

8

Into the Great Northwest

Ben's arms had never felt so sore. After paddling a canoe for two days, he had had enough.

"How much farther?" he asked. "Just another hour or so, and we'll make camp for the night," the guide replied.

When Ben and his dad signed up for the canoe trip, it had sounded like fun. They would spend five days in the woods with nothing to do but paddle and look for wildlife. So far, they had seen several bald eagles, a couple of turtles, too many deer

to count, one bear, one moose, and a bunch of beaver lodges and dams. (Ben was kind of mad at the beavers. Their dams had forced a few unplanned portages.) They had caught some Northern pike that they had cooked over the fire within an hour of pulling them out of the water. Ben had never enjoyed eating fish so much.

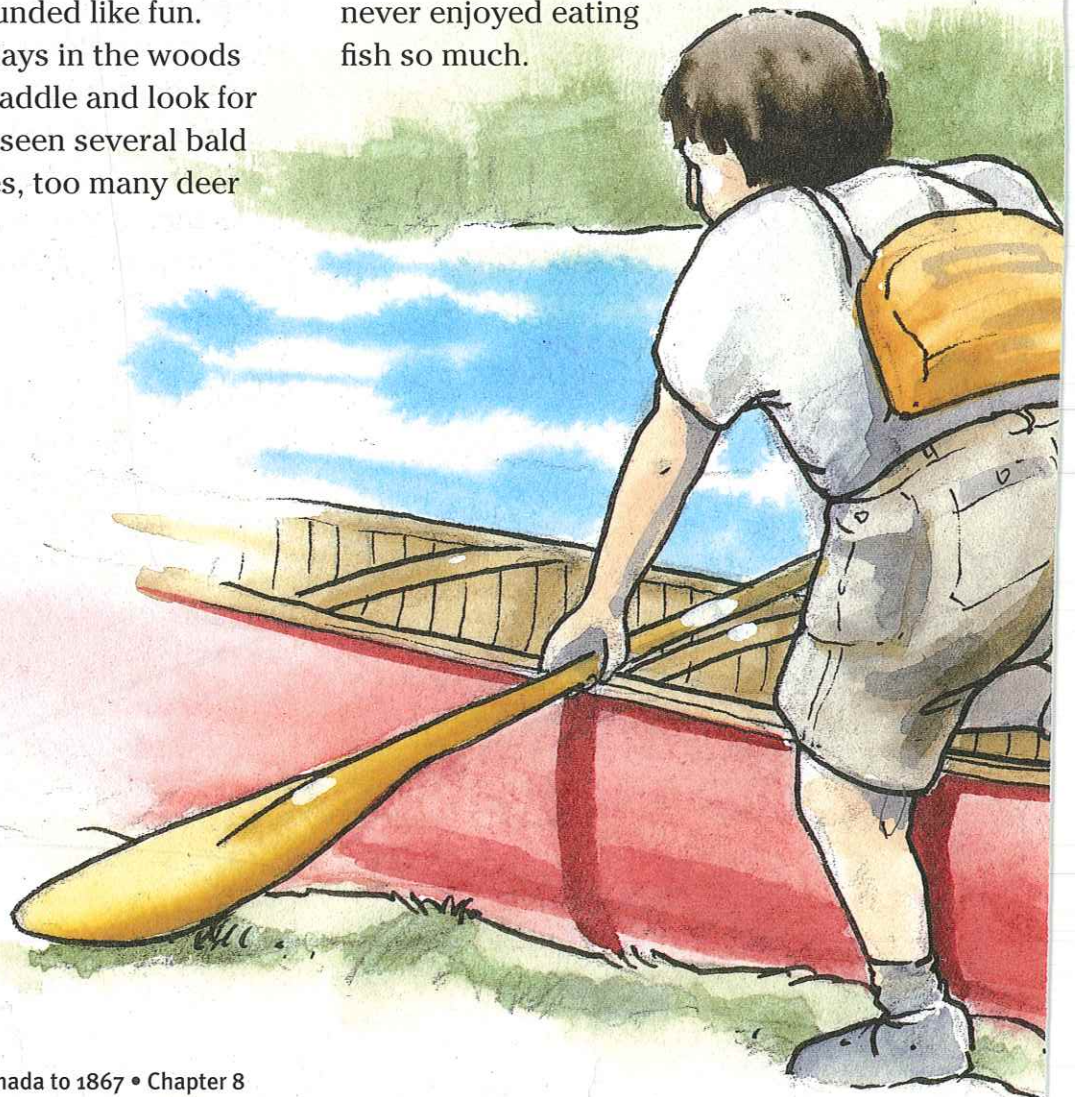


Figure 8.1 Ben's canoe trip

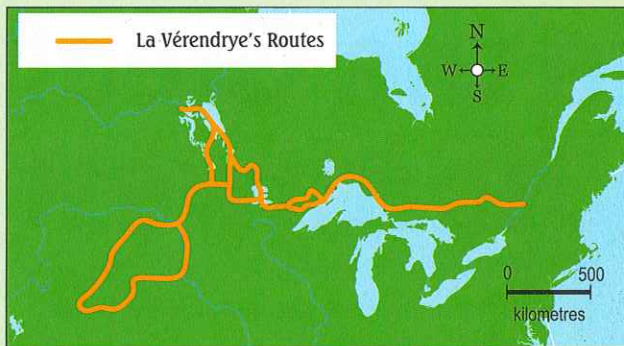


Figure 7.29 LA VÉRENDRYE'S JOURNEYS

many traders brought their pelts to our posts instead of to the English posts on Hudson Bay.

While I didn't find the Western Sea and the route to the East, I strengthened French-Aboriginal friendships. I used all of my skills as a **diplomat** to encourage partnerships with the Cree, Assiniboine, and Mandan. These partnerships cost me a lot. In 1736, one of my sons and several good friends were killed by the Sioux on an island in Lake of the Woods. The Sioux were paying me back, because I had sided with the Cree and Assiniboine against them a couple of years earlier.

Some have said that I didn't have the curiosity or the qualifications to be an explorer. Perhaps I should have spent more time exploring and less time running the forts. I would have realized that the route west was by way of the Saskatchewan River and not the Missouri River. Whatever some people think, I know I played an important role to expand into prime fur-trapping territory.

Pierre Le Moyne d'Iberville

Not everyone thought Pierre Le Moyne d'Iberville was a pirate, but many English settlers did. Born in New France, he attacked English settlements and ships from Hudson Bay to the Caribbean, and he destroyed English fishing villages in Newfoundland. In 1697, d'Iberville turned his attention to the Hudson's Bay Company post York Factory. Aboard the *Pelican*, he battled three British ships and managed to sink one, chase off another, and force the third to surrender. Although the *Pelican* sank, the French were able to capture the fort. They kept York Factory until 1713, when Britain would once again control all the land surrounding Hudson Bay.

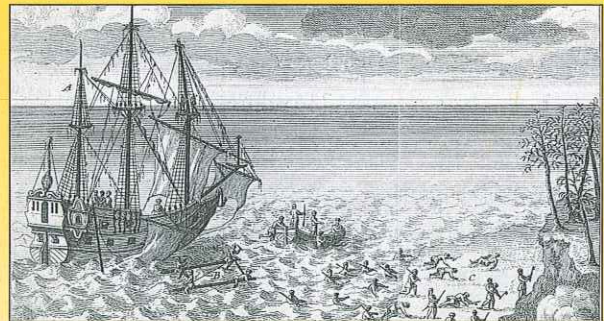


Figure 7.30 *The Sinking of the Pelican*

Conclusion

In this chapter, you learned how the fur trade developed. You also read about how the fur trade played such an important role in the growth of Canada. You learned that the Hudson's Bay Company needed to become more aggressive and expand into new areas if it wanted to compete with the Montreal merchants.

In chapter 8, join Ben on his canoe trip. You will learn how the rivalry between the French merchants and the Hudson's Bay Company resulted in the European expansion into the great Northwest.

The adventure had been a lot of fun, but his muscles were starting to ache. Ben wondered how he'd get through three more days of paddles and portages.

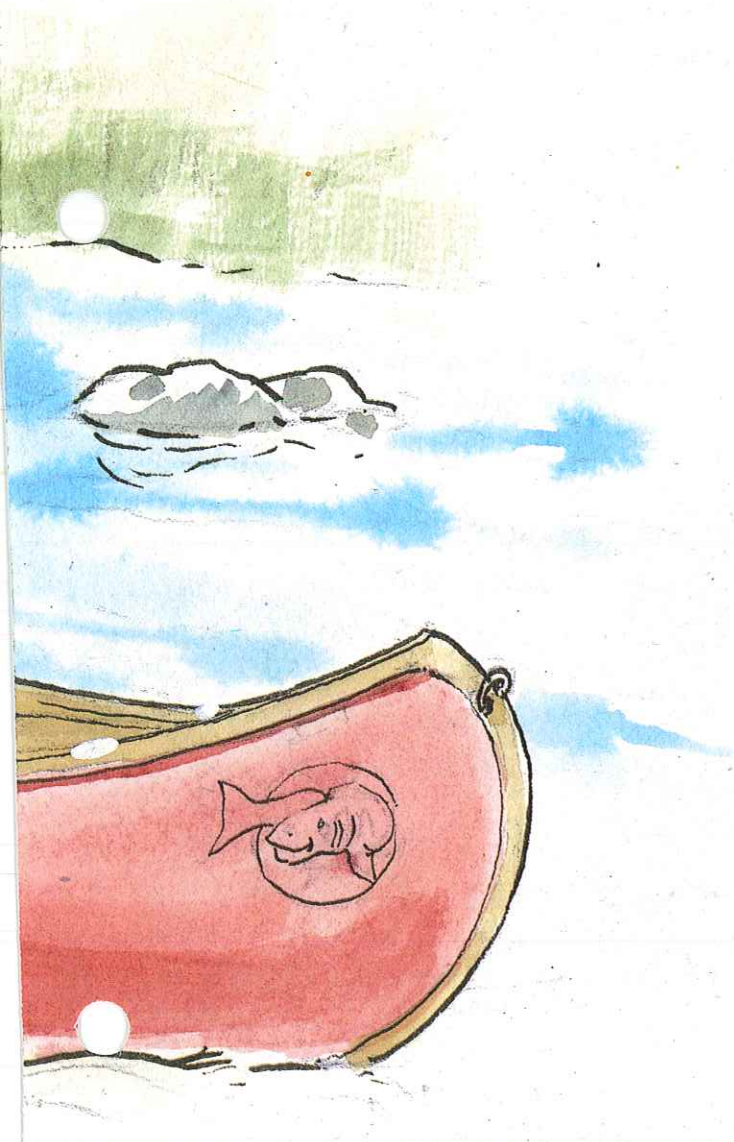
Today, most of us canoe or camp just because we like it. Being in the wilderness is a wonderful way to spend a weekend, and after it is over, we go back to our comfortable homes. During the early days of the fur trade, however, canoeing and camping were not weekend pastimes; they were transportation and lodging. Traders travelled to pick up the furs that provided their livelihood. Handling a canoe was as crucial for the earliest inhabitants of North America as driving a car is for us today.

The voyageurs were a lot tougher than Ben. They had to be able to paddle 16 to 18 hours each day, or for as long as it was light outside. They slept under their canoes in bad weather, and they did without tents. They used wool blankets or tanned hides or furs to keep themselves warm. They did not have waterproof clothing, or protein bars, trail mix, or granola. They ate pemmican or corn mush along the way. If they were lucky, they would catch fish or shoot a bird or an animal to add variety to their meals. They did not have any bug spray or sunscreen.

Although their canoes were light enough to carry, they were still much heavier and more likely to break than modern canoes. The people in the fur trade were some of the best travellers Canada has ever seen. In this chapter, you will read more about the fur trade. You will also be introduced to the only rival and competitor that ever really threatened the strength of the Hudson's Bay Company: the North West Company.

As you read, think about

- how European fur traders and Aboriginal guides and trappers influenced each other
- how the two fur-trade companies were different
- how competition between the two fur-trade companies expanded exploration
- what new places and settlements arose from the fur trade



The Beginning of the North West Company

When the Seven Years' War ended in 1763, the French fur trade was over. The French lost their power, and they had to abandon the land they had once claimed. The British took over their territory. The Hudson's Bay Company was now without a rival in the entire northern part of British North America. However, the French settlers and their descendants had not left the country, and many were still able paddlers and traders.

When Scottish merchants began immigrating to Montreal in the middle of the 18th century, they wanted to profit from the fur trade as well. They saw great opportunity. They began outfitting French-

Canadiens

Voyageurs of the North West Company came from the area that Jacques Cartier had originally called *Canada*. By 1791, the word *Canada* was being used for the area around the present-day provinces of Ontario and Quebec. It would be another 100 years or so before Canada came to refer to lands west, as well.

Canadian voyageurs and sending them into new fur-trading territories. For years, the Hudson's Bay Company had camped by the shores of Hudson Bay, and the Aboriginal trappers came to them. The Montreal merchants sent people to the heart of the fur lands and saved the trappers a trip to Hudson Bay. By the late 1760s, the Hudson's Bay Company's monopoly was weakening, as the Montreal merchants pushed farther and farther into the Northwest.

However, the Montreal merchants had a few challenges of their own as they looked to establish themselves in the fur trade.

- They had far greater distances to travel, because they could not use Hudson Bay as a means to ship furs to Europe.
- They had a lot less money than the Hudson's Bay Company.
- Fierce competition among themselves kept them from being strong enough to take on the Hudson's Bay Company.

In 1776, some of the merchants joined together as partners. In 1779, they officially became the North West Company. For 40 years, they



Figure 8.2 *Shooting the Rapids*, by Frances Anne Hopkins (1838-1919). Hopkins was the wife of a Hudson's Bay Company man. During her 10 years in Canada, she went with her husband on at least three expeditions and saw firsthand the life of the fur trader.

challenged the Hudson's Bay Company. During these years, the Hudson's Bay Company seemed to follow the Nor'westers, as the traders of the Montreal company were called. After the North West Company built a fort, the Hudson's Bay Company would build one close by. The rivalry became fierce. The North West Company had the upper hand in every area except one. They did not control Hudson Bay. Without access to the bay, the Nor'westers could not ship their furs to Europe through it. They had to travel the much longer distance to Montreal and ship their furs from there to Europe.



Figure 8.3 North West Company coat of arms

A day in the life of a Nor'Wester

From early summer to freeze-up in the fall, North West Company voyageurs moved furs and trade goods over thousands of kilometres of waterways. Each day before sunrise, they loaded their canoes and set off.

Every hour or so, for a few minutes, the men stopped to smoke a pipe. A distance could be measured by the number of pipe breaks. For example, the time it took to travel the length of a 24-kilometre lake might be measured as three pipes, representing about three hours of travel. When conditions were good, the voyageurs paddled up to 130 kilometres in a day.

After about three or four hours of paddling, the voyageurs stopped for breakfast, which was often leftovers from the previous night's dinner. The voyageurs also carried rawhide *parflèches* filled with pemmican. The voyageurs snacked on pemmican throughout the day.

Whenever the voyageurs had to make a portage, they carried their loads across a stretch of land, then returned to carry the canoes. Sometimes, they had to run the rapids. With the roar of the rapids filling the air, they emptied their loads from the canoes. One or two paddlers rode the lightened canoe through the rushing water, while the others carried the supplies along the riverbank.

After a full day of paddling, between 8 p.m. and 10 p.m., the voyageurs stopped for the night. They cooked their evening meal, perhaps of cornmeal or dried peas, and fish or meat that they traded for or caught along the way. Sometimes they made rubaboo*, a soup of pemmican, flour, and water. They also repaired any damage to their canoes and equipment. After eating by the fire, and sharing stories and songs, the voyageurs took shelter under their overturned canoes, covered themselves with blankets or fur robes, and went to sleep.

* Rubaboo is a word that comes from the sound pemmican soup makes when it is cooking. The Cree people call it *alupapo*.

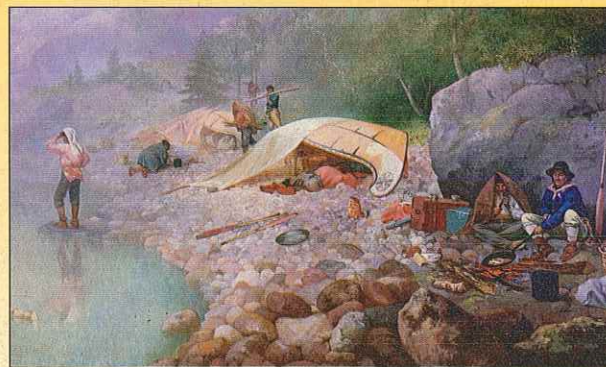


Figure 8.4 *Voyageurs at Dawn*. In 1871, Frances Anne Hopkins made this painting of voyageurs at the start of their day.

People of the North West Company

The early partners of the North West Company were ambitious men, mostly Scottish immigrants. They did not necessarily like or even trust one another. However, they recognized that by working together, they could become rich. Most of the directors in the North West Company were men who had been west and traded furs. They knew how to handle a canoe and carry their own load.



Figure 8.5 Simon McTavish

They included men like Simon McTavish. He was born into a poor family close to Loch Ness, Scotland, and came to New York in 1764 at the age of 13. He began to work in the fur trade, and by 1776, he was an established and wealthy businessman in Montreal. He paid for the education of his



Figure 8.6 William McGillivray

nephew William McGillivray, who was also from a poor family in Scotland and would later head the company.

Benjamin Frobisher was born in England and was the first governor

of the North West Company. He died just as the North West Company was gaining strength and making money. James McGill was born in Scotland. He left money in his will to start McGill University in Montreal.

Other North West Company men took a special interest in exploring and mapping new territories. Some of them are discussed below.

Peter Pond (1740–1807)

Peter Pond was an American who began his fur-trading career around Detroit. He got to know some of the Montreal merchants. He explored west of the Great Lakes, mapping the area around Lake Athabasca. He led the way for Alexander Mackenzie, who would continue Pond's explorations. Pond was a good explorer and a hard worker. He had a bad temper, however, and he was suspected in the murder of two men. Because of this, people did not want to work with him. He eventually sold his share in the North West Company to William McGillivray and returned home to Connecticut.

Alexander Mackenzie (1764–1820)

Alexander Mackenzie was born in Scotland and became a very important explorer for the North West Company. He founded Fort Chipewyan, the oldest European settlement in Alberta, in 1788. The following year, he travelled to the Arctic on a river that he called the Disappointment, because it led to the Arctic and not to the Pacific as he had hoped. The Disappointment River was later named the Mackenzie River. Mackenzie's great achievement was to cross North America by land in 1793, arriving near Bella Coola, British Columbia. At the end of the



Figure 8.7 Alexander Mackenzie

trip, he took some grease and red paint and wrote on a rock, “Alexander Mackenzie, from Canada, by land, the twenty-second July, one thousand seven hundred and ninety-three.”

He had a disagreement with some of the leaders of the North West Company, which led him to found the XY Company. The two companies merged within a few years.

Simon Fraser (1776–1862)

Simon Fraser was born in Vermont. His family came to Canada after the American Revolution (see p. 164), because they were loyal to Britain. He joined the North West Company when he was 16 years old. He made several

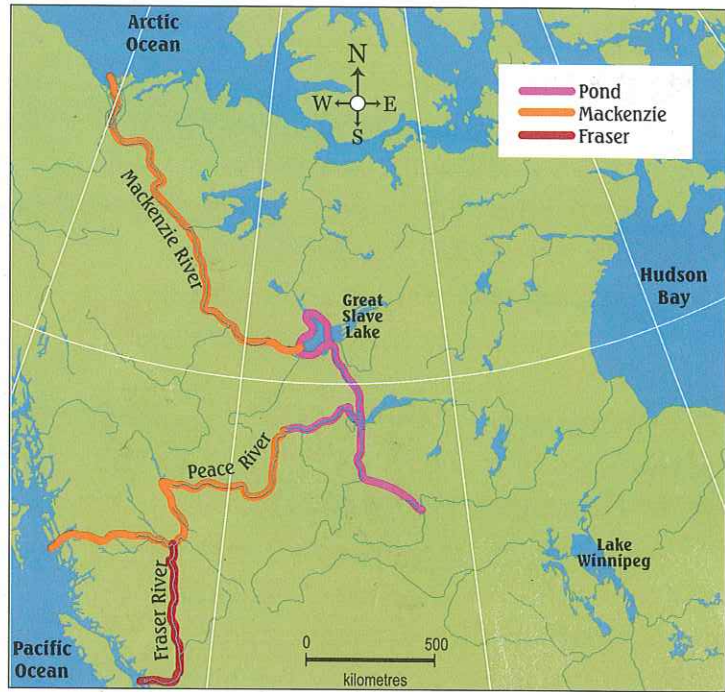


Figure 8.9 THE EXPLORATIONS OF POND, MACKENZIE, AND FRASER

Here I must again acknowledge my great disappointment in not seeing the main ocean—having gone so near it as to be almost within view. Besides we wished very much to settle the situation by an observation for the longitude. The latitude is 49° nearly; while that of the entrance of the Columbia is $46^{\circ} 20'$ [...] This River, therefore, is not the Columbia—if I had been convinced of this truth where I left my canoes, I would certainly have returned from thence.

—Simon Fraser

expeditions between 1805 and 1808, trying to get to the West Coast. As with many explorers, he relied greatly on his Aboriginal guides. They knew the land and negotiated with other peoples along the way, so that Fraser and his party could pass in peace. He considered his trip a failure because he never saw the Pacific Ocean.



Figure 8.8 Simon Fraser

Fraser planned to travel down the Columbia River, but he ended up on another river (later called the Fraser). It was full of whitewater rapids, which made it very hard to navigate. When Fraser finally reached the mouth of the river, Vancouver Island blocked him from seeing the open ocean. The Cowichan people who lived there were unwelcoming and chased the expedition back up the river.

David Thompson (1770–1857)

David Thompson joined the Hudson's Bay Company in 1784 at the age of 14. Thompson learned mathematics, surveying, and astronomy with the company, but he soon left. He felt the Hudson's Bay Company

would not allow him to do the work he wanted as a surveyor. The North West Company

was willing to give him more freedom. In May 1797, in the middle of the night, he crept away from the Hudson's Bay Company post where he was



Figure 8.10
David Thompson
and Charlotte Small

stationed. He travelled 130 kilometres to the nearest North West Company post on the Reindeer River.

Thompson mapped much of the northwest of the continent, nearly 4 million square kilometres worth! He married Charlotte Small, a daughter of a European fur trader and his Cree wife, in 1799. Charlotte travelled with David most of the time. They had 13 children over the course of their 58 years of marriage. Thompson was forced to live with a daughter when he got old, as he had no money. He died in February 1857. Charlotte died three months later. For many years after his death, Thompson was forgotten. In 1914, his journals and maps were discovered and published. He has been called “the greatest land geographer who ever lived.”

No living person possesses a tithe of his information respecting the Hudson's Bay countries, which from 1793 to 1820 he was constantly traversing...he had a very powerful mind, and a singular faculty of picture-making. He can create a wilderness and people it with [vivid images], or climb the Rocky Mountains with you in a snow-storm, so clearly and palpably, that you only have to shut your eyes and you hear the crack of the rifle, or feel the snow-flakes melt on your cheeks as he talks.

—John Bigsby, an English geologist talking about Thompson, whom he once met

Fort William

Fort William was built on the shores of Lake Superior, by the Kaministiquia River. Named after William McGillivray, it was the company's central shipping post. Canoe brigades met there in August, at the North West Company's annual rendezvous

(meeting). Sometimes, close to 1000 people would be in attendance. After the meeting, some people returned to Montreal with furs to ship to Europe. Others, the men of the north, travelled into trapping grounds to spend the winter. Fort William is now in Thunder Bay, where you can visit a reconstruction of the original fort.



Figure 8.11 Fort William

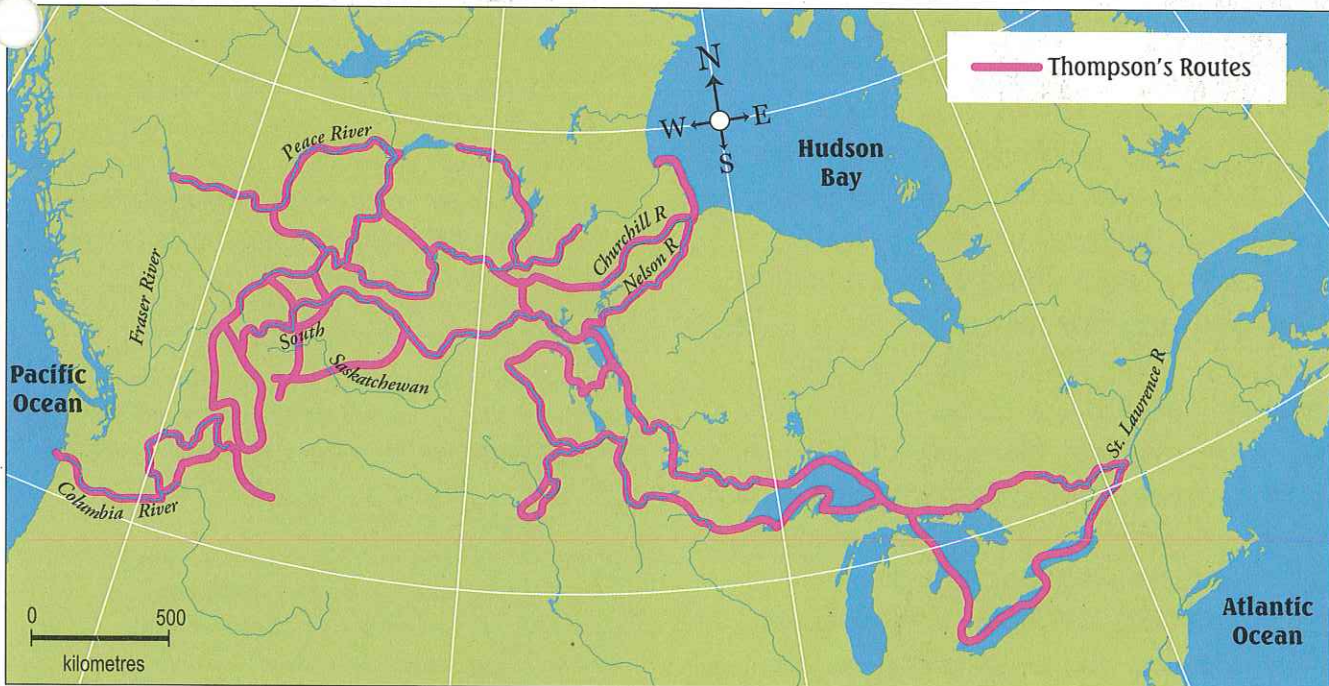


Figure 8.12 THE EXPLORATIONS OF DAVID THOMPSON

People of the Hudson's Bay Company

With the North West Company taking away some of its trade, the Hudson's Bay Company knew it would have to be more forceful. The company sent out men to develop trade with hunters and trappers inland. Below are some of the people who were involved in exploration.

Samuel Hearne (1745–1792)

Samuel Hearne was born in London, England. His first two attempts to reach the Coppermine River failed. The first time, he was deserted by his guides. On his second try, his quadrant, which he needed to navigate, broke. On his third try, in 1771, he succeeded. His success was largely because of the skill of his guide Matonabbee and the Dene women on the expedition who looked after food, clothing, and shelter.

Hearne was the first European to travel to the Arctic Ocean, but he did not find the precious metals he wanted.

Hearne was a faithful Hudson's Bay Company man his entire life. He founded the company's first inland post, Cumberland House, in present-day Saskatchewan. He was a very curious man and documented in his journals all that he saw: people, plants, animals, and landscape. He kept many different wild animals as pets, even beavers. When the weather became cold, he was "obliged to take them into [his] house and keep [them] in the sitting room." It is

said that when women and children entered the sitting room at Fort Prince of Wales, where Hearne was stationed for several years, the beavers sat up and crawled into their laps.

Matonabbee (1737–1782)

Matonabbee was raised at the Hudson's Bay Company post in Churchill, Manitoba, after his father died. The son of Dene parents, he spoke English, Dene, and Cree, and was a skilled negotiator and guide. Matonabbee offered to guide Samuel Hearne on his third attempt to reach the



Figure 8.14
Matonabbee



Figure 8.13
Samuel Hearne

The mystery of Sir John Franklin

In Baffin's Bay where the whale-fish blow
The fate of Franklin no man can know
The fate of Franklin no tongue can tell
Lord Franklin with his seamen does dwell.

—from the ballad "Lord Franklin," traditional

In 1845, the explorer Sir John Franklin and his crew of 134 men set out in two ships, the *Erebus* and *Terror*, to find the Northwest Passage. They had packed supplies for three years, yet no one returned alive. The mystery of the expedition's disappearance captured the imagination of the public in both Europe and North America.

In 1859, the bodies of many of the crew, frozen on King William's Island, were discovered. Also found were two letters saying Franklin and others had died on ship from starvation and scurvy. The ships have never been found.

Historians are still trying to figure out what happened. Some think that everyone was poisoned with lead from the tins that food was stored in. Others think that the men were not prepared for the harsh northern climate. The search for answers about how they died continues to this day.



Figure 8.15 John Rae

Coppermine River, convinced his previous guides had lacked the necessary knowledge and skills for successful expeditions. On the next try, Hearne, guided by Matonabbee, finally reached the Coppermine. Matonabbee also brought his wives along to ensure the success of the journey.

Hearne greatly admired his guide, whom he called “the most sociable, kind, and sensible Indian I had ever met.”

Dr. John Rae (1813–1893)

Dr. John Rae was born in Orkney and joined the Hudson’s Bay Company in 1833. He loved the outdoors, and as the doctor at Moose Factory, he became attracted to “the wild sort of life to be found in the Hudson’s Bay Company service.” Rae learned all that he

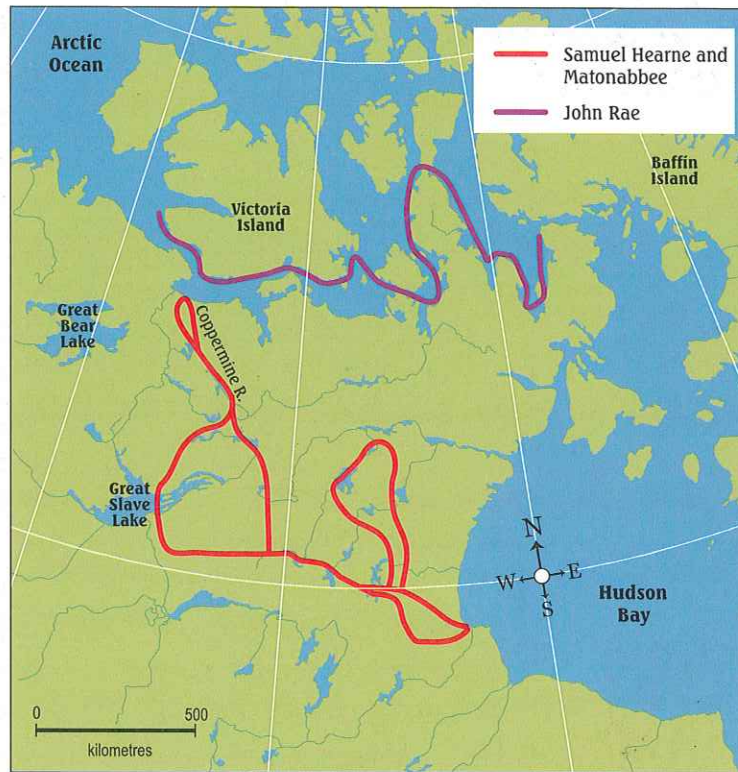


Figure 8.16 THE EXPLORATIONS OF HEARNE, MATONABBEE, AND RAE

could from the Cree people about how to survive in a cold climate. He learned how to hunt and store food, and he became very skilled at snowshoeing. Later, Rae and his Inuit guides made four expeditions to the Arctic, mapping much of the coast. Rae travelled mainly on foot – between 1846 and 1854, he walked more than 16 000 kilometres! Rae also found out from some Inuit people about the death of Sir John Franklin and his expedition, which had disappeared while searching for the Northwest Passage in 1845. Rae’s great admiration for Canada’s Aboriginal peoples made him a controversial figure in his day, as they were often dismissed as inferior to Europeans. However, because he learned their ways, he became a pioneer of Arctic exploration.

Differences between the companies

	NORTH WEST COMPANY (NWC)	HUDSON'S BAY COMPANY (HBC)
Governors	Mostly inhabitants of Canada, Scottish businessmen who were living in Montreal. They often participated in exploration or trading in the wilderness.	British gentlemen who almost never came to Canada. They governed through "factors" in their North American posts.
Employees	French-Canadian voyageurs.	Mainly men from the Orkney Islands, off the coast of Scotland.
Attitudes about women	Marriage to Aboriginal women was encouraged.	Officially, marriage to Aboriginal women was not allowed but it did occur. White women were not allowed at HBC posts until early 19th century.
Buildings/Forts/Factories	Inland along important waterways. 342 posts scattered throughout the west.	By the bay, until they had to move inland. 242 posts usually following NWC posts.
Attitudes toward trappers	We'll go to you and collect your furs in your territory.	You come to us, and we'll buy your furs.
Exploration	Far reaching.	Only when necessary.
Vessels	Canoes.	York boats and canoes.
Turnover time (the time it took to get furs from trapping grounds to Europe)	24 months or more.	About 14 months.
Distances	Two to four times that of HBC.	More manageable because they controlled Hudson Bay.
Payment to employees	Commission. The more you work, the more furs, the more money.	Salary. You will always make the same amount of money.
Food	Easier to get in the more southern areas. Less problems with supply — lots of bison along the plains.	Sometimes known as the "hungry belly company," there was not enough 'portable' food around the bay. People more often struggled with scurvy and hunger in the north.
Land holdings	Rivers and waterways in "southern" Canada.	Land drained by rivers and waterways running into Hudson Bay.
Trade goods	Used alcohol in trading; other trade goods were sometimes of poorer quality.	Reluctantly used alcohol in trading, to keep up with the Nor'westers. Other trade goods were often better quality than NWC.

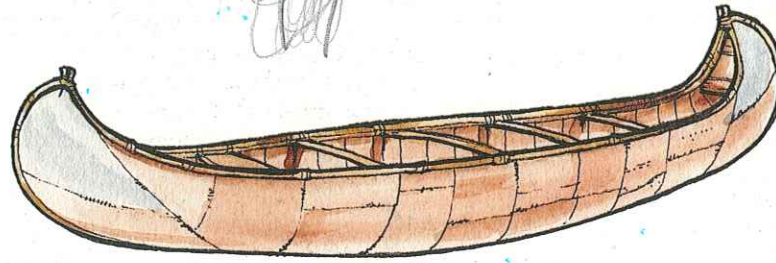


Figure 8.17 Voyageur of North West Company with canoe. The *canot de maitre* was a large birchbark canoe up to 12 metres long and paddled by 8 to 12 voyageurs. Smaller canoes held 4 to 6 men.

Song of the voyageur

Voyageurs sang as they paddled. It helped them keep in rhythm, but it also must have helped pass the long 16 to 18 hour days. The following is a traditional voyageur song:

Mon Canot

Assis sur mon canot d'écorce
 Assis à la fraîche du temps;
 Oui, je brave tous les rapides,
 Je ne crains pas les bouillons blancs!

Je prend mon canot, je le lance
 A travers des rapid's, des bouillons blancs,
 Et là, à grands sauts, il avance.
 Je ne crains mêm' pas l'océan.

Un laboureur aim' sa charrue,
 Un chasseur, son fusil et son chien,
 Un musicien aim' sa musique
 Moi, mon canot, c'est tout mon bien.

My Canoe

Seated in my bark canoe,
 Seated in the coolness of the day;
 Yes, I brave all the rapids,
 I do not fear the white foam!

I take my canoe and launch it
 Across the rapids, the white foam
 And then by great leaps it advances
 I am not even afraid of the ocean.

A farmer loves his plough,
 A hunter his dog and gun,
 A musician loves his music,
 As for me, my canoe is everything.

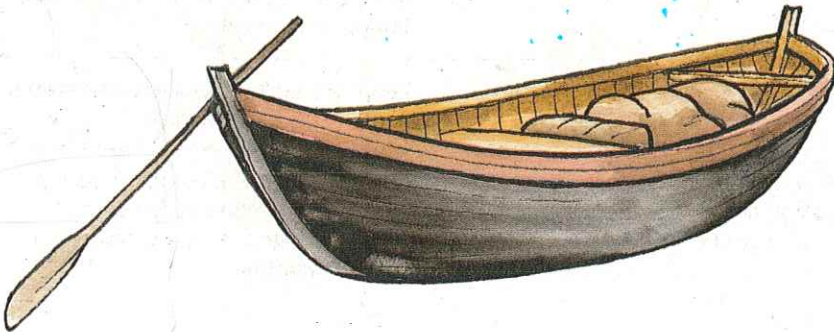


Figure 8.18 Hudson's Bay Company trader and York boat. Based on the Orkney fishing boat, the York boat was used mainly on lakes and major rivers. Sometimes it could be fitted with a sail. It could not be carried on portages, but was rolled over logs. It had a crew of 6 to 8 men.

The Fur Trade in British Columbia

As competition grew, people began looking farther and farther north and west for fur. Many countries became interested in the west coast of North America. Spain had explored and traded there. Russia had explored south from the coast of Alaska. Britain was sending people as well.

James Cook (1728–1779)

Captain James Cook was born in England. As a member of the Royal Navy, he had fought during



Figure 8.19 James Cook

the siege of Quebec in 1759. He later became known as an excellent sea captain and cartographer. In 1778, he sailed up the west coast of North America from California to Alaska, mapping and charting the whole way. He made a stop at Nootka Sound where he traded for sea-otter skins with the Aboriginal peoples there. Despite the presence of the Aboriginal peoples, Cook claimed the area for Britain. He also explored and mapped huge areas in the Pacific Ocean, from the Easter Islands to Australia to the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii). He was able to sail for long distances and his crew did not suffer from scurvy, because he

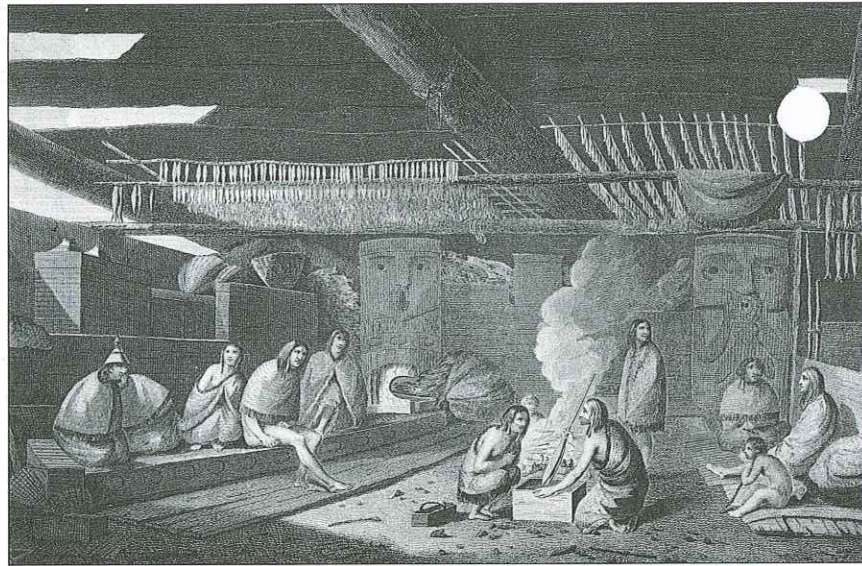


Figure 8.20 This picture of the Nootka was done by the artist on board Cook's expedition. Most expeditions included an artist who recorded the people and places visited.

required his men to eat sauerkraut and citrus fruits. He led the way for George Vancouver to further explore the coast in 1791.

George Vancouver (1757–1798)

George Vancouver was only 15 when he sailed along the west coast of North America with Captain James Cook. Years later, he continued Cook's work, mapping and charting the West Coast in 1793. This was the same year that Alexander Mackenzie completed his overland route. If Mackenzie had been a month earlier or Vancouver a month later, they might have bumped into each other on a beach!

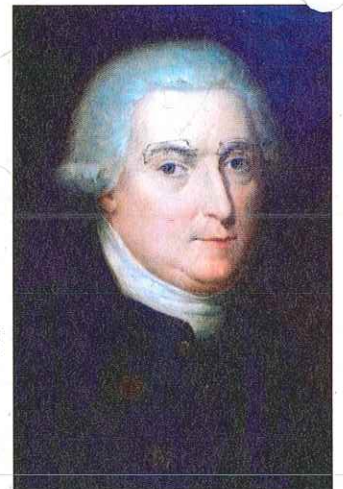


Figure 8.21 George Vancouver

The sea otter

Sea otters have the thickest fur of any animal in the animal kingdom. They were prized for their pelts, which were worth 10 times the price of a beaver pelt. As soon as sea otters were discovered by European traders along the West Coast, they were hunted to extinction. Sea otters can be found along the coast once again, but they are the descendants of Alaskan sea otters that were imported in the late 1960s to early 1970s. Otters have sensitive front paws, love shellfish of all kinds, and need to eat 30 percent of their body weight every day in order to be able to regulate their temperature in the cool ocean waters.

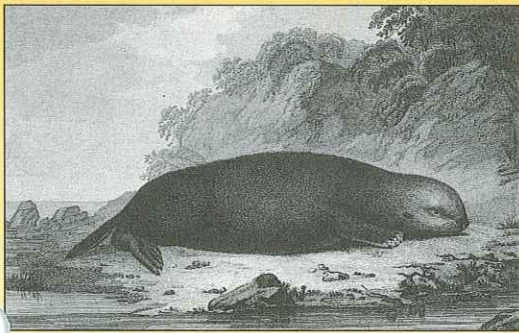


Figure 8.22 Sea otter

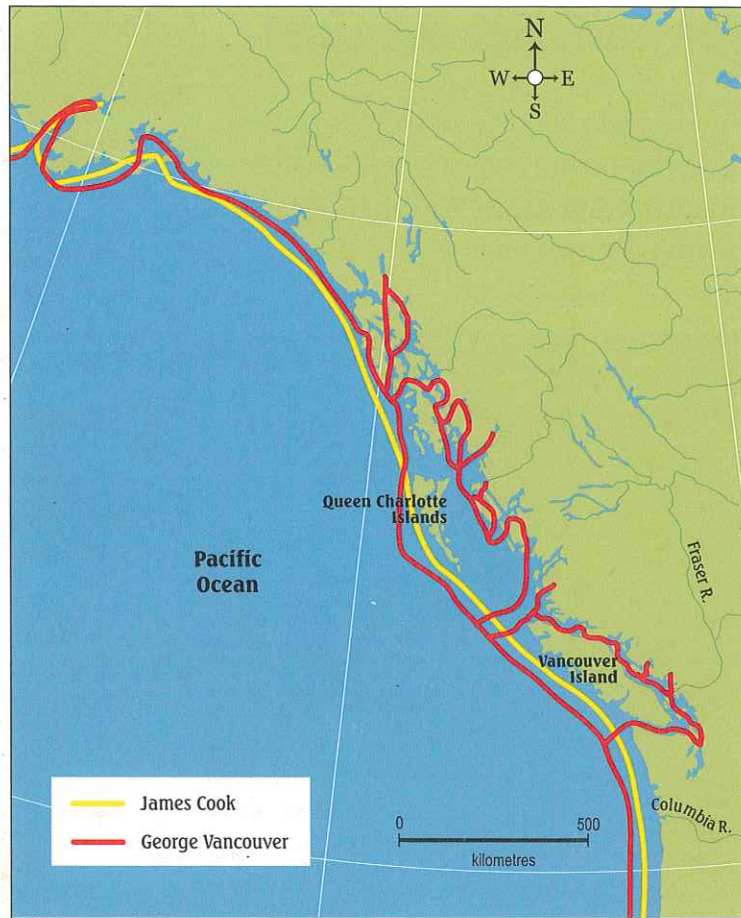


Figure 8.23 WEST COAST EXPLORATIONS OF COOK AND VANCOUVER

Disputes

The **czar** of Russia had granted fur-trading rights in 1799 to the Russian-America Company. The company established fur-trading posts throughout present-day Alaska. When the Hudson's Bay Company wanted to build a post there, they were warned off by the Russians.

The companies came to an agreement. They could both use the land, but the Hudson's Bay Company had to pay rent and supply the Russians with fresh produce. However, the two companies were soon in court to determine who controlled the land north of Vancouver Island. Eventually they

Teen traders

David Thompson was 14, George Vancouver was 15, Simon Fraser was 16, and Henry Kelsey was 17 when they began their working lives. In those days, teenagers were considered adults, and were given many adult responsibilities. How different are things today?

reached another agreement, although there continued to be some problems. American settlers from Oregon were moving into the Hudson's Bay Company territory and did not recognize the company's claim that it was the legitimate government of its territory.

Fur Trade and the Land

Seven main regions of the fur trade stretched from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and from the Arctic Circle to the American border. They were:

BRITISH COLUMBIA. The fur trade in British Columbia centred around the sea otter. The North West Company traded out of Fort Astoria. The main post of the Hudson's Bay Company was Fort Vancouver. From here, smaller posts were administered. Both Fort Astoria and Fort Vancouver were on the Columbia River, in Oregon country, an area shared by Britain and the United States. In 1849, the Hudson's Bay Company moved its Pacific operations from Fort Vancouver to Fort Victoria.



Figure 8.24 MAIN FUR TRADE POSTS. The date after the fort's name indicates the year the fort was built.

THE ATHABASCA REGION. The region around Lake Athabasca and north along the Mackenzie River was rich fur-trading area. Because of the cold climate, the furs were thick and of top quality. For the North West Company, it was a very long trip back to the headquarters in Montreal, but the quality of the furs made the trip worthwhile. Later, when the Hudson's Bay Company established posts in the region, traders could transport their furs to Europe through Hudson Bay.

THE BOTTOM OF THE BAY and HUDSON BAY. The Bottom of the Bay, now called James Bay, was home to some of the earliest Hudson's Bay Company trading posts, such as Moose Factory and Fort Albany. Other posts, such as York Factory, Fort Prince of Wales, and Fort Churchill, were built farther west, out of the reach of the French. The Hudson's Bay Company's first inland post, Cumberland House, was built in 1774.



THE KING'S POSTS. West of Labrador and north of the St. Lawrence River was a vast area that extended to the watershed of Hudson Bay. Under the French, this region was known as the King's Domain (Domaine du Roi). The king of France granted fur-trading rights to private companies, who built trading posts known as the King's Posts. In 1842, the posts were taken over by the Hudson's Bay Company.

LABRADOR. The Hudson's Bay Company began trading in Labrador in the 1830s, when Inuit and Montagnais trappers brought furs to more than 20 posts established by the company. The best furs came from Esquimaux Baie. The "EB" mark on a fur was a sign of very high quality at the fur auctions of London.

THE GREAT LAKES and THE PAYS D'EN HAUT. Around 1640, many First Nations people, escaping from the Iroquois, moved west of Lake Michigan between the Ohio River and the Great Lakes, and as far southwest as Louisiana. The French soon followed, establishing such posts as Fort Frontenac and Fort Michilimackinac. Trappers, traders, and their families settled along rivers that ran into the lakes.

THE FORKS of the Red and Assiniboine rivers. The place where the Assiniboine River flows into the Red River was a key location, because all of the east-west canoe routes passed through it. It was also the northernmost point where the bison came, making it an important food depot for the fur-trade brigades. The bison-rich land around The Forks became home to the Métis. In 1821, when the North West Company and Hudson's Bay Company merged as one company, many fur traders retired to Red River, the settlement at The Forks.

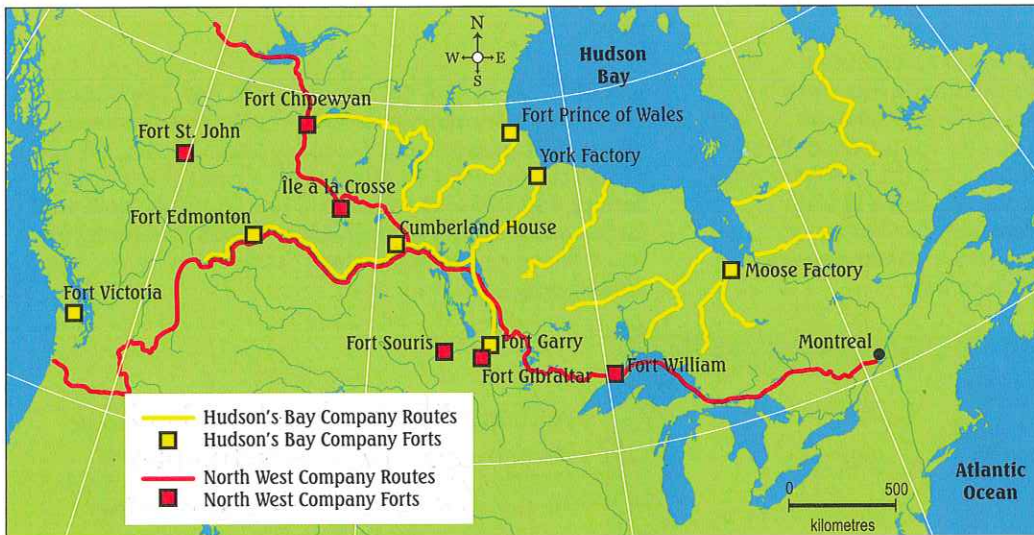


Figure 8.25 FUR TRADE ROUTES. The North West Company and Hudson's Bay Company used different routes to explore their fur-trade territories. Between them, they covered the breadth of the country. Many of their posts became permanent settlements that still exist today.

Place names

Among the great legacies of the First Peoples and of the fur trade are Canadian place names. Below are just a few examples of each.

ABORIGINAL PLACE NAMES

- Winnipeg: Cree for "muddy water"
- The Pas: Cree for "narrow between high banks"
- Manitoba: Cree for "the strait of the spirit of Manitobau" or Assiniboine for "Lake of the Prairie"
- Ottawa: Algonquin for "to trade"
- Wawa: Ojibwe for "wild geese"
- Lake Ontario: Iroquoian for "beautiful lake"
- Saskatoon: Cree for "early berries"
- Saskatchewan: Cree for "swift-moving river"
- Nunavut: Inuktitut for "our land"
- Iqaluit: Inuktitut for "place of fish"
- Tuktoyaktuk: Inuktitut for "reindeer that looks like caribou"

Early names are often changed. In 1975, Quebec decided to replace the Inuit names for northern lakes with names of early French settlers and explorers. In response, the Inuit suggested that some other places might be renamed in Inuktitut. Montreal, for example, could be called Sanikuvik, which means "large garbage dump." In some provinces, an Aboriginal name has replaced the European name. Ottawa was called Bytown until 1855. In 1987, Frobisher Bay officially became Iqaluit. Years earlier, Port Brabant in the western Arctic became Tuktoyaktuk.

FUR-TRADE PLACE NAMES

- Fraser River, British Columbia: named after Simon Fraser
- Portage la Prairie, Manitoba: marks the location where fur traders had to make a portage on their way from the Assiniboine River to Lake Manitoba
- Edmonton, Alberta: named after Fort Edmonton
- Dauphin, Manitoba: named after Fort Dauphin
- Prince Rupert, British Columbia: named after Prince Rupert

The fur trade is also responsible for the more than 660 Canadian places that have *moose* in their names. Some examples are Moose Jaw (Saskatchewan) and Moose Factory and Moosenee (both in Ontario). *Beaver* is also in hundreds of place names, including Beaverton (Ontario) and Beaverlodge (Alberta).

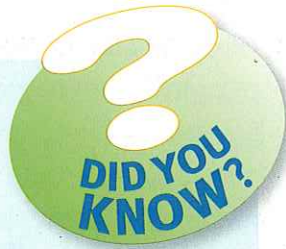
French fur traders were responsible for western place names using *butte* ("small hill" in French) and *coulee* (from *couler*, "to flow" in French). A small town in Manitoba is called Plum Coulee.

Fur-trade names are also used for streets, buildings, and other institutions. For example, one of the main streets in Gillam, Manitoba, is named after the great guide Matonabbee. McGill University, in Montreal, is named for James McGill, one of the founders of the North West Company. La Verendrye School in Winnipeg is named for the explorer Pierre de La Vérendrye.

You suck
of

Canada was just one of several names proposed for the land north of the United States at Confederation in 1867.

Perhaps the most unusual suggestion was *Efisga*. It stands for a combination of the first letters of the countries of origin of most people living in British North America: **E**ngland, **F**rance, **I**reland, **S**cotland, **G**ermany, and **A**boriginal lands.



Portaging

Voyageurs paddled up to 130 kilometres a day. That distance did not include portages. The portage was the most difficult and energy-draining part of the trip. A voyageur was responsible for six pieces of the load, plus his personal gear. Each piece weighed about 40 kilograms, and personal belongings weighed about 18 kilograms.

Voyagers did not strap their loads onto their backs. They used tumplines. A tumpline is a strap or sling that wraps around the bottom of a pack at one end and the forehead at the other end. Using a tumpline, a voyageur could carry two pieces, and sometimes more, at a time.

A voyageur was able to carry an 80-kilogram load about 0.8 kilometres. If a portage was longer than that, he set his load down and returned for the next load. A voyageur might walk five kilometres a day (half of it carrying at least 80 kilograms) in addition to paddling over 100 kilometres.



Figure 8.26 This painting, *At the Portage* (1882), shows Hudson's Bay Company employees preparing to carry their loads using tumplines.

Hudson? Hudson's?

European explorers liked to name places after themselves. Often, they named a place possessively, as if it belonged to them – Hudson's Bay, not Hudson Bay, for example. Around 100 years ago, Canadian mapmakers decided it was not right to name places like that, and they changed "Hudson's" Bay to "Hudson" Bay. The Governor and Company of Adventurers of England Trading into Hudson's Bay did not change their name, however.

Effects of the Fur Trade

For the nation of Canada

The fur trade, in many ways, allowed Canada to exist as it does today. Without the far-ranging explorations of the Hudson's Bay Company and North West Company, American colonizers would have moved into the western regions of Canada. Almost all our early maps were drawn because of the fur trade. Fur-trade employees explored the Arctic. Three early trading posts, Fort Garry (Winnipeg), Fort Edmonton, and Fort Victoria became capitals of their provinces. The Hudson's Bay Company sold its territory in the west to the newly created country of Canada in 1870, which allowed Canada to stretch from "sea to sea."

For the Aboriginal peoples

The fur trade and European contact brought about huge changes to the Aboriginal way of life. Some of them are discussed below.

Weapons and tools. The Aboriginal peoples quickly gave up their use of stone arrowheads and axe heads. Metal ones were much sharper and could be purchased ready-made. Guns were a new weapon they could use for hunting, although bows and arrows were still used much of the time.

Alcohol. Aboriginal peoples had never had alcohol before the fur trade. When it was first introduced, priests spoke out against it. At times, people tried to control the use of liquor as a trade item. Even so, liquor became an important trade item of the fur trade. Traders took advantage of many Aboriginal peoples by getting them drunk before trading so they could get cheaper furs. In some places, alcohol was the only item offered for trade.

Settlements. Many Aboriginal groups moved from season to season to places where food was available. They followed animal migrations. Those who farmed, moved their village every 30 to 40 years when the land became less fertile. As more and more Europeans moved into North America and claimed land, Aboriginal peoples' settlement patterns and traditional routes were disrupted.

Disease. Aboriginal peoples had no immunity to many of the diseases the Europeans brought with them. Diseases such as smallpox and measles wiped out entire villages and groups of people. Aboriginal peoples died in such large numbers that they could not resist European settlement.



Figure 8.27 Encampment at Red River, 1868

For the beaver

Aboriginal peoples had many stories and legends about the beaver. Among the Anishinabe, the beaver played a part in the creation of the world. To the Algonquin, the beaver's tail made the sound of thunder. The beaver was valued and respected among First Peoples.



Figure 8.28 This picture of beavers, by the artist J.J. Audubon, was drawn from nature in 1844. By that time, beavers were no longer endangered.

Aboriginal peoples hunted the beaver for its meat and its pelts. The Europeans were far more interested in beaver pelts than meat. The demand for beaver fur was high in Europe, and traders sold as many beaver pelts as they could to the hat makers there. Aboriginal peoples came to depend on the different trade goods they could get for the pelts. For years, men fought each other for control of the beaver trade.

The year 1823 was a bad year for beaver. That was when a trapper named Sewell Newhouse invented the easy-to-use steel trap. With this new invention, a man or

woman could catch up to 150 beavers a day, just walking the trap line. Newhouse's trap almost caused the beaver to become extinct. By 1840, however, beaver-felt hats were no longer popular, as silk hats became more fashionable. With less demand for beaver fur, the number of beavers slowly increased.

For a new nation

A whole new group of people arose out of this time in history. The Métis were the result of the intermarriage of European immigrants and the Aboriginal inhabitants of North America. The combination of these two backgrounds created a new culture and way of life.

Conclusion

In this chapter, you learned a lot about the fur trade. You found out how European fur traders and Aboriginal guides and trappers influenced each other. You learned the importance of Aboriginal women to the trade. You learned about the differences between the North West Company and the Hudson's Bay Company and about some people who worked for them.

In chapter 9, join Sara and Ben as they learn about a new people – the Métis.

9

A New Nation: The Métis

Sara and Ben were visiting Le Festival du Voyageur, a winter carnival that celebrates the life of the people who lived at the Red River settlement during the days of the fur trade. Many of the people who lived at the settlement were Métis, children of European men and Aboriginal women. The Métis made their living off the fur trade. They trapped and traded fur, and supplied items needed for the fur trade, like pemmican.

Sara ducked into a little cabin. Inside, a small fire was burning. The temperature in the cabin was warmer than it was outside, but just barely.

A park interpreter, dressed in a blue coat wrapped with a multi-coloured Métis sash, stood by the door. He was talking about the life of the Métis – as if he were one of them. Sara asked him why such a small fire was burning on such a cold day.

“This is how we built fires,” the interpreter answered. “We didn’t want to waste wood by making the fire larger than it needed to be. Most of the trees close to the fort had been chopped down to build homes and make fires. Every winter, we had to travel upstream, cut wood, pile it on the frozen river, and wait for the ice to melt to transport the wood

back to the fort. If we didn’t cut enough wood one winter, we would surely pay for it the next!”

Sara shivered and held her hands closer to the fire. It had been a lot of work back then just to cook and stay warm.

Still, Sara noticed, the Métis seemed to have found time for making things beautiful. Their clothing was colourful and combined European fabrics such as wool with



Figure 9.1 A Métis family on the prairie