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Footprints on the Land

Tracing the Path of the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation

A Special Thank You

The Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation
would like to acknowledge the following for their support of this project:

BENEFACTORS

TrueNorth Energy

Shell Canada

Suncor

Syncrude Canada

CONTRIBUTORS

BC Hydro

Indian and Northern Affairs Canada

Sustainable Communities Initiative of Natural Resources Canada

Athabasca Tribal Council

Cumulative Environmental Management Association

Alberta Department of Energy

Canadian Natural Resources

Petro-Canada

Deer Creek

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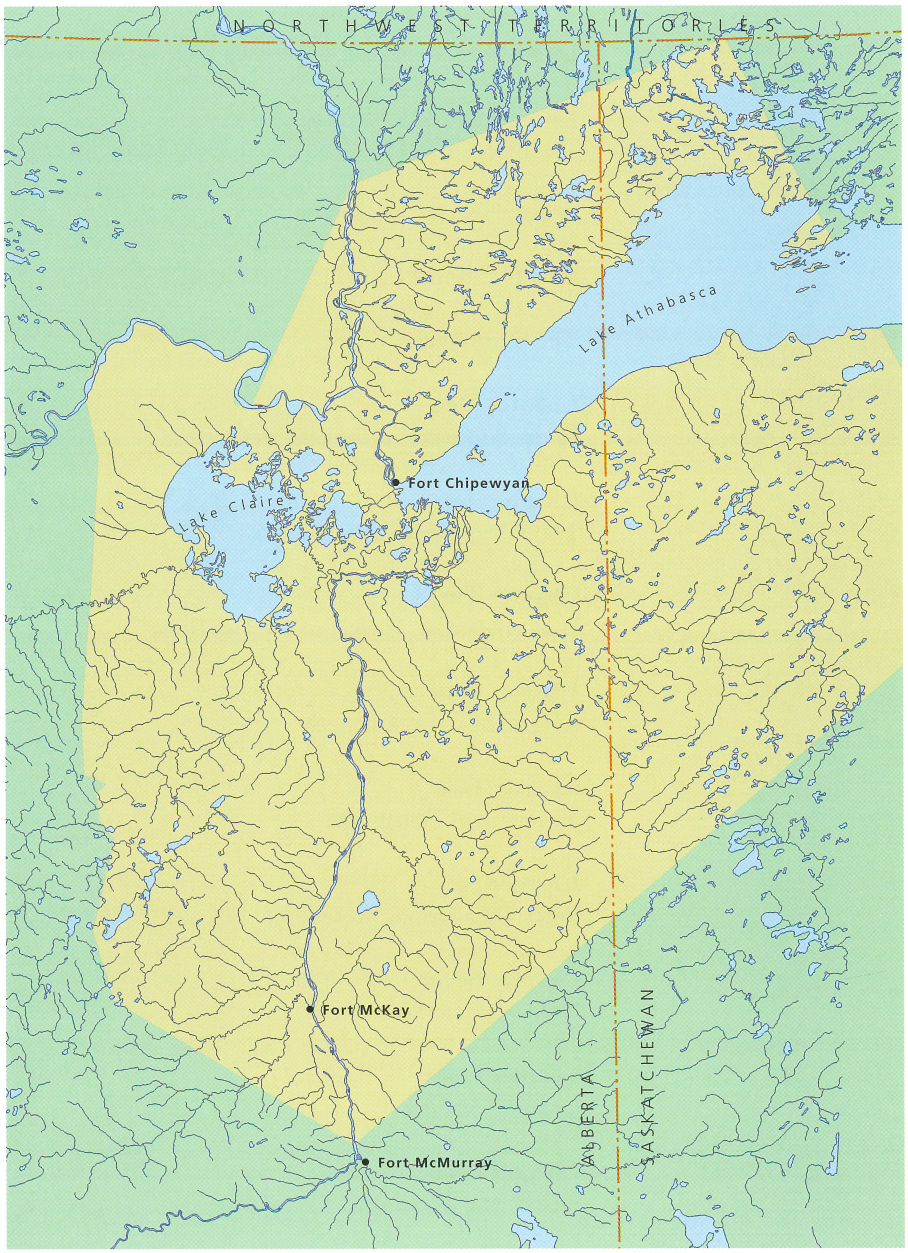
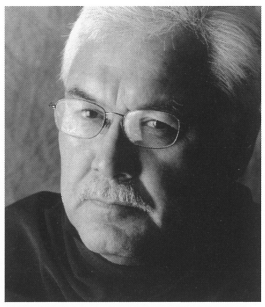
Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation Traditional Lands

This map presents the core area of the traditional lands of the ACFN which has been used by the Athabasca Chipewyan people for hundreds, if not thousands of years. While ACFN land use was not limited to this area, the map represents a reasonable estimate of the more intensively used lands.

Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation Traditional Lands



Letter from Chief Archie Cyprien



Chief Archie Cyprien
Athabasca Chipewyan
First Nation

The land is the essence of Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation (ACFN) culture, values and spirituality. The fact that we have been removed from the heart of our traditional land has made the conclusions reached in our recent Traditional Land Use and Occupancy Study all the more poignant. It is clear to me that our people want and need to return home.

This book, produced as a companion to the study, is an attempt to record and preserve our knowledge, culture and history as told by our Elders. It is our hope that the historical information presented here will clarify our passion for the land and in doing so support the ACFN negotiations, planning and land claims issues.

The core area of the traditional lands of the ACFN is identified in the map presented on the opposite page. This map presents an area that has been used by the Athabasca Chipewyan people for hundreds, if not thousands of years, and their use of this land has continued to the present day. While ACFN land use was not limited to this area, the map represents a reasonable estimate of the more intensively used lands.

Interested parties may contact us to make use of the Traditional Land Use Study to increase their awareness of the importance of the land and its uses to our traditional way of life.

I wish to thank the Elders for their invaluable contributions to the study, the ACFN Council who have stewarded this project from beginning to end, and band members for their wholehearted and practical endorsement, as well as band administration, consultants and all those who worked tirelessly behind the scenes.

Additionally, I thank government and industry for their financial backing. Without the help and support of everyone involved, this important project would not have seen the light of day.

Sincerely,

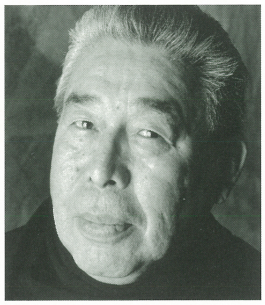


Chief Archie Cyprien,
Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation



Elders, Mary Bruno, Eliza Flett, Mary Madeline Marcel, Josephine Mercredi and Margaret Simpson visiting.

Letter from the Chairman of the Steering Committee



Pat Marcel
Chairman
TLUOS Committee

I am proud to have been the chairman of the Traditional Land Use and Occupancy Study Steering Committee. It has been a wonderful opportunity to record the knowledge of the Elders and also to contribute to the study.

It has become clear that the insight and information garnered here is long reaching. Already, a permanent committee of Elders – the Denesoline Traditional Knowledge Elders Committee – has been formed to consult with industry and government and offer recommendations to Chief and Council. This new committee will be funded in part by organizations using the Traditional Land Use Study for environmental impact assessments and other negotiations. Use of the information found here will improve the ultimate outcome of any project and will help prevent damage to the environment.

The information and history contained in this book, while comprehensive, is not complete. We look forward to expanding the scope of the project by interviewing more Elders for information on genealogy, traditional medicines and traditional ecological knowledge.

I offer my heartfelt thanks to all the members of the TLUOS Steering Committee, including Charlie Voyageur, Councillor Alec Bruno, Councillor Arsene Bernaille, Councillor Rene Bruno, Chief Archie Cyprien, Councillor Lily Marcel, Band Administrator Patricia Lepine, and Alice Rigney.

Thank you.

P. Marcel

Pat Marcel
Chairman, TLUOS Committee



Instead of sitting in the backyard of his Fort Chipewyan bungalow, Alex Flett would prefer to still be out on the land.

A Very Special Thank You

In the summer of 2000, the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation Chief and Council responded to the urgent need to record valuable traditional knowledge, heritage, cultural land use and spiritual information by initiating a traditional land use and occupancy study. The study took place during 2001and 2002 and was published in 2003. This book describes the traditional land use of the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation and their ancestors as researched in that study.

The history of the ACFN describes an originally healthy and relatively affluent society that over the last 250 years – since the arrival of the European fur trade – has been colonized and disenfranchised and has been losing traditional lands. The Traditional Land Use and Occupancy Study is part of an effort to rebuild and restore the spirit, health and dignity of the ACFN people. It is the beginning of a longer process of recording, preserving, developing and teaching about Athabasca Chipewyan land use, traditional knowledge and cultural and spiritual traditions. For this reason it is important that studies of this nature be initiated, controlled and directed by the Aboriginal people.

A traditional land use and occupancy study is based upon the experience and knowledge of community Elders. The basic goal of this study was to record information about land use practices of the ACFN people in an accurate, fair and sensitive manner. Elder interviews were conducted and recorded in the Dene language as much as possible, and the roles of both male and female Elders were acknowledged in the questionnaire and in the interview process. It was also important to ensure that this study was conducted in a manner that was consistent with the principle of self-determination of Aboriginal peoples.

Morningstar Mercredi, an ACFN member, initiated the study organization and was retained by the ACFN to prepare a strategy for study funding. Chief Archie Cyprien and the ACFN Council (Rose Ross, Rene Bruno, Alec Bruno and Lily Marcel) appointed an Elders Committee to supervise the focus, content and methods of the study. The ACFN Council also approved the budget and appointed administrative personnel to assist in the project. In February 2001, Patricia Lepine, an ACFN member, was appointed Administrative Coordinator and a consultant, Jim Tanner, was retained to act as project manager for the study.

The committee

The Traditional Land Use and Occupancy Study (TLUOS) Committee was made up of five Elders – Charlie Voyageur, Pat Marcel, Alec Bruno, Rene Bruno and Arsene Bernaille – two interviewers – Councillor Lily Marcel and Alice Rigney – and the Administrative Coordinator, Patricia Lepine. Jim Tanner served as an ex-officio member. The committee met regularly throughout the project, reviewing the proposal, questionnaire and budgets and providing overall direction and guidance.

Support for the project

Randi Allan, CEO, ACFN Group of Companies, has made a tremendous contribution to the success of the project in many ways, helping from its inception with coordination, organization and raising of funds.

The project was supported by TrueNorth Energy, Shell Canada, Suncor Energy, Syncrude Canada, BC Hydro, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, Sustainable Communities Initiative of Natural Resources Canada, Athabasca Tribal Council, Cumulative Environmental Management Association, Alberta Department of Energy, Canadian Natural Resources, Petro-Canada and Deer Creek.

The ACFN Band Council contributed both financial and administrative support. Patricia Lepine and Susan Michael also supplied administrative support. Interviewers Alice Rigney and Lily Marcel went beyond their responsibilities and contributed time to the committee and to many other tasks, including data entry. Lionel Lepine and Everett Bruno provided support for the interviews, and Everett Bruno provided GIS, technical support and data entry and attended the Elder interviews. The GIS course was attended by Lionel Lepine, Everett Bruno, Lily Marcel, Cherie Stewart, Rose Adams, Karen Adam and Roberta Lepine.

Sharon Bruno also assisted in entering data, and Leonard Flett helped with the interviews. Pat Marcel, Charlie Voyageur, Alec Bruno, Arsene Bernaille and Rene Bruno attended many additional meetings and working sessions to review the surveys and data. Chief Archie Cyprien also contributed many hours to the project reviewing the information provided to Chief and Council. In addition to his role as Chief, he assisted in the mapping of the areas where his parents and grandparents hunted and trapped. Thanks go to Morningstar Mercredi for initiating the organization and fund raising for the project; Joanne Barnaby for her contributions to the organization and scope of the project; Lindsay Giles, who contributed extra time to the mapping; Ann Blyth who conducted the GIS course; and Jordan Kuschminder, Ed McCullough, Gloria Fedrichuk and Kate Peach for their contribution to the archaeological sections of the book.

A very special thank you goes to the Elders of the ACFN who contributed their time and knowledge and without whom this project would not have been possible.

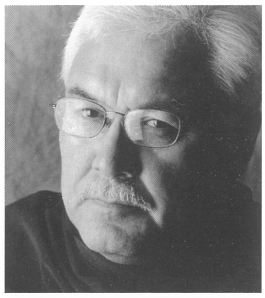
This study is only a beginning. There are several areas where this work could be extended and expanded to serve the interests of the ACFN people. We are hopeful that new and continuing projects, such as the Elders Committee process, the recent archaeological project and the traditional youth camp project, will allow further data to be collected, interpreted, presented and developed and that this study will continue to benefit the ACFN community in preserving, protecting and developing their culture.

The Traditional Land Use and Occupancy Study

Chief	Chief Archie Cyprien		
Steering Committee	Arsene Bernaille Alec Bruno	Rene Bruno Pat Marcel	Charlie Voyageur
Interviewers*	Lily Marcel	Alice Rigney	
Administrative Coodinator	Patricia Lepine		
Elders	Alice Adam * ◆ Eusebe Adam Horace Adam ◆ Joe Adam Marie Adam ◆ Mary Louise Adam * Arsene Bernaille Alice Boucher * Gina Boucher * Alec Bruno Mary Bruno Rene Bruno Dorothy Cardinal * ◆ Ernie Cardinal ◆ Evelyn Cardinal * ◆ Celine Cyprien Janet Dashcavich ◆ Therese Deranger * ◆	Alex Flett Dora Flett ◆ Eliza Flett Louise Flett Victoria Flett Elizabeth King Goodwin * ◆ Yvonne Hoffman * ◆ Anne L'Hommecourt * Marvin L'Hommecourt * Mary Matheson * ◆ Baptiste Marcel Frank Marcel Chief Fred Marcel George Marcel John Marcel Mary Madeline Marcel Margaret Marcel Mary Marcel ◆	Pat Marcel Annie Mercredi ◆ Charlie Mercredi George "Smoky" Mercredi ◆ John Mercredi Josephine Mercredi Victoria Mercredi Alphonse Piche * Margaret Simpson ◆ Elise Whitedeer ◆ Pete Whitedeer Albert Voyageur Alice Voyageur * ◆ Charlie Voyageur * Not photographed ◆ Not interviewed

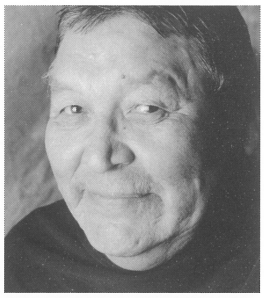
*Leonard Flett conducted one interview.

Chief

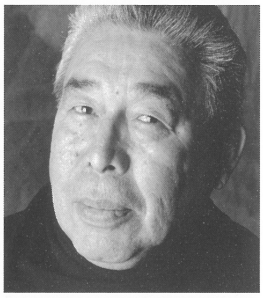


Chief Archie Cyprien

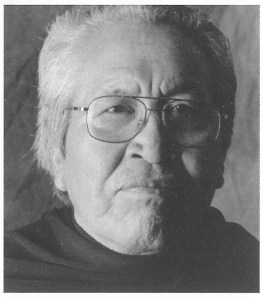
Steering Committee



Arsene Bernaille

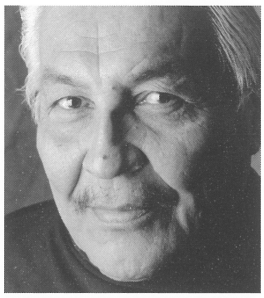


Pat Marcel

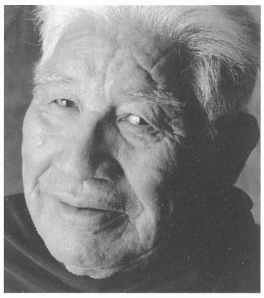


Rene Bruno

Band Administration



Alec Bruno



Charlie Voyageur

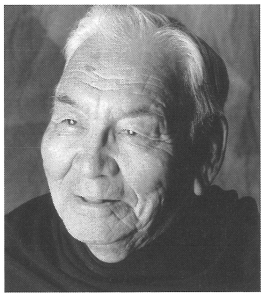


Patricia Lepine



Alice Rigney

The Storytellers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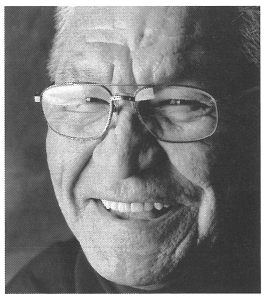
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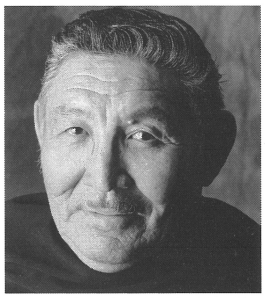
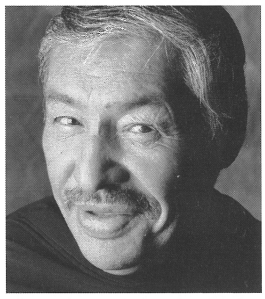

Joe Adam

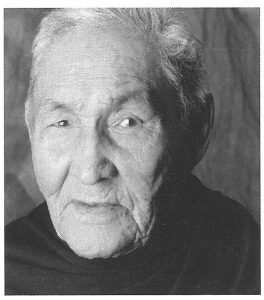

Marie Adam


Mary Bruno

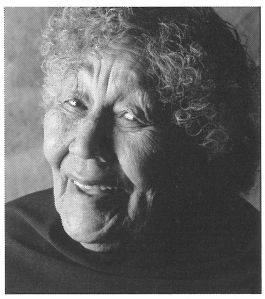

Ernie Cardinal


Celine Cyprien

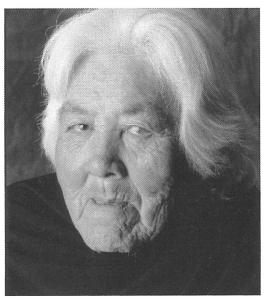

Janet Dashcavich


Alex Flett


Dora Flett


Eliza Flett


Louise Flett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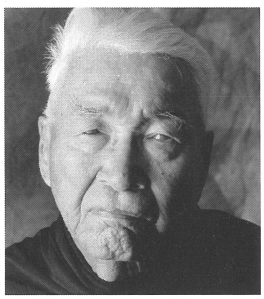
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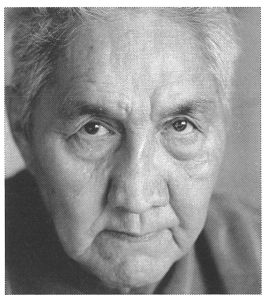
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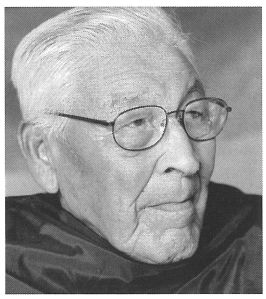
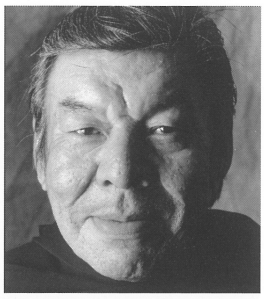
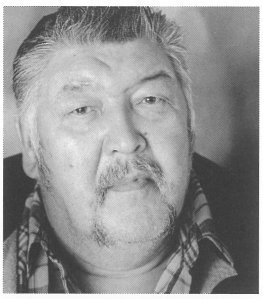

Fred Marcel



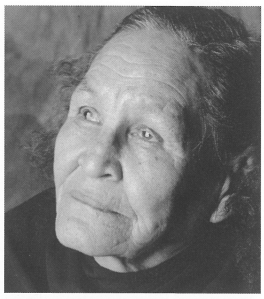
George Marcel



John Marcel



Mary Madeline Marcel



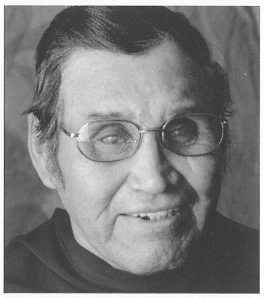
Margaret Marcel



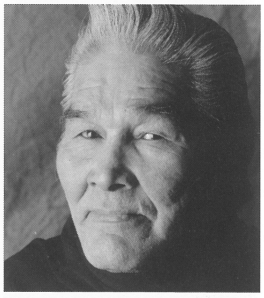
Mary Marcel



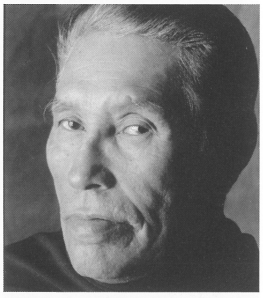
Annie Mercredi



Charlie Mercredi



George "Smoky" Mercredi



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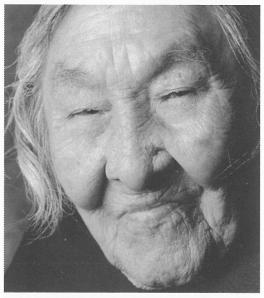
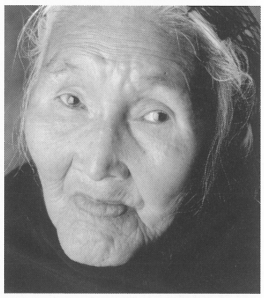


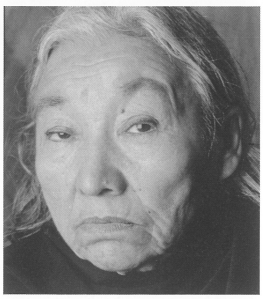
Josephine Mercredi



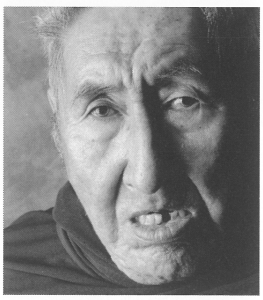
Victoria Mercredi



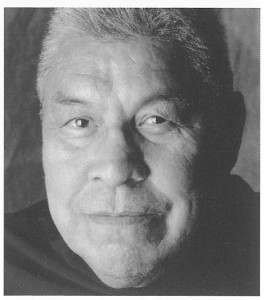
Margaret Simpson



Elise Whitedeer



Pete Whitedeer



Albert Voyageur



Fred Marcel, the last traditional Chief of the ACFN, was an active trapper and an elegant speaker for the First Nation.

CHAPTER ONE

In the Footsteps of the Glaciers

The identity of a people is ultimately defined by their relationship to the land. The Dene people known as the Athabasca Chipewyan have occupied the lands shown on the map on page four for thousands of years. While their history tells of many changes over the centuries, the core of their identity and culture is still tied to their traditional use – hunting, gathering, collecting of medicinal plants – and spiritual understanding of the land.

The Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation (ACFN) is a band of Aboriginal people registered under the Indian Act pursuant to Treaty 8. Although many of the ACFN people now live in Fort Chipewyan, Alberta, they are descended from nomadic Dene peoples who occupied the taiga, barren lands and boreal forests of northern Canada following the retreating glaciers of the last ice age.

Dene Elders have passed on many powerful legends telling how their people came to occupy these lands. Some legends trace Dene ancestors back over many millennia to another continent. Scientific research supports some of these ancient stories. Geologists have determined that twice over the past 100,000 years a land bridge connected Siberia with Alaska. This occurred during an ice age between 75,000 and 45,000 years ago, and again during the last ice age, between 25,000 and 14,000 years ago. Each time, as the glaciers advanced, the sea level dropped as much as 300 feet, creating a land bridge across the Bering Strait – the 90 kilometres of water that today separates the shores of Siberia and North America.

CHAPTER ONE

In the Footsteps of the Glaciers

Lands of the Northern Athapaskan-Speaking People (Dene)

The Northern Athapaskan-speaking people can be collectively referred to as Dene, or "the people." The Mackenzie Dene include the Kutchin, Hare, Mountain, Bear Lake, Dogrib, Yellowknife, Slave and Chipewyan peoples.





Beringia
Ninety kilometres separate the shores of mainland Siberia and Alaska today. Beringia was a land bridge that connected these two continents during two intervals; between 75,000 and 45,000 years ago and between 25,000 and 14,000 years ago.

A short walk between continents

Archaeologists generally believe that the first peoples in North America migrated across the Bering land bridge – commonly called Beringia – during the later ice age. They base this partly on the fact that the earliest archaeological sites in Siberia close to Beringia are only 14,000 years old. Along with the first North Americans came numerous species of animals, many of them giants – such as camels, sabre-toothed tigers, giant sloths, mammoths, and an early horse – which have since become extinct. Many anthropologists suspect that harvesting of these animals by early peoples may have contributed to their disappearance. Of the 22 species of mammals known to have existed in northeastern Siberia at the time of the second land bridge, evidence of 21 of them has also been found in Alaska. Dene legends often tell of these giants, including a now-extinct giant beaver.

The Dene and other Athapaskan-speaking peoples of North America are believed to have their roots among the peoples who walked across the Beringia land bridge. While there is no definitive archaeological proof, traditional legends support this theory. In the late 1700s, North West Company explorer Alexander Mackenzie recounted a traditional story told by the Dene people about how they had come from another country inhabited by wicked people and how they had traversed a great lake full of islands. According to Father Gabriel Breynat, a central figure in Treaty 8 negotiations, the "Caribou Eaters" or "Etthen eldeli Dene" – as the Chipewyan were known among their fellow Dene – talked about how their ancestors once lived on another continent to the west and migrated eastward during a great famine.

CHAPTER ONE

In the Footsteps of the Glaciers

The last ice age covered most of the northern part of North America during its largest expansion. As the ice receded, a corridor opened connecting Alaska and southern regions of the continents.



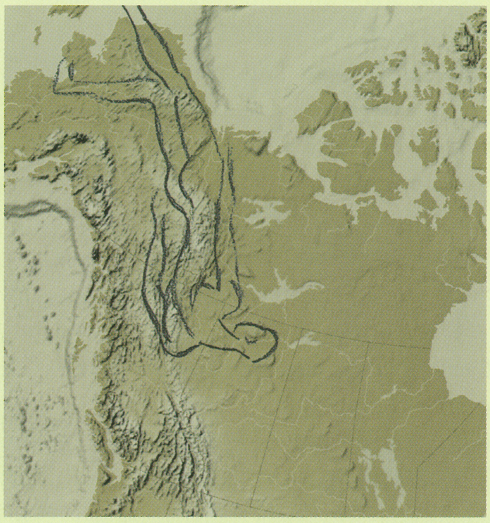
Wisconsian Ice Sheet 12,000 years ago.

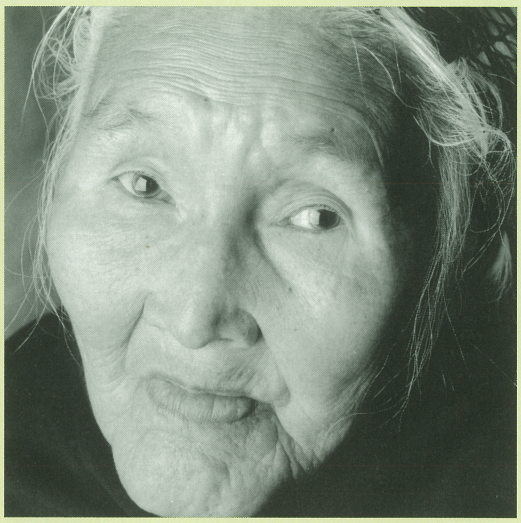


Wisconsian Ice Sheet 9,000 years ago.

Many Dene legends speak of great floods. As the glaciers of the last ice age – collectively known as the Wisconsian Ice Sheet – retreated, massive amounts of ice melt created large lakes and flooded vast areas in what is now northern Canada. By around 10,000 years ago, geologists believe, the melting glaciers had left an ice-free corridor several hundred kilometres wide in northeastern Alberta/Saskatchewan. People quickly followed in the footsteps of the retreating ice, taking up land that the glaciers had left behind. There is evidence of people living near the edges of glaciers as far north as the Great Slave Lake area between 8,000 and 6,500 years ago. Artifacts dating back approximately 7,000 years have been found on what would have been the shoreline of Lake Athabasca at the time.

The Legend of Two Giants





Chipewyan legends tell of two giants who fought a great battle in the Arctic many years ago. One fell dead with his legs landing in the Arctic, his backbone forming the mountains and his head ending up close to where the Chipewyan people lived. The "head of the giant" melted, as a glacier would melt, with the giant's blood (the rivers) flowing from the body. ACFN Elders, including Victoria Mercredi, say the body of the giant represents the lands of the Dene people. Some believe this story might relate to the migration of the Dene from the north.

Victoria Mercredi

Victoria Mercredi has recounted many legends including the legend of Otchôpè, the Arctic Giant, the Copperwoman and many other Dene legends. Many of these legends are described in "Inkonze: The Stones of Traditional Knowledge," by P.R. Couter and L. Hoffman - Mercredi, published by Thunderwoman Ethnographics, 1999.

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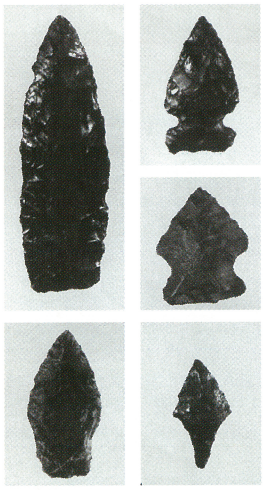
In the Footsteps of the Glaciers



Arrow Heads and Points
Used by Athapaskan peoples 1,000 to 1,500 years ago in northeastern British Columbia.



Projectile Point and Biface
These artifacts were found in the Old Fort Point area as part of the Historical Resources Study for the ACFN Old Fort Point Reserve Land. Projectile points such as these are found within the toolkits used by early Dene ancestors in the region. Among the tools, are a variety of "all purpose" tools such as this large bifacially flaked tool.

By their tools you shall know them

Much can be learned about a people and their relationship to the land by the tools they leave behind. Because only a small part of the entire tool kit of a culture is preserved through time, archaeologists often find little more than stone tools, pottery and animal remains as clues to understanding cultures of the past. The basic tool kit of the peoples who lived in the sub-arctic regions of Canada, including the ancestors of the Dene, changed gradually over time. Archaeologists have found evidence that these peoples developed a tool kit perfectly suited to a nomadic lifestyle that responded to the dramatic seasonal changes of the land.

Artifacts found in the Lake Athabasca area reflect the lives of nomadic peoples whose livelihood was based primarily on hunting caribou and fishing. People expanded into the area soon after the glaciers retreated and large glacial lakes drained. There were at least two important early cultural traditions in the area: the Northwest Microblade tradition and the Northern Plano tradition. A later cultural tradition, the Taltheilei, moved into the area about 3,000 years ago. The Taltheilei people were the direct ancestors of the Dene peoples.

The people who developed into the Northwest Microblade tradition migrated into Alaska from Beringia about 11,000 years ago and are known by their small cutting tools. The most common of these tools were simple flake tools that were used briefly and discarded. "Microblade technology" lasted for over 6,000 years and has been found at the Bezya site in northeastern Alberta, which dates to around 4,500 years ago.

The Northern Plano peoples used distinctive spear points shaped like lance heads. Tools of this type have been found in Alaska dating to about 10,500 years ago and in the Lake Athabasca area dating from about 8,000 years ago. The tool kit of the Northern Plano peoples also included stone adzes (axe-like tools), chi-thos (disc-shaped tools for working hides) and wedges, reflecting a life spent between forest and tundra.

Paleo-aboriginal peoples left behind tools giving some information about their location and occupations in the early history of this region. Although anthropologists are able to connect the Taltheilei people with modern Dene, the connection or evolution of peoples occupying this region in earlier times is unclear.



Paleo-aboriginal times 11,000 to 8,000 years ago.



Paleo-aboriginal times 8,000 to 6,500 years ago.



Paleo-aboriginal times 6,500 to 2,600 years ago.



Aboriginal times 2,600 to 1,500 years ago.

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Evidence of the Taltheilei people dating to about 3,000 years ago has been found in the northern prairie provinces and into the tundra. The hunting traditions carried on today by the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation can be traced back to these people. The Taltheilei depended primarily on caribou and fish, supplemented by moose and snowshoe hare. These Dene ancestors used distinctive dart or lance points, as well as chi-thos, adzes and wedges. The oldest Taltheilei sites are found within the Beverley caribou herd range, which stretches from the northern tundra to Great Slave Lake, Lake Athabasca and Reindeer Lake.

The Taltheilei adapted to the seasons, making the most of food resources that were available or particularly abundant at specific times of year. They located their warm weather hunting camps on or near the barrengrounds at caribou water crossing points, and set up smaller sites as they dispersed in smaller groups throughout the forests in the caribou winter range.

Caribou and fish were the common threads throughout the lives of the early peoples in the region. Caribou provided meat, fat, sinew and skins, as well as bone and antler for tool-making. The people knew their migration routes well and used major water crossings along these routes as campsites and hunting locations continuously over about 7,000 years. Fishing locations were also well known and used continuously. Caribou were particularly abundant during their migration, while fish were most abundant at spawning times. The peoples of the region balanced the harvesting of these two resources through the seasons.

Athapaskan spoken here

The Chipewyan language is one of approximately 50 Athapaskan languages known today. The word "Athapaskan" comes from a Cree word meaning "a place where grass is everywhere." This likely refers to the Peace/Athabasca delta, one of the largest fresh water deltas in the world and an important source of food and furs for Aboriginal peoples for centuries. Because of the natural wealth of the delta, it also became a centre of early fur trade activity – muskrat furs from this area became a standard to which all other muskrat were compared. Also, Lake Athabasca provided an ample supply of fish to support both aboriginal traditional use and the early fur trade establishments in the area. Today, the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation Reserve 201 includes about one-third of this important centre.

Athapaskan Language Groups

The Athapaskan language groups extended over large portions of western North America. Although several Athapaskan languages are quite different, the southern languages of the Navajo and Apache are closely related to Chipewyan.



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The natural wealth of the delta and the human activity it has supported may explain why the word "Athabasca" gained such importance and why it became the name of a group of Aboriginal languages. Athapaskan languages include three major divisions: the Pacific Coast groups, the Southern Athapaskan groups and the Northern Athapaskan groups. The first grouping extends through northern California. The second, called "Apachean," covers groups in the southwestern United States and adjacent plains – Apache, Navajo and Mescalero among them. The Chipewyan belong to the third major group, the Northern Athapaskan speakers who inhabit the land known as "Denendeh," or what is now Alaska and the western two-thirds of sub-arctic Canada. The Chipewyan peoples (or Etthen eldeli Dene) have traditionally occupied the southeastern part of Denendeh.

Comparing languages of different Aboriginal groups gives clues to the possible relationships between them. Of particular interest is the close relationship between the languages of the Chipewyan and Apachean peoples such as the Apache and Navajo. The similarity between their languages suggests these peoples were closely related in the recent past, perhaps as little as 600 years ago. By contrast, the differences between the Athapaskan languages spoken by the Pacific Coast groups and that of the Chipewyan suggest these groups split apart as many as 1,600 years ago.

Again, science and legend may provide clues. Around 1,140 years ago, a huge volcanic eruption, called the "White River Ash Falls," occurred. Some archaeologists believe this may have had a major effect on the Dene peoples, possibly causing some to migrate to what is now the southwestern United States. Dene legends speak of events that could be interpreted as volcanic eruptions. One tells of a "melting mountain" that resulted in people no longer being able to understand each other's language, most likely because of their separation.

The linguistic connections among the Northern Athapaskan speaking groups indicate there would have been considerable sharing, communication and circulation among them. While the inter-relationships among the various Dene peoples before the arrival of the Europeans are not well documented, these linguistic connections suggest that the Dene people have existed as a cultural group for many years. Dene traditional stories and legends bear this out. Consequently, today the northern Dene identify themselves as a distinct cultural group. And in the process of reclaiming their culture the Dene have increasingly defined themselves as a distinct political group.

We are "The People"

While the term "Chipewyan" is commonly used for certain Dene peoples and their place names, it is not a Dene term. "Chipewyan" is a corruption of the Cree word "witshipeean," meaning "pointed skins." By calling their northern neighbours "Chipewyan," the Cree were referring to the pointed tails of the skin shirts worn by these people. However, the late 18th century trader-surveyor David Thompson noted that the "Northern Indians" called themselves "Dinnie." In fact, when the first fur traders arrived in North America, the various Dene peoples called themselves simply "Dene," which means "the people."



Pointed Skins
The word "Chipewyan" is derived from the Cree name "witshipeean" meaning "pointed skins."

Each Dene group has a distinct dialect and history, and each was named among themselves for their occupation or location. In the Dene language, the Chipewyan people were known as the "Etthen eldeli Dene," or the "Caribou Eaters," because they hunted and relied upon the large herds of caribou in the barren lands, the taiga and the boreal forest for their sustenance. The Chipewyan people now living south and east of Fort McMurray were called "Kkrest'ayle kke ottine," meaning the "trembling aspen people" in the Dene language.

Still another name for the Chipewyan was "Desne the ottine" or "Desnedekenade," meaning "great river people." ACFN Elders interpret this to mean "people living on the Athabasca River." It might also refer to people living on the Slave or Mackenzie rivers. In legends the Chipewyan people in this area were called the "Theilanottine," meaning "men of the end of the head" or "those who dwell at the head of the lakes." These people are associated with the region around Lake Athabasca. The Fort Chipewyan Dene are called "K'ái tailé Dene." This name refers to the Athabasca Chipewyan people and Dene peoples living on the Athabasca delta.

These Dene names come from traditional knowledge passed down by the Elders and from records of the early fur traders. However, because the early fur traders forged working relationships first with the Cree, they tended to use the names the Cree had given their Dene neighbors. This is how the term "Chipewyan" came into common usage. Today many Chipewyan people do not like being called by a Cree name, partly because of a long history of hostilities between the two groups. They prefer to be called Etthen eldeli Dene, K'ái tailé Dene or simply Dené.



Charlie Voyageur, still very active on the land.

CHAPTER TWO

The "Original Affluent Society"



Birch Bark container
Originally these containers were used as cook pots by placing hot stones inside with the meats and liquids. More recently these containers would be used for berry picking and gathering medicines, mosses and eggs.

The Etthen eldeli Dene (Chipewyan) people's livelihood during aboriginal times and well into the fur trade era was based on caribou harvesting. We know this from traditional stories passed down by Elders and observations recorded in the diaries of early explorers and fur traders.

Hudson's Bay Company explorer Samuel Hearne's descriptions of the Chipewyan people, based on his observations during the time he spent with them in the 1770s, suggest the Chipewyan had attained both security and comfort in their caribou-based livelihood. "...the real wants of these people are few, and easily supplied: a hatchet, an ice-chisel, a file, and a knife, are all that is required to enable them, with a little industry, to procure a comfortable livelihood," Hearne wrote. He also noted that the Chipewyan "...live generally in a state of plenty, without trouble of risk; and consequently must be the most happy, and in truth, the most independent also."

Indeed, by some measures the Etthen eldeli Dene during aboriginal times could well have been included among the groups that anthropologist Marshall Sahlins described in his groundbreaking paper "The Original Affluent Society." Sahlins debunked the common anthropological view that hunter-gatherer societies led dismal lives of hardship characterized by an "incessant quest for food." He argued that many traditional societies enjoyed a relative abundance of food and a certain material comfort. "When you come to examine it the original affluent society was none other than the hunter's – in which all the people's material wants were easily satisfied," he wrote. Canadian historian Arthur J. Ray would include in this category of affluent societies the "caribou eaters," the "parkland bison hunters," and the "bison-moose hunters" of the boreal forest.

The "Original Affluent Society"

Pre-contact Lands of the Etthen eldeli Dene

The pre-contact lands of the Etthen eldeli Dene, or "caribou eaters," was bounded by the limits of the caribou migration to the south and the Yellowknife and Inuit peoples to the north.



Chipewyan Traditional Lands in Aboriginal Times



Caribou Eaters
The Chipewyan people were known as "caribou eaters." Their livelihood was based upon the caribou providing meat, clothing, shelter, tools, thread, milk and many other products.

Land without boundaries

While we know the Chipewyan were "caribou eaters," it is difficult to determine the range of the lands they occupied before the arrival of the Europeans and during the early years of the fur trade. Anthropologists have created conflicting theories of aboriginal land occupancy based upon different interpretations of the journals of early traders and explorers. However, many of those journals are not very reliable for this purpose because the Europeans often confused different Aboriginal groups and called them by similar names. For example, the early fur traders at Hudson Bay called the Dene people the "Northern Indians" and the Cree, the "Southern Indians." They knew little about the land in the interior or about the Aboriginal peoples and were unable to accurately identify the traditional areas of the various Aboriginal groups.

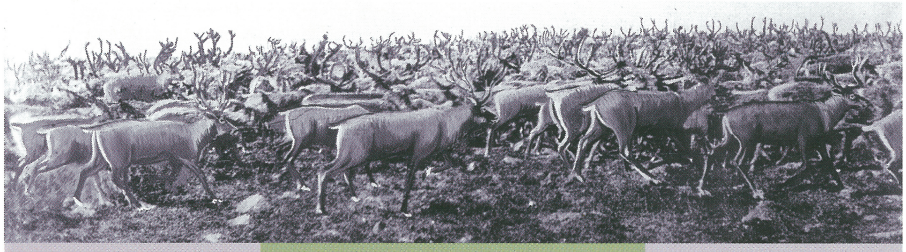
Although Alexander Mackenzie recorded that he encountered Beaver peoples – like the Chipewyan, an Athapaskan-speaking group – after passing the Methye Portage north of Lac La Loche around 1789, some anthropologists question his accuracy. They maintain that the Cree had occupied the area around Lake Athabasca and the Athabasca River since aboriginal times. Others argue that the Chipewyan occupied the area below Lake Athabasca and were pushed to the north (and the Beaver to the west) as the Cree expanded their territories during the early fur trade. Some European observers noted that the Chipewyan were unfamiliar with certain techniques of stretching furs and other skills associated with the boreal forest, yet they appeared to be familiar with many other aspects of life in the boreal forest. Based on what is known through traditional and recorded knowledge, it appears that the Cree and the Chipewyan were familiar with much of the same territories, even in very early times.

In any event, it is not appropriate to try to assign boundaries to various groups, because aboriginal land use was not limited by the European concept of "ownership." Different peoples may have occupied the same lands at different times or in different seasons. Land use studies show that traditional lands of Aboriginal peoples tend to overlap, especially where there are language or cultural relationships between the groups. Overlapping is also common where the traditional areas are very large and sparsely populated. The Etthen eldeli Dene lands in aboriginal times were among the largest and the least intensely populated of any northern group.

CHAPTER TWO

The "Original Affluent Society"

The best way to determine the original lands occupied by the Etthen eldeli Dene peoples is to look at barren land caribou migration patterns, because the Etthen eldeli Dene's early territory was likely associated with the range of the caribou. There are anthropologists who believe this traditional area did not extend below Lake Athabasca, but they tend to base their theories on observations of modern-day caribou migration patterns. However, in aboriginal times the populations of the barren land caribou were likely larger than they are now. Traditional knowledge suggests that with the larger populations of earlier times, the caribou would have ranged farther south and west – in some cases well into the boreal forest. This means the Etthen eldeli Dene traditional area is likely to have extended well below Lake Athabasca and to the headwaters of the Churchill River system. Indeed, ACFN Elders Alec Bruno, Charlie Voyageur and Rene Bruno say that in the early part of the 20th century the caribou would cross Lake Athabasca and winter below the lake in areas of northern Alberta and Saskatchewan. ACFN Elders have noted that after the early 1950s, the caribou stopped migrating south of Lake Athabasca in large numbers as a result of the devastating forest fires in the area that destroyed their food supplies. Even though the lichen has grown back, the caribou have not migrated back through this old route.

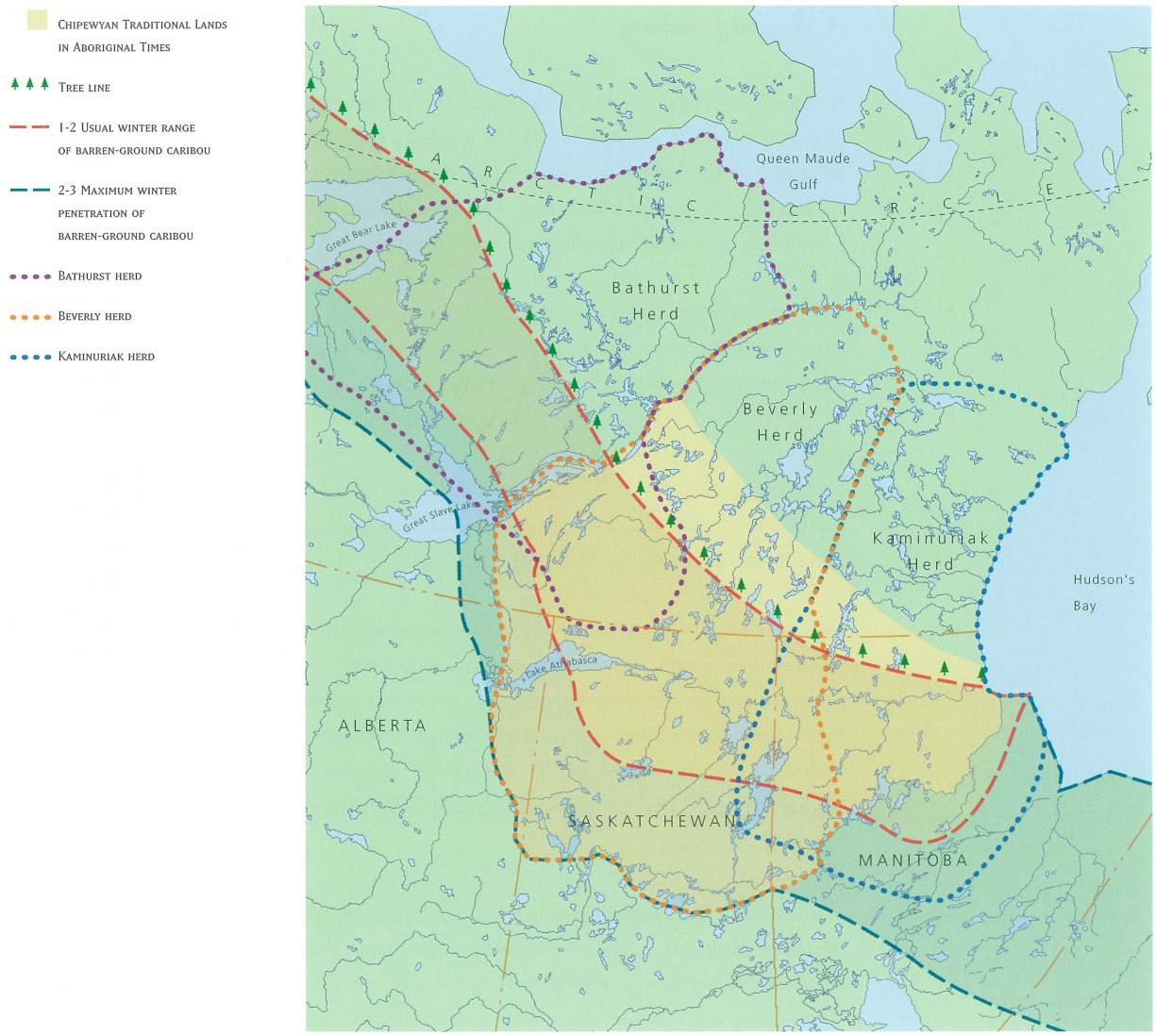


The Great Bounty of the Caribou (Etthen)

Before the arrival of the European fur traders, caribou provided the Etthen eldeli Dene peoples with almost all the basics of a relatively affluent lifestyle. The Etthen eldeli Dene hunted caribou to supply their needs for tools, clothing and shelter in addition to food for themselves and their dogs. Nothing went to waste. Bone and antler were fashioned into spear points, fish hooks, and a variety of other tools. Hides were used to make lodging, carriers and clothing. Rawhide, gut and sinew were put to use for lacing, snowshoe netting, gill nets, caribou snares, and many other necessities of life. Anthropologist J.G.E. Smith estimated that 20 caribou might have provided the necessary domestic annual needs of one person.

Chipewyan Traditional Lands and Caribou Migration

The pre-contact territory of the Chipewyan people was directly related to the migration of the caribou herds. The range of caribou migration likely provides reasonable limits to the normal Chipewyan hunting and gathering territory.



CHAPTER TWO

The "Original Affluent Society"

A sharing society

In aboriginal times the Etthen eldeli Dene had to travel great distances to follow the migrations of the caribou herds. As a result, they occupied a large traditional area with one of the lowest human population densities in the world – an average of one person per 150 square kilometres. They also had to travel light, relying on traditional knowledge and relatively simple tools to survive.

The Etthen eldeli Dene developed a culture and an economic system that reflected their dependence on caribou and enhanced their ability to survive. This system was based on cooperation and sharing – both of food and of information about the location of caribou herds. For example, ethnographic studies suggest Etthen eldeli Dene men were required to marry women as distantly related from them as possible. This kinship system, known as "marrying out," helped ensure that word would spread rapidly along the tree line when the caribou herds crossed. According to the Elders, marrying out is still common among the Chipewyan.

Etthen eldeli Dene social structure was based on the family unit. Etthen eldeli Dene families organized themselves into hunting units that varied in size and makeup according to their economic purpose. A typical hunting unit would centre around a husband and wife and their relatives, possibly including brothers and their wives, or children and their spouses. Two or more families might share a hunting camp. Several hunting units might come together for a meat camp or fish camp or for a large caribou hunt.

The Etthen eldeli Dene carried out their large communal hunts in early winter and in spring during the caribou migrations. To locate the herds, they would divide into smaller hunting groups and spread out across a broad potential caribou path. Etthen eldeli Dene hunters had developed a very efficient technology, called a "pound," for harvesting the largest number of animals possible during these hunts. Once they had located a caribou migration path, they would build a large fence (pound) of bushy trees with openings containing snares to trap the animals as they passed through. Since a hunting group could kill many more caribou than it required, Etthen eldeli Dene hunters distributed the meat among other hunting groups by way of the

kinship and sharing systems they had developed. During other seasons they divided into smaller hunting units to pursue smaller groups of caribou and other game.

By the time the European fur traders began arriving in western Canada in the late 17th and early 18th centuries, the Chipewyan had established the largest population and landmass of any northern group. Using caribou as their main source of food, clothing and shelter, they had an estimated population in the barren land/boreal forest region of approximately 4,000 people.





Top: Moose Hide
Chipewyan women and children are shown in front of a moose hide.
Bottom: Chipewyan Camp pre 1921
Summer hunting and gathering camp adjacent to lake.



Margaret Simpson (Marcel), enjoying a peaceful moment beside the lake.

CHAPTER THREE

First Encounter: Arrival of the Fur Trade

The Etthen eldeli Dene peoples first came into contact with the European fur trade society in the 1680s on Hudson Bay. Since that time the circumstances of the Etthen eldeli Dene have undergone significant changes due to the effects of the fur trade culture and economy.

According to fur trade records and traditional knowledge, the Cree peoples dominated the northwestern fur trade in the late 1600s and early 1700s by assuming an early role as middlemen between the traders and other Aboriginal groups. Newly armed with guns they acquired from the Europeans, they aggressively sought furs and protected their dominant position, pushing the Beaver peoples west to the headwaters of the Peace River and preventing the Chipewyan from trading furs directly at York Factory.

It is likely that the first effects of the fur trade on the Etthen eldeli Dene were raids by armed Cree looking for furs during the late 17th century. Many Etthen eldeli Dene were killed during these raids and it is believed they retreated to the security of the caribou lands north of Lake Athabasca as a result. Explorer Samuel Hearne noted in the early 1770s that he thought the Dene and Cree peoples "had always been at war with each other." In fact, a common name for the Cree in the Dene language (Enná) is translated as "enemy." Some ethnographers are not sure whether the hostilities between these peoples were caused by the arming of the Cree by the fur traders or if the early arming of the Cree exacerbated a long-standing enmity between the two groups.

The fur traders at York Factory on Hudson Bay knew of the "Northern Indians" and were eager to involve them in the fur trade. However, because of the Etthen eldeli Dene's abundant caribou-based livelihood and their determination to avoid the armed Cree, they would not come to the Hudson Bay to trade. It was not until 1715 when an Etthen eldeli Dene woman named Ttha'naltther made peace between the Chipewyan and the Cree that the Chipewyan people began to participate in the fur trade as middlemen. (See the story of Ttha'naltther on page 38.) During the same year, a party of traders led by a Cree known as Captain Swan (Wa pa su) was sent out on a mission to make peace with "all the Indians." In 1717, the Hudson's Bay Company constructed Fort Prince of Wales on the mouth of the Churchill River specifically to trade with the Chipewyan people.

Ttha'naltther's (Falling Sand) Story

The story of the Dene woman Ttha'naltther (Falling Sand) is an important part of the Etthen eldeli Dene's oral history concerning their early encounters with the fur trade.



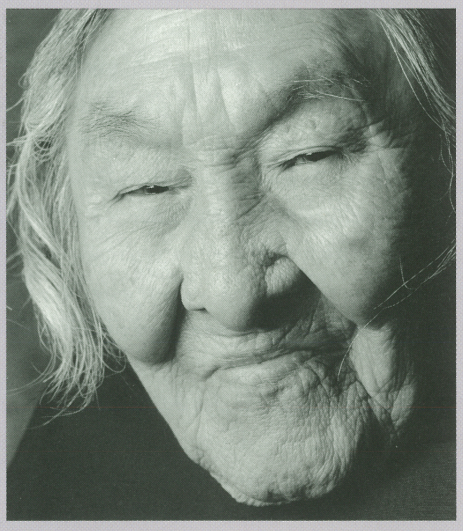
According to stories told by the Elders, the beautiful Ttha'naltther was captured and enslaved by the Cree in the early 18th century during one of their armed raids into Chipewyan areas to obtain furs for trade. The Cree had acquired guns from the European traders and had killed many Chipewyan people during these raids.

Ttha'naltther travelled to Fort York with her captors and while there she told James Knight, the chief Factor of the Fort York trading post, about the treatment of her people at the hands of the Cree. Troubled by Ttha'naltther's story, Knight sent company trader William Stuart into the interior with Ttha'naltther on a mission to make peace between the Cree and the Chipewyan and to bring the Chipewyan into the fur trade. According to Elders' stories, Ttha'naltther was a courageous and dynamic woman who spoke Cree "with indifference." Stuart also spoke Cree.

The trip into the interior was difficult and Ttha'naltther had some trouble locating her people, most likely because they were trying to avoid the threatening Cree. She finally found them somewhere north of Lake Athabasca and east of the Slave River.

However, the Chipewyan people most likely had been pushed north and east as a result of the increased aggressiveness and firepower of the Cree during this time.

It appears that Ttha'naltther was instrumental in making peace between the Cree traders and the Chipewyan and in encouraging her people to join the fur trade, thus beginning a new era in their history. A painting entitled Ambassadress of Peace in the Hudson's Bay Company archives depicts Ttha'naltther standing with arms outstretched between representatives of both Aboriginal groups.



Josephine Mercredi
Josephine Mercredi told the story of Ttha'naltther, an important story about the early relationship between the Cree and Chipewyan people. Josephine has also explained the cultural meaning of the story of Cree Burn Lake as presented in "Inkonze: The Stones of Traditional Knowledge."

A Fine Kettle of Broth

In the late 1700s, Hudson's Bay Company surveyor Peter Fidler journeyed through the Athabasca region with Chipewyan guides. During his travels he lived off the land with his Chipewyan hosts and recorded the many things he learned from them. Here, he tells how the Chipewyan women made broth:

"The Indians made to me a new fashioned kettle, of the paunch of the cow (buffalo); by making a hole in the ground of about two feet in diameter and one foot deep to support the bag and the four corners were propped up with sticks set in the ground in six or eight places keeping the mouth extended about two feet wide. They broke the bones of the buffalo and made marrow fat – boiled meat – made broth all in this uncommon apparatus by immersing hot stones frequently into it – every one of us hauled a stone for the above purpose, for the birch rind kettle; or for occasionally making water." – Peter Fidler, quoted in J.G. MacGregor, *Peter Fidler: Canada's Forgotten Explorer, 1769-1822.*

CHAPTER THREE

First Encounter: Arrival of the Fur Trade

Expanding into the boreal forest

Two major forces in the 1770s and 1780s drew the Etthen eldeli Dene further into the fur trade and into the boreal forest: increased competition between the fur trading companies and a severe smallpox epidemic. The Hudson's Bay Company's rival, the Northwest Company, began to move into the interior and cut off the supply of furs to the Hudson's Bay Company posts on the bay. In the competition that followed, both companies began aggressively building inland posts. By 1778, the Northwest Company had established posts on the Churchill River – at Ile à la Crosse and on the Athabasca River. Hearne established the first inland Hudson's Bay Company post at Cumberland House in 1774, near what is now the eastern border of Saskatchewan. In 1778, Peter Pond, of the Northwest Company, established a successful trade on the Athabasca River and set up a post – the first Fort Chipewyan – about 40 miles up river from Lake Athabasca.

The establishment of the inland posts allowed the Chipewyan people to trade without risking the long and dangerous trip to Hudson Bay. These developments encouraged them to move farther into the boreal forest, where they could pass by the posts regularly to trade their furs. As a result of this shift in their traditional harvesting centre, the Chipewyan gradually changed the emphasis of their livelihood from caribou to furs, moose, fish and other boreal forest resources. But even as the Etthen eldeli Dene gradually became more involved with the fur trade, some bands maintained their ability to return to their earlier traditional livelihood.

In 1781 there was a devastating outbreak of smallpox in the Athabasca region. It is not clear to what degree the Cree and Chipewyan of the area were affected by the disease. However, it is believed that the reduction of the Cree population in northern areas due to smallpox contributed the southwestern migration of the Chipewyan following the epidemic. Fur traders moving into this area at the time noted that the Chipewyan at Lake Ile à la Crosse considered themselves to be strangers in the area. Also, it was after the epidemic (1788) that Mackenzie recorded encountering Athapaskan-speaking people at the Methye Portage. This means the Beaver and other Athapaskans were apparently no longer confined by the



Mission, church and rectory
The first church on this location was built in 1851. It was later replaced with a larger church as shown in the photo.

Cree to the Peace River area. These observations and others suggest that after the devastation of the smallpox epidemic, the Chipewyan people were able to move into areas that had previously been dominated by the Cree.

The journals of Hudson's Bay Company explorer Peter Fidler provide considerable information about the livelihood of the Chipewyan peoples at the time of his travels with Chipewyan guides in the late 1700s. Fidler's records show that the Chipewyan were well adapted to life in the boreal forest and were likely involved in a nomadic boreal forest land use pattern.

In the following years competition among the fur trading companies increased significantly. The new XY Company constructed a second post at Fort Chipewyan in 1799, and in 1802 Fidler built Nottingham House close to Fort Chipewyan for the Hudson's Bay Company. This period of competition came to an abrupt end in 1821 when the fur trade merged into a monopoly under the Hudson's Bay Company.

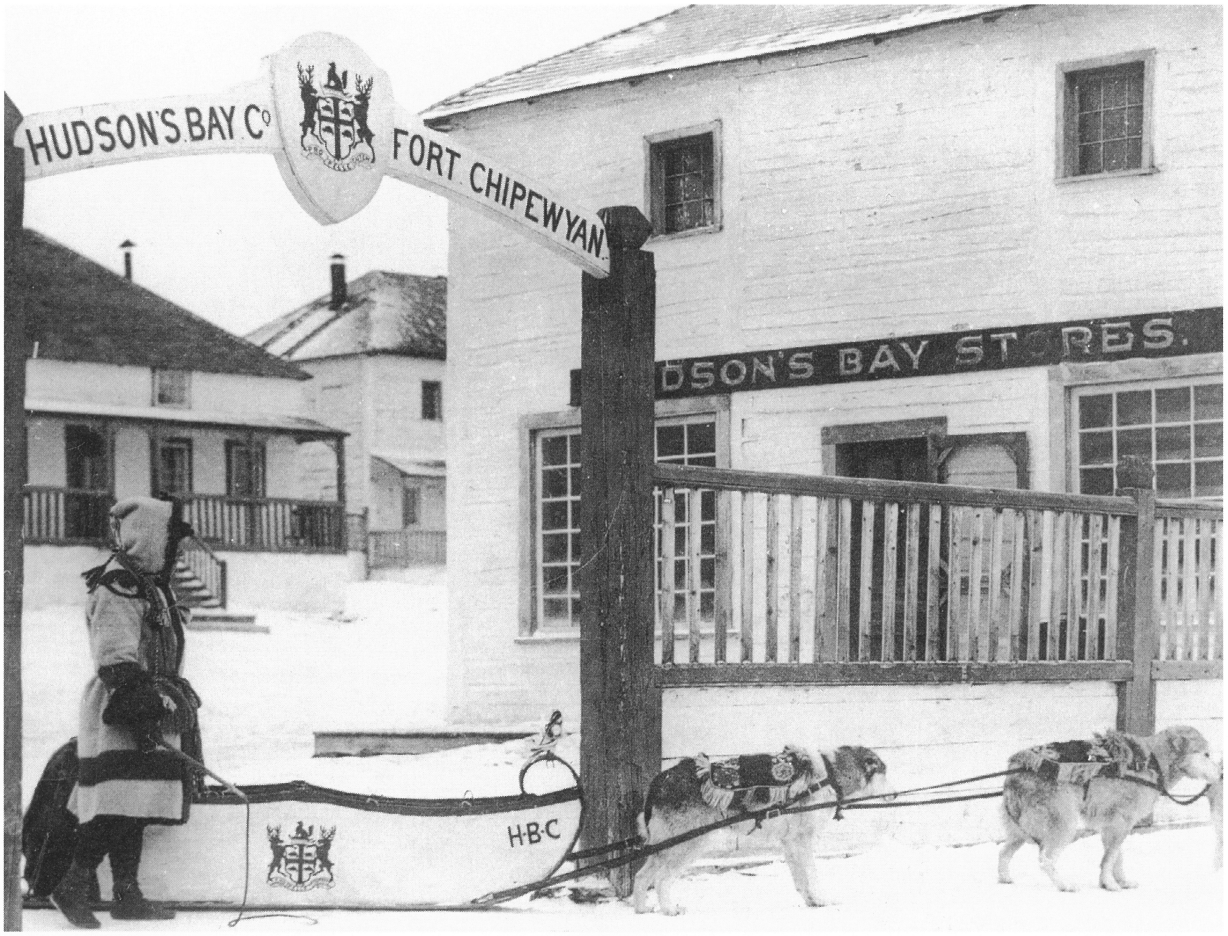
CHAPTER THREE

First Encounter: Arrival of the Fur Trade

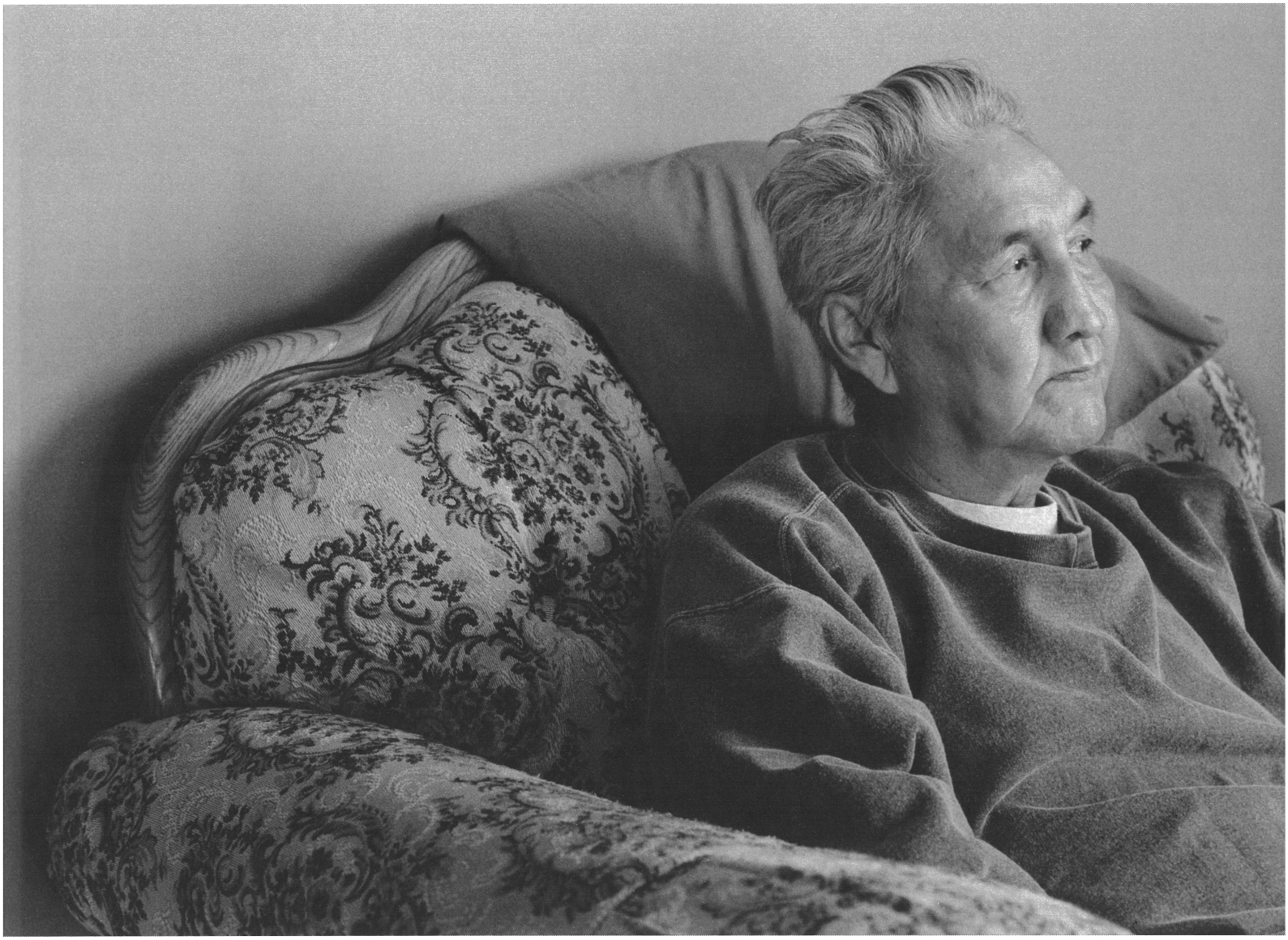
The "Caribou Eaters" enter the fur trade

Although the raiding and the conflict between the Cree and Chipewyan did continue, the period between 1715 and 1760 was relatively peaceful. During the 1750s and 1760s, the Beaver people in the Peace River region and the Slave people – another Dene group – north of Lake Athabasca attempted to bypass the Cree and establish a direct trade with the Prince of Wales fort. This enraged the Cree and led to an extended period of warfare between the Cree and the Athapaskans. In 1761, the Europeans at Hudson Bay sent a Chipewyan named Matonabee, who spoke Cree fluently, to attempt to make peace between the warring groups. After several years, most likely during the winter of 1764-65, he managed to secure a peace agreement between the Cree and the Beaver people at a location that became known as Peace Point. This event also gave the Peace River its name.

Just as the Cree acted as middlemen between western Aboriginal peoples and the fur traders, the Chipewyan became middlemen between Dene peoples such as the Dogrib and Yellowknife peoples and the fur traders. Because of a lack of fur-bearing creatures in the barren lands (hotelnene) where the Etthen eldeli Dene people traditionally hunted, the European traders encouraged the Chipewyan to move farther into the boreal forest to support the fur trade. However, due to resource depletion caused by the intensive harvest of the fur trade, life in the boreal forest presented frequent periods of starvation for those Chipewyan who succumbed and became dependent on the trade. As a result, there was a strong incentive for the Chipewyan people to pursue their traditional livelihood of caribou hunting even after expanding into the boreal forest region. Ethnographer James G.E. Smith maintains that the range of the Chipewyan people was likely increased by their early participation in the fur trade as they continued their harvesting of caribou. Smith notes that because of their caribou hunting, the Chipewyan were able to remain very independent of the fur trade from 1769 to 1772.



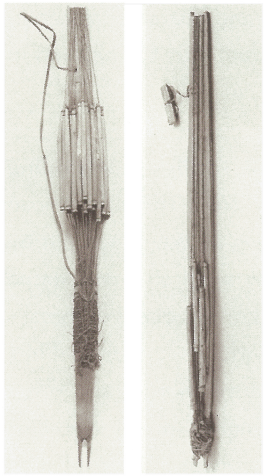
Hudson's Bay Company Post
Hudson's Bay Company post, Fort Chipewyan, with cariole and dog team in foreground.



Frank Marcel, a quiet moment.

CHAPTER FOUR

A Time of Great Changes



Rabbit Snares
These snares are stored and carried on the piece of wood. Before setting, they were usually rubbed with jack pine to kill the smell of humans. Each snare is set by hanging from a toss-pole placed in the branches of a felled tree. The toss-pole is toggled to another stick so that when the rabbit goes through the noose the toggle is released and the toss-pole jerks the animal off the ground. The snares were made and used by women.

Although the Etthen eldeli Dene people were reluctant at first to become involved in the fur trade, they eventually became completely immersed in the trade. As they shifted their primary livelihood from "caribou eaters" to trappers, middlemen and provisioners, their tools, their economy and their relationships also began to change.

The proliferation of trading posts in the interior negatively affected aboriginal economies in fundamental ways. The trade turned useful traditional goods into commodities. Furs were no longer valuable for their own use but as goods for sale to meet the demands of a much larger market of people who lived outside the local ecosystem, on another continent. Aboriginal people traditionally lived a nomadic life, ranging over thousands of kilometres and harvesting food where seasonal surpluses occurred. The Europeans remained in fixed settlements, consuming considerable amounts of food and wood in their immediate vicinity, often in quantities beyond the land's capacity to provide. The trading posts purchased the large amounts of provisions they required from the Aboriginal people. Thus, the Etthen eldeli Dene were gradually coaxed away from their traditional caribou-based livelihood to service these settlements as trappers, middlemen and provisioners.

During the late 1700s or early 1800s, the Theilanottine and K'ái tailé Dene (Flat Willow Dene or Delta Dene, as the ACFN people are called) began to remain more consistently in the Fort Chipewyan area supplying provisions and furs to the trading posts. As a result, they ventured less often to Hudson Bay or out into the barren lands. These people were ancestors of the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation people and closely related to the Gankwendene or Fond du Lac people of northern Saskatchewan. An 1823-24 report estimated the population of the Fort Chipewyan area at 593 Chipewyan and 60 Cree.

Fur trade brings disease and famine

As they became more involved in the fur industry and less dependent on caribou, the Etthen eldeli Dene faced increased risks of food shortages. The lands around trading posts often were over exploited, causing local traditional food sources to become less reliable. As a result, the Aboriginal peoples depended more and more on the trading posts to supply their staple foods. According to the Northern River Basins Study published by Alberta Environmental Protection in 1996, there were periods of starvation among the Aboriginal peoples in 1822, 1839-43, 1873 and

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1887. The study, which was based on traditional knowledge and historical research, also indicated that there was a scarcity of game animals around Fort Chipewyan in 1850, 1871, 1873, 1882 and 1889.

The Aboriginal people also suffered regular epidemics of smallpox, whooping cough, measles and flu, because they had little immunity from these European diseases. The Cree population in the Fort Chipewyan area was all but wiped out by the outbreak of smallpox in 1781. The Etthen eldeli Dene were also devastated by the epidemic. The 1996 Northern River Basins Study recorded many outbreaks of disease during the 1800s among the people of the Lake Athabasca region. They include an influenza epidemic in 1835 as well as epidemics of measles and other diseases in 1819-20, 1846 and 1865. Chief Factor R. McFarlane of the Fort Chipewyan trading post wrote in 1873 that 23 men, women and children died in an epidemic that year. This was a significant proportion of the Aboriginal population at the post, he pointed out. Chipewyan Elders tell of a particularly devastating influenza epidemic that occurred around 1920.

Several other important changes came about with the spread of interior trading posts and the consolidation of the fur trade into a Hudson's Bay Company monopoly in 1821. In order to make trapping more attractive to Aboriginal people, the Hudson's Bay Company introduced a system of credit allowing them to run up debt.



York Boats
York boats using sails to assist in the long journey from Fort Chipewyan to Hudson's Bay.

This further increased the reliance of the Aboriginal people on the trading posts. The company also introduced the York boat to transport furs from the interior posts to the shipping terminals on Hudson Bay. This new trade structure eliminated opportunities for the Cree and Etthen eldeli Dene to act as middlemen, forcing them to become either trappers or suppliers of provisions. It was during this period that the Etthen eldeli Dene began to permanently shift their methods of livelihood.

Changes in traditional rounds

Even as the Etthen eldeli Dene people of the Fort Chipewyan area became more committed to the fur trade, they continued to base their livelihood on their ability to support themselves off the land by hunting, trapping, fishing and gathering. While some southern Chipewyan groups stopped hunting caribou entirely, most bands continued to hunt caribou to supplement their livelihood. However, they shifted the centre of their annual rounds in order to pass by the fur trading posts. Gradually, over the century between 1820 and 1920, they reduced their range of travel, establishing their camps in more permanent social groupings or micro villages strategically located near their key hunting, trapping and fishing resources. Because of their history of wide-ranging migration, the Etthen eldeli Dene were able to shift their regional identities easily and adapted quickly to the boreal forest and to micro-village living. However, they still tended to travel farther than other Aboriginal peoples because of their nomadic tradition.

Sarah Bell, a Chipewyan woman who was born in the 1870s, travelled on annual rounds with her people – the English River Band in Saskatchewan – when she was a child. She passed on her traditional knowledge of the annual rounds to band member Moise McIntyre during the 1940s. In her recollections, Sarah Bell described the activities of two Chipewyan groups, one following a northern round and the other a southern round. Their activities were likely very similar to those practised by many Chipewyan people during the 19th century.

The southern group wintered in small multi-family encampments in the vast area between Foster River and Cree Lake in northern Saskatchewan. Prior to spring breakup, the people lived close to birch groves where they made new canoes.

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In spring, the group would gather close to the Ile à la Crosse trading post for fishing and trading. There was also a spring muskrat hunt. In early August the group travelled farther south to Dore Lake and the headwaters of the Smoothstone River to continue hunting and fishing. In the fall the group would follow a circular route northward through the Churchill River or Souris River back to Foster Lakes. Here they would divide into their winter hunting and trapping groups.

The northern round also involved trading at Ile à la Crosse. This group wintered at Black Birch Lake, where they hunted and trapped in smaller family groups west and southwest of Cree Lake. At breakup the entire group assembled at the headwaters of Clearwater River and travelled to Fort McMurray and Fort Chipewyan to trade. They then travelled north of Lake Athabasca to hunt barren land caribou for food and winter clothing. In late fall and early winter they followed the caribou south and returned to mid-winter hunting and trapping areas in northern Saskatchewan.

Both of these rounds reflect the current locations of Chipewyan settlements in Saskatchewan and Alberta and were likely farther south than the original caribou-based rounds of the Chipewyan before the advent of the fur trade. It is significant that both start close to Ile à la Crosse for the purpose of fur trading. Before the fur trade, the rounds of the Etthen eldeli Dene would not have concentrated on fur trapping and would not have started and ended close to a fur trading post. Sarah Bell's traditional knowledge shows how the Chipewyan people adapted their rounds to the fur trade and how closely they integrated their traditional harvesting livelihood and their early commercial fur trade activities.

Early ACFN micro-villages

The Elders of Fort Chipewyan have described rounds followed by their parents and grandparents in the early 20th century that resemble the annual rounds described by Sarah Bell. While the Elders did not describe the annual cycles in the same detail, their stories show that the K'ái tailé Dene lived in a social and economic environment similar to that of their Saskatchewan cousins.

Adopting New Technologies

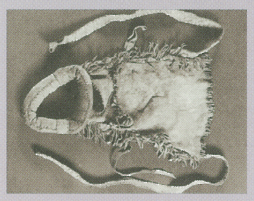
Participation in the fur trade brought about at least three major changes in the tools or technologies used by the Etthen eldeli Dene which have significantly affected their livelihood and culture.

In order to carry heavier loads more securely over greater distances, the Etthen eldeli Dene adopted the larger Algonquin-style canoes used by the Cree. This canoe took a large amount of effort to build, so it wasn't likely to be thrown away after use. As a result, the Etthen eldeli Dene were more likely to use the waterways rather than their former overland routes.

The Chipewyan also began to use dog sleds more often. Although Aboriginal peoples had used dog sleds before, they used them much more during the fur trade because sleds allowed them to travel faster and farther. This technology contributed to the settlement of the Chipewyan into micro-villages because it allowed them to hunt or visit trap lines and return long distances to centrally located cabins. However, the dogs needed to be fed all year round. As a result, fishing for dog food became an important and very time-consuming activity.

A third technological change was the introduction of the rifle. While the use of traditional pounds was as efficient as or even more efficient than the rifle for killing caribou, the rifle was much more efficient for hunting moose in the forest.









Top: Sled
These sleds were used to transport heavier loads including people, furs and meats. They were covered by a wrapper which in earlier times was made of moose or caribou skins.

Left: Dog Harness
A tanned caribou-skin with padded collar and trace for fastening the dog to the sled.

Right: Dog Whip
Wooden handle covered with tanned caribou-skin and decorated with woolen pompoms and wool wrapped to form a pattern of colours of red, pink, orange, blue, green and white. Tapering lash of braided babiche.

Bottom: Canoes
Canoes were used to carry heavier loads more securely over greater distances.

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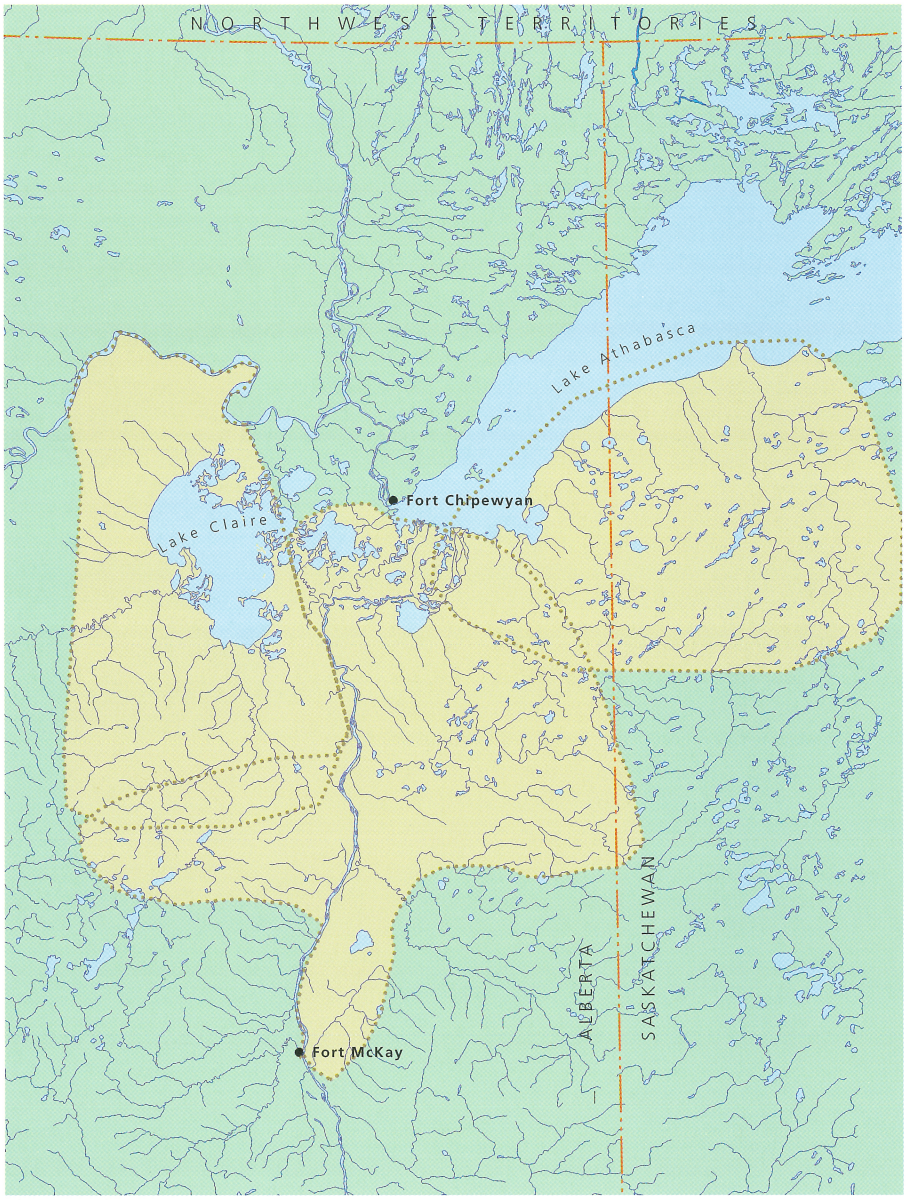
ACFN Land Use Areas in the Early 1900s

This Elders' map shows where their parents and grandparents lived, trapped, hunted and fished in the early 1900s.

These historical areas represent the more intensive land use areas of several early Athabasca Chipewyan groups. These groups were from Old Fort on the south shore of Lake Athabasca, Point Brule and Poplar Point, Jackfish, and the Birch River area. The traditional land use of these people extended beyond these intensive use areas.



ACFN Family Roots in 1920

The Elders of the ACFN have created a map that shows where their grandparents and parents lived, trapped, hunted and fished in the early 1900s. The following is a list of the people and families that occupied the micro-village areas at the time. As these lists were compiled through Elder interviews, some families may have been missed.

Point Brule and Poplar Point

Raymond Boucher
Ted Boucher
Willie Boucher
Jonas Coghan
Edward Cyprien
Moise Cyprien
Alec Flett
John Baptiste Flett
Rudolph Flett
Joe Hymen
Marvin L'Hommecourt
Moise L'Hommecourt
Norbert L'Hommecourt
Roy L'Hommecourt
Ben Marcel
Adam McCrae's widow
George McDonald
Alphonse Piche
Jonas Piche
Pierre Piche
Adam Trip de Roche
Boniface Trip de Roche
Baptiste Willow

Old Fort

Alex Adam
Ernest Adam
Jimmy Adam
Joe Adam
Johnny Adam
Louison Adam
Pat Adam
Pierre Adam
Arsene Bernaille
Alec Bruno
Charlie Bruno (Piche)
Francois Bruno
Napoleon Bruno
Rene Bruno
Baptiste Crookedneck
Armand Deranger
Isadore Deranger
William Laviolette
Albert Marcel
Armas Marcel
August Marcel
Baptiste Marcel
Julian Marcel
Martan Aze
Antoine Mercredi
Charlie Mercredi
Eli Mercredi
Gabriel Mercredi
J.B. Mercredi
John Mercredi
Joseph Mercredi
Larry Mercredi
Pat Mercredi
Smoky Mercredi
Tony Mercredi
Wilfred Mercredi
Jarvis Piche
Louis Piche
Joe Robillard
Pete Whitedeer

Jackfish Lake

Francois Bruno
Napoleon Bruno
Magloire Cardinal
Raphael Flett
Jonas Laviolette
Archie Marcel
Ben Marcel
Daniel Marcel
Fred Marcel
Freddy Marcel
Henry Marcel
Joe Marcel
Big John Marcel
John Marcel
Joseph Marie Marcel
Matthew Marcel
Narcisse Marcel
Pat Marcel
Raymond Marcel
Walter Marcel
Gabriel Mercredi
Marie Mercredi
Jonas Piche
Pierre Piche
Boniface Trip de Roche
Charlie Voyageur
Isadore Voyageur

The River

Joe Dene
Pierre Ratfat

Birch River Families

Adam
Bruno
Flett
Fortin
Gladue
Piche
Ratfat
Simpson
Trip de Roche

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The families would live, trap and hunt together, travelling in groups depending upon the season and the activity. They developed a communal trapping area system that was a natural evolution of their earlier cooperative caribou-hunting system. Once a group identified their trapping area, they respected each other's lines within that area. (See "Mutual Respect Within the Trapping Area," page 53.)

The K'ái tailé Dene family groups made their rounds within three areas similar in size to those described by Sarah Bell. These three groups centred their activities around the Fort Chipewyan trading post and established several micro-villages in locations that offered good sources of fish and easy access to trap lines during the winter months. One group occupied a western area that included much of what is now Wood Buffalo National Park. The summer villages or camps in this area were along the Birch River. Another group occupied an eastern area that took in lands well into Saskatchewan and north into the Northwest Territories. Their summer villages included the Old Fort area on the south shore of Lake Athabasca, or what is now Old Fort Point, and the lower portion of the Athabasca delta, close to Jackfish Lake (Richardson Lake), known as Jackfish. A southern group lived in several settlements along the Athabasca River in summer and hunted and trapped from the Birch Mountains to beyond the Saskatchewan border. Their settlements included Point Brule and Poplar Point, as well as several smaller villages. The villages of Old Fort Point and Jackfish are still in use.

By the 1920s the micro-villages had developed from tent camps into groups of permanent log cabins. The first cabin in the Jackfish micro-village area was built by Benjamin Marcel in about 1918. Many more log cabins were built over the next few years, and the changeover to the fur trade/boreal forest subsistence economy was complete. While the K'ái tailé Dene people still made regular hunting and gathering trips on the land, they had made the log cabin their home base. However, despite the changes in their livelihood and range of travel, the Chipewyan people retained many of the characteristics of their nomadic caribou livelihood and it continues to influence their lives today.

Mutual Respect Within the Trapping Area

Even as they moved into the boreal forest and participated in the trapping economy, the Caribou Eaters maintained cooperative systems of the type they had developed for survival with their earlier, caribou-based economy.

Rather than dividing territory into family-owned trap lines, the Etthen eldeli Dene tended to identify large areas on which many families could establish lines. A trapping area was open to all of the people from a certain group. A group might consist of 10 or 15 people with a group leader. If a trap line was not in use, a trapper could take it.

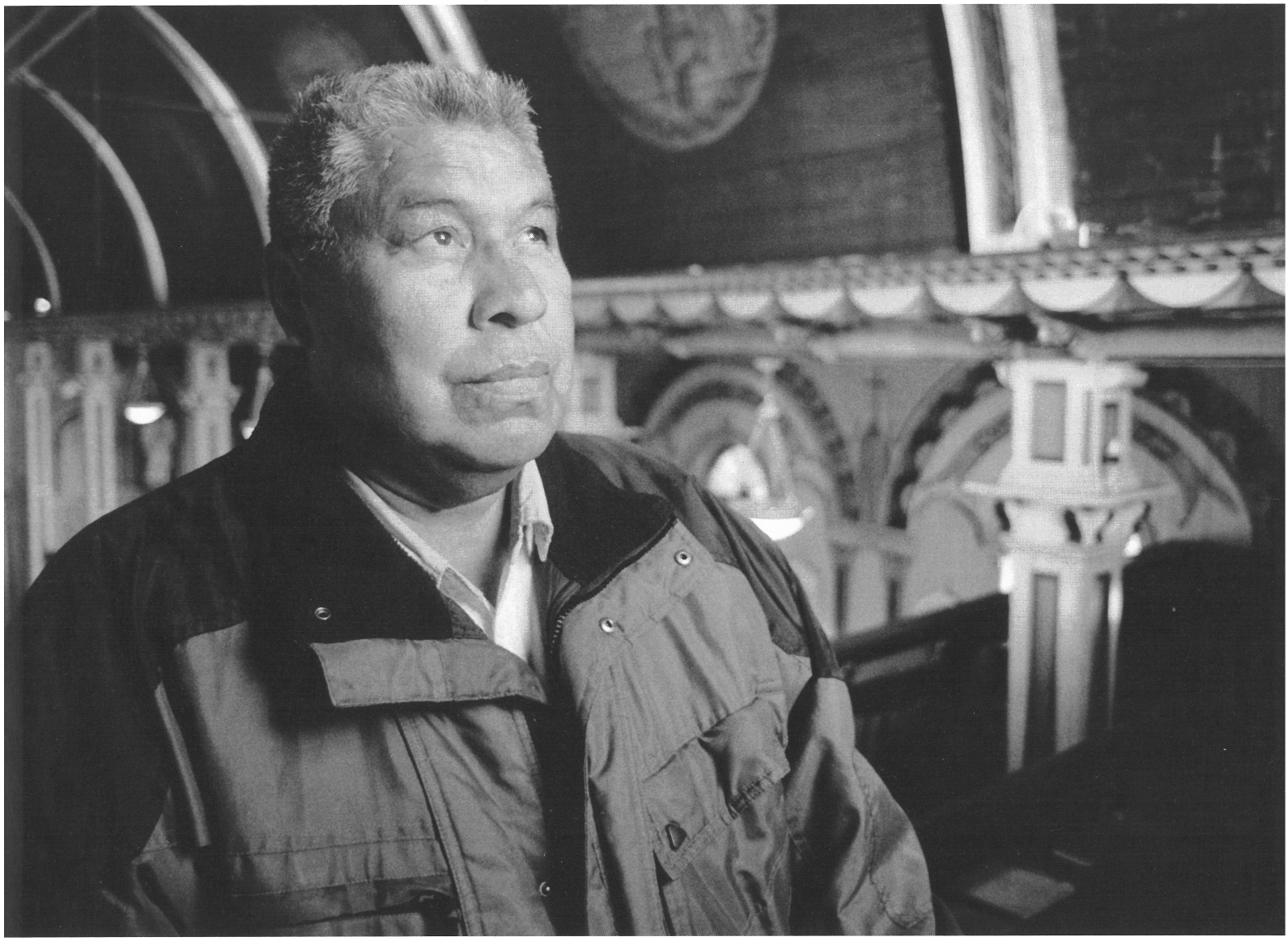
"There were three to four families in an area (micro-village)," an ACFN Elder explained. "You would claim a trap line by making a trail and no one else would use that area. We travelled long distances – like to La Loche to trade a dog. We knew the country for 100 or 200 miles around. We knew which land was ours. We travelled together."

Under this communal method of establishing trapping areas, every individual's trap line was respected. According to one ACFN Elder, "Those people always trapped there before any boundary was established. It was their traditional area. Within the group, in the larger trapping area, a trapper would 'cut the trail' in an area that was unused by others. That was his trap line. You left him alone – there was mutual respect."



Arsene Bernaille

Arsene Bernaille is still active on the land and eagerly anticipates the spring hunt each year. A self-taught fiddler, Arsene plays at traditional fiddle dances.



Albert Voyageur inside the Roman Catholic Church, "The Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary" – which was built in 1909.

CHAPTER FIVE

Treaties and Transitions

While the Etthen eldeli Dene's way of life was changing to accommodate the fur trade, several major developments came about in the late 1800s that would have more far-reaching effects on the lives of all Aboriginal peoples of western Canada.

The British North America Act of 1867 established the Dominion of Canada with four provinces: New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Ontario, and Quebec. Shortly after, in 1870, the Hudson's Bay Company surrendered its rights in the northwest (Rupert's Land) to the new Canadian Confederation in return for money and ownership of certain lands in perpetuity. As part of this acquisition, the Canadian government promised to honour the terms of the Proclamation of 1763, which included negotiating with Amerindians for the termination of their title and the creation of reserves for their exclusive use. The northwest was "Indian territory." In order to provide for orderly occupation of this vast area, the new Canadian government needed to obtain rights from the Aboriginal peoples who occupied the lands. The government began to negotiate treaties with Aboriginal groups, starting with Treaties 1 and 2 in 1871 with the Chippewa and Swampy Cree tribes in Manitoba. Treaties 3 through 7 quickly followed at the rate of one a year up until 1877.

During this same period, the United States government stopped negotiating treaties with Aboriginal peoples. The American West was being settled rapidly, and without treaties, the Aboriginal peoples of the West felt their lands were being stolen. They responded with force. The resulting hostilities became known as the "Indian Wars." Several major battles occurred during this time, including the famous Battle of the Little Big Horn in 1876.

After signing Treaty 7, the Canadian federal government also suspended its treaty-making process. There was considerable discontent among Cree Chiefs – including Big Bear and Poundmaker – with the terms of Treaty 7, which was signed with the Blackfoot and other tribes at the Blackfoot crossing of Bow River and Fort Macleod. During this time the Métis were also struggling for recognition of their land rights. The lack of action by the Canadian government in addressing these issues led to hostilities in Canada similar to those experienced in the United States. The struggle for recognition of Métis and Aboriginal land rights came to a head in 1885 with the

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Canadian Métis and Indian War, also referred to by some as the Northwest Rebellion or the Riel Rebellion. Following this struggle, there was severe repression of many Aboriginal peoples in western Canada, and the Canadian government further postponed the treaty-making process.

No treaty, no aid

During this period, the Etthen eldeli Dene were engaged in a traditional livelihood, participating in the fur trade and travelling rounds based on the natural game cycles of their area. But, after the transfer of power in the northwest, the new Canadian federal government did not pursue the same cooperative economic relationship with Aboriginal trappers as the Hudson's Bay Company had developed. During difficult times of famine or disease, the Hudson's Bay Company had offered food and medicines to the Aboriginal people. But the government did not recognize any obligation towards people with whom they had not signed a formal treaty. Aboriginal peoples without treaties, including those in what is now northern Alberta, suffered devastating consequences. Even those with treaties did not always fare well.

During the deadly 1873 epidemic, Chief Factor R. Mcfarlane of the Hudson's Bay post at Fort Chipewyan complained in a Chief Factor's report about the neglect on the part of the government to aid Aboriginal people in times of hardship. He wrote additional formal complaints in 1880. Then, in 1883, following several years of hardship and severe epidemics, the Chipewyan Chiefs sent an appeal for help directly to the Prime Minister. It appears these pleas for assistance were ignored.

The signing of Treaty 8

The Dominion government continued its policy of withholding aid from Aboriginal groups that had not signed treaties. What's more, the government was not willing to enter into any treaty discussions with those groups. The Canadian government turned a blind eye to the suffering of the Aboriginal people of northern Alberta until 1899. Two developments kindled new interest in negotiating treaties with these Aboriginal groups: northern Alberta had become a route to the Klondike during the gold rush of 1896-98; also it was discovered that the region might contain vast quantities of oil. The government finally negotiated Treaty 8 in the summer of 1899.

At that time, the Aboriginal people lived off the land in various communities in the bush. When the treaty commissioners arrived in Fort Chipewyan, the Chiefs of the Chipewyan and Cree presented the conditions under which they would accept the government's proposals. These conditions included the complete freedom of their peoples to fish, hunt and trap. Their terms also included education for their children.

After the difficult times they had been through, it is likely the Aboriginal people of the area were looking to the government to protect their traditional livelihood when they signed the treaty. However, the people of Treaty 8 later discovered that the treaty printed by the government contained a clause that was not in the original treaty they had signed in the summer of 1899, according to Father Rene Fumoleau, an Oblate priest who researched the history of Treaty 8. This clause stated that the freedom to fish, hunt and trap was "subject to such regulations as may from time to time be made by the Government of the country." In his book *As Long as This Land Shall Last*, Father Fumoleau says that Pierre Mercredi, who served as interpreter for the Chipewyan at the Fort Chipewyan Treaty 8 signing ceremony, said that this clause was not in the original treaty he witnessed at Fort Chipewyan. (See "As Long as This Land Shall Last," page 59.) The Dominion government had already passed the Unorganized Territories Game Preservation Act in 1894 to protect game from over-exploitation by the fur trade. This act restricted harvesting of certain animals and birds and was created without consulting the Aboriginal peoples most affected by the legislation.

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Treaty 8 created two new legal entities in Fort Chipewyan: the Athabasca Chipewyan Band (Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation) and the Mikisew Cree Band (Mikisew Cree First Nation). At the same time, a North West Mounted Police (later known as RCMP) detachment was posted to Fort Chipewyan to administer government laws and programs. This was the beginning of a long series of assimilation policies by the Canadian government and of misunderstandings between the government and the people of Treaty 8.

More newcomers, more changes

The fur trade opened western Canada to other European influences. Following on the heels of the traders, Roman Catholic Oblate missionaries set up a mission in Fort Chipewyan in 1849. Anglican missionaries arrived in the area in 1874. The missionaries set up schools for the purpose of providing Aboriginal people with "a personal knowledge of Christ" and teaching their children the customs of European civilization. Their influences would have even more significant and far-reaching effects on the lives of Aboriginal people than the technological changes that occurred in their culture in the 19th and 20th centuries.

In the early 1900s, the Etthen eldeli Dene people in the Fort Chipewyan area were strongly encouraged to send their children to residential schools operated by Roman Catholic missions. Respecting the "white man's law," the Aboriginal parents entrusted their children to the missionaries. The children who passed through the mission doors were changed forever. For many it was the first time they had heard themselves called "Chipewyan," the term used for them by their traditional enemies, the Cree, and adopted by the Europeans. (As mentioned earlier, they were known among themselves as "Dene".) Like all Aboriginal children attending residential schools, they were also called "sauvages" (French for "savages"). Most had come from a loving extended family where children were treated with affection and were considered on loan from the Creator. They found themselves in a cold, foreign institution where corporal punishment was the norm, and where physical, mental and sexual abuse was common. At home they would have been taught their families' values, stories, language and cultural identity. However, the missionaries did not respect their culture and forbade them to speak their own language. The children of the residential schools often emerged without the concept of love, without parenting skills, without knowledge of who they were, and without respect for themselves.

"As Long as This Land Shall Last"

Pierre Mercredi acted as interpreter for the Chipewyan people of Fort Chipewyan at the signing of Treaty 8. He said later that the original treaty signed by the Chipewyan contained no mention of a promise to obey any hunting regulations set by the government. Nevertheless, such a clause was inserted in the final printed copy of the treaty that was sent later to the people of Treaty 8.

"I read the Treaty to them and there was no clause in it which said they might have to obey regulations about hunting. They left us no copy of the Treaty we signed, saying that they would have it printed and send a copy to us. When the copy came back, that second clause (that they shall promise to obey whatever hunting regulations the Dominion Government shall set) was in it. It was not there before. I never read it to the Chipewyans or explained it to them. I have no doubt that the new regulation breaks that old Treaty. It makes me feel bad altogether because it makes lies of the words I spoke then for Queen Victoria." – Pierre Mercredi, interpreter for the Chipewyan of Fort Chipewyan, quoted in Rene Fumoleau, *As Long as this Land Shall Last.*

The damage they experienced would take many generations to heal. To this day, the hamlet of Fort Chipewyan is still working on recovery of its aboriginal culture and identity. (See "What Happened to Us Must Never, Ever Happen Again," page 60.)

Also in the late 1800s, construction of the railways into southern Alberta brought more Europeans to settle and exploit the economic opportunities of Western Canada. This development tended to shift transportation routes away from the waterways of Lake Athabasca. When the Canadian Pacific Railway reached Calgary in 1883 and land routes were constructed northward, the Athabasca River became a more important transportation route. By the early 1900s, the Chipewyan people were feeling the effects of white settlement.

What Happened to Us Must Never, Ever Happen Again

Residential schools had a profound effect on generations of Aboriginal people in Canada. Here an ACFN member tells of her peoples' experiences in residential schools.



Holy Angel Residential School
In 1924, the Holy Angel Residential School was built. A second school by the same name was built in 1944 and demolished in 1975-76.

"Within the residential schools, the degradation of the aboriginal culture was endemic. The Grey Nuns made sure that the 'savages' were grateful we were being taught the 'Christian way.' To speak aboriginal language was guaranteed punishment. Aboriginal ways were considered evil and wrong, and they had to change or go to hell. So many of the children got to the point where they were ashamed to acknowledge their family, and with it, their identity. The punishment they endured is loaded upon their shoulders to this day....

"Residential life was better in the 1940s and 1950s in the sense there was better food, warmer quarters, and adequate clothing, but the affection and love that they were all used to before they entered the mission was still missing. Most mission kids shook their parents' hand as a sign of hello and goodbye. There was no physical contact between the kids and the Grey Nuns. In fact, siblings were not allowed to talk to each other. The children were not allowed to show their feelings or speak their thoughts. They were often called by their number instead of by their Christian names! Many of these kids cried themselves to sleep only to wake up to their nightmares still there.

"There were many contradictions in the missions. The teachers claimed that English was the language of commerce and therefore a requirement for survival, yet the Grey Nuns always spoke French. In the fall, (the children) would be paraded out to pick blueberries. The nuns would check carefully to ensure the children did not eat any of the many blueberries while they were picking them. Yet none of the children can remember ever having blueberries served to them in the mission.

"Aboriginal language and culture were belittled to such an extent that it was not unusual to hear 150 mission children cheering for the cowboys killing off the Indians in an old western movie.

"The kids left the mission, not belonging anywhere, with low self-esteem, encountering discrimination and intimidation. This affected their children and their family lives. Some mission survivors to this day will not talk about their experiences, the pain and shame still on their shoulders. Many of the mission children cannot speak their language, which means that they can't speak to their Elders and grandparents.

"Our parents were not informed of what was happening to their children....We were not happy but we were taught not to talk about what was happening, so many stories never got beyond those walls for years.

"I spent ten years in the Holy Angels Residential School – ten years I don't have fond memories of. There were fun times, too, friendships that still continue to this day. When we 'mission kids' get together, we do laugh at some of the stories from those lost years. But in the back of our minds, we all feel the same: what happened to us must never, ever happen again."



Victoria at home with her husband, Alex Flett. Victoria continues to make traditional garments, like slippers made of moose hide with beaver trim and intricate beadwork.

CHAPTER SIX

Rules, Regulations, Reserves

Although the K'ai taile Dene people had signed Treaty 8 thinking it would protect their traditional livelihood, they soon discovered it provided little protection from new and growing pressures on the land and their way of life. The people found themselves in a continuing struggle to preserve their traditional livelihood from the effects of European settlers and government control. Meanwhile, the government neglected to keep many of its promises of Treaty 8, and the Chipewyan people continued to be exposed to waves of disease, starvation and scarcity of resources.

After the construction of the railways in the late 1800s, there was in influx of immigrant commercial trappers in the Lake Athabasca region. Apart from the Unorganized Territories Game Preservation Act of 1894, the commercial fur trade was a largely unregulated, open-access industry. The immigrant trappers disrupted the traditional trapping livelihood of the Chipewyan peoples in several ways. They competed with the Aboriginal trappers for the land's finite fur resources, causing problems of over-exploitation. Also, the newcomers did not respect or follow the traditional cooperative trap line rules that the Aboriginal trappers had developed to ensure mutual respect and survival of all. The Aboriginal trappers were aware of the times when the availability of furs was at its peak and practiced sustainable harvesting, taking only the best furs while leaving the rest for other years. They also recognized the rights of trappers on neighbouring trap lines and often relied on this mutual good will for assistance with any emergencies that arose. This mutual respect was accompanied by some clear rules about trespassing on another's trap line. But the white trappers ignored these rules, routinely trespassing on Aboriginal trap lines and even removing traps set by Aboriginal trappers.

The problem had grown worse with the expansion of the railways. In 1912 a railway line reached Athabasca Landing. In 1915, another line was extended to Peace Landing and with it came more Métis and white trappers to Fort Chipewyan. After World War I ended, even more white trappers flooded into the area.

The Aboriginal trappers and hunters reacted angrily to this "invasion." They petitioned the federal government to honour the promises it had made in Treaty 8 to protect the rights of the Aboriginal peoples to live off the land. But they got no action from the government. In their anger, they resorted to burning specific parts of the forest. They increased their own fur trapping to out-compete the white

Rules, Regulations, Reserves

trappers and they petitioned the government to either create a reserve or honour the promises made in Treaty 8. Instead, the government created Wood Buffalo Park.

The heavy hand of government

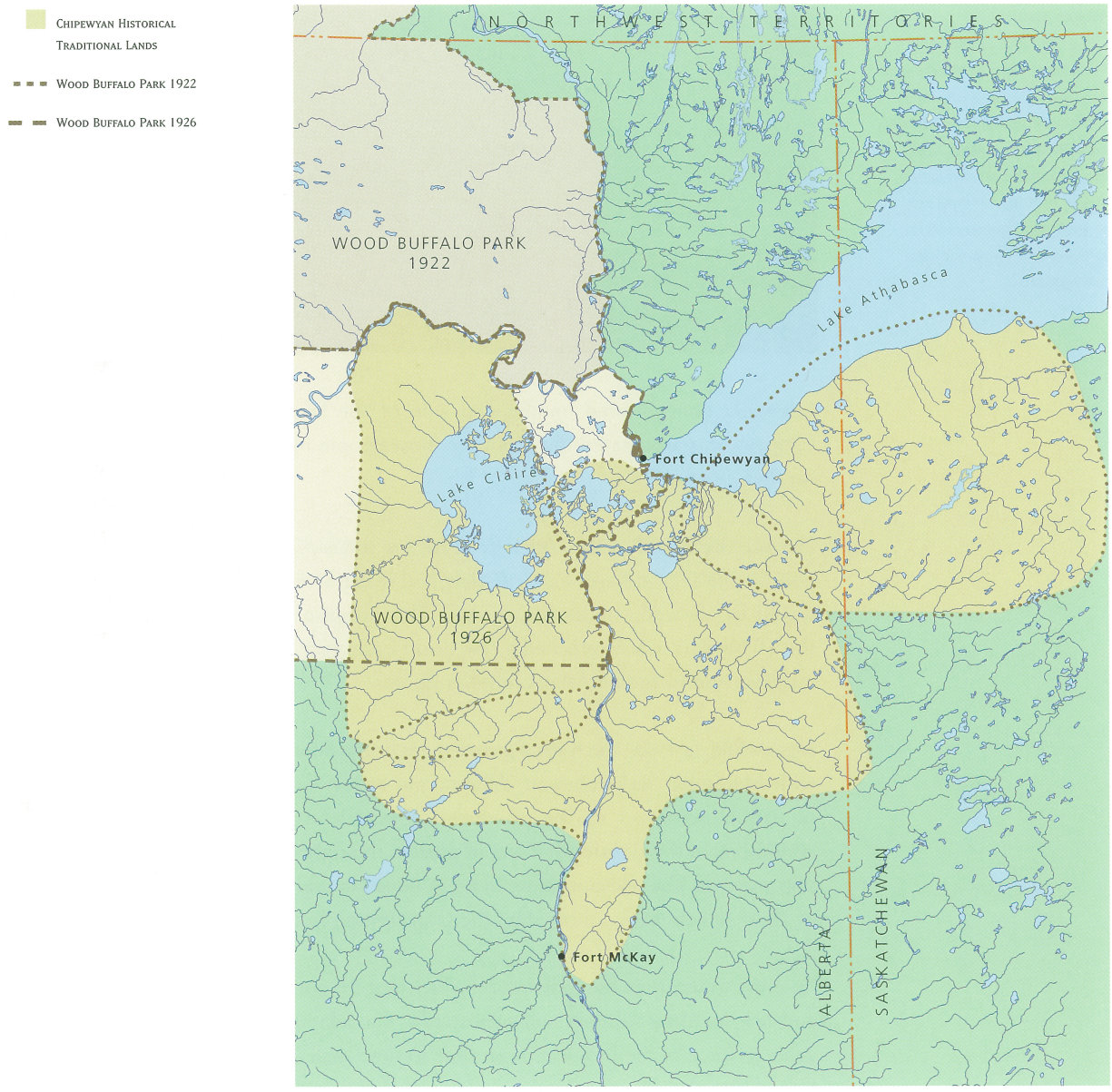
In 1922, the Dominion government designated Wood Buffalo Park to protect a remnant herd of wood bison on the Alberta/Northwest Territories border that had become endangered by over-hunting. The park's southeast corner bordered on Fort Chipewyan and included part of the Peace/Athabasca delta, renowned at the time for the quantity and quality of its muskrat pelts. Some Aboriginal people were permitted to continue trapping within the park, but park regulations excluded new trappers and hunters from within the park's boundaries. The park was expanded in 1926, and a new rule allowed those occupying the new portion of the park to continue hunting, trapping and trading. In the years following the creation of the park, significant land use conflicts continued both inside and outside the park boundaries. The park eventually became a major contributor to hardship among Aboriginal people in the area.

While the creation of Wood Buffalo Park and its accompanying regulations temporarily protected the area from intruders, it also had the effect of excluding some Aboriginal people from the park. The new park occupied a large portion of the traditional territory that was used by the Birch River Chipewyan group. While some Chipewyan people were able to continue to hunt and trap within the park under the new rules, others were excluded from the park entirely, even for purposes of visiting their relatives. As a result, some members of the ACFN moved from the park area into the Jackfish micro-village area. Those who continued to hunt and trap in the park – including 36 Chipewyan families with a total of 116 people – transferred their membership to the Mikisew Cree Band in 1944.

It was around the time the park was created that Aboriginal hunters and trappers began building groups of permanent log cabins in place of tent camps. These micro-villages were in strategic, central locations which the people returned to at various times during their seasonal rounds on the land. In 1926 the economy in the area diversified when McInnes Products established the first commercial fish company on Lake Athabasca. Two other companies began operations shortly after. Fishing

Expansion of Wood Buffalo Park

Many Chipewyan people lived and hunted in the Birch River area around Lake Claire. In 1926 the Wood Buffalo Park was expanded into this area.



CHAPTER SIX

Rules, Regulations, Reserves



Wood bison
In the late 1700s explorer Peter Fidler joined with Chipewyan people in harvesting wood buffalo. As a result of the Unorganized Territories Game Preservation Act of 1894 and the creation of Wood Buffalo Park in 1921 and the expansion in 1926, the Chipewyan's access to this important source of meat was restricted.

originally concentrated on the east side of the lake, however people from Fort Chipewyan participated. By this time most people in the region had small motors on their boats.

Despite the arrival of the commercial fishing industry, by 1930 drought and hunger had hit the region hard. Park officials had made a verbal promise that each family would be allowed one bison per year. This promise was not kept. Instead, during the 1930s park wardens killed a few bison each year and provided the meat to the missions and to Indian Affairs relief programs.

Meanwhile, in 1928, the federal government began entering into a series of agreements with Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia to transfer ownership of natural resources to the provinces. The federal government attached certain conditions to the transfer that would protect the rights of Aboriginal people to hunt, trap and fish. The relevant clause in the Alberta Natural Resources Transfer Agreement of 1930, which was confirmed by the Constitution Act of 1930, reads as follows:

"In order to secure to the Indians of the Province the continuance of the supply of game and fish for their support and subsistence, Canada agrees that the laws respecting game in force in the Province from time to time shall apply to the Indians within the boundaries thereof, provided, however, that the said Indians shall have the right, which the Province hereby assures to them, of hunting, trapping and fishing game and fish for food at all seasons of the year on all unoccupied Crown lands and on any other lands to which the said Indians may have a right of access."

Aboriginal people in northern Alberta continued to suffer from the effects of the park and unfair competition from white trappers. As a proposed solution to their complaints, the Government of Alberta began to impose closed seasons on wildlife. While the government intended the closed seasons to apply to Aboriginal people, the regulations actually violated the terms of Treaty 8. Aboriginal trappers challenged these regulations, correctly citing the clause in the Natural Resources Transfer Agreement assuring them the right to hunt, trap and fish "for food at all seasons of the year." The Supreme Court of Canada eventually ruled that the agreement effectively and unilaterally took away their right to hunt, trap or fish "commercially" but preserved their right to hunt, trap and fish for food. To this day, Aboriginal people worry about being charged for violations when they hunt or trap for food. In many cases they are now defended by additional Supreme Court rulings. However, aboriginal hunting rights are not always respected and laws prohibiting aboriginal hunting for food must be based upon valid conservation reasons or they are non-constitutional.

The Chipewyan were suffering severe hardship as a result of the game regulations and the often biased enforcement of the regulations in favour of white trappers. As well, they were being pushed out of their most productive hunting and trapping grounds by the settler-trappers, who often left the land over-exploited. The situation prompted ACFN Chief Jonas Laviolette to send a letter in 1938 asking the Alberta government to come to his people's rescue. (See "How are We to Live?", page 68.)

In 1939, the Government of Alberta introduced a registered trap line system in the province. ACFN members acquired trap lines under the new system. Originally, Aboriginal people obtained their trapping licences for free. However, by 1944, the government was charging all trappers royalties on the furs.

In 1946, the federal government introduced a regulation to limit each hunter to one moose per year in Wood Buffalo Park. In 1947, there was a large fire in the park, which some attribute to the fact that the government would not allow the Aboriginal people to conduct the controlled burns they traditionally initiated in the area. Trapping areas were introduced in the park in 1949. These were group areas and operated in a manner similar to the Aboriginal people's older traditional systems.

CHAPTER SIX

Rules, Regulations, Reserves

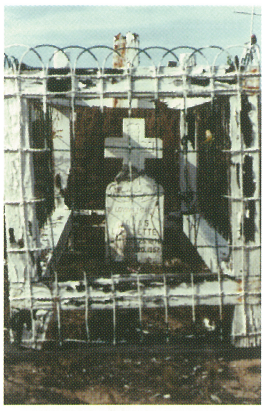
"How Are We to Live?"

Aboriginal fur trappers followed a cooperative system of mutual respect for each other's trap lines based on communal rules that ensured survival of all and of the fur resource. White trappers recognized no such rules and disrupted this system to the extent that their activities seriously threatened aboriginal livelihoods. Government game regulations, as they applied to Aboriginal hunters and trappers, were adding to these pressures. In 1938, Chief Jonas Laviolette sent a letter to Alberta's Minister of Agriculture pleading for the government to "come to our rescue":

"I am taking the liberty of writing to you, in regard to the game Regulations enforced this winter which puts us in an awkward position to make our living at this place [Fort Chipewyan, Alberta], and as Chief of the Chipewyan band. I have to make some complaints to you, and I hope you take steps to remedy the situation, that is to say, that the strangers from outside (white trappers) are taking all our best hunting grounds from us, and they do not allow the Indians to hunt near these, and this has been going on since a good few years. The result is, a good many Chipewyans of my Band cannot find any place to trap rats; and how are we to live, all the place left for Chipewyan belonging to Jack Fish Lake, old Fort and Big Point is the delta, which is barren, no rats there, nothing but sand bars, and we cannot go anywhere also to trap rats.

"I wish to mention also, that the present Game Guardian ... is not fit for a game Guardian, is siding on white trappers only, and Indians never see him to talk to him, I presume that this Game Guardian and a few trappers (his favourites) are the ones that are making laws as they please. And another thing is, if an Indian sets a few traps before the white trappers, those white trappers take the traps away (Indian traps) and set their own traps there. We cannot call that just, that which happens often; according to our Treaty, we are free to trap and fish and hunt anywhere.

"I wish to mention also that the White trappers are taking Big ground and Big Lakes for their own trappings, while a poor old Indian has no chance to kill a few rats, and most of those white trappers are Russians, Germans and Swedes. I want *fair play* for my Band of Chipewyans and I hope the Government comes to our rescue."



Gravesite of Chief Jonas Laviolette
Chief Jonas Laviolette died in 1952.

The creation of Reserve 201

After years of petitioning by the ACFN people for a reserve in the area, the federal government had approved Indian Reserve 201 at the southeast end of Lake Athabasca in 1937 and the provincial government passed a certificate of title to the federal Crown. However, due to administrative red tape, the reserve was not officially declared until 1954. In 1940, the government allocated Reserve 201 to the ACFN. This provided the Chipewyans with exclusive lands free of competition from the settler-trappers and therefore with some protection of the Band's trapping and traditional livelihood.

Once Reserve 201 was created, the ACFN people were able to re-establish their traditional rules regarding animal preservation and mutual respect on the trap line. These traditional hunting rules provided each trapper with an area that would be respected by other members of the Band. Often when ACFN members held registered trap lines they would share their lines among members of their family and close trapping friends. In such cases, the same traditional rules of respect would apply.

During the 1940s and 1950s, Chief Laviolette set quotas or maximum harvests per family for muskrat trapping on the reserve. The limit was based on the number of people in a family and how much was needed to support a family of that size. According to ACFN Elders Charlie Voyageur, Rene Bruno, Arsene Bernaille and Pat Marcel, the quota system was a sort of band bylaw. A single man was allowed 200 muskrats; a family of four got 500; a larger family might be allowed 750. The ACFN trappers put tags on their muskrats and the Indian agent helped keep control of the numbers sold. However, there were independent traders in the area, so some band members sold muskrats on the "black market." But, with Chief Laviolette's conservation method in effect, there were always plenty of muskrats, the Elders say. In 1952, Chief Laviolette died and the quota rule ended.

Commercial trapping continued to be a major part of the Athabasca Chipewyan economy for decades. By the late 1960s, the ACFN people were generating 30 per cent of their income from trapping and most of the men either trapped full time or at least took part in winter and spring trapping activities. With trapping providing

a base income, the people continued other forms of traditional harvesting to supplement their livelihood. Even as store-bought food became available to the community, almost all of the meat consumed by ACFN members came from trapping, traditional hunting, gathering and fishing.

Industry and government bring more changes

Throughout the first half of the 20th century, the Chipewyan people felt increasing pressure to move into a central location such as Fort Chipewyan. Immigration, government regulations and increasing industrial activity in the area threatened their traditional livelihood. Nevertheless, they continued to hunt, gather and trap. Some were able to obtain outside employment but most obtained seasonal or temporary work and returned to their traditional rounds for survival. Those who didn't trap full time worked in river transportation or in commercial fishing or found jobs as labourers, carpenters, fire fighters, welders or cooks in the summer and fall in the forestry, construction and mining industries that were taking hold in northern Alberta.

In the 1940s the Indian agent made a concerted effort to arrange work outside of Fort Chipewyan in these industries for the men of the region who were having trouble supporting themselves and their families on the land. Because of World War II and the resulting interest in uranium, the federal government nationalized Eldorado Gold Mines, located at the east end of Lake Athabasca. The Northern Transportation Company was also nationalized because it shipped supplies up the Athabasca, Slave and Mackenzie rivers, and supplied Eldorado as well. Uranium mining began in Saskatchewan in 1953. Other employment opportunities had opened up when a sawmill was started in 1951 in Wood Buffalo Park. The Swanson Lumber Co. started operations in 1955, also in the park. Major road building projects came along with all the new industrial activity. In 1955, the Mackenzie Highway was completed to Hay River in the Northwest Territories. By 1957, there were road building projects all over northeastern Alberta. These projects brought more settlers to the region, but also provided employment that helped Aboriginal people supplement their livelihood when game was scarce and furs were low. The work was mostly labour, and often seasonal and low paying. The sawmill was one of the most consistent sources of employment and many people moved close to the mill to work there. Others were able to find jobs with the river transportation company, some worked in the mines, and many worked on road construction.

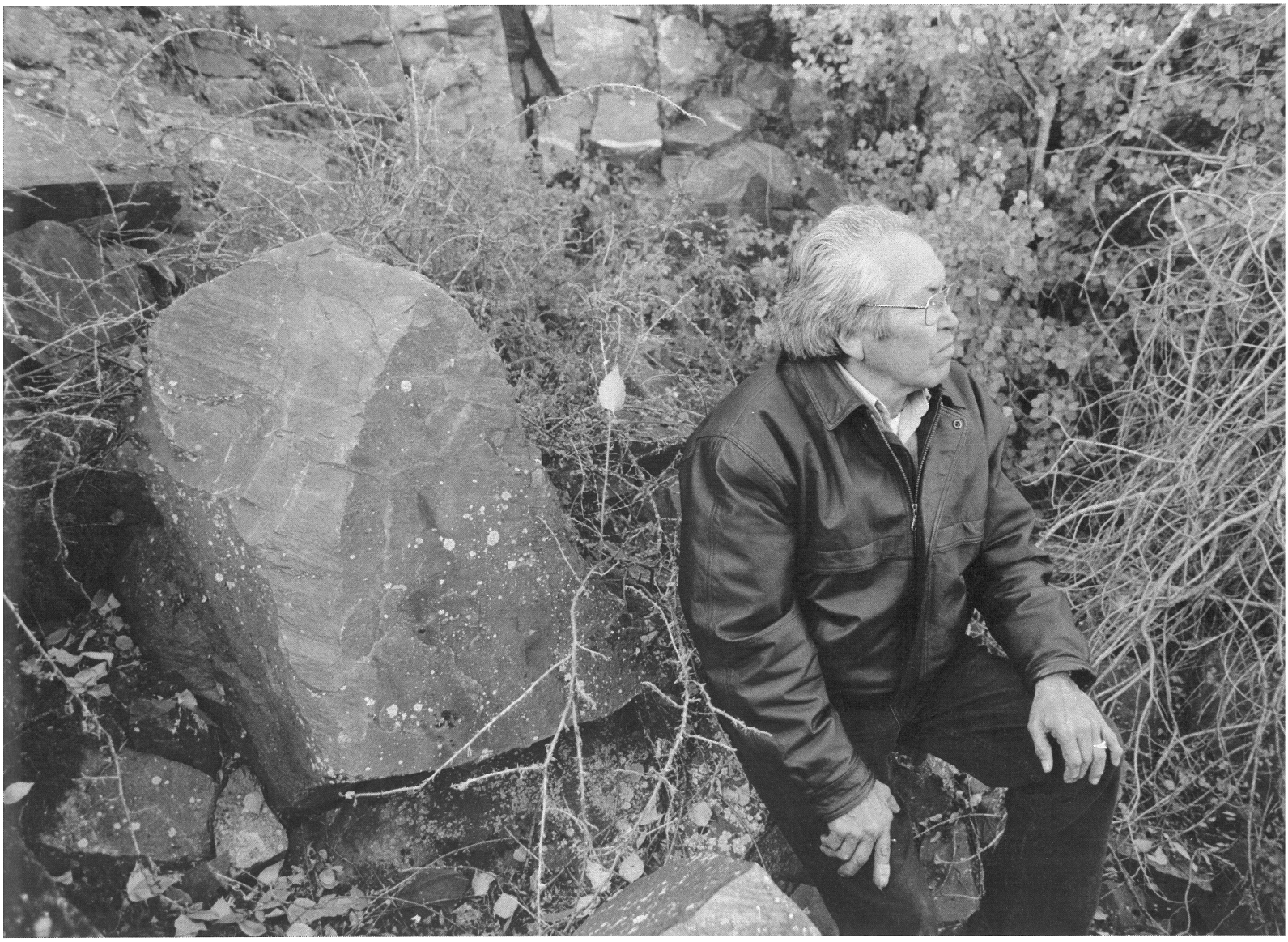
The Dene as Conservationist

The Dene peoples understood the cycles of abundance and scarcity on the land and approached hunting and trapping with respect for the need to conserve the land's resources. The white trappers had no concern for conservation. Rather they exploited the resources of an area and moved on. In 1926, H.J. Bury, the federal agent in the Fort Chipewyan area, described the differences between the Aboriginal and white trappers:

"A comparison between the Indian mode of trapping and that followed by the average white trapper proves beyond all doubt that the Indian is a game conservationist. The Indians trap on the same grounds each year, get their fur when it is prime, refrain from total extermination of the fur bearing animals and exercise as a rule careful restrictions with regard to the use of fire in the bush.

"The average white trapper is not concerned with the question of continuous yearly trapping in one district. Having picked out a promising territory his main object is to clean it out during one season and move to new grounds the following year. With this in mind, he resorts to methods, which result in the extermination of all furbearers in his territory. He is accused...of dynamiting beaver houses and dams, and the trapping of unprimed fur by catching animals with traps equipped with cloth wrapped jaws so as to keep them alive in captivity until the arrival of cold weather...."

Meanwhile, the federal government introduced programs that brought about other economic and social changes. Family allowance payments began in 1944, which helped ACFN families cope to some extent. When Aboriginal people were encouraged to move into settlements closer to the missions or employment opportunities, there often was no housing for them. In 1958, Health and Welfare Canada opened an office in Fort Chipewyan, and in 1959, the federal government began a housing program to help the ACFN people make the transition from living in the bush to living in towns. Although the Aboriginal people of northern Alberta were significantly affected by these and many other government initiatives in the early and middle years of the 20th century, it was not until 1960 that Aboriginal people were given the right to vote.



Rene Bruno is still an active hunter and retains a wealth of traditional knowledge.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Following the Seasons

Despite the many disrupting changes brought to northern Alberta by industry and white settlement, the people of the ACFN continued their traditional activities on the land. Each season and each year brought opportunities to harvest animals, fish and plants, and the people responded to what the land offered. They continued to follow the seasons, moving in family groups and cooperating to harvest foods as they became available.

Whereas in earlier times the ancestors of the ACFN people followed the seasonal movements of the caribou herds, once the Chipewyan had adapted to the boreal forest and to micro-village living, they had a greater variety of foods available to them. Moose meat became an important staple in their new environment. They supplemented this with bison and caribou in the winter and muskrats, waterfowl and fish in the spring, summer and fall.

By the mid-1900s, the annual rounds of the ACFN people had changed significantly from those of a half century earlier. In the mid-1800s, the Chipewyan were still following a nomadic lifestyle. But now, although hunters still travelled great distances, their micro-village cabins had become the centre of their activity.

The men left the cabins, sometimes for up to three months at a time, to hunt caribou and trap fine furs, travelling well into Saskatchewan or the Northwest Territories. They returned to the cabins for Christmas, Easter and at the beginning of each new harvesting season. A family might leave their cabin for short hunting or gathering trips in summer. And in the spring the entire family moved to the Peace/Athabasca delta for the muskrat trapping season and the waterfowl hunt that immediately followed.

Current ACFN Elders have described these rounds in great detail from their own personal experience, as well as that of their parents and in some cases their children. Their stories cover the period from around the time Wood Buffalo Park was created up to the present. And the cycles they describe centre around the micro-villages of Jackfish, Old Fort Point and Point Brule, in addition to smaller groupings along the Athabasca River, "all the way to Fort McKay." Jackfish, a grouping of cabins on the main channel of the Athabasca River delta, is located close to excellent fishing and is a convenient base for trapping muskrats during the spring. The cabins at Old Fort Point are close to good fishing and waterfowl as well as being close to trap lines.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Following the Seasons

Winter hunting and trapping

During the winter months, November to March, the men of a family – father, sons, brothers, brothers-in-law – journeyed great distances from their summer camps or cabins to hunt caribou or work their trap lines to harvest fine furs such as lynx, marten, wolf, wolverine, fisher, ermine, fox, beavers and mink. In the late 1800s and early 1900s women might have joined them, but this was rare in recent times. They travelled by dog sled or by foot with dog packs. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, they changed their mode of transportation in winter to snow machines. This new technology allowed them to travel farther and faster and to make more frequent trips back to their central cabins. It also decreased their need to fish for dog food. In the time of dog sleds, a trapper needed to catch literally thousands of fish to be used as dog food during the winter.

Before departing, the men planned their route and made sure that all dog harnesses were ready and the dogs fit and healthy. They prepared their traps, snares, nets and floats, and packed all the necessary equipment – two axes, chisel, sharp knives, guns and shells, airtight heater, snowshoes, etc.

When they arrived at the trap line they made necessary repairs to the cabin, or set up camp if there was no cabin, gathering spruce boughs for the tent floors. They fished to feed the dogs, gathered firewood, set the nets, if needed, and set the traps along the trails. A trapper might have over 100 traps on a line extending over 50 miles. The group always kept an eye out for moose tracks and other hunting opportunities. Throughout the winter, they made several trips home, visiting their traps and snares along the way.

The women remained at the cabins in the micro-village, where they harvested mink, grouse, rabbits and other local resources. They also helped their husbands get ready for their winter hunting journeys. They prepared their husbands' clothes – moccasins, wrap-arounds, leggings, parka, fur hat, beaver mitts, work mitts and knit socks. They prepared foods such as moose meat, dry meat, dry fish and headcheese, and bought dry goods such as flour, baking powder, sugar, tea, lard, salt, jam, rice, rolled oats, raisins and other dried fruits. They made bedrolls with canvas covers,

feather robes, pillows, and duvet covers with flannelette sheets. It was also their responsibility to make and repair toboggan wrap-arounds, make dog booties for travelling over rough ice, and prepare and repair the tent, as well as skin, flesh and dry the fine furs. In addition, they maintained the home, did the laundry and watched over the children.



MUSKRAT
Muskrat furs from the Peace/Athabasca delta became a standard to which all other muskrats were compared.

Spring muskrat season

In the spring, whole families moved to the delta for the spring muskrat season, which started on March 1. People in the Jackfish micro-village were well positioned for the muskrat hunt. Others would come from their cabins at Old Fort Point and along the Athabasca River by boat to set up their spring ratting camps.

Muskrat season was an important time of year for the ACFN people because it brought all of the people together. Also, harvesting a significant number of muskrat would allow a trapper to pay off debts and provide him with supplies to last throughout the summer. "During this period, every trapper from the community took some time to get a few rats," according to one ACFN Elder.

A trapper might set up to 200 traps, which he checked twice a day. Muskrats were also shot and usually floated to the surface when killed this way. The trappers would take the muskrats back to camp to be skinned and cleaned. The hides were tacked to boards, or stretchers built by the men, and the women scraped them clean of fat and meat using dull knives or scrapers made from moose bone. The pelts were left to dry for two or three days. To prepare the muskrat meat, the women removed the heads and tails, eviscerated the carcasses and washed them in cold water. Then they split the carcasses down the backbone so they could be laid flat for smoking and drying. The meat was placed on a rack above a slow-burning fire and left to dry in the sun for three days before being stored for future use. To prepare it for eating, the women would soak the dried meat and then boil it. The men often helped with the skinning, fleshing and drying.

Warm Memories

ACFN Elder Mary Madeline Marcel was a new bride of 16 in 1937 when she joined her husband Benjamin Marcel on their first summer hunting trip together to the mainland with a group of families from Jackfish. The young newlywed didn't have many skills that would be useful on a month-long hunting and camping trip, so her husband, who was 36, told her to stay behind. As Mary's daughter Alice Rigney tells the story:



MARY MADELINE MARCEL
Mary Madeline Marcel still enjoys being on the land, preparing country foods and passing on traditional skills.

"Mom told him that she was going and needed to know what to pack for the journey overland. Dad told her to make dog packs. She had no idea how to do this so she went over to her sister-in-law's and looked at their dog packs until she had an idea on how to pack the necessary items for such a journey. She had to pack the bedroll, clothing for two, dry goods (flour, tea, sugar, baking powder, lard, raisins, rice, rolled oats, dry milk, matches, pots and pans, dishes and cutlery) and balance the packs so that they didn't fall over to one side or the other. This took some skill and practice. My dad helped Mom load the precious cargo on four dogs and then they were ready.

"Other extended family members on the trip included Isadore and Columbe Voyageur, Uncle Joe and Rosa, Jonas and Annie Piche, and Marie Mercredi, Gabriel Mercredi's mother. They left Jackfish Lake and boated as far as Jonas Laviolette's house (now Magloire Cardinal's home). They unloaded the boats, put the dog packs on the anxious animals and started on their journey. The men and women travelled together until they arrived at Big Rock, where they had lunch (fish cooked over a fire, bannock and tea) and rested the dogs. The dogs each had a leash, which the women would hold so they didn't wander or chase rabbits or grouse. From Big Rock, the men left before the women, who would follow about three hours later.

"Granny Marie (Mercredi) was the leader as she was the oldest and the wisest. The men were headed for the campsite and were hunting along the way. When the women started on the trail, which followed the natural ridge of the sand hills, they would watch for notch signs on trees, which was their signal indicating the direction the men went.

"Mom said it was a hot day and the dogs were thirsty. The women did carry water for the dogs in pails, but the dogs' sharp noses told them there was water up ahead and they started to pull away from the women. Granny Marie told the women to hold on to the leashes. However, some of the dogs got away and made a beeline to the lake, much to the dismay of the onlookers. One of Mom's dogs got away and followed the others into the lake – it was the one with the blankets! Needless to say, that was the spot where camp was to be for the first night. The women got their dogs out of the water and proceeded to dry the bedding and clothing.

"Setting up a good camp is important as comfort counts! Mom cut young spruce boughs, which she laid in the tent – nature's carpet. The soothing scent makes the atmosphere cozy. A shot was heard in the distance, and then another. About two hours later, my mom said, she saw my dad coming over the ridge with a pack on his back that looked pretty heavy. My dad had killed a bull moose and a bear; both animals were in good shape. The pack on his back was so heavy, she wondered how he was able to carry so much meat.

"Later, when the tent was set for the night, the fires were burning, the blankets were drying, and the dogs were tied up, the children were happy, and the atmosphere was one of happiness – a feast was on the way. Dinner {on such trips} was usually the choice cuts, which included the brisket and ribs, usually boiled and made into soup. Bannock and tea completed the meal.

"The next day the men left to hunt for more game, while the women dried the meat from the previous kill."

"All this took about two days. Then the dried meat was placed in the moose hide, tied securely and stored high in the trees where no animals could reach it. The meat was cached in this manner until the return trip. Then it was time to travel to the next camp. And so, for one month, this group of Dene people travelled the sand hills, with the men going ahead and hunting, the women following with the children and dogs, camping beside lakes, making dry meat and storing it. On the return trip, the meat was picked up from the caches and the group went back to Jackfish with their valuable cargo.

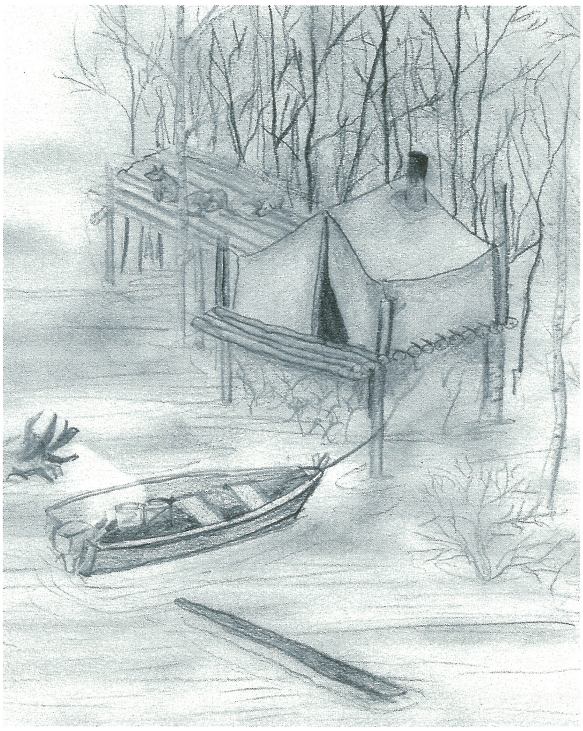
"Mom remembers these times as the 'good old days.' No one got sick; the mood of the group was positive; there was good humour and much laughter around the campfires. All treated the children with kindness; they were never spanked, and the many stories they were told were also lessons of life.

"They didn't have many material goods; they only carried what they needed. And if you ran out of jam, then there was always a berry patch that you could find and make your own – this was a very practical group. This trip was about gathering food for the winter; it was also about teaching the young the traditional way of life."

Pat Marcel says this type of summer trip was common right up to the time he entered residential school in the late 1940s. The people would live from tent to tent all summer long. The longest they would stay in one place was two nights. After Pat went to residential school in 1946, he went hunting and fishing with his dad whenever he could.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Following the Seasons

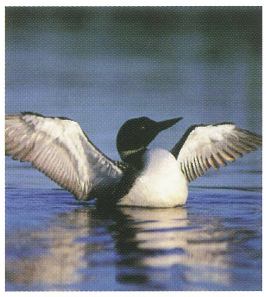


A Stage
Men would build a "stage" or platform to serve as a home in the event of a flood.
Illustration by Trevor Michael – ACFN member

Muskrat was an important food for the ACFN people. During this season, they ate muskrat every day. They also fed it to their dogs. Many ACFN Elders commented that they were happy when the spring waterfowl season arrived: even though they really liked muskrat meat, they were more than ready for a change after eating it for two months straight.

During the later part of muskrat season, the river would regularly flood. On arriving at the delta, the men would build a "stage," or platform, to serve as "home" in the event of a flood. The stage would be made of trees from the delta and would be large enough to provide space for a tent and a living area. This allowed families to remain on the delta until the water subsided. Floods generally lasted no more than a few days.

Muskrat season was usually very successful, with most families averaging about 3,000 rats.



Spring Waterfowl
"The people" were happy to see the migratory birds return each spring. After winter and almost two months eating muskrat meat they were ready for a change of diet.

Spring waterfowl hunt

The spring hunt for migrating birds – ducks, geese, swans – began as soon as the waterfowl returned. The birds arrived in the area in late April and departed in May. The hunt usually centred around Goose Island, where many families gathered and lived for two or three weeks. They harvested the birds with shotguns from boats in the river, on the delta, on Lake Athabasca or on smaller lakes. The waterfowl passed through again in the fall, but fewer birds were taken at that time. A family would take anywhere from 20 to 200 ducks, five to 50 geese, and two to 10 swans each year.

In their spring camps the people dried the waterfowl meat, made grease from the fat and collected feathers for making bedrolls and pillows. In the evenings, the people exchanged stories around their campfires, and shared food and bottomless pots of tea. This was a time of much joy and laugher as they celebrated the end of the recent, successful muskrat season – and a change in diet.

When the lake was clear of ice, the families made the crossing back to Fort Chipewyan. There they would sell their furs to the Hudson's Bay Company or other trader, pay their bills, and stock up on groceries, clothing and other staples needed for the upcoming season. They might also buy new motors or boats.

Summer fishing, hunting and gathering

After the spring hunts and a short visit to town for trading, replenishing supplies and socializing, the families moved back to their cabins. There they began planting their vegetable gardens, an activity introduced by the settler society. The gardens provided an additional source of food – usually potatoes, carrots, turnips, cabbage, onions, beans and cucumbers. Sometimes the whole family would go on two- or three-day trips for hunting, fishing and gathering.

Fishing was an important summer activity for the ACFN people, as it supplied food for the family and dogs as well as a source of income. The men would set the nets and visit them daily – twice a day when the fish were running. The women dried fish to store for winter use and to sell.

Following the Seasons



Blueberries
The K'ai taile Dene would pick hundreds of pounds of blueberries each year to make into jam, to dry and mix with other foods.

I'll Raise You a Blueberry

The people of the ACFN looked forward to the seasons not only for their harvesting opportunities, but also for the unique socializing opportunities they offered. The daughter of an ACFN Elder recounts her mother's special memories of a fall berry-gathering expedition to Old Fort in the early 1940s:

"It was early in the fall – my mom and dad and their two young children left Jackfish Lake and travelled to Old Fort. There was no one there. However, Dad knew that the people had gone to Moose Point to hunt and pick berries, so he headed the boat in that direction. When they came around the point there were many tents and campfires.

"Dad landed his boat where my granny and Mosum had their boat. Mom and Dad set up the camp, had dinner, and Mom got the children ready for bed. My granny told my dad that there was usually a card game going on in the evening and that they were playing for berries! My parents didn't have any berries as they had just arrived there, so Granny told Dad to take a couple of pails and try his luck.

"Mom put the kids to sleep and also went to bed. She didn't hear Dad come to bed. When she awoke in the morning, there along one wall of the tent were pails of berries; there must have been at least 14 pails. She had enough berries to last for some time, but picking berries is a social time that families enjoy doing, so she (still) picked her share."

In July and August, the men hunted moose and, less often, bear. In summer, moose go into the water to escape from insect pests, so the men would hunt them from canoes or boats on the rivers and lakes during this season. In late summer, bears go down to the rivers to feed on berries. Bears were harvested for their fat, which would be rendered into grease and lard for bannock. The men would also check berry patches while they were out in their boats.

The women would dry meat, tan the moose and bear hides, maintain the home, and look after the children. Men and women shared responsibility for tending the gardens and feeding the dogs.



CHARLIE MERCREDI
Charlie Mercredi maintaining a log cabin.

Fall berry harvesting, hunting and preparing for winter

From September to the end of October most families would be on the reserve or at their fall camps preparing fish, foods and equipment for the winter hunting and trapping season.

This was a time to gather straw and sand to prepare root cellars and to harvest vegetables from the gardens. The people would also travel by boat or by foot to berry patches beside lakes or along rivers to gather cranberries, blueberries and a variety of other berries to make into jellies and preserves or to dry for later use. It was not unusual for a family to collect more than 100 pounds of blueberries and low bush cranberries each year. They also gathered and dried a large variety of plants and other substances, which they used for medicines. These included Labrador tea, rat root, mint, spruce gum, poplar bark and saskatoons, as well as beaver castors and bear gall bladders.

The men would fish and hunt by boat on the rivers and lakes close to the summer camps or on Lake Athabasca. They also hunted on foot with dog packs. They used nets for fishing, rifles for hunting big game such as moose and bear, and shotguns for waterfowl. The women snared rabbits and shot grouse. Back in camp the men would hang fish and meat to dry and store for winter use. They might need as many as 2,000 to 4,000 fish for winter dog food alone, based on a typical ration of one whole fish per dog per day. The fish were also valuable for making fish oil, a well known (if not well liked!) medicine. Other fall activities included tanning moose hides and making grease from moose and bear fat.

Following the Seasons

There was also work to do preparing and maintaining equipment. This meant pulling boats out of the water and putting motors away for the winter, as well as preparing traps and repairing toboggans and dog harnesses for the coming hunting and trapping season. Then there were the routine daily tasks: cooking, mending, doing laundry, cleaning house and hauling water for the women; feeding and watering the dogs and gathering, chopping and stacking firewood for the men. The men also helped the women care for the children. Both men and women taught traditional knowledge to the next generation through storytelling and legends.



Louise Cyprien
The Grandmother of Chief Archie Cyprien holding a flesher, made from the leg bone of a moose, which is used for scraping a moose hide.

Many hands made light work

Travelling in family groups had many advantages. When the men went on hunting trips together, they worked as a team and were usually successful. This kept their confidence high and the whole group content.

When a hunter killed a large animal, there were many people to help. He would share the animal and the clan would help dry the meat, make grease from the fat, and prepare the moose hide.

There was also safety in groups. In case of an accident, or if a woman went into labour, there was usually someone in the group who could perform the needed procedure with confidence, using traditional knowledge passed down through the generations.

The social activities of the Athabasca Chipewyan people were an important part of their seasons. Social events ranged from large celebrations like Treaty Days, weddings and dances to daily events like harvesting and preparing moose meat or gathering berries. These social occasions were times to re-kindle friendships, to exchange stories and teach traditional skills.

"We would do things together during gathering times like when we picked berries or when someone got a moose. Everyone would help in the preparation of the moose meat and dry meat," said one ACFN Elder. The work and the meat were shared and the Elders fondly remember the social aspects of these harvesting days. The daily social activities were located in the bush where the moose was shot or the

berries were picked. During these times the children were taught by demonstration and by letting them try things themselves. As the entire group participated it was natural for young children to learn through participation. "From a very young age I was able to snare rabbits because my grandmother taught me and I still know it today," said another Elder.

During these times around campfires or during other activities, the Elders would tell the stories and legends. "Storytelling was like passing on history," the Elders explained. They said that listening to legends was equivalent to learning to read. They learned their history and became steeped in the culture through this oral tradition. "We did not have a written language but we could remember stories and legends very well." Elders of today have very pleasant memories of these social times where they learned their traditional skills and legends.

There were also more formal social occasions at New Year's, at Treaty Days and at weddings. When the trappers came in during Christmas and New Year's there would usually be a celebration. There was also an important gathering during the summer at Treaty Days. But there were other celebrations and dances during the year and of course wedding celebrations.

"Sometimes Dad would put up a dance," one Elder recalled. "It was quite a process because you had to have enough food for everyone for several days, three days and three nights and no booze. They were sober dances. And you had to feed their dogs too. You had to have a lot of food. People would get dressed up in beautiful jackets made of moose hide and caribou with fringes. They would even dress up their dogs."

During the summer, Treaty Days was an important gathering. The Elders would hold meetings and discuss issues of importance to the nation and the Chief would take these matters up with the Indian Agent. There would also be a celebration. It would include a feast, games, drumming and competitions. The people would hold canoe races and pole vaulting and all sorts of other competitions, as well as hand games. Hand games were an ancient form of gambling where two teams of four participants would hide objects in their hands and try and strategize to fool the other team.



Mary Bruno, like most of the Elders, is spiritually connected with the Roman Catholic Church.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Drastic Changes

By the late 1960s, trapping was an integral part of the traditional life of the Athabasca Chipewyan people, providing a base livelihood of roughly 30 per cent of their income.

The Peace/Athabasca delta in those days was a vibrant ecosystem, teaming with thousands of muskrats. But a development in 1967 doomed the muskrats and devastated the Dene people's traditional way of life. That year the Government of British Columbia completed the building of the W.A.C. Bennett Dam, blocking the Peace River at Hudson Hope and creating a reservoir at Williston Lake which took years to fill. By diverting the water into the reservoir, the dam decreased the seasonal floods that normally filled the perched basins in the Peace/Athabasca delta. But this water was the lifeline of the Dene people because the muskrats needed new water in the basins in order to live and multiply. As the frequency of the floods diminished, the delta and the basins dried out and the muskrats were gone.

The action of a Crown corporation located hundreds of miles away had drastically altered the way of life of the ACFN people. But the Dene were not even aware the dam was being built, nor were they told about the major changes that would affect their lives once it was completed. The effects of the dam were not temporary. Over the long term, with the level of the lake lower during the spring, the frequency of the floods continued to decline. Weirs and ditches were constructed by the Peace-Athabasca Delta Implementation Committee (PADIC), a joint effort by the Governments of Canada, Alberta and Saskatchewan, in an effort to keep the delta wet. But these attempts were only marginally successful. The Bennett Dam was the beginning of the end of trapping. With the delta drying up and the muskrats gone, the traditional way of life for the ACFN people was permanently changed.

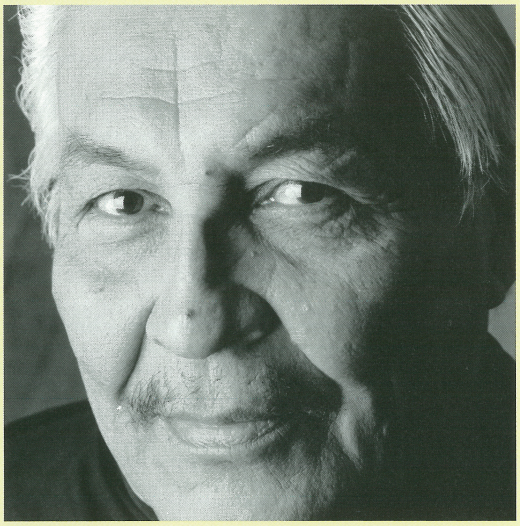
Moving away from the land

Over the decade leading up to the development of the Bennett Dam, some important fur prices had fallen gradually, while some others increased. Overall the fur business was still economical in the 1960s. However, in the years immediately following completion of the dam, the muskrat harvest in the delta reached historical lows, while average Canadian muskrat levels fell less steeply, to levels

Drastic Changes

A Way of Life, Lost

ACFN Elder Alec Bruno was among the Chipewyan people who lost a way of life after the W.A.C. Bennett Dam was completed in 1967. He summed up the effect the dam had on his people:



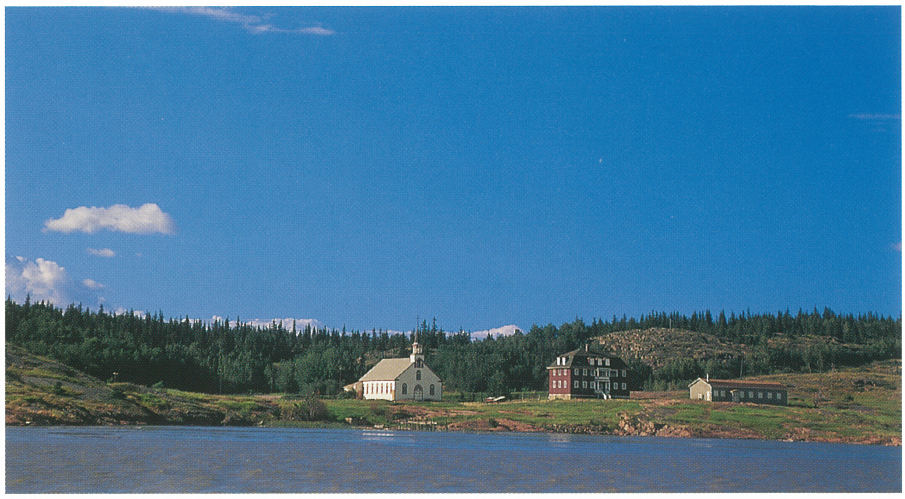
ALEC BRUNO
Alec trapped fine furs on trapline N22 which included a large portion of northern Saskatchewan. Several trappers were assigned to this trapline and managed themselves using traditional trapping rules and relations.

"No water, no rats. After 1967, Reserve 201 was never the same. Without water, nothing grows. By 1969, there was no water nowhere....We blame BC Hydro for the change in the delta.

"When we moved to Fort Chip, everything changed. We didn't have that lifestyle any more. The reason we moved into town was that the delta dried up. Indian Affairs knew about that, but they always used 'school' as the reason we moved families.

"My way of life has been taken away from me. Of course I miss it. I go over it in my mind all the time. My mind is always out there on the land. You don't forget it. It was the only life I knew. It was a good life."

experienced in the mid-1940s. This greatly affected the ability of delta trappers to continue their trade and forced many of them out of business. As the prices of fine furs rose in the late 1970s and 1980s, some Athabasca Chipewyan people temporarily resumed trapping for fine furs and began to participate in muskrat harvesting again. But the combined effects of falling fur prices and the depletion of the muskrat population in the delta due to the dam sealed the fate of the Chipewyan trapping industry. ACFN trappers were not able to sustain themselves without a healthy muskrat harvest.



Fort Chipewyan
The Holy Angels Residential School was demolished in 1976. Left standing today, are the Roman Catholic Church, "The Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary" built in 1909 and the rectory built in the early 1950s.

To support themselves and their families many trappers took jobs as labourers and found other seasonal work. However, a significant number of men continued to trap and hunt during one or two seasons and found outside employment for the rest of the year. Many families moved into Fort Chipewyan and Fort McMurray around this time to improve their chances of finding work. Those who did move continued to hunt, trap and fish during specific seasons.

Other forces pushing the ACFN people away from the land had been present for many years. Since the 1940s the residential school mission in Fort Chipewyan had been taking the Chipewyan children from the lands. By moving into town the Chipewyan people could be closer to their children. They would also have easy access to medical care and social assistance. As well, there were a few jobs to be had with the bands and government in Fort Chipewyan and Fort McMurray. However, these northern centres still didn't offer a solid foundation of wage-based employment.

The majority of the people knew only one way of life – trapping and living off the land. Their traditional bushman skills didn't provide the trappers or their children with the skills they needed for employment. While they were used to cycles of abundance and scarcity on the land, many were experiencing a poverty unlike any they had known before. Most didn't even have a house of their own, so it was not unusual for as many as 20 people to live under one roof without work or other meaningful activity.

Drastic Changes

Old Ways, New Ways

Life changed drastically for the ACFN people after they moved off the land and into town. These are only some of the ways their current lifestyle differs from their traditional lifestyle on the land:

Traditional Lifestyle	Current Lifestyle
Trapping as a livelihood	Working for wages or receiving welfare
Country foods from the land	Store bought foods and fast foods
Moccasins	Store bought shoes
Stories and legends	Television and video games
Medicine from the land	Medicine from the nursing station
Dog teams	Skidoos or quads
Sharing	Not sharing
Child rearing by all	Child rearing by nuclear family
Traditional language	English
Problem-solving by healing circles	"I'll do it on my own" attitude
No diabetes	Diabetes common
Living off the land	Making short visits to traditional lands



Dogsleds & Snowmobile
Dogsleds were replaced by the snowmobile in the late 1960s. This cut down the need to fish for dog food and allowed trappers to travel farther and faster.

This new way of living created many social problems. Drinking, family violence, and sexual abuse were not uncommon. At first most Dene families still had their cabins to go to on the weekends, where they carried on traditional life. They hunted for birds in the spring. In the fall they hunted birds and moose and gathered berries. They hunted big game and participated in commercial fishing. But most stayed in town for freeze-up and break-up. If the men stayed out in the fall or spring, the women usually stayed in town so the children could attend school. Some people managed to continue trapping, fishing and hunting for a living but they were very few.

> "Today, a lot of the kids don't have the slightest idea of what living out on the land is all about. You want your children to know about their culture and traditional way of life."
>
> ACFN Elder Alec Bruno

On the land, families worked and played together and sharing was a way of life. After they settled into town life, ACFN people were more reluctant to share meats and other products from the land. Now, when a hunter killed a moose, only immediate family members expected a share of the meat. Instead of being reared by the extended family group, children were raised in isolated nuclear families. Watching television and playing video games took the place of hearing traditional stories and legends by the campfire. Living in town, the people depended more and more on store-bought food and fast food. As they became less active and adopted unhealthy non-traditional diets, they became susceptible to diabetes.

No longer living on the land, the ACFN people were losing not only the occupational basis of their culture but the traditional knowledge and skills they needed to pursue their traditional livelihood. Elders and parents had passed on their knowledge of traditional life and trapping to their children for generations. The decline of trapping and other traditional activities also brought a decline in the passing of this knowledge.

ACFN Elder Alec Bruno regrets this loss: "Today, a lot of the kids don't have the slightest idea of what living out on the land is all about. You want your children to know about their culture and traditional way of life."

The Economics of Trapping

Trapping, like farming, depends upon natural cycles and market prices. If either does not cooperate, it becomes extremely difficult to make a living as a trapper. When prices for fine furs were high, trapping could be a profitable occupation. When they were low, or the allowable numbers were regulated, trapping became uneconomic, even when supplemented by traditional foods and a traditional lifestyle.

Since the 1950s there have been significant fluctuations in the prices of various furs depending on availability. Beaver prices remained relatively stable through a gradual decline from $70 to $100 per pelt in the 1950s to between $20 and $50 per pelt in the 1990s. Mink prices generally followed the same trend. Lynx prices were relatively stable during the 1950s and 1960s, but spiked upwards in the 1970s and 1980s, only to fall significantly in the 1990s. Fisher and martin prices likewise climbed in the late 1980s and dropped significantly in the 1990s.

Muskrat prices were very strong – above $10 per pelt – before 1950, but dropped off during the 1950s to between $5 and $10 per pelt. The price of muskrat rose to the $10 level again during the mid-1970s and early 1980s, only to plunge to record lows in the 1990s.

Over the same period – 1950s through 1990s – a number of factors affected the availability of various furs, including natural fluctuations and cycles, over harvesting, depletion and regulation. Among natural factors, for example, the rabbit cycle would affect the cycle of the lynx and other carnivores that prey on rabbits. Likewise, mink feed on clams, fish and muskrat and are found close to waterways. So when the muskrat population declined after the Peace/Athabasca delta dried up, the delta mink population fell victim as well.

Among human factors, competition, waste and over harvesting by settler-trappers impacted Aboriginal people who relied on trapping as a traditional livelihood. Government regulations also affected the economics of fur trapping. For example, ACFN Elder Charlie Voyageur used to trap 50 to 70 lynx a year on his trap line north of Lake Athabasca. But in the mid-1960s, the government surveyed lynx populations and laid down a restriction of one lynx per line.

It also limited otter and wolverine to one each. However, the restriction was based on a miscalculation. In the study, the government grouped the Fort Chipewyan area in with the open farm country of Lac La Biche, failing to realize they were different ecosystems. The resulting restrictions made the trapping of lynx, otter and wolverine uneconomical for ACFN trappers.

The introduction of the snow machine in the late 1960s and early 1970s cut down the need to fish for dog food and allowed trappers to travel farther and faster. But it also added new costs to the supplies and equipment an Aboriginal trapper needed to remain competitive. Rising costs plus the gradual decline of beaver and mink prices put continuing economic pressures on ACFN people who depended on trapping for a living.

Given all these factors, it wouldn't take much to upset the delicate balance of the fur economy. When the Bennett Dam was constructed in 1968, its effect on the muskrat harvest in the Peace/Athabasca delta struck a devastating and lasting blow to the trapper's traditional livelihood. This along with the general fall in fur prices eventually caused the industry to collapse.



Lynx
In the mid-1960s, the government surveyed lynx, wolverine and otter populations and laid down a restriction of one of each per line. These restrictions made trapping uneconomical for ACFN trappers.



Eliza Flett lived and raised her family with her husband on the trapline for many years.

CHAPTER NINE

Respecting and Preserving Traditional Knowledge

Traditional knowledge is the body of skills and knowledge Aboriginal people use to survive and to live in harmony with their environment. Like learning to swim – traditional knowledge doesn't come from a book. It is handed down by the Elders through the generations and forms the core of the person and the community.

The saying "it takes a whole village to raise a child" aptly describes how the ACFN community passed on traditional knowledge and skills to their children. Parents and grandparents, extended family and friends were all involved in teaching the next generation about their culture and environment. The men taught the younger boys how to track, hunt or trap each species of animal their people used for food or fur. They taught them how to make traditional traps and how and where to set their traps. They showed them how to navigate on the land and how to remember landmarks.

Parents and grandparents, extended family and friends were all involved in teaching the next generation about their culture and environment.

The women taught the younger girls how to cook, sew, can fruits and vegetables, and prepare meats and grease. They showed them how to tan hides, how to make clothing from moose and caribou hides, and how to stretch and prepare furs. They also taught the girls how to collect feathers, make bedrolls and pillows, and collect and preserve medicines and berries.

All young people were taught how to care for dogs and how to use dog teams. They learned migration routes, the locations of fish lakes and spawning areas, and how to set nets in summer and winter. They learned how to forecast the weather, to build shelters, and to listen to their environment. Safety and respect were always an important part of the lessons the children learned from an early age.

In addition to practical traditional knowledge and skills, Elders taught children their people's history and culture through stories and legends. Traditional knowledge was the means by which the ACFN people maintained and promoted their cultural and spiritual identity. For example, although there is no Dene word for "please," children learned that sharing was a way of life and an integral part of their culture. This extended even to a form of traditional adoption whereby people with many children would give a child to a childless couple.

Respecting and Preserving Traditional Knowledge

Traditional knowledge in practice

Through a lifetime's experience of trapping and hunting the ACFN Elders have gained a wealth of knowledge about the characteristics, habits and locations of many species of animals. Elder Pat Marcel, for example, described how to hunt moose along a river. When the hunter finds moose tracks, he moves away from the tracks and down wind of the moose. He then approaches the tracks again and again to determine when the moose is preparing to sleep. As the animal prepares to sleep it doubles back towards its route to ensure it isn't being followed. When he sees the tracks double back, an experienced hunter takes the opportunity for the kill.

The Sacred Call of the Loon

Listening carefully to what the environment has to tell them is an important part of the traditional knowledge of the ACFN people. Many Elders of the ACFN community say that if they listen a loon will tell them what is happening around the water. For example, loons have certain calls for when they see an animal enter the water, and others to note an animal passing by. Taken in this context many Aboriginal stories and legends that tell of birds talking to people are easily understandable. Some ACFN Elders consider the loon sacred and believe the spirits of their ancestors speak to them through the loon.

Following tracks is also the key to successful caribou hunting. A skilled Dene hunter could spot caribou tracks many months old. By following tracks and knowing caribou feeding habits, he would be able to harvest a caribou in a matter of three days. Knowing the feeding habits of bears, ACFN hunters quietly drift down river and listen. Bears feed along riverbanks and are very noisy eaters.

ACFN trappers know they will find lynx where there are rabbits and mice. They know wolverine are travellers and are very fierce and powerful. Charlie Voyageur says he once found a wolverine that had dragged a trap around all winter and still fought to the end. On the other hand, he says, the ermine, or weasel, can be friendly if approached carefully and fed. ACFN people learn how to trap mink or marten with a traditional deadfall trap, made by supporting a few large logs on small sticks. To get the bait, the animal has to pull on a stick. This causes a log to fall, trapping the animal underneath. ACFN children learn that the best way to remove a porcupine quill from a dog's muzzle is to first cut off the end of the quill and allow it to deflate.

How to Tan a Hide

Tanning hides is an important part of the traditional knowledge passed down by ACFN women to the next generation. This method of tanning a moose hide is similar to the method used to prepare the hides of caribou and other large animals:

Soak the hide in water. Then scrape off all the flesh – a traditional scraper was made from the leg bone of a moose or caribou – and remove the hair. Work the moose brains and fat into the hide to keep it supple. Soak the hide for 24 hours, wring it out and roll it. Let the hide swing over a fire to dry. Scrape it again. Sew the hide and smoke it again until it is ready.

ACFN women made a variety of items from moose hide, including shirts, pants, mittens, slippers and covers.



Elders know the cycles of the animals they trap and hunt. For example, snowshoe hares, which the ACFN people shoot or snare for food and fur, go through seven- to 10-year cycles. Each family would harvest hundreds of rabbits a year. Rene Bruno recalls a winter when other animals were scarce and he lived entirely on rabbits. During the spring trapping season on the delta, trappers know how to check the "pushups" – muskrats' mud and stick homes – with a rat spear. They then open the rats' plunge hole and place a trap on the feeding platform. Elders and even the children were able to call muskrats by emulating their mating calls.

The women Elders of the ACFN have acquired a wealth of traditional knowledge about the uses of various medicinal herbs, which they passed on to the girls of the community. For example, rat root, Labrador tea, mint and tamarack bark could be boiled together to make a remedy for colds and sore throats. Rat root alone could be chewed as a mouth freshener or to soothe a sore throat, while tamarack bark could be chewed to a pulp and placed on cuts as an antiseptic. Spruce gum placed on cuts also acted as an antiseptic and prevented scarring. Dried puffballs were used to stop bleeding and when inhaled protected the lining of the nose in cold weather.

Mountain ash was used for heart ailments and in Dene is called "naidii dechen" or "medicine stick." Willow fungus made a good mosquito repellent. The girls learned also that, when gathering herbs for medicines, they must pay respect to Mother Earth by sprinkling or burying tobacco in the place where the herb was harvested.

The whole family had roles to play in making dry fish and the children learned how this was done by assuming increasingly more responsible tasks as they grew older. The young children washed the fish, while the older ones did the scaling. Other family members sliced the fish and the men hung the fish on poles to dry in the sun and wind. The people would gather diamond willow wood and alder for the smoking fire, meanwhile regularly checking the fish to ensure it wasn't spoiling. Children kept the blackbirds away with slingshots or .22 rifles. It took about a day for the fish to dry, and in good weather, the dry fish stayed on racks overnight. Then the backs were cut off and the fish were put on sticks and hung in the smoke house for about two days until it was ready for storage.

Traditional knowledge also benefits settler society

The examples mentioned above are only a small part of the vast storehouse of traditional knowledge the ACFN Elders passed on to the next generation of their people. They illustrate clearly how the traditional lifestyle of the ACFN people was based on a uniquely intimate knowledge of the land and a respectful relationship with the environment. Because of this, traditional knowledge is useful not only to First Nations peoples but to settler society as well. The Elders' knowledge of animal habitat and behaviour, for example, can be useful for resource management, for preserving food opportunities for Aboriginal people, and for planning industrial development in a way that optimizes environmental sustainability.

Settler society sometimes recognizes the value of traditional knowledge and attempts to "collect" it from the Elders the way one would catalogue the various plants and animals in an ecosystem. But, traditional knowledge goes far beyond merely "collecting" information. It also includes knowledge about the inter-relationships among the plants and animals of an ecosystem. Traditional knowledge must be practised by gaining one's livelihood from the land over the days and months, seasons and years while living in tune with the environment. This means that

scientists, resource managers and industrial planners need to bring the Elders into the planning process and continuously consult them in order to obtain the benefits of their traditional knowledge.

Pat Marcel told a story about how consulting the Elders could have saved some fish biologists from Edmonton a lot of time and money. The biologists came up north to tag pickerel and without asking advice from anyone locally, they built a fish trap on the Maybelle River. Pat's father, Benjamin Marcel, explained to them that there were no fish spawning in the Maybelle River. In fact, he told them that these fish spawn in the lakes and bays. The biologists ignored this information and continued in their misguided study. After several days without success, they finally came to Benjamin Marcel. He showed them where the fish spawned and where to place their nets and traps. Marcel's sons made the biologists' tagging job easier by helping them set their nets on the channel where the river enters the lake.

"Extra Virgin" Bird Oil and Indian Popcorn

The ACFN people used every part of the animals they hunted, fished or trapped including the fat, which they rendered into grease or oil. Bear fat was rendered into grease and lard for bannock, but according to one Elder, "Bird oil is better oil, like your extra virgin oil."

The rendering process for bear fat produced a tasty byproduct called "Indian popcorn." Rendering the fat would take a day and involved cutting the fat away from the meat and into one-inch cubes. The cubes of fat were placed in a large pot and heated slowly until the fat was liquefied. At this point, remnants would be floating on the top and would be skimmed off. This "Indian popcorn" was considered a delicacy and was eaten with bannock or dried meat. The rendered fat was poured into jars and stored in the root cellar for winter use.

CHAPTER NINE

Respecting and Preserving Traditional Knowledge

The ACFN Elders point out that resource managers could have learned a lesson or two from Chief Jonas Laviolette, who kept the muskrat population on the delta healthy through a quota system on Reserve 201 during the 1940s and 1950s. Chief Laviolette set limits on the numbers of muskrats each family could harvest based upon his traditional knowledge of the muskrat. He had no muskrat surveys or scientific studies to consult, but only his traditional understanding of the capacity of the delta and the ability of the muskrat to reproduce. This kind of traditional knowledge could be very useful in managing regional resources in the Fort Chipewyan area.

Controlled burning is another traditional way the Aboriginal people exercised their stewardship of the land. Arsene Bernaille told how his grandfather would light a fire around the edge of Lake Athabasca to promote berry growth and add new habitat for moose. The Chipewyan people conducted burns regularly to maintain buffalo habitat in the area that is now inside Wood Buffalo National Park. But ever since the Aboriginal people were prevented from burning in this region, wildfires have been more frequent in the park.

Charlie Voyageur told about the spring when he was 11 years old and was out picking eggs. One day he left his campfire burning while he picked duck eggs and the fire got away from him. His father was going to punish him for letting the fire go out of control, but his grandfather said: "Leave the kid alone – he has done the country good." "Two years later the raspberries were tremendous in that area," Charlie recalled.

Charlie Voyageur and Pat Marcel explained how traditional knowledge could be used to dam and divert water to preserve Jackfish Lake as a spawning lake for many kinds of fish including whitefish, pickerel and suckers. At one time Richardson River used to feed into the lake through Jackfish Channel. However, the channel was diverted away from the lake to provide some people access to their cabin. As a result, the channel going out to the lake is now too small and freezes over, making it difficult for fish to spawn in early spring. The Elders recommend that the old channel be opened to allow more water to flow, as it did before, into the lake.

This would refresh the lake and allow more fish to spawn. Their recommendation is based on broad, in-depth knowledge of the area, the species of fish and their behaviour, and the ecology of the area. It is also based on the need of the ACFN people to continue to live off the land and to harvest the fish in their traditional way. Water diversion is a common aboriginal traditional technique for maintaining fish populations. But government officials are reluctant to approve the diversion of Jackfish Channel because they do not understand the ecology of the area.

Scientists often receive the benefits of ACFN traditional knowledge without giving proper credit to the Elders who help them. Charlie Voyaguer frequently takes muskrat surveyors out to test for muskrats on the delta, but although he has been involved in many studies, he has never seen the published reports. In fact, many people have come to the area to do studies or make films and have recorded traditional knowledge. But the Elders who help them rarely get credit in the films or scientific papers produced even though they often have a great deal to do with the success of the projects. Elders also resent the fact that they never receive copies of the studies or films that are produced with their help. They are determined that in the future traditional knowledge will be treated properly, with acknowledgement and compensation given to the true owners of the information.



Lake Athabasca
Traditional knowledge must be practised by gaining one's livelihood from the land over the days and months, seasons and years while living in tune with the environment.

CHAPTER NINE

Respecting and Preserving Traditional Knowledge

A fundamental right of Aboriginal people

The ACFN people believe that not only should Aboriginal people receive credit for sharing their traditional knowledge, they should also have a guarantee that they will be consulted and their voices heard on any issues having to do with industrial development or resource management in northern Alberta.

Traditional Rights

"Indigenous peoples have the right to practise and revitalize their cultural traditions and customs. This includes the right to maintain, protect and develop the past, present and future manifestations of their cultures, such as archaeological and historical sites, artifacts, designs, ceremonies, technologies and visual and performing arts and literature, as well as the right to the restitution of cultural, intellectual, religious and spiritual property taken without their free and informed consent or in violation of their laws, traditions and customs."

From the United Nations
"Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples," article 12, 1993.

Recent Supreme Court decisions have supported the Aboriginal peoples' legitimate claim to exercise their traditional lifestyle on Crown lands. Recent court rulings in British Colombia have established that private companies also have a duty to consult with Aboriginal peoples before undertaking any activity on their traditional lands. In a landmark case, infringement was deemed to refer not only to creating undo hardship, but also to denying Aboriginal Peoples their preferred way to exercise their right to hunt and fish for food.

ACFN Elders have noted that the availability of traditional foods has been declining due to intensive industrial development in the oil sands region, hydro-electric developments, and competitive hunting and recreational harvesting. As a result, they say, their preferred way of hunting and fishing has been affected. Therefore it is imperative that Aboriginal Elders be included in consultations with respect to resource developments and in regional resource planning, not only for their vast understanding of the resource, but to supply information on aboriginal harvest requirements as stipulated in the Canadian Constitution.

Going Home

The case has been made that preserving traditional knowledge is important not only for the future of the ACFN, but also for the scientific community, for resource managers and for commercial fishermen. In order for this to happen, the ACFN people must be able to pursue their traditional harvesting activities as they and their ancestors did when they lived in micro-villages. But the impact of settler society has taken away much of their opportunity to continue their traditional way of life on the land.

At one time the ACFN people centred their traditional harvesting around four micro-village areas – Jackfish on the Peace/Athabasca delta, Birch River and what is now Wood Buffalo National Park, Point Brule and Poplar Point on the Athabasca River, and Old Fort Point. Now, three out of the four have been impacted by settler society. The park pushed people out of Birch River; the delta was devastated; and oil sands plants are impacting the Athabasca River. The ACFN people were forced, not by choice, to relocate to the north shore of Lake Athabasca.

However, there are areas on the south shore of Lake Athabasca that are core to the ACFN traditional lands. The south shore has not been as impacted by settler society and is one area that may offer economic potential for the ACFN people. Through the exchange of land, the ACFN is looking to revitalize their community. Using traditional harvesting and tourism as an economic base, the ACFN will once again have a solid footing on the land from which they can pass on their traditional knowledge and culture to their children. As Chief Archie Cyprien says: "It is time to go home."

Glossary

The following are traditional Dene names for the plants and animals found on the traditional lands of the ACFN people:

Fur Bearing Animals	
Beaver	Tsha
Ermine/Weasel	Techkale
Fisher	Tha chok
Grey Wolf	Nuneá
Hare/Rabbit	Gah
Lynx	Chize
Marten	Tha
Mink	Tehjuzi
Muskrat	Dzen
Otter	Nambe
Porcupine	Tsee
Red Fox	Nagee thoashe
Red Squirrel	Dlie
Silver Fox	Tsamba nagidé
Skunk	Nooltsee
Wolverine	Naghaye

Big Game Animals	
Moose	Deniye
Female Moose	Deni es'udahi
Black Bear	Sas
Caribou	Etthën
Barren Land Caribou	Ot'thelie thenne
Woodland Caribou	Thunzea
Bison	Ejëre

Fish	
Jackfish/Pike	Uldai
Pickerel	Ehch ui
Sucker	Gothéchaé
Trout	Luézané
Whitefish	Lú
Grayling	Sat ié/Ts ét ite

Birds	
Common Loon	Ta tsenne
Grebe	Notha tselle
Whistling Swan	Gogoos
Canada Goose	Ha chok
Snow Goose	Ho ga
Mallard	Tsheth tshok
Canvasback	Thaeeoée
Teal	Edjowasé
Pintail	Otchel tshethe
Common Golden Eye	Bedthe yelah
Ruffed Grouse	Et'theree
Sharp-tailed Grouse	Dih
Sandhill Crane	Delth
Willow Ptarmigan	K'asba
Wavies/Grey-fronted Goose	Da theth

Berries, Trees and Medicinal Plants	
Blueberry	Tsatchoth
Highbush Cranberry	Ts utséljié
Lowbush Cranberry	Na clre
Raspberry	Dakalé jié
Saskatoon	K ihijié
Strawberry	Idziyazé
Birch	Ki
Jackpine	Gani
Muskeg	Niteli
Rosehip	Ihtsoté
Sweetgrass	Tt otsén
Tamarack	Nithe
Poplar	K és
White Spruce	Tsuchoghé
Spruce Gum	Eldzéghé
Labrador Tea	Naghodhi

Credits

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