Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation
Traditional Land Use Study

Credits:

The main credit for this work must go to the ACFN Elders who have provided the knowledge and experience that is described in this book. Thanks also goes to the Traditional Land Use Committee who supervised the study and contributed many hours into telling the authors about their land use and history. Thanks go to the Chief and Council for initiating and supporting the project and to the many contributors from industry and government who understood the importance of this type of initiative. Also thanks go to many band members, trainees and administrators who supplied pictures, attended interviews and helped to produce this publication.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The K'ai taile dene or Athabasca Chipewyan people have occupied the lands shown on the map below for thousands of years. At least 3,000 years ago as the last ice sheets melted northwards, they began to migrate into these lands from the Yukon tundra and Boreal forests of what is now central Alberta and northern BC. Archeological information suggests that the Chipewyan (Dene) and their ancestors had lived in these lands for at least 2,600 years.[1] However, in the late 18th century, due to the influences of the fur trade, the Chipewyan people migrated back to the Boreal forest and changed their land use significantly. During the last century, influences of the settler society caused the Athabasca Chipewyan peoples to further reduce their traditional land use activities and move into small settlements within the Boreal Forest. Now, although they still go out on the land to hunt and fish, most members of the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation (ACFN) live in or around Fort Chipewyan or Fort McMurray.

Although the history of the land use of the Athabasca Chipewyan people includes many changes, the core of their identity and culture comes from their relationship with the land. They continue to hunt and gather, harvest animals and plants and collect traditional medicines, sharing in the Aboriginal spiritual understanding of

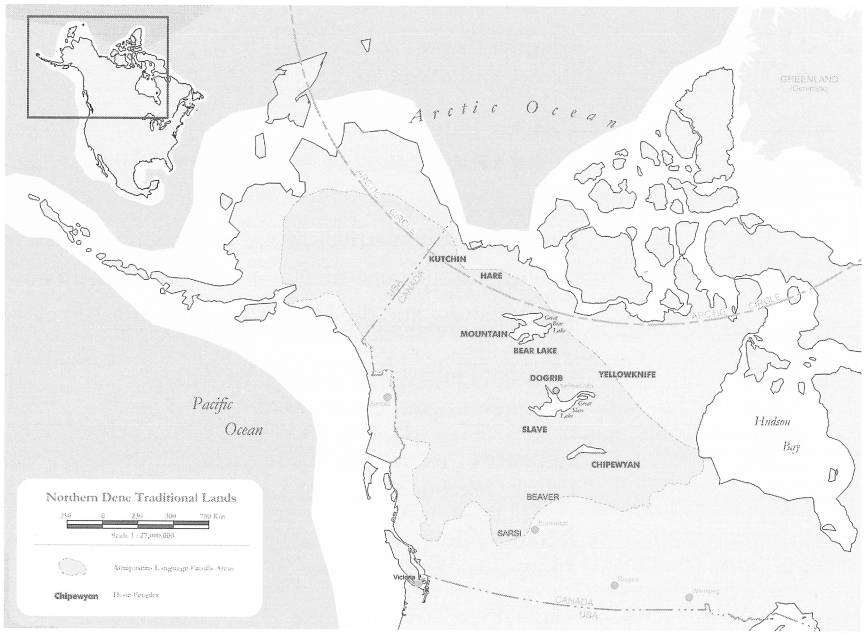
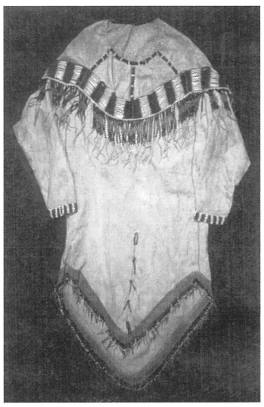


FIGURE 1.1
The Northern Athapaskan-speaking people can be collectively referred to as Dene, or "the people." The Mackenzie Dene include the Kutchin, Hare, Mountain, Bear Lake, Dogrib, Yellowknife, Slave and Chipewyan peoples.

1 The Taltheilei People are Dene ancestors and occupied what is now considered to be Dene traditional lands as the Wisconsin Glaciation receded approximately 3,000 years ago.



The word "Chipewyan" derives from the Cree name "witshipeean" for their Athapaskan neighbours; it means "pointed skins", referring either to the form in which they dried their beaver skins, or the shape of their original skin shirt tails which were pointed, like those of the Eskimo, before and behind" Duncan, Kate C. Northern Athabascan Art: A Beadwork Tradition. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre: 1989.

the land. The reduction in land use is threatening many aspects of their identity and culture. Because of this, it has become very important to record and document the land use activities and knowledge of the Elders. This traditional land use study is part of the strategy for preserving and promoting the culture and identity of the Athabasca Chipewyan people.

This study details the traditional land use of the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation (ACFN) or K'ai taili dene as described by 32 Elders, supplemented by additional historical and archeological research. The Elder interviews, held during 2001 and 2002, include descriptions of hunting, fishing, trapping and gathering, as well as legends and stories of the Chipewyan people. This study combines the first hand knowledge of the Elders with historical and pre- and proto-contact research in an effort to describe the land use of these people from the earliest times. The study includes an overview of the pre-contact and historical land use regions, an analysis of the recent land use areas, and a description and discussion of their land use activities. The knowledge of the Elders includes descriptions of the animals, birds and plants that were and are harvested. The ACFN Elders have also provided a discussion of some aspects of traditional knowledge, including oral traditions and legends, as well as cultural, spiritual and heritage sites and activities.

Traditional land use studies often focus only upon the current land use activities of an Aboriginal group. However, in earlier times the ACFN land use extended far beyond the borders of their current harvest areas. Many of the traditions and characteristics of the Chipewyan people have evolved from earlier land use environments; therefore a complete land use assessment must include these earlier times. Before the arrival of the fur traders, Chipewyan peoples concentrated their activities in the taiga transition zone of what are now Nunavut, Manitoba, Alberta, Saskatchewan and the Northwest Territories. They occupied the lands between the Hudson Bay and the Athabasca and Slave Rivers. They nomadically harvested caribou for their survival. When the fur traders arrived they encouraged the Chipewyan people to move into the Boreal forest to trap and participate in the fur trade. After some reluctance the Chipewyan people did migrate into the Boreal forest but continued to maintain a nomadic life centered on the fur trade. Further settler influences encouraged the Chipewyan people to become less nomadic and

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forage around micro-villages established in the Boreal forest. The region the K'ai taile Dene or Athabasca Chipewyan people now call home is around Lake Athabasca, on the Peace Athabasca Delta and on the Athabasca River. It is in these areas that they were granted Reserves subsequent to Treaty 8. This study includes a review of the pre- and proto-contact information and discusses the land use of the ACFN peoples during three phases: the taiga-barren land nomadic period, the Boreal forest nomadic period and the micro-village period. Each land use period involves a different adaptation, different land use patterns and as a result, different traditional lands.



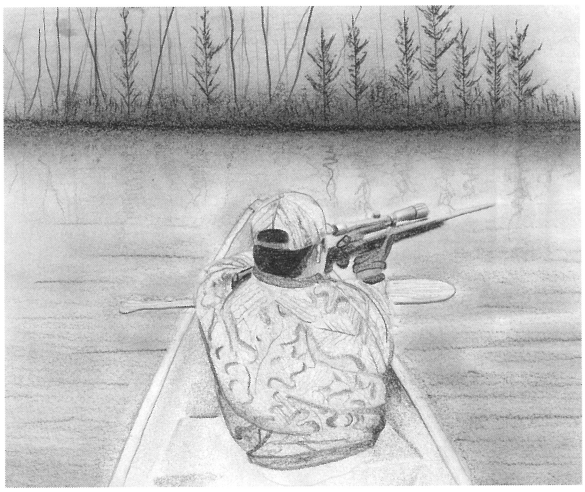
Teepees at Fort Chipewyan, 1899. Photograph donated by the Provincial Archives of Canada and courtesy of the Fort Chipewyan Museum, Alberta.

Chapter Outlines

Chapter 2 contains a description of the information on the pre-contact activities and migrations of the ancestors of the ACFN peoples. This chapter is based upon academic literature, traditional knowledge and legends. Of particular interest is the relationship between the legends, stories and the academic information available from archeological evidence. The traditional history of the ACFN ancestors is dramatically enhanced by their legends. Their oral traditions assist in placing the archeological information in context.

Chapter 3 deals with proto-contact land use obtained from historical documents and anthropological analysis of the Chipewyan peoples. This chapter discusses the evolution of these peoples from the nomadic caribou livelihood, through the fur trade in a boreal forest nomadic stage and eventually to the micro-village lifestyle. This chapter includes a map of early land use during the micro-village period developed through interviews with Elders.

Chapter 4 includes an historical overview of the events in the period after the Canadian Confederation. This chapter also includes a discussion of the life of the micro-village as described by ACFN Elders. Chapter 5 includes a discussion of the



Sketch Of Hunter by ACFN Member-Trevor Michael. ©ACFN.

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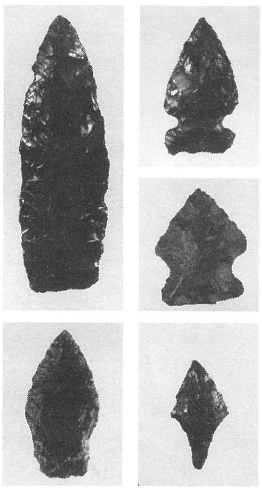

Arrow Heads and Points
Used by Athapaskan peoples 1,000 to 1,500 years ago in northeastern British Columbia.



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 tool kits 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.

annual rounds followed by a description of the Chipewyan people when they were established in their micro-villages. This chapter describes the major activities of each season and contains a story from an Elder about a typical summer hunting trip of that period.

Chapter 6 contains a discussion of the trapping activities and the furbearers harvested by the ACFN people. This Chapter includes a map of the locations where terrestrial and aquatic furbearers were harvested and contains a discussion of traditional traps and snares. The ACFN reliance on the muskrat harvest is explained, as well as a description of the winter fine fur-trapping season. The effects of the Bennett Dam on the Delta and the decline of commercial trapping are discussed. A map of the traditional land use for trapping is included in this chapter.

Chapter 7 includes a discussion of the big game harvested by the ACFN. Big game includes barren land caribou, moose, bear, woodland caribou, wood bison and deer. The Chipewyan peoples were referred to as the Caribou Eaters, as they followed the caribou herds and harvested barren land caribou as their main source of food. In the Boreal forest the main source of meat was moose supplemented by caribou, bison and bear. This chapter also includes maps showing the land use area for big game hunting.

Chapter 8 reviews the harvesting of fish by the ACFN. It includes a discussion of the types of fish caught and the methods of fishing they used. This chapter includes a description of how to make dryfish. A map of the locations of fish harvesting by the ACFN is also presented.

Chapter 9 reviews the harvesting of waterfowl and other birds by the ACFN people and includes a map of the harvesting locations for these birds.

Chapter 10 includes a description of the berries and medicines that were harvested by the ACFN and includes a discussion of the use of certain plants. Maps of the harvest locations are also provided.



Chipewyan Indian shooting a wood buffalo in winter. Reference NA-1185-12. Frederick Remmington, Artist. From "On Snow-shoes to the Barren Grounds" by Casper Whitney. P. 126. Photograph courtesy of Glenbow Museum, Calgary.

Chapter 11 includes place names of the ACFN traditional lands in both English and in Dene, which are clearly depicted on a map of the region.

Chapter 12 contains a discussion of some of the uses of traditional knowledge of the ACFN Elders. The application of the traditional knowledge of ACFN Elders to current issues and problems is an important part of the preservation of their culture and identity. In this chapter solutions to some environmental problems are suggested.

Chapter 13 discusses the traditional land use areas of the ACFN people from nomadic times through to the micro-village of the Boreal forest. This chapter contains an analysis of the intensity of land use in the most recent times and discusses the issues of boundaries and use of lands by more than one Aboriginal group.

Chapter 14, the conclusion, includes a discussion of the major results of this study including the evolution of land use by the Chipewyan people, the intensity of land use in the micro-village, the implications that government policy and industrial activities have had on the land use of these peoples, and how this study may be continued and used in the future.

CHAPTER TWO

Pre-contact Land Use

Inter-continental Migration

It probably would surprise many to realize that only 90 kilometers separate the shores of mainland Siberia and mainland Alaska today. Geologists have determined that during the last 100,000 years, a land bridge connected Siberia with North America over two time intervals; between 75,000 and 45,000 years ago, and then again between 25,000 and 14,000 years ago. As the glaciation increased the sea level dropped as much as 300 feet exposing the areas shown in orange on the map below.

Archaeologists generally accept that the first Paleo-americans migrated across the bearing land bridge – commonly called Beringia –during the later interval, 25,000-14,000 years ago. Archaeologists have suggested that northern Eurasia was not



FIGURE 2.1
Wisconsian Ice Sheet 12,000 Years Ago. Based on Atlas of the North American Indian, Waldman (2000) and The Sand Dunes of Lake Athabasca, Jonker and Rowe, (2001).

1 Klein, R.G. 1984. Mammalian Extinctions and Stone Age People in Africa. Quarternary Extinctions: A Prehistoric Revolution. P.S. Martin and R.G. Klein (Eds) University of Arizona Press, Tucson. pp. 553-573. 2 Yi, S and Clark G. 1985. The Dyuktai Culture and New World Origins. Current Anthropology 25(1): 1-13, 19-20. 3 Harrington, C.R. 1980. Faunal Exchanges between Siberia and North America: Evidence from Quaternary Land Mammal Remains in Siberia, Alaska and the Yukon Territory. The Ice-Free Corridor and Peopling of the New World. N.W. Rutter and C.E. Schweger (Eds) pp. 45-49. Canadian Journal of Anthropology 1(1). Edmonton, Alberta. 4 Grayson, Donald K. 1988. Perspectives on the Archaeology of the First Americans. Americans Before Columbus: Ice-Age Origins, compiled by R.C. Carlisle. pp. 107-123. Ethnology Monographs 12, Department of Anthropology, University of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

occupied until approximately 40,000 years ago[1] and the earliest archaeological sites close to western Beringia are only 14,000 years old.[2] Of the twenty-two species of mammals (not including people) known to have existed in northeastern Siberia at the time of the land bridge, twenty-one are also known to have existed in Alaska.[3] Thus, in the scheme of animal migration, the event of the first people crossing through Beringia into Alaska was a relatively anticlimactic event – it is more of a scientific dilemma attempting to explain why the Woolly Rhinoceros never made the crossing to Alaska.[4]

As discussed earlier, the Athapaskans probably had their roots in this early population of explorers but an archaeological connection is yet to be established.[5] However, traditional legends also provide valuable information about the pre-history of the Chipewyan peoples. Alexander Mackenzie noted that the Chipewyan people told a traditional story stating that they came from another country, inhabited by wicked people, and that they traversed a great lake full of islands.[6] Also, Father Breynat wrote of the "Caribou Eaters" talking about how their ancestors once lived on another continent to the west. They migrated eastward during a great famine.[7] These stories likely refer to the pre-historical journey of their ancestors across Beringia and support this anthropological theory.

Glacial Evolution

The glaciers covered much of northern Canada persisted until 13,000 to 12,000 years ago and during the Pleistocene. The big game or mega-fauna that migrated with people across Beringia became extinct 11,000 years ago. The Chipewyan legends often tell of giants, including giant beaver, which were actually a species of the now extinct mega-fauna.

The early Paleo-american cultural assemblages and patterns which once demonstrated strong evidence for a highly adaptive but basically similar tradition, evolved into more diverse traditions[8] thought to be a result of the isolation and environmental disruption brought on by the break-up and recession of the massive glaciers.[9] The Cree Lake Morraine (glacial deposits) located near the western end of Lake Athabasca in Northern Saskatchewan has been dated by Geologists to be 10,000 years old. It is understood that an 'ice-free corridor' existed which by this time in

5 Clark, Donald W. 1981. Prehistory of the Western Sub-arctic Handbook of North American Indians, Volume 6. Sub-arctic, June Helm (Ed) Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press. pp. 107-129.
6 Coutu, Phillip R., and Hoffman-Mercredi, Lorraine. Inkonse:Stones of Traditional Knowledge, A History of Northeastern Alberta. Edmonton: Thunderwoman Ethnographies, 1999. p. 19
7 ibid. Inkonse, p. 30 8 Willig, J. and C. M. Aikens.1988. The Clovis-Archaic Interface in Far Western North America. Early Human Occupation in Far Western North America: The Clovis-Archaic Interface. J.Willig, C.M. Aikens and J. Fagen (Eds) pp. 21-41. Nevada State Museum Anthropological Papers 21: 1-40. 9 Bonnichson et al. 1994. Human Adaptation at the Southern Margin of the Laurentide and Cordilleran Ice Sheets. Current Reserch in the Pleistocene 11:1994.

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North-eastern Alberta/Saskatchewan was several hundred kilometres wide.[10] This corridor separated the two great ice sheets; the Cordillera from the west and the Laurentide from the east, that had once almost completely covered the province; while claims have been made that this corridor was open for the majority of time since 55,000 years ago,[11] we only know for sure that the last major ice accumulations receded from north-eastern Alberta about 10,000 years ago. Thus, the Dene (Athapaskan's) could have existed as a distinct population as early as 10,000 or more years ago.

As the massive amounts of ice melted they created large lakes and flooding over vast areas of what is now northern Canada. The Chipewyan legends contain several flood stories.[12]

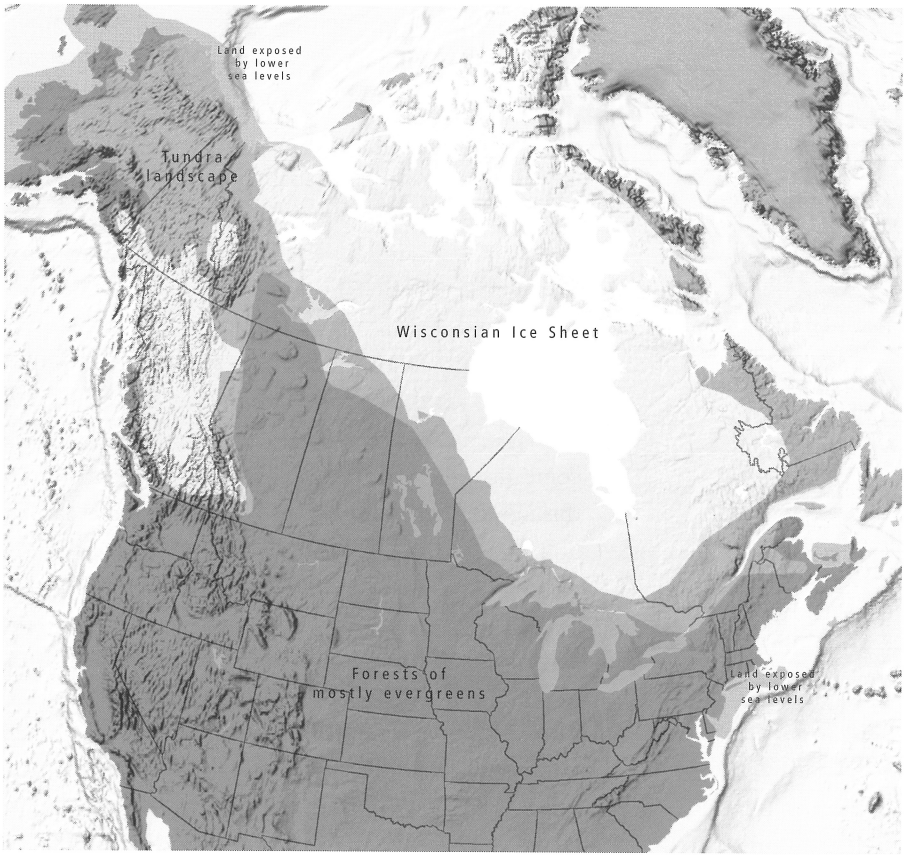

FIGURE 2.2
Wisconsian Ice Sheet 9,000 Years Ago. Based on maps from The Sand Dunes of Lake Athabasca, Jonker and Rowe, (2001).

10 David 1981 11 Reeves, Brian O.K. 1973. Culture Change in the Northern Plains: 1000 BC – AD 1000. Archaeological Survey of Alberta Occasional Paper Number 20.
12 Birket-Smith, Kaj, (2000). Contributions to Chipewyan Ethnology, eHRAF Collection of Ethnography, New Haven Connecticut, p. 83.



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.

There were at least two important early cultural traditions in the area: the Northwest Microblade tradition and the Northern Plano tradition. The earliest clearly identifiable tradition in North America is the Northern Plano. Distinctive spear points shaped like lance heads have been found in Alaska dating to about 10,500 years ago and in the Lake Athabasca region about 8,000 years ago. At this time there is evidence of peoples living in the areas of glacier edges as far north as the Great Slave Lake area indicating that people were very quick to take up land that the receding glacier had left behind. The people of the Northwest Microblade tradition are thought to have migrated into Alaska from Beringia about 11,000 years ago and are known for their small cutting tools. It represents a people whose culture was primarily based upon hunting caribou and fishing. For this, they developed tools that resemble small cutting and scraping tools. They are originally believed to have come directly from Siberia (where similar artifacts are found with similar dates) through Beringia and settled into the ice-free parts of the entire Canadian North, Northern British Columbia, and Northern Alberta. It is difficult for anthropologists to link specific artifacts and traditions to the ancestors of modern aboriginal groups. However, Dene legends contain interesting stories about their past. The Chipewyan legends contain a story of two giants that fought in the arctic many years ago. After being slain, one giant fell with his legs landing in the Arctic, his backbone forming the mountains, and his head landing close to where the Chipewyan people lived.[13] The legend talks about the "head of the giant" melting as a glacier would melt with the rivers (giant's blood) flowing from the body. This legend reinforces the evidence

13 ibid. Inkonse, pp. 16-18.

CHAPTER TWO

Pre-contact Land Use

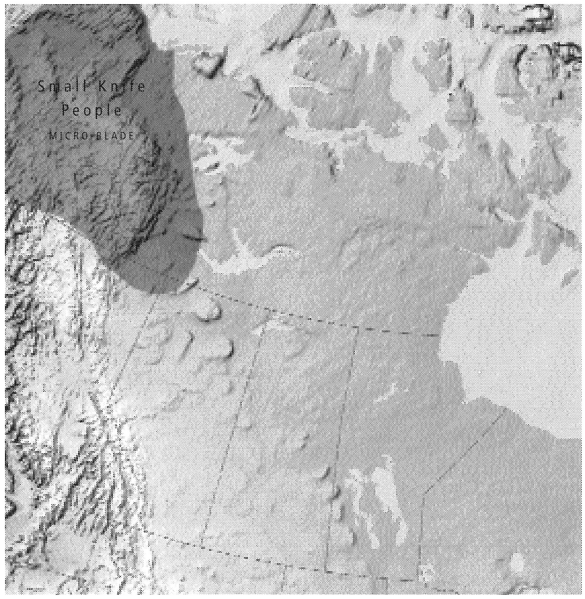

FIGURE 2.3
Paleo-aboriginal Times 11,000 to 8,000 Years Ago. Derived from The Sand Dunes of Lake Athabasca, Jonker and Rowe. 2001.

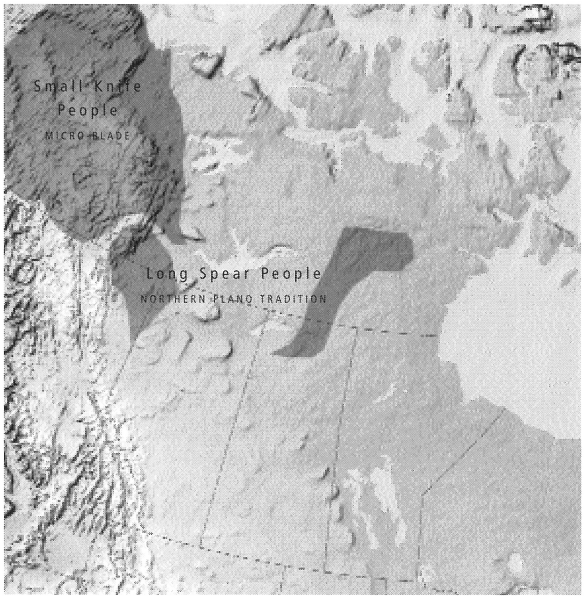

FIGURE 2.4
Paleo-aboriginal Times 8,000 to 6,5000 Years Ago. Derived from The Sand Dunes of Lake Athabasca, Jonker and Rowe, 2001.

that these people lived close to the melting glacier. ACFN Elders like Victoria Mercredi also told how the body of the giant represented the lands of the Dene peoples. This could speak to the migration of the Dene from the north and the other Dene groups such as the Beaver, Slave, Kwich'en, Yellowknife and Dogrib.

The microblade technology is understood to be used until historical times by the Inuit and the Athapascans. What is evident is that people with marine adaptations emerged on the west coast and along the perimeter of Arctic Canada around 9,000 years ago, and that Athapaskan peoples could be found living in the sub-arctic interior in Boreal Forest settings around 8,000 years ago.

While the tool kit of the people who remained in the Arctic appears to have stayed consistent over time, this is not the case for people who lived in the sub-arctic and further south.

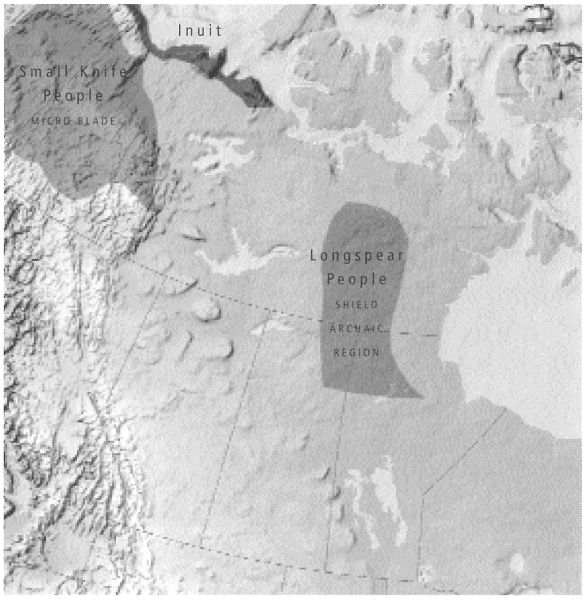

FIGURE 2.5
Paleo-aboriginal Times 6,5000 to 2,600 Years Ago. Derived from The Sand Dunes of Lake Athabasca, Jonker and Rowe, 2001.

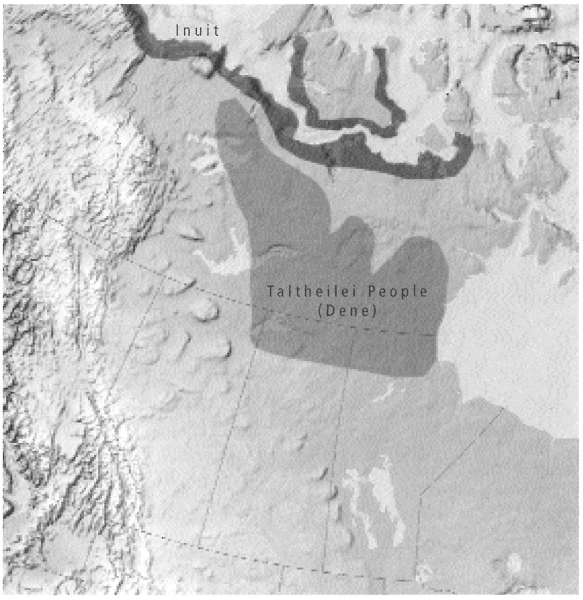

FIGURE 2.6
Aboriginal Times 2,600 to 1,500 Years Ago. Derived from The Sand Dunes of Lake Athabasca, Jonker and Rowe, 2001.

Likely influenced by seasonal climate changes, which transformed their landscape entirely in a matter of weeks each year, people further south realized that they required a specialized tool kit.[14] This kit must have been specific enough for the jobs it was needed for, yet general and simplified enough so that it would not inhibit the group's ability to remain nomadic. In North-western Canada, this specialization begins around 10,000 years ago.

Over time, the Northern Plano Tradition gradually evolved into what was named the Shield Archaic Tradition, which has been estimated to exist from 6,500 to 2,600 years ago.

14 Dumond, Don E. 1987. A Re-examination of Eskimo-Aleut Prehistory. American Anthropologist 89: 32-56.

CHAPTER TWO

Pre-contact Land Use

Boreal Forest and Barrenland Adaptations

It is in the taiga (boundary between the Boreal Forest and barrenlands) where the ancestors of the Dene people balanced hunting caribou, moose, beaver, bear, muskrat and fishing for survival. The Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation has carried on this land-based hunting regime to the present day. Dene (Chipewyan) prehistory is commonly termed the Taltheilei archaeological tradition. Around 3,000 years ago, the Taltheilei tradition represents continuity in the ancient adaptations made by all barren land Athapaskans including the Chipewyan.[15] The Taltheilei people are likely to have finished their migration to the northeast as the glacier receded as illustrated on the adjacent map.

The Taltheilei people are archaeologically visible around 3,000 years ago in the northern Prairie Provinces and northward into the tundra. These people, who spoke Athapaskan, are the ancestors of the Dene populations that exist today. In Lake Athabasca, these early settlers depended primarily upon caribou, however, a diverse hunting and gathering economy developed.

The oldest archaeologically 'true' Taltheilei sites (around 2,500 years old) are found in the sub-arctic within the Beverley caribou range, which stretches from well into the northern tundra, southward to the Slave River and Lake Athabasca areas. With the oldest sites being in the south, archaeologists speculate on a south/south-western origin for the Taltheilei peoples. Archaeological evidence from sites in northern Alberta and northern British Columbia appear to support this theory.

The Early Period of the Taltheilei is archaeologically visible from Great Bear Lake almost to northern Manitoba, and from Lake Athabasca to the large lakes on the lower Thelon River. Archaeologists believe that this very rapid occupation indicates rapid adjustment and alignment of the various community groups that would make up the Taltheilei peoples.

15 Gordon, Bryan H.C. 1977. Chipewyan Prehistory. Prehistory of the North American Sub-arctic. The Athapaskan Question. J.W. Helmer, S. Van Dyke, and F.J. Kense (Eds) Calgary: Archaeological Association. The University of Calgary, pp. 77-82.

At around 2,000 years ago, archaeologists believe that the Taltheilei peoples began to regionally specialize their technologies. Middle Talthelilei sites occur in a smaller area than the earlier Taltheilei sites between the districts of Mackenzie and Keewatin in the Beverly range. There have been scattered sites also found at Lake Athabasca, the upper Kazan River, and at South Indian Lake (in the Kaminuriak caribou range).

Approximately 2,000 years ago there was a volcanic eruption called the "White River Ash Falls" that may have had important effects upon the organization of the Dene peoples.[16] Possible volcanic eruptions are also present in the legends of the Dene peoples.[17] J. Ives (Workman 1979) has suggested that these eruptions may have contributed to the dispersal of the Dene peoples into the southern U.S. since 2,000 B.P.[18] The legend of the melting mountain tells about the people who are no longer able to understand each other's language indicating their longer-term separation.[19]

Among the Dene (Taltheilei), the Chipewyan grew to have the largest population and landmass of any northern group by the first half of the eighteenth century with an estimated barren land/Boreal forest population of approximately 4,000 people.[20] The Chipewyan used Caribou as their main food, clothing and shelter resource. Naturally, in such an unpredictable environment as the Boreal forest and barren lands, other game such as waterfowl and fish also supplemented the Chipewyan diet. The Taltheilei tradition is understood to represent continuity in the ancient adaptations made by all barren land Dene or Athapaskans.

16 Ives, John W. 1990. A Theory of Northern Athapaskan Prehistory. Boulder: Westwood Press and the University of Calgary Press. p. 42. 17 Ibid. Inkonse, p. 36, "The Mountain Which Melted". 18 Ibid. Ives, p. 43 – Workman (1979) 19 Dene Legend, ACFN Elders. 20 Mooney, 1928 and quoted in ibid, Gordon, Bryan. 1977.

CHAPTER THREE

Etthen eldeli Dene – "Caribou Eaters"



Summer Costume
This is a common style of clothing for the Dene people. Similar styles are used by the Kutchin, and several other western Athapaskan groups, including the Tanaina, Han Tutchane and Tagish. This garment is made of caribou hide and includes a hood and mittens.
The Athapaskans: Stranger of the North collected by R.H. Mulock, before 1955 NWMVI-2-432-c.

Etthen eldeli Dene – "Caribou Eaters"

In the late 1600s and early 1700s the Hudson's Bay fur traders referred to the different Aboriginal peoples they encountered as "Northern Indians" (The Dene) and "Southern Indians" (The Cree). David Thompson, a trader-surveyor of the late 18th century, recorded that the "Northern Indians" called themselves "Dinnie" (Dene) but that the Cree, their southern neighbours, called these peoples Chipewyan.[1] When the first fur traders entered North America each of the Dene peoples referred to themselves simply as Dene (the people). Each group of Dene people has a distinct dialect and history, and the different Dene groups were named based upon their occupation or location. However, the white traders came to use the names that the Cree had appointed them. "Chipewyan" or "pointed skins", refers to their style of clothing. However, in the Dene language, the Chipewyan were known as the "Caribou Eaters" or "Etthen-eldeli Dene" because they harvested large quantities of caribou.

This chapter outlines the Athapaskan language group and discusses the relationship between the Chipewyan people, other Athapaskan speakers and the Dene. The following sections discuss the historical aspects of Chipewyan evolution, land use and cultural adaptations from the time just before European contact, until the beginning of the 20th century.

1 Gillespie, Beryl C., (1981). Territorial Groups Before 1821: Athapaskans of the Shield and the Mackenzie Drainage, June Helm, ed. Subarctic. Handbook of North American Indians, Vol. 6 pp. 161-168, Washington: Smithsonian Institute Press.



Traditional Birch-bark cook pail
© Canadian Museum of Civilization,
RSM 560.

Chipewyan and the Athapaskan Languages

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," which likely refers to the Peace/Athabasca Delta, one of the largest fresh water deltas in the world.[2] The Athabasca Delta has been 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 activity for the fur trade. The muskrat furs from this area represented a standard to which all other muskrat were compared.[3] Also, the fishery on Lake Athabasca provided an ample supply to support both Aboriginal traditional use and the early fur trade establishments in the area. Today, the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation Reserve 201 includes approximately 1/3 of this important natural centre. It is therefore understandable that such importance was assigned to the word "Athabasca" and why this word became the modern name of a grouping of Aboriginal languages.

Today, Athapaskan languages include approximately 50 different North American communities.[4] These language communities can be divided into three major groups: the Pacific Coast groups, the Southern Athapaskan groups, and the Northern Athapaskan groups. The Pacific Coast languages include the Upper Umpqua, Tututni-Chasta Costa, Galice-Applegate and the Chetco-Tolowa. This language grouping extends through northern California and includes the Hupa, Mattole, Sinkyone-Wailaki and Cahto. Also a part of the Pacific Coast language group is the Kwalhioqua-Tlatskanai, which is now extinct.[5] The second group, the Southern Athapaskan, is termed Apachean and includes the Apache, Navajo, Mescalero, Jicarilla and Chiricahua of the southwestern United States. This grouping also includes the Kiowa Apache and Lipan on the adjacent plains.[6]

It is the third major grouping to which the Chipewyan belong. They are among the Northern Athapaskan speakers who inhabit what are now Alaska and the Western two-thirds of sub-arctic Canada. It is these people who occupy a land that can be called the "Denendeh". A map of the Athapaskan speakers of North America is presented on the following page depicting the three major geo-linguistic groups.

2 Ibid. Ives, John W. (1990) 3 ACFN Elder Interview (2002) 4 Clark, A. McFadyen, (1974) "The Athapaskans: Strangers of the North", Managing Editor, Norman J. Boudreau, National Museum of Man, Ottawa, Canada. 5 Krause, Michael E. and Golla, Victor K. (1981: 68)Northern Athapaskan Languages, in Handbook of North American Indians, ed. June Helm, Washington, Smithsonian Institute Press pp. 67-85. Reference from Ives, John W. A Theory of Northern Athapaskan Prehistory. Calgary: University of Calgary Press. (1990)
6 Ibid. Krause and Golla (1981: 68)

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CANOES
1975, Picture courtesy of Leonard Flett.

By comparing the languages of different Aboriginal groups, linguists and anthropologists are able to draw conclusions about the likely evolution and relationships between Aboriginal peoples.Of particular interest to the Chipewyan people is their close language relationship to the Apachean peoples of the southwestern United States. The similarity of these two languages indicates that these groups were closely associated in the recent past, perhaps as late as only 600 years ago. This is in contrast to the Athapaskan speakers of the west coast who likely split with the northern Athapaskans as much as 1,600 years ago.[7] This confirms that the Chipewyan language is very close to the Navajo language that was used during World War II to support the Allies' security.

The Dene "The People"

The Northern Athapaskan speakers are a single family of languages spoken over a contiguous area.[8] Jack Ives (1990) notes that the linguistic relationship between northern Athapaskan speakers is reflected in the social structure and cultural realities of the northern Athapaskan societies and that "social processes circulated people within and between different local and regional social groups."[9] These linguistic connections and social exchanges indicate that the Dene people have existed as a cultural group for many years. The Dene traditional stories and legends also reflect this historical relationship between these peoples.[10] Today, the northern Dene people identify themselves as a congruous cultural group and are developing this connection further in recent political actions.

The sharing, communication and circulation of the Dene was likely an adaptation that promoted security and survival of these peoples. The traditional circulation of individuals between bands supported economic and social cooperation and was likely an important adaptation during times of scarce game or other difficulties.[11] One such important adaptation was the sharing of meat. Sharing of traditional meats is still very much alive in the culture of the Chipewyan people,

7 Ibid. Clark, A. McFadyen, (1974). 8 Ibid. Krause and Golla (1981: 68) 9 Ibid, Ives, John W. (1990) 10 Ibid, Coutu and Hoffman Mercredi (1999) 11 Sharpe, Henry S., (2000) Cultural summary: Chipewyans. eHRAF Collection of Ethnography – Cultural View, p. 9.

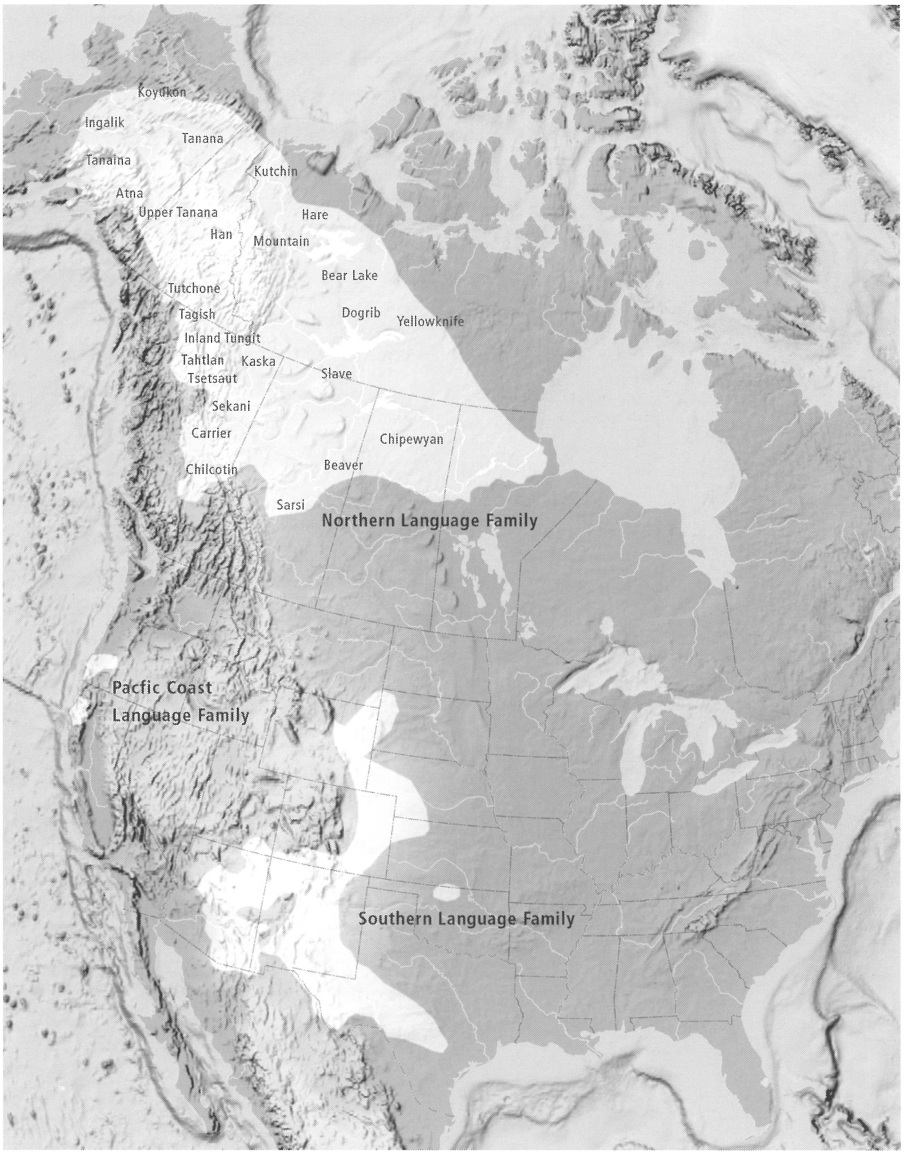

FIGURE 3.1
ATHAPASKAN LANGUAGE GROUPS.
Derived from the Atlas of the North American Indian, Waldman, 2000. The Athapaskan language groups extended over large portions of western North America. Although several Athapaskan languages are quite different, the southern languages of the Navajo and Apache are closely related to Chipewyan.

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although it may not be practiced as regularly.[12] There have been several studies of the social structures and marriage practices of different Dene peoples. These studies discuss the importance of intermarriage between groups and the implications of the intermarriage systems on language, culture and economic relationships.[13]

The pre-contact relationships between the different Dene language and cultural groups are not well documented. Given the linguistic connections however, there must have been significant inter-relationships between the different groups. Alexander Mackenzie noted that the Chipewyan and the Beaver Indians seemed very similar in their characteristics.[14] The habitat of the northern Dene people is close to that of the Chipewyan, Beaver, Sarcee, Slave and Dogrib people.

Linguistically, the Hare, Dogrib and Slave are closely related to the Chipewyan and are all classified as "Arctic Drainage Dene".[15] In contrast, both the Beaver and Sarcee are linguistically separated and culturally divergent from the Arctic Drainage Dene.[16] June Helm in her book, "The People of the Denendeh" includes a map of the major divisions of the Dene people, which shows the Chipewyan peoples traditionally occupying the southeastern portion of Denedeh.



First Nations trappers of the northwest. Reference NA-1406-113. Courtesy of the Glenbow Museum, Calgary.

12 Smith, G. E., (1978), The Emergence of the Micro-Urban Village Among the Caribou-Eater Chipewyan, Human Organization, Vol. 37, No. 1, Spring, 1978. 13 Sharpe, Henry S., (2000) The Chipewyan Hunting Unit; Helm, June, Bilaterality in the Socio-Territorial Organization of the Arctic Drainage Dene; Smith, J. G. E. (1975). The Ecological Basis of Chipewyan Socio-Territorial Organization, Ottawa: National Museum of Man Mercury Series.



FIGURE 3.2
Major Divisions of Northern Dene. This map is a composite of maps produced by June Helm, Jack Ives and the Atlas of the North American Indian. © ACFN.

14 Mackenzie, A. (1971) Voyages from Montreal on the River St. Lawrence through the Continent of North America to the Frozen and Pacific Oceans in the Years 1789 and 1793. Edmonton: M.G. Hurtig. 15 MacNeish, R. and Helm, J. (1956). Leadership Among the North eastern Athapaskans, Anthropologica 2: 131-163. As quoted in Ives, John W. (1990) 16 Carter, Robin Michael, (2000) Chipewyan semantics: form and meaning in the language and culture of an Athapaskan-speaking people of Canada/ Doc. Number 10, eHRAF Collection of Ethnography.

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The Chipewyan People

The Chipewyan were called the Etthen-eldeli Dene or "Caribou Eaters" because of their relationship with the large herds of caribou in the barren lands, the taiga, and the Boreal forest of northern Manitoba, Saskatchewan and the Northwest territories. They have also been known as the "Athapaskans" which was the Cree name for these "northern strangers".[17] Some were called "Kkrest'ayle kke ottine" meaning the " trembling aspen people" in the Dene language. This name refers to the Chipewyan people now living south and east of Fort McMurray. Yet another designation for the Chipewyan was the "Desne the ottine" or Desnedekenade meaning "great river people." The ACFN Elders interpreted this to mean "people living on the Athabasca River". It could also refer to those living on the Slave or Mackenzie Rivers.



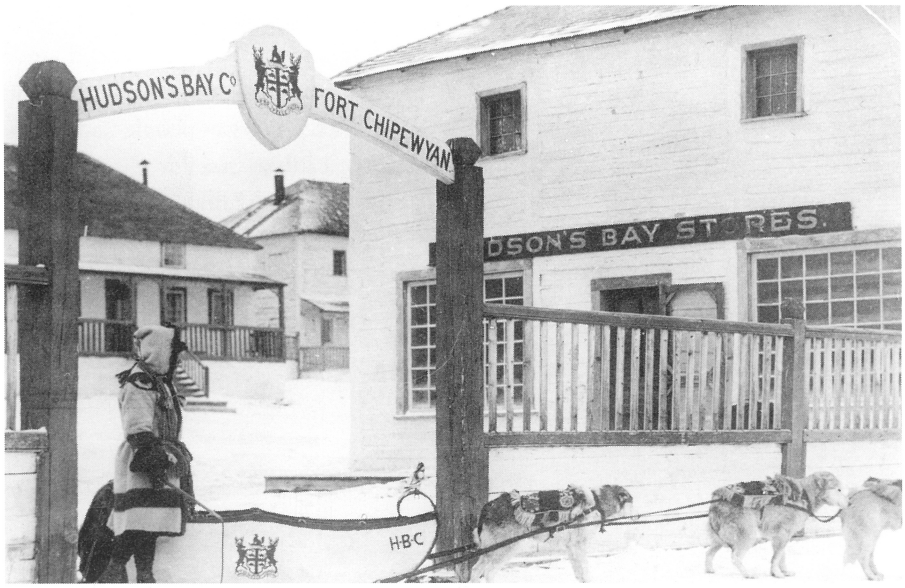
Chipewyan women and children are shown in front of a moose hide. Photo courtesy of the Fort Chipewyan Museum.

17 The Cree people called many other tribes "slaves" which meant "strangers".

There was another group of Chipewyan people in this area who were called the "Theilanottine" meaning "men of the end of the head" or "those who dwell at the head of the lakes". This name could refer to people associated with Lake Athabasca. The Athabasca Chipewyan people refer to themselves as K'ai taile dene or simply Dene. These names are Dene and come from traditional knowledge as passed on by the Elders and from records of the early fur traders.[18] It is difficult to accurately connect the different Chipewyan groups with specific ancestral groups. Their early movements and evolution has not been recorded and has changed quite dramatically since contact with settler society. The next sections of this chapter discuss the early history of the Chipewyan peoples and their evolution through the changes of the fur trade. An important aspect of this evolution is the social, cultural and economic adaptations of the Chipewyan peoples in response to those changes in their environment.

Early Contact

It has been approximately 320 years since the early European fur trade society made contact with the Etthen-eldeli-Dene or "Northern Indians". The first contact with the Chipewyan was on the Hudson Bay in the 1680s.[19] Since that time there have



Hudson's Bay Company post, Fort Chipewyan, Alberta, with cariole and dog team in foreground. Reference NA-2750-1. Photograph courtesy of Glenbow Museum, Calgary.

18 Smith, J. G. E., (1975). The Ecological Basis of Chipewyan Socio-Territorial Organization, Document Number 20, eHRAF, Collection of Ethnography.
19 J. C. Yerbury, (Summer 1976) The Post-Contact Chipewyan: Trade Rivalries and Changing Territorial Boundaries, Ethnohistory 23/3. Page 237

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Beaver photograph donated by the Provincial Archives of Canada and courtesy of the Fort Chipewyan Museum.

been significant changes in the circumstances of the Chipewyan peoples. Over those 320 years the effects of the fur trade culture and economy, changes in the caribou herds, resource scarcity resulting in famine, and the spread of diseases have greatly changed the original Chipewyan way of life. The memories and traditional knowledge of current Elders includes some knowledge of the earlier times. However, this knowledge does not provide sufficient information about the very early land use patterns of the Chipewyan peoples.

Based upon observations of the early explorers and fur traders[20] along with some traditional stories, we can surmise that early Chipewyan pre-contact livelihood was based upon caribou harvesting. Samuel Hearne[21] describes the wealth of the Chipewyan peoples during the time he spent with them in the 18th century before they had adapted to the fur trade. The Chipewyan people were nomadic and had an economic adaptation to caribou harvesting that allowed them a high level of affluence that Marshall Sahlins referred to with his groundbreaking paper, "The Original Affluent Society" (Sahlins, M. 1972).[22] In his paper, Sahlins contradicts the old concepts of the "incessant quest for food" and the hardship that was assumed to accompany hunter-gatherer societies. He claimed that many traditional societies experienced a relative abundance of food and a certain material comfort. Samuel Hearne's comments clearly indicate that the Chipewyan people had attained both security, and affluence in their caribou based livelihood. According to Arthur J. Ray (1984) this category of "affluent" includes the "caribou eaters", the "parkland bison hunters," and the "bison-moose hunters" of the Boreal forest.[23]

20 Samuel Hearne, (2000) from Gillespie, Beryl C. Territorial Expansion of the Chipewyan in the 18th Century. New Haven, Connecticut: eHRAF. 21 Ibid, Samuel Hearne from Gillespie, Beryl C. (2000) 22 Sahlins, Marshall, (1972). Stone Age Economics, Aldine Publishing Company, Chicago, Illinois. 23 Ray, Arthur J. (1984). Periodic Shortages, Native Welfare, and the Hudson's Bay Company 1670 – 1930.

Early Fur Trade

The first effects of the fur trade on the Chipewyan people were likely the Cree raids in the early 18th century by the newly armed Cree people looking for furs. When the Chipewyan people were threatened by the Cree (their traditional enemy who had become armed fur trading middlemen) they likely retreated to the security of the caribou lands. The fur traders at Fort York knew of these "Northern Indians" but had not been able to contact them in order to convince them to trade. The story of the Chipewyan people's first encounter with the fur trade is documented in the Hudson's Bay Company Journals but is also a part of the Chipewyan oral history as told by the Elders. It is the story of Ttha'naltther. Ttha'naltther means falling sand in the Dene language.



Finding Her People. "Ambassadress of Peace" A Chipewyan (Ttha'naltther) makes Peace with the Crees, 1715. Hudson's Bay Company Archives, Provincial Archives of Manitoba. Artist Franklin Arbuckle. Picture courtesy of the Fort Chipewyan Museum.

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Ttha'naltther (Falling Sand)

The story of Ttha'naltther is very important to the history of the Chipewyan people and to the fur trade. According to the story, Ttha'naltther was a Chipewyan woman captured by the Cree during early fur trade raids. The Cree had killed many Chipewyan people during the period before 1714 and were using their recently acquired guns to venture into Chipewyan areas to obtain furs for trade. Because Ttha'naltther was beautiful, she was captured by the Cree, became a slave, and then traveled to Fort York with her capturers. In 1715, Ttha'naltther told James Knight, the Chief Factor of the Fort York trading post, about the treatment of her people at the hands of the Cree. James Knight was troubled by Ttha'naltther's words. He sent William Stuart into the interior with Ttha'naltther to find her people, make peace between the Cree and Chipewyan and bring the Chipewyan into the fur trade. William Stuart was a company trader who spoke Cree. Ttha'naltther also spoke Cree "with indifference" and was clearly a courageous and dynamic individual.[24]

The trip into the interior was difficult and Ttha'naltther had some trouble locating her people as they were likely avoiding the threat of the Cree. It appears as though she finally found them north of Lake Athabasca and east of the Slave River.[25]

Apparently, Ttha'natther was successful in making peace between the Cree traders and her people and encouraged the Chipewyan to join the fur trade.[26] With this success a new era began. Inkonze: The Stones of Traditional Knowledge,[27] presents some traditional stories about Ttha'naltther as told by Victoria Mercredi and Josephine Mercredi (ACFN Elders).

Researchers have attempted to use information from such stories to draw conclusions about traditional harvesting locations before contact. Although it may be tempting to draw conclusions about the traditional lands of these people based upon this story, it appears that the location of these Chipewyan people had been impacted by the Cree aggression and increased firepower.

24 Ibid, Coutu and Hoffman-Mercredi. (1999) 25 Ibid, Yerbury, J. C. (Summer 1976). 23/3 Page 237. 26 James Knight Journals, from Coutu, Phillip R., and Hoffman-Mercredi, Lorraine. (1999) 27 Ibid, Coutu and Hoffman-Mercredi. (1999)

War and Peace Point

Through fur trade records and traditional knowledge it is clear that in the late 1600s and early 1700s, the Cree peoples dominated the northwestern fur trade. The Cree were armed with guns, seeking furs,[28] and had apparently pushed the Beaver Indians to the headwaters of the Peace River. The Chipewyan people were also prevented from trading furs at York Factory.[29]

The fur traders continued to make efforts over the next 100 years to encourage peace and promote the Chipewyan involvement in the fur trade. In 1715 a party of traders led by a Cree Indian named Captain Swan (Wa pa su) was sent out to make peace with "all the Indians" and Swan made more than one peace-making voyage.[30] In 1717 Fort Churchill (Fort Prince of Wales) was constructed on the mouth of the Churchill River to promote exclusive trade specifically with the Chipewyan people. There were some cases when war or conflicts were reported over the next decades. Still, the traders continued to promote peace between these two groups. In the early 1770s Samuel Hearne commented that the Chipewyan and Cree peoples "had always been at war with each other". Beryl Gillespie notes that it is difficult to determine if these hostilities were worsened or caused by the fur trade.[31] Although raiding did continue, the period up to 1760 seemed to be relatively peaceful. The Chipewyan people traded and acted as middlemen for other "Northern Indians" and the Cree continued their role as middlemen. During the 1750s and 1760s the Athapaskans (Beaver people) in the Peace River Region and Athapaskans (Slave) north of Lake Athabasca attempted to bypass the Cree middlemen and establish a direct trade with the Prince of Wales Fort. The Cree wished to protect their role as middlemen and this drew the Cree and Athapaskans into "a situation of protracted warfare."[32] In 1761, in an effort to promote peace between these groups, a Chipewyan named Matonabee was sent out from The Hudson's Bay. Matonabee was proficient in both Cree and Chipewyan and was supplied with many goods. After several years of effort (probably during the winter of 1764-65) Matonabee secured a peace between the Cree and the Athapaskans (Beaver) of the region.[33] This is the peace that was made at Peace Point and is the origin of the name of the Peace River.

28 Yurbury, J. C.(1981) Lake Athabasca Region Before 1765; A History, 29 (1) pp. 31-35. 29 McCormack, Patricia A., Becoming Trappers: The Transformation to a Fur Trade Mode of Production at Fort Chipewyan. 30 Ibid. Yurbury, J. C. (1981) 31 Ibid. Gillespie, Beryl, No. 19 (2000) p. 363. 32 Ibid. Yerbury, J.C. (1981) p. 34. 33 Ibid. Yerbury, J.C. (1981) p. 34.

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Middlemen and Caribou

Just as the Cree had been the middlemen between western Aboriginal peoples and the fur traders, the Chipewyan became middlemen between the Dogrib and Yellowknife people, and the fur traders.[34] However, the Caribou Eaters continued their reputation of being independent of the trade.

Samuel Hearne in the 1770s was very aware of the independence of the Chipewyan and noted that "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.[35] Hearne also noted that 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".[36]

Beryl Gillespie describes how the fur traders obtained a limited range of furs from the Chipewyan people because of the lack of fur bearing creatures in the barren lands. The traders continued to encourage the Chipewyan people to move further into the Boreal forest and support the fur trade. However, Yerbury comments that, "life in the Boreal forest was characterized by frequent periods of starvation for those Chipewyan who became dependent on the fur trade."[37] As a result, there continued to be a significant incentive for the Chipewyan people to maintain their traditional livelihood of caribou hunting, even after moving into the Boreal forest region.



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. © ACFN.

34 Ibid, Yerbury, J.C. (1971) p. 248. 35 Gillespie. Beryl C., (1975) Territorial Expansion of the Chipewyan in the 18th Century, eHRAF Collection of Ethnography, Doc. Number 19. 1975. p. 367. 36 Ibid, Hearne, Samuel, from Ives, John W., (1990) p. 213. 37 Ibid, Yerbury, J.C. (1971), p. 249.

The Construction of Inland Posts: Fur Trade Competition

At the end of the 18th century the competitive fur trade began to build trading posts in the interior at such locations as Ile à la Crosse and Fort Chipewyan. At this time the Chipewyan people began to move further into the Boreal forest and gradually changed the emphasis of their livelihood from caribou to furs, moose, fish, and other Boreal forest resources. This shift in their traditional harvesting centre allowed the Chipewyan to pass by the posts regularly to trade their furs.

Even though the Chipewyan people gradually became more involved with the fur trade, some bands were able to maintain the ability to return to their earlier traditional livelihood (even to the present day). There were however, two major factors in the 1770s and 1780s that drew the Chipewyan's further into the trade: increased competition between the fur trading companies, and a severe small pox epidemic.

The early Northwest Company was beginning to move into the interior and cut off the supplies of furs to the HBC posts on the Hudson's Bay. As a result, both trading companies began an aggressive policy of establishing 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 was to establish the first Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) post inland at Cumberland House in 1774 just over the future eastern border of Saskatchewan. In 1778 Peter Pond of the Northwest Company



Successful caribou hunt. Photograph from Cinquante Ans du Pays des Neiges: Chez les Mangeurs de Caribous. Montreal: Fides. 1945.

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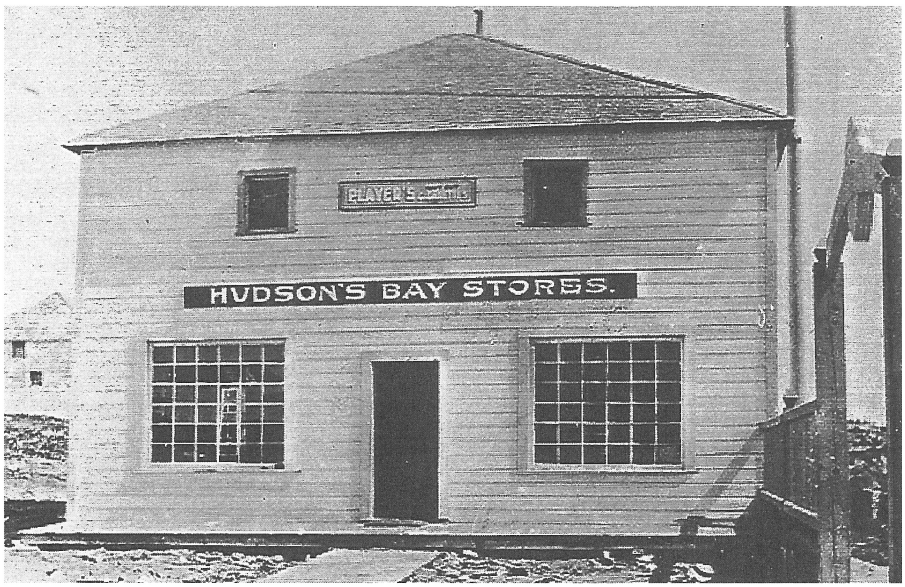

Fort Chipewyan Hudson Bay Company supply store used to trade furs for goods. Hudson's Bay Company Archives, Provincial Archives of Manitoba. Photo courtesy of Fort Chipewyan Museum.

was able to conduct a successful trade on the Athabasca River and establish a post about 40 miles up river from Lake Athabasca (the first Fort Chipewyan). This development allowed the Chipewyan people to trade without the long and dangerous trip to the posts on the Bay and encouraged them to reduce their range of travel.

In 1781 there was an outbreak of small pox in the Athabasca region. The degree to which the Cree and Chipewyan of the area were affected by this disease is unclear. It is thought however, that the depopulation of the Cree in northern areas due to small pox contributed to the Chipewyan migration, as the Chipewyan people moved further to the southwest after the epidemic.[38] Fur traders moving into this area recorded that, "the Chipewyans at Lake Ile à La Crosse considered themselves to be strangers in the area at that time." (Garvin 1927: 120) It was in 1788 that Mackenzie encountered Athapaskan people at the Methye Portage. It appeared that the Beaver and other Athapaskans were living in the area of the Clearwater River and were no longer confined by the Cree to the Peace River area. These notations and other theories of migration suggest that after the devastation of the small pox epidemic, the Chipewyan people were able to move into areas that had been previously dominated by the Cree.

38 Ibid, Gillespie, Beryl, (2000) Number 19, p. 375.

Peter Fidler and Chipewyan Travels

Shortly thereafter, Chipewyan guides escorted the HBC surveyor, Peter Fidler, through the region. During his travels, Fidler lived off the land with his Chipewyan hosts.[39] During his journey he learned many things, one of which was 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."[40]

Fidler's journals provide considerable information on the livelihood of the Chipewyan peoples of that time. These journals show that they were well adapted to life in the Boreal forest and were likely participating in a nomadic Boreal forest land use pattern.



Caribou migrating across the river. Photograph from Cinquante Ans Du Pays des Neiges: Chez les Mangeurs de Caribou. Montreal: Fides. 1945.

39 J. G. Macgregor, (1998) Peter Fidler: Canada's Forgotten Explorer 1769 – 1822, Fifth House Ltd: Calgary, p. 36. 40 Ibid, J.G. MacGregor. (1998) p. 37.

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In the following years there was significant competition among the fur traders. The new XY Company also constructed a post at Fort Chipewyan in 1799 and in 1802 Peter Fidler built Nottingham House close to Fort Chipewyan for the HBC. However, the period of competition came to an end in 1821 when the fur companies all merged into one monopoly, the Hudson's Bay Company.

James G. E. Smith maintains that the range of the Chipewyan people was not diminished by their early participation in the fur trade.[41] If anything it was increased. They did not give up their harvesting of caribou until later. He notes that because of their use of the caribou, from 1769-72 they were able to remain very independent.

The Chipewyan Traditional Lands

Anthropologists have maintained a dispute with respect to the "boundaries" of the Chipewyan, other Athapaskans, and the Cree.[42] They questioned the accuracy of the statements of Mackenzie when he recorded that the Beaver and other Indians were encountered after Methye Portage.[43] They maintain that the Cree had occupied the area around Lake Athabasca and the Athabasca River since Aboriginal times. Another theory maintains that the Athapaskans occupied the area below Lake Athabasca and were pushed to the north (and the Beaver were pushed west) by the Cree as they expended their territories during the early fur trade.[44]

It appears that the Chipewyan were unfamiliar with certain techniques of stretching furs and other skills associated with the Boreal forest,[45] yet they did not appear to be unfamiliar with many other aspects regarding Boreal forest adaptation.[46]

The Chipewyan developed a specialization to harvest barren land caribou and it was likely that their early territory was limited to the range of the barren land caribou, which extends well into the Boreal forest.[47] In Aboriginal times the range of the barren land caribou may have been larger than currently observed and may not provide a justification for limiting the Chipewyans early traditional lands to the transitional area and the barren lands.[48] Traditional knowledge obtained from interviews of the ACFN Elders, Alec Bruno, Charlie Voyageur and Rene Bruno, indicate that in the early part of the 20th century the caribou would cross Lake Athabasca and spend

41 Ibid. Smith, J.G.E. (1975) 42 Ibid, Gillespie, Beryl. (1981); Ibid. Yerbury, J.C. (Summer 1976); Ibid. Smith, (1981) 43 The information obtained from the journals of early fur traders about Aboriginal peoples before the arrival of Europeans is often difficult to interpret accurately. They often confused different Aboriginal groups, called them by similar names, and grouped them into odd groupings. Some of the records suffer from exaggeration. As a result, it is often difficult to use even the most direct observations. In more recent times, anthropologists have created conflicting theoretical models of Aboriginal location based upon different interpretations of the journals of early traders and explorers. The early fur traders at the Hudson's Bay called the Chipewyan people the "Northern Indians" differentiating them from the Cree or "Southern Indians". They knew little about the interior or the Aboriginal peoples and were unable to

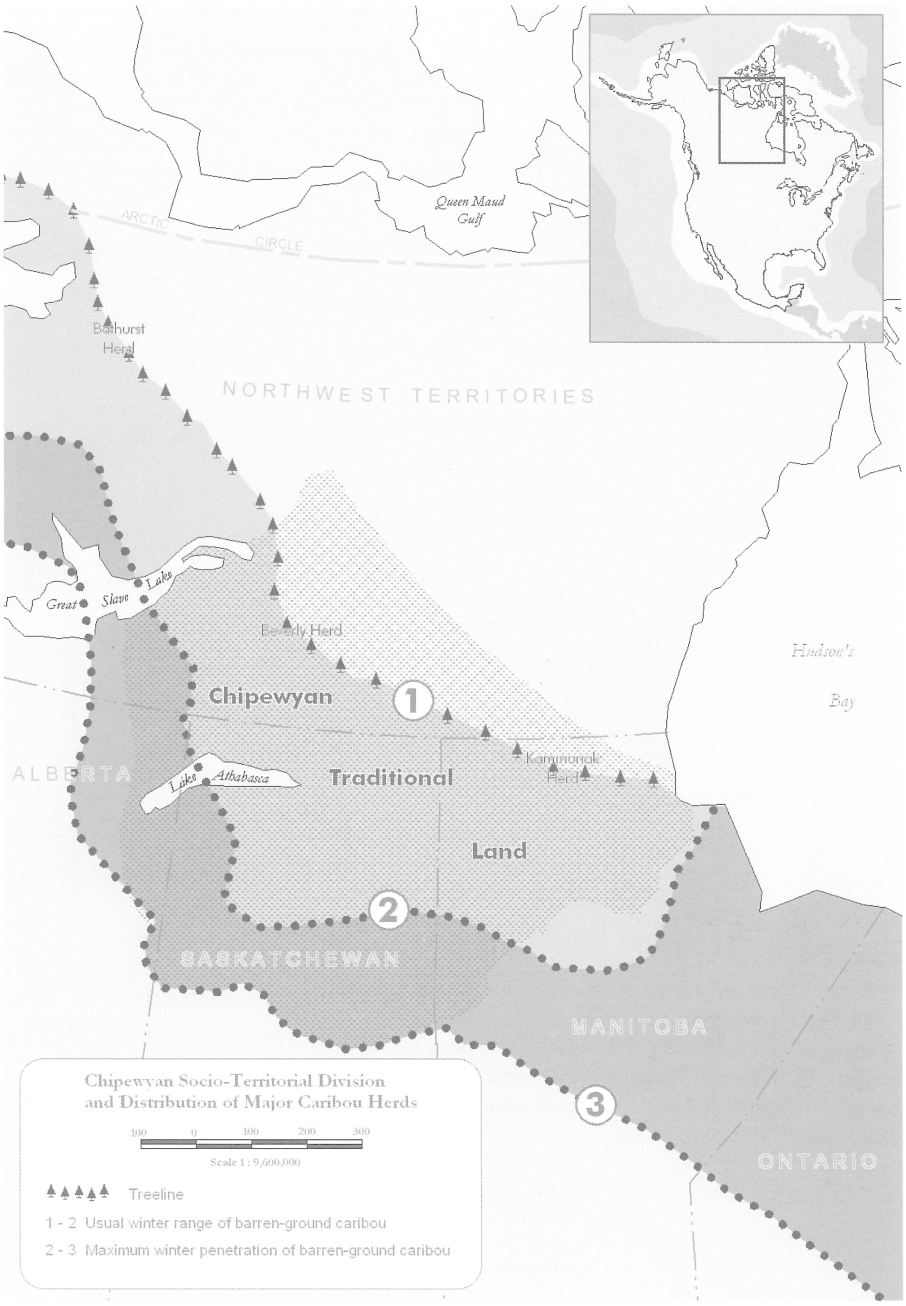


Figure 3.3
Caribou Habitat. Derived from Smith's "The Ecological Basis of Chipewyan Socio-territorial Organization" and Dr.Cormack Gates, personal comments. ©ACFN
The pre-contact territory of the Chipewyan people was directly related to the migration of the caribou herds. The range of caribou migration likely provides reasonable limits to the normal Chipewyan hunting and gathering territory.

44 Ibid. Yerbury (1981) 45 Ibid. Gillespie, (2000), Number 36. 46 MacGregor (1998) refers to the harvesting of Buffalo in Fidler's story, which indicates that they were quite familiar with this practice. 47 Ibid. Smith, (1975) 48 Muller-Wille, Lugar. (1974). "Caribou Never Die" The Muck Ox. Vol. 14:7-13.

Etthen eldeli Dene – "Caribou Eaters"

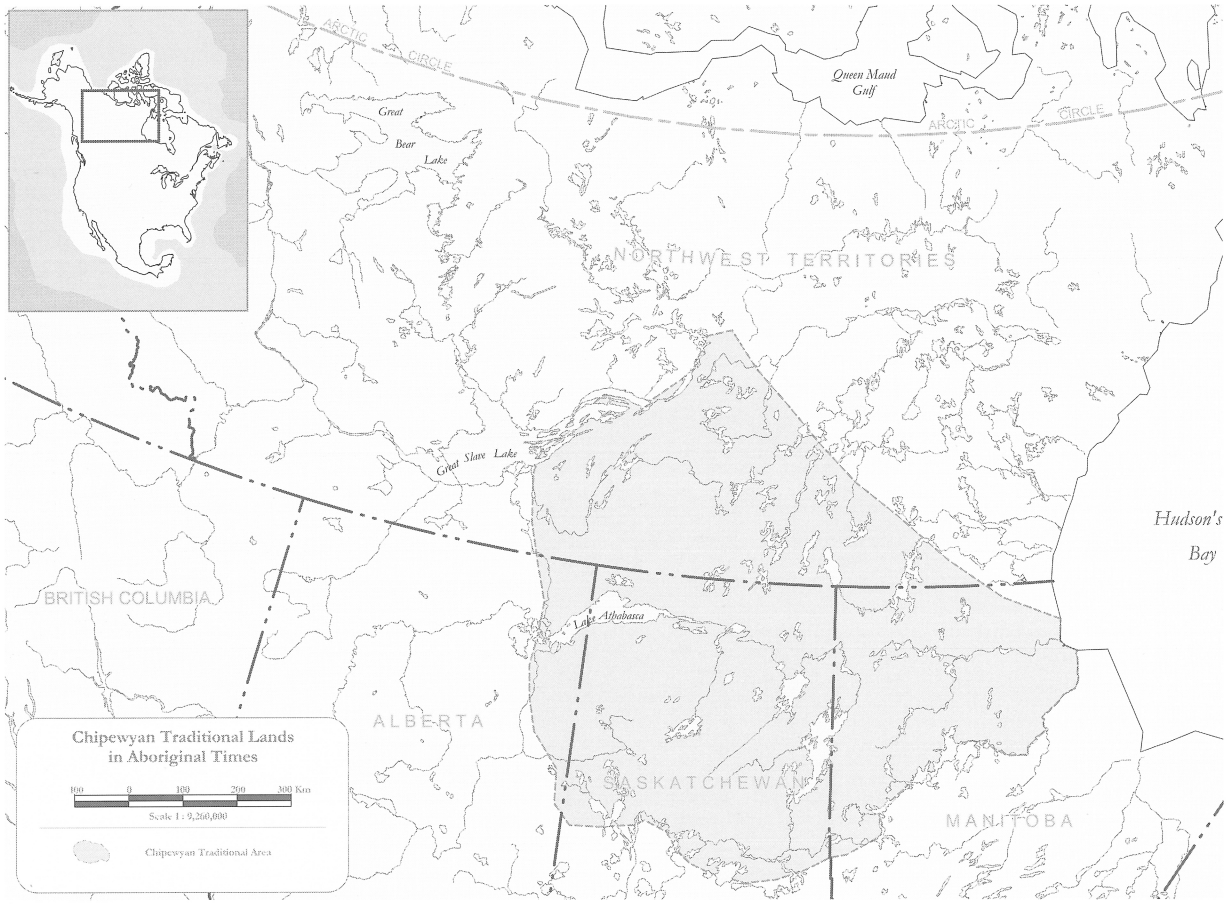


FIGURE 3.4

Chipewyan Traditional Land in Aboriginal Times. Derived from Helm (2000), Duncan (1989), Waldman (2000), Smith (1975), Gillespie (1981), and Gates personal communication, Luger Muller-Wille (1974) and traditional knowledge from ACFN members. ©ACFN 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.

the winter in areas of northern Alberta and Saskatchewan below Lake Athabasca.[49] Also, Luger Muller-Wille (1974) describes how the southern fringes of the caribou migration changed.[50] He notes that not only did the caribou herds decrease in numbers since the 1940s, but the settlement of Fond du Lac had not seen migration of caribou across the Lake since 1966-67. Before this the caribou migrated well south of the Lake. In fact, the location of the Fond du Lac settlement is itself a testament to this migration. The hunters found it convenient to hunt caribou as they passed the settlement in the fall and spring. However, they were forced to change their hunting activities as the caribou migration pattern shifted further north.

The arguments used by J. G. E. Smith and Beryl Gillespie both suggest that the Chipewyan peoples' pre-contact traditional area did not stretch below Lake Athabasca. These arguments maintained that the Chipewyan people would have limited their traditional range to where they could harvest caribou. However, both Smith and Gillespie based their theories on caribou migration studies from the 1970s.[51]

Traditional knowledge of caribou migration indicates that with larger populations the caribou migration patterns extended further south and west. Therefore, the Chipewyan traditional area is likely to have extended well below Lake Athabasca and to the headwaters of the Churchill River system. This may have increased the likelihood of conflicts with the Cree but in Aboriginal times (before the Cree had rifles) this may not have been quite as serious.

49 ACFN Elder interviews (2002) 50 Ibid, Muller-Wille, Lugar. (1974) 51 Ibid, Gillespie, Beryl C. (1981)

CHAPTER THREE

Etthen eldeli Dene – "Caribou Eaters"

The Use of Boundaries for Traditional Areas

The common use of the word "boundary" throughout this Aboriginal land use literature is not particularly appropriate. It may be more appropriate to identify an economic centre, a livelihood specialization and a general geographical range based upon the understanding of the Aboriginal livelihood requirements and the intensity of resource use. A proposed statistical method is discussed in later chapters of this book. It appears that both the Cree and the Chipewyan were familiar with much of the same territories, even in very early times. As land use studies show the traditional lands of Aboriginal peoples tend to overlap. This overlap is particularly evident when there are language or cultural relationships between the groups. Overlapping is also more likely when the traditional areas are very large and sparsely populated. It is important to note that the Chipewyan lands in Aboriginal times were among the largest and the least intensely populated.[52]

Another reason for overlap is that members of one band may share ancestors with members of other bands. For example, the ACFN people share ancestors with the Fond du Lac people living in Northern Saskatchewan. Also, in 1944 the Athabasca Chipewyan people living and hunting in the Wood Buffalo National Park joined the Mikisew Cree Band. These people are related to ACFN members and share traditional lands.

Aboriginal land use was not limited by the settler society concept of ownership. Instead, lands were traditionally used by those who were there and able to defend their occupation and use. Different peoples may have occupied the same lands at different times or in different seasons.

52 Ibid. Ives, John (1990)

From Nomadic Caribou to Boreal Forest Fur Trade: Chipewyan Hunting Adaptations

The Chipewyan enjoyed a nomadic livelihood that was reliant upon strong traditional knowledge and relatively simple tools. They had to travel light and make use of their knowledge, rather than extensive equipment, to survive. Their activities required considerable travel therefore they occupied a very large area. The Chipewyan traditional territory had, on average, one person every 150 square kilometers. This made it one of the lowest human population densities in the world.

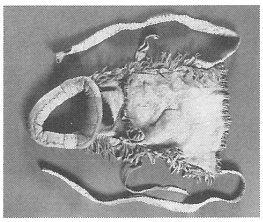
Because of the Chipewyan caribou harvesting adaptations, they practiced cultural and intermarriage systems that enhanced their ability to survive.[53] This includes their practices of sharing food and sharing information about the location of the herds. J. Ives (1990) postulates that Chipewyan men were required to marry women as distantly related as possible.[54] This kinship system ensured that word would spread rapidly along the tree line when the caribou herds crossed. It is still a common custom to "marry out".[55] Their social structure was adapted to allow them to hunt in larger groups and harvest large numbers of caribou during certain times of the year. They also divided into smaller hunting groups during other seasons to pursue smaller groups of caribou and other game.

J.G.E. Smith explains that "in addition to providing food for man and dogs, bone and antler provided the raw material for spear points, fish hooks, and a variety of other implements; the hides were made into clothing, lodges, bags, babiche for snowshoe netting, gill nets, caribou snares and many other things which it is impossible to remember." He estimated that 20 caribou were necessary for the domestic annual needs of one person.[56]

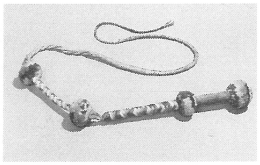
The large communal hunts were held in the early winter and spring during the caribou migrations. These hunts often used a pound erected on one of the migration paths of the caribou. The pound was a large fence made of bushy trees with openings containing snares. Smith notes that new technologies such as the dog sled and the repeating rifle eventually made the use of the pound obsolete.[57] In order for the Chipewyan peoples to survive on the caribou, it was very important for them to be able to locate the herds. In order to do this the Chipewyan people would divide

53 Ibid, Smith, J.G.E. (1975) 54 Ibid. Ives, John (1990) 55 ACFN Elder Interview (2002) 56 Ibid, Smith, J.G.E. (1975) p. 405. 57 Ibid, Smith, J.G.E. (1975) p. 408.

Etthen eldeli Dene – "Caribou Eaters"



Dog Harness
Royal Scottish Museum. RSM 558.61.



Dog Whip
Canadian Museum of Civilization, CMC VI-E-48, image no. S75-4172.

into smaller hunting groups and disperse across a broad potential caribou path. Since one hunting group could kill many more caribou than it required, the kinship and sharing reciprocity systems among the Chipewyan allowed them to distribute the meat among other hunting groups.[58] The culture of the Chipewyan people promoted economic cooperation between groups for survival. This included not only the sharing of meat between hunting groups but also the sharing of information on the location of the herds.[59] June Helm describes the organization of the Dene society based upon the family unit.[60] She categorizes the grouping of people based upon work tasks and economic purposes. Common groupings are the male hunting or trapping pair or trio, the trapping party of a few families, the many family meat camp or fish camp, and the large-scale caribou hunt.

The Hunting Unit

Sharpe (1977) describes the Chipewyan hunting unit as based upon a conjugal pair and their relatives.[61] It may include brothers and their wives, or children and spouses of the children. Two hunting units may share a base camp. Several hunting units may come together for a fish camp or a larger caribou hunt. It was within these larger hunts that the caribou pounds described by Samuel Hearne were most likely used.

Aboriginally, the Chipewyan people occupied huge ranges of land and followed the caribou throughout northern Canada. The range of the caribou herds extended down into the taiga transitional zones and in many cases well into the full Boreal forest. It is upon the basis of the caribou migrations that the original lands occupied by the Chipewyan peoples can best be approximated. Clearly the Chipewyan people moved further into the Boreal forest as they participated in the fur trade activities.[62]

58 Ibid, Sharpe, Henry S. (1977) pp. 35-40. 59 Ibid, Sharpe, Henry S. (1977) 60 Helm, June, Bilaterality in the Socio-Territorial Organization of the Arctic Drainage Dene, ethnology, pp. 361-385. 61 Ibid. Sharpe, Henry S. (1977) 62 Ibid, Gillespie, (2000), Number 19; and Ibid, Smith (1975)

Left: Laying the foundation of a canoe. Photography from "Cinquante Ans du Pays des Neiges: Chez les Mangeurs de Caribous. Montreal: FIDES 1945.

Right: Making the interior of the canoe. Photography from "Cinquante Ans du Pays des Neiges: Chez les Mangeurs de Caribous. Montreal: FIDES 1945.





Adaptations Due to The Fur Trade: Canoe, Dog Sled and Rifle

Although the Chipewyan people initially showed reluctance toward the fur trade, eventually they became completely immersed. As they shifted their activities from the life of the "caribou eater" to that of the "trapper, middleman, or provisionor", their tools and relationships began to change. Sharpe outlines three technological changes that occurred that might have had significant effects. The first is the adoption of the larger Algonquian style canoe.

This larger canoe allowed for a large load and a greater traveling range. This canoe required a large amount of effort to build and would not be thrown away after use. Therefore, the Chipewyan people were likely encouraged to use the waterways instead of their former overland routes.

The second change was the increased use of the dog sled. Although dog sleds were used aboriginally, they were used much more during the fur trade. These sleds allowed for more rapid travel over longer distances but the dogs had to be fed all year round. As a result, fishing for dog food became a more important and time-consuming activity.

The third change was the hunting efficiency provided by the rifle.

CHAPTER THREE

Etthen eldeli Dene – "Caribou Eaters"

Increased Risk of Starvation

Arthur J. Ray states that, "the fur trade negatively affected Indian economies in two fundamental ways. It served to increase the risk of serious resource shortages for native groups. At the same time, it increasingly undermined their ability to deal with this problem."[63] The fur trade turned useful traditional goods into commodities. Furs were no longer for their own use but sold according to prices – other people's wants. Posts required large amounts of provisions that they would buy from the Aboriginal peoples. The Chipewyan people were coaxed away from their traditional caribou livelihood into an ecosystem that was pressured by much larger resource consumption. This consumption was driven by a market rather than by survival, and this market changed the basic Aboriginal economic strategy. Aboriginal peoples formerly followed an extensive migration to harvest seasonal food surpluses while the Europeans were sedentary and required maintenance in fixed settlements. As a result of the localized consumption of trading posts and the reduced nomadic range of the Aboriginal fur traders, localized traditional foods became less reliable and the Aboriginal population became more reliant upon the posts to supply even their own staple foods.

Chipewyan Land Use Adaptations
K'ai taile Dene

It is likely that it was during the late 1700s or early 1800s that some of the ancestors of the ACFN people began to remain more consistently in the Fort Chipewyan area supplying provisions and furs to the trading posts. They were less likely to venture to the Hudson's Bay and out into the barren lands. These Athabascans were closely related to the "Ganikwendene" people of the pine house (Fond du lac Band) and called themselves the K'ai taile Dene or delta people.

From 1821 to 1870

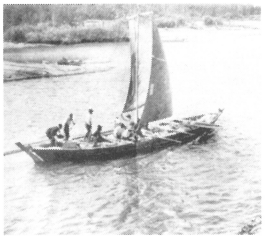
The proliferation of interior trading posts, due to competition, had changed the structure of the fur trade. Therefore in 1821 when the fur trade became an HBC monopoly there were several important changes. In order to make trapping more attractive the practice of allowing debts was reintroduced. This served to further

63 Ibid, Sharp, (1977)

increase the reliance of the Aboriginal peoples on the posts. In addition the HBC introduced the York Boat to transport furs from the interior posts to the shipping terminals. This new structure removed the middlemen opportunities for the Cree and Chipewyan, forcing them to become either suppliers of provisions or trappers.[64] It was over this period of time that the Chipewyan people began to permanently shift their livelihood methods.

Although many bands did not give up their access to caribou hunting, there was still a shift in the centre of their annual rounds to coincide with the fur trading posts. The Chipewyan adopted the larger canoes used by the Cree and began to use dog sleds more often.[65] With the credit and attractive fur trade post locations, the Chipewyan increased their participation in fur trade activities.

An 1823-24 report estimates the population at 593 Chipewyan and only 60 Cree. Although it appears that the Chipewyan people of the Fort Chipewyan area became more committed to the fur trade their livelihood continued to be based upon their ability to support themselves off the land.



York Boats
Above: Photography from "Cinquante Ans du Pays des Neiges: Chez les Mangeurs de Caribous. Montreal: FIDES 1945.

Right: York Boats, Lesser Slave Lake, Alberta. Reference NA-2283-10. Photograph courtesy of Glenbow Museum, Calgary.



64 Ibid, Ray Arthur S., Periodic Shortages. 65 Ibid, Gillespie, Beryl C.(2000). Number 36 & Ibid, Sharpe, Henry S. (1977)

CHAPTER THREE

Etthen eldeli Dene – "Caribou Eaters"

Rounds in the Boreal Forest

Sarah Bell, a Chipewyan woman who was born in the 1870s, remembered the annual rounds and routes taken by her people when she was a child. This traditional knowledge likely describes activities that were practiced by many Chipewyan people during the 19th century. She passed down some of her traditional knowledge to Moise McIntyre of the English River Band during the 1940s.[66] Mosie McIntyre recounted the description of two Chipewyan groups, one group that followed a southern round, and another that followed a northern round. The southern round involved wintering in small multi-family encampments in the vast area between Foster River and Cree Lake in northern Saskatchewan. Prior to spring breakup they lived close to birch groves where they made new canoes. In the spring the group would gather close to the Ile à la Crosse Trading Post for fishing and trading. There was mention of a spring muskrat hunt as well. Then in early August they traveled further south to Dore Lake and the headwaters of the Smoothstone Rivers to continue hunting and fishing. In the fall the group would follow a circular route northwards through the Churchill River or Souris River back to Foster Lakes. It was here that they would divide into their winter hunting and trapping groups.

The northern round also involved trading at Ile à la Crosse and wintering at Black Birch Lake where they hunted and trapped in smaller family groups, west and south west of Cree Lake. At break up the entire group assembled at the headwaters of Clearwater River and traveled to Fort McMurray and Fort Chipewyan to trade. They then would travel north of Lake Athabasca to hunt barren land caribou for food and winter clothing. In the late fall and early winter they followed the caribou south and returned to mid-winter hunting and trapping areas in northern Saskatchewan.[67] These annual rounds reflect the current locations of Chipewyan settlements in Saskatchewan and Alberta. However, both of these rounds begin close to Ile à la Crosse for the purpose of fur trading. At a minimum, before the fur trade, the rounds would not have concentrated on trapping for furs and would not have started and ended close to a fur trading post. These rounds are an adaptation to the fur trade and clearly show the close integration and interdependence of the early commercial fur activities and the traditional harvesting livelihood.

66 Robert Jarvenpa and Hetty Jo Brumback, (1984) The Microeconomics of Southern Chipewyan Fur Trade History. 67 Ibid. Robert Jarvenpa and Hetty Jo Brumback, (1984)



Summer in Jackfish.
© ACFN.

The rounds described by Sarah Bell were likely further south than the original caribou based rounds of the Chipewyan before the advent of the fur trade. The Elders of Fort Chipewyan have also described territories used by their ancestors in the early 20th century that resemble the annual rounds described by Sarah Bell. These rounds involve the grouping of families within three areas similar in size to those described by Sarah Bell. The ACFN Elders describe the territories used by their parents and grandparents before the creation of Wood Buffalo Park in 1922. They have pointed out some summer camps and winter trap lines or trapping areas.

These ACFN groups used the Fort Chipewyan trading post as an important center of their rounds. However, with the proliferation of settler immigration in the late 1800s, independent fur traders came regularly to the Aboriginal villages. ACFN Elders described the traders: "The fur trader would come right to the camp – two or three different traders would come down, when I was a kid I remember those fresh oranges. There were stores we could go to along the river as well; Embarras Point at the store there and there was a store down the river from Jackfish."[68] (The Jackfish micro-village.) These Elders were not able to describe the annual cycles in the same manner as Sarah Bell but these Chipewyan peoples lived in a similar environment to their Saskatchewan Cousins. After 1820, the adjustment to the fur trade changed the Chipewyan land use in the Fort Chipewyan area from nomadic to a more distinct socio-territorial center.[69] This involved the establishment of areas that were controlled by groups or families, and where the family or group trap line rules were established. By the 1920s groups of permanent log cabins had developed and the fur trade/Boreal forest subsistence economy was firmly in place. The subsistence and territorial range of these Aboriginal peoples had changed significantly from the nomadic pattern of pre-contact Aboriginal times. The cycles became centered on the location of the fur trade posts and were getting smaller.

68 ACFN Elder Charlie Voyageur (2002) 69 McCormack, P. "Romancing the NorthWest as Prescriptive History: Fort Chipewyan and the Northern Expansion of the Canadian State." McCormack, P and Ironside G (Ed) The Uncovered Past: Roots of Northern Alberta Societies. Circumpolar Research Series No. 3 Edmonton: Canadian Cataloguing in Publication Data, 1993. 168.

CHAPTER THREE

Etthen eldeli Dene – "Caribou Eaters"

Traditional Trap Line Use

With the evolution into the boreal forest the Chipewyan people maintained a communal method of dividing up trap areas. Rather than dividing the territory up into family owned trap lines they tended to identify larger areas upon which many people could establish lines. If a trap line was not in use another trapper could take it. In one trapping area there may have been a group leader for 10 to 15 people. The trapping area was open to all of the people from a certain group. But any individual's trap line was respected. "You left him alone, there was mutual respect. 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."[70] The cooperative system described here likely evolved from the interdependence required by the Chipewyan earlier caribou adaptations.

Historical Land Use

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 names of the ACFN families occupying these areas are also listed. These areas are based upon the memories of the Elders and do not represent a full description of the entire land use during that period. This land is more appropriately viewed as an area of more intensive land use of their parents and grandparents.

"There were three to four families in an area (micro-village). You would claim a trap line by making a trail and no one else would use that area. We traveled long distances like to La Louch to trade a dog – we knew the country for 100 or 200 miles around. We knew which land was ours. We traveled together."[71]

70 ACFN Elders Committee (2002) 71 ACFN Elders (2002)

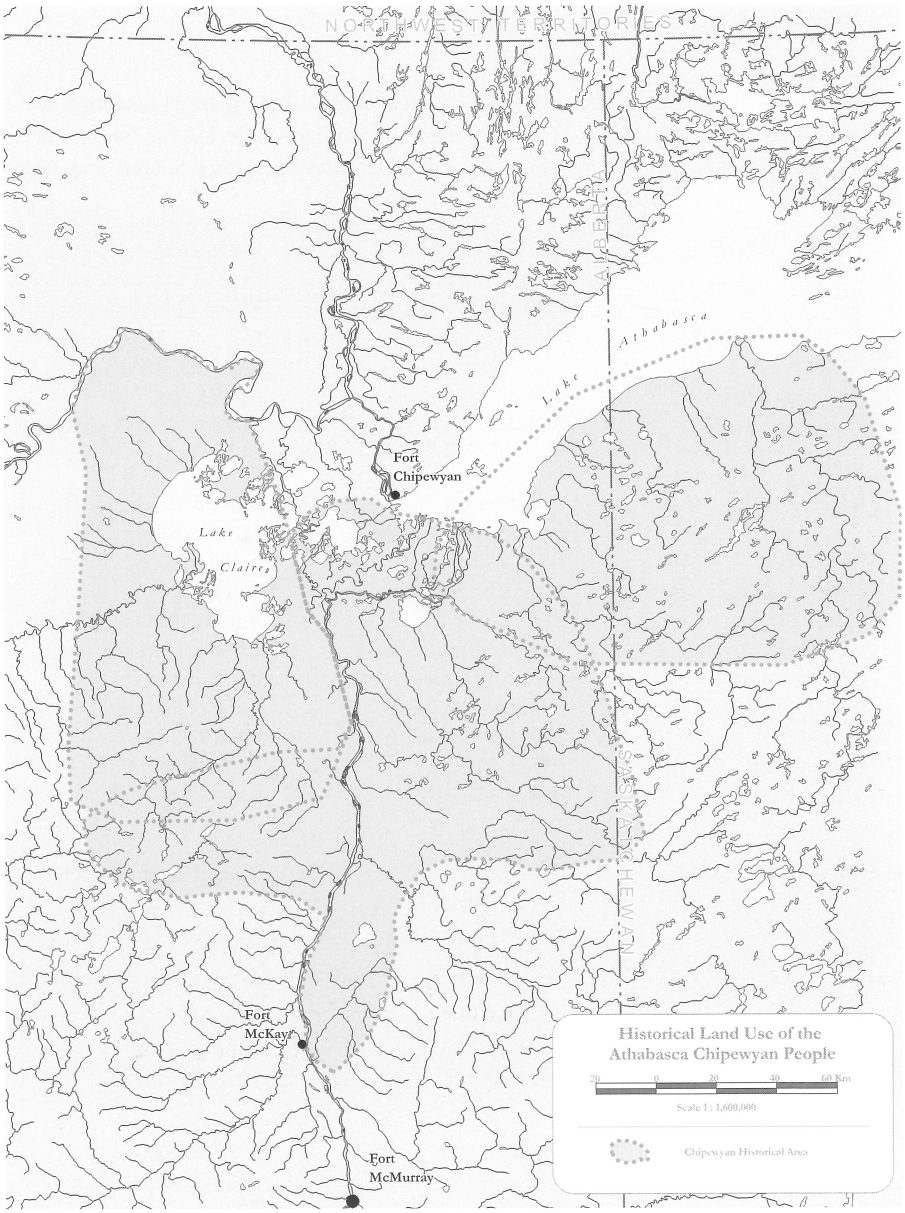


Figure 3.5
Historical Land Use of Athabasca Chipewyan.© ACFN.
These historical areas represent the more intensive land use areas of several early Athabasca Chipewyan groups. These groups were from Old Fort on the south shore of Lake Athabasca, Point Brule and Poplar Point, Jackfish, and the Birch River area. The traditional land use of these people extended beyond these intensive use areas.

Etthen eldeli Dene – "Caribou Eaters"

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

The family groups would live, trap and hunt together depending upon the season and the activity. From the map one can see that the Western Area included much of what is now the Wood Buffalo National Park. The summer villages or camps in this area were along the Birch River. The Eastern Area took in lands well into Saskatchewan and north into the NWT. The summer villages included the Old Fort area and the Delta. People in the Southern Area lived along the river in the summer and hunted and trapped from the Birch Mountains to beyond the Saskatchewan border. During these times the amount of outside employment was extremely small, and almost all of their livelihood was obtained from the land.

According to the ACFN Elders, the life during this period was very similar to the life during the 50s and 60s. However, due to opportunities in forestry and river work, as well as a school for children, more and more families began to move into Fort Chipewyan.

Conclusion

The Chipewyan people experienced massive changes during the 320 years since the arrival of the Europeans. The "Caribou Eaters" of the Fort Chipewyan area have gradually changed their subsistence livelihood from a nomadic range covering thousands of kilometers to a hunting, trapping and fishing livelihood centered around permanent log cabins. The adjustments in their livelihood changed their range of travel and their use of traditional lands. Despite the changes in the livelihood of the Chipewyan peoples they have retained many characteristics of their nomadic caribou adaptation and it continues to influence their lives today.

The following chapters describe the land use of the Elders of the ACFN during the period from the 1920s to the 1980s. Although this study reviews earlier information, it is primarily concerned with the lands that have been used by the Chipewyan people since the signing of Treaty 8 in 1899.

CHAPTER FOUR

Historical Context of the Lands

In 1870 the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) surrendered its rights in the northwest to the new Canadian Confederation (1867) for fee simple lands and money. However, the Canadian northwest was "Indian territory" and in order to provide an orderly occupation of this vast area the new Canadian Government had to obtain rights from the Aboriginal peoples who occupied the lands. A treaty making process commenced starting with Treaties 1 and 2 in 1871. These were followed by a series of Treaties that included Treaty 3 in 1873, Treaty 4 in 1874, Treaty 5 in 1875, Treaty 6 in 1876 and Treaty 7 in 1877.

It was during this same period that the United States government discontinued their treaty signing process. The American west was being settled at a rapid rate and without treaties the Aboriginal peoples felt their lands were being stolen. They responded with force and the "Indian Wars" began. Several battles occurred in this "war" including the famous Battle of the Little Big Horn in 1876. In Canada, after Treaty 7 in 1877, the Canadian federal government also postponed the making of

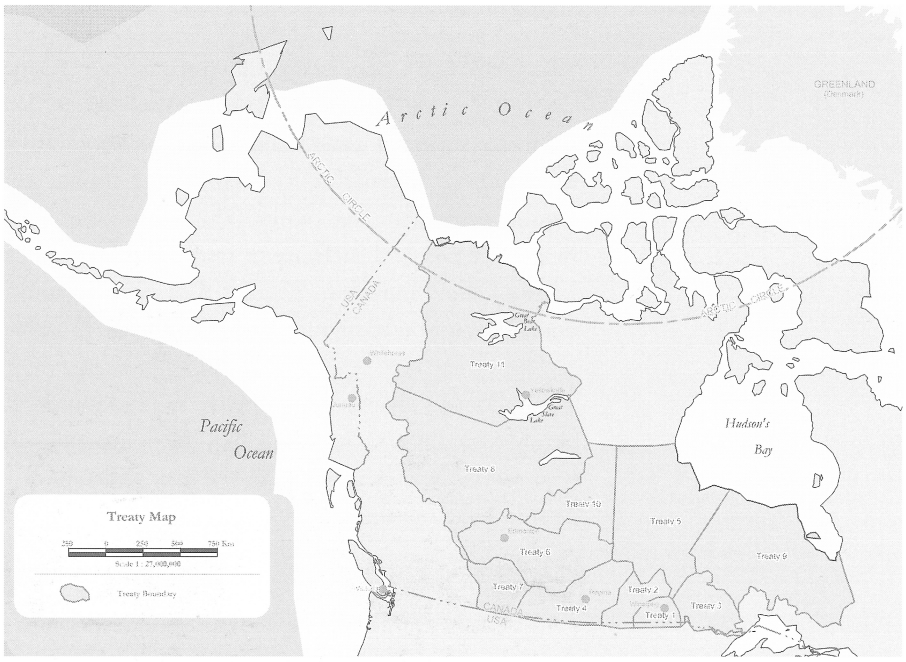


FIGURE 4.1
Numbered Treaties.

additional treaties. There was discontent with the terms of Treaty 7 among the Cree Chiefs like Big Bear and Poundmaker. During this time the Metis were also struggling for recognition of land rights. The lack of action by the Canadian government created similar consequences in Canada to those experienced in the U.S. In 1885, as a result of a struggle for Metis recognition and Indian land rights, the Canadian Metis and Indians War[1] took place. After this Canadian war there was a severe repression of many Aboriginal peoples in western Canada.[2] As a consequence, the treaty making process was further postponed.

During this period the Chipewyan people were entirely engaged in a traditional livelihood relying upon both the natural game cycles of this area, and the fur trade. But the new Canadian Federal Government did not have the same cooperative economic relationship with the Aboriginal trappers as did the HBC. In lieu of this, the Government did not feel any obligation towards people with whom they had not signed a formal treaty. During the fur trade, when there were difficult times such as famine or epidemic disease, the HBC had offered foods and medicines to the Aboriginal peoples. However, after the transfer of power, the Canadian Government did not respond in the same manner. Aboriginal peoples without treaties (such as those in northern Alberta) suffered devastating circumstances. Even those with treaties did not always fare very well.



Chipewyan people in front of tipi, Northern Alberta. Photographed during Treaty 8 Exhibition. Reference NA-949-128. Courtesy of the Glenbow Museum, Calgary.

1 Referred to by some as the "Riel Rebellion". 2 Stonechild, Blair and Waiser, Bill. (1997) Loyal till Death:Indians and the North-West Rebellion. Calgary:Fifth House Publishers.

CHAPTER FOUR

Historical Context of the Lands

Settler Influence in Fort Chipewyan

In 1849 the Oblate missionaries arrived in Fort Chipewyan. The Anglican missionaries followed them in 1874.[3] These missionaries set up schools and were assigned the duel task of providing the children with a working knowledge of western civilization, as well as a personal knowledge of Christ. During this period more settlement and railway construction was developed in southern Alberta and the transportation routes were shifting away from the waterways of Lake Athabasca. As the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) reached Calgary in 1883 and land routes were constructed northward, the Athabasca River became a more important transportation route. In 1894 the Canadian government passed the "Unorganized Territories Game Preservation Act" in order to protect game from the obvious 'tragedy of the commons' introduced by the market system and open access to wildlife.



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.

3 Stuart Adams & Associates. (1998) Fort Chipewyan Way of Life Study. Vancouver. p. 73.

Starvation and Disease

Over the previous one hundred years the fur trade had drawn the Chipewyan people to the trading posts. As a result, the Chipewyans had developed a dependency upon the fur trade and trade goods. The biological and economic cycles of the trade were another detriment to the Aboriginal people. The stationary posts consumed large amounts of food and wood in their immediate vicinity, and as a result game for traditional foods was often over-exploited. This sedentary harvesting did not allow the Aboriginal people the same variability of opportunity as in the past and resulted in the local scarcity of game. The "Northern River Basins Study" indicates periods of starvation in the years 1822, 1839-43, 1873 and 1887. The study also indicated that during the years 1850, 1871, 1873, 1882 and 1889 there was a scarcity of game animals around Fort Chipewyan.

The Aboriginal people were also exposed to regular epidemics of smallpox, whooping cough, measles and the flu. There was a well-documented smallpox epidemic in the Fort Chipewyan area in 1781. Some historians believe that this smallpox epidemic may have all but wiped out the Athabascow Cree and diminished the populations and strength of the Cree traders. However, like the Cree, it was the Chipewyan people who were closer to the fur trade, and they too were devastated by this smallpox epidemic.

A summary of the occurrences of disease and starvation during the 1800s has been recorded in the "Northern River Basins Traditional Knowledge Component Studies" (1996).[4] For the people of the Lake Athabasca Region, this study identifies an influenza epidemic in 1835 as well as measles and other epidemics in 1819-20, 1846 and 1865. Some documents indicate that there was also an epidemic of influenza in 1928 that was particularly devastating.[5] Traditional knowledge however, indicates that the influenza epidemic was closer to 1920.[6]

The Chipewyan people had little immunity from the European diseases, and changes introduced by their participation in the fur trade made it difficult for them to cope with this new scarcity of food. In the July 15, 1873 edition of the "Factor of the Fort Chipewyan Post," Mcfarlane complained about the lack of action on behalf of the government to aid the people in times of hardship. He wrote that 23 men,

4 Northern River Basins Study, A Report of Wisdom Synthesized From the Traditional Knowledge Component Studies, Alberta Environmental Protection, Edmonton, Alberta, March 1996.
5 Ibid. MacCormack, P. 6 ACFN Elders Interviews (2002)

women and children were carried off by the epidemic (1873) and in proportion to the population, the deaths were much more numerous at Fort Chipewyan. In 1880 Mcfarlane wrote additional formal complaints. In 1883 Chipewyan Chiefs wrote an appeal to the Prime Minister asking for help following several years of hardship and severe epidemics between 1873 and 1881.[7]

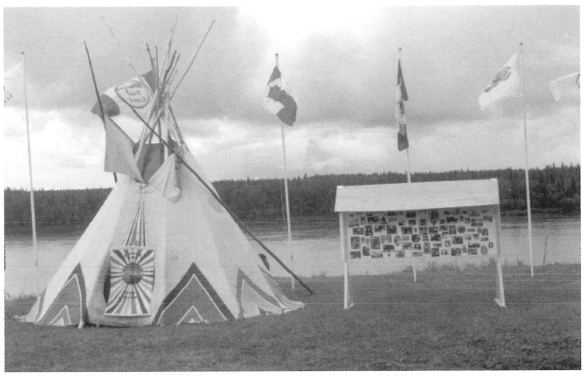
Treaty 8

It appears that these pleas for assistance were ignored. The Government continued their policy, insisting that these people would receive no aid until after they had signed a treaty. The problem with that policy was that the government was not willing to initiate treaty discussions. The politicians did become interested however, once the northern area was thought to contain vast quantities of oil and became a route for the Klondike Gold Rush. It was in 1899 that the Canadian government finally negotiated Treaty 8.

In 1899 the Aboriginal people lived in various bush communities and were living off the land. When the treaty commissioners arrived in Fort Chipewyan, the Chiefs of the Chipewyan and Cree presented conditions upon which they would accept the government's proposals. These conditions included their complete freedom to fish, hunt and trap. Their terms also incorporated education for their children. The Aboriginal people of this area had suffered difficult times and were likely looking to the government to protect their traditional livelihoods. In the book by Rene Fumoleau, "As Long as this Land Shall Last," he quotes Pierre Mercredi, interpreter for the Chipewyan of Fort Chipewyan:

" 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."[8]

7 Fumoleau, Rene, (1973) "As Long as This Land shall Last" McClelland and Stewart Limited, 8 Ibid, Fumoleau, Rene, (1973)



Treaty 8 gathering at Poplar Point 1999. ©ACFN.

Treaty 8 had created two new legal entities in Fort Chipewyan, the Athabasca Chipewyan Band (ACFN) and the Mikisew Cree Band (MCFN). Also in 1899, the first NWMP (RCMP) detachment was created in Fort Chipewyan to administer government laws and programs.

This was the beginning of a long process of misunderstandings and assimilation policies by the Canadian government. It has only been since 1982, with the constitutional amendment, that the legal and administrative conditions for the Aboriginal people have begun to change.

Micro-village and Period from the Early 1900s to 1960

The development of the micro-village forest adaptation continued from the 1800s up until the modern period. After accepting the life of the micro-villages, the ACFN was affected by the immigration of settlers, the creation of National Parks and the limited industrial development of the area. Still the ACFN people continued to hunt, gather and trap for their livelihood.

During the late 1800s and early 1900s the ACFN people continued their traditional life in the forest supplemented by caribou hunting, but they were also active participants in the fur trade. They were exposed to diseases and game scarcity caused by over-harvesting and other natural cycles. But unlike nomadic times, they were no longer able to change locations and food. Because of their history of wide-ranging migration the Chipewyan people exhibited relative ease in shifting

Historical Context of the Lands

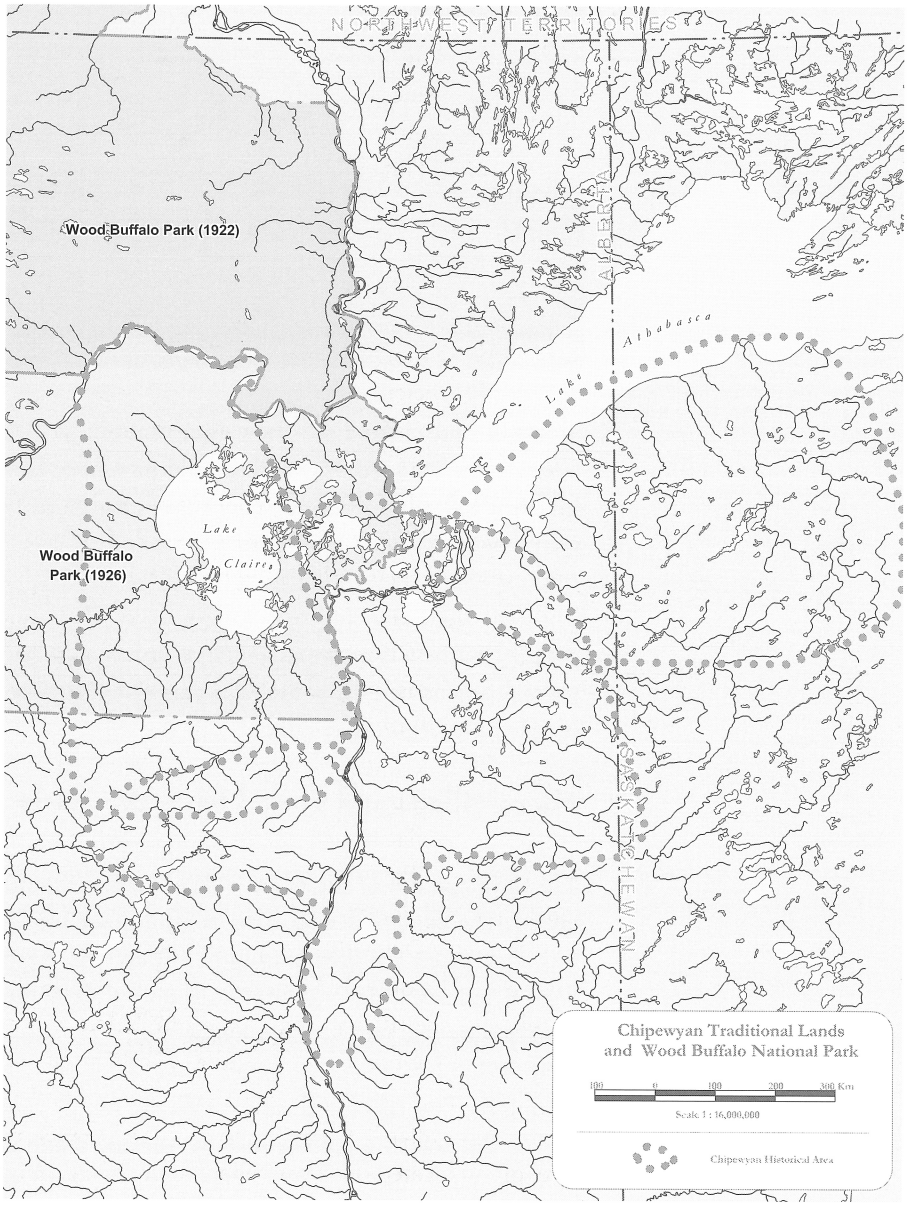


Figure 4.2
Historical Land Use with Wood Buffalo Park . ©ACFN. Many Chipewyan people lived and hunted in the Birch River area around Lake Claire. In 1926 the Wood Buffalo Park was expanded into this area.

regional identities (Jarvenpa 980:44).[9] They were able to easily adapt to the forest and to their life in micro-villages. Due to concentration on the fur trade, dog sled use became more widespread.[10] This allowed them to travel further and faster. It allowed the Chipewyan to hunt or visit trap lines and return long distances to a centrally located cabin. This Aboriginal technology contributed to the establishment of the micro-village.[11]

The Chipewyan also adopted a larger canoe and made more use of the rifle. The canoe allowed them to travel more securely with heavier loads. The use of traditional pounds were still as, or more efficient than the rifle for killing caribou. The rifle however, was much more efficient for hunting moose in the forest. The Chipewyan people were becoming more involved with the fur industry and less dependent on the caribou. Some southern Chipewyan groups had stopped the caribou hunts altogether. However, it has been reported that even during the fur trade the Chipewyan people tended to travel further than other Aboriginal peoples. This trait likely stems from a continuation of their early caribou adaptation.

According to J.G.E. Smith, many Chipewyan people built permanent log cabins in the 1920s but it is likely that cabins were used well before this date.[12] The Elders of the ACFN know that the cabins in Jackfish have been there since at least the 1920s.

Benjamin Marcel built the first Cabin in the area in about 1918.[13] There were several ACFN micro-villages located along the Athabasca River, one on the Birch River and one at Old Fort Point. The settlements of cabins along the Athabasca River included Point Brule and Poplar Point. The Elders have described two of these locations that are still in use. One village is located on Old Fort Point on the south shore of Lake Athabasca. The other is located on the lower portion of the Athabasca Delta, close to Jackfish Lake (Richardson Lake). The Elders also describe several small villages located all along the Athabasca River.

These micro-villages were groups of cabins that were used as a home base. They were often located in areas where there were good sources of fish, and were strategically located for access to trap lines during the winter months. Regular foraging trips on the land were still performed but the cabin became more of a central location.

9 Ibid, Jarvenpa, Robert and Brumbach, Hetty-Jo (1984) 10 Ibid, Sharpe, Henry S. (1977) 11 Smith, James E., The Emergence of the Micro-Urban Village Among the Caribou-Eater Chipewyan, Human Organization, Vol. 37, No. 1, Spring 1978. 12 Ibid, Smith, James G. E., (Spring 1978) pp 38–40. 13 Alice Marcel Rigney, personal interview.

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Historical Context of the Lands



CHARLIE MERCREDI
Charlie Mercredi maintaining a log cabin.

Other External Factors

In the 1900s there were seasonal jobs to be had in river transportation, construction and the forestry business. Still the Chipewyan people continued their traditional livelihood and the protection of this life from the effects of settlers and government control became an extremely important issue.

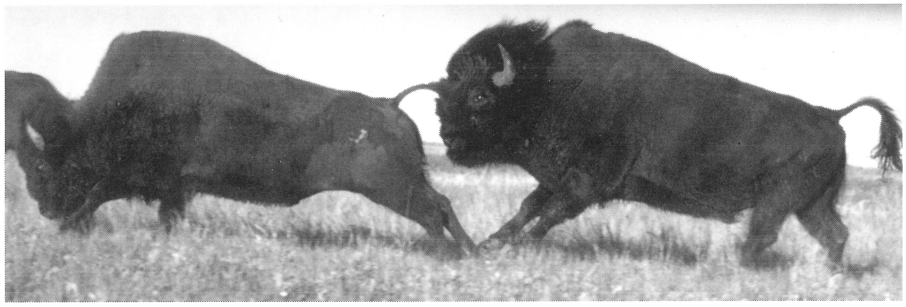
In 1912 a railway line reached Athabasca Landing. In 1915 another rail line reached Peace Landing, and with it came more Metis and white trappers to Fort Chipewyan. After World War I there was an "invasion" of white trappers into the Fort Chipewyan area followed by an angry reaction from the Aboriginal trappers and hunters. They resorted to burning specific areas of the forest, they increased their own fur production to out-compete the white trappers and they petitioned the government to either create a reserve, or protect and honor the promises made in Treaty 8.[14] Instead of protecting the treaty rights of the Aboriginal people, the Government created Wood Buffalo Park.

In 1922 Wood Buffalo Park[15] was designated and further expanded in 1926. The Park initially excluded new trappers and hunters but it eventually became a major contributor to the Aboriginal hardships in the area. After the 1926 Park expansion a new rule allowed those present in the new portion of the Park area to continue to hunt, trap and trade. Although this temporarily protected the area from intruders, this rule had the effect of excluding other Aboriginal people from the Park.[16] Some Chipewyan people were able to continue to hunt and trap within the Park under the new rules, while others were excluded from the Park entirely (even for the purposes of visiting their relatives).

In 1926 commercial fishing in Lake Athabasca began. The fishing originally concentrated on the east side of the Lake but most of the people in the region had small motors on their boats. This was the first economic diversification for this area. By 1930 drought and hunger had hit the region hard. The Aboriginal people called for buffalo from the Park to be killed and supplied to the hungry people of the area.

14 McCormack, P. (1993) Romancing the Northwest as Prescriptive History: Fort Chipewyan and the Northern Expansion of the Canadian State. 15 This Park was designated a National Park later. 16 Ibid, McCormack, P. (1993)

Photograph of Bison courtesy of Fort Chipewyan Museum.



As a proposed solution to the complaints from this region the Government of Alberta began to impose closed seasons on wildlife such as beaver and muskrat, despite the appeals of Chief Jonas Laviolette of the ACFN.[17] In 1928 the Federal Government agreed to transfer the natural resources to the provinces. During that transfer the Federal Government attached specific conditions protecting the Aboriginal peoples rights to hunt, trap and fish. This relevant clause from the Natural Resources Transfer Agreement (NRTA) of 1931 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."[18]

Unfortunately, the Supreme Court of Canada had ruled that the effect of this clause effectively takes away the right to hunt, trap or fish "commercially".

December 23, 1937, almost ten years later, Indian Reserve 201 was approved and a certificate of title was passed to the Federal Crown. However, due to administrative red tape, the reserve was not officially declared until 1954. In 1940, the Chipewyan people and the Federal Government agreed to a land claims settlement.[19] In the meantime the ACFN peoples continued to suffer. Chief Laviolette sent a letter to the Government in 1938.

17 Ibid. Fumoleau, (1973) 18 Ibid. Natural Resources Transfer Agreement, from Burrows and Rotman (1998) Aboriginal Legal Issues: Cases, Materials and Commentary, Vancouver, Butterworths. 19 Ibid, Stuart Adams & Associates (1998) p. 83.

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"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 (white trappers) from outside 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 else 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 favorites) 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."[20]

20 Letter from Jonas Laviolette to the Alberta Minister of Agriculture on April 4, 1938, reprinted from Fumoleau.

Despite the invasion of the white trappers, and the other difficulties faced by the ACFN peoples, they continued to live off the land. Once the allocation of Reserve 201 was finally made, there was some protection for the Band's trapping and traditional livelihood.

In 1939 the Alberta government introduced registered trap lines. Originally the Aboriginal people obtained their trapping licenses for free. However, by 1944 the Government was charging royalties on the furs. That same year, 36 Chipewyan families with 116 people transferred membership to the Cree Band.

These were the Chipewyan families who had remained hunting, trapping and fishing in the Park. Also, in 1944 family allowance payments had begun. During this time there was a concerted effort by the Indian agent to arrange work for the men of the region outside of Fort Chipewyan. As a result of World War II and the interest in uranium, the Federal Government nationalized Eldorado Gold Mines and the Northern Transportation Company. In 1946 a Park regulation was introduced to limit each hunter to one moose per year. In 1947 there was a large fire in Wood Buffalo National Park. Some attribute this fire to the fact that the Park would not allow the controlled burns traditionally initiated in the area by the Aboriginal people. In 1949 trapping areas were introduced in Wood Buffalo National Park. In 1951 a sawmill was started. In 1953 uranium mining was started. In 1955 the Mackenzie highway was completed to Hay River, and the Swanson Lumber Co. was started. In 1957 there were road-building projects all over the area. In 1958 the health and welfare department came to Fort Chipewyan and in 1959, the Federal Government started a housing program. Through all of this, it was not until 1960 that Aboriginal people were given the right to vote.[21]

21 The information on these historical developments was obtained from the Fort Chipewyan Way of Life Study (1998)

Historical Context of the Lands

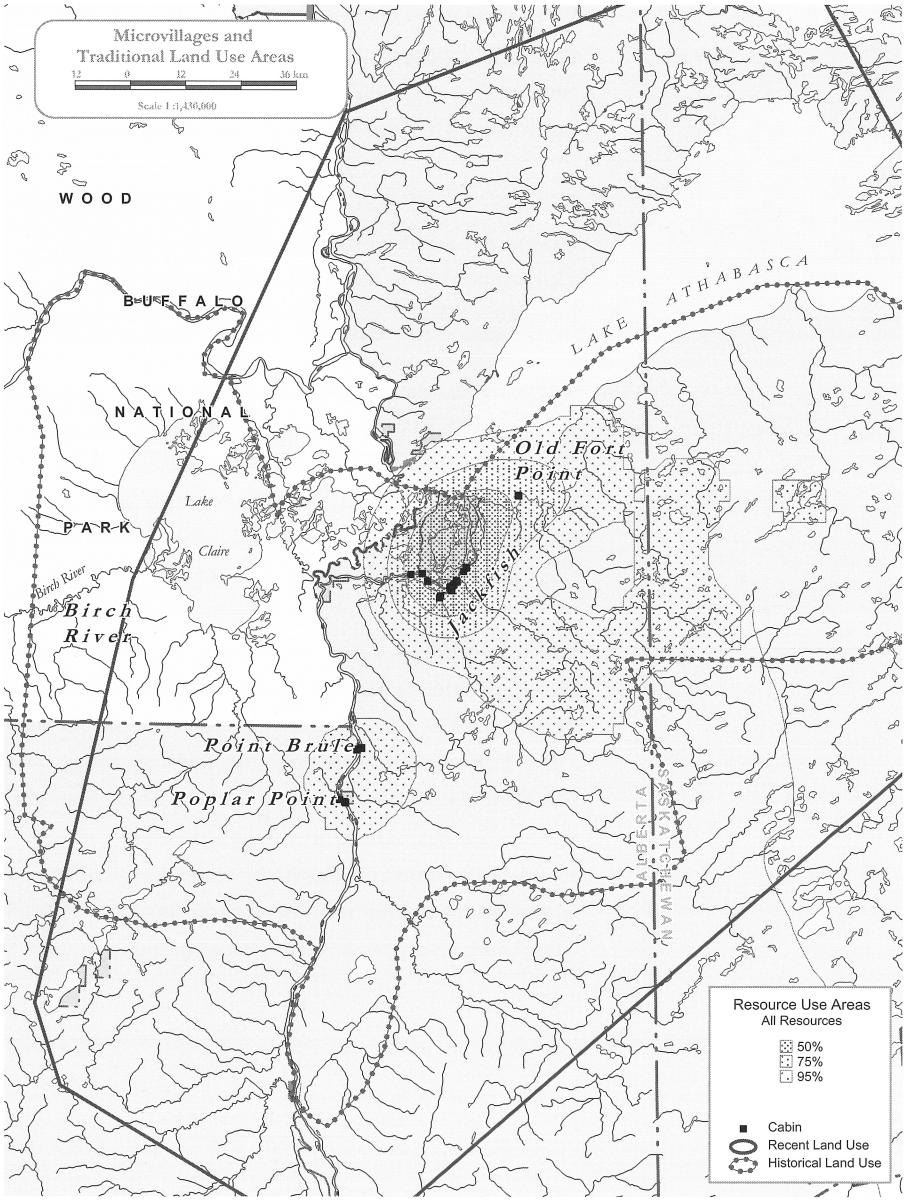

Figure 4.3
Micro-villages © ACFN.

Recent Land Use Intensity

Figure 4.3 presents a rough analysis of the land use that was recorded in Elder interviews during 2002. The land use was recorded by identifying locations where animals were trapped, or shot and where fish were caught and berries and medicines gathered by the current ACFN Elders. The intensity of land use is measured by counting the number or percentage of land use locations included within a specific area. The map shows areas where 50, 75 and 95 percent of the locations are included. This land use intensity does not account for the relative importance of different types of harvests such as the difference in importance between a moose, a muskrat or some rat root. This land use description is representative of the land use of the current Elders only. Some Elders that used important ACFN areas have recently passed away or are otherwise unable to be interviewed. However, this is a rough estimate of the intensity of more recent traditional activity. This map also emphasizes the importance of the villages and cabins along the river (Pont Brule and Poplar Point) and cabins on the Delta (Jackfish) and cabins on Lake Athabasca (Old Fort Point). These concentrations of activity coincide with the micro-village concept. Since ACFN people moved from the Birch River area in the 1920s, their land use of this area is not recorded in the recent interviews. The interview time period begins in the 1940s.

Historical land use areas and the larger land use area are also presented on the map. The creation of the Wood Buffalo Park has shifted the land use eastward out of the park, but intensive land use areas are included within the other historical areas. Also, the larger land use area extends further north, where caribou harvesting was recorded but has been declining in recent times. The land use area also extends further south however Elders that more actively used these areas have passed away or been displaced by other developments.

The intensity of ACFN traditional land use is centered around their micro-villages. These villages are located in the approximate center of their larger land use area that extends north, south and east from these villages. The Wood Buffalo Park has reduced the western land use area.

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Conclusion

In the latter part of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, the ACFN people continued their lives within the context of their micro-villages, in spite of increasing pressure to move into a central location such as Fort Chipewyan. During this time, more settlers were occupying their lands, their traditional livelihood was not being protected, and many promises of Treaty 8 were being ignored. The Chipewyan were exposed to waves of diseases and periods of starvation and resource scarcity.

In 1926, H.J. Bury, the federal agent in the area described the difference between the Indian and white trappers like this:

"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..."[22]

The pressure of settlement continued to grow during this period. The Aboriginal people struggled to obtain protection in the form of preserves and reserves that would allow them to continue their traditional livelihoods. Some were able to obtain outside employment but most obtained seasonal or temporary work and returned to their traditional livelihood for survival. The following chapters contain a record of these traditional activities.

22 H. J. Bury, Supervisor of Indian Timber Lands, to Deputy Superintendent General, 7 July 1926, from McCormack, (1993) p. 114.

CHAPTER FIVE

Traditional Land Use Activities

Traditional Land Use Cycles

The land use activities of the ACFN were recorded by interviewing the Elders of the Fort Chipewyan community during the years 2001 and 2002. Some Elders who were interviewed had moved from the Fort Chipewyan region and are now living in Fort McKay or Fort McMurray. The land use described below is the land use of the current Elders who are members of the ACFN. In some cases this includes their parents and their children. This account of the land use is from their personal experiences on the land covering the period from approximately 1920 to the present.

The experience of these Elders does not include the land use before the creation of the Wood Buffalo National Park, but it does include the micro-villages of Jackfish, Old Fort Point and Point Brule. There were also several smaller groups of people living along the Athabasca River during this time. Just as in earlier times, the traditional life of these people involved an annual cycle. This cycle would be oriented towards the availability of different foods or medicines and would involve long trips away from the micro-villages, sometimes three months at a time.

Margaret Marcel, Liza Flett, and Daniel Marcel traditionally cleaning hide.© ACFN.



CHAPTER FIVE

Traditional Land Use Activities

The ACFN people responded to what the land offered. Each season would bring different opportunities to harvest different animals, fish or plants. The people had to move and adapt to harvest the various foods. Each season and each year nature provided harvest opportunities, and the people would harvest the foods as they became available.

In previous times the ACFN ancestors followed the caribou herds, therefore their annual cycle was geared toward the caribou's seasonal movements. With the Boreal forest adaptation and the micro-village centre, the variety of foods for the ACFN people increased. An important staple in this environment is moose meat, which is supplemented in the winter by caribou and in the spring, summer and fall by muskrats, waterfowl and fish. During this period, the Chipewyan people used the cabin as a center, so it was usually located where there were plenty of harvesting opportunities. The men often left the cabin for longer periods for caribou hunting and fine fur trapping, and traveled well into Saskatchewan or the NWT. They would return to the cabin for Christmas, Easter or at the beginning of new harvest seasons.



The migration of Caribou, North West Territories. Reference NC-6-2349. Photograph courtesy of the Glenbow Museum, Calgary.



Camp at Old Fort.© ACFN.

The family might leave the cabin for hunting or gathering trips, and in the spring the entire family would move to the Delta for the muskrat-trapping season that was immediately followed by a waterfowl hunt.

Therefore the annual cycle changed since the days of Sarah Bell when, although adapted to the Boreal forest and trapping economy, the Chipewyan were still following a nomadic lifestyle. Since 1900, the micro-village had become a true center of activity. Although there was significant travel, they would return and live in the cabin many times during the same year.

One of these micro-villages is Jackfish; a grouping of cabins on the main channel of the Athabasca River Delta. This location is close to excellent fishing and is a convenient base for trapping muskrats during the spring. Some Elders told of their cabins at Old Fort Point as well. Old Fort Point is close to good fishing and waterfowl as well as close to trap lines. Others had cabins on the Athabasca River "all the way to Fort McKay," including Point Brule and Lobstick Point. These micro-villages are identified on Figure 4.3 in the previous chapter.

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Traditional Land Use Activities

The Annual Rounds

The annual round has been divided into five (5) periods, all relating to different harvest activities.

1. The **winter** period involves the trapping and hunting activities of the adult males. During this time, the rest of the family generally remains around the cabin.
2. In the **early spring** period, the family moves close to the Delta in order to trap and shoot muskrats.
3. In **later spring**, the waterfowl hunt is conducted on the Delta and on Lake Athabasca.
4. In the **summer** period, the families return to their cabins for fishing and other harvesting. Summers may also include hunting, fishing or berry picking expeditions that involve the entire family.
5. In the **fall**, during September and October, they would harvest the ripe berries and medicines. This was also the time to accumulate and prepare fish and dry meat for the winter. There was some waterfowl and moose hunting during this period as well.

Winter

During the winter months the men would go on hunting and trapping expeditions. They would journey great distances from their summer camps in the cast of caribou hunting, or to work their trap lines. They would travel by dog sled or by foot with dog packs. Fifty to 100 years ago, women may have joined the men on these winter trips but in more recent times, this was relatively rare.

Men would often travel together on hunting and trapping trips, accompanied by their father, brother or brother-in law. Before departure, they would plan their route, prepare traps and snares, make sure that all dog harnesses were ready for travel, and the dogs were fit and healthy. They prepared their nets and floats, and made certain that all the necessary tools were packed (two axes, chisel, sharp knives, guns and shells, airtight heater, etc.). They traveled to the trap line by dog sled, set up a camp if there was no cabin, fished to feed the dogs, set the nets if needed, gathered firewood, set the traps along the trails, hunted moose if the opportunity arose,



Tanned Caribou and Moose Skin Wrap-around Moccasins. "Canadian Museum of Civilization, CMC VI-E-13 a,b, image no. S75-4285



Gloves made from caribou skins by ACFN Elder, courtesy of the Fort Chipewyan Museum.

cooked for themselves, gathered spruce boughs for their tent floors, made any necessary repairs to their cabins, and still made several return trips home while visiting their traps and snares along the way.

The women would remain at the cabins where they would harvest mink, rabbits and other local resources. They would prepare their husband's clothes (extra changes), moccasins, wrap-arounds, leggings, parka, fur hat, beaver mitts, working mitts and knit socks. They spent time preparing foods such as moose meat, dry meat, dryfish and headcheese. They bought dry goods such as flour, baking powder, sugar, tea, lard, salt, jam, rice, rolled oats, raisins and other dry fruits. They prepared bedrolls with canvas covers, feather-robes, pillows and made duvet covers with flannelette sheets. It was also the responsibility of the women to repair or make toboggan wrap-arounds, make dog shoes (little booties for dogs during rough ice travel), maintain the home, watch over the children, do the laundry, prepare and repair the tent, as well as skin, flesh and dry the fine furs.

Spring – Muskrat Season

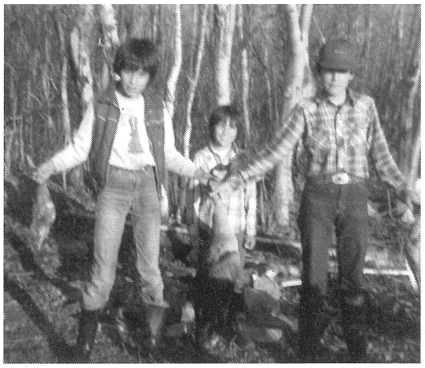
In the spring the people would move to the Delta to participate in the spring muskrat season. People would come from their cabins at Old Fort Point and the Athabasca River in order to set up camp. The Jackfish micro-village was well positioned for the muskrat hunt. March 1st is the first official day to trap muskrats and beavers. Rat canoes and dog teams were prepped for spring trapping.



Fort Chipewyan in the spring (circa 1960). ©ACFN. Since the construction of the Bennett Dam in 1968, the Bay in the foreground has dried up and is now filled with reeds.

CHAPTER FIVE

Traditional Land Use Activities



John Cardinal, brother James and Julian Adam. Goose Island 1979.

The men's roles included:

- Setting up rat camp for family;
- Building a stage in case of a flood;
- Making new stretchers for muskrats;
- Cutting poles for traps;
- Making sure that all traps were in good working order;
- Repairing rat canoe, moving family to camp;
- Setting muskrat traps;
- Lifting traps twice a day;
- Helping with the skinning;
- Fleshing and drying of muskrat pelts;
- Keeping aware of surroundings (water levels were checked to indicate whether the river was breaking up); and
- Feeding dogs.

The women's roles included:

- Preparation of extra clothing for entire family;
- Packing a six week supply of food and non-perishables;
- Bedrolls for all;
- Repairing moccasins or sewing new ones;
- Skinning, fleshing and drying muskrats; and
- Maintaining home and children.

Muskrats brought all the people together and helped pay off all the debts. Old Fort and Athabasca River people would come to the Delta as well. Muskrat season was an important period for the ACFN people.

Spring Waterfowl Hunt

After May 15th the trapping season was officially closed and the annual spring hunt for migrating birds began (ducks, geese, swans). This hunt usually took place at Goose Island where many families gathered. Travel was by boat. During this time swan meat was dried, grease was made from the fat and feathers were collected for making bedrolls and pillows.

Stories were exchanged around endless campfires with bottomless pots of tea and food. This was a time of joy and much laughter, and who wouldn't laugh, trapping was usually successful with most of the trappers averaging about 3,000 muskrats a season. Families lived at Goose Island for two to three weeks or until the lake was open and cleared of ice so that the families could make the crossing back to Fort Chipewyan. There they would sell their furs to the HBC or some other fur buyer, pay their bills, and buy new motors, boats, groceries, clothing and other staples necessary for the upcoming season.

The late spring was the time families began planting their vegetable gardens. They were seeded and tended to daily (watering and weeding). Gardening was introduced by the settler society and the micro-village existence allowed them to adopt this useful source of food.

Summer

After the spring hunts and a short visit to the town for trading, supplies and socialization, the families moved back to their cabins. Sometimes there would be summer trips for hunting, fishing and gathering (usually by boat). Fishing was an important summer activity to the Chipewyan people. Since the moose often got into the water to escape from flies, they were hunted from canoes on rivers and lakes during this season. Bears feeding on berries by the rivers in late summer were also harvested for their fat.

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Georgiana Mercredi cleaning fish.
©ACFN.

Fishing

Fishnets were set to make dryfish for storage, and to supply food for the family and dogs. Most of the dryfish was for winter use, although some of it was sold and used as a source of income.

Men's role:

- Set and visit nets daily (twice a day if the fish are running);
- Moose and bear hunting along the river, usually July and August (the bears come down to the rivers to feed on the berries and are in good shape);
- Work and maintain the garden;
- Feed dogs;
- Check berry patches; and
- Assist women with tanning moose hides and gathering firewood (for drying fish, cooking and heat).

Women's role:

- Help with the dryfish making;
- Maintain the garden;
- Make dry meat;
- Tan moose and bear hides;
- Feed and water dogs; and
- Maintain the home and children.

Stretching Moose hides in the fall.
Courtesy of A. Rigney ©ACFN.

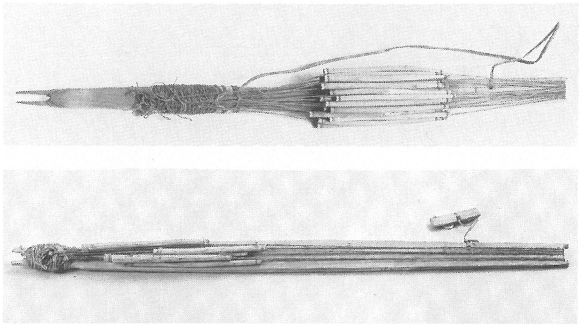


Fall

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. The activities in this period included fishing, hunting, gathering berries and medicines, and preparing for winter. Fishing and hunting took place on the rivers and lakes close to the summer camps or on Lake Athabasca. Nets were used for fishing, rifles were used for hunting big game, and shotguns were used for waterfowl. They would travel by boat (canoe or skiff). Motors were not used until 1930. They would travel to the berry patches by boat or foot, and would gather berries in special locations around the lake or along the rivers. The fall was also a time to hunt moose and bear. Fall hunting trips were on foot with dog packs, or in boats.

CHAPTER FIVE

Traditional Land Use Activities



Six Rabbit snares, each of sinew with a wooden toggle, wrapped around a piece of wood that has skin thong with wooden toggle for carrying. ©Canadian Museum of Civilization, CMC VI-N-57, image no. S75-4099.

Fall Activities:

- Making dryfish and storing it for winter use;
- Making fish oil;
- Gathering berries (cranberries, blueberries, moose berries);
- Making and preserving jams and jellies;
- Gathering vegetables from the garden (potatoes, carrots, turnips, cabbage, onions, beans, and cucumbers);
- Gathering straw and sand to prepare root cellar for vegetables;
- Making dry meat, and storing it for winter use;
- Making grease from moose and bear fat;
- Tanning moose hides;
- Gathering, sawing, chopping and stacking firewood;
- Feeding and watering the dogs; and
- Gathering, drying, and storing medicines.

Activities from October to freeze-up:

- Hunting waterfowl for winter use;
- Hanging 2,000-4,000 fish for winter dog food;
- Gathering berries until the snow covered them;
- Hunting moose and hanging meat for winter use;
- Stockpiling firewood;
- Repairing toboggans and dog harnesses;
- Preparing traps;
- Pulling boats out of the river and putting motors away for the winter;
- Wait for the river to freeze and become crossable; and
- Cross the river and mark the trail for others.

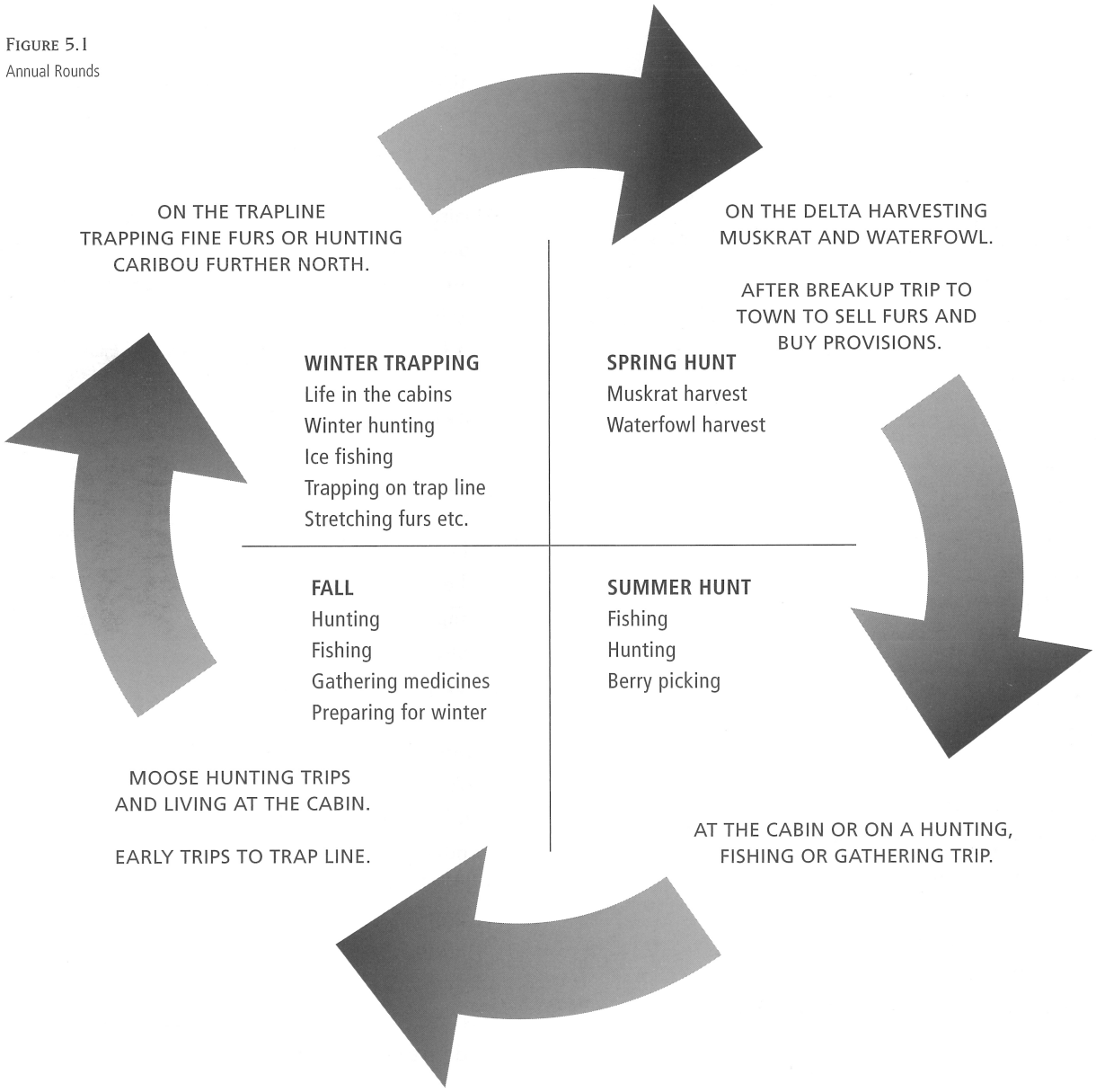
The men's daily tasks included:

- Planning hunting trips;
- Lifting nets and hanging fish;
- Gathering firewood;
- Telling stories (teaching traditional knowledge and legends); and
- Helping the women care for the children.

The women's daily tasks included:

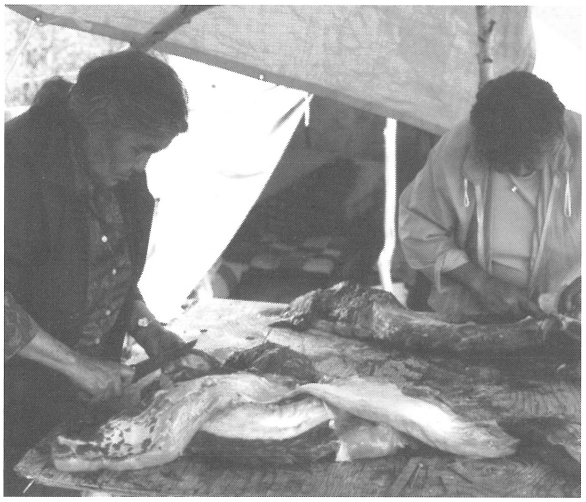
- Cooking and cleaning house;
- Watching over drying fish or meats;
- Laundry;
- Mending clothes;
- Hauling water,
- Gathering medicine;
- Telling stories and legends;
- Snaring rabbits; and shooting grouse; and
- Tending to and playing with children.

FIGURE 5.1
Annual Rounds



CHAPTER FIVE

Traditional Land Use Activities





Left: Mary Madeline Marcel and Liza Flett making drymeat at Old Fort Bay. ©ACFN.

Right: Mary Madeline Marcel and Adeline Tripe de Roche fleshing hide. ©ACFN.

During the boreal forest times the Chipewyan people continued to use the adaptations learned many years ago. The summer hunting trips would include the entire family. Mrs. Marcel describes one of these trips below.

Alice Rigney's Story of her Mom (Mary Madeline Marcel)

"When my mother married my dad she was 16 years old and my dad was 36. Their marriage was arranged (mom said that she should have arranged all of her children's marriages). Mom being so young didn't have very many skills and this was a drawback and she felt distraught but wasn't discouraged; she needed someone to teach her the skills. Within a few months of their marriage (1937), dad told mom that a few families were going out on the mainland for a month or so. Dad also told mom that she was to stay home as she didn't know much of anything. 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.



Irene Marcel, Henry Marcel, Barbara Marcel, Pat Cruikshank, Donna Marcel, and Raymond Marcel drying meat. ©ACFN.

They were joined by other extended family including Isadore and Columbe Voyageur, Uncle Joe and Rosa, Jonas and Annie Piche, mom and dad, and Marie Mercredi (Gabriel Mercredi's mother). They left Jackfish Lake and boated as far as Jonas Laviolette's house (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, there they had lunch (fish cooked over a fire, bannock and tea) and rested the dogs. The dogs all 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 (Gabriel Mercredi's mother) was the leader as she was the oldest and the wisest. The men were headed for the campsite and hunted along the way. When the women started on the trail, which was following the natural ridge of the sand hills, they would watch for notch signs on trees which was their signal in 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), the dogs' sharp noses told them there was water up ahead and 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 cosy. In the distance, a distinctive shot was heard 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.

After the tent is set for the night, the fires are burning, the blankets are drying, dogs are tied up, the children are happy as the atmosphere is one of happiness and a feast is on the way. Dinner is usually the choice cuts, which included the brisket and ribs, usually boiled and a soup made. Bannock and tea completes the meal.

All this took about two days, then the dried meat was placed in the moose hide, tied securely and stored high into 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 traveled 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 in turn the many stories they were told were also lessons of life.



Jackfish Lake. © ACFN.



Summer Family Camp. ©ACFN.

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 explained that this type of summer trip was common right up to the time he entered residential school in the late 1940s. They would live from tent to tent all summer long. The men would leave in the morning to hunt, and the others would head for the camp of the next night. The longest time they would stay in one place was two nights. In 1946 Pat went to residential school. After that he went with his dad hunting and fishing when he could."

Family Groups

Family groups traveling had many advantages. When a large animal was killed there were many people to help. The animal was shared, dry meat was made, grease was made from the animal fat, and the moose hide was made with the help of the clan.

There was also safety in groups. In the case of an accident, or a woman going into labor, there usually was one or more in the group who was able to perform the appropriate procedure with confidence. This was knowledge that was passed down from one generation to the next. The men would go on hunting trips together, and working as a team, they were usually successful. This kept their confidence high and the whole group content.

The delta was a vibrant eco-system, teaming with thousands of muskrats. One would think they would never die out, but they did!

CHAPTER SIX

Trapping Activities





TRAPPING

Top: Charlie Mercredi's south shore trap line. ©ACFN.

Bottom: Margaret Voyageur in front of sampling of pelts harvested by husband Charlie Voyageur. ©ACFN.

Trapping is a traditional and commercial activity of the ACFN people. It has been a traditional practice of the Chipewyan people since aboriginal times. However, with the arrival of the fur traders, Aboriginal trapping expanded to meet the commercial demands of the European markets. During the first stages of the fur trade, from approximately 1700 to 1821, the Chipewyan people were both traditional trappers, commercial trappers and served as intermediaries in the fur trade. It was their participation in the fur trade that eventually changed their way of life from the caribou nomadic to a more sedentary life in the boreal forest. By the late 1800s and early 1900s the Athabasca Chipewyan people were very involved in commercial trapping and pursued quasi-nomadic traditional lives in the three regions described in the historical map presented in the previous chapters. During this period, visiting the fur trade posts in their area was an important part of their annual cycles.

During the late 1800s, after the construction of the railways, there was considerable competition from immigrant-trappers in the Lake Athabasca region. The Aboriginal trappers suffered from the pressures of an unregulated open access industry. Although Treaty 8 signed in 1899 was promised to protect the Aboriginal livelihood, immigrant commercial trappers continued to disrupt the traditional and trapping livelihood of the Chipewyan peoples. The Aboriginal peoples made significant representations to the Governments to honor the promises of the Treaty.

However, the response of the Government was not to protect the Aboriginal people, but to create Wood Buffalo Park. In the years following the creation of the Park, significant land use conflicts continued both inside and outside of the Park boundaries. Some Aboriginal people were permitted to continue trapping within the Park boundaries, while others were excluded.

It was during this period that micro-villages developed. More permanent cabins were constructed and Aboriginal trapping and hunting activities were conducted out of these centrally and strategically located groups of cabins. When Wood Buffalo National Park was created, it occupied a large portion of the traditional territory that was used by the western Chipewyan group. As a result, some members of the ACFN moved from the Wood Buffalo Park area into the Jackfish micro-village area, while other Chipewyan people were absorbed into the Mikisew Cree Band and continued to trap and hunt in the Park.

Finally, after the Natural Resources Transfer Agreement in 1939, a registered trap line system was introduced in Alberta. ACFN members acquired trap lines under this system. Also, in 1940, Reserve 201 was allocated to the ACFN, which provided the Chipewyans with exclusive lands with no competition from the settler-trappers. The ACFN members currently hold registered trap lines in the Lake Athabasca region that are shown on the trap line map in Figure 6.1. ACFN members currently holding trap lines are Archie Cyprien, Charlie Voyageur, Ernie Cardinal, Leslie Laviolette, Marlene Bruno, Peter Whitedeer, Julie Mercredi, Joe Marcel, Freddy Marcel and Roy Marcel.

Members of the ACFN also trapped muskrats and other furs on Reserve 201. During the 1940s and 1950s Jonas Laviolette, the Chief of the Athabasca Chipewyan People, set quotas or maximum harvests per family for muskrat harvesting on the Reserve. These traditional hunting rules provided each trapper with an area that would then be respected by other members of the Band. Commercial trapping continued to be a major part of the Athabasca Chipewyan economy for decades. During the late 1960s the Athabasca Chipewyan people generated 30% of their money income from trapping. Trapping provided a base income that allowed the continuation of other forms of traditional harvesting. Even as store food became

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available to the community, almost all of the meat consumed by the ACFN came from trapping, traditional hunting, gathering and fishing. Trapping was an integral part of the traditional life of the Athabasca Chipewyan People.

The trapping activities of the ACFN can be divided into two major groups: winter trapping for fine furs, and spring trapping for muskrat. Trapping for fine furs takes place on designated trap lines from November to March and includes lynx, marten, wolf, wolverine, fisher, ermine, fox and mink.

Beaver is also trapped during the winter on trap lines. Muskrat trapping takes place on Reserve 201 and other locations on the Peace Athabasca Delta and begins in the late winter/early spring. "During this period every trapper from the community took some time to get a few rats." (ACFN Elder)

Winter Trapping Season

Since the early traditional cycles of the Chipewyan peoples (as described in the previous chapter) there has been a winter trapping season where the families live in cabins relatively close to the winter trapping areas. During this time the trappers regularly check their trap lines either on foot, by dog sled, or more recently by snow machine.

The animals trapped at this time are martens, fishers, lynx, mink, wolverine, fox, wolves, ermine and beavers. Rabbits are also snared by both the trappers on the trap line and by the family close to the cabin. A trapper may have over 100 traps on the trap line extending over 50 miles. In the fall the trapper would prepare for the trapping season. In the time of dog sleds, this would involve catching literally thousands of fish to be used as dog food during the winter. The trapper would also gather wood for cabins on the trap line and repair the cabins for winter. He also prepared various types of equipment such as the sled, dog harnesses, dog foot covers, hatchets, knives, snowshoes etc.





Left: 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.

Right: Freddy Marcel on Flood Stage on Delta ©ACFN.

Once trapping season started, the trapper would go out on the trap line to set traps, and hunt and fish for food caches. During the dog sled times the trapper may be out on the trap line until Christmas. However, with the advent of the snow machine, more frequent trips could be made to the central cabin. On the trap line the trapper would check his traps while maintaining an awareness of moose tracks or other harvesting opportunities. In this way, the commercial trapping existence complemented the traditional harvesting opportunities.

Traditional Trap Line Rules

Traditional trapping rules of the ACFN involved respect and cooperation with the trapping neighbour. The Aboriginal trapper was aware of the peak fur availability and the sustainable economic ecology of harvesting only the best furs while leaving the rest for other years. The Aboriginal trapper was also cognoscente of the rights of the next trap line and would often rely on this good will for assistance with any emergencies that may arise. Sometimes one trapper's trail could be followed by another to get to his own trap line. However, once a trap line trail was "cut," it was always respected. This mutual respect was also accompanied by some clear rules

Trapping Activities

about trespassing on another's trap line. As noted in Chief Laviolette's letters, and other quotes in the last chapter, the settler trappers did not obey the traditional rules regarding animal preservation, or the rules outlining trap line respect. Once Reserve 201 was created, at least the rules could be re-established and enforced on the Reserve. Often when ACFN members held registered trap lines they would share their lines between their family and close trapping friends. In such cases, the same traditional respect rules would apply. The traplines that are currently held by the ACFN members are presented in Figure 6.1.

Trapping as a Vocation

In the survey done for this study the occupations of each Elder were recorded according to the seasons of fall, winter, spring and summer. Questions were asked about two periods, before 1967 and after 1967. Most of the men answered that they were trappers and most of the women referred to themselves as homemakers. During the period before 1967, most of the men would trap either full time. If not, they would at least partake in trapping activities in the winter and spring. Many were labourers, carpenters, welders or cooks in the summer and fall. Hunting and fishing were cited as occupations as well as dog protector and bushman.

After 1967 the number of men claiming to be trappers declined as they became labourers and took on other seasonal occupations. The term "unemployed" was used only once. 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.

Elders and parents had passed on their knowledge of traditional life and trapping to their children for generations. Unfortunately, the decline of trapping and traditional activities also brought a decline in the passing of this knowledge. The survey shows that many families were moving into Fort Chipewyan and Fort McMurray to find other work. However, those who did move continued to trap, hunt and fish during specific seasons.

It was during the late 60s and early 70s that the mode of winter transportation changed from dog sleds to snow machines. This change was accompanied by a shift in the fishing intensity for dog food. They began to spend less of their time fishing since it was not required for the dogs. Snow machines also allowed trappers and hunters to travel further, faster, and to live in more centralized locations.

The profitability of trapping activities depended upon the quantities and prices of each fur obtained. Since the 1950s there have been significant fluctuations in the prices of furs. These price fluctuations varied depending on the type of fur and the availability. Beaver prices showed a relatively stable but declining price from the 1950s to the 1990s. These prices gradually declined from 70 and 100 dollars per pelt to between 20 to 50 dollars per pelt. Mink prices generally followed the same trend. Lynx prices were relatively stable during the 50s and 60s, but spiked upwards in the 70 and 80s (only to fall significantly in the 90s). Fisher and martin prices also climbed in the late 80s and fell significantly again in the 90s. Muskrat prices were very strong before 1950 (above 10 dollars per pelt) but fell during the 50s to between 5 and 10 dollars per pelt. During the mid 70s and early 80s the price of muskrat rose to the 10-dollar level again, only to fall to record lows in the 90s.

Fur availability fluctuated due to natural factors, over harvesting, depletion, and regulation. Trapping of fine furs was impacted by natural fluctuations and cycles. For instance, the rabbit cycle would affect the cycle of the lynx and other carnivores. The Aboriginal people were also exposed to settler-trapper competition and the effects of trapper waste and over harvesting. In addition to these challenges, the cost of snow machines, trapping supplies, and the gradual decline of beaver and mink prices, placed continuing economic pressures upon the trappers.The muskrat harvest in the spring was an important part of the trapper's year. Harvesting a significant number of muskrat would often allow the trapper to pay off debts and provide him with supplies to last throughout the summer. When the 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 supported by traditional foods and a traditional lifestyle). Trapping, like farming, is dependent upon natural cycles and market prices. If either does not cooperate, it becomes extremely difficult to make a living.

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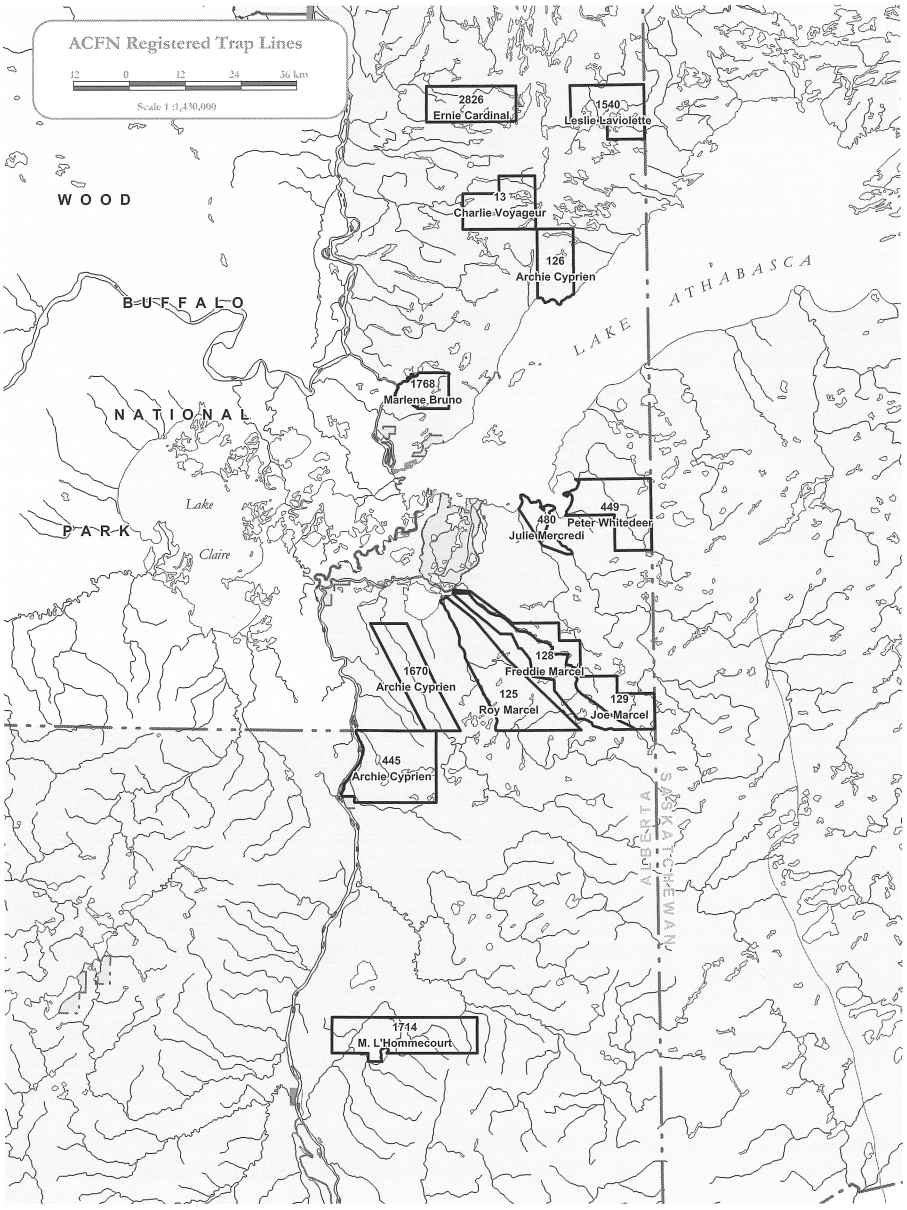


FIGURE 6.1
ACFN Registered Trap Lines.
©ACFN.

Effects of the Bennett Dam

When industrial or competitive factors are introduced to this delicate fur economy, the economic balance can be easily lost. The initial and continuing effects of the Bennett Dam have had significant effects upon the muskrat harvest of the Peace-Athabasca Delta. As discussed in earlier chapters, the ACFN community was also exposed to other pressures that pushed them away from the traditional economy into towns. One of these important forces was the requirement to have their children attend school. Also, medical services were available in the towns and the wage economy sometimes offered attractive rewards.

Although muskrat harvesting could be very profitable, due to fluctuating muskrat populations, the trapper must take advantage of the good times to make ends meet. The Bennett Dam significantly impacted the muskrat harvest at an important time in the evolution of the ACFN peoples. During the late 60s and early 70s (after the Bennett Dam) the muskrat harvest reached historical lows. This greatly affected the ability of trappers to continue their trade and forced many of them out of business. As the prices of some fine furs increased during the later 70s and 80s, some trappers temporarily resumed trapping for fine furs and began to participate in muskrat harvesting again. However, the Delta continued to generate fewer and fewer muskrats. This, along with the general fall in fur prices eventually caused the industry to collapse. The traditional economy of the ACFN people was also impacted, since trappers were no longer on the land providing traditional foods as they had been before. The bushman skills did not provide the trappers or their children with the skills required for employment. With this, the ACFN knowledge was quickly eroding, along with the occupational basis of their culture.

Trapping Activities



Wolverine



Fisher



Ermine–Weasel



Red Squirrel



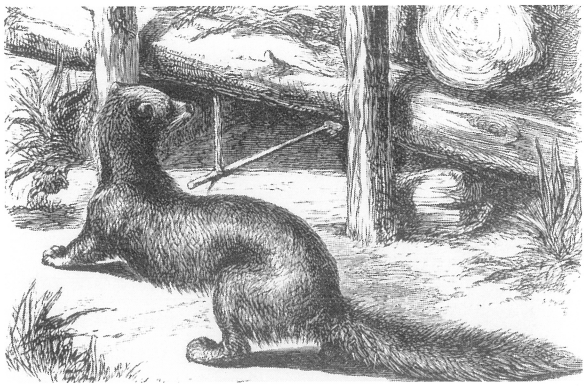
Snowshoe Hare



Skunk

Traditional Names of Fur and Aquatic Bearing Animals

Mink	tehjuzi
Marten	sa
Lynx	Tseeshe
Red Fox	Nageechtaroy
Wolverine	Nabe
Fisher	Sa Tsho
Ermine/Weasel	Techkale
Grey Wolf	Nunneea
Hare/Rabbit	Ga
Red Squirrel	Gleee
Skunk	Nooltsee
Porcupine	Tsee
Muskrat	Tshenn
Beaver	Tsha
Otter	Nambe



Left: Mink taking bait from a deadfall trap. Painted by Robert Hood in 1821. McGill-Queens University Press. Picture courtesy of the Fort Chipewyan Museum.

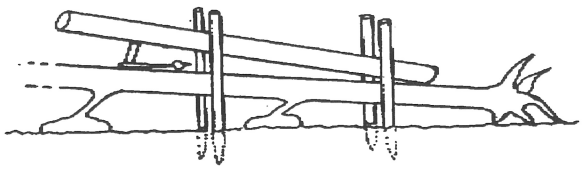
Right: Sketch of a deadfall trap and marten. Reference NA-1240-4. Courtesy of the Glenbow Museum, Calgary.

Mink (tehjuzi)

The mink has been a very desirable fur throughout history and has been continuously trapped by the ACFN people. Being a carnivore, mink eat a variety of foods. They eat clams, fish and muskrat, and are regularly found close to waterways and streams. Over the past years, as the Delta dried and the muskrat declined, the mink population fell victim to decline as well. Minks are best trapped in the winter on a number 1 1/2 trap and are found both on the trap lines and in the Delta. The locations of mink trapping are illustrated on the furbearers map in Figure 6.2.

Note the illustration of a mink taking the bait from a deadfall or traditional trap. These traps are set using large logs that are supported by small sticks. As the mink takes the bait, it pulls on the stick and causes the large log to fall. As a result, the mink becomes trapped underneath.

A diagram of a deadfall trap illustrating this trapping technology.



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Marten (sa)
Marten are found in pine or spruce forests where there are squirrels. They like the timber for cover, and it is the habitat for their prey. The province put a limit on marten for a while but they decided that they were not endangered and lifted any restrictions.



Lynx (Tseeshe)
Where there are rabbits and mice one will usually find the lynx. The lynx eat rabbit, mice and beaver, move very quickly and have an extremely large range. Charlie Voyageur used to trap between 50 and 70 lynx a year on his trap line north of Lake Athabasca, but not any more. In the mid sixties the government surveyed lynx populations, which resulted in a restriction of one lynx per trap line. What the government failed to realize was that they had studied zones that were not homogeneous ecosystems.

This miscalculation grouped the Fort Chipewyan area in with Lac La Biche and treated the bush country the same as open farm country. Close by in Saskatchewan and in the NWT, lynx continued to be trapped without restriction. However, in ACFN territory, the restrictions of one lynx, one otter, and one wolverine was enforced, making the trapping of these animals uneconomical.



Red Fox (Nageechtaroy)
Like the lynx, fox are also wide ranging animals, and follow the mice and rabbit cycle. These animals eat muskrat and are often found in meadows. The season for fox is November 1 to February 28.

Wolverine (Naghaye)
The wolverine can be found from the barren lands through to farming country. These animals are travelers, and are very powerful and fierce for their size. Charlie Voyageur recalls finding a wolverine that had dragged a trap all winter long and still it fought to the end. Current regulations only permit taking one wolverine per year.

Fisher (Sa Tsho)
Fishers feed on 'everything' including marten, rabbits and mice. They are far ranging animals that can be found almost anywhere. However, the fisher is a dry land animal that prefers to reside in the woods. Restrictions on fishers are also enforced.

Ermine – Weasel (Techkale)
Although you tend to find ermine where the mice are, there are not very many ermine around. If you have lots of mice you will get lots of ermine. The ermine can be friendly if you carefully make friends by feeding it.



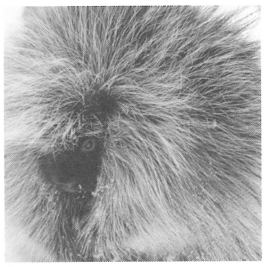
Grey Wolf (Nunneea)
The wolf goes after big game. However, they also live off of mice, rabbits and whatever else they can get a hold of. Charlie Voyageur remembers a wolverine that he killed. There were holes in its back where a wolf had bitten him.

Smaller mammals

Snowshoe Hare/Rabbit (Ga)
Hares go through 7 to 10 year cycles. Although rabbits are shot, the most common way to kill a rabbit is to snare it. Rabbits are snared both for food and for fur. Hundreds of rabbits were harvested by each family each year. Rene Bruno recalls one winter when he lived on rabbits when other animals were scarce.

Red Squirrel (Gleee)
Squirrels are also snared. Although used for their fur, these animals are also good to eat.

Skunk (Nooltsee)
Skunks will eat anything they can from roots to hornets' nests. They will even kill ducks. Skunks were used for meat, and skunk oils for medicines.



Porcupine (Tsee)
Porcupines are easy to find and kill since they tend to stay in the same place all the time. In earlier times people used porcupine quills for design. The quill of a porcupine can be extremely dangerous. To remove a quill from a dog's muzzle you first cut the end off to allow the quill to deflate. Then it comes out much easier.

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Traditional Trapping Knowledge

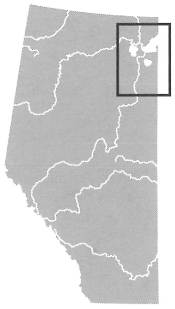
The lifetime experience of trapping has taught the ACFN Elders many things about the characteristics, habits and locations of many different species of animals.

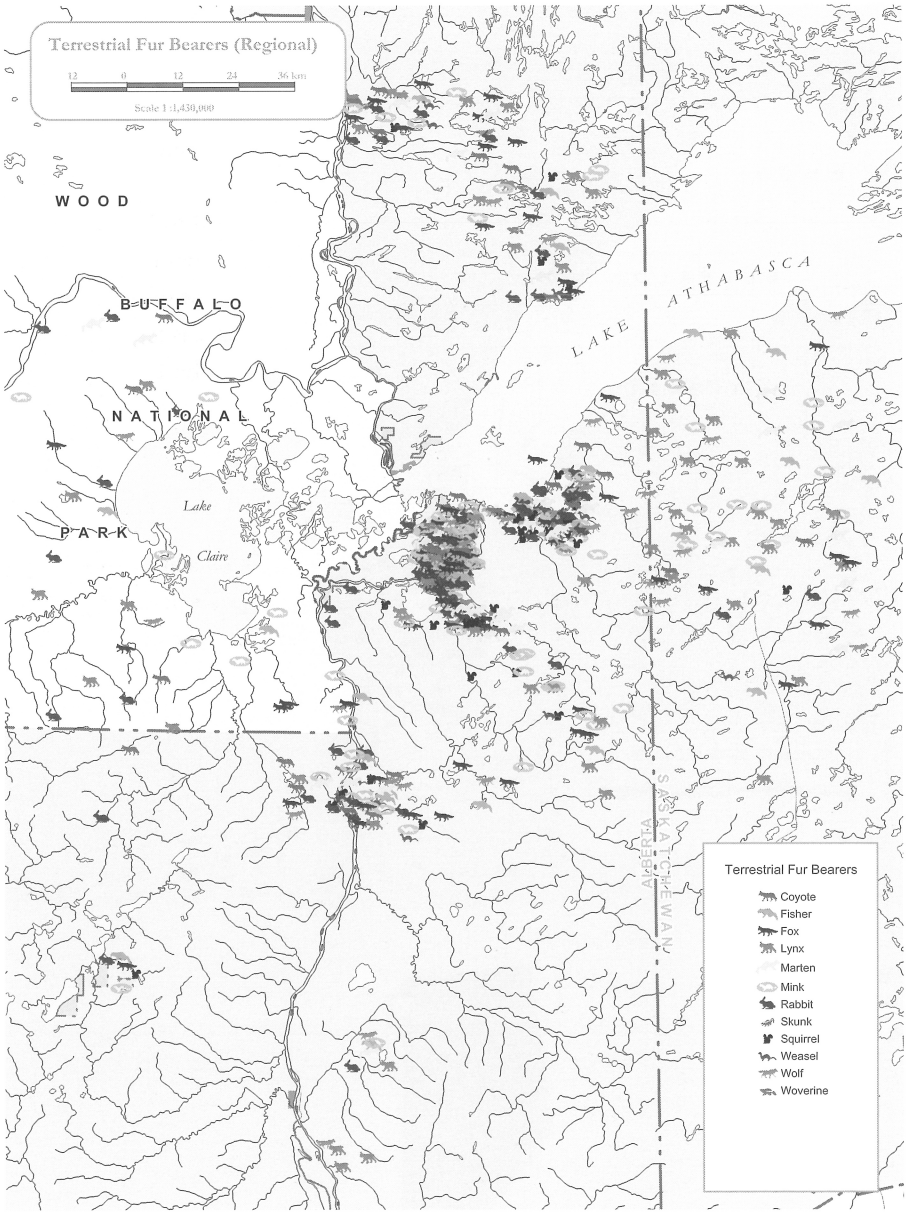
In the survey, the Elders were asked to locate various winter trapping areas, routes, cabins, and trails used throughout their traditional lands and they are depicted in the map provided in this chapter. Because of the number of Elders, trappers, and hunters that are no longer with us, these areas and trails are not exhaustive. This map does, however, give some indication of the traditional routes that were followed by the ACFN people.

Trapping Locations

Figures 6.2 and 6.3 contain the locations where the interviewed Elders trapped terrestrial mammals during the time period before 1968. The Elders were asked to identify specific locations where these animals were actually trapped.

FIGURE 6.2
Terrestrial Furbearers (Regional).
©ACFN.





CHAPTER SIX

Trapping Activities



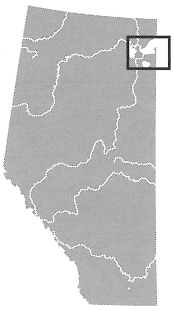


FIGURE 6.3
Terrestrial Furbearers (Local)
©ACFN.



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

Aquatic Furs

Aquatic furs that were trapped by the ACFN included muskrat, beaver and otter. Muskrat and beaver trapping locations of the ACFN are included in the Aquatic Furbearers map located at the end of this chapter.

Muskrat (Tshenn)

The cyclical nature of muskrat populations was reflected in the cycle of the traditional lives of the ACFN. Resource harvesting activities in the Delta were increased (decreased) during times of higher (lower) muskrat harvest. Muskrat harvesting provided a major incentive to spend time on the Delta.

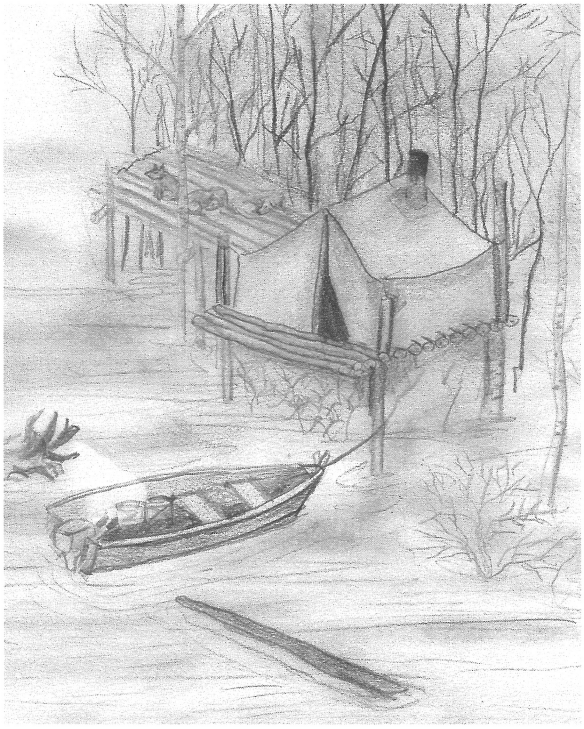
Spring ratting camps are established at the beginning of March. Essential requirements include canoes, fur stretchers and flag markers. Any necessary repairs are made to the traps during this time. Trappers may have up to 200 traps that are checked twice a day. Muskrats are taken back to camp where they are skinned and cleaned. Their hides are stretched, tacked on boards, and scraped clean of fat and meat. Cleaning is done with dull knives or scrapers that are made from moose. Pelts are then left to dry for two or three days.

Muskrat meat is eviscerated and washed in cold water. The tail and head are removed and the animal is split down the backbone to produce a flat lying carcass suitable for smoking and drying. It is then placed on a rack above a slow burning fire and dried in the sun for three days. When one wants to eat the dried meat it is soaked and boiled first.

Muskrat are shot as well as trapped. After they are shot they will usually float. Some hunters were able to call muskrats by whistling. Pushups (a muskrat mud and stick home) are checked with a rat spear. They would open the plunge hole of the muskrat and place the trap on the feeding platform. Traps #2 or #3 are used.

CHAPTER SIX

Trapping Activities



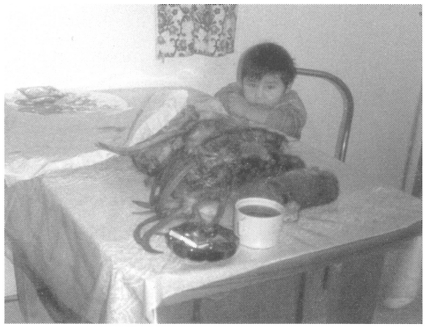
A Stage
Men would build a "stage" or platform to serve as a home in the event of a flood. Illustration by Trevor Michael – ACFN member.

Muskrat was an important food source for the ACFN people. During the muskrat-trapping season the meat would be eaten every day. In addition, meat was dried and stored for future use. Muskrats were also used as dog food during this period. ACFN Elders commented on how they were happy when the waterfowl came. Even though they really liked muskrat meat they were usually ready for a change after two months of eating muskrat.

During the later part of the muskrat-harvesting season as the snow melted, the river would often flood. During this time the entire family was helping to harvest on the delta. In preparation for a flood a stage would be constructed. The stage was a platform built using trees from the delta upon which a tent and living area was provided. The stage would allow the family to continue to live on the delta during a flood and maintain their harvest the best they could. A sketch of a typical stage is provided. The flood would usually only last for a few days and the stage was home during this time.







Top: Beaver. Photograph courtesy of the Fort Chipewyan Museum.

Centre: (left to right) Charlie Mercredi and Joe Adam with Beaver Pelts. ©ACFN.

Bottom: Charlie Mercredi Jr. and Muskrats. ©ACFN.

Beaver (Tsha)

Beaver are trapped in the fall. Unless you have a trap line, then you trap them in the winter. Still, the main hunt for beaver is in the spring around April and May. During the winter the trapper looks for runways in which to set his traps. In contrast, the trap is set on the shore in the spring, using a beaver castor or willow.

Although beaver can be used for food, it is also a very important fur. The beaver was used as a standard in the fur trade to measure the amount of fur that was traded.

Aquatic Fur Trapping Locations

The aquatic fur trapping locations are presented in Figures 6.4 and 6.5. Here you will find the trapping locations identified by the Elders who participated in this study. The quantity of symbols are not intended to represent the number of animals trapped, but rather each location where trapping occurred.

Otter (Nambe)

Otters are found in rivers and lakes and surrounding areas. They live on fish, frogs and other small animals. Otters have been known to eat muskrats. Otters were relatively rare and were not trapped in large quantities by the ACFN trappers.

Trapping Activities

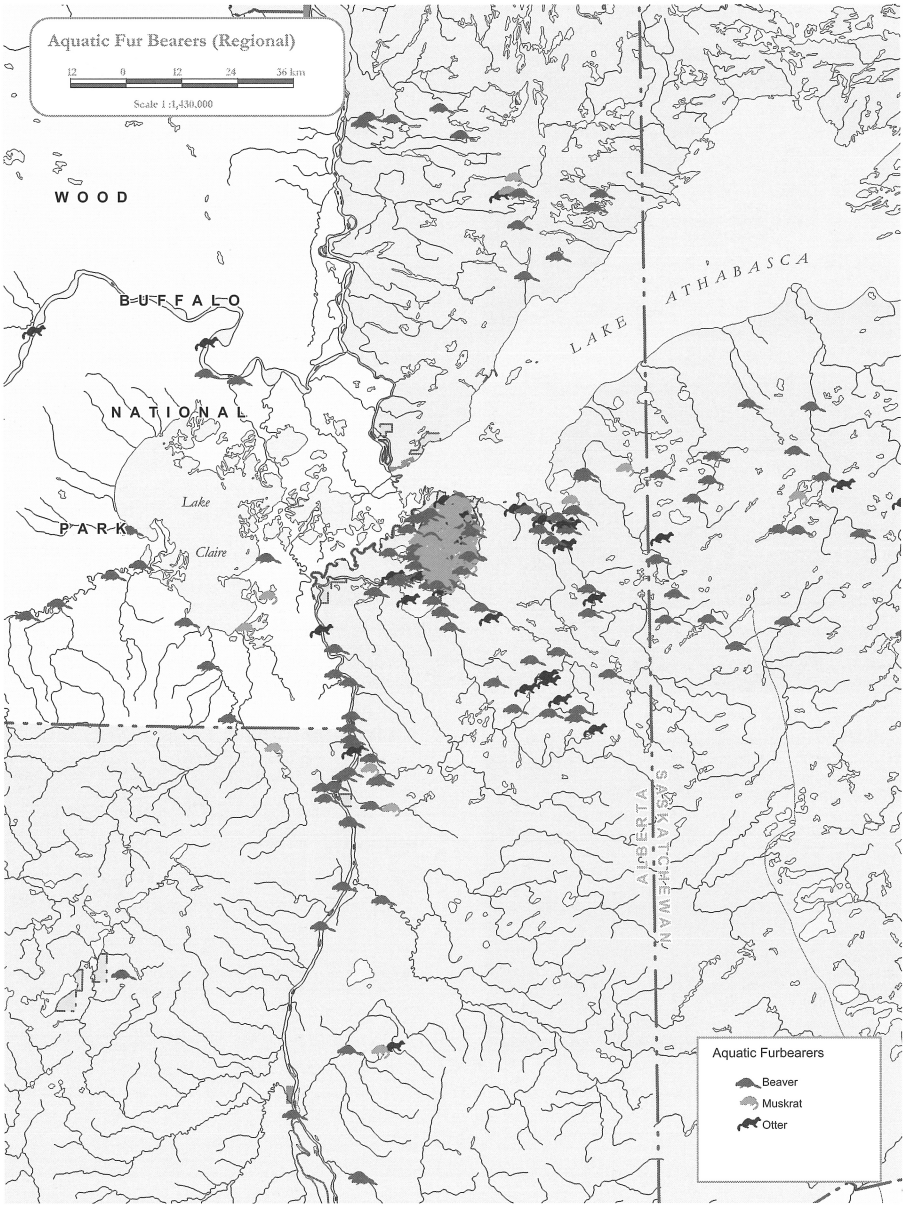


FIGURE 6.4
Aquatic Furbearers (Regional).
©ACFN.



FIGURE 6.5
Aquatic Furbearers (Local).
©ACFN.

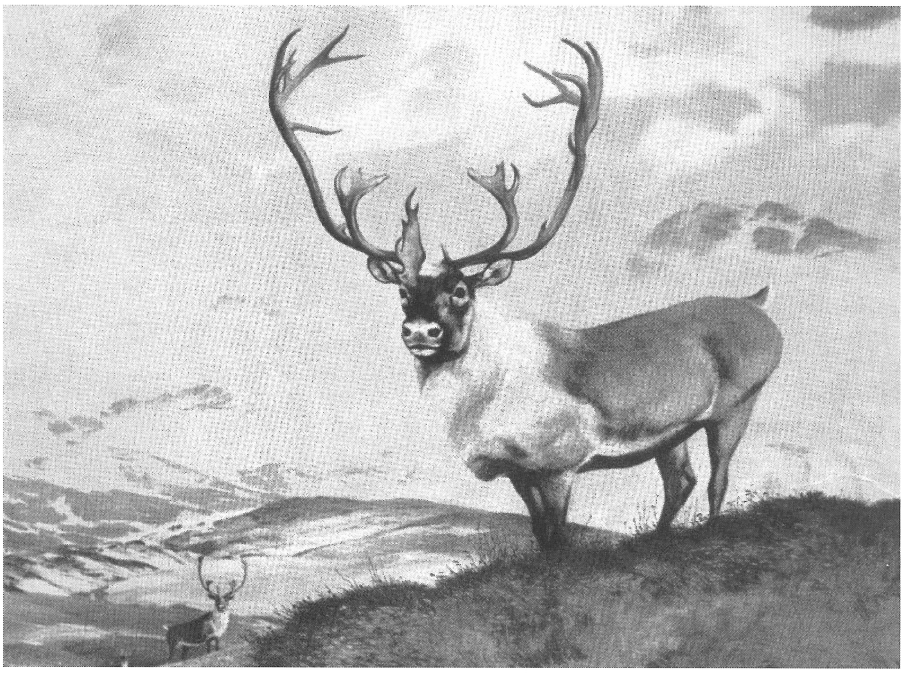
CHAPTER SEVEN

Big Game

The big game harvested by the Athabasca Chipewyan people includes moose, barren land caribou, woodland caribou, bear and bison. Deer are very rarely taken because deer meat is not considered a delicacy for Dene people.[1] Moose are harvested at any time of the year. Barren land caribou are harvested during the winter months as they migrate into the ACFN traditional lands. Woodland caribou, however, are taken whenever the hunter or trapper encounters them. Like the barren land caribou, the bison are generally harvested during the winter season. In contrast, bear are harvested in the spring, summer and fall. However, bear will be harvested in the winter months if a den is found.

In earlier times many Dene people harvested significant numbers of barren land caribou, hence their important Dene ascription Etthen-eldeli, "Caribou Eaters". Now migration patterns of caribou have changed and the time required to travel from the micro-village to the barren lands is significant. As a result, fewer caribou are harvested and the ACFN people continue to rely upon moose as their major source of high quality meat. Today the occasional buffalo is still taken and the bear is hunted less frequently.

Barrenland Caribou.
Painting by Hokum.



1 ACFN Elders (2002)

Traditional Names of Big Game Animals

Moose	Deneee
Female Moose	Deni es'udahi
Black Bear	Sass
Caribou	Et' thenn
Barren Land Caribou	Ot' thelie thenne
Woodland Caribou	Thunzea
Bison	Edsheere



Barrenland Caribou (Etthen)

Twenty-eight of the 32 Elders that were interviewed reported harvesting caribou. Before 1968 a large portion of the ACFN meat supply came from the caribou. For the period before 1968 there were an average of 25 caribou taken per family per year. This incorporated an average time of 14 days dedicated to the caribou hunt. During this time the caribou were killed in the bush and then transported back to the cabins. Although one dog sled can carry six caribou, one hunter may make several trips to bring his kill back to town or the cabin. The kill site may be as much as 100 miles away.

Traditional methods of harvesting caribou included pounds equipped with snares. The pound may include miles of fence leading to chutes containing snares. A caribou pitfall was also used. A pitfall is similar to a pound since its main feature is a fence that leads to a pit or fall for the caribou. These traditional methods of harvesting caribou were considered to be superior to using a rifle in the early days.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Big Game



Caribou Migration

The ACFN Elders described caribou migration routes coming from the north to Lake Athabasca. The ACFN Elders can still point out these old paths today. These routes came to the Lake, indicating where the herds had crossed. The Elders stated that there were thousands of Caribou that used these paths.

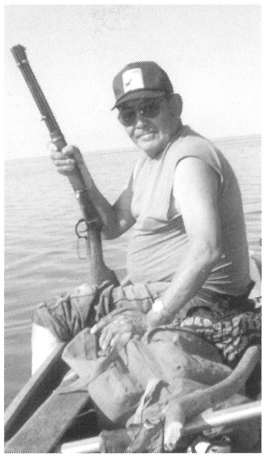
The herds would cross at the narrows by Fond du Lac and on the other side of Fond du Lac at Pine Channel. The normal migration would follow the south shore and come out by Old Fort Bay. At that time they would continue southward around Jackfish Lake. The caribou would travel where there was lichen and Jack pine, and there is a good feed of lichens on this south shore. The caribou ate moss and pine. In the 1950s the caribou herds traveled as far as Janvier, and in 1947 there was a caribou migration through the Fort Chipewyan area.

"The caribou probably do not come south anymore because they let the North Country burn. In Saskatchewan they don't fight fires enough. Otherwise, it would have been good caribou habitat. Earlier the Caribou came down every year. In 1947 they came to Fort Chipewyan. They would be so close we could shoot them with a shotgun. There were two different herds, one from the east, and one from the west. here are three different kinds, different herds." (Rene Bruno)[2]

2 Acfn Elder Interview (2002)

When Pat Marcel was growing up he and his father built a cabin south of Jackfish for the sole purpose of drying caribou meat. His father expected that the caribou would continue to come into the area as before. Although there were some years that the main herd did not come, there were always smaller groups that would visit the area. In 1951 there was a big fire. After that the caribou did not come down as often. The people at Fond du Lac lived there because the caribou came every year. The same was true of the Snowdrift community on Great Slave Lake.

Hunting Caribou



Joe Adam on Lake Athabasca. ©ACFN.

Successful caribou hunting is done by following the tracks. These skillful hunters could spot caribou tracks from months before. It was on the third day of tracking that the animals were shot. They were able to hunt in just three days since the caribou had to stop to feed.

"Every year Charlie Voyageur goes caribou hunting. Somebody would tell where they are – it took five hours from Uranium City – five hours – hunting. Crossing lake you make a fire and wait for them. They spend time in the open lakes because they are scared of the wolf or when it is windy. We would hunt caribou on Old Fort Point. In the fall they are rutting so you only kill the cows." (Charlie Voyageur)

There was a migration from the north in 1951. At that time caribou were even coming through Fort McKay to Lac la Biche.

Because of an abundance of muskrat nobody thought of caribou meat very much in Jackfish. There are still groups of caribou that come to northern Saskatchewan but caribou stopped coming close to the settlements. After 1969 the average number of barren land caribou taken per ACFN family fell to 3.4 per year and hunting was limited to the years that hunters chose to hunt for caribou. Although people would still go on the caribou hunts they now had to travel a long way north to do it.

Caribou were normally hunted from November to March and would often come around Fort Chipewyan. Although the barren land caribou frequently came down into Northern Saskatchewan and were commonly seen south of Lake Athabasca hunters now had to go up to the NWT border or further to hunt caribou.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Big Game



Caribou teepees of the "Caribou Eaters". Photograph from Cinquante ans du Pays des Neiges: Chez les Mangeurs de Caribous. Montreal: Fides. 1945.

During the time before the snow machine, trips were made from the micro-village to hunt caribou by dog sled. The tradition of hunting caribou was strong and the Fond du Lac people, close relatives of the ACFN, still maintain this caribou hunting tradition.

Uses of Caribou

Caribou is the preferred meat for the Chipewyan people. The hides of the caribou were formerly used not only for clothing, but also for shelter and various other uses.

It was estimated by Samuel Hearne that it took approximately 25 caribou each year to support one person. The hides would be prepared for moccasins, shirts, gloves, outer garments, teepee covers, wraps for a sled and other clothing. The time required to cut, smoke and dry one caribou hide is three to four hours. Scrapers, toys and various other tools were made out of the bones and the brains were used to cure the hide. Every part was used.

Moose (Deneee)

Moose are a very important source of meat in the traditional economy. Before 1968 a family would take an average of five to six (5.64) moose per year. This would supply fresh meat, dry meat, and hides for making clothing, tools and toys. Moose were hunted just before rut in the fall, in late summer, in winter, and again in July and August. The only time moose were not hunted was in the spring during the muskrat harvest. (However, moose will be taken at that time if encountered).

After 1968 the average number of moose taken per family dropped to 3.26. Fewer people were participating in the hunt and many of the younger generation did not hunt at all. Traditional hunting was drastically reduced as many of the people began to move into Fort Chipewyan.

The breeding season for moose is September to mid-October, and the calving season is mid-May to early-June. A moose cow has one or two young per season. The moose is generally solitary by nature and they require a large habitat. Elders described methods of hunting moose. One must hunt moose down-wind. In the winter they are hunted by tracking.

Alice Rigney's dry meat. ©ACFN.



CHAPTER SEVEN

Big Game

Hunting Moose by a River: By Pat Marcel

Pat Marcel described how he hunts moose along a river. For example, when the moose is traveling along a river, the hunter will find the tracks and move out away form the tracks down-wind of the moose. He will approach the tracks again and again to see when the moose is preparing to sleep. As the moose prepares to sleep, it will double back towards its route to ensure there is nothing following. The hunter will see this doubling back in the tracks and use this opportunity for the kill.

During the summer moose are hunted by boat as the moose are trying to escape the harassment of insects by moving into deeper water in rivers and lakes. In the fall they are hunted by calling because they are in rut and will respond to the call of a cow. Also during the fall the moose come down from the Birch Mountains to avoid the deep snow and to find better feed. Moose are fattest before rut. Some people harvest both cows and bulls.

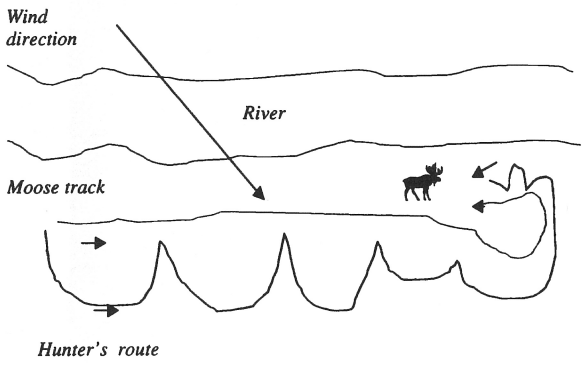


FIGURE 7.1
Hunting moose by a river.

Some Elders say moose numbers have declined in the area in recent years. Others believe this to be false. Some say the numbers of moose are cyclical and that the wolf population depends greatly on the increase and decrease of the moose population.

When moose are cleaned all the edible portions of the animal are saved. During the cleaning process the moose is first quartered and taken to the camp or cabin in these pieces. The moose is then cut up, the hide is preserved, and the bones, organs, brains and sinew are separated. The preparation of dry meat is an important process in preparing a moose. This involves cutting the meat into thin strips and hanging it over a smudge fire until it is like a jerky.

Another important process is the preparation of the moose hide. This procedure is similar for the preparation of caribou and other large hides. This tanning involves cleaning the hide, scraping the flesh off, removing the hair, working in brains and fat to keep the hide supple, soaking, drying, stretching and smoking the hide.



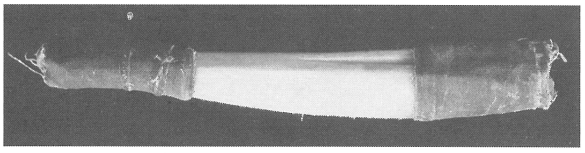
Big Game

Hide: Preparation & Use

How to tan a hide:

- Soak in water
- Scrape off all flesh
- Remove moose hair
- Work moose brains and fat into the hide
- Soak for 24 hours
- Wring out and roll
- Swing over fire to dry
- Scrape again
- Sew and skirt
- Smoke until ready

The bones are also used to prepare tools and toys. For example, a double handled scraper is made of the leg bone of a caribou. Another common scraper traditionally used is made of the leg bone of a moose. An illustration of this useful tool is provided below.



Chipewyan side scraper. Used to scrape the hair off the skins. This particular scraper is made of caribou bone, split down the middle with a skin wrapping on each end. ©Canadian Museum of Civilization, CMC VI-D-93, image no. S75-4107.Chipewyan side.

Items made from hide:

- Shirts
- Pants
- Mittens
- Slippers
- Covers

Activities

Make frame, cut slits, tie hide on frame, fleshing, dry and scrape hair, mix and apply softener, smoking, soaking, softening, wringing, drying, collect rotten wood (willow), final smoking.





Bear (Sass)

Out of the 32 Elder interviews only six harvested bear before 1968. During one year there were a total of 23 bear harvested by those six Elders. Only four Elders harvested bear after 1968 taking a total of 19 bear in one year. Bear was harvested when there was a need for fat.

"Easiest way to kill was to snare a bear. Choke snare. Tie it to a solid pole or tree."

"Yes sometimes bears are shot when feeding along riverbank."

"They are hunted in July and August but only when needed. Two hunters go for safety. Late fall or early spring – some of them are still fat – the bigger ones."

The most consistent supply of big game meat would come from moose with caribou meat in the winter. But Bear meat also contributed to the total meat consumption.

"Up to the 1960s and 1970s they made grease and lard for bannock. They would use lots of it. People don't want the grease or wild meat anymore. "

"Bears will eat rotten food. People will not harvest them because they are now dirty. Now they eat garbage."

"To hunt them we drift down the river – you can hear them feeding they are noisy."

"Bear fat is used for Bannock – use it in recipes that require lard."

"Rendering fat would take a day."

Rendering fat from the bear meat involved cutting fat away from the meat and into one-inch cubes. The cubes are placed in a large pot and heat slowly until the fat is liquefied. Do not stir. Skim off the ruminants floating at the top. This is called "Indian popcorn" a delicacy with bannock or dry meat. The rendered fat is poured into jars and stored in the root cellar for winter use.

"Lots of bears still live on the delta. In the Ft. McMurray area there are bear camps and bait bear killing bears for the hide."

CHAPTER SEVEN

Big Game



Woodland Caribou (Thunzea)

The ACFN people did not specifically hunt for woodland caribou and only killed them if they saw them. The breeding season for woodland caribou is early to mid October.

The Elders have stated that Woodland Caribou are not more plentiful than before. "No change now – but for a while it seemed they were wiped right out. The Birch Mountain herd is increasing. There is also a herd that lives on border with Saskatchewan. They are hard to access – their numbers are growing again. They grow to 30 or 40 then start a new herd of maybe 10 or so. " According to the Elders, woodland caribou were not harvested a great deal. During the first period, before 1968, only a total of eight were recorded in the entire survey and in the second period (1970s) a total of three.

Deer (yahtoe)

In the first period six to seven deer were recorded from the series of interviews. In the second period there were none recorded.



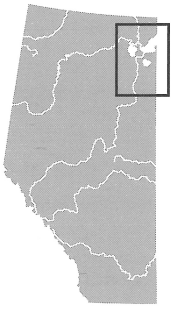
Bison (tl' oghijere)

Wood Bison have been harvested for centuries. Peter Fidler's journal records that the Chipewyan peoples were harvesting Wood Buffalo during his time with them in the late 18th Century. In recent times there have been prohibitions on hunting bison within the Wood Buffalo Park. Bison are hunted when they come out of the park from November to March.

Big Game Harvesting Locations

Figures 7.2 and 7.3 contain the big game harvesting locations as identified by the Elders. These locations represent the actual harvesting locations of big game animals and are not intended to represent the number of animals harvested but rather the specific locations where big game were harvested. The number of animals harvested by each Elder or family were recorded in the interviews for each Elder and are not presented in this document. Figure 7.4 is a map used to identify the density of big game harvesting locations. This map presents the frequency of harvesting locations within specific geographic polygons. The 90, 75 and 50 percentile polygons are presented on the map. These polygons reflect the intensity of big game harvesting activity surrounding the micro-villages.

Big Game



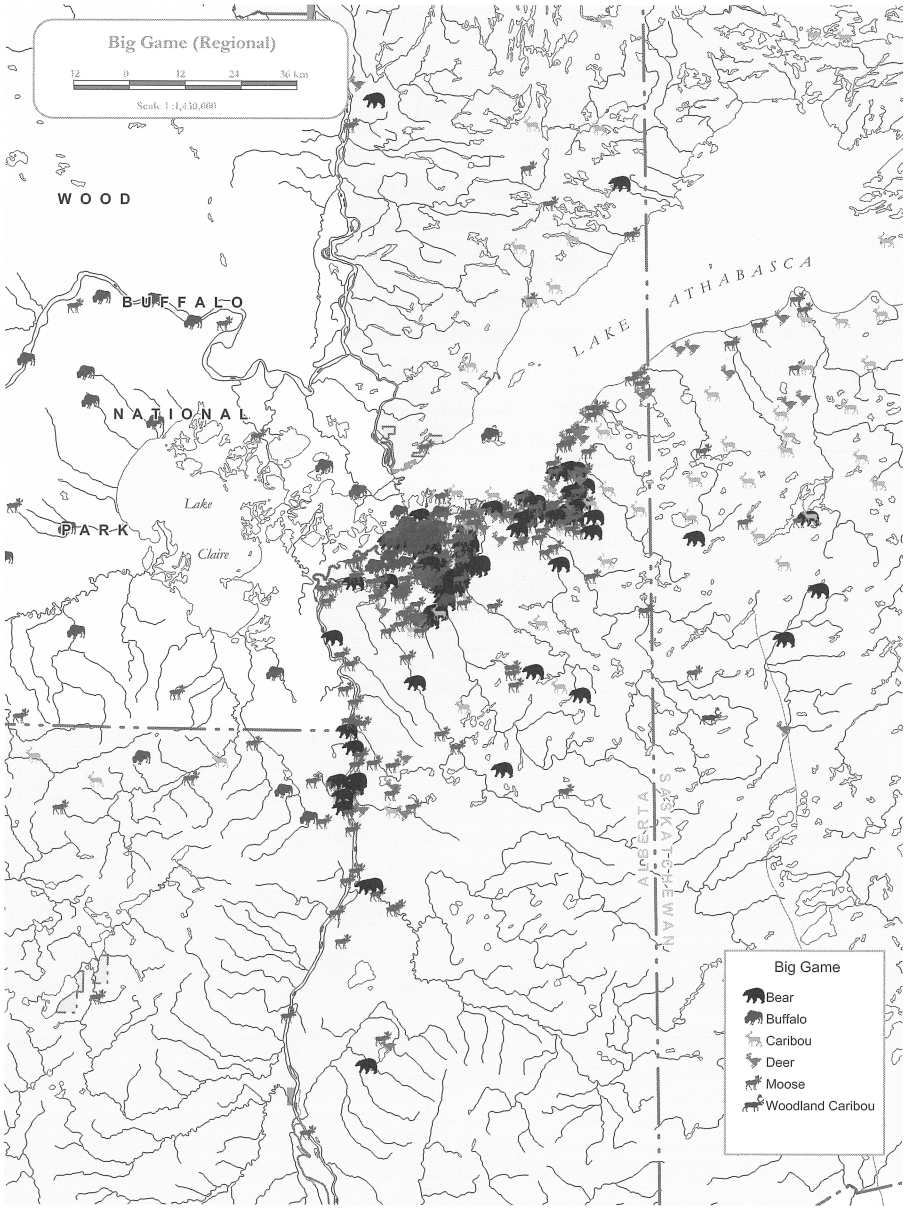


FIGURE 7.2
Big Game Harvesting (Regional).
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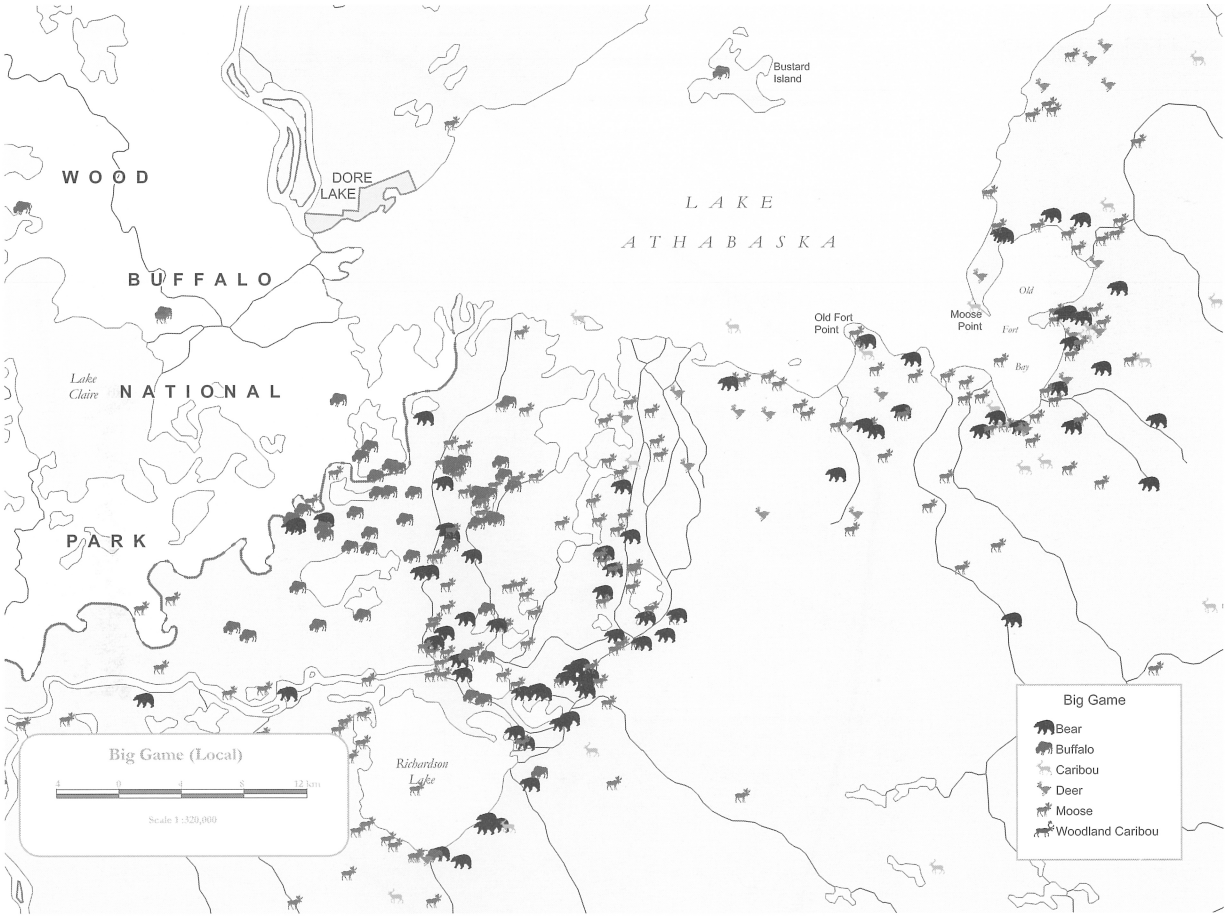
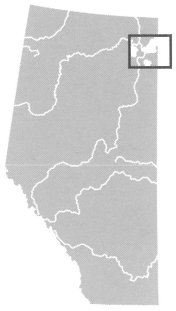


FIGURE 7.3
Big Game Harvesting (Local)
©ACFN.



CHAPTER SEVEN

Big Game

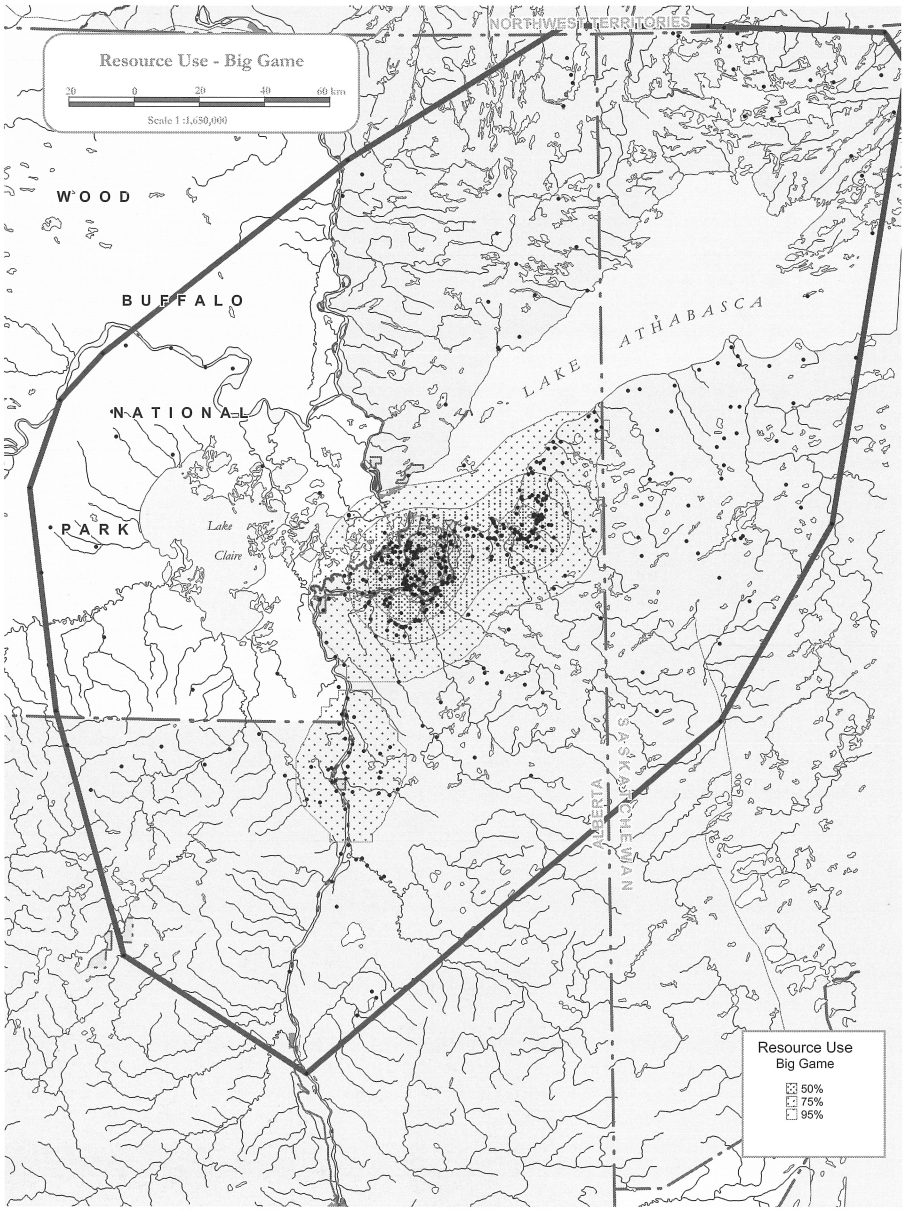


FIGURE 7.4
Big Game Resource Use. © ACFN.

Traditional Fishing

Fish have always been a large portion of the traditional foods of the ACFN people. Although most Elders preferred red meats like caribou or moose, fish were a common portion of their normal diet. Fish were also relied upon when other food sources were scarce. Fish, especially whitefish, were used to feed the dog teams during the spring, summer, and fall months. They also stored fish to be used for dog food in the winter.

The ACFN people fished during every season of the year. Before 1968, over the course of a normal year, a full four months would be spent fishing. During the fall, in preparation for the trapping season, a trapper with a dog team would have to stock up on fish for dog food during the winter season. The average trapper would stock several thousand fish. During the summer, fish were caught to make dryfish, which was eaten throughout the year. During the winter and spring however, fish were caught primarily for fresh food.



Sketch by artist Trevor Michael – ACFN Member.

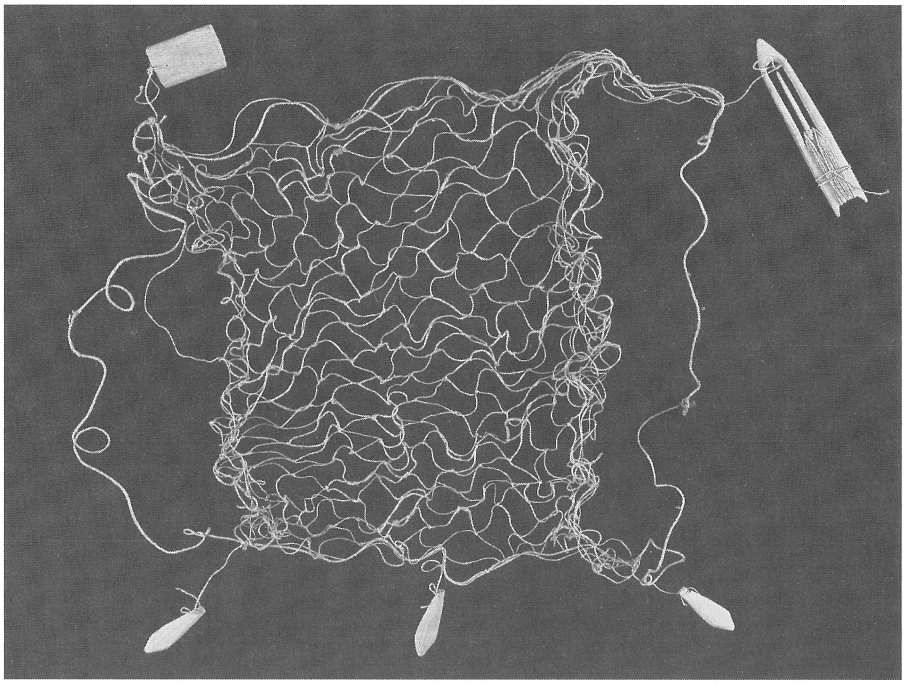
CHAPTER EIGHT

Fish

An average of four weeks was spent ice fishing during the winter. Ling cod were frequently caught during this time under the ice. During the winter many trout were caught at Big Island as well. Nets would be set under the ice by making two holes and threading the net between them using a long pole.

Gill nets were the primary tool used for fishing. The nets used were up to 100′ long and contained 5″ holes in order to catch the larger fish. Nets were set in both lakes and rivers and were set according to the location, water flow and known behavior of the fish.

The ACFN people fished in Lake Athabasca, the Athabasca River, and other lakes, rivers and channels of the area. The maps provided Figure 8.1 and 8.2 illustrate the locations where Elders fished and designates the types of fish caught in those locations. Fishing was a regular part of a camp and part of setting up camp usually included setting a net in the adjacent river or lake.

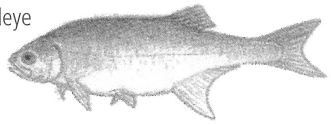


Traditional gill net with needle, gauge and floats. ©Canadian Museum of Civilization. CMC NMM VI-N-80a-e.

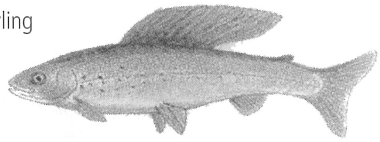
Traditional Names of Fish

Jackfish/Pike	Uldai
Pickerel	Ehch ui
Sucker	egothechae
Trout	Tuezane
Whitefish	Tu
Grayling	Sat ie/Ts et ite

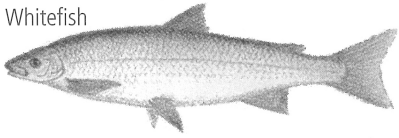
Goldeye



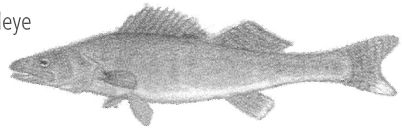
Grayling



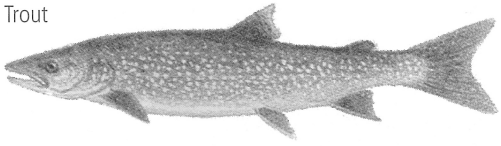
Lake Whitefish



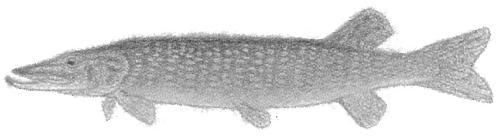
Walleye



Lake Trout



Pike



Types of fish used by the ACFN people

- Whitefish
- Pike or Jackfish
- Walleye or Pickerel
- Goldeye
- Red and Longnose Suckers
- Ling Cod, Burbot
- Grayling
- Chub
- Perch
- Brook Trout
- Lake Trout in Lake Athabasca
- Deep water whitefish, and other species



Joe Adam fishing on Lake Athabasca © ACFN.



Ice-Fishing. ©ACFN.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Fish





Left: Fish Drying. © ACFN.

Right: Dryfish ready for storage. Photograph courtesy of A. Rigney.

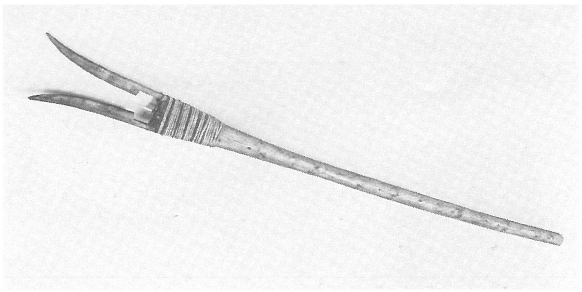
Dry Fish

Whitefish were used to make dryfish. Whitefish is preferred for dryfish since it dries nice and soft, while pickerel tends to dry much stiffer. Dried pounded pickerel however, is soft and tasty. Making dryfish is a long process, and the fish is handled 12 times before it is dried.

The whole family usually helped with the making of dryfish. This family activity had the children washing the fish, the older ones doing the scaling, and other experienced family members would perform the slicing of the fish. The men hung the fish on poles for the sun and wind to dry. Diamond willow wood and alder were gathered for the smoke and the dryfish was checked on a regular basis to ensure that spoilage did not occur. Children helped further by keeping the blackbirds away with slingshots or 22 rifles. If the weather was good, the dryfish would remain on the racks overnight.

It took approximately one day for the fish to dry. Then the fish backs were cut off. The fish were then put on fish sticks to hang over the smoke in the smoke house. This process took about one to two days and then the dryfish was ready for storage. Dryfish could not be made when the weather turned wet.

Th fish spear is a traditional tool used to harvest fish. It consists of a wooden shaft with a point of moose bone and two wooden prongs lashed on with sinew and babiche. ©Canadian Museum of Civilization, CMC VI-G-55, image no. S75-4191.



Other Fishing Activities, Uses

Nets were made of purchased twine. The photograph earlier in this chapter shows the finished net with floats, and the needle or threader. Fishhooks carved out of caribou or moose bones, and fish traps, although rarely used in more recent times, were used historically. Fish oil was often rendered and was a well-known (if not a well liked) medicine. As previously mentioned, dog food was also an important use for the fish. A typical ration would be one whole fish per dog per day.

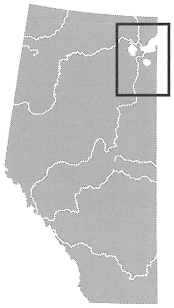
Cultural Changes

During the late 1960s and early 1970s the snow machine became the dominant method of transportation during the winter months. In later years, snow machines replaced the dog team in use on trap lines and for other winter transportation. As a result, dogs were no longer needed and there were fewer dog teams to feed. Because of this, the number of fish previously required fell to approximately one quarter of the levels. This decline in fishing time provided the ACFN with more time for other activities and lessened the demand previously placed upon the fisheries.

Figure 8.1 and 8.2 show the local and regional locations of traditional fish harvesting. These locations are in various rivers and lakes on the ACFN traditional lands. These locations reflect the activities of the Elders during the period from approximately the 1940s to the 1970s.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Fish



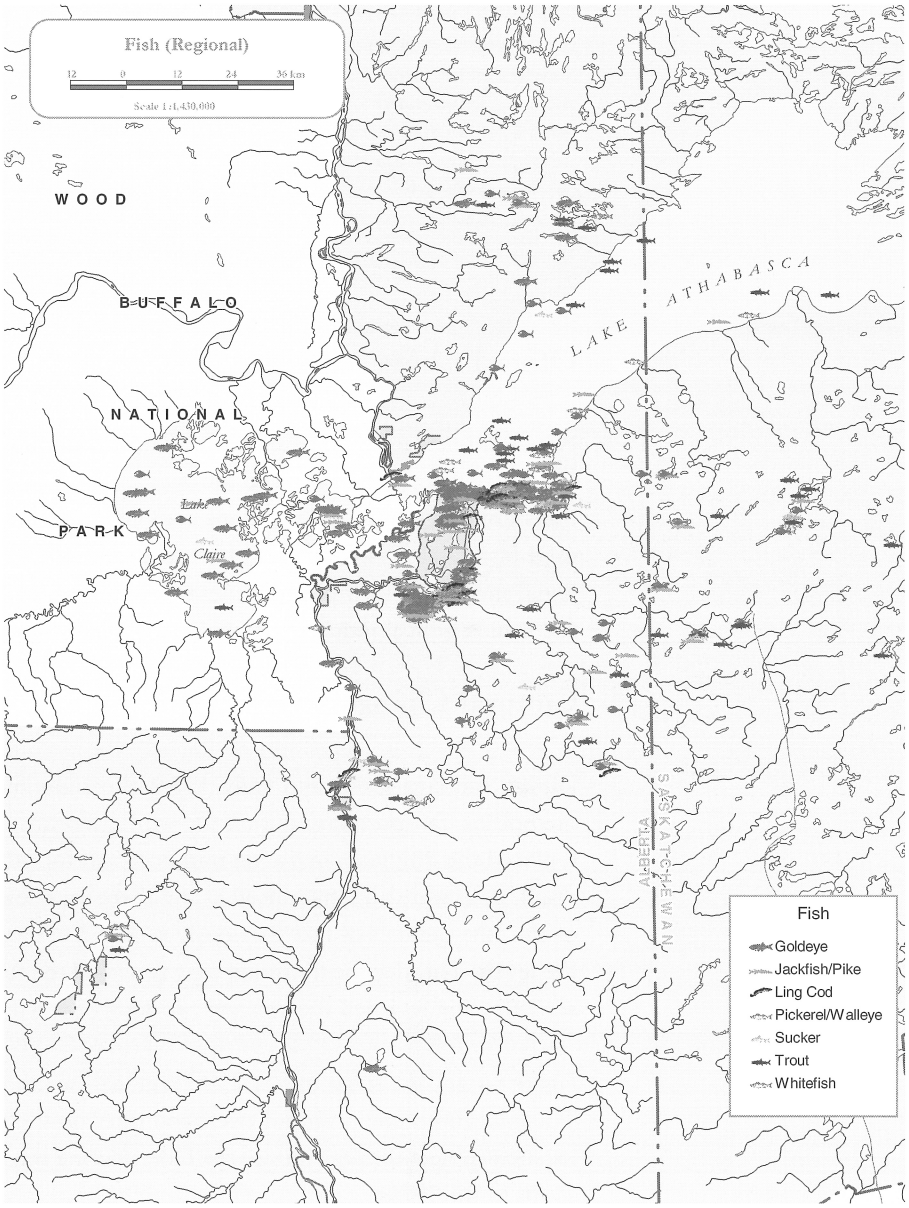


FIGURE 8.1
Traditional Fish Harvesting (Regional) ©ACFN.

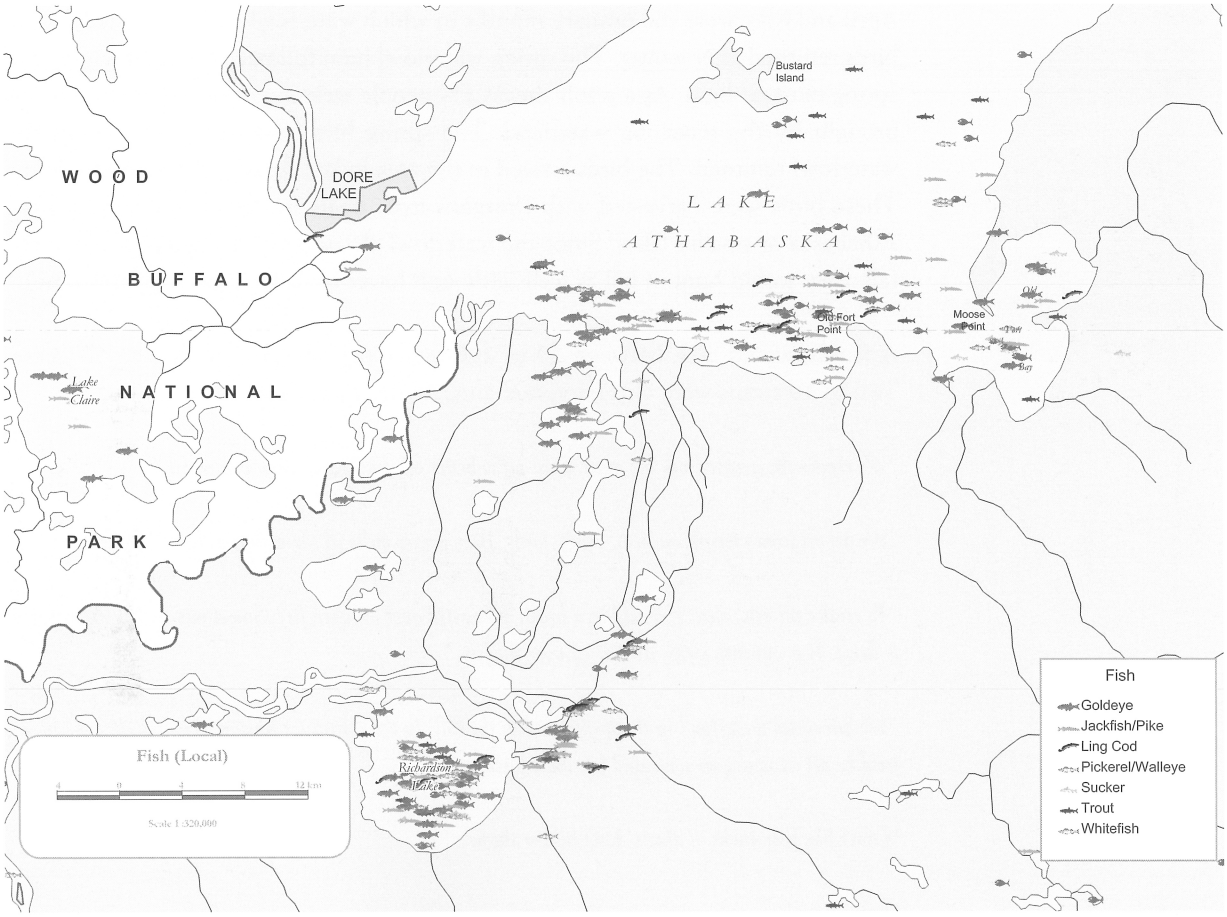
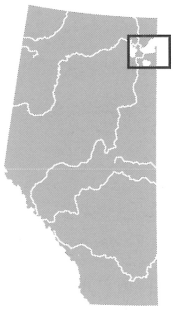


FIGURE 8.2
Traditional Fish Harvesting (Local)
©ACFN.



CHAPTER NINE

Waterfowl

April and May were the primary months in which waterfowl were harvested, as the birds returned after winter. The spring waterfowl hunt followed the long winter and spring muskrat hunt. As a result the ACFN people welcomed the variation in foods brought by the returning waterfowl. The spring bird hunt began as soon as the waterfowl returned. The birds arrived in the area in late April and departed in May. These birds were harvested with shotguns from boats in the river, delta, on Lake Athabasca or smaller lakes. Since the waterfowl always passed through again in the fall, they would hunt in fall as well (although fewer birds were taken at this time).

A family would take between 20 to 200 ducks per year and from 5 to 50 geese. Two to 10 swans were also harvested annually by each family.

"We render the grease from the meat. Bird oil is better oil, like your extra virgin oil."

"We get oil from everything, fish, bears, birds. Bear grease melts at room temperature."

"To render the oils, meat is boiled in a broth or roasted over an open fire. Sometimes the waterfowl meat is dried. It is cut into strips and dried over the fire."

"We harvested waterfowl in the spring and in the fall. In the spring we harvested many. In the fall, we tried to get as many as we could for the winter."

"Don't like fish ducks – divers don't bother them."

"Lots of ducks – so many now – this year."

May 10th they would stop muskrat harvesting, since the waivies came at that time. During the fur harvest they would only harvest what they needed. After the trapping was over, they would harvest quite a few and dry them.

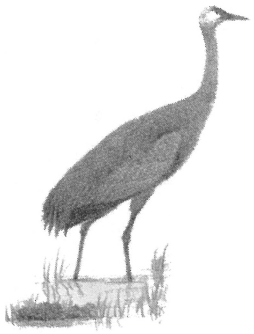
Canada Goose



Snow Goose



Sandhill Crane



Tundra (Whistling) Swan



Traditional Names of Birds

Common Loon	Ta tsenne
Grebes	Notcha tselle
Whistling Swan	Ga Goos
Canada Goose	Cha
Snow Goose	Cho ga
Mallard	Tsheth tshok
Canvasback	Thaeeoee
Teal	Edshonasse
Pintail	Otchel Tshethe
Common Golden Eye	Bedshee yel ase
Ruffed Grouse	Et' theree
Sharp-tailed Grouse	Etchay
Sandhill Crane	T'delth
Willow Ptarmigan	Gaspa

Types of ducks used by the ACFN people
- Mallard
- Widgeon
- Teal
- Canvasback
- Golden Eye
- Pintail
- No fish eating ducks (i.e., Grebes) because they tasted like fish.

Types of geese and swans used by the ACFN people
- Canada
- Greater Canada
- Waivies (White Fronted)
- Snow Goose
- Ross

Other Waterfowl
- Swans

Other Birds
- Grouse
- Ptarmigan
- Sandhill Cranes

CHAPTER NINE

Waterfowl

Each family would harvest between 5 to 50 grouse per year.

A grouse was commonly called a "Chicken". The ACFN hunted three different types of grouse; ruffed grouse, spruce grouse (spruce hen) and sharptail grouse.

Ptarmigans were harvested in the winter. "They used to be so plentiful that the women would set a net in the willows and beat sticks to scare the ptarmigans into the nets."[1] Both ptarmigan and grouse were snared, although grouse were also shot with shotgun. These birds were taken whenever encountered and were usually found around camp and often taken by women. When they were encountered on hunting or trapping trips they were taken by the men.

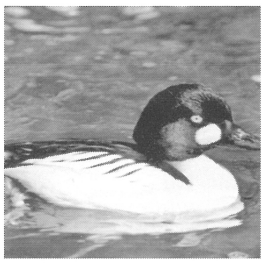
"Sandhill Cranes were tasty in the spring – make a lot of grease and there are many ways to preserve the meat."[2]

Loons are considered sacred birds by some of the ACFN Elders. "Loons have many calls. They have calls when another animal is entering the water. They have calls for when an animal is passing by. The old people could recognize these calls. They could listen to the loons talk and tell them what was happening around the water. Loons are very curious. If you know how to call them they will come right up to you. The traditional knowledge of the Elders comes in many forms. The ability to hear the different meanings of the calls of the loon is an example of the complexity of traditional knowledge and the relationship between traditional knowledge and what western thought has classified as "the environment". Many Aboriginal stories and legends contain animals and birds talking to people. When these stories are viewed in the context of the calls of the loon, these stories and legends become more easily understood and less supernatural. Traditional knowledge is often important and useful in the context of the Aboriginal environment. However, this environmental knowledge is often difficult to translate into modern scientific terms.

Uses of Birds

Birds were used for feathers, blankets, pillows and decorations. A loon storage bag was made from the skin of a loon. These bags were waterproof and used to store matches, ammunition or anything that needed to stay dry. Bird meat could be boiled for grease, or eaten roasted, boiled or fried.

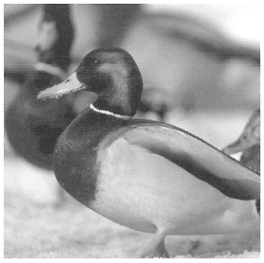
1 ACFN Elder (2002) 2 ACFN Elder (2002)



Common Goldeye
Bedshee yel ase



Canvasback
Thaeeoee



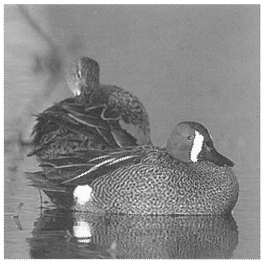
Mallard
Tsheth tshok



Northern Pintail
Otchel Tshethe



Ruffed Grouse
Et' theree



Teal
Edshonasse



Swans
Ga Goos



Whooping Cranes
T'delth



Willow Ptarmigan
Gaspa



Loon
Ta tsenne

CHAPTER NINE

Waterfowl

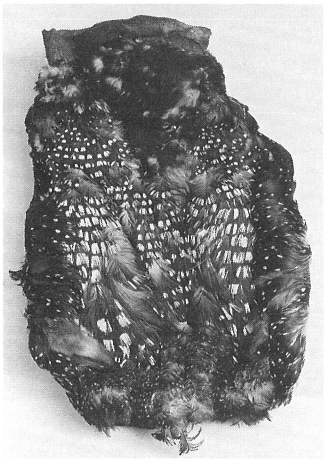
Gathering Eggs

The cootes were usually not eaten because they were so hard to pluck, but their eggs were gathered in the spring and a favourite of the ACFN people. Eggs were often gathered around Egg Lake, Frezie Lake, and many other places on Reserve 201. Mallard eggs, Canvasback eggs, Pintail eggs and occasionally Canada Goose eggs were also gathered by the Chipewyan.

Eggs were primarily found along the shore of a lake, in a slough, in grassy places close to a lake, or in perched basins on the Delta. An ACFN family may harvest up to 200 eggs per year.

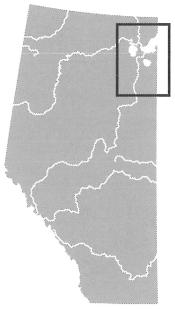
Waterfowl and Terrestrial Bird Harvesting

Figures 9.1 and 9.2 resent the local and regional harvest locations for the waterfowl and terrestrial birds. These harvest locations reflect the location of aquatic species such as geese, ducks and swans as well as the harvest locations of terrestrial birds such as grouse and ptarmigan around the micro-villages or on the trap lines.



Left: The loon bag was made from the skin of a loon and sewn with sinew. This bag was waterproof. ©Canadian Museum of Civilization, CMC VI-D-48, image no. S75-4253.





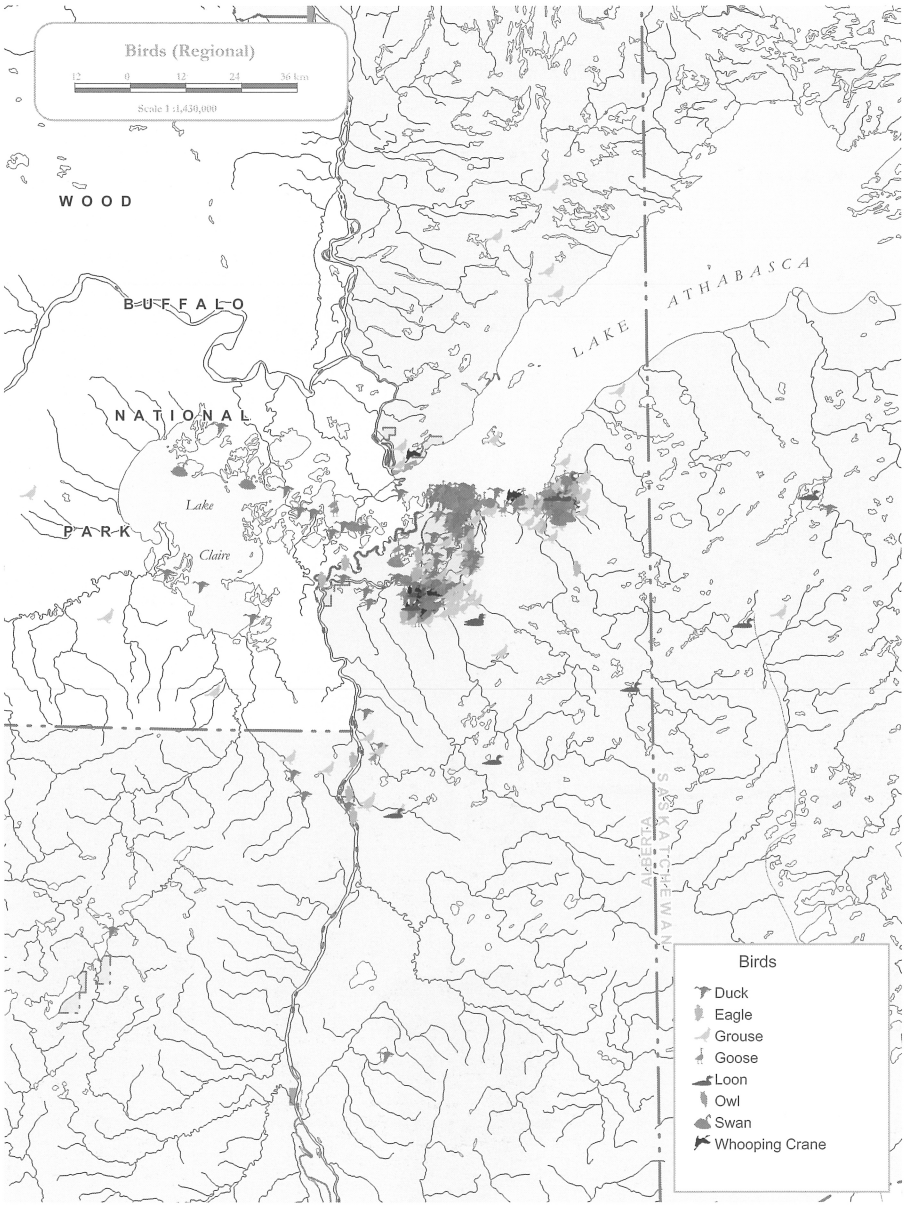


FIGURE 9.1
Waterfowl and Terrestrial Bird Harvesting (Regional). ©ACFN.

CHAPTER NINE

Waterfowl

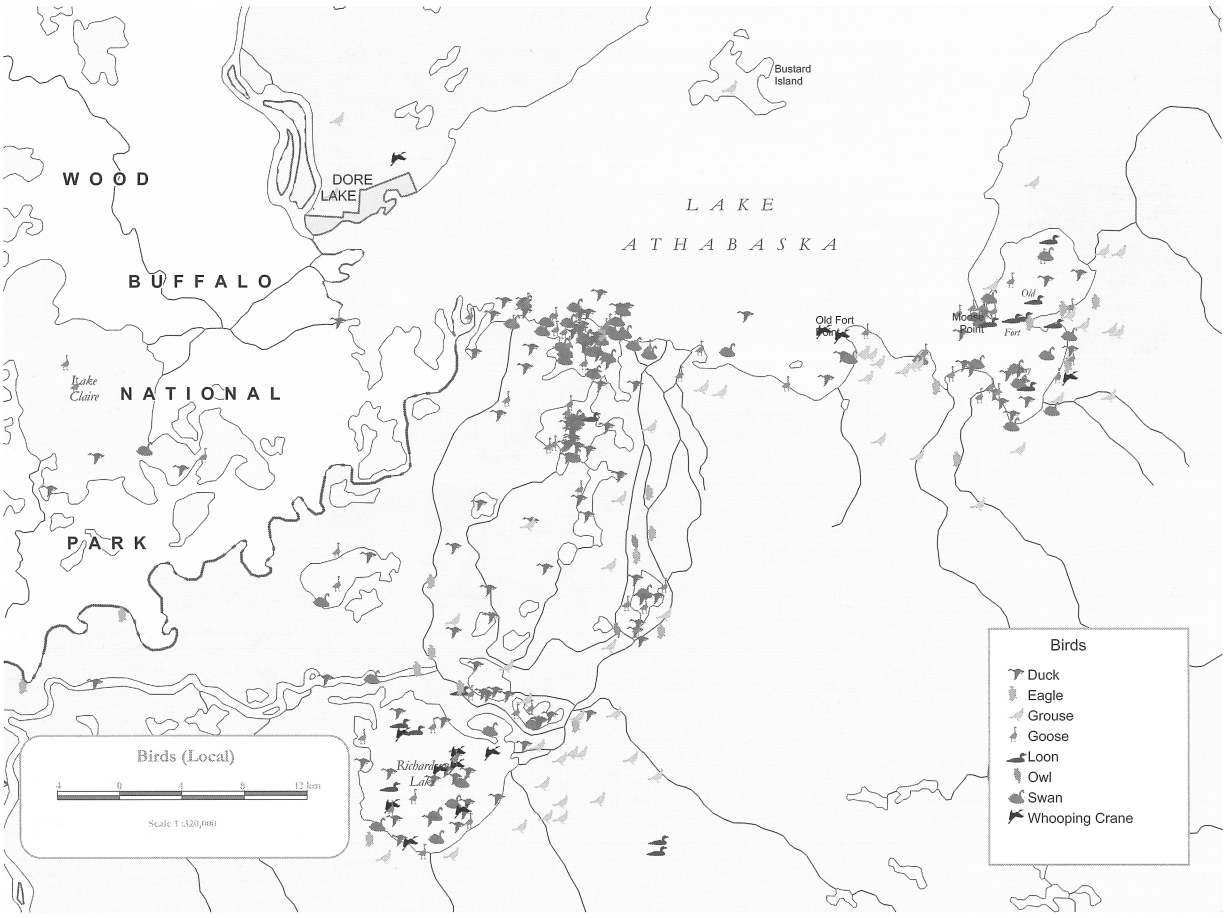
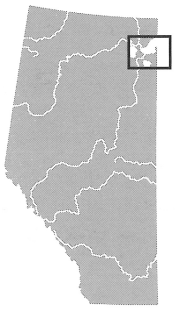


FIGURE 9.2
Waterfowl and Terrestrial Bird Harvesting (Local). ©ACFN.



CHAPTER TEN

Berries and Medicine



Birch Bark and Spruce Root Pail with thong carrying-strap, used for berry picking. © Canadian Museum of Civilization, CMC VI-B-132, image no. S97-14229.

Berries

It was not unusual for a family to collect more than 100 pounds of blueberries and low bush cranberries every year. The ACFN people would spend a couple of days boiling, drying, stringing and canning these berries for later use. Everybody picked berries and it was common to plan a berry-picking trip to well-known berry patches. A family may also obtain 10 to 20 pounds of other berries like saskatoons, raspberries and highbush cranberries as well.

Other berries that were picked in lesser amounts included gooseberries, mooseberries, and black and red currents. Cranberries can be stored in boxes and frozen. Blueberries however, have to be cooked without sugar and stored in wooden barrels or jars.

Berry Harvesting Locations

Figure 10.1 presents the locations where berries were traditionally harvested. These locations are, again, surrounding the micro-village locations. Note that because of the lack of ACFN Elders still living from the Athabasca river locations, few berry locations on the Athabasca River were recorded on the map. However, based upon the historical population of the area and the volume of berries picked in other micro-village areas, the river area would have had more locations had these Elders been interviewed.

Berries are most frequently harvested in the vicinity of the micro-village because of the cost of traveling to harvest them. Berries are occasionally harvested while on summer hunting trips if large patches are encountered. There are many other locations of berry patches in the Boreal forest however, these locations cannot be economically harvested unless there is another harvesting activity associated so that the costs of travel are shared. This map clearly demonstrates that the destruction of habitat or the displacement of people from around the micro-villages destroys the economic ability to harvest berries even though there may be plenty of berries in more distant locations.

CHAPTER TEN

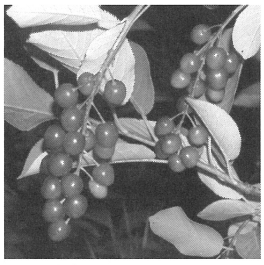
Berries and Medicine



Blueberries (Tsatchoth)



Lowbrush Cranberries



Chokecherry



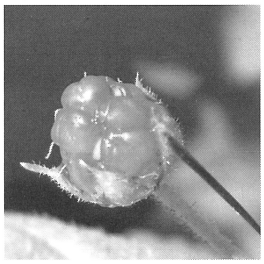
Pincherry



Highbrush Cranberry



Saskatoon Berry



Raspberry



Strawberry

Traditional Names of Berries, Trees, & Medicinal Plants

Blueberry	Tsatchoth
Highbush Cranberry	Ts uts_lji_
Lowbush Cranberry	Ji_ sutin_
Raspberry	Dakal_ ji_
Saskatoon	K ihiji_
Strawberry	Idziyaz_
Birch	Ki
Jackpine	Gani
Muskeg	Niteli
Rosehip	Ihtsot_
Sweetgrass	Tt ots_n
Tamarack	Nithe
Poplar	k _s
White Spruce	Tsuchogh_
Spruce Gum	_ldz_gh_
Labrador Tea	Naghodhi

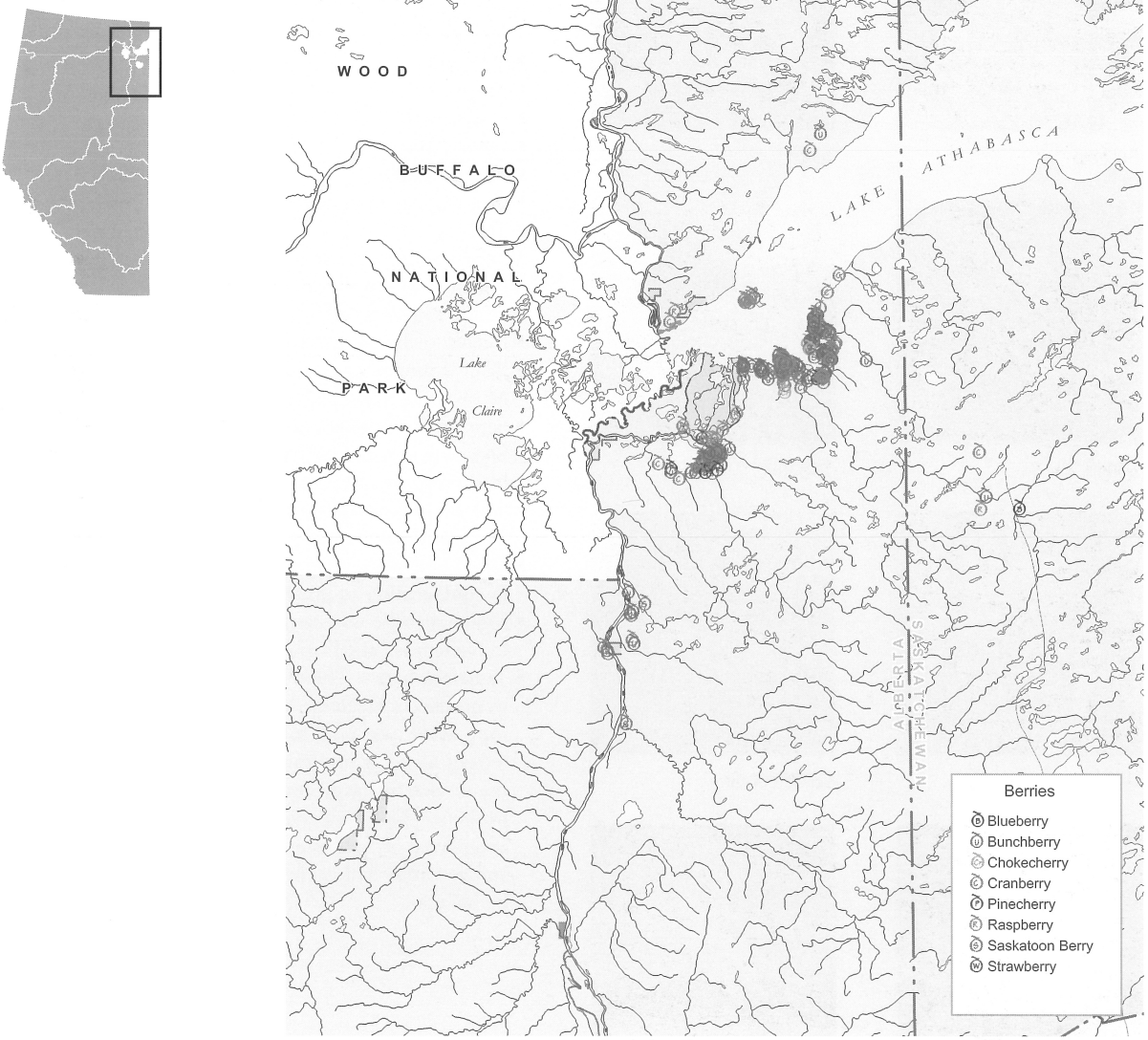


FIGURE 10.1
Traditional Berry Harvesting (Regional). ©ACFN.

CHAPTER TEN

Berries and Medicine



Rosehip



Birch



Mint



Tamarak



White Spruce



White Poplar



Aspen

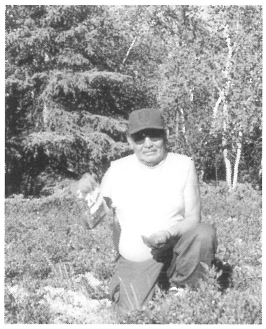


Sweetgrass

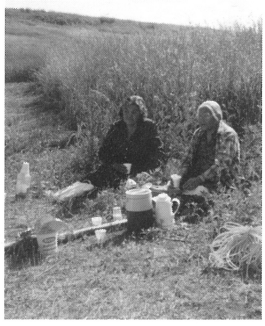
Medicines

Types of medicines collected by the ACFN people

- Labrador tea
- Rat root
- Mint
- Poplar bark
- Chokecherries
- Beaver castors
- Gall bladder from bear
- Tree sap
- Spruce acorn was used for rashes.
- Poplar buds – wounds and cuts
- White tipped flower – used as an energizer.
- Pitcher plant was used for heart illness
- Willow fungus was used as mosquito repellant.
- Muskeg tea (Labrador tea) – stomach pains
- Sage and sweetgrass were burned for cleansing.
- Spruce gum – Spruce gum was used for cuts. It acted as an antiseptic and prevented scarring.
- Saskatoons contain many vitamins. The stems were used for arrow shafts.
- Dried puffballs – used to stop bleeding and inhaled in cold weather to protect the lining of noses.
- Mountain ashe was used for heart illness – In Dene it is called "naidii dechen" or medicine stick.
- Tamarack bark – These herbs could be boiled together to produce a medicine for colds and sore throats. Rat root, alone, was used for many things. It was chewed in root form for sore throats, ground and placed on the tongue for raspy coughs, and also used as a mouth freshener. This bark could also be chewed to a pulp and placed on cuts as an antiseptic. Mint, labrador tea and tamarack bark were all used as tea medicines or herbal teas.



Joe Adam picking berries at Old Fort. ©ACFN.



Mary Madeline Marcel and Adeline Tripe de Roche. ©ACFN.



Jack Pine.

The average time spent collecting medicines was from two to three days per year. Depending upon the usage, the ACFN people would collect between one to ten pounds of each medicine. Sometimes more rat root would be gathered throughout the year. When medicines were gathered, out of respect for Mother Earth, Mother Earth was paid by sprinkling or burying tobacco in the place where the herb was harvested

Alice Rigney's Mom's Story

"It was early in the fall, my mom and dad and their two young children (Pat and Archie) left Jackfish Lake and traveled 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 (Esther Piche) 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. 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 picked her share."

Trees and Medicinal Plants

Figure 10.2 presents the tree and plant harvesting locations recorded by the ACFN Elders. These locations also surround the Micro-village locations. The economics of gathering medicines is again related to the travel time required to gather. Elders from the southern river areas were not interviewed and this concentrates the locations in the northern regions.

Berries and Medicine

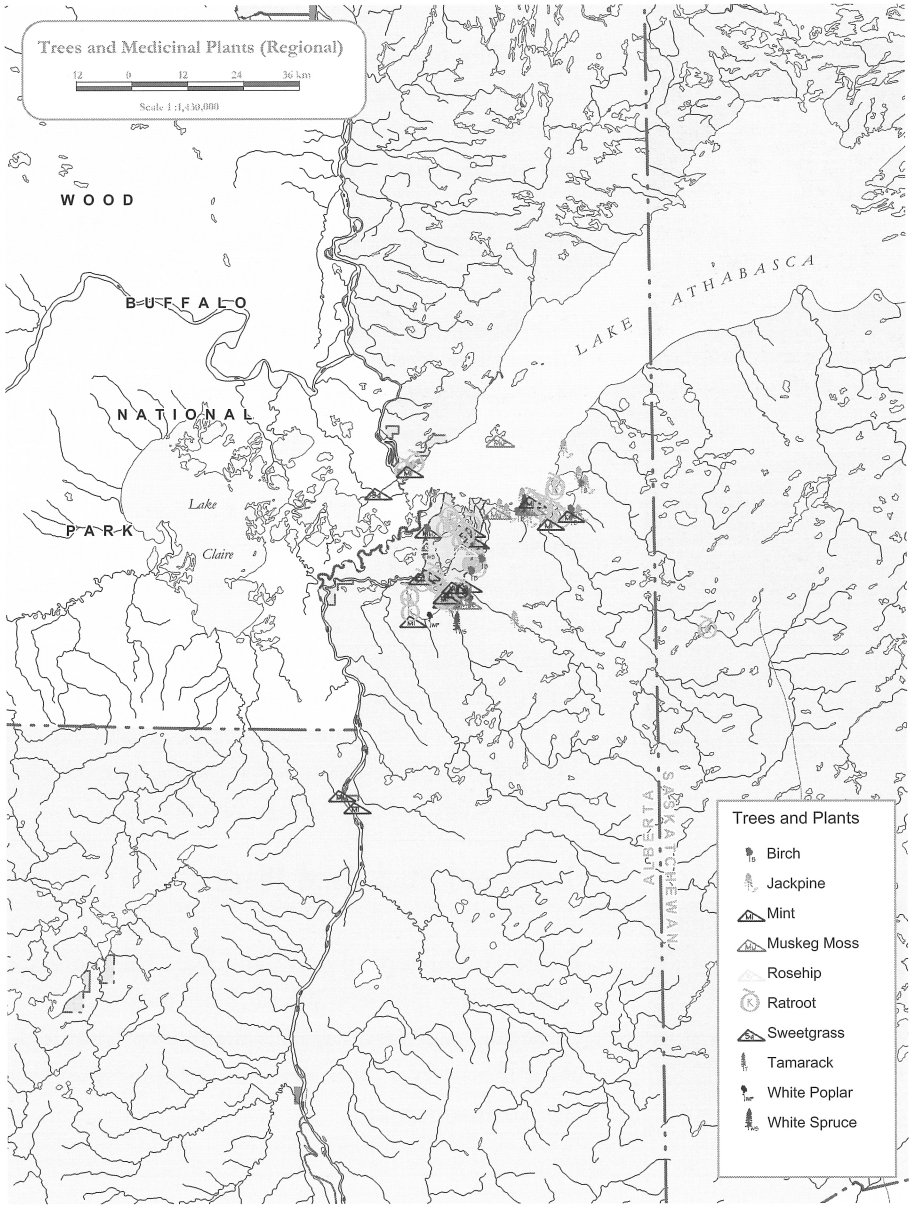
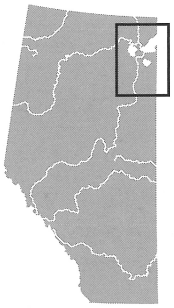
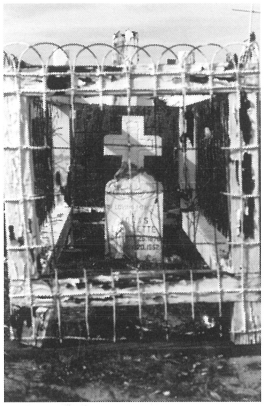


FIGURE 10.2
Trees and Medicinal Plants (Regional). ©ACFN.



CHAPTER ELEVEN

Historical and Spiritual Sites and Place Names



Gravesite of Chief Jonas Laviolette
Chief Jonas Laviolette died in 1952. His gravesite is located in the graveyard southeast of the Jackfish Micro-village.

Indigenous peoples have the right to practice 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.

– Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (1993, art. 12)

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Historical and Spiritual Sites and Place Names

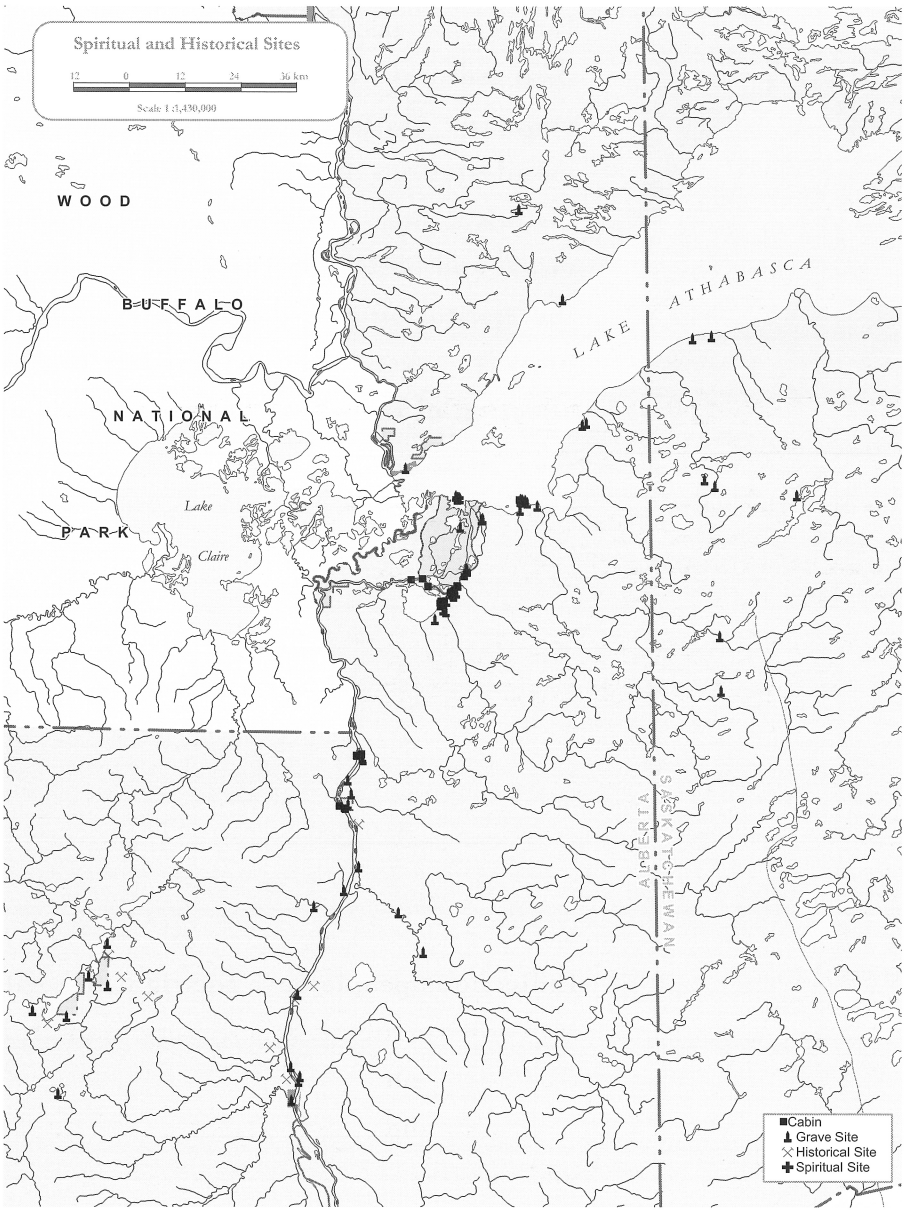


FIGURE 11.1
Spiritual and Historic Sites. ©ACFN.

Figure 11.1 shows the historical and spiritual sites identified by the ACFN Elders. This map is not exhaustive and was not confirmed by ground truthing or GPS location of the sites. The further location and confirmation of such sites will be the objective of a future project.

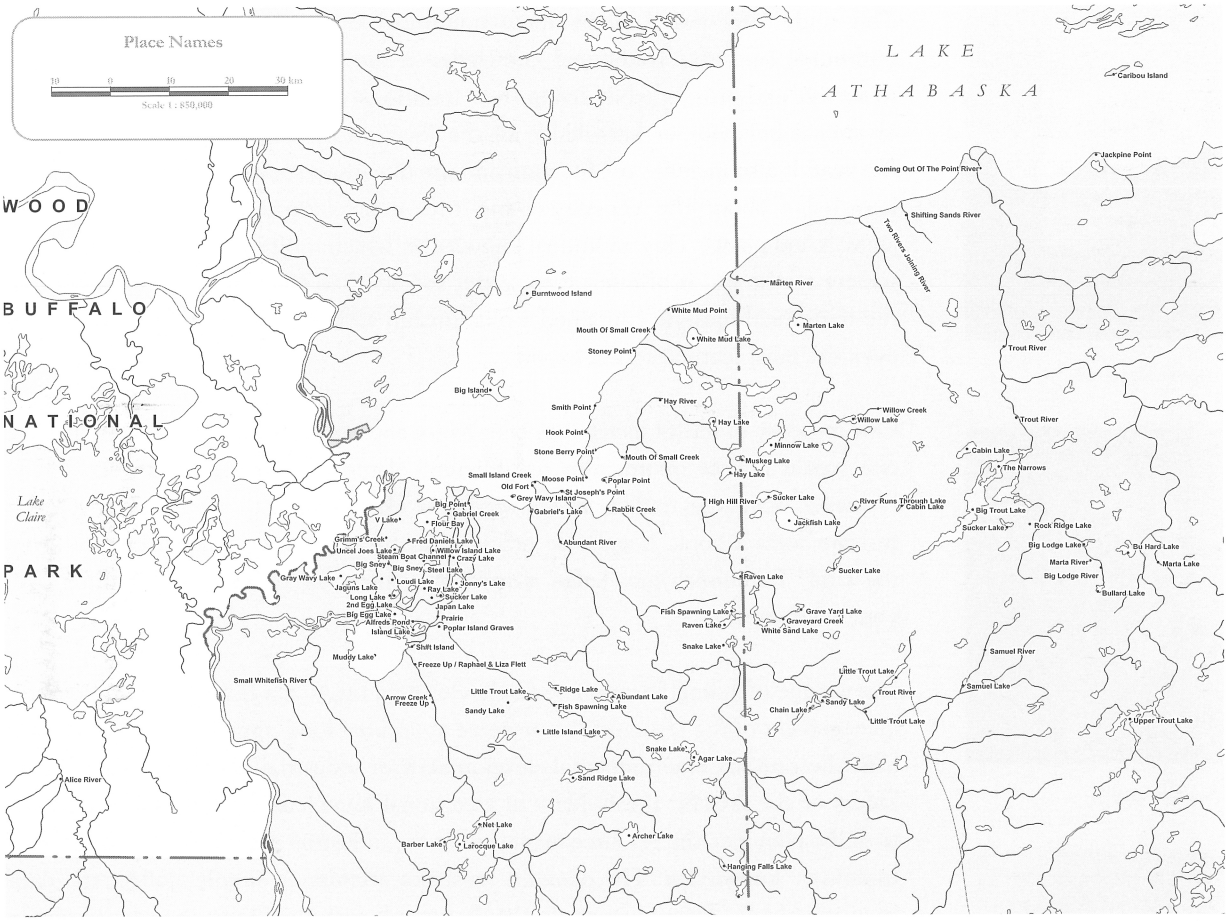


FIGURE 11.2
Place Names. ©ACFN.

The names used by the ACFN peoples to describe their lands are included in Figure 11.2 – ACFN Place Names. Both English and Dene names are provided.

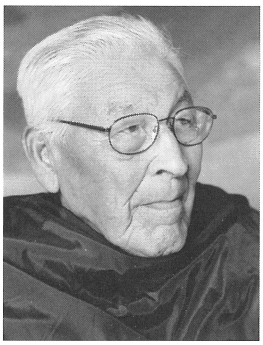
To view a larger map depicting the place names of the ACFN area, contact the ACFN in Fort Chipewyan, Alberta.

Indigenous people have the right to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations, their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies writing systems and literatures, and to designate and retain their own names for communities, places and persons.

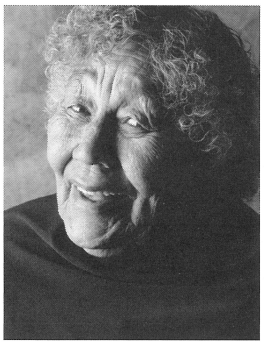
– Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UN 1994, art. 14)

CHAPTER TWELVE

Uses of Traditional Knowledge



Fredoline Marcel. ©ACFN.



Eliza Flett. ©ACFN.



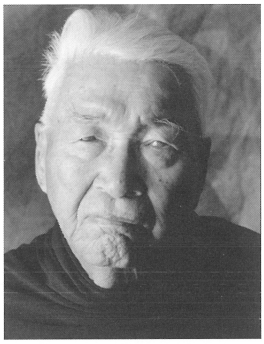
Antoine Mercredi. ©ACFN.

This study interviewed Elders about traditional knowledge and how it relates to traditional land use. Traditional knowledge is the knowledge that the people use to survive and prosper while living their traditional lives. It involves the knowledge of animal behavior or knowledge of the location of animals at certain times of the year. It also includes the location and use of various species of plants. It includes knowledge about the ecosystem and the inter-relationships between different animals and plants. This traditional knowledge, which is often not available in settler society textbooks, is of interest to settler society. It is clear in these instances that the traditional lifestyle contained a relationship with the environment that escapes even the most learned settler expert.

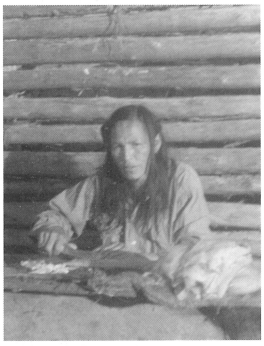
One response of settler society has been to try and 'collect' traditional knowledge like one would collect information on different plants and animals in an ecosystem. However, acquiring traditional knowledge is like learning to swim – it is difficult to learn form a book. It must be practiced as part of gaining ones livelihood from the land. Traditional knowledge is partially about how to live more in tune with your environment.

Knowledge of animal location and behavior held by ACFN Elders can be useful for management of the resources, to preserve aboriginal food opportunities and to help plan the optimal environmental development of industrial activities. But it is the Elders of the ACFN, the holders of traditional knowledge, who must participate with the planners, the resource managers or the industrial planners to interpret their traditional knowledge. The planners must not attempt to simply 'collect the data' from the Elders. They must continuously consult with the Elders in order to obtain the benefits of their traditional knowledge.

Presented below are some stories about how traditional knowledge can help scientists, economic development and resource management followed by a discussion of the use of traditional knowledge in the context of the priority right of the Aboriginal people to feed themselves in their traditional ways.



Baptiste Marcel. ©ACFN.



Margarette Marcel. ©ACFN.

Aids to Scientific Studies

Pat Marcel told a story about some fish biologists from Edmonton. The biologists came out to tag pickerel. Without asking anyone they built a fish trap on the Maybelle River to tag fish. Benjamin, Pat's father, explained to them that there were no fish spawning in the Maybelle River; that these fish spawn in the lakes and bays. However, the biologists did not listen. After several days of no success and plenty of wasted money, they finally came to Mr. Marcel. He then showed them where the fish spawned and where to place their nets or traps to tag the fish. With the help of the Marcel boys the tagging of fish was quite a bit easier. They used Marcel's sons to set nets on the creek where the river goes into the lake.

The traditional knowledge of the Elders includes not only an understanding of the spawning habits of various species of fish, but it includes a vast range of information on many different animal behaviors and inter-relationships. For example, Alec Bruno, an ACFN Elder, described the particular environment of small fishes in and around Minnow Lake, a lake south of Lake Athabasca. These small fish congregate under ledges and tunnels around the lake and it is in these tunnels where they are harvested by predators. The traditional name of the lake even gives a clue to the peculiar characteristics of the area.

Credits for Traditional Knowledge

Charlie Voyageur frequently takes muskrat surveyors out to test if there are muskrats on the Delta. The last time they were out only Egg Lake had any water. Although Charlie has been involved in many studies he has never seen the published reports. He has always given them the benefits of his knowledge.

Elders are upset about the number of times people have come to either do studies or make films about their land or life without ever hearing about it again. There is a problem with the approach that has been taken by researchers and film makers to record traditional knowledge. The Elders that help with these studies rarely get any credit in the scientific papers that are produced when they often have a great deal to do with the success of the studies. The films should also assist the community in preserving their culture and knowledge.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Uses of Traditional Knowledge



Alec Bruno. ©ACFN.

Settler society has been using Aboriginal skills to survive in the bush for many years yet Aboriginal peoples rarely receive credit for these contributions. Among Aboriginal peoples the Chipewyan people have been well known for their ability to travel light and rely upon their significant resources of traditional knowledge. There are many contributions that Aboriginal knowledge has made and will continue to make to science. In the future, traditional knowledge must be treated properly giving proper credit, compensation and acknowledgement of the true source of the information.

The Use of Fire

Arsene Bernaille's grandfather would light a fire around the edge of Lake Athabasca because it would promote berry growth and add new habitat for moose. The Chipewyan people would burn regularly in the area now inside the Wood Buffalo National Park to maintain buffalo habitat. Wildfires in the Park have been more frequent since the Aboriginal people stopped burning in this region.

Charlie Voyageur went out picking eggs every second day one summer. He was 11 years old. He left his campfire burning while he picked berries and it got away from him. His father was going to punish him for letting his fire get away but his Grandfather said, "leave the kid alone – he has done the country good." Two years later the raspberries were tremendous in that area.

Commercial Fishing

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. Many different kinds of fish spawn in Jackfish Lake, "whitefish, pickerel, suckers, all of the fish in the area."

Richardson River used to feed into the lake. However, now no water is flowing out through Jackfish Channel so the Channel going out is too small and the fish can't get in to spawn. Originally, the Channel was diverted away from the lake by people who wanted access to their cabin. Now the Richardson River no longer enters Jackfish Lake except in flood conditions and then it fills the lake with sediment.

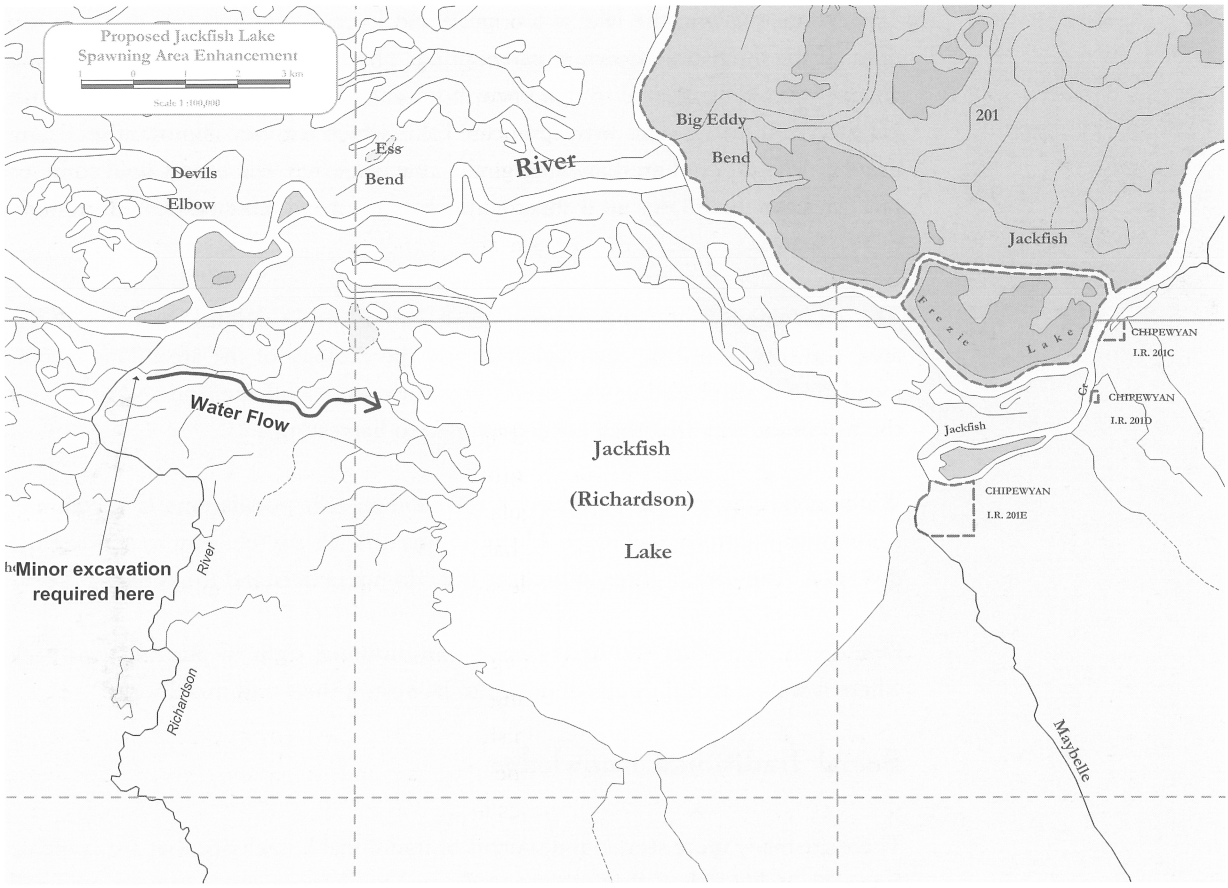


FIGURE 12.1
Jackfish Lake Spawning Area Enhancement. ©ACFN.

Uses of Traditional Knowledge

The channel leaving the lake is too small and freezes over and this makes it too difficult for the fish to spawn in early spring. The Elders recommend that the old channel should be opened so that some more water will flow regularly into Jackfish Lake as it did before. This will refresh the Lake, which is a very important spawning ground. The pickerel are spawning in the channel where the access used to be to Jackfish Lake. It will dry up if there is no change – a new channel will allow more fish to spawn.

This recommendation is based upon a very broad and in depth knowledge of the area, the species of fish, their behavior and the ecology of the area. This recommendation is also based upon a need to continue to live off the land and to harvest the fish in the way that they are accustomed to harvesting.

Water diversion for the purposes of maintaining fish populations is a common Aboriginal traditional technique. However, the officials are reluctant to approve the diversion. They are frightened because they do not understand the ecology.

One could argue that the ACFN has a constitutional right to put the river back where it was so that they can continue to harvest in their traditional ways.

Social Traditional Knowledge

There are many more stories and sources of traditional knowledge that are available from the ACFN Elders. Part of their traditional knowledge involves promoting and maintaining their cultural and spiritual identity. An example that was given by an Elder was traditional adoption. There were times when people who had many children would give a child to someone who was childless. It is interesting to note that there is "no such word as please," in Dene yet sharing was a way of life. In the 1950s someone would kill a moose and everyone would come and take some of the meat. People still share the meat if you live in the bush. In "town", people don't share anymore. Before the people helped each other bring the animal back to the settlement and the women helped each other butcher and prepare the meat. Now times are different.



ACFN Elders (left to right) Liza Flett, Adeline Trip de Roche, Mary Madeline Marcel, and Josephine Mercredi Playing Hand Games. ©ACFN.



Louise Cyprien. ©ACFN.

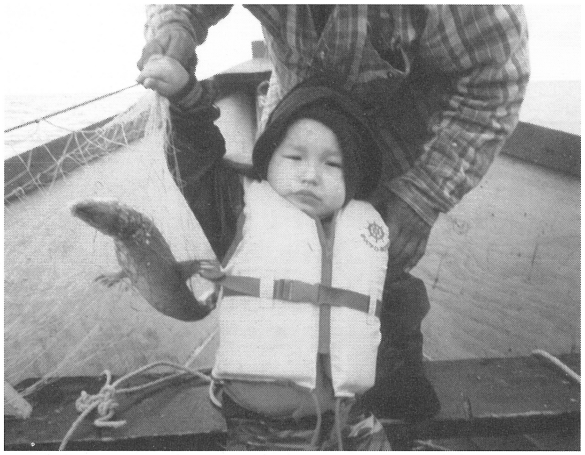
Teaching Traditional Skills and Knowledge

The saying "it takes a whole village to raise one child" is very true in the context of the ACFN community. Children would be taught not only by their parents and grandparents but also by their extended family and friends. In teaching traditional knowledge and skills, safety was always included. Men taught the younger boys how to set traps, where to set traps and how to make traditional traps. They taught navigation on the land and how to remember landmarks. They were taught how to hunt each animal. Women taught the younger girls how to cook, sew, make moose hide and caribou clothing, canning, tanning of hides, stretching and preparing furs, preparation of meats, (moose, bear, waterfowl, fish) and preparation of grease. They also taught how to collect feathers, collect and preserve medicines and berries and make bedrolls and pillows.

The Elders taught all of the above tasks as well as teaching oral history through stories and legends. They taught respect. Both men and women were taught animal behavior, animal habits, caring for dogs, using dog teams, setting nets in summer and winter, where fish lakes are, where spawning areas are, where migration routes are, how to forecast the weather, how to build shelters and how to listen.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Uses of Traditional Knowledge





Left: Brandon Mercredi and his grandfather Charlie checking the nets. ©ACFN.

Right: Fred Marcel. ©ACFN.

Resource Management

Charlie Voyageur, Rene Bruno, Arsene Bernaille and Pat Marcel, Elders of the ACFN, told a story about Chief Jonas Laviolette. During the 1940s and 1950s Jonas Laviolette, the Chief of the Athabasca Chipewyan people, set quotas or maximum harvests for muskrat harvesting on the reserve. The limit was based upon the number of people in the family. The idea was that one would be able to harvest enough to support the family. It was sort of like a band bylaw, a rule for the reserve. A single guy got 200 muskrats, for a family it was 750. A family of four got 500. They put tags on the muskrats and the Indian agent would help keep control of the numbers sold. However, there were traders around so that you could sell on the "black market". With this conservation method there was always lots of muskrats. In 1952 Chief Jonas Laviolette passed away and the rule was terminated. In those days the people depended upon trapping for their money income.

The limits were based upon the Chief's traditional knowledge of the muskrat. No muskrat surveys had been done. And no scientific studies were needed, only the 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 region.





Left: Napoleon and Maryanne Bruno. ©ACFN.

Right: Victoria Mercredi and family at Old Fort. ©ACFN.

According to the Canadian Constitution and the Supreme Court of Canada, Aboriginal use of animals and plants for food takes priority over any other resource use except conservation.[1] This principal applies under the hunting and gathering terms of Treaty 8 and is a right of the ACFN people.[2] Currently, through intensive industrial development in the oil sands region, through hydro-electric developments, competitive hunting and recreational harvesting the quantities of available traditional sources of food are declining. The ACFN Elders and resource users are aware of the decline in the availability of these sources of food.

Canadian Law also requires at least the Provincial and Federal Crown to consult with the Aboriginal peoples to determine if their Aboriginal rights, such as the priority right to hunt and fish for food, is being infringed in any way. Recent court rulings in British Columbia have even declared that private companies also have the duty to consult.[3] In Sparrow[4] a prima facie infringement not only includes effects that create undue hardship but also includes effects that deny the Aboriginal peoples their preferred way of exercising their right to hunt and fish for food.

1 R. v. Sparrow, (1990) 1 S.C.R. 1075; [1990] 3 C.N.L.R. 160; 2 R. v. Badger (1996), 133 D.L.R. (4th) 324, [1996] 4 W.W.R. 457, 37 Alta. L.R. (3rd) 153. 3 Haida Nation v. B.C. and Weyerhauser, 2002, BCCA 462. 4 R. v. Sparrow, (1990) 1 S.C.R. 1075; [1990] 3 C.N.L.R. 160;

CHAPTER TWELVE

Uses of Traditional Knowledge



(left to right) Charlie Voyageur, Ben and Mary Madeline Marcel. ©ACFN.

Although this study did not focus on measuring the variability of wildlife populations, several Elders have noted in this study that there have been declines in the availability of traditional foods as a result of resource development and competitive use and that 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 required by the Canadian Constitution. Elders are required in development consultations and regional resource management systems because regional management of these resources must acknowledge the priority rights of the Aboriginal peoples and include consideration of these rights in their deliberations.

Preserving traditional knowledge is important for the future of the ACFN, for the scientific community, for resource managers and for commercial fishermen. It is important to preserve traditional knowledge. It is based upon a culture and spiritual tradition that is in tune with the environment that supports us all.

There is also a duty of the Crown because of its fiduciary duty to Aboriginal people to consult with Aboriginal people with respect to infringements of Aboriginal rights. The traditional knowledge that is held by the Elders and resource users of the ACFN provides the information required for these consultations.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The Traditional Land Use Areas of the ACFN

This study has reviewed the traditional land use area of the Chipewyan people in three major periods: the nomadic caribou era, the nomadic Boreal forest era and the micro-village era. In each of these times, the Chipewyan people obtained their traditional livelihood over large areas of land. The changes in land uses were primarily caused by their exposure to the fur trade and other influences of settler society. The following chapter discusses the changes in the land use patterns of the Chipewyan people.

In 1795 Samuel Hearne observed that the Chipewyan people were reluctant to leave their caribou resource. He described their nomadic hunting and gathering livelihood as an affluent society and the Chipewyan people appeared to be content. This reluctance to participate in the fur trade extended the nomadic period of the Chipewyan people where they followed the caribou in the barren lands, the taiga, and in the margin of the Boreal forest.

There have been disagreements with respect to the likely proto-contact traditional area of the Chipewyan people immediately before their encounter with European fur traders. Because of the recent occupation of the Boreal forest, some explorers and students have proposed that the Chipewyan people had always occupied the Boreal forest. However, based upon the information in historical journals and the Chipewyan people's caribou adaptation, it is likely that the proto-contact location of these people was mostly within the regular range of the barren land caribou as shown on Figure 13.1.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The Traditional Land Use Areas of the ACFN

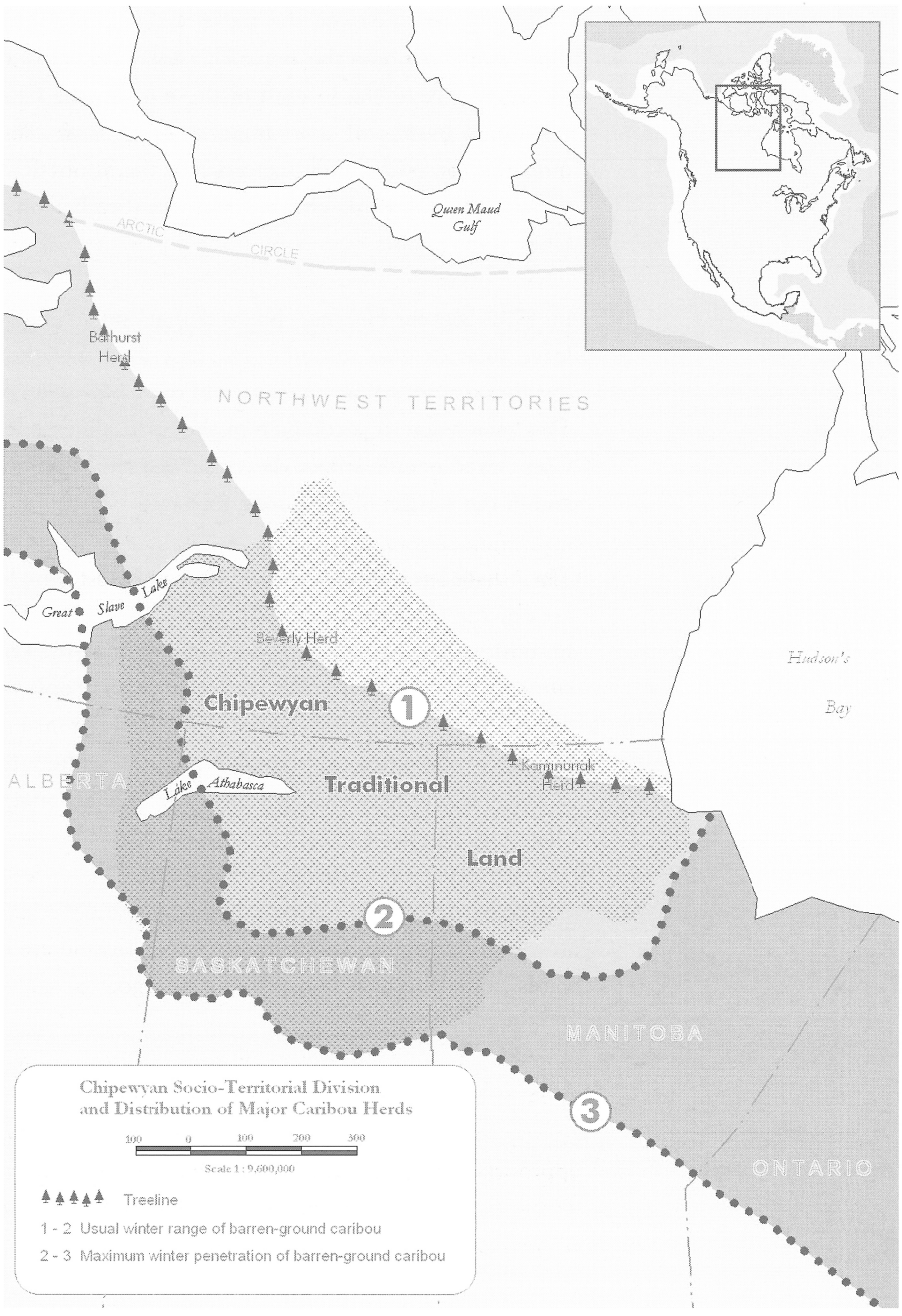


FIGURE 13.1
Caribou Habitat and Chipewyan Lands in Aboriginal Times. Derived from Smith's "The Ecological Basis of Chipewyan Socio-territorial Organization" and Dr.Cormack Gates personal comments.©ACFN. The pre-contact territory of the Chipewyan people was directly related to the migration of the caribou herds. The range of caribou migration likely provides reasonable limits to the normal Chipewyan hunting and gathering territory.

Still, this does not impose a boundary upon the traditional land use of the Chipewyan people that would exile them from the Boreal forest. In fact the contrary is likely the case. It is more likely that they would have ventured into the Boreal forest during times of caribou migration, and may have returned there (depending upon the caribou or other migration conditions). The concept of a boundary is foreign to the typical characteristics of a nomadic people with such a wide range. Although the idea of ownership of property did not exist in the ACFN culture, they were apparently experienced at defending or fighting over their right to harvest in any particular location.

The range of the nomadic Chipewyan people was very large and was estimated through looking at the likely pre-contact range of the caribou herds. Some more recent studies have suggested that the southern migration of caribou does not extend below lake Athabasca in Alberta. However, in historical times (when herd sizes might be somewhat smaller) there was occasional caribou migration well below Lake Athabasca and west into the Boreal forest.

Another interesting hypothesis proposes that the original Dene people migrated into their proto-contact location from what is now the Boreal forest of northern BC, perhaps 2,500 to 3,000 years ago. Also the Dene legends talk of the unity and relationship between all of the Dene people, some of whom gained their livelihood from the Boreal forest (Beaver). Cultural and economic adaptations are continually changing and changed in the context of the pre-contact hunting and gathering society. It has been established by both linguistic anthropological analysis and traditional knowledge that the Athapaskan people from the southwest United States are closely related to the Chipewyan people and are likely to have migrated southwards from Alberta as late as 600 years ago.

In the context of the large nomadic territory likely occupied by the Chipewyan people, and the context of the continually evolving culture and adaptations of these Aboriginal people, it is inappropriate to speak of boundaries. It may however, be appropriate to look at the likelihood of territorial occupation at any particular time. This approach is more consistent with what we know about the culture and behavior of the Dene people.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The Traditional Land Use Areas of the ACFN

Figure 13.2 shows the traditional lands of the Chipewyan people in Aboriginal times. This vast area reflects the nomadic life of harvesting caribou also includes some habitat on the edges of the Boreal Forest.

According to Smith and others, the range of the Chipewyan people was not diminished by their early involvement in the fur trade. In the beginning of their participation as middlemen, and with their regular trips to the Hudson's Bay, the territory of habitation of the Chipewyan was likely larger than before. It would have extended into the Boreal forest for trading and taking furs, and would also involve regular travel to Fort Churchill to trade furs. At the end of the 1700s the fur trade competition began to heat up with new trading posts being built in the interior. During this time, and up to 1821 with the creation of the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) monopoly, the Chipewyan people were able to move further into the Boreal forest and benefit from their status as middlemen and fur suppliers. In addition to this, the new forts required provisions, which were often supplied by Chipewyan hunters.

The Boreal forest nomadic cycles probably began during this period. This cycle continued to involve a trip close to or well into the barren lands to harvest caribou as they followed the caribou south at the beginning of winter. This nomadic Boreal forest cycle was likely shorter and involved visiting local fur trading posts rather than the longer trips to the Hudson's Bay. These annual rounds would be similar to the northern round described earlier by the Chipewyan Elder Sarah Brown. The lands that were occupied during this time are presented in Figure 13.3 – Historical Land Use areas.

Due to the adoption of the dog sled, canoe and rifle the Chipewyan nomadic life style began to change as they moved to micro-villages in order to hunt, trap, fish and gather. The cabin was another adaptation introduced by the settler society and the participation in the fur trade allowed the Chipewyan people to participate in a less nomadic cycle. Figure 13.4 uses the Elder's interviews and harvesting and land use locations to identify the intensity of land use during this period. The frequency analysis reinforces the fact that micro- villages were the centers of the hunting, gathering and fishing activities. As can be seen on Figure 13.4, these areas roughly surround Jackfish on the Delta, Old Fort Point of the Lake Athabasca and Point Brule on the Athabasca River.

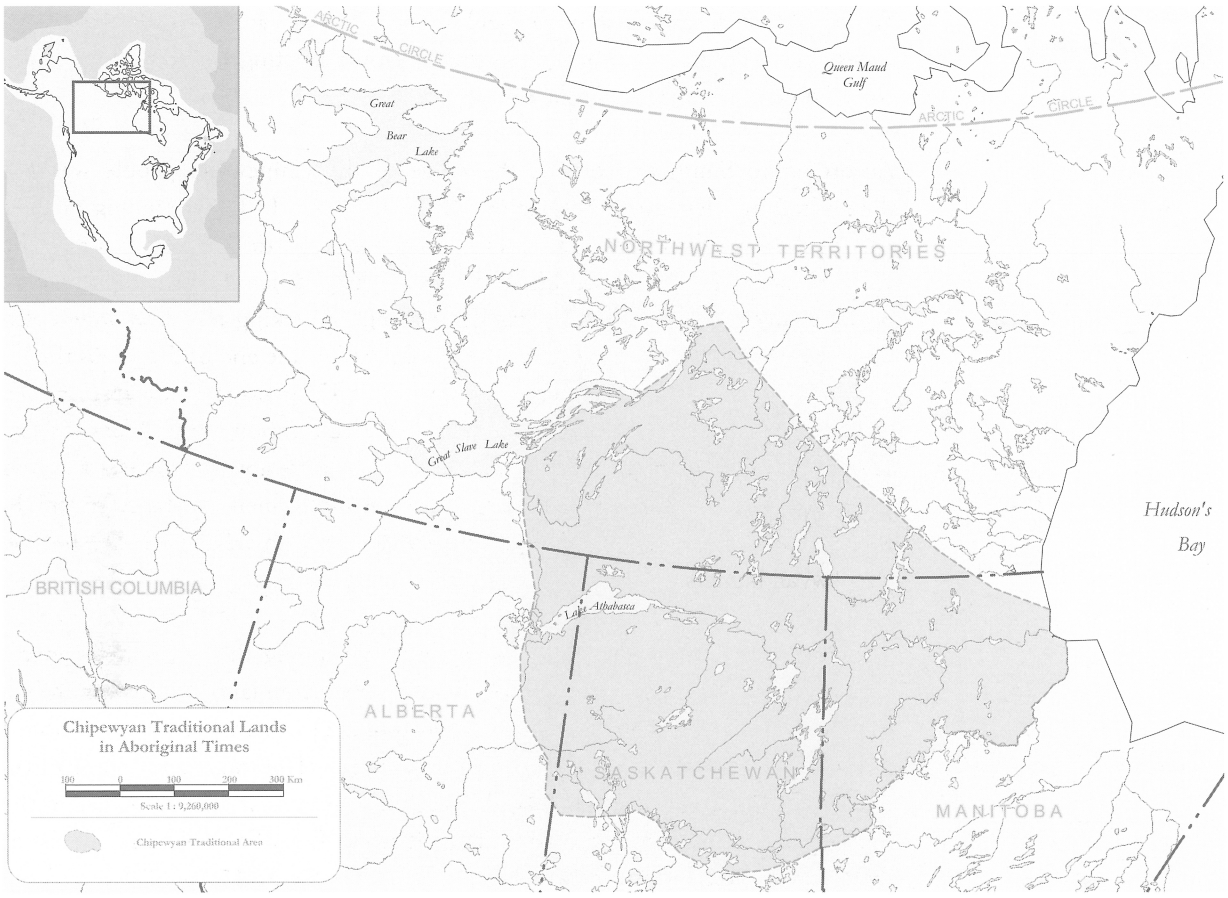


Figure 13.2

Chipewyan Traditional Lands in Aboriginal Times. Derived from Helm (2000), Duncan (1989), Waldman (2000), Smith (1975), Gillespie (1981), and Gates personal communication, Luger Muller-Wille (1974) and traditional knowledge from ACFN members. ©ACFN. 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.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The Traditional Land Use Areas of the ACFN

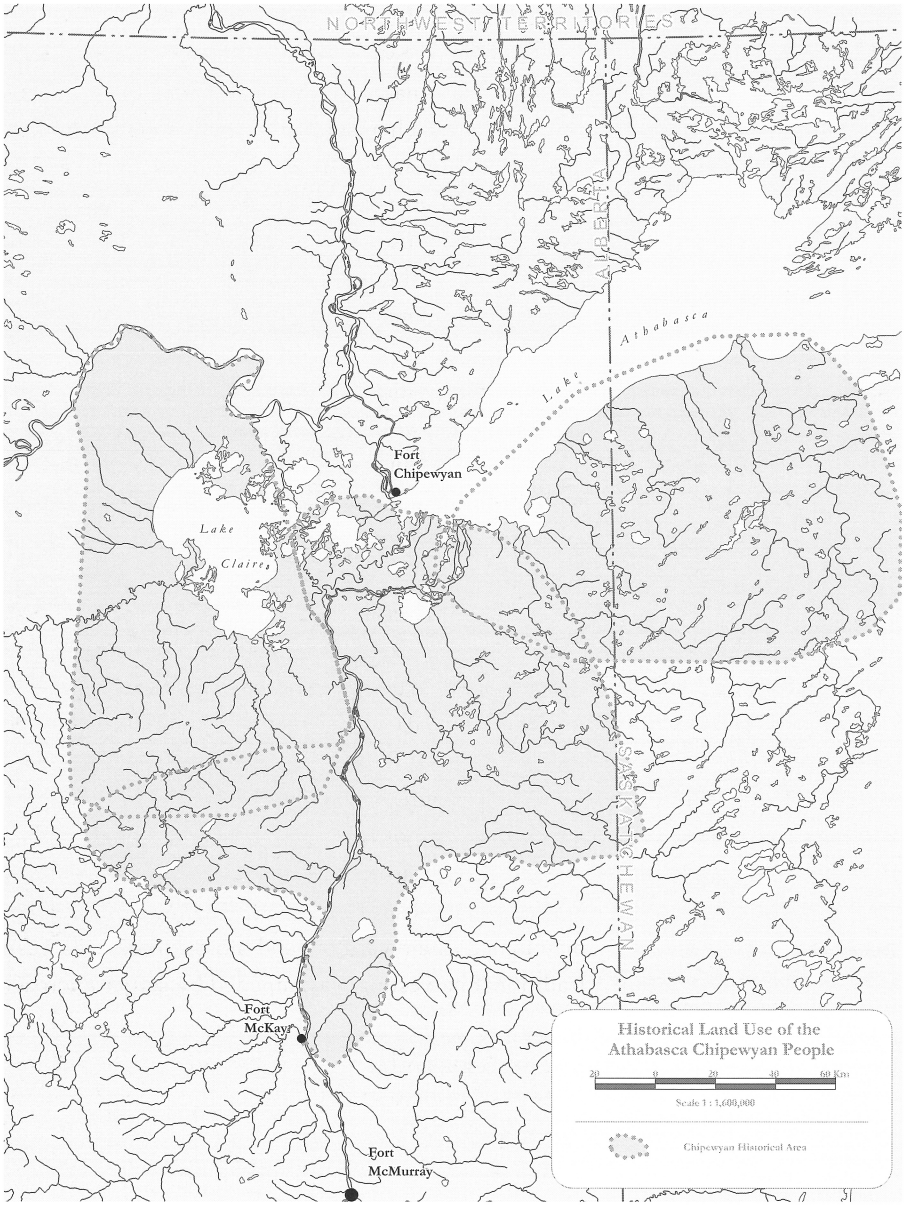


FIGURE 13.3
Historical Land Use. ©ACFN.

To calculate the use intensity polygons on the maps ArcView GIS 3.2a (Environmental Systems Research Institute, Inc.) with internal program extensions called Spatial Analyst and Animal Movement that operate with the ArcView System. (Hooge and Eichenlaub 1997). Fixed kernel home range utilization distribution analysis (Worton 1989) was employed using a default smoothing parameter to calculate and map utilization distributions (areas of probability of occurrence) for traditional land use point locations. The 50%, 75% and 95 % probability polygons for all traditional use sites combined, rather than for individual resource categories. Also, the minimum convex polygon for the distribution of resource use point locations for each of these categories was calculated. The minimum convex polygon represents an estimate of the maximum extent of the harvesting land use of the people interviewed and could serve as an estimate of the traditional lands of the ACFN. Two additional maps of the big game harvests and the furbearers harvest have been included to demonstrate the flexibility and analytical potential of this method of analysis.[1]

In order to create the map of ACFN Traditional Lands a polygon that connected the external harvest and land use points of a composite map of all harvest and land use activities was developed. This map represents the Land use area of the Athabasca Chipewyan People during the period from 1940 to the 1970s (Elder Interview Period) and coincides closely with the historical land use area as defined in Figure 13.3. This ACFN Traditional area is not limited to this area as boundaries are not appropriate concepts when dealing with traditional areas in this context (see Chapter 3). The ACFN traditional Lands extend to the north into the Caribou harvest areas and further east, west and south as the ACFN people had maintained their caribou and Boreal Forest harvesting in vast areas until their traditional harvesting was impeded by settler encroachment.

However, the ACFN Traditional Lands as represented in Figure 13.5 provide an estimate of the area of predominant use of the ACFN people.

1 Cormack Gates generated the use intensity polygons for this study.

The Traditional Land Use Areas of the ACFN

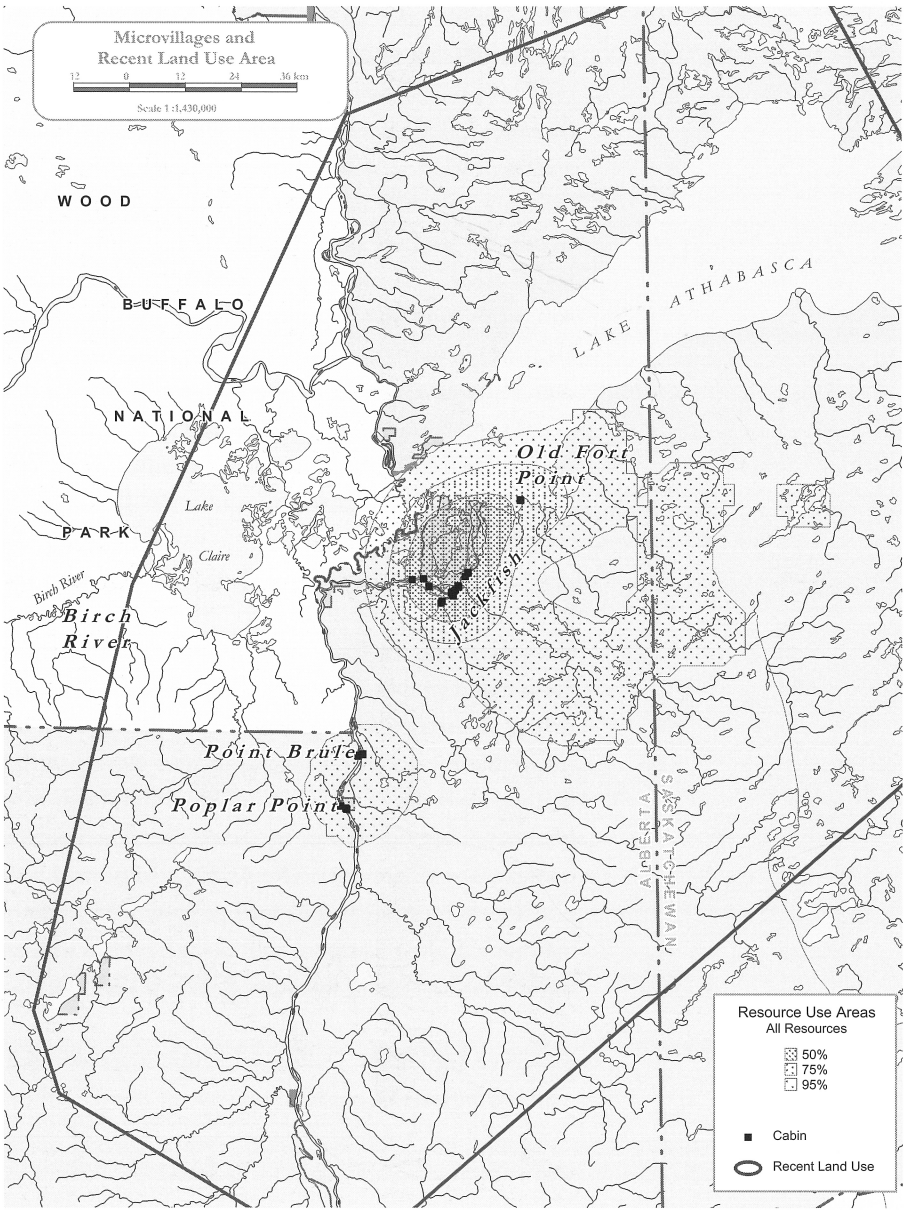
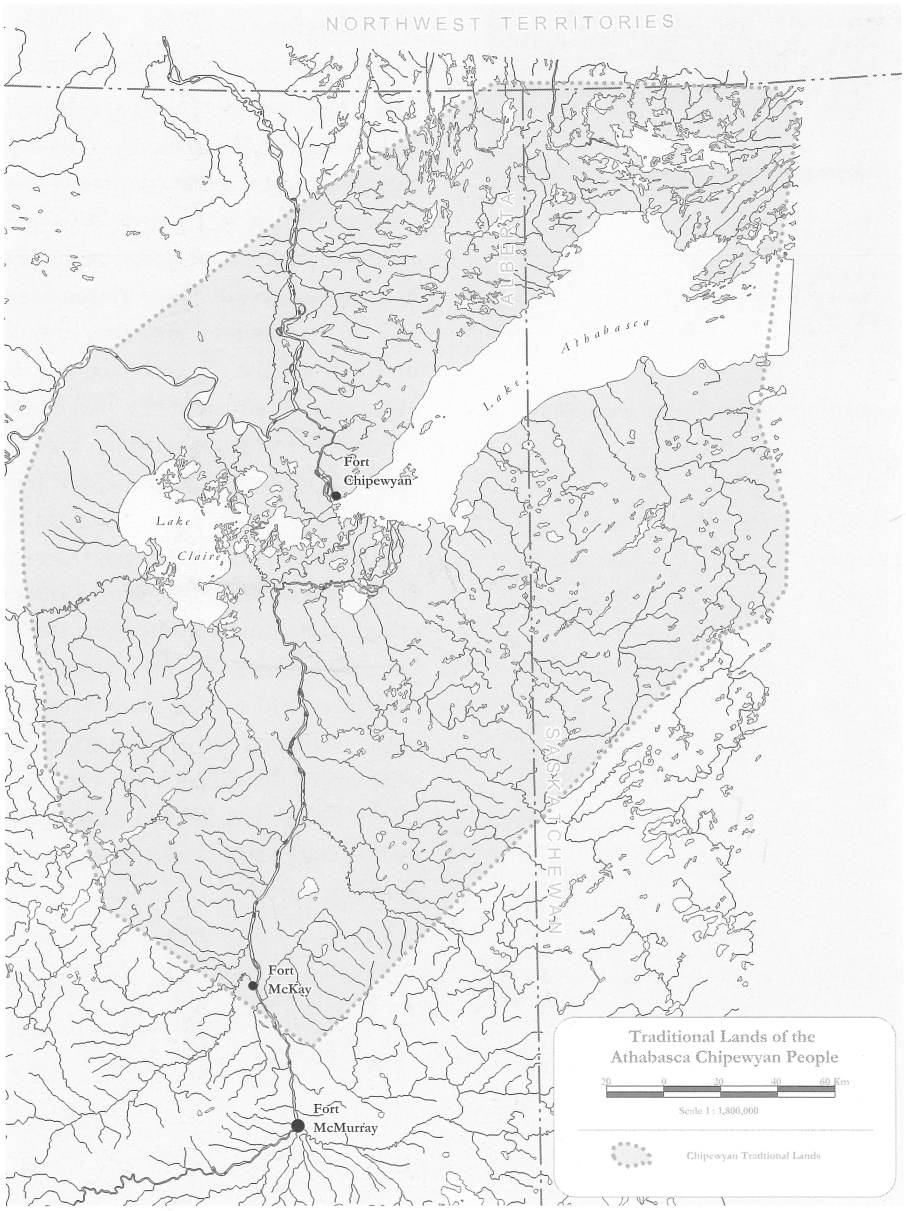


FIGURE 13.4
Micro-villages and Recent Land Use Area.

FIGURE 13.5
ACFN Traditional Lands. ©ACFN.



CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The Traditional Land Use Areas of the ACFN



Dogsled team. Photograph courtesy of Leornard Flett.

Conclusion

The Chipewyan people have experienced three major land use eras. Beginning with the nomadic caribou era they eventually moved into the boreal forest while continuing some contact with their previous life ways. Then as the trade developed and new technological and economic adaptations occurred they began to settle in micro-villages in the boreal forest. The traditional land use of these people was vast and encompassed an area that extended from the Hudson's Bay to northern Alberta. Recent land use information indicates that the harvesting locations of the ACFN are now more concentrated but still include a large territory extending from just north of Fort McMurray into Saskatchewan and north into the NWT.

The land use intensity analysis shows that the harvesting activity was concentrated around the micro-villages that have been described in the other chapters. It is worth noting that the most southern micro-village has already experienced the impact from the industrialization of Fort McMurray and the oil sands as well as the impact of government village centralization. The micro-village in the Athabasca Delta has experienced the effects of the BC Hydro Bennett Dam and the drying of the Delta. The Band is now proposing to redevelop their third micro-village and has referred to this development quite appropriately as "going home".

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Changes in Land Use and Conclusion

Changes in Land Use

This study presents the evolution and current land use patterns of the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation. These land use patterns have changed significantly since contact with settler society, but the ACFN still maintains important ties to their traditional lands.

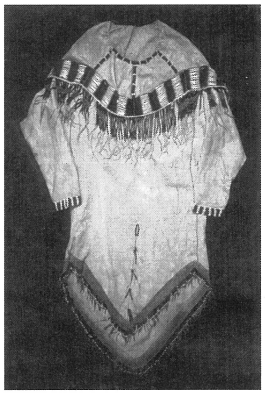
As discussed in Chapter 2, the Chipewyan peoples are thought to be descendants of the paleo-aboriginal people, the Taltheilei, who occupied northern Canada for thousands of years. The ACFN people are Dene. The early fur traders called them Chipewyan and they often referred to themselves as "caribou eaters". Their early foraging included nomadic harvesting of barrenland caribou, and their land use stretched from the Hudson's Bay to south of Lake Athabasca and northwards well into the barrenlands. Chapter 3 discussed a debate amongst anthropologists over the location of Chipewyan traditional lands caused by conflicting historical records. However, there is an emerging consensus that their early traditional lands would have been intimately connected with caribou harvesting. This study has presented an approximation of these early lands, based upon available information on caribou habitat and historical documents.



Chipewyan camp. ca. Pre. 1921. Photograph courtesy of the Glenbow Museum, Calgary.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Changes in Land Use and Conclusion



Caribou hide Dene Tunic, Photograph courtesy of Smithsonian Institute. Reference # US NM 607 (2030).

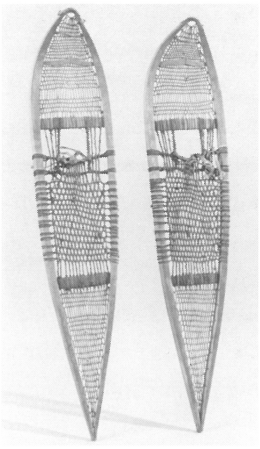
The fur trade encouraged this proud and independent people to become participants. Despite their relatively affluent caribou economy, the Chipewyan people eventually played a key role in the fur trade, acting as middlemen, guides, provisioners and trappers. This induced them to move from the barrenlands into the Boreal forest during the late 1700s. It was here that they began to center their nomadic cycles around fur trading posts and harvested caribou in the barrenlands less frequently. Over time and with technological changes like rifles, larger canoes and increased use of dog sleds, the Chipewyan people began to center their harvesting around micro-villages. Micro-villages are groups of cabins and tents that were close to key traditional resources. It is these micro-villages that form the center of their traditional harvesting today.

Chapter 4 discusses important historical influences that affected the land use of the ACFN people. Although Treaty 8 was signed in 1899, it did not protect the ACFN people from the pressures of settler immigration and competition. Partially in response to those pressures, the Wood Buffalo Park was established in 1921 and expanded in 1926. The new rules of the Park forced many ACFN members to shift their harvesting activities away from the park. This shift is reflected in the recent land use patterns described by the Elders during this study. However, the ACFN traditional lands must include these historical use areas and therefore, these areas are included in the current ACFN traditional lands maps.

Harvest Activities and Uses of Traditional Information

This study has recorded the harvest activities and some of the characteristics of each of the various resources that were harvested by the ACFN people. The knowledge of these species and the descriptions of their way of life are very valuable and can help the ACFN Elders communicate this information to the youth. This information is also useful for negotiation concerning Treaty Rights, loss of traditional foods and resources, and future land use planning. This information is owned by the Elders, and they have authorized its use for this book. This study can provide a beginning point for consultation with the First Nation and the Elders of the ACFN.

This work can be continued by refining and increasing the collection of the traditional information of the ACFN, by geo-referencing the spiritual and historical sites, and by continuing to transfer knowledge to the youth of the community.



Wooden frames laced with babiche, skin ankle thongs. The spliced upturned toes wrapped with babiche. The Athapaskans: Stranger of the North collection by J.A. Mason, 1913 NWMVI-N-40a,b.

ACFN Traditional Lands

An analysis of the current ACFN traditional lands occupied for hundreds of years has been included. These lands include the areas used for recent harvesting activities identified by the Elders, the historical lands of the ACFN occupied from the late 19th century until the creation of Wood Buffalo Park, and other settler infringements. The current ACFN traditional lands are presented in the map in Figure 13.5. This area only represents the region of most intensive use, since ACFN hunters and trappers often harvested caribou and other resources beyond the lines on this map. However, for the purposes of discussion, negotiation and research, this area encompasses most of the ACFN spiritual and traditional land use area.

Loss of Traditional Opportunities

During the 1950s, the ACFN people continued to live off the lands by trapping and hunting. Often they would find seasonal employment in commercial fishing, forestry, fire fighting, construction and other occupations. The churches and the Government encouraged the people to move into centers such as Fort Chipewyan. In these centers children were able to attend school, few jobs with Bands and Government were available along with medical and social assistance and children. Still, there was not a solid foundation of wage- based employment.

Even with these influences, the traditional way of life including hunting, trapping and fishing, made up a major portion of the livelihood of the ACFN people. In the late 1960s, the Bennett Dam was built in northern BC. The Dene people were not aware of this, nor were they told of the major changes that would take place upon its completion. The Dam was finished in 1967 and the reservoir took years to fill. This water, which was the lifeline of the Dene people, was stored in the Dam reservoir causing seasonal floods to diminish. The Delta and the perched basins that normally filled during a flood, dried out. The muskrat needed these basins to live and multiply. This dam was devastating for the Dene people's muskrat harvesting and traditional way of life. A Government located hundreds of miles away was altering their way of life. The effects of the dam were not temporary. Over the long

Changes in Land Use and Conclusion

term, with the level of the lake lower during the spring, the frequency of floods continued to decline. There were more dry years, and the outcome was very visible as the perched basins dried up.

Weirs and ditches were constructed in order to try and keep the Delta wet, but these efforts were not sufficient. With the Delta drying and the muskrats gone, the traditional way of life for the ACFN people was devastated. This was the start of the end of trapping. With no muskrats the Dene people had to move to town and participate in another way of life. The majority of these people only knew one way of life, which was trapping and living off the land. Most of them didn't even have a house of their own, so it was not unusual for as many as twenty people to live under one roof with nothing to do.

This created many social problems. Drinking, family violence, and sexual abuse were not uncommon. At the beginning of this move, most of the Dene families had their cabins to go to on the weekends, where traditional life carried on. There was the spring hunt for birds, commercial fishing, hunting for big animals, fall hunt for moose and birds, and berry picking. But most of them stayed in town for freeze-up and break-up. If the men stayed out in the fall or spring, the woman usually stayed in town with the children, who attended school.



A handmade Beaver and Moosehide Jacket made by Mary Madeline Marcel.

In the traditional life, families worked and played together; sharing was a way of life. Most of the people did not think of any other way of life, this way was comfortable, reliable and sturdy. This mindset is now gone. There is not much food sharing anymore. Nowadays, when someone kills a moose (unless that person is directly in your family) one should not expect any meat.

There has been a major change in tasks over the last 30 years. Most people have left the traditional lifestyle and now live in town. Below is an outline of some of the changes.

Traditional Lifestyle	Current Lifestyle
Trapping for income	Working for wages or welfare
Country foods	Store bought or fast food store
Moccasins	Bought shoes
Stories and legends	Television and video games/school
Medicine from land	Medicine from nursing station
Dog teams	Snow machine or quads
Life on the land	Life in hamlet
Sharing	Not sharing
Numerous children	Nuclear family
Traditional language	English
Syllabics	English
Healing circles	Do it on my own attitude
Child rearing by all	Nuclear family
No diabetes	Diabetic
Living off the land	Short visits to traditional lands

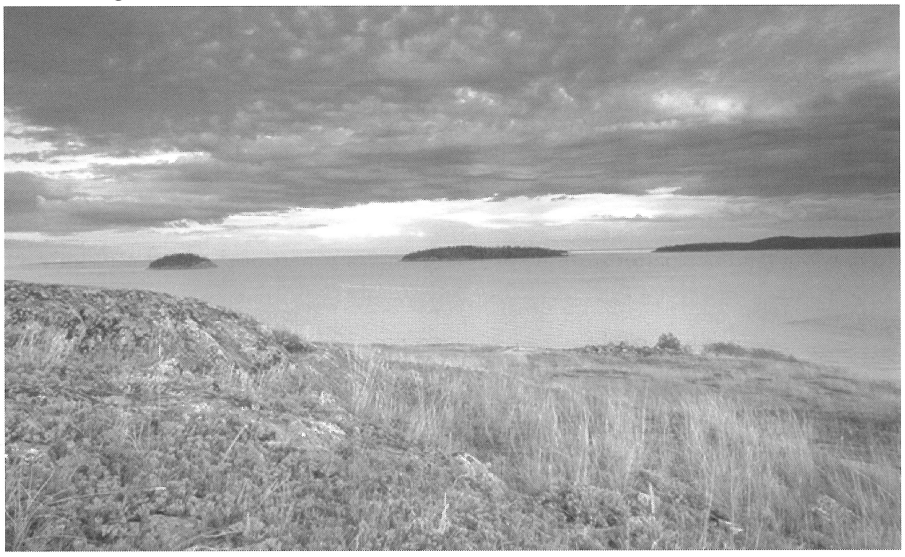
CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Changes in Land Use and Conclusion

More Changes

As a result of the infringements on the traditional activities of the ACFN people, they have lost much of their opportunity to continue their traditional ways of life. The reserve on the Athabasca Delta that was granted after the creation of the Wood Buffalo Park provided a bountiful resource for harvest. As shown in the micro-village maps, there were four general micro-village areas: Jackfish on the Delta, Birch River and in Park, Point Brule and Poplar Point on the Athabasca River, and Old Fort Point. Now, three out of the four sites are being impacted by settler society. The Park pushed people out of Birch River, the Delta has been devastated, oil sands plants are moving up the Athabasca River, and the only area left is the south shore.

There has been a large intensity of activity around the Old Fort Point area where there was a considerable amount of big game hunting, waterfowl hunting, fishing and berry picking. It is therefore appropriate that the ACFN is seeking to set up another reserve in the Oil Fort Point region. The south shore of Lake Athabasca may offer economic potential for the ACFN that has not otherwise been exploited by settler society. As Chief Archie Cyprien has said in his introduction to this study, it is time to go home.



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.

APPENDIX

Project Methodology

Project Organization

The project was organized under the supervision of the Chief and Council who appointed a TLUOS committee. It was important for the First Nation to have complete control over the process that would gather information on their traditional lives. Consultants were hired to assist with technical and logistical aspects of the project.

Project Scope

The project was to include an interview process during which the Elders of the ACFN would be asked questions about their traditional land uses and traditional practices. The interviews would be recorded and videotaped if permissible. Youth in the community would be trained in GIS systems and would be employed in assisting with interviews, entering data and producing maps. The interviews would contain a mapping section where the Elders would prepare maps of their traditional activities. The maps and data would be entered into a database and a book presenting the result of the study would be produced.

Permission forms were obtained from the Elders and clear and detailed explanation of the purpose of the study and the use of the information was conducted before the Elder was asked to sign any forms.

Questionnaire, GIS and Interview Process

The TLUOS committee was charged with drafting an initial questionnaire. When the draft was completed it was put through a test process. An Elder's committee then reviewed the questionnaire and suggested methods and parameters for conducting interviews. The TLUOS committee provided guidance in selecting the interviewers, interviewer assistants and translators. The organizational process required several TLUOS committee meetings over a period of at least two months.

Recording land use patterns on maps is an important part of the land use study. GIS technology is now required to fully utilize this type of information. Therefore, GIS equipment and training had to be obtained as part of the project. The TLUOS committee recommended who from the Band would take the course and participate in the technical aspects of the study.

The management of the project had two primary tasks. One was to coordinate the design, preparation and implementation of the interview process and the other was to prepare the GIS course and set up the technical support for the study.

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Several drafts of the questionnaire were made and two test interviews were performed to help qualify the questions. Joanne Barnaby (consultant), Lily Marcel, Patricia Lepine and Alice Rigney, proposed that two questionnaires be designed, one for the men and one for the women since questions directed at the men would be different than those directed at to the women. This was an important and useful innovation to the questionnaire process.

Once the questionnaire was finalized and presented to the committee, the interview process could start. While the questionnaire was being prepared, a GIS course was offered to 7 band members. This course was offered in the multiplex building beside the ACFN offices. The course involved two four-day sessions divided by a month of exercises during which the students were to practice and prepare assignments. Five students finished the course. The students were also encouraged to participate in interviews as technical support. This experience was useful as they learned how the information (data) was obtained and how it may be used in the GIS systems.

Two of the students became involved in recording and interview sessions regularly. One student was able to continue on and work more consistently with the GIS system after the course was finished. As the project progressed, this student, Everett Bruno, took two more courses in GIS and has provided technical support for the project since the end of the initial course.

Alice Rigney, Lily Marcel and Leonard Flett were chosen to conduct the interviews. The important qualifications for the interviewers included having the trust and confidence of the Elders, speaking the Dene language and having some knowledge of traditional activities. Shortly after the beginning of the interviews, Leonard was called away to an important obligation and Lily Marcel and Alice Rigney finished the interviews. Sometimes interviews would extend over 3 to 4 days and involve 6 or 7 hours of tapes. All the interviews were tape-recorded. Some interviews were also filmed but more often the filming was done at interesting times during the interview as selected by the interviewer or the assistant. There were a total of 32 Elders interviewed.

A questionnaire was filled out during each interview, a woman's questionnaire for the women and a man's for the men. All the Elders were paid the same honorarium regardless of the time taken for the interview.

The interview questionnaire included questions on land use activities including the location, types and quantities of animals, birds and plants harvested; the uses for these plants, birds and animals and the processing, cooking or preserving done. The equipment that was taken to an interview included a tape recorder, a copy of the questionnaire including a consent form and a record of payment form. In addition, the interview package would include larger and smaller maps of the general areas included in the family's traditional territory. Also, a video camera was used when permitted. The interviews took place according to the preferences of the Elders; sometimes in their homes and sometimes in the Band office. Some interviews were done in the bush; at Old Fort or at Jackfish.

The TLUOS committee was asked to review some answers to questions where there was considerable divergence in the responses. In addition, the committee prepared additional maps that included the land use areas of their grandparents before the imposition of trapping blocks and before the reserve lands were established.

The Information Storage and Presentation

Once the maps and questionnaires were completed the information was entered into a database and a GIS mapping system. In this way the information could be easily analyzed, duplicated and presented. Once the questionnaire process was completed and the data entered, the production of a book on traditional land use started. The book required pictures, sketches and maps and an analysis of materials that had been collected on tape, film and in questionnaires. In addition, research was needed on historical and anthropological information that could provide a context for the recent traditional land use.

Alice Rigney was asked to begin the process of reviewing tapes and stories that might be included. In 2002, Jordan Kuschminder was hired by the ACFN. Jordan was asked to do some anthropological research on the pre-history of the ACFN. Jim Tanner also did some historical research work. One interesting publication that was investigated was InKonze, by Lorraine Mercredi – Hoffman. This book contains many interesting stories and oral traditions of the ACFN ancestors. Discussions were held with Lorraine Mercredi-Hoffman on her book.

The ACFN Traditional Land Use Study includes information from interviews and stories from the Elders. It also contains information obtained from historical and anthropological sources. The book is not intended to present all of the material collected in the study but is intended to give an overview and a summary of the general land use patterns and important uses to which the lands were put.

Traditional Knowledge Interviews

By Alice Rigney

Interviewing my Dene Elders has always been a journey for me. I was raised on the Chipewyan Reserve 201 from birth until the age of five. My early years are beautiful memories, with loving parents and extended family; the only language I heard and spoke was the Dene language. I was away from home for 14 years and came home, speaking only English. I lost my language and with it, my identity.

I wanted to communicate with my parents, my grandmother and other family members but couldn't. I was frustrated. My grandmother told me that if I spoke our Dene language, the Elders would know who I was. Those words inspired me, and since I was able to understand the language, practicing it by speaking with my Elders was a challenge, if not funny at times. But I didn't quit; I was determined to speak my language.

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It paid off in more ways than I imagined, I was fascinated by the stories I was told around many campfires, with endless cups of tea. I was able to trace family bloodlines, traditional stories of my grandmothers and grandfathers, to understand the teachings and values of my people. I felt pride and comfort and found my identity.

Through these interviews, it's very obvious to see that the Dene people were active at all times. They respected Mother Earth, respected each other, the willingness to share was evident. They did not make or demand that Mother Earth was at their disposal or whims as the demand is in this day and age, instead they lived in harmony and in doing so, there was equilibrium and as a result, the Dene people were content and happy.

As a little girl growing up at Jackfish, I remember many great times: There was a moose swimming across the river by Daniel's home, when Alexsand spotted him and told Daniel. I was sick in bed, or maybe I was just pretending so that I didn't have to do the dishes or something like that. I heard someone in the house say that there was a moose swimming and that Daniel was going to shoot him, so I jumped out of bed and ran outside with the rest of the family. It's not every day that a moose swims out into the river. We also knew that we were going to have fresh moose meat and dry meat. Daniel shot the moose and it was dragged up out of the river and on some willows that were cut and laid out, this was to help keep the meat clean. I ran over to see what was going on. It was a cow moose as Alexsand was squirting the milk on us. It never dawned on me that there was a calf out there on its own, my only thoughts were on the fact that we all had lots of moose meat and mom will probably make dry meat. Daniel and Margaret made the moose hide with the help of my mom and my aunt Liza. This happened when I was about 9 yrs. old.

As a young girl, living at Jackfish Lake during my summer vacation, family and friends always surrounded me. So, when I was told to go in the bush, I was scared. The fact that I was a "mission kid" didn't help. Also the Elders and our parents used to tell us to stay close as "Boogie Man" will catch us if we wander away. I grew up afraid, afraid of the unknown, wild animals, strange looking white men, among the scariest.

I was about 25 yrs old when my dad said to me, "What are you afraid of?" I told him of my fears about being out on the land by myself. He replied, "You shouldn't be afraid of the animals, they would not harm you if you have respect for them and their behaviour. If you should be afraid, you should be afraid of the animals that walk up-right." He was right. He also told me to talk to the animals, for example, talk to the bear and tell him that he should stay away from our cabin, that he has no business bothering us as we don't bother him in his den. Also, that if he doesn't, we may have to shoot him. I find myself talking to the bear whenever I leave our place; I also know that the bear hears me.

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