated for procuring either corn or rice and which hired a large number of Orcadians and Scots, imported oatmeal for the same purpose, but at least one post factor (Thomison of Cumberland) regarded it as "not a wholesome food alone for men on long Journeys".<sup>8</sup>

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4. Harmon, Sixteen Years, p.92 .

5. Ibid.

6. Thompson's Narrative, p.296.

7. Ibid., p.297.

8. Cumberland and Hudson House Journals, II, p.295.

Corn, beans, pumpkins and other crops were also grown beyond the borders of the Northwest for use in that country. The most important suppliers of these products were the Mandans of the Missouri, and Ojibwa beyond Michilimackinac who also supplied maple sugar.<sup>9</sup> These foods added variety and interest to the traders' otherwise monotonous diet which consisted largely of meat.

Most of the meat used in the trade was supplied by the Indians. This was either "green" (as fresh meat was known in the trade) or it was preserved. Preservation was almost invariably performed by cutting the meat into thin slices and then drying them - either over a fire or in the sun. Dried meat was not only very portable but it was considered palatable as well, particularly that dried very slowly in the sun, or by means of a large slow fire. The latter method was preferred by the northern tribes whose lands did not always provide a hot sun. In the south, fires were also used, but they were much larger and the meat was dried more quickly. Hearne considered the result inferior to the northern fare although most of the traders preferred it.<sup>10</sup>

The most important prepared meat was pemmican, the main staple of nearly all those engaged in the fur trade during the open season. It was made from the lean and fleshy parts of the buffalo which were dried, smoked and pounded into a state known

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9. Harmon, Sixteen Years, p.211.

10. Hearne, Journey, p.192.



as "beat meat". Forty pounds of melted buffalo fat was poured over fifty pounds of beat meat to make ninety pounds of pemmican. This was then tightly packed in bags made from buffalo hide with the hair left on. These were about thirty inches long, twenty inches wide and about four inches thick - a convenient size and shape for stowage and carriage.<sup>11</sup> Berries were sometimes dried and mixed with the pemmican to give added flavour. According to Thompson, pemmican was wholesome, tasty and nutritious, and afforded the greatest nourishment for the least possible bulk and weight.<sup>12</sup> Even the gluttonous French Canadians, he said, who devour eight pounds of fresh meat every day are contented with a pound and a half of pemmican per day.<sup>13</sup>

Most of the pemmican was bought from the Indians of the plains who prepared sufficient not only to supply the posts on or near their own country, but enough to supply the canoes and boats going to, and coming from the Great Western Forest as well. Without these supplies, the North West Company, at least, would have been forced to abandon the most lucrative part of its trade.<sup>14</sup>

Pemmican would keep indefinitely. Stocks of it were frequently put aside at the posts for use in emergencies. But apparently some of the men of the Hudson's Bay Company had been

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11. Thompson's Narrative, p.434.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid., p.435.

14. McGillivray, Some Account of the Trade, p.69.

negligent in maintaining their reserves for, in 1807, a strongly worded circular letter was sent to the officers and traders inland from Churchill urging them to get as much dried provisions from the natives as they could and, at the same time, warning them that the provisions were not to be used as they had been in the past. Instead, they were to be "religiously preserved" for use in case of a scarcity of fish or fresh meat, although they might be spared for giving the men sent after the natives in winter, and for the men who took the furs down to the factories in boats.<sup>15</sup> But in spite of these instructions, a serious shortage of dried provisions developed during the severe winter of 1811, and an urgent request went out to the provision depot at Bas-de-la-Riviere-Winnipeg for pemmican for Churchill and other factories.<sup>16</sup>

#### European Provisions

Country provisions were chronically scarce at Churchill and York, and both factories had always depended heavily upon European provisions.<sup>17</sup> But with the war, these became more difficult to

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15. HBC Archives, B.42/b/50, f 23d.

16. HBC Archives, B.42/b/55, f 4d.

17. These included bacon, barley (English, Scottish), beef fat, biscuit (brown, white), French brandy, butter, cheese, chocolate, coffee, crystallized lemon juice, currants, figs, fish salt, flour, hams, herbs, hops, lard, malt, molasses, mustard, oats, groats & meal, oil genoa, pease (grey, hag, split, white) pickles, salt pork, porter, raisins, rice, rum, salt (common, petre), sauce (fish, ketchup), spices (cinnamon, cloves, ginger, mace, nutmeg, pepper), suet, sugar, tea, vinegar, wine (port, sherry). -HBC Archives, B.239/d/156.

obtain, and quality deteriorated.<sup>18</sup> At the same time, the company tried to economize by reducing the consumption of European provisions in favour of the products of the Northwest. With this end in view, instructions were issued by London in 1810, that Bas-de-la-Riviere-Winnipeg and the Saskatchewan factories were to supply York, Churchill and other factories with pemmican and dried meat.<sup>19</sup>

#### Methods for Procuring Country Provisions

The pemmican and dried meat came mostly from the plains. With the Indians of this area, preparing it became a major industry, especially for the Assiniboines. They traded luxuries such as liquor, tobacco, powder, balls, knives, awls, brass rings, brass wire, blue beads and other trinkets.<sup>20</sup> The Assiniboine captured most of their buffalo in pounds. In building these, and in driving the buffaloes into them, this tribe was considered to be the most expert on the plains.<sup>21</sup> Their pounds were of various dimensions depending upon the number of tents in one camp. The most common size was from 60 to 100 yards in circumference and about 5 feet in height. To construct a pound, trees were cut down, laid on top of one another, and woven together with branches and green twigs. Small openings were left to enable the dogs to

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18. HBC Archives, A.6/18, ff 1-2.

19. Ibid.

20. Coues, *New Light*, p.517.

21. Ibid., p.518.

enter to devour the carcasses of the bulls, which were not normally used by the Indians. The pounds were usually constructed between two hummocks on the downward slope or at the foot of rising ground. The entrance was about 10 yards wide and always fronted onto the plains. On each side of the entrance was the beginning of a range of fascines which spread outward, away from the opening, for about 300 yards. The initial 100 yards were solid but the last 200 yards became increasingly open as they extended away from the pound. Beyond the fascines, the lines were continued, here and there with three or four cross-sticks to resemble dogs or other animals, for another 2 miles out onto the plains. Double rows of them were also planted in several other directions to an even greater distance.<sup>22</sup>

Young men were sent out to perform the tedious task of collecting and bringing in the buffalo. This was done by setting fire to the dung and grasses on the plains. The herds were driven slowly at first but when the ranges came into sight the speed was increased. As soon as the herd entered the ranges, a sure footed person disguised with a buffalo robe, who had been stationed there, led the animals towards the pound. Young men at the rear of the herd then appeared and drove them on with all possible speed. The remaining men, together with the women and children, then took up positions between the cross-sticks and in the openings among the fascines in order to direct the buffaloes onward by waving their robes. The Indian leading the herd rushed

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22. Coues, New Light, pp.518-9.



into the pound and out the other side either by jumping over the wall or by crawling through an opening left for that purpose. The buffaloes tumbled in pell-mell at his heels where they were quickly slaughtered with bows and arrows.<sup>23</sup>

The Europeans apparently did not imitate the Indians in using pounds, probably because of the great amount of skill and manpower involved. Nevertheless, they did frequently hunt buffalo on horseback, partly for amusement and partly for profit.<sup>24</sup> However, this was resented by the Indians who regarded it as an infringement of their "right" to supply provisions. To protect this right, they frequently set fire to the plains near the posts in order to drive the buffalo out of the range of the white hunters.<sup>25</sup>

Pounds for deer were made by the Indians of the forest. These were always placed along well used deer runs. They were similar to buffalo pounds except that they were often a mile or more in diameter and snares were set for the deer which became imprisoned within them.<sup>26</sup> Snares were also used for capturing caribou. These were placed in the openings in a long hedge constructed across the animals' migration path for this purpose.<sup>27</sup>

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23. Coues, *New Light*, pp.519-20.

24. McGillivray, *The Journal of Duncan McGillivray*, p.67.

25. *Ibid.*, p.33.

26. Hearne, *Journey to the Northern Ocean*, pp.49-51.

27. Thompson's *Narrative*, p.98.



Water-fowl were caught in a similar manner. A number of hedges or fences, about two or three yards apart, were placed at right angles along the edge of the water where the birds generally came to feed. Small openings, large enough for the birds to swim through, were left in the hedges. In these were placed the snares.<sup>28</sup> Much the same type of trap was set to catch partridges as they hopped along the edges of the willow groves.<sup>29</sup> The natives also had another simple, but ingenious, way of capturing partridges in winter. Noticing that the snow made it difficult for them to get pebbles for their gizzards, they devised a method of catching them in nets with no other bait than a heap of gravel.<sup>30</sup>

Geese were the most important of the water-fowl.<sup>31</sup> They made up a large part of the provisions at the bayside factories.<sup>32</sup> They were killed by both white and native hunters who used a combination of European and Indian techniques. When the geese arrived in the spring about ten of the best shots at the factory with several Indians were sent to the marshes to shoot them. Each man carried two guns and erected a blind, about three feet high and six feet in diameter, made from drift wood and pine branches. This was to provide shelter from the elements as well as to con-

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28. Hearne, Journey to the Northern Ocean, p.177.

29. Ibid., pp.14-5.

30. Ibid., p.265.

31. Thompson's Narrative, p.34.

32. Umfreville, Present State, pp.20-1.

ceal the hunter from the birds' view. The blinds were placed about 120 feet apart along a line across the main flight path of the geese which was always near the sea or lake-shore. Each hunter had about 10 decoy geese. These were sticks made and painted to resemble the head and neck of the grey goose, to which was added a piece of canvas for a body. These were placed about 20 yards from the blinds, with their beaks to the windward, the position in which geese feed. When the geese first arrived, they readily answered the call of the hunter. In fact, the Indians imitated them so well that they would have landed among the decoys, had not the shots of the hunters prevented them from doing so.<sup>33</sup>

The geese were all shot on the wing. They were too timid, and the marshes too level, to allow the hunters to approach them when they were on the water. According to Thompson, some good shots killed from 70 to 90 geese during the spring hunt, but the general average was from 40 to 50, depending upon the season.<sup>34</sup> This tallies closely with Umfreville who said that a good Indian hunter, in times of plenty, could get from 50 to 60 geese a day.<sup>35</sup> The natives generally bagged more than the Europeans<sup>36</sup> but not, perhaps, because they were better shots so much as because they

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33. Thompson's Narrative, pp.34-5.

34. Ibid.

35. Umfreville, Present State, p.20.

36. Hearne, Journey to the Northern Ocean, p.283.

were better able to put up with the long hours of waiting in the cold.<sup>37</sup>

On the plains, the huge flocks of passenger pigeons added variety to the traders' diet during the annual migrations of these birds. Henry mentions "great numbers" of them at the mouth of the Assiniboine in 1800. "The trees were every moment covered with them," he wrote, "and the continual firing of our people did not appear to diminish their numbers".<sup>38</sup>

A number of other foods were gathered by the natives and whites, and added interest to the traders' table. Some of these, like dandelion greens and hazel nuts<sup>39</sup> had been familiar in Europe while others like maple sugar and wish-a-capucca "tea" were quite new. Dandelion greens were especially valued at Churchill where they made an early salad long before anything could be produced in the garden.<sup>40</sup> Maple sugar, made by boiling down the sap of the maple tree, was used as a substitute for cane sugar. It had long been produced by the Indians who sold large quantities to the traders, who also adopted their practice of making it.<sup>41</sup> Wish-a-cappuca was the name given by the natives of Hudson Bay to a plant from which they made a "tea". It was good tasting and

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37. Umfreville, Present State, pp.20-1. (The feathers of the geese were sent to London where they commanded a ready sale. - Thompson's Narrative, p.35.)

38. Coues, New Light, p.46.

39. Coues, New Light, p.54.

40. Hearne, Journey to the Northern Ocean, p.294.

41. Harmon, Sixteen Years, pp.46, 99.

used as tea by all Europeans living in that part of the Northwest.<sup>42</sup> Many berries were also gathered and used. Gooseberries made excellent pies and tarts;<sup>43</sup> strawberries "of a considerable size and excellent flavour" were found as far north as Churchill River;<sup>44</sup> and cranberries, found in great abundance near Churchill, were annually sent to England in considerable quantities as presents.<sup>45</sup> Other berries used were the heathberry, whose juice made an exceedingly pleasant beverage;<sup>46</sup> the juniper-berry, which was sometimes used with brandy to make a cordial; currents, and the bethago-tominick or dewater-berry. All of these berries were considered wholesome and antiscorbutic.<sup>47</sup>

Fish was the main staple at many posts. In fact, most of the posts had been located on lakes and streams noted for their fisheries to ensure that there would be a steady supply of food when other provisions were scarce. Fish were generally caught in nets set near the house, so that a minimum of labour and transport was necessary. The best fish were caught in the autumn and early winter. These were either dried or frozen, but seldom, it would seem, salted. Where fish was plentiful, it was intended

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42. Hearne, Journey to the Northern Ocean, p.26.

43. Ibid., p.289.

44. Ibid., p.291.

45. Ibid., p.289.

46. Ibid., pp.289-290.

47. Ibid., p.290.



to form the main item of diet. Dried provisions were to be reserved for emergencies although some were allowed to be given to the men going down in the canoes. Fish would not have been suitable since it was perishable, awkward to carry and, unlike dried provisions, had to be cooked which required precious time.<sup>48</sup> The same applied to the men who went to fetch furs from the Indian tents in winter who were allowed pemmican. Their object was to keep their sled-loads as light as possible, and so they did not wish to be encumbered with a kettle and bulky fish.<sup>49</sup> Far less bulky, and therefore more suitable for long journeys, was the roe of the fish. When dried it was easily carried and a small amount of it would serve many people. For example, two pounds of whitefish roe, when well bruised, would make four gallons of broth.<sup>50</sup>

The Chipewyans were probably the most skilled fishermen. They angled for trout and pike with hooks, some of which they bought from the traders, but for large fish they preferred their own hooks made of bone. Fish caught on their bone hooks seldom got away; such was not always true when European hooks were used.<sup>51</sup> They used a variety of baits whose nature was kept secret. However, Thompson spied a few of these and reported that eagle's fat, red rag, beaver castorum and red woodpecker feathers were among

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48. HBC Archives, B.42/b/50, f 23d.

49. Ibid.

50. Hearne, Journey to the Northern Ocean, pp.137,143.

51. Thompson's Narrative, p.129.



the things used.<sup>52</sup> For catching large trout which were taken only at depths of from 120 to 240 or more feet, the head of a whitefish was used. No hook was necessary. Instead, a small round stick of birch, well dried and hardened in the fire, was loosely attached to the underside of the bait. The trout took the bait head first, and a system of slip knots enabled the fish to swallow it before stopping its progress with a jerk. This caused the piece of wood to become vertical in the mouth and the trout was caught. This technique was adopted by the traders.<sup>53</sup>

Both the traders and natives set nets under the ice.<sup>54</sup> The traders' nets were made from twine in the European manner. But the Chipewyans made theirs from small thongs cut from raw deer-skins. These seemed very good when dry, but after being soaked in water for some time, grew so soft and slippery that when large fish struck the net, the hitches were very apt to slip and allow them to escape. Moreover, these nets were liable to rot unless regularly removed from the water and dried.<sup>55</sup> The Dogrib Indian nets were superior and did not suffer these disadvantages because they were manufactured from twine made by twisting the inner bark of willows.<sup>56</sup>

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52. Thomson's Narrative, pp.165-6.

53. Ibid., pp.157-8.

54. Hearne, Journey to the Northern Ocean, pp.11-12.

55. Ibid., p.170.

56. Ibid., pp.167-70.

### Agriculture

Hunting, fishing and gathering provided most of the food at the trading posts. But the produce of the kitchen gardens which existed at many posts augmented the food supply. Wherever possible, these were planted within the stockades to protect them from the depredations of the Indians and of the wild animals. The gardens, too, were a blending of the European and the North American. Indian corn, squashes, pumpkins, beans and potatoes from the new world, were grown beside barley, oats, wheat, cucumbers, peas, onions, turnips, beets, radishes, parsnips, cabbages, cauliflowers, cresses and lettuce from the old. With the exception of the potato (which was by then also well known in Europe) the native vegetables seem to have been raised only along the Red, Assiniboine, and Rainy rivers; that is, only in the more temperate parts of the Northwest. Barley, oats and wheat had been tried with varying degrees of success in many parts of the country. However, information was too sketchy to indicate future prospects for these or, for that matter, any other crops. But it was known that barley had been grown with excellent results at Dunvegan, on the Peace River.<sup>57</sup> It had also been successful at Bas-de-la-Riviere-Winnipeg,<sup>58</sup> and Ile-a-la-Crosse,<sup>59</sup> but failed at Churchill.<sup>60</sup> Wheat sometimes came to maturity at Ile-a-la-Crosse.<sup>61</sup> It must have been tried elsewhere as well, although

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57. Harmon, *Sixteen Years*, pp.122-3.

58. Franchere, *Narrative*, p.379.

59. Thompson's *Narrative*, p.559.

60. Hearne, *Journey to the Northern Ocean*, p.134.

61. Thompson's *Narrative*, p.559.

none of the traders mentioned it. Root crops, particularly potatoes, were grown in most of the areas inhabited by the traders. The most notable exception was the coastal strip of New South Wales where, apart from radishes, only hardy "greens" like cabbages, cauliflowers, cresses and perhaps beans and peas, could be grown.<sup>62</sup> Inland from the bay, the climate improved considerably so that potatoes, turnips and cabbages could be raised at Split Lake, on the Nelson River,<sup>63</sup> and turnips, and Potatoes at Oxford House on Knee Lake.<sup>64</sup>

#### Animal Husbandry

The Indians of the Northwest had only two domesticated animals - the dog and the horse. Their bushy-tailed, sharp-eared dogs, resembling foxes and wolves,<sup>65</sup> were described in the preceding chapter. These were also used by the traders although the Hudson's Bay Company, at least, imported dogs of its own as well. These were the large animals from Newfoundland, already mentioned, and domesticated dogs from England. The latter were not always a success. One that had been sent out to Churchill had been badly frozen because of insufficient hair. As a result a request went out for a "Dog and Bitch of large make & thick long hair the younger they are the better & do not let them be lower than 3 or 4 feet high at least".<sup>66</sup>

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62. Umfreville, Present State, pp.13-4; HBC Archives, B.42a/133,f2.

63. HBC Archives, B.239/e/1, f 4.

64. Ibid., f 5.

65. Hearne, Journey to the Northern Ocean, p.207.

66. HBC Archives, B.42a/133, f 4d.

Horses were introduced into North America by the Spaniards in Mexico and quickly spread throughout the plains,<sup>67</sup> and by the time the first whitemen entered the Northwest, the Indians were already using them.<sup>68</sup> Undoubtedly, the rapid spread of these animals had been accelerated by the frequent raids of one tribe upon another in search of horses. Indians were known to travel hundreds of miles looking for this loot. Thompson reported one occasion when the Piegans (who lived near the source of the Saskatchewan" journied a distance of fifteen hundred miles in a direct line, and stole horses and mules from the Spaniards.<sup>69</sup>

It has already been seen how, at first, the horse simply replaced the dog as a beast of burden. Besides its size, its greatest advantage over the dog was that it did not compete with the human being for food and in many areas it could, unlike the dog, fend for itself. On the plains, horses were usually kept near an "island" of trees where they could take shelter from the storms.<sup>70</sup> They fed on the long grasses of the plains throughout the year, for the snow was seldom very deep, although at times the horses were forced to remove a foot and a half of it to find their food.<sup>71</sup> The snow was usually blown from the hill tops<sup>72</sup>

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67. Francis D. Haines, *The Northward Spread of Horses*, pp.433-6.

68. La Verendrye, *Journals and Letters*, ed., L.J. Burpee, p.387.

69. Thompson's *Narrative*, p.370-1.

70. Henry, the elder, ed. Bain, *Travels & Adventures*, p.316.

71. Harmon, *Sixteen Years*, p.50.

72. *Ibid.*



but the horses preferred the grasses of the valleys which grew to a great height.<sup>73</sup> In this, they differed from the buffalo which preferred to feed on the hilly, dry ground, where the blades of grass were small, short and tender.<sup>74</sup>

Although small, the Northwest horse was bold and intrepid and so delighted "in the pleasures of the chace" that when it sighted a large band of animals, it could "scarcely be restrained from pursuing them", and was so full of fire that it could with ease out-run most of the large animals on which man depended for his subsistence.<sup>75</sup> According to Henry, a common horse could be bought from the Blackfeet and Piegans for a carrot of tobacco which weighed about three pounds and cost four shillings in Canada.<sup>76</sup> But some were apparently far more expensive since Harmon mentions losing one in the Swan River department which had cost the North West Company goods to the value of 100 dollars.<sup>77</sup> "Whenever an Assiniboine sells a racer", wrote Harmon, "he separates from him in a most affectionate manner. Immediately before delivering him to the purchaser, he steps up to the favourite animal, and whispers in his ear, telling him not to be cast down or angry with his master for disposing of him to another, for, he adds, 'you shall not remain long where you are. I sold you to obtain certain articles, that I stood in great need of; but before many nights have passed, I will come and steal you away'.

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73. Umfreville, Present State, p.78.

74. Ibid.

75. McGillivray, Journal, pp.28-9.

76. Coues, New Light, p.523.

77. Harmon, Sixteen Years, p.57.



"And, unless great vigilance on the part of the purchaser prevent, he generally fulfils his promise; for they are the greatest horse thieves, perhaps upon the face of the earth."<sup>78</sup> Thompson agreed with Harmon that the Assiniboines were the most notorious of the horse stealers and said that whenever they appeared in small numbers, the horses were immediately guarded. At great risk to themselves, they frequently stole from other tribes. All too often, this was done when the victims were visiting the trading posts. When the traders, themselves, left the posts to take their furs down to the depots by boat or canoe, the horses were sent to places where there was plenty of food and water, as well as aspen and poplar, and where they could be easily guarded by two or three well-armed men. The aspen and poplar were used to make fires to relieve the horses from the torment of mosquitoes and horse-flies.<sup>79</sup> In spite of their depredations, the Assiniboines always appeared to be short of horses which was probably a result of their hard usage of them.<sup>80</sup>

The plains tribes to the westward of the Assiniboines, the Bloods, Piegans and Blackfeet were notorious thieves, although they had not yet taken to stealing horses. This was probably because they had such vast numbers of their own.<sup>81</sup> Some of the

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78. Harmon, *Sixteen Years*, p.213.

79. Thompson's *Narrative*, pp.367-8.

80. *Ibid.*, p.367.

81. Coues, *New Light*, p.523.

Blackfeet had as many as 40 or 50 horses apiece, but the Piegans had even greater numbers, one man having been reported as having 300.<sup>82</sup> Most of these had been stolen from the defenceless tribes to the south and west, the Snakes [Shoshon], Salish and Kootenay Indians, who owned vast herds of horses but lacked guns and ammunition to protect them.<sup>83</sup> The Sarcees, seem to have contented themselves with rearing their own horses.<sup>84</sup>

A few horses appear to have been sent out from Europe to Hudson Bay<sup>85</sup> but later, even the bay posts seem to have got their horses from the plains.<sup>86</sup>

Besides horses and dogs, a number of other animals were introduced from Europe. Among these were oxen,<sup>87</sup> hogs,<sup>88</sup> goats<sup>89</sup> and cattle.<sup>90</sup> Rats were introduced, unavoidably, as they came

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82. Coues, *New Light*, p.523.

83. *Ibid*; Thompson's Narrative, p.367.

84. *Ibid*.

85. "The ships Hannah and Mary with Norton came to Churchill and brought masons and other artisans, labourers, equipment, and, apparently, a horse which died two days after arrival." - James Kenny in James Knight, *The Founding of Churchill*.

86. Coues, *New Light*, p.600.

87. James Kenny, *The Founding of Churchill*, ed. James Knight, pp. 94-5.

88. Hearne, *Journey to the Northern Ocean*, p.267.

89. William Wales, *Journal of a Voyage Made by Order of the Royal Society to Churchill River ...*, p.118.

90. HBC Archives, B.42/b/55, f 17.

from England "part owner of the cargo" but they had not yet travelled beyond the factories at the sea-side.<sup>91</sup> Domestic fowl were to be found as far west as Fort Vermilion as early as 1810,<sup>92</sup> and Hearne appears to have had a canary during his stay in the Northwest.<sup>93</sup>

The canary was only one of many pets found at the trading posts, where the men frequently took in animals to relieve the monotony of the long winter days. These ranged from the polar bear<sup>94</sup> at Churchill which wrestled with the men and shared their grog,<sup>95</sup> to the field-mouse, which was regarded as the easiest animal to tame.<sup>96</sup> Mink were also very easily tamed and in a short time became so affectionate that it was scarcely possible to keep them from climbing up the legs and body.<sup>97</sup> Of the various types of deer, the moose took most readily to taming. Hearne mentions seeing many at Churchill "as tame as sheep, and even more so; for they would follow their keeper any distance from home, and at his call return with him, without the least trouble, or ever offering to deviate from the path".<sup>98</sup> Horned owls also

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91. Thompson's Narrative, p.69.

92. Coues, New Light, p.579.

93. Hearne, Journey to the Northern Ocean, p.270.

94. The natives often tamed young bears, as well. - Thompson's Narrative, p.113.

95. Thompson's Narrative, pp.14-5.

96. Hearne, Journey to the Northern Ocean, p.242.

97. Ibid.

98. Ibid., p.166.

made good pets and Thompson often kept them during the winter.<sup>99</sup> If taken young, the arctic fox could be domesticated to a certain degree but they never became fond of carressing and were always impatient with confinement.<sup>100</sup> But still more impatient was the weasel, which sometimes lived in the out-buildings and provision sheds of the bayside posts, where they more than made up for the depredations they committed by killing great numbers of mice. Hearne tried very hard to tame and domesticate these beautiful animals but never succeeded, for the longer he kept them the more restless they became.<sup>101</sup>

Attempts to domesticate grouse also failed. Many trials were made at York by placing the eggs of the grouse under domesticated hens. The eggs hatched and the hens were every bit as fond of the young grouse as they would have been of their own kind, but the grouse always died "probably for want of proper food".<sup>102</sup> Greater success was had with the Canada Goose. In some years, the young ones were taken in considerable numbers at Churchill. They were easily tamed, but they would never learn to eat grain unless some old geese were taken with them. This was easily done when the birds were moulting.<sup>103</sup>

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99. Thompson's Narrative, p.63.

100. Hearne, Journey to the Northern Ocean, p.234.

101. Ibid., p.243.

102. Ibid., p.263.

103. Ibid., pp.281-2.

Having noticed that the beaver and the bee were "nearly alike in instinct Wonderfull in their Management of their Buildings and alike providing in the Summer for their Wants in Winter" a certain Frank Oakey, in 1806, humbly submitted to the London Committee of the Hudson's Bay Company a suggestion that the beaver, like the bee, could be domesticated. Even if the skins and castorum were worth nothing, he pointed out, the beaver would be worth breeding "as a Provision to the Servants at the Factories".<sup>104</sup> The Committee, well aware of the great distances which the company was then "obliged to go to procure Beaver in consequence of the approaching annihilation of the Species in the Country adjacent to the Factory" eagerly seized on the idea of domesticating the animal and immediately wrote to William Auld to enquire if there were in his vicinity a "Situation adapted to put his plan into Execution" and for him to inform them of the advantages and disadvantages of the scheme.<sup>105</sup> Auld apparently made enquiries at York Factory which replied directly to London that "The least or even the greatest attempt, with the aid of all your servants at York Factory to execute the plan for propagating Beaver as a commercial concern here or we think in any part of the Country would shew in the Undertakers marks not only of Folly but signs of insanity".<sup>106</sup>

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104. HBC Archives, A.10/1, ff 94-95d.

105. HBC Archives, A.6/17, ff 89d-90.

106. HBC Archives, B.239/b/79, ff 51-51d.



### Clothing

Most of the clothing used by the traders came from either Canada or England, usually as partial payment for services; but some was also bought from the Indians, particularly winter wear. This was inevitably made from furs and dressed skins, since none of the Indian tribes of the Northwest had wool, linen or cotton. Skins of the deer family were preferred, with moose being the most popular. It made excellent tent-covers and shoe-leather and was used for all types of clothing. The Indians dressed these skins by soaking them in a lather made of the brains and some of the softest fat and marrow of the animal, after which they were dried by the heat of the fire and then hung in the smoke for several days, before being taken down and well soaked in warm water. The skins were then taken out and wrung as dry as possible and afterwards dried by the heat of a slow fire, care being taken to rub and stretch them as long as any moisture remained in the skins.<sup>107</sup> Because the skins were not dressed in oil, they always went hard after being wet unless great care was taken to keep rubbing them all the time they were drying. The same applied to all Indian dressed leather except that made from the wapiti [elk] which washed as well as chamois-leather and always preserved its softness.<sup>108</sup> Because their own clothing was frequently stiff and uncomfortable after having been wet, the Indians often preferred European wear, especially

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107. HBC Archives, B.239/b/79, p.168.

108. Ibid., p.167.

for use during the wet weather of the spring and autumn. European clothing must have had a special appeal for the women who otherwise had to perform the tedious task of softening the leather of the family's clothing, particularly when the men were in camp. It also relieved them, of course, of the labour of making the clothing in the first place.

Some idea of the amount of work and material which went into producing an Indian's clothing may be gained by examining the annual wardrobe for an adult. First in importance was the warm winter suit. To make it, the prime parts of the skins of from eight to ten deer were required. All of these should have been killed during August or early September, for after that the hair was too long and at the same time so loose that it would drop off with the slightest injury.<sup>109</sup> Light summer clothing, as well as stockings and shoes, were made from dressed leather. For these things, several more skins were required. In addition, skins were needed in a parchment state, for making thongs, or clewla, as the natives called them, for manufacturing netting for snow-shoes, snares for deer, sewing for sledges, fish-nets and so on. All in all, each person required upwards of twenty deer-skins for clothing and other uses, each year, exclusive of tent cloths, bags and a number of other things made from them.<sup>110</sup>

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109. Hearne, Journey to the Northern Ocean, p.127.

110. Ibid., p.128.

Among the most highly esteemed articles of native clothing were Eskimo boots. These were worn to above the knee by both the men and women. The foot was of moose-skin, and the upper part was of seal-skin with the hair off. Both were sewed neatly together so as to be perfectly water-tight. These boots were much sought after by the people at the factories for use in the marshes where their European boots always leaked. With care, a pair would last two years.<sup>111</sup>

#### Medicine

For the most part, the natives of the Northwest had strong constitutions and good health. Their diseases were few with dysentery and a violent pain in the chest, known as the "country distemper", being among the most prevalent.<sup>112</sup> The latter was supposed by Umfreville and other "to proceed from the cold air being drawn into the lungs; which impeding the vessels from spreading through that organ, hinders the circulation, and renders respiration extremely painful and difficult".<sup>113</sup> Mackenzie, however, thought this unreasonable. He believed that the complaint came from the natives' "immoderate indulgence in fat meat at their feasts, particularly when they have been preceded by a long fasting".<sup>114</sup> A venereal disease was also very common among the natives although Umfreville thought the symptoms to be "much milder than in Europe,

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111. Thompson's Narrative, p.20.

112. Umfreville, Present State, p.19; Harmon, Sixteen Years, p.200; Mackenzie, Voyages, p.xcv.

113. Umfreville, Present State, p.19.

114. Mackenzie, Voyages, p.xcv.

"perhaps owing to their diet, which is void of spices, or salt, and of spiritous liquors, when from the Factory".<sup>115</sup> According to Mackenzie the progress of this disease was slow but it nevertheless gradually undermined the constitution and brought on premature decay.<sup>116</sup> In any case, few of the natives lived to a great age. However, they tended to enjoy all their faculties to the last.<sup>117</sup> Many of them died of consumption and "fevers" frequently attacked them.<sup>118</sup> They were also troubled with pains in their heads, breasts and joints, and many of them, especially the women, were subject to fits.<sup>119</sup>

For relief from nearly all of their diseases, the Indians resorted to their favourite remedy - sweating. This was done in a structure designed especially for that purpose. "They make a Little hutt or tent, about four foot high and about 6 foot over, - which Done, they take as many Coats or skin's, as they can procure, and Cover itt up close, Leaving a small Vacancy to go in att, - they then take about 20 Large stones, and heet them hott in the fire, in another tent, when hott, they put them into their hutt or swetting house, as they Explain itt. (Mu tu tu san a'ke,) then they go Naked as they were born, their they sitt Like monkey's

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115. Umfreville, Present State, p.19.

116. Mackenzie, Voyages, pp.cxxiv-cxxv.

117. Umfreville, Present State, p.19.

118. Harmon, Sixteen Years, p.200.

119. Ibid.

"upon their Brich, tell they are in a perdigious sweet, - and when they think they have swetted Suffitiently, they then come out, and Run as they are in Such a heat into the River if Summer, if Winter they wash themselves with Snow, by Which I never Knew itt did them Either good or harm; - Such methods with Some Europeans wou'd be prest. Death, But these Natives are of such a Strong constitution as before mentiond that nought can hurt them."<sup>120</sup>

The sweat-house was supplemented by a fairly elaborate system of medicine. The Ojibwas, Woodland Crees and Plains Crees had a greater knowledge then other tribes of the medicinal qualities of the bark of trees, herbs, roots and so forth. This, together with their superior medical skill enabled them to charge high fees to members of other tribes who frequently called upon them for their professional services. Sometimes, for a handsome compensation, the medicine-men would give instructions on where to procure certain medicinal ingredients, and how they should be prepared and used in particular cases.<sup>121</sup> The usual method of administration of their materia medica was in the form of purges and clysters, but these remedies, like their rudimentary surgery, were blended with the mystery of magic and incantation.<sup>122</sup> Harmon was obviously impressed with their skill and said that it was well known "to those

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120. James Isham's Observations on Hudsons Bay, ed. E.E.Rich, pp.96-7.

121. Harmon, Sixteen Years, p.199.

122. Mackenzie, Voyages, p.cvi.



"acquainted with the Indians, that their physicians frequently effect cures with their roots, herbs, &c in cases, which would baffle the skill and the drugs, of a scientifick physician"<sup>123</sup> although he cynically observed that it was very probable "that Indian doctors, like some apothecaries in the civilized world, sell some medicines, of little or no value".<sup>124</sup>

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123. Harmon, Sixteen Years, pp.199-200.

124. Ibid., p.199. (But if the Indians were capable of perpetrating drug frauds, they were also equal to being the dupes of one. Referring to the Chipewyans, Alexander Henry, the elder, wrote in 1776; "Their solicitude and credulity, as to drugs and nostrums, had exposed them to gross deceptions, on the part of the agents of the Hudson's Bay Company. One of the chiefs informed me, that he had been at the Bay the year before, and there purchased a quantity of medicines, which he would allow me to inspect. Accordingly, he brought a bag, containing numerous small papers, in which I found lumps of white sugar, grains of coffee, pepper, allspice, cloves, tea, nutmegs, ginger and other things of this kind, sold as specifics against evil spirits, and against the dangers of battle; as giving power over enemies, and particularly the white bear, of which the Indians in these latitudes are much afraid:- others were infallible against barrenness in women; against difficult labours; and against a variety of other afflictions. In a second parcel, I found small prints; the identical ones, which, in England, are commonly sold in sheets to children, but each of which was here transformed into a talisman, for the cure of some evil, or obtention of some delight:- No. 1, "A sailor kissing his mistress, on his return from 'sea';"- this, worn about the person of a gallant, attracted, though concealed, the affections of the sex! No. 2. "A soldier in arms"; - this poured a sentiment of valour into the possessor, and gave him the strength of a giant!

"By means of these commodities, many customers were secured to the company; and even those Indians, who shortened their voyage by dealing with us, sent forward one canoe, laden with beaver-skins, to purchase articles of this kind, at Cumberland House."

Henry, the elder, Travels and Adventures, 1809 edition, pp. 326-7.)

The Crees had certain simples which induced abortions, which they sometimes practised, and it was claimed that the act could be repeated without injury to the health of the woman on whom it was performed.<sup>125</sup> For sprains, the dung of an animal just killed was considered to be the best remedy.<sup>126</sup> To cure blisters on the feet caused by frost or chafing shoes, the Indians immediately opened the blister and applied the heated blade of a knife to the affected part. As painful as it was, the treatment was found to be effective.<sup>127</sup> A sharp flint was used as a cautery for searing bruises and swellings, as well as for a lancet for letting blood.<sup>128</sup>

The Indian procedure for letting blood was found to be very effective and was adopted by the traders on occasion.<sup>129</sup> Unlike the European method, it was not performed upon the arm but upon the back of the hand, after the wrist had been tied off "pretty hard". In praise of this technique, James Isham wrote that he had "never heard of any one that Losst their arm, or that came to any hurt by so doing".<sup>130</sup>

Chipewyan medicine was far less developed than that of their southern neighbours. In fact, Mackenzie claimed that the uses of

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125. Mackenzie, Voyages, p.xcviii.

126. Ibid., p.cvi.

127. Ibid.

128. Ibid.

129. Cumberland and Hudson House Journals, I, p.145: II, p.246.

130. Isham's Observations, pp.97-8.

simples and plants were unknown because their country did not produce any.<sup>131</sup> Consequently they had to recourse to superstition for their cures; and charms were their only remedies, except for the bark of the willow, which was burned and reduced to a powder and sprinkled on open wounds and ulcers.<sup>132</sup>

The use of the inner bark of the larch as a poultice, "which is generally us<sup>d</sup> among the Natives to stop or Prevent a Mortification"<sup>133</sup> was adopted by the Europeans. They also learned from the Indians the only "efficient cure yet known" for snow blindness. It consisted simply of applying the steam of boiling water, as hot as the patient could bear, to the affected eyes.<sup>134</sup>

Probably the greatest elixir of the Northwest was wish-a-cappuca "tea".<sup>135</sup> Umfreville wrote that it grew "very plentifully in all parts of the country. The Indians make use of it by way of medicine; it makes a very agreeable tea, and is much used here both by Europeans and natives, not only for its pleasant flavour, but for its salutary effects. Its virtues are many; it is an aromatic, very serviceable in rheumatic cases, strengthens the stomach, relieves the head, and also promotes perspiration. Outwardly, it is applied to gangrenes, confusions, and excoriations;

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131. Mackenzie, Voyages, p.cxxv.

132. Ibid.

133. Journals of Hearne and Turnor, p.139.

134. Thompson's Narrative, p.52.

135. Also Wee suc a pucke, Labrador tea, or *Ledum groenlandium* Oeder.

in the latter case the powder is made use of".<sup>136</sup> However, Samuel Hearne, who was a very keen observer, very much doubted if wish-a-cappuca tea "had the least medical quality" although it was "much used by the lower class of the Company's servants as tea; and by some ... thought very pleasant".<sup>137</sup> Thompson seems to have been less sceptical and found it a useful cure for dysentery.<sup>138</sup>

The cold of winter, which was thought to be "fatal to every species of contagious fever" seemed in the case of scurvy to be "the most dreadful auxilliary".<sup>139</sup> To cure and prevent scurvy many expensive articles were imported including English porter, port wine, crystalized salt of lemon, and essence of malt.<sup>140</sup> Local cranberries were considered "nearly equal to oranges & lemons as a specific for Scurvy".<sup>141</sup> Spruce-juice was also very effective as an antiscorbutic.<sup>142</sup>

Apart from the usual sicknesses, epidemics raged across the Northwest from time to time. Probably the most catastrophic of these was the smallpox epidemic of the winter of 1781-2.

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136. Umfreville, Present State, p.15.

137. Hearne, Journey to the Northern Ocean, p.293.

138. Thompson's Narrative, p.152.

139. HBC Archives, A.11/18, f 23b.

140. Macdonell to Selkirk, Nelson Encampment, 29 May 1812, Rep. on Canadian Archives, 1886, p.ccxvi.

141. HBC.Archives, B.42/b/57, f 4d.

142. Macdonell to Selkirk, Nelson Encampment, 29 May 1812, Rep. on Canadian Archives, 1886, p.ccxvii.



Thompson thought that the epidemic probably had its origin in an attack which some Sioux and Ojibwa had made on a number of infected white settlers in 1780. From the Ojibwa the disease had spread among the tribes of the forest throughout the country, and from the Sioux, to all of the Indians of the plains and even to those beyond the Rockies.<sup>143</sup>

At first the Indians were unaware that smallpox could be passed on, one man to another, any more than a wounded man could give his wound to another.<sup>144</sup> But after they had learned of the infectious nature of the disease, they would immediately abandon even their closest relations as soon as they became ill.<sup>145</sup> As a result, many Indians starved or were eaten by wild animals before they could recover their strength.<sup>146</sup> However, the Hudson's Bay men, at least, took many of the victims under their roof and shared with them all that they had.<sup>147</sup> Apparently none of the Europeans contracted the disease from the Indians.<sup>148</sup> Although no records remain, it is possible that the servants of the North West Company behaved just as humanely. The Hudson's Bay men tried to prevent the disease from spreading by keeping the different tribes separated

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143. Thompson's Narrative, pp.322-3.

144. Ibid., p.337.

145. Cumberland and Hudson House Journals, II, p.264.

146. Ibid., II, p.265.

147. Ibid., II, pp.262-298.

148. Ibid.



from one another,<sup>149</sup> and by smoking their own effects with flowers of sulphur to prevent them from transmitting the infection.<sup>150</sup>

Proportionately more men died than women and children because the men, unable to bear the heat of the fever, rushed into the rivers and lakes to cool themselves, and the greater part of them perished. From the number of tents which remained after the epidemic, it appeared that about two-fifths of the natives died, although the survivors believed that far more than half the population had perished.<sup>151</sup>

#### Slavery

After the epidemic, at least one tribe stopped the indiscriminate slaughtering of its enemies and began adopting the children, young women and male youths not yet bearing arms, whom they captured in attacks. In this way, they hoped to build up their own strength at the expense of that of their enemies.<sup>152</sup> Older Indians, of course, continued to be slaughtered.

A number of the young women captives were sold to the traders and reared at the posts, where Umfreville claimed they were "more happy than their slaughtered parents had ever been".<sup>153</sup> Some, like

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149. Cumberland and Hudson House Journals, II, p.297.

150. Ibid., II, p.226.

151. Thompson's Narrative, p.323.

152. Ibid., p.339.

153. Umfreville, Present State, p.97.

the one Hearne requested a war party to obtain for him, were brought up as domestics,<sup>154</sup> while others, like the two Sioux women Thompson's men bought from the Mandans in 1798, were later sold to other traders.<sup>155</sup> On one occasion, two women were reported to have been taken as far as Montreal to be sold.<sup>156</sup>

After 1806, the partners of the North West Company were forbidden to allow their men to take women from the Indians. Those who did so were made to pay a heavy fine.<sup>157</sup> The Hudson's Bay Company was not known to impose a fine, but it had always discouraged its men from having any sort of connection with the native women. Nevertheless, over the years a considerable number of Indian wives and Halfbreed children tended to collect at the various posts. Finally in 1802, the small council at York Factory decided to throw caution to the winds, and sent an address to the London Committee on their wives and children. The address preceded the sending of an account of the company goods which had been supplied to the women and children, and was apparently intended to allay any protests which the committee might make by pointing out that the women were "deserving of some encouragement and indulgence" since they cleansed and put into a state of preservation all beaver and other skins brought in by the Indians,

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154. Hearne, Journey to the Northern Ocean, p.171.

155. Thompson's Narrative, pp.238-239.

156. Journals of Hearne and Turnor, p.35.

157. Documents Relating to the North West Company, p.262.

as well as preparing line for snow-shoes, making leather shoes and performing many other useful tasks. "In short" the council added, "they are virtually your Honours Servants and as such we hope you will consider them".<sup>158</sup>

#### Uses of Trees

Tanning leather was among the important tasks of the women. They generally employed the reddish inner-bark of the birch for this purpose.<sup>159</sup> The outer-bark of this tree, as previously seen, was widely used for covering canoes. But it was also highly esteemed for making tents as well because, unlike leather, it could be packed when wet without rotting. However, it had the disadvantage of cracking if it were rolled when cold. Consequently, it often had to be heated over a fire before being packed away.<sup>160</sup> The bark was most easily removed from the tree during the early part of the summer when the sap was rising.<sup>161</sup> Undoubtedly, the birch was the most important single tree in the Northwest but, as already pointed out, the maple, cedar, pine, spruce and other trees were also widely used for a variety of purposes. The pine was also important for its turpentine.<sup>162</sup>

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158. HBC Archives, B.239/b/79 f 40d.

159. Thompson's Narrative, p.115.

160. Ibid., p.116.

161. Ibid.

162. Journals of Hearne and Turnor, p.318.

### Minerals

Few minerals were known to exist in the Northwest, and of those which were known, not many were used. Salt-springs had been discovered in many places,<sup>163</sup> but they were apparently not used by the Indians for preserving food. The natives probably understood the preservative qualities of the brine, but preferred to preserve their food by drying it. Certainly the traders, who would have been very familiar with salted provisions at home, completely adopted the native method of preservation when they were in the interior,<sup>164</sup> although the Nor'westers carried salt provisions from Fort William and the Hudson's Bay Company annually put down many barrels of ducks and geese in brine at its bayside factories. Native provisions were often scarce on the bay, and so the produce of the short water-bird seasons had to be used throughout the year. Salting seemed to be the only means available for preserving the birds until they could be used. The salt being sold to passing traders by the free-trader at The Pas in 1808,<sup>165</sup> would have been intended solely for flavouring.

Coal was found in open seams at several places along the Saskatchewan<sup>166</sup> and Mackenzie rivers.<sup>167</sup> In its pure state it was

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163. Mackenzie, Voyages, p.403.

164. Harmon, Sixteen Years, p.113.

165. Coues, New Light, pp.470-1.

166. Ibid., pp.702, 742, 743.

167. Mackenzie, Voyages, p.96.

used by the smiths of the North West Company for the forge, with equal portions of charcoal made of birch or aspen, and answered every purpose for making and repairing axes and other tools.<sup>168</sup> It does not appear to have been used by the natives except for dying porcupine quills.<sup>169</sup>

Probably the natives did make use of the bitumen which issued in "fountains" along the banks of the Athabasca River near the forks of the Clearwater and elsewhere,<sup>170</sup> and it was probably they who taught the traders to mix it with spruce gum to seal their canoes.<sup>171</sup> The fountains seemed to be quite deep, since a twenty foot pole could be inserted "without the least resistance".<sup>172</sup>

Copper appeared to be the only metallic mineral employed by the natives (although Mackenzie saw several lumps of un-used iron ore on the banks of the Mackenzie River).<sup>173</sup> It was found on the Coppermine River and on the south shore of Lake Superior.<sup>174</sup> It was only used by a few Indians and even then it was not smelted but merely beaten into shape.<sup>175</sup>

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168. Coues, *New Light*, p.702.

169. Mackenzie, *Voyages*, p.96.

170. *Ibid.*, p.402.

171. *Ibid.*, p.lxxxvii.

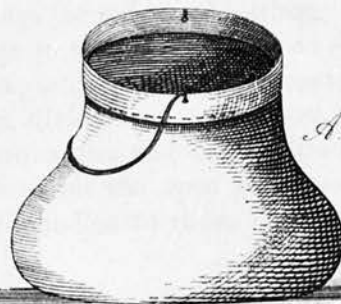
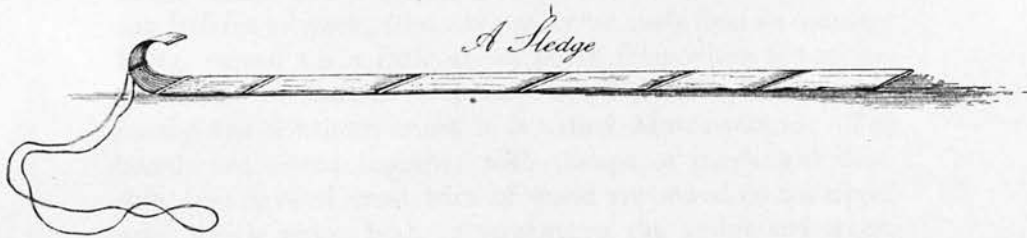
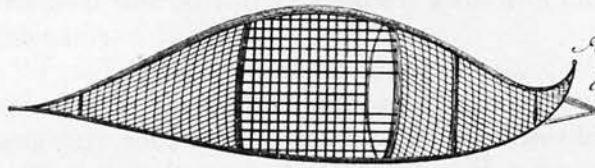
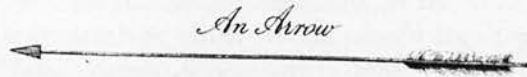
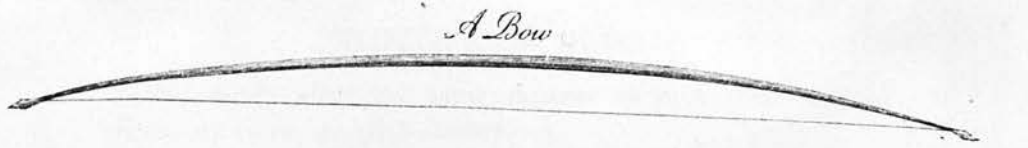
172. *Ibid.*

173. *Ibid.*, p.95.

174. Henry, the elder, *Travels and Adventures*, ed. Bain, pp.186, 187, 195, 196; Thompson's *Narrative*, p.291.

175. Henry, the elder, *Travels and Adventures*, ed. Bain, p.187.





INDIAN IMPLEMENTS

Figure 11. Indian Implements

### Native Craftsmanship

Stone was widely used by the Eskimoes and by some Indian tribes for making utensils and other objects. The Chipewyans skilfully carved stone pipes for smoking tobacco, a habit which they had learned from the Europeans.<sup>176</sup> These pipes, along with the tobacco, a flint and steel, and touchwood for making a fire, were often carried in a small bag called a skiperton. Some of these were truly elegant, being richly ornamented with beads, porcupine-quills and moose-hair. They were made by the women and were highly esteemed by the Europeans for the neatness of their workmanship.<sup>177</sup> The porcupine-quills were coloured with a number of different dyes which the Indians made from the roots of plants. So impressed was John Reinhold Forster with the quality of the natives' dyes, that he urged the Hudson's Bay Company to export some of the roots to England for dying cloth.<sup>178</sup>

### Eskimo Carvings

Ivory was much used by the Eskimoes in making many of their utensils, weapons and tools. It was also employed for making toys for their children. These were mostly small carvings in the forms of their birds, beasts and fish; their men, women and

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176. Mackenzie, Voyages, p.cxxvii.

177. Hearne, Journey to the Northern Ocean, p.31.

178. John Reinhold Forster, A Letter from Mr. John Reinhold Forster, F.R.S. to William Watson, M.D. giving some Account of the Roots used by the Indians, in the Neighbourhood of Hudson's Bay, to dye Porcupine Quills, pp.56-7.

children; and of their utensils. Their more recent carvings reflected what they had seen of the whiteman and his equipment. For there were now also carvings of European men, and of their ships, luggage boats, small canoes, and bows and arrows. In short, nothing escaped their keen powers of observation and imitation.<sup>179</sup> William Wales, the scientist, believed that perhaps few people had a "greater genius for arts". He said that it was shown in every one of their implements, but particularly in their boats, harpoons, darts, bows and "snow-eyes". The latter was a device "excellently contrived" for protecting the eyes from the effects of the bright sun on the snow in the spring.<sup>180</sup>

#### Whaling

One of the most ingenious of the Eskimo implements was the harpoon. These were designed for use at sea. They were attached to inflated bladders by means of coiled ropes. The bladder not only marked the course of the wounded animal, but greatly slowed it down as well, so that it might easily be taken.<sup>181</sup> With these weapons, large white whales could be taken by the Eskimoes in their frail little kayaks. The kayaks were ideally suited for the geographical conditions of the area near the mouth of the Seal River where the white whales congregated for about a month each summer. At this place, the bottom of the bay was studded with huge rocks

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179. Coats, Geography of Hudson's Bay, p.75.

180. Wales, Journal of a Voyage ... to Churchill River, p.110.

181. HBC Archives, B.42.a/136a, ff 11d, 12.

and was so level that the water retreated some six to seven miles at low tide. The whales swam among the rocks making them very difficult and dangerous to pursue in conventional boats. But the Eskimoes, with their kayaks, could twist about in any direction with great dexterity to avoid the rocks and still capture their prey with their harpoons and bladders.<sup>182</sup>

This method of whaling was safer than that used by the men of the Hudson's Bay Company. They used small sail-boats with the bottoms painted white to resemble the whales. The crews consisted of "two of the worst hands in the factory". One man acted as both steersman and harpooner and stood, with the tiller between his legs and the harpoon in his hands, watching under the boat for any "silly whale" which mistook it for a companion.<sup>183</sup> The harpoon line was fastened to the boat (rather than to a bladder) and frequently a wounded whale pulled the boat from three to five miles, at some five miles per hour, before the animal could be finally dispatched with a lance.<sup>184</sup> In an area with so many large rocks lurking beneath the shallow waters, the small boats and their crews were in constant danger of being pulled to their destruction. For many of the whales were large and powerful.

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182. HBC Archives, B.42.a/136a, ff 11d, 12.

183. HBC Archives, B.42.a/136a, ff 11d, 12. (In defence of the whales' intelligence, it might be pointed out that during the time of year (June) they frequented this area, the waters were very muddy as the rivers, expanded by the melting snows, dumped large quantities of clay, sand and other debris into the bay. Peter Freuchin, Arctic Year, p.220).

184. Thompson's Narrative, pp.23-4.

William Auld wrote that they ranged from sixteen feet in length down to three or four feet,<sup>185</sup> while Thompson said that they averaged about fifteen feet.<sup>186</sup>

Eighty or ninety whales were taken by each of the company's boats during the season.<sup>187</sup> That meant that each boat produced some eight and a half to nine and a half tons of oil each year. The number of boats used depended largely on how many men could be spared from other tasks to man them.<sup>188</sup> With the shortage of personnel during the wars, it was unlikely that more than one or two boats could be fitted out for whaling in 1811, and probably the production was then no higher than it had been during Hearne's time when eight to thirteen tons of oil were sent to England each year.<sup>189</sup> Because of the manpower shortage and the financial difficulties the company was then experiencing, it was doubtful if the bounty offered to those engaged in whaling during Hearne's day,<sup>190</sup> was still in effect.

White whales were also taken by the Eskimoes in the Mackenzie delta,<sup>191</sup> but only in New South Wales were they hunted by Europeans. Whaling was never popular among the whites, but at least it provided a diversion for those who were forced to live in what must have been one of the least interesting regions in the whole of the Northwest - New South Wales.

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185. HBC Archives, B.42a/136a, f 11.

186. Thompson's Narrative, p.23.

187. HBC Archives, B.42a/136a, f 11.

188. Ibid.

189. Hearne, Journey to the Northern Ocean, p.253.

190. Ibid.

191. Mackenzie, Voyages, p.64.



## CHAPTER VI

### NEW SOUTH WALES<sup>1</sup>

"Wales, New South, a country of vast extent, but little known, lying round the southern part of Hudson Bay." So read the entry in Jedidiah Morse's (1810) American Gazetteer. Morse made no attempt to define the limits of New South Wales but under "Wales, New North", he set its northern boundary at Seal River. However, from this and from contemporary maps, it may be assumed that New South Wales comprised the extensive coastal plain which bordered the southwestern part of Hudson Bay. North of Seal River, the "granitic rocks" of the Stony Region extended to the shores of the bay, but from Seal River southward to Churchill River, a narrow marsh, apparently the alluvial of Seal River, intruded between the rocks and the bay. South of Churchill, the rocks formed a retiring line from the coast to meet the Nelson River some 135 miles from its mouth.<sup>2</sup> From there to Severn River, the line seemed to parallel the bay since the first granite was encountered approximately the same distance up that river. From the Severn, it was only a short distance to the eastern boundary of the Northwest. Enclosed between the line

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1. See figure 1. *Canadians*, VII, p. 326.

2. Thompson's Narrative, p. 8.

of rocks and the bay was the coastal plain of New South Wales. According to Thompson, it was "wholly alluvial".<sup>3</sup>

Named "New Wales" in 1612 by Thomas Button and renamed "Principality of South Wales" nineteen years later by Captain Thomas James,<sup>4</sup> New South Wales was still largely unexplored in 1811. Traders had occupied its shores since 1683, but they had seldom strayed from its turbulent rivers or from the great windswept marshes which lined its coast. The rivers carried them into the interior of the Northwest; their rapids, shoals, and rocks were very well known, indeed; so too were the marshes, for they had been covered on foot many times by the men going from one factory to another; but for the rest: it was largely unknown.

#### The Edge of the Bay

The coastal marshes of New South Wales were so broad that the stunted trees along their western limits could not be seen from the low-lying coastline of the bay.<sup>5</sup> During the spring and autumn, the marshes were visited by vast flocks of migrating ducks and geese. They came to feed upon the short tender grasses which grew upon the intervals of land between the innumerable small ponds and streams covering much of the marshes. The birds

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3. Thompson's Narrative, p.8.

4. Encyclopedia Canadiana, VII, p.326.

5. Thompson's Narrative, p.32.

never ventured more than a mile or two from the coast, for the interior of the marshes contained too much moss for their feeding.<sup>6</sup>

From the edge of the marshes, the waters of Hudson Bay appeared to be deep. However, a change of tide quickly showed how deceptive this appearance was. For instead of water, as far as the eye could see, stretched a vast expanse of glistening mud, strewn with innumerable boulders.<sup>7</sup> How these huge stones (weighing from one to seven tons) had got there and where they had come from, was not clearly understood. Observing that the greater part of them were lodged about half-tide, where the drift ice remained on shore, and that Seal River was the most southerly place where the coastline was of rock, Thompson reasoned "that the whole of these boulders must have come with the ice from the northward of that river, for south of it, and of Churchill River all is alluvial". Since these rocks were found along the western shores of the bay to its most southern part, he continued, "this evidently shows a strong set of the north sea into Hudson's Bay on its west side, returning by the east side into Hudson's Straits".<sup>8</sup>

But whatever their origin, the boulders were a menace not only to whaling, as already seen, but to the navigation of the annual supply ships from England, as well. Few indeed, were the places where the ships dared to venture close to the land.

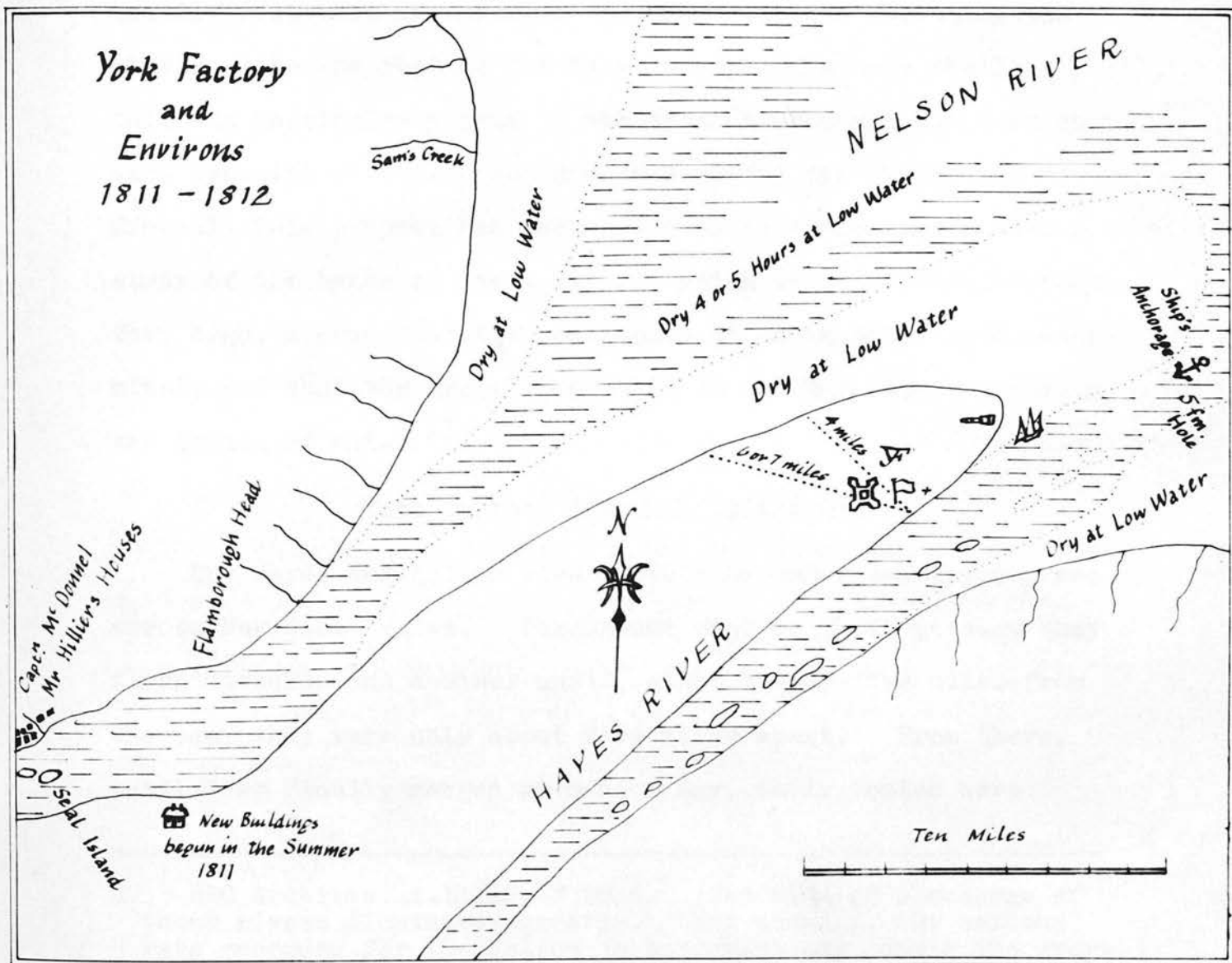
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6. Thompson's Narrative, p.34.

7. Ibid., p.32.

8. Ibid., The boulders are now believed to have resulted from the Keewatin glaciation and from being rafted along the coast by ice during winter.

Figure 12



Near the mouths of the main rivers there were sometimes basins suitable for anchoring ships: these were scooped out by the spring torrents from the rivers. But their presence could never be counted upon for the torrents which created them might just as readily fill them in again.<sup>9</sup> In any case, the mouths of the rivers, like the rest of the bay, were getting more shallow. This was particularly true of the shoal Nelson and Hayes which were becoming steadily less and less useful for navigation.<sup>10</sup> Probably this process had been going on for some ages. For a study of the banks of these rivers, which were from ten to forty feet high, showed that they consisted of earth and gravel intermixed, and that the gravel and small stones had been rounded by the action of water.<sup>11</sup>

#### York Factory (figures 12 and 13)

The Hayes and Nelson rivers followed northeasterly courses across New South Wales. Throughout most of their passage they flowed towards one another until, about twenty-five miles from the sea, they were only about five miles apart. From there, until they finally merged at Hudson Bay, their routes were

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9. HBC Archives, A.11/18, f 28 d. The rate of discharge of these rivers fluctuates greatly. For example, the maximum rate recorded for the Nelson is approximately double the average, and more than six times the minimum rate. For the Churchill, a maximum of nearly three times the average has been recorded. - Atlas of Canada, plate 33.

10. Ibid.

11. Thompson's Narrative, p.9. We now know, of course, that there was an appreciable "spring back" after the ice of the last sheet melted from the land. This led to a slow but widespread elevation which is reflected in many raised beaches.



roughly parallel. On the long point of land between their final ascents was located the main establishment of the Hudson's Bay Company, York Factory. The factory buildings were situated upon the Hayes about four miles wide.<sup>12</sup> The Hayes, rather than the mighty Nelson, had been chosen because it was considered by the natives to be much the safer river to travel upon and consequently they had generally used it in coming down to the bay. Moreover, it was generally open a month before the Nelson.<sup>13</sup> After the establishment of York and with the later development of communication with the interior, the white traders came to agree with the natives in their preference for the Hayes.<sup>14</sup> An added advantage of the Hayes over the Nelson was that the very mud-flats and boulders which made it difficult for the supply ship to approach the factory, also protected the factory from attack from the sea. From Five Fathom Hole, where the company ships anchored, to the factory three miles away, all was mud between almost every tide.<sup>15</sup>

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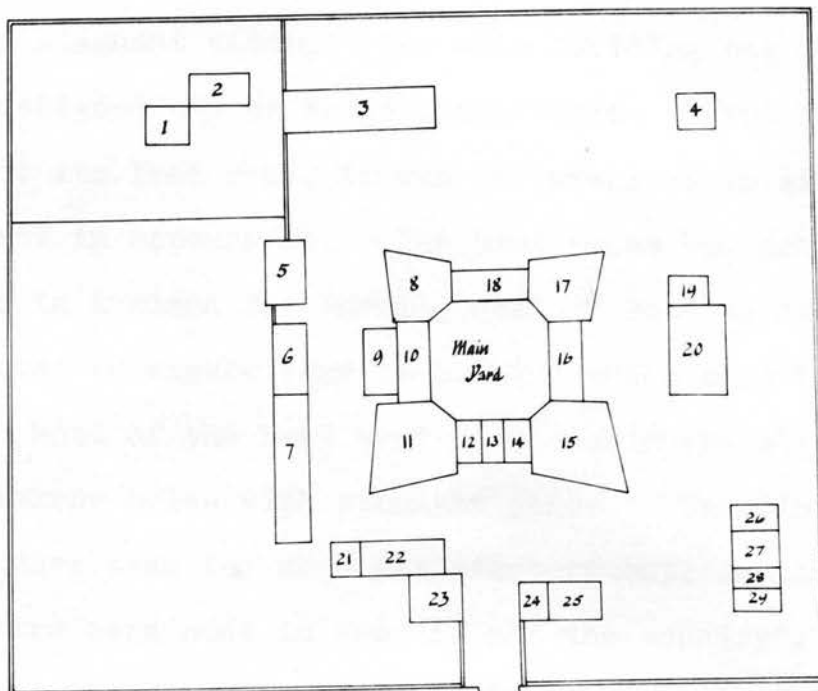
12. HBC Archives, B.42/b/57, sketch map of York Factory area.

13. Macdonell to Selkirk, York Factory, 1 October 1811, Report on Canadian Archives, 1886.

14. HBC Archives, B.42a/136a, ff 7-7d. In the 1750's the company had also had a post on the Nelson as well. It was located opposite Flamborough Head and had been intended to anticipate an interloping expedition thought to be planned by a group in England who were at that time trying to deprive the company of its charter. The interlopers had been expected to establish themselves on the Nelson. - J.B.Tyrrell in Journals of Hearne and Turnor, p.165.

15. Coats, Geography of Hudson Bay, pp.38-9.

Figure 13



A Sketch of  
York Factory  
1815

Scale 1:288

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|--------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Winter House          | 16. Warehouse          |
| 2. Cook Room             | 17. Warehouse          |
| 3. Distillery            | 18. Warehouse          |
| 4. Magazine              | 19. Salt Shed          |
| 5. Men's Winter Dwelling | 20. Inland Men's House |
| 6. Carpenter's Shed      | 21. Shop House         |
| 7. Fur Shed              | 22. Trading House      |
| 8. Warehouse             | 23. Keg Shed           |
| 9. Cook Room             | 24. Meat Shed          |
| 10. Servants Apartments  | 25. Officers Room      |
| 11. Officers House       | 26. Oil Shed           |
| 12. Shed                 | 27. Cook Room          |
| 13. Gateway              | 28. Cooper             |
| 14. Shed                 | 29. Blacksmith         |
| 15. Men's House          |                        |

From a sketch in the H.B.C. Archives, G1/13

The factory was built on low miry ground about one hundred yards from the river. During the open season it was always surrounded by stagnant water. The main building was two storeys high, badly designed and as badly constructed. From its heaving foundations to its lead roof, it was inconvenient in every respect and indifferent in appearance. The best rooms had grates similar to those used in England for burning coal. But the front bars had been removed to enable logs to be used which were burned standing on end. Most of the heat went up the chimneys which were merely deep narrow holes with straight jambs. Canadian or Swedish stoves would have been far more satisfactory but, complained Miles Macdonell, there were none in use "in all the country".<sup>16</sup>

All of the buildings, except the launch house and the canoe store, were surrounded by a rectangular stockade some four hundred by three hundred feet. The pickets were about eighteen feet above the ground and so slender and open that they could give no protection from an enemy. Outside the stockade, on the bank of the river close to the wharf, was a store called the launch house. Each spring, it was in danger of being carried away by the breaking up of the ice, and the precaution of removing the stores into the factory had to be taken. In 1811, however, the stores were little safer in the factory since it, too, was flooded. So grave was the threat at one

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16. Macdonell to Selkirk, Nelson Encampment, 29 May 1812, Rep. on Canadian Archives, 1886, p.ccxvi.

point, that manned boats were kept on the ready at the front gate so that the inhabitants could save themselves and some of the stores should the waters continue to rise.<sup>17</sup>

Because the factory was built in a swamp, its cellars were full of water from June to November, and had to be pumped out several times a week. During this time, nothing could be kept in them.<sup>18</sup> But even in winter, their use was limited, since anything which would be damaged through freezing could not be stored in them.<sup>19</sup> With the coming of the cold weather and the freezing of the swampy ground, the buildings tended to shift on their foundations, causing the doors and windows to cast. Through the resulting gaps, whipped the winter's winds. So cold was the main building, and so inefficient and ineffectual were its fireplaces, that serious consideration was being given to abandoning it in winter. The men would be moved to the woods a few miles off. A responsible person would be left in charge of the factory with one or two others to assist in the care of the gates and other tasks. In this way, five or six fires could be saved while most of the men would enjoy the comfort of a snug winter house. The winter house would be built of "temporary materials" so that after the woods near it had been burned off, it could be either moved to a new site, or unreluctantly abandoned since the original cost

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17. Macdonell to Selkirk, Nelson Encampment, 29 May 1812, Rep. on Canadian Archives, 1886, p.ccxvi.

18. HBC Archives, B.42a/136a f 6d.

19. Macdonell to Selkirk, Nelson Encampment, 29 May 1812, Rep. on Canadian Archives, 1886, p.ccxvi.



would be very low.<sup>20</sup>

Although the factory buildings were still being lived in during the winter of 1811-12, it should be pointed out that for many years previously, it had been the custom for some of the people to take to log tents in the woods during the severe weather;<sup>21</sup> particularly, the sick who could not be permitted to live in the factory because there were no fireplaces in the men's cabins.<sup>22</sup> These log tents must have been similar to those used by Edward Ellis more than half a century earlier. His tents "were made of Trees hewn and cut, about sixteen Feet long, raised close together, their Ends lying one against another at the Top, but extending at the Bottom, in the Form of the Roof of a Country-House. Between these Logs the Vacancies were stuffed with Moss, and that being plaistered over with Clay, made a warm Hutt; the Door was low and small, a Fire-Place in the middle, and a Hole over it, to let out the Smoke".<sup>23</sup> Ellis supposed the "contrivance" to be borrowed from

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20. HBC Archives, B.42a/136a, f 7.

21. On 8 January 1811, Mr. Cook, who was then in charge of York Factory, wrote "Our Gentlemen have all tho' rather reluctantly been out at Tents and are there yet indeed there is no alternative owing to the wetness of the firewood. I have seen the Doctor twice and the poor Devil appeared to be miserable, from indolence having a habitation that Proserpine herself could not exist in. He declared he was almost blind with smoke but as he saw that I was out myself and braved the smoke like another Pluto I expected he would do the same and make a virtue of necessity . . ." - HBC Archives, B.42/b/55, f 1d.

22. HBC Archives, B.42/b/57, ff 4-4d.

23. Henry Ellis, *Voyage to Hudson's Bay*, p.154, quoted in James Isham's *Observations on Hudson's Bay*, ed. E.E. Rich, p.214, footnote.



the Indians<sup>24</sup> although James Isham, his contemporary, said they "never build any".<sup>25</sup>

In October of 1811, an irregular line of log tents were built along the north bank of the Nelson River, about fifty miles from York Factory, to house a group of Irish and Scots settlers. With the coming of spring, the settlers planned to travel inland to take up land along the Red River in a tract which had been recently granted to Lord Selkirk. The tents were high in front with a shade roof sloping to the rear, and were covered over with moss and clay nearly a foot thick.<sup>26</sup> They had been placed near a point known as the "Deer Crossing Place", where it was thought there would be a ready supply of food. According to the natives and the traditions of their forefathers, there had never been a year when, at certain seasons, the deer had not passed that way.<sup>27</sup> About two miles of deer fences, with snares concealed in them, had been erected on both sides of the river but by the end of 1811, the deer had still not come.<sup>28</sup>

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24. Henry Ellis, *Voyage to Hudson's Bay*, p.154, quoted in James Isham's *Observations on Hudson's Bay*, ed. E.E. Rich, p.214, footnote.

25. *Ibid.*, p.91.

26. Macdonell to Selkirk, *Nelson Encampment*, 31 May 1812, Rep. on the Canadian Archives, 1886, p.ccxviii.

27. HBC Archives, B.42/b/55, f 1.

28. Macdonell to Selkirk, *Nelson Encampment*, 31 May 1812, Rep. on the Canadian Archives, 1886, p.ccxix.

Across the river and a bit down stream, the year-old outpost of York, known as the "New Establishment", was also disappointed by the failure of the deer. Its success the previous winter, had caused the chief at York to rashly predict that his factory, from then onward, could be virtually independent of English provisions. But now he must have ruefully echoed Hearne's warning, based upon twenty years of experience in the Northwest, that anyone who relied "much on the produce of the different seasons, will frequently be deceived, and occasionally expose himself and men to great want".<sup>29</sup> "In some years," wrote Hearne, "hundreds of deer may basily be killed within a mile of York Fort; and in others, there is not one to be seen within twenty or thirty miles. One day thousands and tens of thousands of geese are seen, but the next they all raise flight, and to to the North to breed. Salmon . . . . . is so plentiful in some years at Churchill River, that it might be procured in any quantity; at others so scarce as to be thought a great delicacy."<sup>30</sup>

It was hoped that the garden laid out at the New Establishment would be more productive than the deer hedge had so far been. The soil about the house appeared to be rich and "being from its low situation exposed to the innudation of a Creek and the River receives each year tribute of rich manure the finest nature produces".<sup>31</sup>

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29. Hearne, Journey, p.254. *Journal of the Voyage of James Hearne, 29 May 1812, 30p.*

30. Ibid. *Canadian Archives, 1886, p.207.*

31. HBC Archives, B.42/b/55, f 1.

34. Ibid.

35. Unfreville, Present State, pp.6-7.

36. Ibid., p.7.

Certainly, any produce of this garden would be extremely welcome at York for, in 1811, there was no garden at the factory, itself.<sup>32</sup> (The cabbages served at the factory in October had come from the garden at Churchill Factory.)<sup>33</sup> Miles Macdonell, with the critical eye of the new-arrival, claimed that a garden formerly cultivated at the old factory at York had produced well, but that the present chief "has no taste that way".<sup>34</sup> Relations between Macdonell and the chief, William Auld, had not been very cordial and it was possible that Macdonell was being unfair. There was, of course, a serious manpower shortage and it might well be that Auld felt he could not spare the men for a garden.

Macdonell had only spent one winter in the Northwest when his comments were made. He had not yet experienced the full extremes of the climate of New South Wales where Umfreville reported that "a good Fahrenheit's Thermometer frequently stood at 50 degrees below the cypher in the month of January; whereas in summer, the mercury would very frequently ascend to 90 deg. above the cypher, making a difference of 140 degrees between the extremities of heat and cold".<sup>35</sup> The frost never left the ground. Even in summer it remained at a depth of four feet below the surface in open areas and in places where the forest shut out the sun, to a depth of only two feet.<sup>36</sup> But even if the climate had been less extreme,

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32. Macdonell to Selkirk, Nelson Encampment, 29 May 1812, Rep. on the Canadian Archives, 1886, p.ccxvi.

33. Ibid.

34. Ibid.

35. Umfreville, Present State, pp.6-7.

36. Ibid., p.7.

Umfreville felt that the "loose and clayey" nature of the soil at York made it very unfit for agriculture, even if the climate would have permitted it. He conceded that "a tolerable quantity of cresses, radishes, lettuces, and cabbages" could be procured with proper cultivation and, in a favourable season, even peas and beans but he warned that "these so seldom come to any perfection, that they are esteemed a kind of luxury".<sup>37</sup>

Macdonell admitted that the season was too short for growing grain but observed that good meadows might be made in every part of the country which he had so far seen. Auld would no doubt have agreed with this, but would also have pointed out the difficulties involved in keeping domesticated animals in such a severe climate. Sufficient grass had to be cut to last the eight months of winter and, during this period, the cattle as well as the store hogs, were fed in the house.<sup>38</sup> At the end of 1811, there were three cows and as many horses at York Factory.<sup>39</sup> Hay was procured from islands in the vicinity. Macdonell claimed that these could furnish fodder for a considerable stock were the people expert in making it. Instead of following the present practice of

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37. Umfreville, Present State, pp.13-4.

38. HBC Archives, B.42a/131, f 1d.

39. Two calves, born in the spring, were then at Oxford House. They were to be sent with the colonists to the Red River. - HBC Archives, A.11/18, f 25.



cutting only what was close to the water's edge and bringing it away in boats to the factory to dry, he suggested that it could be cured and stacked on the spot; and since the islands did not flood until spring, that it could easily be brought away in winter.<sup>40</sup>

With so little in the way of agricultural produce and country provisions, York Factory had always relied heavily on European supplies, particularly salted meats.<sup>41</sup> This resulted in periodic epidemics of scurvy. Those suffering from the disease were always put into a log tent "for the benefit of having a fire near their bed".<sup>42</sup> York was the most notorious post for scurvy, although the disease was not unknown at the other bayside factories.<sup>43</sup> By the end of 1811, it had not made its expected appearance, although Macdonell was not very hopeful for the months ahead since, with the failure of the deer-hedge, his men were then living entirely on salted provisions.<sup>44</sup> In an attempt to stave off the disease, he requested from Auld "a quantity of Essence of Malt, Chrystalized Salts of Lemon, &c".<sup>45</sup> Auld apparently did not have sufficient stocks on hand at York Factory, for when he left for Churchill late in October, he took with him two men with Indians and dogs, who were

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40. Macdonell to Selkirk, Nelson Encampment, 29 May 1812, Rep. on Canadian Archives, 1886, pp.ccxvi-ccxvii.

41. HBC Archives, B.42/b/55 f2.

42. HBC Archives, B.42/b/57, ff 4-4d.

43. Macdonell to Selkirk, Nelson Encampment, 29 May 1812, Rep. on Canadian Archives, 1886, p.ccxvi.

44. Macdonell to William Cook, Governor of York Factory, Nelson Encampment, 30 November 1811, Report on the Canadian Archives, 1886, p.cxcviii.

45. Ibid.



to return to York with a load of "Essence of Malt and Cranberries".<sup>46</sup>

Auld had gone to Churchill for the winter in order to help reduce the amount of wood burned at York.<sup>47</sup> During the past summer at Churchill, many of the superfluous servants from the interior had been employed in rafting fire-wood, while awaiting the arrival of the annual ship. The ship, as already seen, was so late in reaching the Northwest, that it by-passed Churchill and went right on to York. As a result, a huge pile of wood accumulated which, along with the coal from England on hand, should last for three or four years at least.<sup>48</sup> Unlike Churchill, the Hayes and Nelson rivers did not seem to have been used for rafting down fire-wood, although drift-wood was known to collect at Flamborough Head.<sup>49</sup> Instead, horses were employed to haul in fire-wood during the winter months. Late in December 1811, after the deer and other animals had failed to materialize, Auld's replacement at York sardonically wrote, "our fire-wood hunters succeed better, thank God the Trees are not migratory, else no doubt they too would have shunned our now unhallowed and pestilential neighbourhood".<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, the line of trees, over the years, had been retreating ever further from York and the other bayside factories, under the relentless

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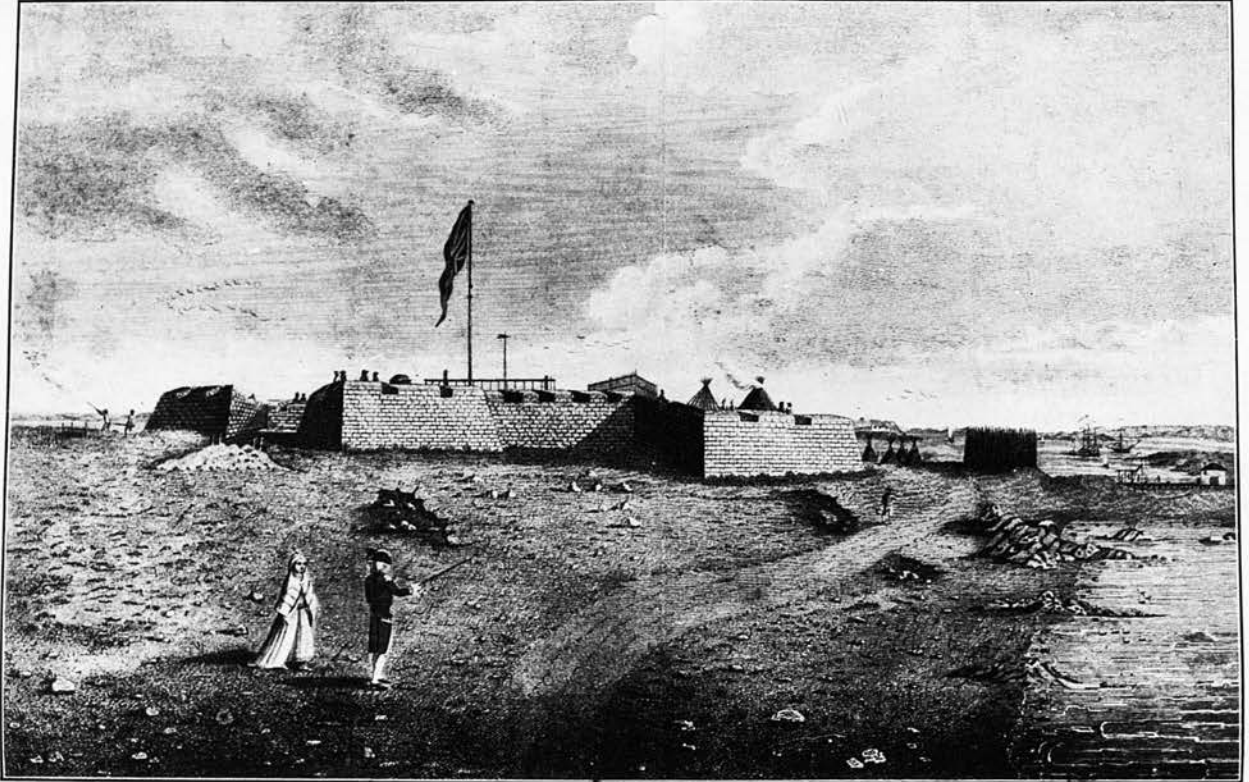
46. HBC Archives, B.42/b/57, f 4d.

47. Ibid.

48. HBC Archives, A.11/17, f 17.

49. HBC Archives, B.239/b/82 f 12.

50. HBC Archives, B.42/b/57, f 13d.



A NORTH-WEST VIEW OF PRINCE OF WALES'S FORT IN HUDSON'S BAY, NORTH AMERICA

Figure 14. Fort Prince of Wales

51. HBC Archives, B.43/v.46, p.16.

52. Coats, Geography of Hudson Bay, p.16.

demands for fire-wood and timber. This was particularly true at Churchill where the trees were both further from the factory and smaller in size than at the other factories. There, the country had been ransacked for timber so long that nothing worthy of the name could now be obtained. Back in 1802, when some planks were required to repair the launch, a number of men were sent in search of timber. After several days of hunting, the best they could find was a "patch of middling stout trees" which had to be hauled several miles overland before being sent twenty-six miles by water to the factory. On this, as on other occasions, the needed timber was finally obtained from Severn, the most southerly factory in New South Wales.<sup>51</sup>

#### Churchill Factory (Figure 15)

By the middle of the eighteenth century, the scattered trees along the banks of the Churchill had been cleared to a distance of some eighty miles from its mouth.<sup>52</sup> Most of them undoubtedly had been consumed in the large fire-places at Fort Prince of Wales (figure 14) where they had brought the inhabitants a mixture of comfort and distress. For it had been the custom at the fort to close the tops of the chimneys with an iron cover as soon as the wood had burned down to glowing coals. This kept the heat in the house, but unfortunately it also kept in the smoke as well, causing

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51. HBC Archives, B.42/b/46, p.12.

52. Coats, Geography of Hudson Bay, p.36.

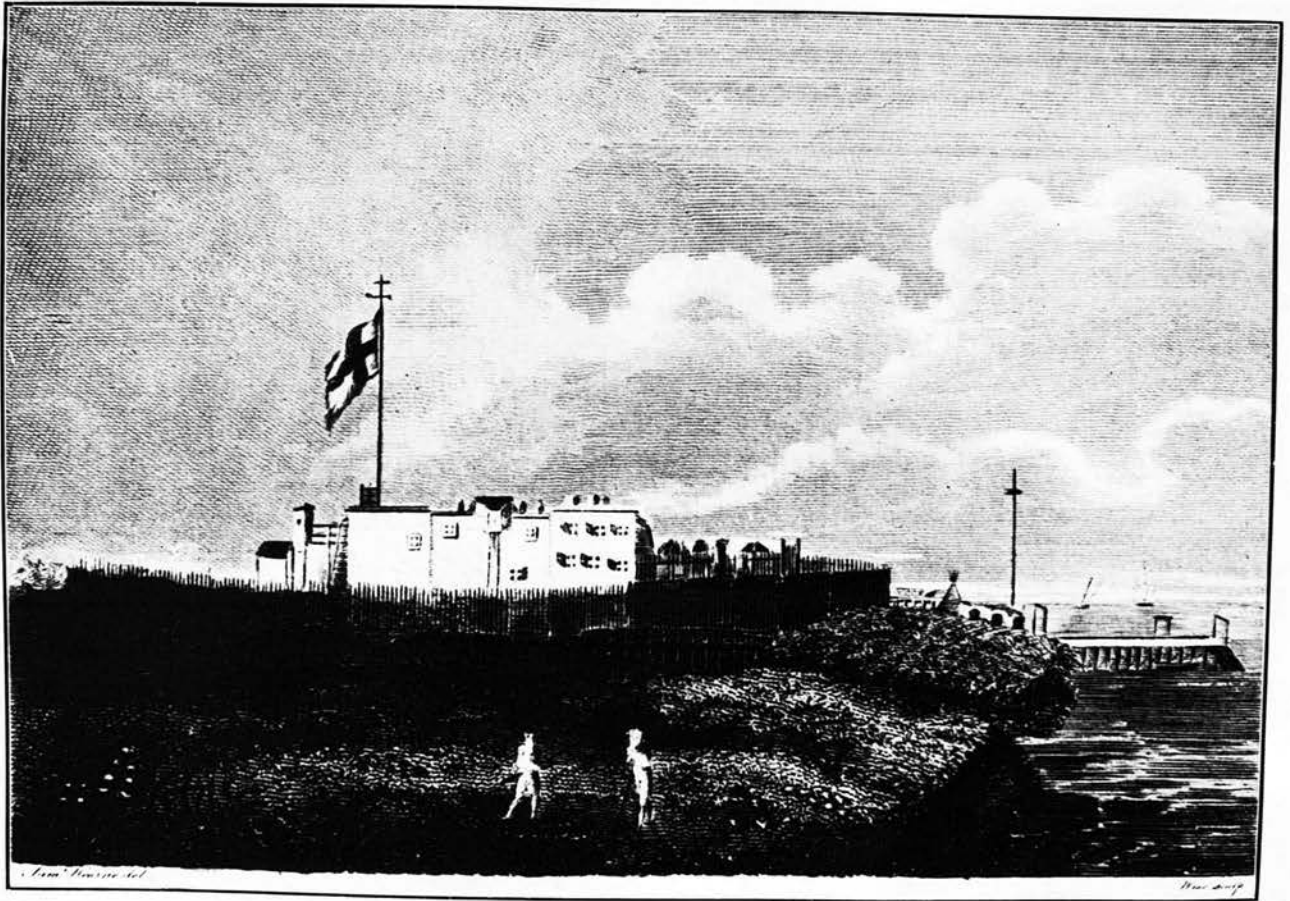


Figure 15. Churchill Factory

Christopher Clark

pp.130-1.

EPJ Archives, E.130.1



the inmates' heads to ache, particularly during the eighteen hours a day when the shutters were kept closed. In four or five hours, the fire was out and soon the inside walls of the house and the bed places were covered with two or three inches of ice. This was chopped away each morning with a hatchet. Three or four times a day, twenty-four pound shot were made red hot and hung in the windows of the apartments. Yet even with these to supplement the fires, it was not enough to prevent the beer, wine, ink and so forth, from freezing in the rooms.<sup>53</sup>

Probably few of the men wept when Fort Prince of Wales was destroyed by the French in 1782. But if they had expected it to be replaced with a more comfortable building, they were doomed to disappointment. For the new house, sent out the next year "in frame", had apparently been designed for English conditions and, because of the "thinness of the weather boarding", offered meagre protection from the harsh winds of Hudson Bay.<sup>54</sup> During the following year, Thompson spent his first winter in the Northwest in this building. He vividly described the experience: "All our movements more, or less, were for self-preservation: All the wood that could be collected for fuel, gave us only one fire in the morning, and another in the evening. The rest of the day, if bad weather, we had to walk in the guard room with our heavy coats of

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53. Christopher Middleton, *The Effects of Cold*, ed. John Barrow, pp.130-1.

54. HBC Archives, B.239/b/43, f 5d.



dressed Beaver; but when the weather was tolerable we passed the day in shooting Grouse. The interior of the walls of the House were covered with rime to the thickness of four inches, pieces of which often broke off, to prevent which we wetted the whole extent, and made it a coat of ice, after which it remained firm, and added to the warmth of the House . . ."<sup>55</sup>

During his stay at Churchill, Thompson visited the granite ruins of Prince of Wales and was much impressed with how the fort from its strategic position upon Eskimo Point, commanded the narrow entrance to the mighty Churchill. By land the fort could be approached only by a narrow neck of sand, and by sea only at one place because of the shallowness of the water.<sup>56</sup> The new house, where Thompson wintered, had been built five miles above the stone fort. It had been suggested that Samuel Hearne, the Governor of Churchill, had deliberately chosen a location for the new post from which Prince of Wales could not be seen, because he did not wish to be ever reminded that it was he who had surrendered it to the French without firing a single shot. This, however, was not the case. The decision to relocate the post had been made by Beaver House, the company's headquarters in London. It had instructed Hearne to choose "the most convenient Situation above Cuckolds point . . ."<sup>57</sup> miles higher up the River than where the Stone Fort was built".

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55. Thompson's Narrative, pp.12-3.

56. Ibid., p.9.

57. HBC Archives, B.42/b/44 f ld.

Probably London thought it expedient to move closer to the source of fire-wood and lumber, although it must have known that this was a very marshy area. However, Hearne managed to find a rocky point and here he built his fort.

The rocky point proved to be a very poor choice. In fact, William Auld went so far as to say that the factory "could not have been more disadvantageously placed had the highest premium been given for the most diligent search".<sup>58</sup> The situation, he said, was so inconvenient that a very considerable part of the men's "labour and study" had to be expended in merely overcoming the difficulties it produced. The point was small - just large enough to accommodate the factory and its palisades, but no more. It was too high and too steep for easy communication with the water, and yet it was too low for safety since "any old drunken women" could set the place ablaze in a moment by throwing down fire-brands from the higher rocks, near by. Nor would there be the slightest hope of extinguishing the fire since water could only be got at a great distance and at an even greater inconvenience. During the winter, the palisades were of no use whatever since they were covered over with drifted snow to a depth of fifteen feet. Fresh-water came from a cask sunk in a swamp about three hundred yards from the factory. Unfortunately, it was on the

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58. HBC Archives, B.42/a/131, f 2d.

same level as the high tides so that in the autumn, it was rare when the cask was not overflowed with sea-water. But what really vexed Auld was the knowledge that near at hand was an ideal site for a factory. Not only did it have a large fresh-water pond, but it was well situated for defence and easily accessible from the river. Moreover, part of the site was level and admirably suited for a garden. So eligible did the spot appear to everyone at the factory that they often considered putting up a palisade around it in order to prevent the Canadians from settling there should they ever come to the Churchill, for there was not a single other place on the river suitable for an establishment.<sup>59</sup>

Although Churchill had a garden in 1811, when York did not, it must be pointed out that Churchill was even worse situated for provisions than York. For not only was its climate more severe, because of its more northerly location, but the banks along the lowest ten miles of the river were nothing but loose gravel, bare rocks, or marshes. Each year they were overflowed by the spring tides and never dried until they were flooded once again.<sup>60</sup>

William Wade, F.R.S., explored this area to see if he could discover any ground suitable for grain. But "in all that extent", he wrote, "we did not find one acre, which, in my opinion, was likely to do it."<sup>61</sup> However, Wales was less pessimistic about

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59. HBC Archives, B.42/a/131, ff 2d-3.

60. William Wales, *Journal of a Voyage Made by Order of the Royal Society to Churchill River*, p.118.

61. *Ibid.*

the prospects of growing oats in ground near the stone fort, although he was "well convinced" that no other grain could be raised. He based his optimism upon a trial he had seen which led him to believe that oats "might be brought to some tolerable degree of perfection in time, with proper culture".<sup>62</sup> This trial was almost certainly the one referred to by Hearne who was at Churchill when Wales was there. Hearne, who had served with the Navy in Spain before going to Hudson Bay, described the oat field as "nothing but a hot burning sand, like the Spanish lines at Gibraltar, the success of the experiment may easily be guessed; which was, that it did not produce a single grain".<sup>63</sup>

The problems involved in keeping livestock at Churchill were similar to those at York. With a great deal of labour sufficient hay was cut and dried in the marshes to keep a few animals during the long winter.<sup>64</sup>

#### Country Provisions

Local provisions were similar to those found at York. They consisted mainly of ducks and geese from the coastal marshes, and deer from the interior woodlands, and also like York, could never be depended upon. In many areas of the Northwest, where game was scarce, fish played an important supplementary role in the trader's

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62. Wales, *Journal of a Voyage*, p.118.

63. Hearne, *Journey*, p.134, footnote.

64. Wales, *Journal of a Voyage*, p.118.

67. RBC Archives, B.235/b/75, p.11.

Fortunately, few of the unhappy incidents which marred the early relations between the whites and Eskimoes now occurred. Part of the improvement was probably due to the influence of a number of Eskimo interpreters, trained at Churchill during the previous half century. These had not only learned English, but often Cree or Chipewyan as well. In fact, the whites usually communicated with the Eskimoes in Cree.<sup>76</sup> At the end of 1811, there was an Eskimo youth staying at the factory who had arrived only a few months before but already he promised "much advantage" in the company's "future connection with these people".<sup>77</sup>

#### Trade in New South Wales

Churchill had been intended to trade with the Eskimoes. But the main reason for establishing it had been to tap the trade of the Chipewyans and Athapaskans, the apex of whose lands reached the bay at Churchill. The somewhat older York Factory had been expected to continue to monopolize the trade with the Algonkian Crees and their Siouan allies, the Assiniboines. But these tribes, already armed with guns, soon cut the Athapaskans off, and quickly dominated the Churchill trade, as well. The fact that they were armed and came to the factories by canoe while the Athapaskans travelled on foot, gave them a tremendous advantage over their

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76. HBC Archives, B.42/b/55, ff 15d-16.

77. HBC Archives, All/16, f 18.



diet. But in New South Wales this had never been the case. For fish were few in both kind and number. Hearne maintained that the black whale, white whale, salmon, and a small fish called kepling were the "only species of Sea-fish" found in that part of the country.<sup>65</sup>

York, however, had one great advantage over Churchill Factory in that the Hayes and Nelson led to Lake Winnipeg and ultimately to the pemmican lands along the Saskatchewan and Red Rivers. The Churchill River, on the other hand, was poor in provisions. Along its banks were few plains and those which did exist were too covered with trees for the buffalo to graze. The only exception was the area around its source in the Beaver River.<sup>66</sup>

#### Natives of New South Wales

In the autumn of 1808, a few Chipewyans, who had summered far to the north of Churchill, arrived at the factory with three hundred pounds of venison to trade. On their way there, they had been waylaid by a considerable number of Eskimoes who had "laid them under contributions". Guns and ammunitions, of course, changed owners, but fortunately for the Indians, they were allowed to continue to the factory for a fresh stock.<sup>67</sup> Such incidents were all too common between members of the different native groups. But no post was more familiar with them than was Churchill. For here

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65. Hearne, Journey, p.252.

66. HBC Archives, B.42a/136a, f 10d.

67. HBC Archives, B.239/b/75, p.11.

was the meeting place of three of the four major linguistic families of the Northwest - the Algonkian, Athapaskan and Eskimoan. (See figure 5.) All three groups were extremely jealous of one another, making it essential for the traders at Churchill to be ever on their guard not to show favouritism to any one of them.<sup>68</sup> The Algonkians were represented by the Crees who formed the "Home Guard", not only at Churchill, but at York and at its outpost, Fort Severn, as well. The Home Guard were Indians who lived near the factories where they could be called upon to assist in case of attack, to help in the hunt, to carry messages, and to aid in the transport of furs and goods between the bay and the posts in the interior. Apparently, they had not always been the gainers from their long contact with the whites. In fact, it filled Miles Macdonell with melancholy when he reflected "that during their long intercourse with the whites they have not acquired one moral virtue, nor is the faintest idea of the true deity to be found among them". By 1811, he said, their morale and loyalty had slipped so low, that the people who had offered to defend the factories against the French attack in 1782, would not now even come to take part in the goose hunts. There were no chiefs among them and they were "in the utmost state of individual debasement and depravity than can be conceived".<sup>69</sup>

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68. HBC Archives, B.42a/132, f 18.

69. Macdonell to Selkirk, Nelson Encampment, 29 May 1812, Rep. on the Canadian Archives, 1886, pp.ccxvii-ccxviii.

Most of New South Wales was occupied by the Crees except for the Churchill area, which was shared with the Chipewyans of the Athapaskan group, and the coastal strip north of Churchill, which was the domain of the Eskimoes. The Chipewyans were somewhat less debauched than the Crees, mostly because their contact with the whites had been less intimate and for a shorter time; while the Eskimoes, though long associated with Europeans, had always kept their distance and were comparatively little influenced by them.

About the middle of the eighteenth century, the Hudson's Bay Company, with the invaluable assistance of Hearne's Matonabee, was instrumental in bringing about a truce between the Chipewyans and the Crees.<sup>70</sup> It was still in effect in 1811, although quarrels still broke out from time to time, particularly where liquor and women were concerned.

But another feud, that between the Chipewyans and the Eskimoes still persisted into 1811. Its origins were lost in history. James Knight, the founder of Churchill nearly a century earlier, regarded the Eskimoes as the aggressors while Hearne, some fifty years later, placed the blame on the Chipewyans. Whenever an important Chipewyan died, he explained, it was generally believed that they had been conjured to death, either by some of their own

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70. Hearne, Journey, pp.225-7.

countrymen, by some of the Crees, or by some of the Eskimoes. Too often the suspicion fell on the latter which was "the grand reason their never being at peace with those poor distressed people".<sup>71</sup> An exception during Hearne's time, were the Eskimoes of Knapp's Bay, Navel's Bay and Whale Cove. They were not attacked by the Chipewyans because they were under the protection of Churchill Factory which annually sent a sloop up the coast to trade with them.<sup>72</sup> The sloop, complete with an Eskimo interpreter, enabled the company to trade with the Eskimoes who were too timid to come to the factory. During the winter, however, when the Chipewyans would be absent, the Eskimoes sometimes became bolder, in fact, too bold. In 1805, for example, the Governor of Churchill was alarmed to see "the whole of the Esquimaux returned again wanting much to winter at the factory". It was only "with great difficulty" that he "persuaded them to go to their own Country to hunt furs and return again early in the spring to kill Whales and Seals which they . . . promised to do".<sup>73</sup> The following year they returned, with sixty-one seals, in time to take part in the whaling.<sup>74</sup>

By 1811, traders from the company's sloop visited the Eskimoes' tents with the greatest freedom and safety in areas where not so long before, they would not have dared to venture unarmed.<sup>75</sup>

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71. Hearne, Journey, pp.216-7.

72. Ibid., p.217.

73. HBC Archives, B.42/a/130, ff 1-2.

74. HBC Archives, B.42/a/132, f 18.

75. Hearne, Journey, p.218.



enemy-rivals.<sup>78</sup> Since both York and Churchill ended up trading with the same tribes, an unintentional and unwelcome rivalry developed between the two factories which was highly damaging to the company's interests.

Most of the Athapaskans who did manage to trade at Churchill Factory were of the Chipewyan tribe. They occupied a large tract between Reindeer Lake and Churchill.<sup>79</sup> It was relatively rich in reindeer but very poor in fur animals. South of them lay reasonably good fur lands but they were prevented from trading or hunting there by the Crees with whom they were then at war. To the northwest were the Yellow-knives and Dogribs whose countries produced excellent furs. From them the Chipewyans obtained by purchase, extortion or theft, most of the peltry they brought to Churchill to trade.<sup>80</sup>

After the truce was arranged by Matonabee, the Chipewyans began hunting on Cree lands "without giving the least offence to the proper inhabitants", and soon their trade at Churchill increased by many thousands of Made Beaver.<sup>81</sup> Amidst such prosperity, who could have predicted that in a few years the truce would lead to disaster for the Chipewyans. For from their former enemies, during the winter of 1781-2, they caught smallpox which "carried off nine-tenths of them and particularly those people who composed the trade at Churchill Factory."<sup>82</sup> The few survivors, following the example

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78. Douglas MacKay, *The Honourable Company*, p.75; Knight, *Churchill*, p.90.

79. Thompson's *Narrative*, p.559.

80. Hearne, *Journey*, p.115.

81. *Ibid.*, pp.115-6.

82. *Ibid.*



of the Crees, began to carry their furs to the Canadians, who had by then settled in the heart of their country. With most of the Chipewyan middlemen gone, the Yellow-knife and Dogrib trade failed which, in turn, led to yet another catastrophe. For the sake of the few remnants of iron-work which remained among them, a war broke out in which the more numerous Dogribs destroyed nearly all of the Yellow-knives. Soon after the war, the few Yellow-knives who remained found their way to a Canadian post to trade and were thus lost to the Hudson's Bay Company as well as to the few surviving Chipewyan middlemen.<sup>83</sup>

For many years the Churchill trade languished. But, in 1805, it began to improve.<sup>84</sup> The absorption of the XY Company in 1804 had given the North West Company a monopoly in the Athabasca Country. Prices were immediately raised and there were complaints of harsh treatment among the Indians.<sup>85</sup> The Hudson's Bay Company was quick to exploit this growing dissatisfaction and soon Indians from as far away as Lake Athabasca and Great Slave Lake began trading at Churchill.<sup>86</sup> In spite of the fact that it was usually necessary to expend the powder, shot and so forth, which had been the object of the trip, on the homeward lap,<sup>87</sup> these Indians apparently con-

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83. Hearne, *Journey*, pp.115-6.

84. HBC Archives, B.42/b/51, f 11d.

85. *Ibid.*

86. HBC Archives, B.42a/136a, ff 12-12d.

87. Mackenzie, *Voyages*, p.xci.

sidered the journey worth while if it meant avoiding the Canadians. Before the epidemic, they would have been in great danger of being robbed by the Chipewyans on their way to or from the factory.<sup>88</sup> But now the greatly reduced Chipewyans appeared to be concentrating their attention on hunting in the fur lands of their Cree neighbours. Certainly they were encouraged to do so by the Hudson's Bay Company who, by refusing to take any more reindeer skins, were deliberately forcing the Chipewyans "to desert a country which tho teaming with Deer has no shelter for valuable Animals whose furs alone are able to cover the enormous expenditure of the Company".<sup>89</sup>

Both Churchill and York were plagued with personnel shortages but fortunately for Churchill, more than two thirds of its furs were carried to its gates from great distances by the disgruntled Indians.<sup>90</sup> In other words, the recent increase at Churchill had been largely fortuitous and it had apparently been recognized as such by the London Committee. For in 1810, it decided that most of the inland trade, including Athabasca, would be in future conducted from York. In fact, it seemed that even Churchill, itself, was destined to be reduced to a mere outpost of York. For in 1811, it was proposed that the posts on the Churchill should be supplied from York; those on the lower river by schooner, while those on the

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88. Hearne, Journey, pp.116-7.

89. HBC Archives, B.239/b/74, pp.61-2.

90. HBC Archives, B.42/b/51, f 11d.

upper river by means of boats and canoes via the Burntwood River and portage.<sup>91</sup> The schooner would be the one now used to supply Severn Factory from York. The changes would be in preparation for the company's long projected assault upon the Athabasca Country. York, rather than Churchill, would be the base largely because of its superior situation for supplies. Thus, through the shabby warehouses of York Factory was to flow the whole of the trade conducted by the Hudson's Bay Company in the Northwest.

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91. HBC Archives, A.6/18, pp.32-3.



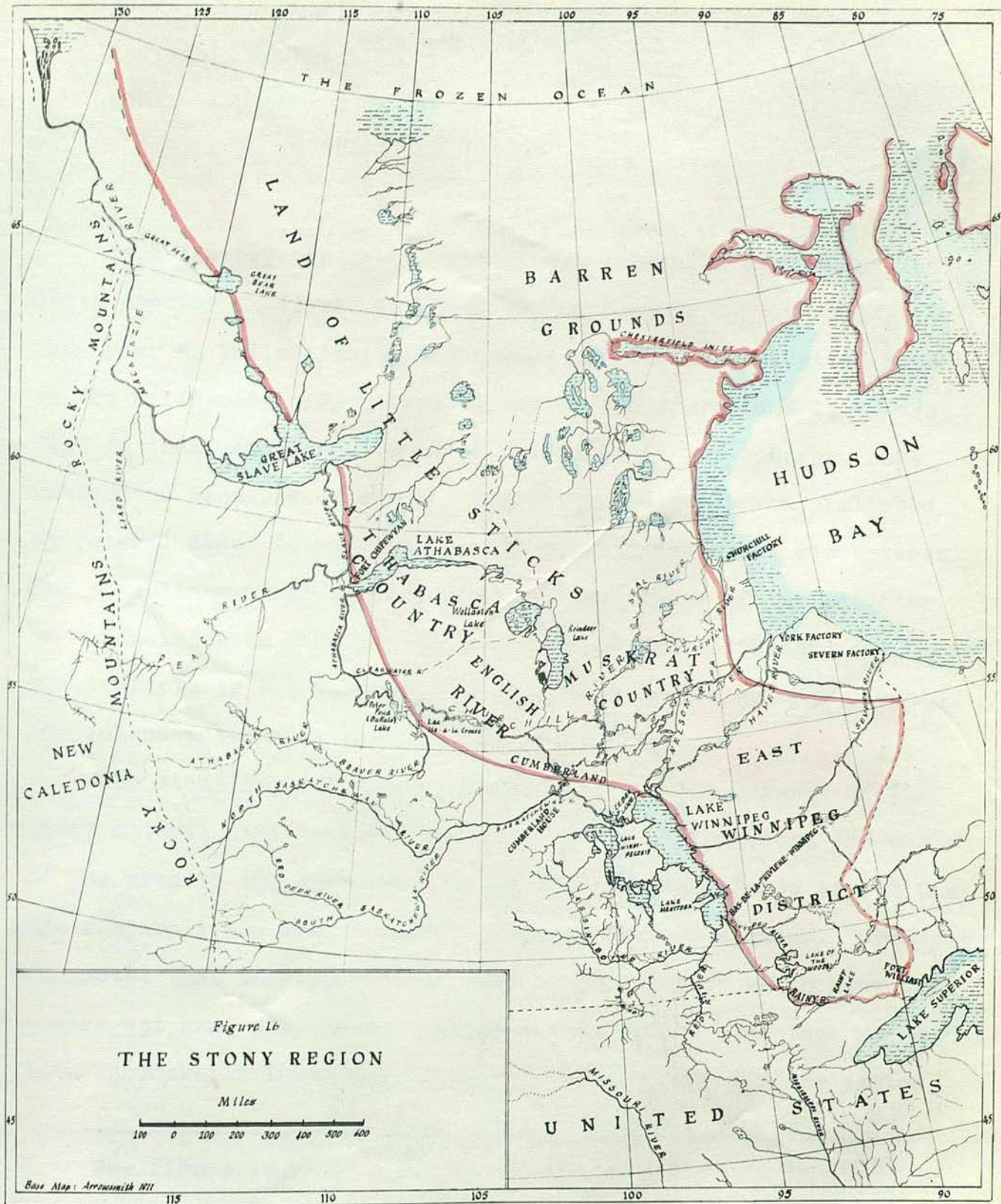
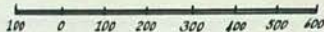


Figure 16

THE STONY REGION

Miles



Base Map: Arrowsmith 1871

## CHAPTER VII

### THE STONY REGION<sup>1</sup>

York Factory was one of the oldest permanent settlements in North America. It was established (as Fort Nelson) in 1682, the same year as Philadelphia, the former capital of the United States. In the Northwest, only Churchill and Severn approached it in age. Next to them, among the posts of the Hudson's Bay Company, came Cumberland House, a relative youngster of thirty-seven, followed by several other inland posts. To explain the great gap between the establishment of the bayside posts and those of the interior, it was helpful to look at the geography of the Northwest, and particularly at the geography of the Stony Region which separated the inland posts from those of New South Wales.

The Stony Region Laurentian Shield was the largest of the three natural divisions of the Northwest. It comprised the whole of the area to the Northwest of the Valley of the Lakes except for the comparatively small coastal plain of New South Wales. Thompson suggested that perhaps "Rocky" rather than "Stony" would have been a more apt name for the area since "it is little else than rocks with innumerable Lakes and Rivers".<sup>2</sup> But if the surface varied

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1. See figure 16.

2. Thompson's Narrative, p.300.



little throughout its vast area, the same could hardly be said for its vegetation which reflected the wide range of climates prevailing in the Stony Region. Along its southern boundary was the rich, almost lush, mixed forests of the Rainy River district, beloved by trader and traveller alike for the brilliance of its autumn maples, poplars and oaks against a backdrop of the deep rich greens of the spruces, pines and larches. But northward, the dashes of colour rapidly became rarer as the hardwoods made way for the pines, spruces, hemlocks and other evergreens of the Great Western Forest which, in turn, gave way to the dwarf spruces, willows and junipers of the Land of Little Sticks and finally to the endless, rolling, mosses and lichens of the Barren Grounds. The northern edge of the forest, wrote Mackenzie, followed a line from the mouth of the Churchill along the border of Reindeer Lake to the north shore of Lake Athabasca. West of Athabasca, the line extended northward along the north shore of Great Slave Lake to the Rocky Mountains.<sup>3</sup> Thus, east of Lake Athabasca the forest stopped near the 58° parallel (as confirmed by Thompson)<sup>4</sup> and west of that lake at about the 62° parallel.<sup>5</sup>

The forests immediately north and south of Lake Athabasca and stretching along the western edge of the Stony Region were among the

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3. Mackenzie, Voyages, p.404.

4. Thompson's Narrative, p.300.

5. Modern surveys have extended this somewhat further north, to Great Bear Lake and Anderson River, although the main forest boundary lies much as it was observed by Hearne in the eighteenth century.

best fur producing areas in the whole of the Northwest. But generally speaking, however, the Stony Region was not rich in either furs or in provisions, and held little attraction for the traders. To them it was a nuisance, a barrier, an obstacle which had to be crossed in order to reach the rich fur lands to the north and west of it. Its rivers and lakes, though very numerous, were difficult to navigate, because of frequent rock barriers and gorges, and it was this, as much as anything else, which had kept the Hudson's Bay Company so long hemmed in on the Bay.

The natives of the Stony Region belonged to the Algonkian, Athapaskan and Eskimoan linguistic families. Some of them hunted and trapped the thinly scattered animals of their country and carried them to the posts to trade. Others entered the fur trade by taking advantage of their geographical position. These were the middlemen who carried the furs and provisions from richer lands across their own country to the trading posts. Still other natives took part in the trade by building and manning canoes, hunting provisions for the factories and, in the case of the Eskimoes, engaging in whaling.

Throughout most of the first century of its existence, there was little need for the Hudson's Bay Company to cross the Stony Region. As long as the middlemen continued to carry the furs from the interior, all it had to do was to wait for them by the side of the bay. But during the middle years of the eighteenth century, the traders from Canada began crossing the Stony Region in the south to divert the flow of furs from Hudson Bay to the Saint

Lawrence. They passed through the Stony Region by way of the Rainy and Winnipeg rivers, the most favorable of all the routes through it. Not only was it relatively easy to navigate, but it was a source of canoe materials and of wild rice, as well as being relatively rich in game animals and possessing good agricultural potential.

After suffering the diversion of its furs for many years the Hudson's Bay Company finally, in 1774, crossed the Stony Region to establish its first inland post, Cumberland House, on Pine Island Lake on the Saskatchewan. Once having established a base on the other side of the Stony Region and then having worked out its transportation problems, the company found it relatively easy to establish other posts in the interior. And, indeed, over the next few years, these followed rapidly.

But in the Stony Region itself, even as late as 1811, few posts had been established. And of those which did exist, few, if any, had been founded primarily for local trade. Instead, they were mostly intended as provision depots and warehouses, or had been built to intercept Indians on their way to rival posts. The "intercept" posts were generally located towards the interior side of the Stony Region where they would be near the fur lands along its western margin as well as the provisions and furs of the neighbouring Great Plains.

#### THE MUSKRAT COUNTRY

The largest single group of posts in the Stony Region was situated in the so-called Muskrat Country west of York Factory.

Strictly speaking, the Muskrat Country probably comprised only the area east of the Sturgeon-Weir between the Nelson and Churchill river,<sup>6</sup> although earlier traders of the region tended to link up the lower valley of the Churchill as far as Reindeer Lake with it.<sup>7</sup> The term is used here in its wider sense. The maze of rivers and lakes which covered the surface of much of the Muskrat Country were easily accessible from the Nelson, Churchill and Saskatchewan rivers. It was these waterways which enabled the Crees and Chipewyans, who inhabited the country, to take their furs with comparative ease to the bayside factories to trade; and, although the country had never been rich in furs, still the Hudson's Bay Company had for many years enjoyed a steady trade from this area; that is, until the Canadians established themselves there. For several years afterwards the Canadians succeeded in getting the larger part of the furs. But in 1793, the Hudson's Bay Company belatedly sent people into the Muskrat Country to trade and soon it recaptured much of the trade. Because of the short distance its men had to travel and the large quantity of goods it could afford to supply, the English company had little difficulty in underselling its rivals.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, the shorter route meant that the English traders could arrive earlier

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6. i.e. the area where the shield disappears under the broad marine terraces of the bay.

7. Morton, History of the Canadian West, p.440. It includes the whole of the region forming a low saddle in the shield between the bay and the prairies.

8. Mackenzie, Voyages, p.lxxvi.



and thus commit the natives to trade with them. To assure happy relations between themselves and the various bands of Indians, as well as to out-fox their rivals, the English adopted a policy of establishing themselves for a year or two first in one place and then in another.<sup>9</sup> Because the posts they built were to be soon abandoned, little care was taken in their construction. "We builded log Huts to pass the winter," wrote Thompson of Bedford House, "the chimneys were of mud and coarse grass, but somehow did not carry off the smoke, and the Huts were wretched with smoke, so that however bad the weather, we were glad to leave the Huts." It had been the practice for the men's house to be built some distance from the store-house and the master's house. But when this came to the attention of the governor of Churchill in 1807, he immediately ordered that all detached dwellings be immediately taken down and rebuilt attached to the store-house with the men's quarters forming one end and the master's apartment, the other. Henceforth, no apology or excuse would be accepted "for deviating from this indispensable precaution".<sup>11</sup>

#### Country Provisions and Agriculture

Because of the general scarcity of game animals it was absolutely necessary for the posts to be located near good fisheries.

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9. Morton, History of the Canadian West, p.449.
  10. Thompson's Narrative, p.153.
  11. HBC Archives, B.42/b/50, f 23. Even to this day, as a legacy of the need for defence, the Hudson's Bay Company posts have a very compact form.



This was the lesson learned at Fairford House during the hungry winter of 1795-6. The house had been built on the bank of the Churchill just a mile below the mouth of the Reindeer River. It was an excellent place for trade but, because of the poor fishery, the men could "barely maintain" themselves and the post soon had to be abandoned.<sup>12</sup> The Churchill was poor for fish and so was generally unsuitable for settlement, although some of the deep lakes, "wholly independent" but discharging into it, had very good fisheries indeed.<sup>13</sup> But even on those lakes, the fishery could unpredictably fail, as did the one on Reindeer Lake in 1811.<sup>14</sup> Considering it was on the Churchill, Nelson House had enjoyed a reasonable fishery for many years. But during the winter of 1810-11, the English traders had been forced by the Canadians to abandon the spot where they had placed their nets for the past eighteen years. Fortunately, however, they were able to find another place before starvation overtook them, for animals in this area were exceedingly scarce. The mosses and willows which covered the ground could support only a few straggling moose; buffalo were unknown, and seldom did a reindeer penetrate from the north.<sup>15</sup> Traders on the Nelson apparently fared no better. At Sipiwesk

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12. Thompson's Narrative, pp.133-6.

13. Ibid., p.136.

14. HBC Archives, B.42/b/55, f 6d.

15. Ibid., f 10d.

Lake House fish were described as being "very Scarce", but at Split Lake the situation was somewhat brighter. There, fish were caught throughout the year "but not in great numbers nor of the best quality".<sup>16</sup> However, since the post was situated on a deer crossing there was the hope of supplementing the fish with fresh venison between August and November, and again in April each year.<sup>17</sup>

Although the climate of the Muskrat Country was far more favourable to vegetation than it was along the coast of New South Wales, yet it was far from being equal to that of the more southerly districts of the Northwest, or of situations which were "remote from the chilling influence of the sea".<sup>18</sup> Agriculture was therefore necessarily limited. At Split Lake, for example, the climate would permit potatoes, turnips, and cabbages to be grown but not corn.<sup>19</sup>

#### York Factory versus Churchill Factory

Split Lake House was the first post to be established in the Muskrat Country by the Hudson's Bay Company. It had been built as an outpost of York in 1790 in answer to Canadian competition. But soon there were complaints from Churchill that the first

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16. HBC Archives, B.42/b/55 f 10d.

17. HBC Archives, B.239/e/1 ff 4-4d.

18. HBC Archives, B.239/e/1 f 5.

19. Ibid., f 4. Ice coming down stream at the deltas and mixing with off-shore pack ice at the Bay, helped to delay the spring and shorten the growing season.

Indians who traded at the new post were Chipewyans "who never in their lives saw York Factory but yearly brought the produce of their hunt to Churchill, and were engaged every spring to kill Geese there".<sup>20</sup> In 1791, another settlement was made on the Nelson and trade at Churchill dropped accordingly. The next year, yet another post was founded and there was a further decrease. But in the following year, 1793, Churchill entered the competition with a post up the Churchill River, and soon her trade began to recover.<sup>21</sup>

The intra-company rivalry undoubtedly delighted the Indians. For not only did it tend to raise the prices of their furs but it also provided a wonderful opportunity for them to escape from their debts at one factory by going to an outpost of the other.<sup>22</sup> In this, they were aided and abetted by some of the more unscrupulous inland traders. To increase their own portion of the trade, they were not above diverging trade from their fellow company-men. The injured parties frequently took revenge with similar actions. Tempers rose. Accusations followed counter-accusations, and the situation became increasingly confused. In 1803, the exasperated governor of Churchill complained bitterly to his opposite number at York that one of his men was continuing "his practices upon our Northern Chipewyan Indians, intercepting them, seducing them,

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20. HBC Archives, B.42/z/1, f 48d.

21. Ibid.

22. HBC Archives, B.239/b/68, f 25.

and villianously deceiving them, by propagating false and injurious reports, which would scarcely become a Canadian".<sup>23</sup> As early as 1795, the dispute had reached the London committee room. David Thompson's charts were unrolled and an attempt was made to work out spheres of influence for each factory. But it was a difficult situation to arbitrate for, supposing a trader did refuse to trade with the Indians who came to him because they belonged to another post, there was no guarantee that they would not then go to the Canadians rather than to another company post.<sup>24</sup>

#### The Muskrat Country Trade in 1811

The rivalry continued at least until 1810, when the whole of the Northwest was put under the command of a single superintendent. One of his duties was to end the rivalry and to prevent any others from developing. At the same time, the Muskrat Country was placed under an inland master responsible to York. But by then the country had been largely hunted out and its productiveness so diminished that W. Holmes, the first inland master, did not think it would pay the company to remain in the area even supposing they should gain the whole of the trade.<sup>25</sup>

Years of competition between the Canadians and the English, and between the two English factories had produced a sellers' market which the Indians knew how to exploit. Liquor was

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23. HBC Archives, B.239/b/68, ff 24d-25.

24. HBC Archives, B.239/b/79, f 10.

25. HBC Archives, B.42/b/55, f 5d.



virtually the only thing they would now accept for beaver, the only fur then in demand on the London market. Even if our goods were "embroidered in Gold", moaned Holmes, the Indians will not trade if we "keep back Liquor".<sup>26</sup> And so the liquor flowed. But even so, seldom did the Indians repay two-thirds of their credits, small though they usually were.<sup>27</sup> By 1811, most of the beaver within easy range of the posts had been exterminated. Yet, the natives were reluctant to go further afield in search of other beaver areas because they could no longer bear to be far from the source of their liquor. As a result, many of the poor debauched wretches were so reduced in circumstances during the hard winter of 1810-11 that some of them had been forced to eat the few furs they did get in order to survive.<sup>28</sup> However, it must be pointed out that the destruction of the beaver had not been entirely of their own doing. Much of the damage had been perpetrated by Indians from Canada who had been brought into the Muskrat Country to hunt for the Canadians. Auld was extremely bitter about the intruders and wrote that wherever there was plenty of food for their support, there the fur animals would soon be "extirpated" by them.<sup>29</sup> So discouraged were some of

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26. HBC Archives, B.42/b/55, f 5d.

27. Ibid.

28. HBC Archives, B.42/b/55, f 10.

29. Ibid., ff 10d-11.



the local Indians becoming that they were beginning to migrate towards Cumberland House.<sup>30</sup> If the trend continued, it was likely that very few posts would be retained in the area in the future. Already moderately successful posts like the one belonging to the Hudson's Bay Company at Indian Lake were being closed down. In this particular case, the English post had been getting more of the trade than its rival establishment near by.<sup>31</sup> But apparently the company did not feel that it was justifying its expenses.

The future of the Muskrat Country looked bleak indeed. Not only was it becoming less productive in itself but with the migration of its natives, there would be fewer middlemen to carry the furs and provisions of richer areas to its trading posts. To the traders, it would seem even more of a barrier between the fur-lands of the north and west and the Great Lakes and Hudson Bay.

#### THE ENGLISH RIVER DISTRICT

Above the mouth of the Reindeer River, the Churchill was usually known as the English River, and the area which it drained as the English River District or Department. Although also part of the Stony Region, its climate was more favourable to the "productions of the vegetable and animal kingdoms" than was that of the Muskrat Country. Furs and provisions were produced in considerable quantity but, like the Muskrat Country, the English

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30. HBC Archives, B.49/e/1, f 4.

31. HBC Archives, B.89/a/2.

River was important primarily because of its geographical position. For across it ran the main route to the Athabasca Country, the eldorado of the fur trade. For several years, the Athabasca Country had been the exclusive preserve of the North West Company. Now it seemed as if the English River District would become so as well. For by the end of 1811, through bullying and even through open violence, the Canadians had succeeded in driving nearly all of their English rivals from the district. They knew that the English River District was the geographical key to the Athabasca Country and they were prepared to go to almost any lengths to keep their English rivals out of it.

The North West Company brigades bound for the English River District and the Athabasca Country, entered the English River near Portage-de-Traite after coming from the Saskatchewan by way of Cumberland House, the Sturgeon-Weir River and Beaver Lake. Portage-de-Traite took its name from an event which took place in 1774-5. Joseph Frobisher, a trader from Canada, after having wintered near by, met in the spring a group of Indians making their annual journey to Churchill to trade. He persuaded them to trade with him instead and soon he had all the furs his canoes could carry. Ever since this coup, the carrying-place had been known as Portage-de-Traite. Before that, it had been called Frog Portage from the Crees having placed a stretched skin of a frog there as a sign of derision to the natives of the country whom they regarded with contempt because, among other things, they were ignorant of how to prepare, stretch

and dry the skins of the beaver.<sup>32</sup> As far as the Canadians were concerned, the carrying-place might well have been named "Portage Cornucopia" for across it flowed not only the furs of the Athabasca Country and English River District, but some of those of the Muskrat Country as well. An envious official of the Hudson's Bay Company reported in 1811 that "not less than 1300 Bundles of furs came over the Frog Portage last year".<sup>33</sup> In 1809, he said 52 canoes with six or seven men in each went north but in 1810, there were only 34 with five or six men "which is a very strange difference".<sup>34</sup> Possibly the difference was not quite as great as the Hudson's Bay man believed, for 38 canoes had been assigned to this area at the annual meeting of the North West Company at Fort William in 1810. of these, thirty-one had been apportioned to the Athabasca Country and seven to the English River. In the same year, only three canoes were assigned to the Muskrat Country.<sup>35</sup> The figure illustrate well the relative importance of the three districts to the North West Company.

From Portage-de-Traite, the brigades headed up the Churchill, passed through several "lakes" in the river and negotiated thirty-six portages before they came to a well-built fort on the north side of Lac-Ile-a-la-Crosse, the headquarters of the North West

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32. Mackenzie, *Voyages*, pp.lxxvi-lxxvii.

33. HBC Archives, B.42/b/55, f 6.

34. Ibid.

35. Wallace, *Documents Relating to the North West Company*, pp.264-5.

Company's English River Department.<sup>36</sup> The post had an excellent garden. From the lake were taken the best of white fish throughout the year, and along its banks were captured moose, deer and other game animals.<sup>37</sup> The only Indians who came to trade were the Chipewyans and Crees. Since the peace arranged by Matonabee, the Chipewyans had been allowed by the Crees to hunt on their lands south of the Churchill, but not without exacting contributions when they occasionally met them. Failure to pay could bring punishment with arms. The contributions were often levied when the two tribes met at the trading posts and were usually in the form of rum which the Chipewyans readily parted with since they seldom drank it themselves.<sup>38</sup> Relations between the two peoples seemed to be good on the whole and from the Crees, the Chipewyans were now learning how to build canoes and in other ways how to adapt themselves to the living conditions of their new lands.<sup>39</sup>

About the turn of the century the Hudson's Bay Company had built beside the North West Company at Lac-Ile-a-la-Crosse.<sup>40</sup> From the beginning, this distant outpost of the Hudson's Bay Company had met with unusually fierce opposition because of its strategic position in relation to the Athabasca Country. Any

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36. Harmon, Sixteen Years, pp.113-4.

37. Ibid.

38. Mackenzie, Voyages, p.lxxxii.

39. Thompson's Narrative, p.539.

40. Morton, History of the Canadian West, p.453.

further expansion of the English in this area was to be prevented. In 1810, for instance, when the Hudson's Bay Company tried to buy a few canoes to go up the Beaver River to settle at Green Lake, the Canadians forbade the Chipewyans to sell them any on any account.<sup>41</sup> Green Lake was situated on the edge of the Stony Region. Beyond it, the Beaver flowed through the Great Plains and in one place, near Lac d'Orignal [Moose Lake], approached the Saskatchewan. From the plains, buffalo could be procured and from the Saskatchewan, dried meat and pemmican, which could be easily carried across to Beaver River, by way of Lac d'Orignal, and brought down the river to Green Lake. Thus, a post on Green Lake would have given the Hudson's Bay Company the provision depot which it needed if it were to extend its operations into the Athabasca Country. A similar depot had been operated by the North West Company for several years. In fact, it was the provisions from this post which enabled the canoes each year to speed down the English River with the minimum of delay.<sup>42</sup> During a period of expansion about the turn of the century the Hudson's Bay Company had also built a post on Green Lake called Essex House,<sup>43</sup> but it had flourished for only a short time. After the Canadians had prevented the Chipewyans from selling them the canoes they required, the English efforts to re-establish themselves upon the lake took on a rather pathetic air

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41. HBC Archives, B.89/a/2, f 1d.

42. Morton, History of the Canadian West, pp.451-2.

43. Ibid., p.453.



as Mr. Sutherland began to saw in two their small boat at Ile-a-la-Crosse to lengthen it by four feet.<sup>44</sup> But before the enlarged boat could be used in an advance towards Green Lake, the Canadians succeeded in driving the English from their base at Ile-a-la-Crosse, and forced them to retreat down the English River towards the Muskrat Country.<sup>45</sup>

From Ile-a-la-Crosse, the annual brigades of the North West Company paddled northwestwardly through Buffalo Peter Pond Lake to Methye Lake and finally to the Methye Portage, the most famous portage of them all. This enabled the brigades to cross the great divide which separated the rivers draining into Hudson Bay from those flowing northward into the Frozen Ocean. It was a long portage - eight miles and fifteen hundred yards, according to Turnor<sup>46</sup> - but, because the plateau-like divide was level and thinly wooded, the road was good.<sup>47</sup> From a high hill near its western end, the traders caught a breath-taking view of the promised land of the fur trade, the Athabasca Country.<sup>48</sup>

#### EAST WINNIPEG COUNTRY

South of the Muskrat Country and stretching to the United States boundary was the East Winnipeg Country. In common with

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44. HBC Archives, B.89/a/2, f 1d.

45. Ibid., f 36d.

46. Journals of Hearne and Turnor, p.446.

47. Harmon, Sixteen Years, p.114.

48. Ibid.

the Muskrat Country and the English River District, its importance lay not so much in the furs it produced as in the waterways it provided for gaining access to the valuable peltry and provisions of the interior. The most important of these waterways, as already seen, were the Fort William-Lake Winnipeg and the York Factory-Lake Winnipeg routes. Both routes were noted for their rocky surfaces, their innumerable rapids and waterfalls and their large numbers of lakes. But the Fort William route, because of its more moderate climate, was lined with a far greater variety of trees and other vegetation.

The natives of the East Winnipeg Country were Crees and Ojibwas. Both were Algonkian peoples. They were not numerous for their lands were incapable of supporting a large population.<sup>49</sup> Though originally rich in animals, the forests were now almost exhausted. Fur animals were very few indeed, and deer were virtually unknown. The natives had come to rely mainly on the fish in the lakes<sup>50</sup> although some of the Ojibwa had turned to agriculture<sup>51</sup> while others migrated to the lands of the Assiniboines and Crees to the westward.<sup>52</sup>

Except for a few small outposts away from the main routes, all of the houses in the East Winnipeg Country were intended as staging points for the canoes and boats going to and from the interior,

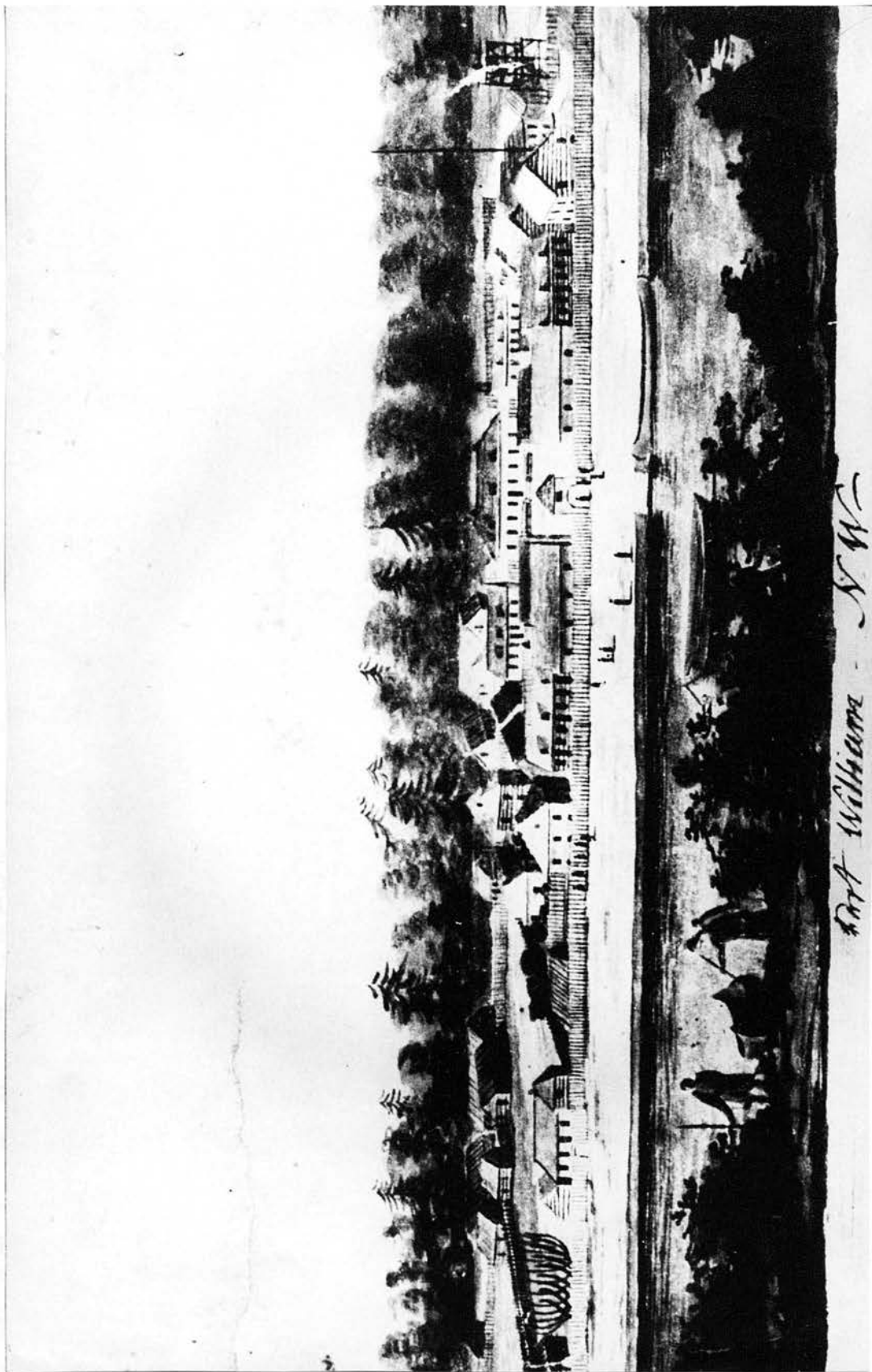
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49. Thompson's Narrative, p.181.

50. Ibid.

51. Harmon, Sixteen Years, p.211.

52. Masson, Les Hourgeois, II, p.308.



Fort William - N.W.

Figure 19. Fort William, 1811

rather than for trading furs. There was Oxford House and Rock Fort on the Hayes, and Rainy Lake House, Rat Portage House and Fort Bas-de-la-Riviere-Winnipeg on the Fort William Route. Each was an important supply depot and storehouse. But far more important by far than any of these was Fort William, itself, easily the largest establishment in the whole of the Northwest. It was situated on the Kaministikwia River about 500 rods from its mouth, near the place where the French had built their Fort Kaministiquia before the British conquest of Canada. Like York Factory, its Hudson's Bay counterpart, Fort William had been built upon low swampy<sup>53</sup> ground but, unlike York, its inhabitants had succeeded "by incredible labor and perseverance . . . in draining the marshes and reducing the loose and yielding soil to solidity".<sup>54</sup>

Fort William in 1814 (Figure 19)<sup>55</sup>

"Fort William has really the appearance of a fort, with its palisade fifteen feet high, and that of a pretty village, from the number of edifices it encloses. In the middle of a spacious square rises a large building elegantly constructed, though of wood, with a long piazza or portico, raised about five feet from the ground, and surmounted by a balcony, extending along the whole front. In the centre is a saloon or hall, sixty feet in length by thirty in width, decorated with several pieces of painting, and some portraits of the leading partners. It is in this hall that the agents, partners, clerks, interpreters and guides, take their meals together, at

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53. The swamp had been chosen because the surrounding table-lands or spurs of the shield were not suited to building.

54. Franchere, Narrative, p.386.

55. This vivid description of Fort William in 1814 has been included here because the scene must have differed little from that of 1811.



different tables. At each extremity of the apartment are two rooms; two of these are destined for the two principal agents; the other two to the steward and his department. The kitchen and servants' rooms are in the basement. On either side of this edifice, is another of the same extent, but of less elevation; they are each divided by a corridor running through its length, and contain each, a dozen pretty bed-rooms. One is destined for the wintering partners, the other for the clerks. On the east of the square is another building similar to the last two, and intended for the same use, and a warehouse where the furs are inspected and repacked for shipment. In the rear of these, are the lodging-house of the guides, another fur-warehouse, and finally, a powder magazine. The last is of stone, and has a roof covered with tin. At the angle is a sort of bastion, or lookout place, commanding a view of the lake. On the west side is seen a range of buildings, some of which serve for the stores, and others for workshops; there is one for the equipment of the men, another for the fitting out of the canoes, one for the retail of goods, another where they sell liquors, bread, pork, butter, etc., and where a treat is given to the travellers who arrive. This consists in a white loaf, half a pound of butter, and a gill of rum. The Voyageurs give this tavern the name of Cantine salope. Behind all this is another range, where we find the counting-house, a fine square building, and well-lighted; another storehouse of stone, tin-roofed; and a jail, not less necessary than the rest. The Voyageurs give it the name of pot au beurre, the butter-tub. Beyond these we discover the shops of the carpenter, the cooper, the tinsmith, the blacksmith, etc., and spacious yards and sheds for the shelter, reparation, and construction of the canoes. Near the gate of the fort, which is on the south, are the quarters of the physician, and those of the chief clerk. Over the gate is a guard-house."56

#### THE NORTHERN STONY REGION

(Athabasca Country - Land of Little Sticks - Barren Grounds)

North of the Muskrat Country and the English River District, the Stony Region extended, so far as was then known, to the edge of the

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56. Franchere, Narrative, pp.386-8.



Frozen Ocean. In the parts which had been explored, the surface seemed much as it did in the rest of the region, except that the waterways appeared to be less useful both on account of their arrangement and because they were frozen over for much of the year.<sup>57</sup> The southwest corner of this vast tract formed part of the Athabasca Country. It was densely forested and rich in fur animals. To the north and east of it, the trees gradually gave way to the Land of Little Sticks, which in turn grudgingly gave way to the mosses and lichens of the Barren Grounds. The humble vegetation of the Barren Grounds was not despised by Hearne and Mackenzie. For they knew that it supported the reindeer caribou which made human habitation possible there.<sup>58</sup> These animals travelled in vast herds and, because of the sparseness of vegetation, were nearly always in motion. According to Hearne, their direction was usually either from east to west or west to east, depending upon the season, and the prevailing winds. "From November till May," he wrote, "the bucks continue to the Westward, among the woods, when their horns begin to sprout; after which they proceed on to the Eastward, to the barren grounds; and the does that have been on the barren ground all the Winter, are taught by instinct to advance to the Westward to meet them, in order to propagate their species."<sup>59</sup>

The natives of the Land of Little Sticks were all of the

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57. Hearne, Journey, p.210.

58. Mackenzie, Voyages, p.404.  
Hearne, Journey, pp.210-11.

59. Hearne, Journey, p.129.

Athapaskan group. The most important of them were the Chipewyans who, as already seen occupied the strategic area north of the Churchill between the fur lands of the west and Hudson Bay. To the north and west of them were the tribes from whom they obtained many of the furs which they traded to the Europeans. These were Yellow-knives, Hares, Dogribs and Slaves. Like the Chipewyans, the Yellow-knives and Hares followed the reindeer out onto the Barren Grounds during the summer. The Dogribs, however, made only quick sorties onto the Barren Grounds, while the timid Slaves preferred to remain under the cover of the trees.<sup>60</sup> All of these tribes of the northern Stony Region travelled on foot and used their tiny canoes only for crossing rivers and narrow lakes, or for hunting reindeer. The reindeer provided their main subsistence as well as their clothing and many other useful articles. But sometimes the reindeer suddenly and inexplicably disappeared. On these occasions the Indians could often fall back, for food at least, upon the rich fisheries of the lakes and rivers,<sup>61</sup> and, if they were very lucky, capture a few water-birds as well. For some of the marshes produced several kinds of grass which grew very rapidly but was "dealt out with so sparing a hand as to be barely sufficient to serve the geese, swans, and other birds of passage, during their migrations in the Spring and Fall, while

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60. Jenness, *Indians of Canada*, pp.392-3.

61. Hearne, *Journey*, p.210.

they remain in a moulting state".<sup>62</sup> Alpine hares were also "pretty plentiful" in some parts of the Barren Grounds as well as some herds of musk-oxen. To the westward among the woods, there were rabbits and partridges.<sup>63</sup> But should these, as well as the birds and fish, fail as well, there was always the black, hard crumply moss growing upon the rocks. It was far from appetizing in appearance but, when boiled to a gummy consistency, was actually quite palatable. In fact, Hearne said that most people grew fond of it. It was "remarkably good and pleasing when used to thicken any kind of broth," he wrote, but it was "generally most esteemed when boiled in fish-liquor".<sup>64</sup>

Yet inspite of this apparent abundance of food on the Barren Grounds, Hearne found that half of the inhabitants, and perhaps the other half as well, were frequently in danger of starving to death, partly, as he observed, "owing to their want of economy".<sup>65</sup> Scenes of distress, he wrote, had been particularly common during the long dangerous journeys to Churchill<sup>66</sup> when presumably the Indians had been more intent upon reaching their goal than following the reindeer, or in seeking out the best

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62. Hearne, Journey, p.210.

63. Ibid., p.212.

64. Ibid., pp.210-11.

65. Ibid., p.212.

66. Ibid.

fishing areas along the way. For the more distant tribes there was, as already discussed, the additional hazard of falling prey to the depredations of their kinsmen, the Chipewyans, who were always ready to relieve them of their furs, goods and women, and, sometimes, even of their lives.<sup>67</sup> In this way, the Chipewyans ruthlessly guarded their one big asset in the trade, their geographical position. By 1811, however, they seem to have largely turned their attention to the fur lands of the Crees to the south of them and to have missed, or even to have ignored, the small bands of Indians from the Northwest who were again coming to Churchill to trade.

#### The Eskimoes

In a similar way, the Eskimoes immediately north of Churchill assumed the position of middlemen in the trade with their relations living further to the north. When the more northerly tribes travelled to the factory to trade, they had to pass through the lands of their southern relations. While doing so they were filled with all sorts of malicious rumours about the white traders and generally discouraged from going any further. At the same time, the southerners offered to take their furs off their hands for a mere trifle. This having been done, the southerners proceeded to the factory where they exchanged them for trading goods

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67. Hearne, Journey, pp.116-7.

and were then ready to journey to the northward to go into business for themselves.<sup>68</sup> For many years, the Hudson's Bay Company had tried to persuade the nearer tribes to come to the factory to hunt whales, and to leave the fur trade to the more distant Eskimoes. But as late as 1811, these efforts had met with little success.<sup>69</sup> It was to enable the northern Eskimoes to avoid their grasping neighbours, as well as the depredations of the Chipewyans, which had caused the company annually to send a boat northward to trade with the Eskimoes along the west coast of the bay.

As far as was known in 1811, the Eskimoes lived only near the sea-coast.<sup>70</sup> They apparently never ventured inland and, unlike the Indians, remained on the Barren Grounds throughout the year.

There were no trading posts on the Barren Grounds: its limited trade was conducted from posts along its periphery. There was Churchill in the east and a number of North West Company posts in the west. Among these were Fort Chipewyan, Slave Fort, Fort Providence, Great Bear Lake House, Fort Norman and Fort Good Hope. All of them were approached by way of the Great Plains, and from the plains came much of the provisions which enabled them to exist.

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68. HBC Archives, B.42/b/55, ff 15d-16.

69. Ibid.

70. Thompson's Narrative, pp.16-7.



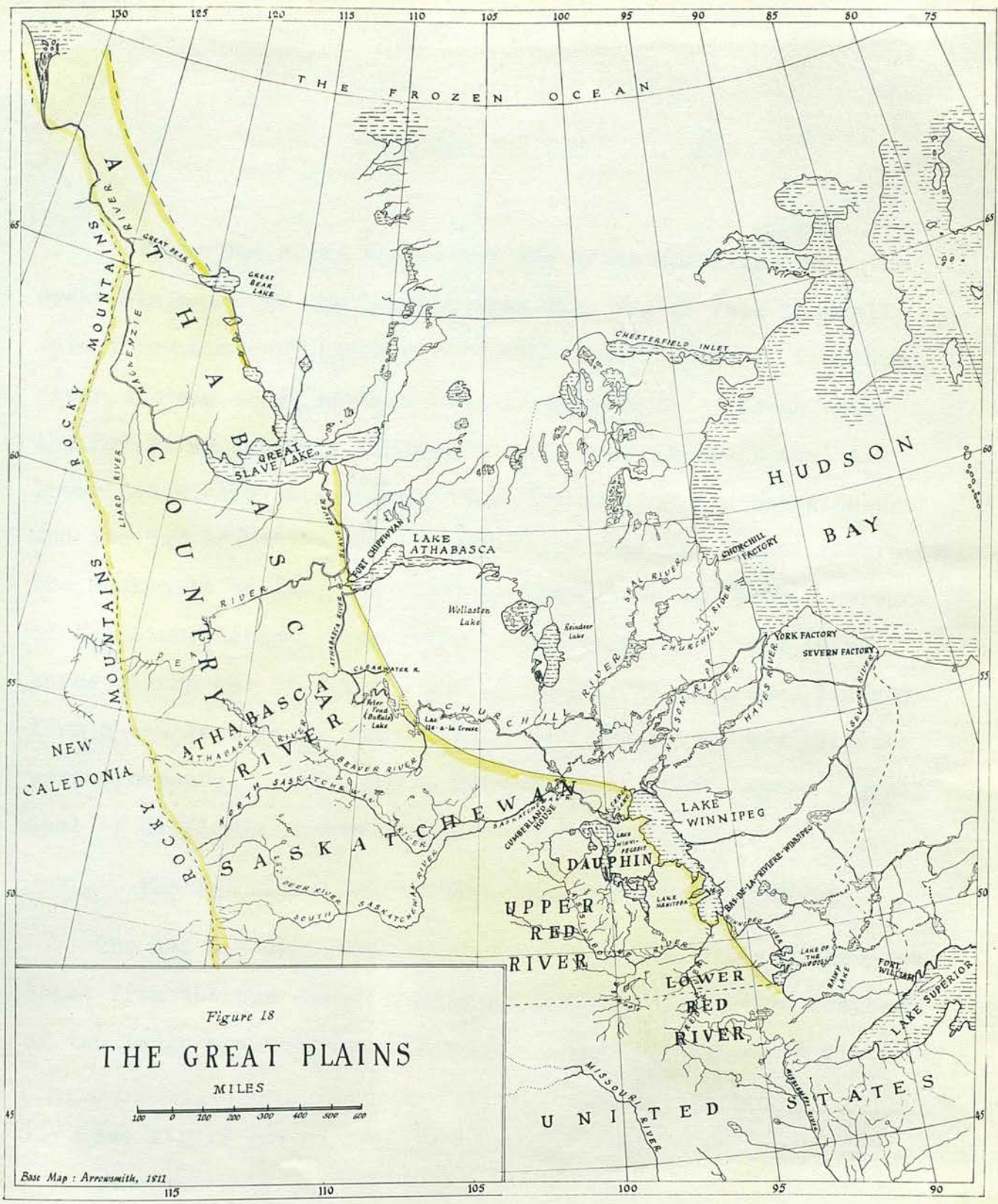


Figure 18

**THE GREAT PLAINS**  
MILES



Base Map: Arrowsmith, 1812

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE GREAT PLAINS<sup>1</sup>

Between the Stony Region and the Rocky Mountains were the Great Plains. To the traders this vast region fell naturally into three distinct "countries", each based on one of the three river systems which enabled them to exploit it. These were the Red River Country, drained by the Upper [Assiniboine] and Lower Red Rivers; the Saskatchewan Country, by the Saskatchewan and its two branches; and the Athabasca Country, by the rivers of the Mackenzie basin. In sharp contrast with the broken streams of the Stony Region, with their innumerable rapids and lakes, these rivers had few rapids and, according to Thompson, did not form a single lake.<sup>2</sup> This, of course, meant that few portages were necessary. There were, however, many places where a great deal of difficult poling and tracking were required.

#### THE RED RIVER COUNTRY AND THE SASKATCHEWAN COUNTRY

The Red and Saskatchewan systems were remarkably alike - at least from the fur traders' points of view. Both were composed of two large branches which merged a comparatively short distance

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1. See figure 18.

2. Thompson's Narrative, p.184.



from their mouths. In each case, the smaller northern branch was by far the more important of the two. This was because they passed through a wide variety of vegetation, ranging from open grasslands to fairly dense forests, and consequently were able to produce both furs and provisions, not to mention the raw materials for houses, boats, canoes and clothing. The southern branches, on the other hand, flowed most of their lengths through open plains. Only on their upper-most reaches were there significant forests and furs. As a result, they could produce little other than provisions, wolves and bears but, in each case, even this production was greatly handicapped, as shall be shown later, by the presence of hostile tribes as well as by the absence of building materials and fuel.

The two main rivers and their branches were joined by innumerable smaller streams. Some of these originated in the foothills of the Rockies, or in the hills along the Assiniboine, while others had their sources on the plains. But whatever their origin, they often flowed, in common with the main rivers themselves, through a variety of vegetation and like them were capable of producing either furs or provisions, and often both. Generally speaking, trading posts were placed at, or near, the mouths of one of these tributaries although other factors had to be considered as well before the actual site was chosen. First of all, there were the general considerations: what furs or provisions did the river produce; were they required at that time; would operations here interfere with another post of the same company; were the natives well disposed towards the company; was it on an Indian

travel route, or near one of their gathering places; would the site be between the lands of two mutually hostile tribes; if so, perhaps, two posts, one in the lands of each tribe, would be less dangerous and more profitable to the company than one post catering to two hostile tribes. Once the general area for the post had been chosen, there were still a number of local factors to be considered in choosing the precise situation for the house: would there be sufficient wood for building and for fuel; would there be easy access to the river; did the buffalo seek shelter in the area in winter; was there a deer run or a good fishery; was the land suitable for a garden; could the position be easily defended; were there meadows for the horses; and so on. Seldom, however, was it possible for the traders to make an ideal choice. For nearly always, trade rivalry being what it was, there was an opposition present which prevented them from doing so; and consequently posts were frequently located not so much from the considerations outlined above, as from a desire to achieve some short term advantage over an opponent.

The first trader to arrive in a new area had considerable latitude in choosing a place for his house. But rivals who came after him usually felt obliged either to build beside him, in the hope of attracting the Indians from his gate, or above him, in order to intercept the Indians on their way down stream to the older house. If the latter course were followed, the first trader would almost certainly then either have built an out-post beside the new house, rebuilt the old post next to him, or established a

post above him. If the latter course were followed, another round of moves would likely have resulted, provided that the traders involved had the resources and men necessary to do so. This type of competition particularly favoured the large and powerful North West Company which met opposition by establishing as many small posts as it had clerks and men to operate them, knowing full well that its smaller rivals would not be able to match them at every place. To keep their rivals hopping, some of the North West Company posts were established and abandoned several times.<sup>3</sup>

This technique was used to good effect against the XY Company and was largely responsible for its absorption by the larger company in 1804. After the union, the enlarged North West Company directed its energies into new activities in the Athabasca Country and beyond the Rockies in New Caledonia. Many of its own posts in the Red River and Saskatchewan Countries, as well as most of those which had belonged to the XY Company, were abandoned as the enlarged company consolidated its position into a relatively small number of larger posts. Many of these were near the houses of the then smaller and weaker Hudson's Bay Company.

Most of the abandoned houses scattered throughout the Saskatchewan and Red River Countries in 1811, dated from the days of the XY Company. The majority of them had been hastily built during one of the chaotic autumns of that time. Usually, with winter

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3. Masson, *Les Bourgeois I*, p.273.



rapidly closing in, little thought could be given to either site or situation. However, the months which followed soon showed the traders whether or not they had been fortunate in their choice. A poor fishery, or a failure in provisions or in furs, meant that they had been unlucky and that the post would soon have to be abandoned. But some of those which did manage to pass the test of winter failed miserably in the spring when it was discovered, after the frost had left the iron-hard ground, that they had been built in the middle of a swamp. In a few years, only a pile of stones where the chimney had stood and a few charred or rotten logs showed where once a group of Whitemen had struggled to live. Each pile of stones had its own story to tell. They spoke of areas where the fur animals had been hunted out or were no longer in demand in London: they told of Indian troubles, particularly on the open plains where several posts had to be abandoned because of hostile natives, and where some had actually been destroyed by them; or they told the less romantic story of buildings which had to be abandoned because they were old, and rotten, and full of lice.

#### Below the Forks

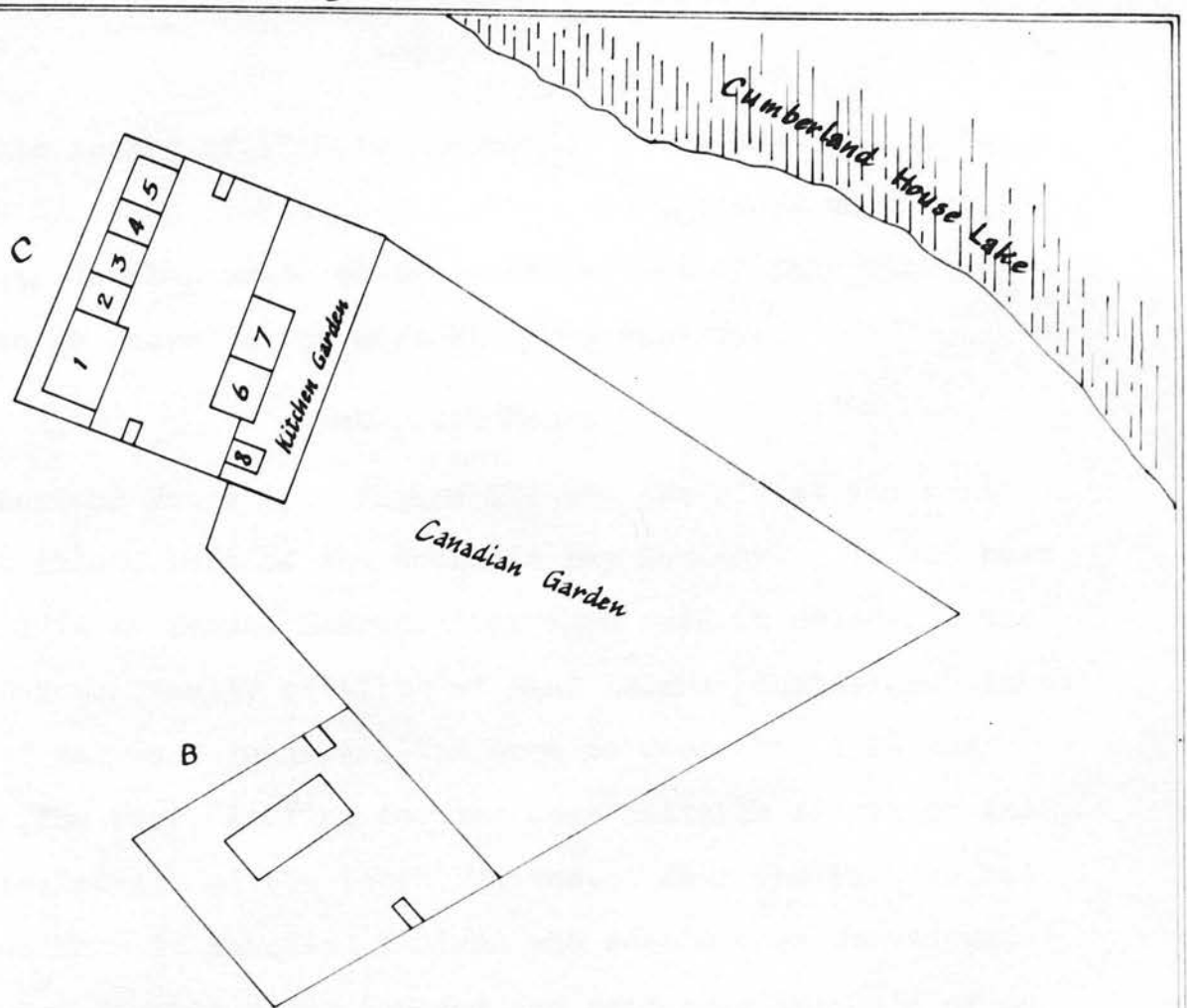
The large number of ruins along the Saskatchewan below the forks of the Upper [Assiniboine] and Lower Red, reminded the traveller of the dramatic rivalry of a few years before. By 1811, however, relations between the two surviving companies had largely stabilized themselves in this part of the Northwest and active posts remained at only one place on each river: at Cumberland Lake

on the Saskatchewan, where both companies had posts, and immediately below the mouth of the Assiniboine on the Red, where the North West Company had its Fort Gibraltar. Although Fort Gibraltar, like Cumberland, was primarily a depot for storing the provisions gathered along the two branches of its river, it could hardly be compared with the much more important Saskatchewan post. Far more valid would have been a comparison between the posts at the mouth of the Winnipeg River, Fort Bas-de-la-Riviere-Winnipeg and Fort Alexander, with Cumberland. For these posts, although not actually on the Red, nevertheless did receive most of their provisions from the Upper and Lower Red and, like Cumberland, supplied the brigades on their way to and from the interior. The North West Company's Bas-de-la-Riviere was by far the more important of the two, since it supplied all of the northern brigades. Until recently, the Hudson's Bay Company's Fort Alexander had played a similar role, although on a much more modest scale, by supplying the brigades from Albany (at the bottom of the bay) on their way to and from the interior by way of Winnipeg River. These brigades were discontinued in 1810, and the posts which they had served were assigned to York Factory.<sup>4</sup> This did not mark the end of the Hudson's Bay Company's activities in this area, however. For some of the men wintering at Nelson encampment in 1811, were scheduled to be

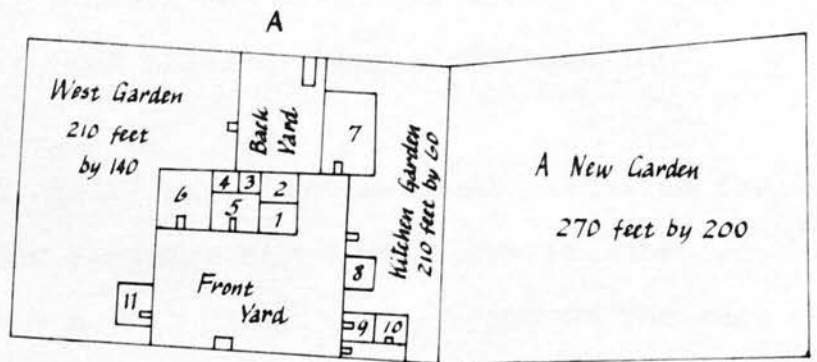
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4. HBC Archives, A.6/18, pp.28-9.

Figure 17



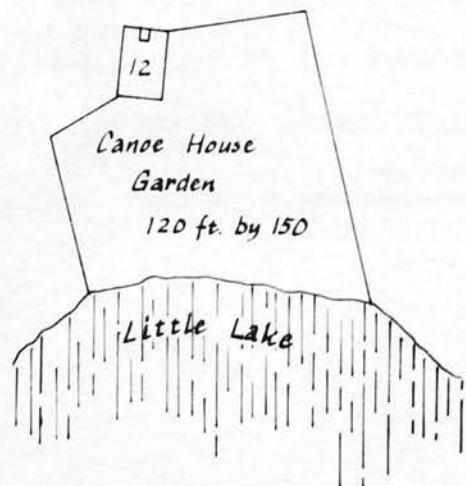
A Sketch of  
Cumberland House  
and Gardens  
1815



- A. The Honble H.B. Co. Houses
1. A Small Winter Room
  2. Bed Room
  3. Bed Room
  4. Trading Room
  5. Guard Room or Hall
  6. Men's Dwelling House
  7. Store House
  8. Small Dwelling House
  9. Cook Room
  10. Stable
  11. Fisherman's House
  12. Canoe & Fish House

B. A New Fort the N.W. Cos. are building

- C. The N.W. Co's Fort
1. The Officers House
  2. Guide and Interpreters House
  3. Men's House
  4. Men's House
  5. Blacksmiths Shop
  6. Store
  7. Store
  8. Fish House



sent in the spring of 1812 to the mouth of the Winnipeg to build "near the Canadian provision-store". The proposed post was intended to develop trade on the eastern side of Lake Winnipeg and was to be known as the East Winnipeg Factory.<sup>5</sup>

#### Cumberland House

Cumberland House (see figure 17) was the oldest and most important inland post of the Hudson's Bay Company. It had been built in 1774 by Samuel Hearne after much care in selecting the site. Before finally settling at Pine Island [Cumberland] Lake, Hearne had surveyed in detail the area between this lake and Basquiau [The Pas], looking for the most suitable situation and seeking the advice of the local Indians. Near The Pas, he had "met 22 Cannoes of Basquiau Indians who seem'd very Courtious, ask'd me how I lik'd their Country and said they approv'd of my settleing in their Quarter, and offer'd their assistance in Procureing Provisions &c".<sup>6</sup>

In many ways, The Pas would have been an ideal situation for Hearne's purposes. A long distance below and above it, the Saskatchewan flowed through a vast reedy marsh. But at The Pas, there was an extensive gravel plain, an island of dry ground in a watery wilderness. From it, passable trails led to the higher lands of the Muskrat Country to the north, and to the Great Plains

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5. HBC Archives, B.42/b/57, f 5d.

6. Journal of Hearne and Turnor, p.111.



to the south. From time out of mind, the Indians had used these trails to come to The Pas to trade and, on occasion, had proved troublesome to the traders passing up and down the river. But after the smallpox epidemic of 1781-2, when their numbers were greatly reduced, they were no longer much of a problem.<sup>7</sup>

The French had had a settlement at The Pas (called Fort Pascoyac) but when Hearne visited the site, the only sign of the place having been occupied was the absence of trees, and the remains of a fire-place in which many of the missing trees must have been consumed. This lack of wood for fuel and for building must have discouraged Hearne. After discussions with the leading Indians, he decided that it would be better to build at Cumberland Lake, it being "the general opinion of those Indians that that Part will be more comodious both for Drawing the Indians to Trade as well as for Provisions than Basquiau [The Pas], it laying in the Middle between three Tribes".<sup>8</sup>

By 1811, the Hudson's Bay Company's buildings at Cumberland were in a good state of preservation, considering that they had been built fifteen or twenty years before. Both the dwelling house and store were made of squared pine logs and covered with boards.<sup>9</sup> Beside it, the North West Company had built a rival post in 1793.<sup>10</sup>

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7. Coues, New Light, p.470.
  8. Journal of Hearne and Turnor, p.113.
  9. HBC Archives, B.49/e/1, f 3d.
  10. Coues, New Light, p.483.



Both posts now functioned primarily as provision depots although in the past they had carried on a considerable local trade in furs as well. Most of the limited returns now made were in martens and muskrats. There were also a few beaver skins but these usually originated a great distance from Cumberland.<sup>11</sup> The North West Company, according to Alexander Henry, regarded this part of the trade as being "of no great advantage to us" and allowed it to be monopolized by the Hudson's Bay Company.<sup>12</sup> However, without greatly inconveniencing themselves, it was difficult to see how the Canadians could have prevented the English from doing so. For, as Henry himself pointed out, the Hudson's Bay Company, unlike its rival, had no great northern brigades to provision with the large supplies of pemmican which it received from the Saskatchewan. This meant that it could afford to feed the local Indians "whose country is wretchedly destitute of game animals" throughout the year in return for their furs.<sup>13</sup> The natives consisted of a band of Crees and a few straggling Ojibwas.<sup>14</sup> The latter had undoubtedly migrated from their over-hunted lands east of Lake Winnipeg. By 1811, they were being joined by some of the Indians of the Muskrat Country and New South Wales, whose lands were also being rapidly hunted out.<sup>15</sup>

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11. HBC Archives, B.49/e/1, f 2.

12. Coues, *New Light*, p.475.

13. *Ibid.*, pp.475-6.

14. *Ibid.*, p.477.

15. HBC Archives, B.49/e/1, f 5.

Hearne's decision to locate at Cumberland was probably far wiser than he knew. Thirty-seven years later, its lake was still producing sufficient fish throughout the year to sustain both the men and the dogs.<sup>16</sup> During May, and again in September and October, flocks of geese supplemented the fish. There were also some reindeer and moose, as well as pemmican from the Saskatchewan Country.<sup>17</sup>

In spite of the severe climate, which was said to consist of six months of winter and six months of summer,<sup>18</sup> agriculture was remarkably successful. The soil was reasonably good for the latitude although a great deal of hard work was required to remove the stones covering it before gardens could be planted. Potatoes and all kinds of garden stuff were raised and barley grew "to perfection".<sup>19</sup>

As to be expected in a land with six months of winter, the rivers and lakes were frozen over for much of the year. The ice in Cumberland Lake did not usually break up until the 15th or 20th

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16. By 1815, however, the lake was becoming "very unproductive", and "the constant labour of two men with from twelve to twenty nets" was not sufficient to procure one meal per day for all hands for ten months of the year. During the remaining two months, i.e. May and November, there was "generally Sturgeon enough for daily consumption". The dogs required nearly as much fish as the men. - HBC Archives, B.49/e/1, ff 2-2d.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid.

19. Coues, *New Light*, p.476. Agriculture was, however, strictly limited in extent, and was confined to glacial-lake or kame terraces. Beyond, the land was too acid and poorly drained and stony for use.

of May, although it left the river fifteen or twenty days earlier. Water communication was therefore limited to about five and a half months of the year.<sup>20</sup> During the early part of the open season, large pemmican brigades could be seen, paddling rapidly along with the spring current, as they came out of the buffalo country bound for the warehouses at Cumberland. Alexander Henry reported in 1808, that the North West Company usually brought down from three hundred to five hundred bags of pemmican, and upwards of two hundred kegs of grease each spring. Part of the grease was taken to Fort William, he said, but the whole of the pemmican was "required for our people going out in the spring and coming back in the fall".<sup>21</sup> Some of the pemmican came from further up the main stream where the plains approached the river and where the tree-covered hummocks along its banks provided shelter and grass for the buffaloes during the winter.<sup>22</sup> More pemmican came from similar country along the north branch, while still more came from the open plains of the south branch.

#### The South Saskatchewan and the Lower Red

The South Saskatchewan, like the Lower Red, flowed mostly through open plains. Both rivers, as a result, produced provisions but few furs, and so had held comparatively little attraction for

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20. HBC Archives, B.49/e/1, ff 2-3.

21. Coues, *New Light*, p.475.

22. *Ibid.*, p.483.

the fur traders until the trade had expanded into the far northwest and, in doing so, had created a huge demand for the products of these rivers. This was well illustrated by the production figures for the Lower Red River Department of the North West Company for the period 1800-8. (See appendix C.) During that time, the output of furs declined while that of provisions showed a large increase.

Both rivers drained countries which had been more forest in the past. For here, as elsewhere along the margins of the open plains, the forest was being forced to give up territory to the advancing grasslands by the annual prairie fires. Thompson reported that the south branch was "for the most part . . . bare of Woods, and those that remain are fast diminishing by fire".<sup>23</sup> Later, when travelling along the western bank of the Red, he saw the charred stumps of many trees and concluded that "it was evident this side of the River was once a Pine Forest".<sup>24</sup> The general absence of wood meant that houses could be built only in the occasional spots where there were trees lining the river. Such places were to be found here and there along the middle section of the Lower Red, but since the trees did not extend any distance away from the river, any future building would necessarily be limited. Otherwise, the area appeared likely to become "a pastoral or

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23. Thompson's Narrative, p.188.

24. Ibid., p.248.

agricultural country", for the soil of this part of the river was rich and deep and "everywhere fit for cultivation".<sup>25</sup> Probably the best place for settlement would have been the country about the junction of the Upper and Lower Red, which was glowingly described by Harmon as appearing "to have a richer soil than at any other place I have observed in this part of the World - and is covered with Oak, Basswood, Elm, Poplar and Burch &c. also are here Red Plumbs & Grapes &c".<sup>26</sup> Prospective settlers, however, could have taken warning from the "extraordinary inundation" which occurred on the Lower Red in the spring of 1811, when the river over-flowed its banks for four miles on either side. The flood was believed to have been caused by the melting of an unusually large amount of snow which had fallen near the river's source during the previous winter. But since nothing similar had taken place in the memory of the oldest Indian, it was hoped that perhaps it would not happen again. Interestingly enough, the Upper Red was not affected by the flood, being "no more swollen than usual".<sup>27</sup>

For many years it was believed that trees grew only along the lowest part of the south branch of the Saskatchewan, and that

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25. Thompson's Narrative, p.259.

26. Harmon, Sixteen Years, p.91. This, of course, is the site of present Winnipeg, the largest city in the Northwest, founded by the Selkirk settlers in 1812.

27. Macdonell to Selkirk, York Fort, 1 October 1811, Report on the Canadian Archives, 1886, p.cxcv.



the remainder of the river flowed through open plains, entirely devoid of wood and consequently unproductive of furs; and, without wood for fuel, would be impossible to settle. Because of this belief, the river had remained unexplored throughout most of its length as late as 1800, when, so far as is definitely known, it was descended for the first time by a group of Nor'westers who had entered its headwaters from the headwaters of the North Saskatchewan. Later in the same year, it was again explored by Peter Fidler and several men of the Hudson's Bay Company.<sup>28</sup>

The reason for this sudden interest in a river so long passed by was probably the realization about this time, that towards its upper reaches "where the plains terminate toward the rocky mountain, there is a space of hilly country clothed with wood, and inhabited also by animals of the fur kind".<sup>29</sup> Exploration was not, however, followed by any large scale exploitation and, by 1811, the small trade of this new area was carried on from Rocky Mountain House on the north branch. A post had been established by the North West Company on the Bow, an upper tributary of the South Saskatchewan, in 1802.<sup>30</sup> About the same time, the Hudson's Bay Company, North West Company and XY Company all built posts further to the east as well. These were near the place where the south branch was joined by the Red Deer. They had been intended

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28. J.B. Tyrrell in Thompson's Narrative, p.188.

29. Mackenzie, Voyages, p.lxix.

30. Coues, New Light, p.705.

to draw the Blackfeet and Piegans southward and the Indians of the Missouri northward, (see figure 5) but the natives proved to be very troublesome and by 1805, all three posts had been abandoned.<sup>31</sup>

The natives had also been troublesome at "South Branch House" the name given to several posts operated by both the North West Company and the Hudson's Bay Company along a stretch of the South Saskatchewan extending from seventy to a hundred miles from its mouth. In fact, in 1794, the Gros Ventre went so far as to destroy the Hudson's Bay Company post and killed all but one of its inhabitants. On the same occasion they also turned their fury upon the North West Company's post immediately after burning the English house. But the Nor'westers, seeing what was happening to their neighbours, had time to prepare for the attack which followed, and managed to come through it safely. The Gros Ventre, had resented the traders for selling arms to several neighbouring tribes with whom they were at war.

Like the south branch, some of the upper tributaries of the Lower Red, particularly the Red Lake River, drained lands which were covered with trees and, in the past, had been comparatively rich in furs. These were mostly along the western margin of the Stony Region. Until recently, beaver had been quite plentiful here but, because of the peculiar soil and relatively mild climate

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31. Morton, History of the Canadian West, pp.511-2. It has also been said that the French had had a post (called Fort La Jonquiere) on the Bow, near the present Calgary, as early as 1751-2. - Coues, New Light, p.484.

of the area, they tended to build less strong houses than elsewhere, and so were an easier prey for the hunters than were beaver in other parts of the Northwest. As a result, few of them remained in 1811.<sup>32</sup> Game animals, too, were relatively scarce and both the traders and natives had, on occasions, been forced to live on a diet of wild rice and maple sugar. Both were gathered locally.<sup>33</sup> The natives were mostly Ojibwa. On occasion they left the woods of their homeland to journey up the Lower Red in search of their inveterate enemy, the Sioux. This was in spite of the fact that the Ojibwa were generally inferior in number to the Sioux<sup>34</sup> and, since they had no horses, they had to meet the mounted Sioux on foot.<sup>35</sup> Not surprisingly, reported Mackenzie, the Ojibwa were getting the worst of these skirmishes. If they continued to venture out of the woods "which form their only protection", he said, they would probably soon be "extirpated".<sup>36</sup> Thompson, however, implied that the Ojibwas had been quite successful in their forays. For when he met Sheshepaskut, their principal chief in 1798, he described him as the man who had repressed the incursions of the Sioux, and who had driven the "Village Indians"

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32. Thompson's Narrative, p.249.

33. Ibid., p.274.

34. Mackenzie, Voyages, p.lxii.

35. Thompson's Narrative, p.246.

36. Mackenzie, Voyages, p.lxii.

to the Missouri.<sup>37</sup>

Thompson's "Village Indians" were, of course, the Mandans who have already been seen selling the produce of their fields to the fur traders who had formerly journeyed to their country to trade. Now that the Mandans were out of their reach, the younger Ojibwa complained that they no longer had any means for distinguishing themselves in battle.<sup>38</sup> This, however, seems to have been an empty complaint for, as long as the feud with the Sioux continued, there should have been opportunity enough.

For many years, the Red River had been a no-man's land between the territories of the two parties in the feud. For this reason, it had been little frequented by other than war parties and was therefore generally a poor place for trade. Besides, the Sioux heartily disliked the traders for supplying arms to their Ojibwa enemies and, as far as they were able to do so, generally made the area less healthy for white habitation. There was ample reason to assume that the attack on one of the trading posts by them, which was mentioned by Harmon,<sup>39</sup> was only one of many such incidents.

By 1811 the Hudson's Bay Company appears to have maintained only one post on the Lower Red. This was Fort Pembina, situated near the mouth of the river of the same name. Like the neighbouring North West Company post, its main function was to gather

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37. Thompson's Narrative, p.253.

38. Ibid., p.195.

39. Harmon, Sixteen Years, p.111.

provisions. Further up river, the Nor'westers also had three fur trading posts. These were only temporary, however, since the general scarcity of furs in the area did not make it worthwhile for a given place to be hunted upon a second winter.<sup>40</sup>

#### The Upper Red and the North Saskatchewan

The native situation on the Upper Red, or Assiniboine, was somewhat more peaceful than it was on the Lower Red. This was in spite of the fact that the two principal tribes living there, the Siouan Assiniboine and the Algonkian Cree, belonged to two totally different linguistic groups. An uneasy friendship prevailed between them which had partly grown out of the Assiniboines need for an ally against their estranged kinsmen, the Sioux, and partly as a result of the fact that the two tribes did not compete economically. The lack of competition was well illustrated along the Upper Red, where the Assiniboine Indians, a plains people, occupied the country along its middle section, and traded pemmican, wolves and bears. They had little interest in the wooded countries along the upper and lower reaches of the river, which they left to the woodland Crees and their near relatives, the Ojibwa, who were then moving into the area from east of Lake Winnipeg. These tribes were expert in hunting beaver and other fur animals and, of course, provided most of

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40. Thompson's Narrative, p.268.



the peltry collected in this part of the country. There was a similar division of territory along the North Saskatchewan, with the Crees generally occupying the wooded areas and the Assiniboine the open plains but, as will be seen later, there were other tribes as well. By 1811, some of the Crees had given up their forest life to adopt the ways of their Assiniboine allies of the grasslands. However, they were still not as efficient as the Assiniboine on horseback and, like all woods tribes, preferred to use firearms for killing game. The Assiniboine, on the other hand, still killed buffalo with bows and arrows which they found just as convenient as guns.<sup>41</sup>

Besides the Sioux, the Crees and Assiniboines also had a common enemy in the Gros Ventre, whom they were then in the process of driving from the Northwest. Some of the Gros Ventre had already taken up residence beside the Mandans on the Missouri and from their new neighbours were learning how to dwell in villages and to live from agriculture.<sup>42</sup>

The Gros Ventre had once occupied the point of land between the two branches of the Saskatchewan. But trouble with their neighbours had forced them south of the south branch.<sup>43</sup> This was a poor country and produced only buffalo robes (which the Gros Ventre dressed in a superior manner) and some foxes, bears, wolves

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41. Harmon, Sixteen Years, p.41.

42. Thompson's Narrative, pp.235-6.

43. Coues, New Light, p.530.

and dried provisions.<sup>44</sup> Only the latter had been much in demand during the years before 1811 and as a result the Gros Ventre had fared badly at the trading posts. This meant that their enemies, whose richer lands had provided a more abundant trade, were better supplied in arms than they were. Consequently, the Gros Ventre blamed the traders for their troubles and whenever the opportunity arose, they did not hesitate to commit "depredation, pillage, and murder" at the white settlements. By 1811, they had succeeded in plundering at least two Hudson's Bay Company posts and in murdering the occupants of them. In both cases, the neighbouring North West Company posts had been successful in repulsing similar attacks.<sup>45</sup>

It has already been seen how the Sioux resented the whites for arming the Ojibwa. They were, of course, further angered by the trading of guns and ammunition to the Crees and Assiniboines - not to mention the Mandans. For the parties of traders who journeyed to the Missouri to procure the products of the Mandans' gardens, usually took a supply of firearms with them which the Mandans were glad to buy in order to be able to protect themselves from the Sioux who were living all around them.

During their visits to the Mandans, the traders had often tried to persuade these gentle people to trap beaver and to bring them to the Upper Red to trade. But the Mandans, who were then

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44. Coues, *New Light*, p.734.

45. *Ibid.*

economically self-sufficient, could see little reason for leaving their fortified villages and thus exposing themselves to attack by their enemies.<sup>46</sup> From their country to the Souris River, the nearest tributary of the Upper Red, was a winter journey of ten or twelve days on horse-back. And since it was almost entirely through open country, they would be in danger not only of attack by the Sioux or Ojibwa, but of freezing to death for want of fuel and shelter.<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless, to encourage them to come, the North West Company in 1795, built Ash House for them on the Souris. But the post soon had to be abandoned "from it's being too open to the incursions of the Sioux Indians."<sup>48</sup> From then onward, the Sioux made it increasingly dangerous for the whites to go to the Missouri<sup>49</sup> and in 1807, the Mandan trade was abandoned altogether.<sup>50</sup>

With the end of the Mandan trade, Fort Souris was apparently abandoned, also. This left, in 1811, active trading posts of any importance at only seven places on the Upper Red and its tributaries, although there were undoubtedly a number of small temporary outposts as well. The first post to be reached in travelling up the river from its mouth was Portage-la-Prairie, "so called by the

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46. Masson, *Les Bourgeois*, I, pp.299-340.

47. *Ibid.*, p.272.

48. Thompson's *Narrative*, p.213.

49. *Ibid.*, p.212.

50. Masson, *Les Bourgeois*, I, p.317.

Indians from time out of mind", because it was at the beginning of the portage to Lake Manitoba, some twelve miles away. The French had followed the Indians over this route and made good use of the portage for sending in their goods for Fort Dauphin.<sup>51</sup> In 1811, both the Hudson's Bay Company and North West Company maintained posts at the beginning of the portage.

From Portage-la-Prairie, the river continued to follow its devious course to Brandon House. So frequent were its innumerable bands, that an Indian compared its route to that of a spy "who went here and there, and everywhere, to see what was going on in the country".<sup>52</sup> One Nor'wester estimated that a man on foot could go as far in three hours as the canoes could in a day.<sup>53</sup> Consequently, there was ample time for those who go up by land to hunt buffalo, moose and fish, in order to keep the canoes supplied with fresh provisions.<sup>54</sup>

From Brandon to Aspen River, trees were very scarce along the Upper Red. In fact, except for a few favoured places, such as Montagne-a-la-Bosse, where the North West Company had a post, there was not sufficient wood either for building or for fuel.<sup>55</sup> Six

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51. Masson, *Les Bourgeois*, I, p.270.

52. Thompson's *Narrative*, p.245.

53. Masson, *Les Bourgeois*, I, p.268.

54. *Ibid.*, p.274.

55. Mackenzie, *Voyages*, p.lxiii

days by canoe above Montagne-a-la-Bosse, the Upper Red was joined by the Qu'Appelle. From this important tributary which flowed from the open plains, came most of the provisions of the Upper Red River country, and both companies maintained large depots there.<sup>56</sup> From the Qu'Appelle, the Upper Red continued through open plains to the mouth of the Shell River where the two companies were established. The Shell River drained the forested Dauphin Duck and Riding Mountains Hills and consequently its trade included furs, as well as provisions from the neighbouring plains. In a sense it was a transitional post, for those below it produced mainly provisions while those above it were engaged mainly in collecting furs.

Above the Shell River, the Upper Red received many small rivers and brooks. Most of these originated in a small range of hills to the northeast of the river. Seen from the plains, the west side of these hills [Manitoba Escarpment] had a gentle elevation of about 200 feet. But when observed from the east, they presented an elevation of from 500 to 800 feet above the surrounding country. The forests of large trees which covered them, provided shelter for the animals which contributed most of the furs gathered along this river.<sup>57</sup> For many years, this district had been among the most productive in the whole of the Northwest. But by 1811, it had

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56. Masson, Les Bourgeois, I, p.257.

57. Thompson's Narrative, p.185.



been largely hunted out. That this should happen was almost inevitable. For the area was not only relatively restricted, but also readily accessible. It could be entered not only from the Upper Red, but from Lake Winnipeg via the Dauphin River, and from Cedar Lake by way of Lake Winnipegosis and Swan River as well. Moreover, it had recently been the centre of some of the keenest competition in the history of the trade, and it had been hunted upon not only by its native Indians, but by Ojibwas from east of Lake Winnipeg,<sup>58</sup> and by the Nipissings, Algonquins and Iroquois from Canada, as well.<sup>59</sup>

The Swan River route provided a short-cut to the Upper Red for the traders from York Factory, and enabled them to reach the district a month before the Canadians from the Grand Portage could put in an appearance.<sup>60</sup> This, of course, gave the English a considerable advantage over their rivals. The area through which they came, between Lake Winnipeg and the Assiniboine, the so-called Swan River Country, had also once been rich in furs, and particularly in beaver. When Thompson visited the district in 1797, he reported that "these sagacious animals were in full possession of the country, but their destruction had already begun, and was now in full operation".<sup>61</sup> By 1811, the relentless activities of the large com-

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58. Thompson's Narrative, p.194.

59. Ibid., pp.204-6.

60. Masson, Les Bourgeois, I, p.275.

61. Thompson's Narrative, p.196.

panies, who operated competing posts at several places on both the Swan and Red Deer rivers, had greatly reduced the beaver population.

Travel among the posts on the Swan and Red Deer, and between them and those on the upper Upper Red was relatively easy on horse-back, in spite of the presence of numerous small streams and ponds.<sup>62</sup> For example, it required only three days for the Hudson's Bay Company to carry its merchandise from the Swan to the Assiniboine River.<sup>63</sup> Horses could also be used to go from the Assiniboine to the North West Company post at Dauphin Lake, south of Lake Winnipegosis. This journey took only four days on horse-back but about two months via the round about canoe route.<sup>64</sup>

The North West Company's Dauphin, in common with its posts on the Red Deer and Swan Rivers, received its supplies from the depot at Bas-de-la-Riviere. Three small brigades from that depot would set out across Lake Winnipeg for the mouth of the Dauphin River. They would then travel up the Dauphin and pass through Lake Saint Martin to Lake Manitoba which they would cross to its northwestern end. Here, Meadow Portage lead them into Lake Winnipegosis where the three brigades separated. One went southward to Fort Dauphin and the other two northward to Swan

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62. Thompson's Narrative, pp.193-7.

63. Masson, Les Bourgeois, I, p.275.

64. Harmon, Sixteen Years, p.36.

River and Red Deer River, respectively.<sup>65</sup>

Both companies entered the North Saskatchewan at the forks, and conducted their trade along its banks in very similar ways. So similar, in fact, that in one place, at Fort White Earth River, the two competing posts were even built within the same stockade.<sup>66</sup> This strange departure from the normal cut-throat rivalry between the two companies was a new development which had grown out of a need for mutual protection against the increasing hostility of the natives in this area. The problem was basically the same as on the Assiniboine. There was an out-group, the Blackfoot nation, whose lands did not produce much in the way of valuable furs, and there was an in-group, the Crees and their Assiniboine allies, who did have access to fur countries. The Blackfoot nation, which consisted of three Algonkian tribes, the Blackfeet, Bloods and Piegans, was at war with the Crees and Assiniboines. Consequently, they resented the fact that their enemies had the means for providing themselves with more arms than they could obtain themselves. For a number of years before 1809, the Hudson's Bay Company (but not the North West Company) had conducted a trade in wolf-skins with the Blackfeet, but in that year, orders arrived from England to the effect that no more wolves were to be traded.<sup>67</sup> It was impossible for the English traders to explain to the Blackfeet

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65. Morton, History of the Canadian West, p.439.

66. Coues, New Light, p.605.

67. Ibid., p.559.

that the change in policy had been due to the continental blockade in Europe and it "exasperated those savage brutes to the last degree".<sup>68</sup>

The new Hudson's Bay Company policy led to a tense situation along the Saskatchewan which was greatly complicated by the events of the previous summer which had ended with the murder of several Piegans by the Crees. This put the whole Blackfoot nation in a vengeful mood and they resolved to go on the war-path either against the Crees or against the whites who had armed them.<sup>69</sup> Meanwhile, the Crees, fearing that the Blackfeet would themselves obtain arms from the traders, gathered on the north branch at the mouth of the Battle River in the autumn of 1808, and probably would have attacked the traders on their way up with supplies had they not fallen into disagreement among themselves.<sup>70</sup> During the following winter, the tense situation continued. Summer came and with it the news that the English would no longer take wolves which resulted in an uproar among the Blackfoot nation. This was followed later in the summer by intelligence that the Crees and Assiniboines had declared war against the Europeans and were determined to "sweep the river clear of Whites, and steal every horse". Thus the traders found themselves at variance with nearly every Indian on the river.

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68. Coues, *New Light*, p.578.

69. *Ibid.*, p.540.

70. *Ibid.*, pp.500-1.

Both companies decided that only a radical operation could reduce the danger of an attack by one or other or both of these hostile groups. The first step was to separate the two Indian alliances in order to prevent them from engaging in any further conflicts which might end by being turned against the whites. To help bring about this separation, both companies decided to reduce the number of posts on the river to three. These would be widely separated and large enough to withstand attack. Each would deal with only one group of natives. To implement the new plan, a post was hurriedly built in 1810 at White Earth River on the upper reaches of the north branch. It replaced Fort Vermilion, where both companies had had posts, and the North West Company's Fort Augustus and Hudson's Bay Company's Fort Edmonton which had been only a musket shot apart.<sup>71</sup> It was hoped that the new post would draw the tribes of the Blackfoot nation.<sup>72</sup> An outpost would be established up river, from time to time, to trade with the woodland Assiniboines and Crees.<sup>73</sup>

The plains Crees were expected to go down the river to trade at The Montee where the Hudson's Bay Company was to have its Fort Carlton and the North West Company, its Fort La Montee. Whether or not these posts were in operation by the end of 1811 is not clear, but their function was to provide for the Assiniboines,

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71. Masson, *Les Bourgeois*, II, p.22.

72. Coues, *New Light*, p.585.

73. *Ibid.*



plains Crees, woodland Crees and Ojibwas of that part of the country.<sup>74</sup>

Because they were roughly half-way between Cumberland and White Earth River, the posts at The Montee were expected to function as provision depots as well as collecting places for Cumberland. As provision depots, they would be especially useful during the downward journey of the canoes and boats in the spring because it was doubtful if White Earth River, with its large population to support, would ever be able to supply them with much in the way of food and, as already pointed out, there was not time for hunting and fishing during the trip down. Both posts at White Earth River had an unusually large number of mouths to feed. A count of heads at the North West Company post on 3 June 1810, showed 28 men, 35 women and 72 children, or a total of 135. On the same date, there were 85 people at the Hudson's Bay Post.<sup>75</sup> This was a large population to be supported "off the country" and perhaps it was not to be wondered that the inhabitants "suffered much with hunger"<sup>76</sup> during the following winter, which was a particularly severe one. Fortunately, however, they did not suffer unduly from the cold. For their houses, although hastily built, were snugly constructed of pine logs and covered with mud and pine bark, and "white-washed" with local clay which was as

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74. Coues, *New Light*, p.585.

75. *Ibid.*, p.603.

76. *Ibid.*, p.746.

white as lime.<sup>77</sup> In their haste to establish the new post and to solve the Indian problem, apparently the traders had given little thought to the agricultural potential of the new site. For it was soon discovered that its climate was too severe for a successful garden. It would be tempting to have blamed the failure of the first summer upon an "unusual year" had the garden at the abandoned Fort Augustus also failed. But indeed, it produced well.<sup>78</sup> Alexander Henry believed the difference in climate between the two posts to be due to Fort White Earth River being slightly further north than Fort Augustus and pointed out that only a few miles north or south on the Saskatchewan "makes a material alteration in the face of the country, especially in depth of snow".<sup>79</sup>

#### Rocky Mountain House and Acton House

Above Fort White Earth River, at the head of navigation on the North Saskatchewan, about a mile and a half beyond the entrance to the Clearwater River, were two more trading posts. Both were active in 1811. They were the Hudson's Bay Company's Acton House and the North West Company's Rocky Mountain House.<sup>80</sup> The latter had been built in 1799<sup>81</sup> and by 1810 "its rotten old buildings"

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77. Coues, *New Light*, pp.604-5, 615-6, 622.

78. *Ibid.*, pp.621-3.

79. *Ibid.*, p.745

80. *Ibid.*, p.701.

81. J.B. Tyrell in *Thompson's Narrative*, p.88.

were falling to pieces.<sup>82</sup> During the autumn of that year repairs were carried out, particularly to the gates and bastions but in 1811, they were still "wretched buildings for defense".<sup>83</sup> With better buildings, however, the position would have been comparatively easy to hold, for the post was situated upon a high bank on the north side of the river.<sup>84</sup> Most of the Indians who came to trade lived south of the river and therefore would have found it difficult to ambush the post without being discovered. Now that many of the trees had been cut down for use at the house, there was "a grand view of the Rocky mountains" although, for some traders, its enjoyment was lessened by the sound of a nearby waterfall "whose perpetual roaring makes it a dismal neighbour in this solitary spot".<sup>85</sup> This waterfall, or rapid, was the first of any importance to be encountered in ascending the Saskatchewan. True, there were many small rapids below it where the water ran over sloping beds of rocks and gravel, but this was the first real break in navigation.<sup>86</sup> Above it, and especially as the higher mountains were approached, the rapids became ever more frequent and the water increasingly shallow. Before long, there was not enough water for the canoes to pass with more than half cargo, and finally, as the great divide was reached, they had to be taken from the

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82. Coues, *New Light*, p.655.

83. *Ibid.*, p.666.

84. *Ibid.*, p.701.

85. *Ibid.*

86. *Ibid.*

water and carried across to the headwaters of the Columbia in New Caledonia.

Rocky Mountain House was one of the three bases from which the North West Company was then developing its trade in New Caledonia. The others were Henry's House on the Athabasca and a post on the upper Peace, also called Rocky Mountain House. The latter was easily the most important of the three, partly because it was not bedeviled by the serious Indian problems which plagued the other two, particularly Rocky Mountain House on the Saskatchewan. The natives who traded at the Saskatchewan post were anxious to prevent their enemies across the mountains from obtaining arms and so were taking every means within their power to stop the traders from going there. They were mostly Piegans, Blackfeet and Bloods, although there were also a few Gros Ventres, who were then living in friendship with the Blackfoot nation, as well as the whole of the Sarcees. The Sarcees were a small Athapskan tribe who had recently crossed the Saskatchewan to live with their Blackfoot allies. When they were living north of the Saskatchewan, the Sarcees had been excellent beaver hunters and had brought in large quantities of furs, "and were accordingly much indulged by the traders".<sup>87</sup> But contact with the Blackfeet led them to become "fully as lazy and indolent" as the Blackfeet<sup>88</sup> and by 1809, their

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87. Coues, *New Light*, p.575.

88. *Ibid.*, p.737.

92. *Ibid.*

93. *Ibid.*, pp.719-20.

hunt had fallen to very little although they still expected the traders "to treat them as before".<sup>89</sup> During 1811, the Sarcees were occupying a position closer to the Rockies than usual in order to be out of reach of the Assiniboines with whom they had quarrelled in the summer of 1810.<sup>90</sup> Normally this part of the country was inhabited by the Piegans, the largest tribe of the Blackfoot nation. This was good beaver country and the Piegans, unlike the other tribes of the nation, were reasonable beaver hunters<sup>91</sup> which probably explained why they got along better with the whites than did the other two.<sup>92</sup>

Little is known about the neighbouring Acton House, but since the Hudson's Bay Company had not yet entered the New Caledonia trade, it was probably not as important as Rocky Mountain House. That a high degree of co-operation existed between the two houses may be taken for granted for both faced the future in fear. During the summer of 1811, many of the Indians who traded there, had made a raid upon some American traders and Indians on the upper Missouri. As the year ended, the small white settlements on the upper Saskatchewan were living in dread that the chain of events thus unleashed, would end in the destruction of their posts and even in their deaths.<sup>93</sup>

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89. Coues, *New Light*, pp.575-6.

90. *Ibid.*, p.737.

91. *Ibid.*, p.530.

92. *Ibid.*

93. *Ibid.*, pp.719-20.



THE ATHABASCA COUNTRY

The trader crossing the Rockies for the first time must have viewed the Columbia with the same sense of achievement he would have experienced in first glimpsing the Athabasca Country from the high hill on the far side of the Methy Portage. It was not so much the satisfaction of having conquered a difficult portage as in having at last reached a fabulous land. A land about which they had heard so much during the short summer evenings by the camp-fire and the long winter nights at the trading post. Perhaps in some ways, the Athabasca Country was a disappointment when it was finally reached. But certainly not so for its size: for it comprised the whole of the area east of the Rockies that was drained by the Mackenzie. Much of this country was an extension of the Great Plains but it also included a wide western margin of the Stony Region. The southern part was generally covered by the Great Western Forest but north of Lake Athabasca and Great Slave Lake, the forest faded into the land of Little Sticks.

On a rocky point on the north shore of Lake Athabasca near the entrance to Slave River was Fort Chipewyan, the North West Company's headquarters for the Athabasca Country.<sup>94</sup> Before 1804, it had been on the south shore of the Lake as shown by

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94. Harmon, *Sixteen Years*, p.115.

Arrowsmith's map of 1811. Like most of the other important posts of the Northwest, Fort Chipewyan was surrounded by marshes which were much flooded in the spring and autumn. During those seasons, as at the other posts, the marshes were filled with ducks and geese. These were preserved for winter use in salt which was "very plenty at this place" and which could be traded "at a very easy rate" from the Indians.<sup>95</sup> Near the post was the usual garden which during part of the year relieved the endless monotony of the trader's diet.<sup>96</sup> Here, as elsewhere, the diet consisted largely of fish from the lake.<sup>97</sup> Whenever possible, this was supplemented with moose, reindeer and buffalo meat.

During the winter of 1791-2, the Hudson's Bay Company had also established a post at Fort Chipewyan.<sup>98</sup> But it was withdrawn immediately afterwards and the Canadians were left completely in control of the Athabasca Country, an area larger than any country in Europe. For a time, the Canadians were divided into rival factions but, after 1804, virtually all of them came under the control of the North West Company. With no opposition, the North West Company found the Athabasca Country an easy empire to rule. For apart from some Crees, who had pushed their way in from the south with the aid of the whiteman's guns, and a few Eskimoes at the mouth of the Mackenzie, all of the natives belonged

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95. Journal of Hearne and Turnor, p.454.

96. Harmon, Sixteen Years, p.124.

97. Ibid., p.116.

98. Journal of Hearne and Turnor, pp.325-493.

to the Athapaskan linguistic group. As has been seen, these woodland tribes were generally far more peaceful than the Indians of the plains and, although they occasionally went to war against one another, they seldom involved the traders in their disputes. There was an excellent transportation system, consisting of a well arranged network of navigable rivers and lakes, radiating from the "capital" to all parts of the country. One of the main routes, of course, was the Athabasca River. It provided the only important link with the outside world. From it, by way of the Clearwater River and the Methy Portage, the Athabasca Country received all of its supplies and trading goods. In 1810, thirty-one canoes loaded with goods and supplies went in,<sup>99</sup> and thirty-three came out, carrying 783 packs of furs.<sup>100</sup> Each pack weighed 85 pounds and was composed almost entirely of beaver since there were not at that time sufficient men available to carry out the less valuable skins. These consisted mainly of cats, wolves and wolverines, and were left behind in the country.<sup>101</sup>

When the canoes entered the Athabasca River from the Clearwater, most of them went down river to Lake Athabasca and Fort Chipewyan. But a few (there were five in 1810) went up river to supply the posts on Lesser Slave Lake and Lac la Biche, as well as those on the headwaters of the Athabasca in the Rocky

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99. Documents of the North West Company, pp.264-5.

100. HBC Archives, B.89/a/2, f 2d-3.

101. Ibid.

Mountains. The other canoes deposited their cargoes at Fort Chipewyan where the outfits for all of the trading posts in the remainder of the Athabasca Country were made up. During the autumn, most of the men in charge of those posts came to Chipewyan to receive their goods.<sup>102</sup> Because the outfits for the Athabasca River were not made up at Fort Chipewyan, the area was not, for administrative purposes, usually regarded as part of the Athabasca Department but was considered a separate entity, the Athabasca River District.

Because the North West Company had no competition in the Athabasca Country, it was able to fix its prices as high as the market would bear. From Chipewyan, operations of the various districts could be co-ordinated to produce a high degree of efficiency for the district as a whole. For example, the Peace River was given the task of supplying most of the pemmican for the Fort Chipewyan depot, although the Slave River had extensive buffalo plains,<sup>103</sup> as well as the Peace.<sup>104</sup> Undoubtedly the company considered it more economic to bring the pemmican by canoes or boats down the Peace, where only two or three men would be required, than up the Slave where a full crew would be necessary.

In many ways the Peace could be described as the North Saskatchewan of the Athabasca Country. For like that river, it

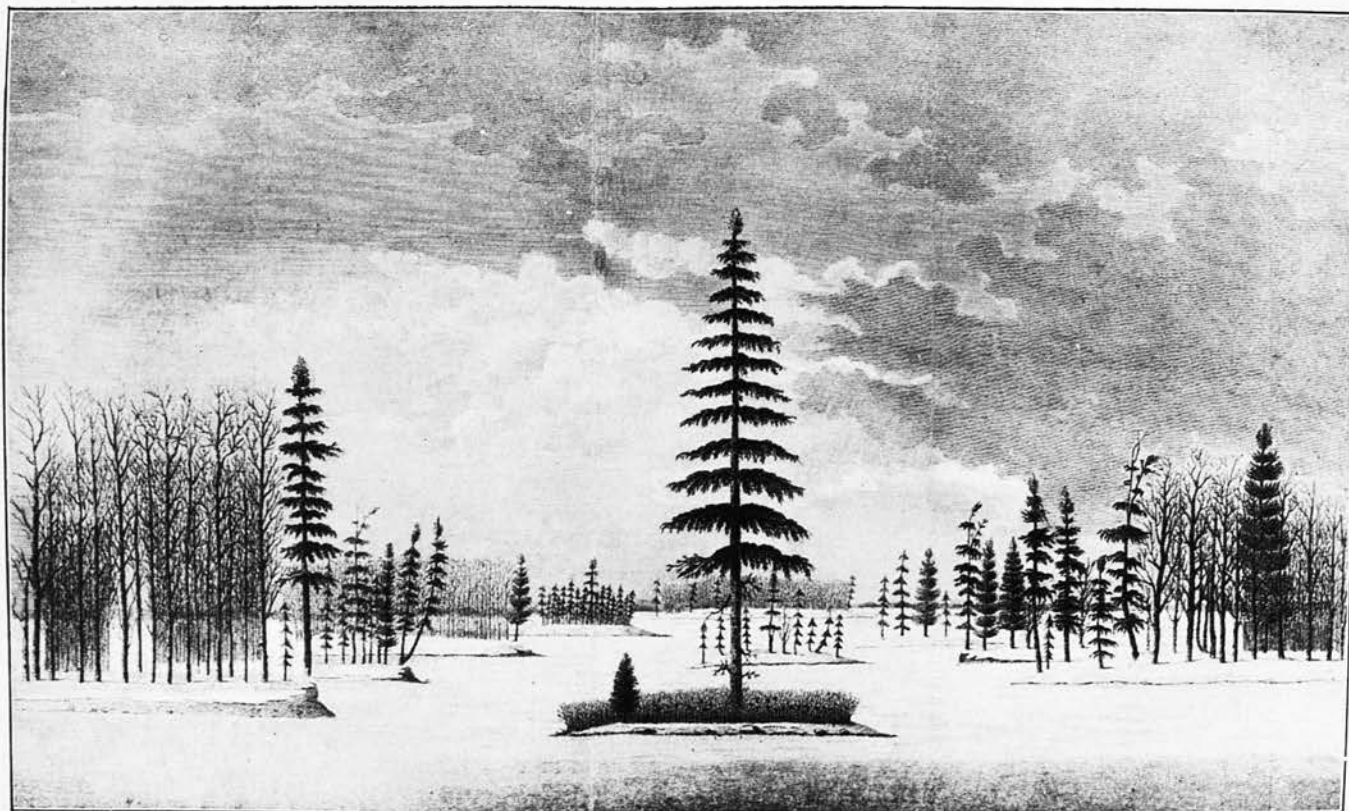
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102. Harmon, Sixteen Years, p.115.

103. Mackenzie, Voyages, p.8.  
Journals of Hearne and Turnor, p.456.

104. Harmon, Sixteen Years, p.124.





A WINTER VIEW IN THE ATHAPUSCOW LAKE  
By Samuel Hearne, 1771

Figure 20. Great Slave Lake, 1771



tribe had caused them to be driven "from place to place, up the Peace River, until they were, at length, obliged to cross the Rocky Mountain".<sup>109</sup> In 1805, the North West Company established a post at McLeod's Lake on the other side of the mountains for the harrassed Sekani. Since then, it had been rewarded by a large trade in beaver.<sup>110</sup>

Like the post at McLeod Lake, most of the other houses in the Athabasca Country had been carefully situated in order to trade with specific tribes. Most of them were located along the western edge of the Stony Region although they were "serviced" from the navigable rivers of the Great Plains. In this way, the North West Company was able to bring their goods into the Indians' own countries and so spare them the long dangerous journey across the Stony Region to trade at the factories on Hudson Bay. For the Chipewyans, there were Fort Chipewyan, Fond-du-Lac, and Slave Fort; for the Yellow-knives, Fort Providence; for the Slaves, Fort Forks of the Mackenzie and Fort Riviere-au-Liard; for the Dogribs, Great Bear Lake House; and for the Hares, Fort Norman. Of course, none of these posts traded only with one tribe. But as far as possible it was the company's policy to provide at least one outlet for each tribe. In doing so, it was hoped to keep conflicts from developing among the tribes, and to prevent any of them from becoming "middle-men".

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109. Harmon, Sixteen Years, p.256.

110. Ibid., p.132.

Some idea of the relative importance of the Athabasca Country to the North West Company may be gained from the fact that more than one-third of the boats and canoes allocated to the various departments of the company in 1810, were assigned to the Athabasca Country.<sup>111</sup> The furs from this cold region were among the richest produced in the whole of the Northwest and yet, because it had no competition, the North West Company was able to procure them more cheaply than possibly anywhere else. It was not surprising then, to find in 1811, that the Hudson's Bay Company was making plans to enter this preserve. In the spring, the settlers then wintering at the Nelson Encampment were to go to the Red River. Here they were to establish an agricultural base, which in time was to play its part in enabling the company to extend its activities into the Athabasca Country, the Eldorado of the fur trade.

Apart from the forested margin along its western edge, particularly in the late Athabasca area, the Stony Region had always been relatively poor in furs and provisions but, by 1811, it was becoming so hunted out that it was coming to be regarded as more of a barrier than as a productive region in itself - a barrier which had to be crossed to reach the rich provision areas of the grasslands and fur countries of the northern plains. Many of the natives of this area, taking advantage of their geographical pos-

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111. Wallace, Documents of the North West Company, p.269.

The broken rivers of the Stony Region added to its barrier-

## CHAPTER IX

### CONCLUSIONS

The fur traders of 1811 saw the Northwest as three distinct regions: New South Wales [Hudson Bay Lowlands], the Stony Region [Canadian Shield] and the Great [Interior] Plains. To them, the least important of these was New South Wales which was by then functioning primarily as a base from which the Hudson's Bay Company conducted its trade in the Northwest. It was relatively poor in both furs and provisions. Except for migrating ducks and geese, game was both scarce and unpredictable and the three factories maintained there by the company were largely dependent upon provisions from Europe and pemmican from the interior.

Apart from the forested margin along its western edge, particularly in the Lake Athabasca area, the Stony Region had always been relatively poor in furs and provisions but, by 1811, it was becoming so hunted out that it was coming to be regarded as more of a barrier than as a productive region in itself - a barrier which had to be crossed to reach the rich provision areas of the grasslands and fur countries of the northern plains. Many of the natives of this area, taking advantage of their geographical position, became "middlemen" and carried the furs and provisions of wealthier countries across their homeland to trade on Hudson Bay.

The broken rivers of the Stony Region added to its barrier-

like appearance. In sharp contrast were the three large, highly navigable, river systems of the Great Plains, the Red, Saskatchewan, and Mackenzie. These not only enabled the traders to exploit the furs and provisions of the Great Plains but also the fur lands along the western margin of the Stony Region. Two important routes enabled the traders to cross the Stony Region to enter the rivers of the Great Plains. One led from Fort William to Lake Winnipeg and the other from York Factory to Lake Winnipeg. Each was approached from one of the two great waterways which led from the Atlantic into the heart of North America, the Saint Lawrence-Great Lakes system and Hudson Strait and Bay. By 1811, each entrance was controlled by a single fur monopoly, the Great Lakes by the North West Company and Hudson Bay by the Hudson's Bay Company. The latter route was the more economic and the North West Company was then attempting to come to an agreement with the Hudson's Bay Company in order to be able to use it as well.

In the Northwest, itself, the two companies competed side by side nearly everywhere in the Red and Saskatchewan countries and in much of the Stony Region. In the Athabasca [Mackenzie] basin Country, however, the North West Company had so far succeeded in excluding the Hudson's Bay Company from this, the richest fur area in the whole Northwest. The Canadian Company also enjoyed a monopoly in the area beyond the Rockies known as New Caledonia, in which it was then extending its activities.

Most of the important trading posts were situated near good fisheries. Exceptions were the bayside factories and a number of



posts near the open plains where buffalo were plentiful. All of the principal provision depots and goods stores in the interior were established on lakes forming part of the "Valley of the Lakes" which separated the Stony Region from the Great Plains. These were Rainy Lake House, Fort Bas-de-la-Riviere, Fort Cumberland, Fort Ile-a-la-Crosse and Fort Chipewyan. In each case, the provisions were brought down stream to the depot with the minimum of effort. Ducks and geese were also plentiful along these lakes during the spring and autumn. The lakeside posts, in common with most posts in the Northwest, were situated near the river junctions. Other posts were usually placed near a sharp elbow in a river or perhaps along its headwaters. In each of the latter cases, the house would probably also be near a portage or an overland pass. Fierce competition between rival factions led to some fairly irrational choices of location as well.

Generally speaking, relations between the trading factions were best where the Indians were most hostile and poorest where the Indians were most friendly. That is, they were best on the plains, where the Indians were not dependent upon the traders and could afford to be reckless in their dealings with them, and poorest in the forest, where the inhabitants could no longer live without the traders' goods. Along the periphery of the trade, which in 1811 corresponded roughly with the borders of the Northwest, relations were poorest of all. For the natives along the trade frontier were anxious that the trade should spread no further geographically because they did not want the natives beyond them-



selves, who in nearly every case were enemies, to receive guns and ammunition. Moreover, the peripheral tribes often carried on a very lucrative trade in European goods with their more distant enemy-neighbours, and realized that any extension of the trade might destroy their position as middlemen. To the traders, these middlemen were, at best, mere nuisances who added little to the trade, and they were anxious to penetrate to the Indians of the country beyond them. The peripheral tribes, of course, tried to obstruct the progress of the traders and open hostility was often the result.

In order to carry on his trade and, indeed, merely to exist in this harsh new land, the European had to borrow many skills and techniques from the natives. From them, he learned how to use the birch bark canoe and to make pemmican. It was these two things which enabled him to develop his vast transportation system which, more than anything else, permitted him to earn his living in the Northwest. Canoe travel was expensive and only a luxury product like furs could bear the high cost. By 1811, the Napoleonic wars had so depressed the fur markets, that little other than beaver was then worth carrying.

The wars had also been responsible for an increasingly serious personnel shortage in the Hudson's Bay Company. This had contributed much to the company's ineffectiveness in dealing with Canadian competition. The company had also been labouring under the handicap of an overly rigid organization. Nevertheless, in

1811, it faced the future with confidence. For not only had a more flexible organization recently been adopted by there was real hope that the chronic personnel shortage would soon be solved. Lork Selkirk had just concluded an agreement with the company to supply a large number of men each year in return for a vast grant of land along the Red River for the purpose of establishing an agricultural settlement. In the years to come, it was hoped that the settlement would also provide a source of recruits. The vanguard of the settlers were then wintering along the Nelson above York Factory. During the next century, hundreds of thousands would follow them. And they would change the face of the Northwest. The bold checkered pattern of agriculture would spread across much of the Great Plains, pushing the traders northward and eastward into the Stony Region until all that remained of the old Northwest which had been theirs, was a pile of stones in some farmer's field near the meeting place of two streams, or the fragile remains of a copper kettle below a waterfall, marking the place where a canoe had capsized and a voyageur's song had ended.

Upper Athabasca	55 to 62	110 to 118	6	8	13	72	30
(Nasichipe)	58, 65						
Athabasca	55 to 62	110 to 120	10	5	15	175	307
Upper Athabasca River	64 to 58	112 to 118	3	3	4	21	10
South side of Lake Superior and the Fond du Lac	45 to 55	84 to 88	15	1	15	20	34
		88-90					
						102	18 141 222 291

\* Lieutenant Governor Milnes to Lord Robert, Quebec, 30 October 1809, and Lord R. to Milnes, 11 November 1809, in the Annual Report on the Canadian Archives, 1952, p. 142.

## Appendix A

Number of Men Employed by the North West Company and  
XY Company in 1802 \*

Names of Departments	Latitudes	Longitude	Posts	Partners	Clerks	Common Men	Total
Saint Maries	46.30	84W	1		2	11	14
Michipicotin	from 46.5 to 47.55	84.15 to 84.45	3		3	10	13
Kamanistiqua	48.25	89.20	1		2	18	20
Grand Portage	48	90	2		3	8	11
Mille Lacs	48.35	91.30	2		3	6	9
Pic	48.40	86.2	3		4	10	14
Nipigon Lake	49 to 53	86 to 91	2		2	7	9
Nipigon	...	...	7	1	10	55	86
Lac de la Pluie	48.9 to 49.20	91.50 to 94.30	6		6	28	34
Riviere Rouge and Assiniboine	48.25 to 51.45	97 to 103.15	10	2	16	90	108
Lac Quinipique	50 to 54	94.50 to 99	7	2	13	65	80
Fort Dauphin	51.40 to 53	98.35 to 102.45	7	1	14	60	75
Shuskachivan River	53.10 to 54.30	99.47 to 115	9	2	16	80	98
English River (Missinipe)	53.56 to 55.45	98 to 112	9	2	12	75	89
Athabaska	55 to 66	110 to 120	18	5	16	186	207
Upper Athabasca River	54 to 55	112 to 116	3	3	4	44	50
South side of Lac Superior and the Fond du Lac	46 to 48	84 to 95.30	12	1	15	68	84
			102	18	141	822	981

\* Lieutenant Governor Milnes to Lord Hobart, Quebec, 30 October 1802, enclosure D, signed by McTavish, Frobisher & Co. Printed in the Annual Report on the Canadian Archives, 1892, p.142.

Appendix B

WOOD USED FOR THE PARK RIVER POST (1800)<sup>1</sup>

Red River District

Stockades, 15 ft. long oak . . . . .	564
" 8 ft. oak, for rembrits (?) . . . . .	564
" 6 ft. for 3d lining to bastion . . . . .	100
" 5 ft. over the two gates . . . . .	34
" 7 to 15 ft. oak, for laths . . . . .	34
" 8 ft. for plank for gates . . . . .	14
" 7 ft. for plank for bastions . . . . .	20
Pegs, 1½ ft. for stockades, etc. . . . .	<u>770</u>
Total	<u>2,100</u>

FOR DWELLING-HOUSE

Oak logs of 10 ft. for the square . . . . .	72
" " of 18 ft. for the pinions (pignons, gables) . . . . .	18
" " of 15 ft. for the cloisons (partitions). . . . .	45
" " of 9 ft. for the covering . . . . .	230
" " contg. 100 ft. for the sableries (sablères, wall-plates) . . . . .	6
" " contg. 100 ft. for the covering . . . . .	6
" " of 11 ft. for the aiguilles (rails?) . . . . .	5
" " of 20 ft. for the faites (ridge-poles) . . . . .	3
Squared posts, 8 ft. for doors and covers . . . . .	14
Posts, 4 ft. for windows . . . . .	11
Planks, 8 ft. for flooring . . . . .	105
Boards, 6 ft. for doors, beds, etc. . . . .	<u>115</u>
Total	<u>630</u>

FOR STOREHOUSE

Oak logs of 24 ft. for square . . . . .	12
Pine logs of 13 ft. for pinions . . . . .	20
Oak logs of 9 ft. for covering . . . . .	120
" " of 24 ft. for faites . . . . .	1
" " of 22 ft. for covering . . . . .	2
" " of 11 ft. for aiguilles . . . . .	3
Oak posts of 5 ft. for doors . . . . .	2
" planks of 5 ft. for doors . . . . .	3
" logs of 12 ft. for flooring . . . . .	<u>50</u>
Total	<u>213</u>

FOR SHOP

Oak Logs of 15 ft. for the square . . . . .	15
" " of 13 ft. for the pinions . . . . .	20
" " of 9 ft. for the covering . . . . .	73
" " of 15 ft. for the faîtes . . . . .	3
" " of 11 ft. for the aiguilles . . . . .	2
Oak posts of 5 ft. for the doors . . . . .	2
" planks 8 ft. for the flooring . . . . .	<u>55</u>
Total	170

Pieces of timber and wood . . . . .	3,113
Oak stick of 55 ft. for a flag-staff . . . . .	<u>1</u>
Total	<u>3,114</u>

Deer Skins, weight 1700	402	402
Black Bear Skins	22	177
Green Bear Skins	10	10
Arctic Bear Skins	4	1
Wolf Skins	11	83
Red Fox Skins	32	102
Wile Skins	9	7
Sheep Skins	37	150
Fiber Skins	102	70
Star Skins	25	14
Wolverine Skins	2	2
Impressario Skins	9	11
Washed Moose and Elk Skins	1	22
Washed and Parahmed Moose Skins	20	20
Washed Skins	1	26
Buffalo robes	2	21
Beaver Skins	2	14
Frogs of 90 lbs, each	2	20
<hr/>		
Bag of Emulsion of 30 lbs. each	20	27
<hr/>		
Bag of Oil	1	1
Bag of Soap	1	7
Bag of Oil	1	10

1. Coues, New Light, pp.122-3.



## Appendix C

## RETURNS OF THE LOWER RED RIVER DEPARTMENT

1800-1808 \*

1800-01

	Reed River	Park River	Total in Canoes
lbs.			
Beaver Skins; weight 1904	832	643	1475
Black Bear Skins	52	125	177
Brown Bear Skins	20	23	43
Grizzly Bear Skins	4	2	6
Wolf Skins	111	83	204
Red Fox Skins	82	102	184
Kitt Skins	9	7	16
Raccoon Skins	37	160	197
Fisher Skins	108	70	178
Otter Skins	60	36	96
Marten Skins	26	36	62
Mink Skins	68	29	97
Wolverine Skins	2	3	5
Loup-cervier Skins	9	11	20
Dressed Moose and Biche Skins	1	20	21
Shaved and Parchment Biche Skins	63	29	92
Muskrat Skins	1	26	27
Buffalo Robes	26	31	56
Badger Skins	1	9	10
Packs of 90 lbs. each	26	34	60
<hr/>			
Bags of Pemmican of 90 lbs. each	20	57	77
<hr/>			
Kegs of Grease	..	4	4
Kegs of Beef	..	7	7
Bales of Dried Meat	..	10	10

\* Coues, New Light, pp.184, 198, 221, 245, 259, 281, 422, 440.

1801-02

	Grandes Fourches	Hair Hills	Riviere aux Gratias	Panbian River	Totals in Four Canoes
Beavers, weight 1805 lbs.	410	200	130	629	1369
Black Bears	22	24	..	18	64
Brown Bears	2	5	..	4	11
Wolves	30	160	8	58	256
Foxes	20	39	2	16	77
Raccoons	29	14	3	39	85
Fishers	23	57	38	67	185
Otters	29	5	2	24	60
Martens	..	13	5	6	24
Minks	6	..	5	26	40
Wolverenes	..	3	1	..	1
Loup-cerviers	..	8	8	51	67
Dressed Moose and Biches	..	20	..	..	20
Shaved and parchment Biches	..	220	12	38	270
Muskrats	..	5	..	8	13
Buffalo Robes	..	1	7	2	10
<hr/>					
Packs of 90 lbs each	9	24	3 $\frac{1}{2}$	25 $\frac{1}{2}$	62
<hr/>					
Bags of Pemmican of 90 lbs each	..	50	7	33	90
Kegs of Beef	..	..	..	16	16
Kegs of Grease	3	..	..	..	3
Kegs of Sugar	3	..	..	..	3
<hr/>					

1802-03

Nine Canoes, North West Company

	Panbian River	Turtle River	Red Lake	Hair Hills	Prairie en Longue	Barr's Head	Lake Manitoba	Portage la Prairie
1801 Beavers, weight 2,825	550	337	85	30	150	254	116	229
152 Black Bears	30	28	3	39	3	7	12	30
42 Brown Bears	8	12	1	8	..	3	2	8
1 Grizzly Bear	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	1
801 Wolves	104	114	..	364	5	22	4	188
190 Foxes	23	61	..	78	1	..	5	22
24 Kitts	..	1	..	23	..	..	..	..
127 Raccoons	25	63	..	14	..	8	..	17
496 Fishers	69	98	3	111	60	15	35	105
172 Otters	30	34	10	6	19	13	41	19
722 Martens	9	26	12	47	47	6	243	332
122 Minks	39	3	2	8	..	7	..	43
10 Wolverines	4	..	1	..	1	1	2	1
194 Lynxes	11	13	2	23	60	28	11	46
139 Dressed Moose and Biches	5	62	13	10	..	31	18	..
129 Shaved and Parch- ment Skins	18	1	1	26	..	1	3	79
144 Muskrats	46	54	4	27	..	..	13	..
4 Buffalo Robes	..	..	..	1	..	..	..	3
9 Badgers	1	1	1	2	..	1	..	3
<hr/>								
94 Packs of 90 lbs each	22	16	2	12	4	8	8	22
<hr/>								
95 Bags of Pemmican of 90 lbs each	20	..	..	33	..	..	..	42
10 Kegs of Sugar	6	4	..					
12 Kegs of Grease	12							
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1805-06Eight Canoes

	lbs.	Portage La Prairie	Dog Lake	Ft. Wasp Mount	Grandes Fourches	Panbian River
1621 Beavers, weight	2625	116	103	284	342	776
125 Black Bears		42	6	12	24	51
49 Brown Bears		25	2	2	..	20
4 Grizzly Bears		1	..	..	..	3
862 Wolves		81	5	13	310	533
509 Foxes, black, silver, red and cross		75	4	2	171	256
152 Raccoons		14	..	..	75	63
322 Fishers		66	13	44	59	140
214 Otters		36	26	23	27	102
1456 Martens		532	400	249	4	271
507 Minks		93	130	108	35	141
45 Wolverenes		20	1	13	1	10
469 Dressed moose and Biches		222	13	48	7	179
78 Shaved and parchment Moose and Biches		..	..	17	7	54
12470 Muskrats		10865	1428	39	9	109
74 Buffalo Robes		..	..	..	6	68
1 Beaver Robe, 7 skins		..	..	..	..	1
<hr/>						
126 Packs		36	6	11	18	53
6 Packs		..	..	..	1	5
132 Packs		11	11	11	19	58
<hr/>						
235 Bags of Pemmican		12	..	..	35	188
3000 lbs. of Bear Meat		3000	..	..	..	..
14 Kegs Grease		..	..	..	4	10
5 Kegs Sugar		..	..	..	2	3
24 Kegs Beef packed in casks		..	..	..	..	24
6 Kegs Tongues		..	..	..	..	6
5 Kegs Gum		..	..	..	..	5
1 Keg Salt		..	..	..	..	1
2 Kegs small bosses (?)		..	..	..	..	2

1806-07Six Canoes

	lbs.	Portage la Prairie	Riviere du Millieu	Sandy Hill River	Panbian River
1184 Beavers, weight 1750		47	72	500	565
213 Black Bears		31	23	37	122
51 Brown Bears		8	11	4	28
1 Grizzly Bear		..	..	1	..
1207 Martens		908	209	15	75
126 Minks		54	18	33	21
544 Muskrats		471	9	22	42
119 Otters		24	7	24	64
238 Fishers		48	21	91	78
420 Wolves		31	12	250	127
216 Dressed Biche Skins		69	48	2	97
30 Dressed Red Deer Skins		..	..	..	30
53 Parchment Biche Skins		2	18	12	21
32 Fallow Deer Skins		..	..	30	2
119 Red Foxes		32	10	43	34
7 Cross Foxes		4	..	..	3
4 Silver Foxes		4	..	..	..
8 Wolverines		5	..	3	..
4 (copy blank)		2	1	..	1
1 Muskrat Robe		1	..	..	..
21 Ermines		6	15	..	..
<hr/>					
77 Packs of 85 lbs. each		13	7	20	37
<hr/>					
116 Bags of Pemmican of 85 lbs. each		18	5	10	60
24 Kegs Grease		..	..	6	18
11 Kegs Sugar		2	..	3	6
4 Kegs Gum		..	..	..	4
5 Kegs Beef		..	..	..	5
4 (?)		..	..	..	4
2 Kegs Tongue		..	..	..	2

Gain, £198. 4s. 10d., Halifax Cy.

1807-08

Three Canoes

	lbs.	Deed River	Hair Hills	Grandes Fourches	Panbian River
696 Beavers, weight 908		54	53	150	339
161 Black Bears		31	34	48	48
19 Brown Bears		5	5	2	7
1 Grizzly Bear		..	..	1	..
932 Martens		855	2	6	69
198 Minks		110	7	18	63
118 Otters		27	3	35	53
167 Shaved Parchments		17	71	5	74
55 Dressed Biches		15	..	..	40
46 Raccoons		4	8	15	19
118 Fishers		29	46	14	29
4 Loup-cerviers		2	1	..	1
3 Wolverines		2	1	..	..
37 Foxes		1	2	6	28
68 Wolves		..	20	5	43
8 Buffalo Robes		..	4	..	4
<hr/>					
60 Packs of 90 lbs. each		10	11	16	23
<hr/>					
334 Bags of Pemmican, 90 lbs. each		..	60	103	171
46 Kegs of Grease, 70 lbs. each		..	..	..	46
2 Kegs of Grease, 90 lbs. each		..	..	..	2
<hr/>					
42 Kegs of Sugar brought from L. Lake				3,903 lbs. gross	
6 Kegs of Sugar made at Panbian River				<u>744 lbs. tare</u>	
<u>48</u>				<u>3,159 lbs. net</u>	

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Section A includes: minute books, extracts of the minutes of the committee, London agenda books, grand ledgers, grand journals, officers' and servants' ledgers, account books, servants' commissions, cash books, bills payable books, invoice book of shipments, fur sale book, London correspondence outward, London correspondence inward.

Section B has been further sub-divided according to the different types of records, a lower-case letter having been allocated for each sub-division:

- a - post journals
- b - correspondence books (outward and inward entries)
- c - correspondence (inward)
- d - account books
- e - reports on districts
- f - lists of servants
- z - miscellaneous items

The remainder of the material is classified under sections C, D, E, F and G and includes the ships' logs, private journals of some of the traders, North West Company correspondence, etc., and maps.

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