

bia have been pressing for resolution. The government was reluctant to bend that land claims were entirely its long-standing position and encourage the Nations of the province to create a process that facilitates three-way negotiations. Key issues at the negotiating tables are about resources and self-government. There are 122 individual groups, representing more than a decade of negotiated (the Nisga'a Agreement took many agreements-in-principle are this does not guarantee that any of them have failed at this point in the hope that new treaties will be final-

First Nations have been asserting control before the Nisga'a signed their agreement. They are administering their own services, administering their own standard provincial curriculum with the Sechelt, a Coast Salish group on the north coast of British Columbia. In 1981, the title to their reserve was transferred to them under the Indian Act with the Sechelt Indian Self-Government Act. Protests, successfully stopped the southern portion of Haida Gwaii. The Bulkley Valley, jointly managed by Haida, pending resolution of Aboriginal title is Haida.

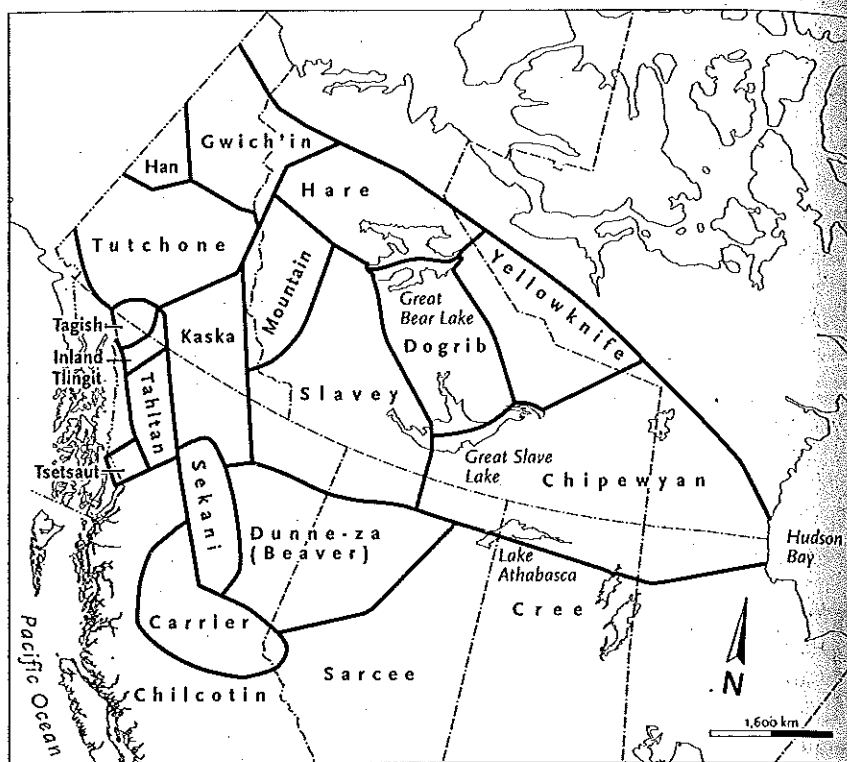
Their canoes along the rugged coast environment. These were the people who declined, their land was appropriated by a few generations their world was under government control. Today, the situation of First Nations are restoring and preserving their heritage to a new generation of people to shape their own future.

The Western Subarctic

THE NORTHERN boreal forest and forest-tundra transition of the Western Subarctic stretches from the interior of Alaska to Hudson Bay. In the north it is bounded by the treeline, though some Subarctic Native groups made seasonal forays after caribou out onto the barrenlands. In the south it grades into the Plains and Plateau. Lakes, rivers and muskeg cover much of its surface. Winters are long and piercingly cold, with deep accumulations of snow, but the forest provides shelter. Summers are short and pleasantly hot, but are plagued by swarms of biting insects. From a southern urban perspective it seems a harsh and demanding environment, yet it was home to many groups of mobile hunters and fishers, whose modern descendants are determined to maintain traditional ties to the land.

Physiographically diverse, the Western Subarctic can be divided into three broad regions. In the east is the rocky Canadian Shield, extending from the Eastern Subarctic across northern Manitoba and Saskatchewan and into Nunavut and the Northwest Territories. To the west, the Northwest Territories, northern Alberta and northeastern British Columbia are in the Mackenzie Lowlands, which slope gradually to the Mackenzie River delta. At the western edge is the Cordillera, the array of mountain ranges and valleys that characterize the Yukon and central British Columbia. In this region many of the rivers flow to the Pacific, which provided Native People with access to bountiful salmon runs, and to trade corridors that linked them with coastal cultures.

For the big-game hunters of the Western Subarctic, caribou and moose were essential resources. Some of the more southerly groups intercepted the bison herds, and in the Cordillera people hunted mountain goat and sheep. Smaller

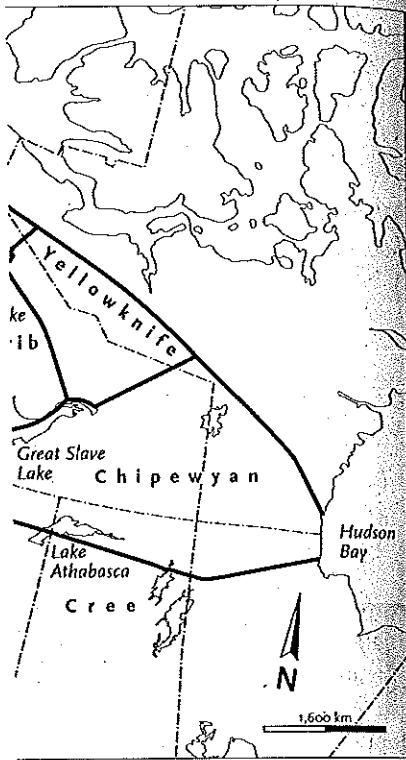


ABOVE Ethnographic groups in the Western Subarctic

mammals, especially the snowshoe hare, played an important role in the diet. Great numbers of migratory waterfowl could be taken for brief periods each year, and the lakes and rivers provided whitefish, lake trout, pike, grayling and other fish.

The Athapaskan people, or Dene as many prefer to be called, lived throughout this vast region. More than twenty Athapaskan languages, including those in Alaska, have been defined for the Subarctic. All are closely related, which indicates they differentiated relatively recently. Their classification is somewhat arbitrary since they tend to grade into one another through a series of intermediate dialects, and neighbouring groups usually understood each other's languages.

Athapaskan migrations and cultural adaptations have attracted considerable anthropological interest. From their northern homeland the Athapaskans spread far to the south in a series of separate movements. The Sarcee on the Plains and the Nicola and Chilcotin in the Plateau appear to be relatively recent examples. The Navajo and Apache of the American Southwest, as well as the cluster of Athapaskan language speakers on the Pacific coast around the Oregon-California border, are evidence of earlier, more extensive migrations. When they entered



new regions, the Athapaskans adopted patterns of cultural traits that earlier residents had developed. In their northern homeland, for example, the Cordilleran groups borrowed and absorbed many aspects of Northwest Coast cultures. Such diffusion, along with their adaptation to differing local environments, accounts for the considerable cultural diversity among Subarctic Athapaskans.

Speakers of two non-Athapaskan Aboriginal languages also inhabit the Western Subarctic. Tlingit is spoken in extreme northwestern British Columbia and the southern Yukon, which reflects the coastal Tlingit's move inland for furs during the historic fur trade. It has since spread through intermarriage and its widespread use as a ceremonial language, at the expense of Athapaskan languages in the southern Yukon. Cree is spoken more widely, by people in communities throughout northern Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. (Their culture differs little from the Cree of the Eastern Subarctic, described in chapter 5.)

Cree antiquity in the Western Subarctic has been the subject of debate. Some believe the Cree arrived in the eighteenth century and dramatically expanded their territory at the expense of the Athapaskans during the fur trade. In this view, the Cree had an economic and military advantage over their neighbours because they were in contact with European traders around Hudson Bay and acquired firearms early. Several archaeological studies, however, suggest that the Cree arrived in the Western Subarctic much earlier. Selkirk pottery, which is usually attributed to the Cree, has been found in archaeological sites in northern Manitoba and Saskatchewan. Although Cree speakers, along with other Aboriginal groups, were moving west during the historic fur trade, some earlier writers seem to have exaggerated the dramatic surge from Hudson Bay to the Rockies.

HOLOCENE CULTURAL DEVELOPMENTS

This vast land of northern forests is one of the least-known archaeological areas in Canada and one of the most difficult to interpret. Small groups of hunters moving across the landscape left few traces, and the acidic soils have reduced even these meagre remains to a few simple stone tools. The sites tend to be small and shallow, largely hidden by forest cover, and disturbed or mixed by frost action. Although the pace of archaeological research has recently accelerated, the emerging picture is still far from clear.

Early occupants were the so-called "Paleo-Indians," whose distinctive projectile points are relatively widespread. The earliest styles occur in the west, where fluted points similar to those described in chapter 2 have been found. Most are undated surface discoveries. Only at Charlie Lake Cave in northeastern British Columbia, where hunters took a large form of bison 10,500 years ago, has a fluted point been found in a radiocarbon-dated context. Somewhat later, the appearance of large unfluted spearpoints marked the early complex known as Plano or, in the north, Northern Cordilleran. Most archaeological finds are undated, but at the Canyon site in the southern Yukon, on a bluff today topped by historic Tutchone gravehouses, a small group of ancient hunters left behind a large spearpoint and

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other stone tools, several bison bones and the remains of a hearth which could be dated to 7200 years ago.

To the east, the huge Laurentide ice sheet blocked human entry until about 8000 years ago. The Plano hunters were the first people to move into this area, leaving behind the large lanceolate spearpoints known on the Plains as Agate Basin, at sites far out onto the barrenlands. The Plano people are assumed to have been big-game hunters, attracted to the north by the large herds of caribou.

At the same time as these early cultures were hunting across the region, a different population was entering from the west. These were people with a Eurasian technology, crossing into North America shortly before Beringia finally disappeared. Small distinctive tools commonly termed microblades—thin, parallel-sided stone flakes with razor-sharp edges that were set as cutting or slicing edges into grooved bone or antler spearpoints or other tools—marked their presence. Stone knives, spearpoints, scrapers and other implements were also part of their tool kits. Microblade technology is evident in Alaska at least 10,700 years ago and somewhat later in the Yukon and adjacent areas of the Northwest Territories and the northern interior of British Columbia. In these regions microblades may indicate that local peoples gradually adopted this technology. At later sites, notched stone projectile points have been found with microblades, which suggests people and ideas mixed throughout a large area.

The microblade technology did not spread east past the Mackenzie River valley, where diversified cultures followed the late Plano hunters. In the rocky Shield country around Hudson Bay, proto-Algonquian cultures became recognizable about 6000 years ago. Termed "Shield Archaic" by archaeologists, these people used notched stone spearpoints, knives and scrapers and occupied an area from the Eastern Subarctic to the eastern portions of the Western Subarctic. The lifeways represented by these archaeological remains would be immediately familiar to the Cree or Innu.

Between about 3500 and 3000 years ago a new group from the north pushed into the lands east of the Mackenzie River and left behind the very small stone tools that were their trademark technology. These were the Tuniit people of Arctic antiquity (see chapter 10). Archaeologists refer to this branch of the Tuniit as Pre-Dorset. Their expansion is associated with colder climatic conditions, which pushed the treeline far to the south. Following the caribou herds, Tuniit hunters moved south as far as what is today northern Saskatchewan and Manitoba. Their occupation of these lands was short-lived, lasting only a few centuries. Traces of their ancient camps consist mostly of scattered stone tools around fire-cracked rocks that once were hearths used to heat their shelters.

The first traces of Athapaskan cultures are still much debated. Some believe the Athapaskans were present during the period when microblades first appeared and spread, which would give them an ancient heritage in the Western Subarctic. Others have traced Athapaskan migrations through later styles of projectile points.

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Linguistic and social units, however, cannot be defined through the distribution of stone tools. Furthermore, the ancient Athapaskans were culturally diverse and occupied a wide range of environments, which means they probably left a varied signature in the archaeological record. Nevertheless, the emergence of specific Athapaskan cultures has been charted at archaeological sites in several regions.

In the east, the Taltchei tradition spans the last 2500 years in the historic homeland of the Chipewyan, Yellowknife and Dogrib Athapaskans. Most of our information comes from around Great Slave Lake and Lake Athabasca, though sites are found more widely in the Northwest Territories, Nunavut, northern Manitoba and Saskatchewan, and parts of Alberta. Evidence of Taltchei cultures appears far out on the barrenlands, suggesting that these people, like their historic counterparts, ranged between the forests and tundra to intercept migrating caribou herds. The ancient Plano, Algonquian, Tuniit and Athapaskan (Taltchei) peoples, for example, sequentially occupied the Migod site in southern Nunavut, from which they all hunted the caribou herds out on the barrenlands. Fishing has always been a vital part of the Athapaskan economy as well, as the location of many sites suggests ("Taltchei" refers to water). Stone-stemmed and lanceolate spearpoints, changing in form over time, as well as knives, endscrapers and stone-slab or boulder-flake hide scrapers (generally known by the Athapaskan term *chithos*) are the characteristic tools. Small notched points that presumably tipped arrows appeared later. Implements of native copper are also relatively common from that time. Finally, beads and other European goods mark the transition to such historic Athapaskans as the Chipewyan.

About 1300 years ago a massive volcanic eruption in the St. Elias Range, at the southern end of the present Yukon-Alaska border, blasted immense quantities of volcanic ash into the air. Winds swept the ash about 1000 kilometres to the east, blanketing the southern Yukon with a thick layer of grit. Visible today along river banks and road cuts, the horizontal white band in the otherwise brown soil is known as White River ash. The eruption and ashfall must have alarmed the local people, darkening the sky, fouling the water and covering the land so that the areas most affected must have been temporarily uninhabitable.

Such conditions would have forced many groups to abandon their country in search of unaffected lands, dispersing to the north and south of the ashfall area. As people moved into regions already occupied by neighbouring people local hostilities likely resulted. Many groups might have been forced to continue their wanderings for considerable distances. Alaskan archaeologist William Workman has pointed out that the time of this environmental disaster corresponds with linguistic estimates of Athapaskan divergence. He suggests that the ashfall was a "triggering mechanism" that stimulated the southward migrations that eventually led to the Navajo and Apache of the American Southwest. However, as these movements are very difficult to demonstrate archaeologically, this hypothesis remains speculative.

As plant and animal life gradually returned to its usual state in the ashfall area, humans reoccupied the land. In the layers overlying the White River ash, archaeologists have found implements of the Aishihik culture, dating to just before the advent of the global era. Stone spear and arrow points, knives, chi-thos and wedges for splitting wood are typical artifacts, as are distinctive arrowpoints, awls and other tools of copper. Nuggets of this metal occur locally and were heated and hammered to shape. Such tools continued into the global era and can be linked to the Tutchone people who occupy the southern Yukon today.

High-elevation ice patches in the southern Yukon began to retreat during the warm summers of the late 1990s. Great quantities of caribou dung exposed by the melting ice showed that the animals had congregated long ago on the ice patches to escape the summer heat and biting insects. Human hunters pursued their prey to these locations, leaving behind the spears and arrows they lost during the hunt. As these froze into the ice, they were perfectly preserved and the wooden shafts can now be dated. Short spears or darts, which were hurled by atlatls (spear throwers), have been dated from about 8350 to 1250 years ago. These darts are often found intact, with stone points in place, as well as with preserved sinew, feathers and caribou hair. The bow and arrow appeared about 1300 years ago, after which arrows gradually replaced atlatl darts in the ice patch remains. Stone points disappeared as the intact arrows were tipped with barbed antler points.

The melting ice revealed another remarkable discovery just south of the Yukon border, in northwestern British Columbia. In the summer of 1999, hunters on a glacier came across the almost perfectly preserved remains of a young man who had perished there about 550 years ago. At the time of his death, this individual was wearing a fur garment and a finely woven hat of plant fibres. He was carrying several wooden implements, including an atlatl dart, and food supplies in the form of dried salmon. The hat is of a type characteristic of the coastal Tlingit, and local oral histories tell of frequent travel between the coast and interior over the glacier. The Tutchone people of the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations termed this discovery Kwaday Dan Ts'inchí ("Long Ago Person Found"). They worked with archaeologists and the Tlingit people of Alaska to remove and study these remains, and cremated them and returned the ashes to the glacier following the analysis.

In the northern Yukon, the deeply stratified Klo-kut site, which was occupied from about 1000 years ago into the global era, has shown developments linked to the historic Gwich'in. Excavated stone tools include such distinctive Athapaskan items as tapered-stem projectile points (known as Kavik points) and chi-thos. Well-preserved bone tools such as barbed points, fish-hook components and a carved fish effigy lure, as well as trays and other items of birchbark, have also been recovered and indicate a stable economy of caribou hunting and fishing extending into recent times.

In northern Manitoba and Saskatchewan south of the Taltheilei sites, the archaeological sequence is similar to that of the Eastern Subarctic (see chapter 5).

as Dene ("people"). Athapaskan groups in other areas use similar, though varying, terms. Today the term "Dene Nation" has become the preferred collective self-designation in the Northwest Territories.

The fluid Athapaskan social groups are not the same as political "tribes." Small, highly mobile bands tended to resemble their neighbours in speech and lifestyle, and division into named units is somewhat arbitrary, often reflecting administrative or anthropological convenience rather than Aboriginal reality. Group names indicate linguistic differences, though not all of them spoke entirely separate languages. The now-extinct Yellowknife, for example, were a distinct ethnic entity but they spoke a dialect of Chipewyan. Similarly, some modern linguists classify Slavey, Hare and Mountain as dialects of the same language. Even separate languages, such as Beaver and Sekani, grade into one another through a series of dialects. Modern group names often come from terms applied by European traders or the Cree. As the explorer David Thompson wrote of the Chipewyan, "The country is occupied by a people who call themselves 'Dinnie' by the Hudson Bay Traders 'Northern Indians,' and by their southern neighbours 'Cheepawyans.'" This Cree term means "pointed skins," referring either to the way they prepared beaver pelts or to the pointed tails on their shirts.

All northern Athapaskans lived by hunting and fishing; gathering plant foods played only a minor role. During the historic fur trade many shifted to hunting and trapping fur-bearing animals. Athapaskan lifeways were flexible, and each group closely adapted to the territory it inhabited. Groups living in the Cordillera on the west, where most rivers drain to the Pacific, differed significantly from those living on the Shield and Mackenzie Lowlands to the east, where the rivers flow north to the Arctic or into Hudson Bay.

THE ATHAPASKANS OF THE SHIELD AND MACKENZIE LOWLANDS

Few environments in Aboriginal North America were as challenging to human survival as the Western Subarctic. Long severe winters and short warm summers characterized the seasons. During the winter, intense cold, deep snow and limited daylight made starvation and death by exposure constant dangers. During the pleasant months of summer, dense swarms of mosquitoes and blackflies meant people had to keep their bodies covered at all times. David Thompson, on western Hudson Bay in 1784, commented: "Summer such as it is, comes at once, and with it myriads of tormenting Musketoes; the air is thick with them, there is no cessation day nor night of suffering from them . . . and [we] were thankful for the cold weather that put an end to our sufferings" (Glover 1962: 17).

Although the land supported huge herds of barren-ground caribou in the northern transitional forest and tundra, woodland caribou and moose in the full boreal forest and numerous fish in the lakes and rivers, these resources were not always predictable. Failure to find animals or poor luck in fishing could mean disaster for the entire group.

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ABOVE Chipewyan caribou-hunting camp on the barrenlands near Fort Churchill, ca. 1880. CMC 74880

In the east are the Chipewyan, the most numerous and widespread of the northern Athapaskans. They were an "edge-of-the-forest" people, occupying the northern transitional forest west of Hudson Bay and far out onto the tundra or barrenlands. The barren-ground caribou were essential to the Chipewyan, who based their economy on following the herds in their seasonal movements. Both humans and caribou found shelter in the forests during the winter. When the animals began to migrate out onto the barrenlands in the spring, the Chipewyan hunters ambushed them along their major routes. During the summer, humans and the herds ranged far out onto the barrenlands. In the fall, the caribou were again taken in large numbers as they migrated south. Their flesh was cut into thin strips, dried in the sun and pounded into pemmican for winter provisions.

One productive method the Chipewyan used to take caribou was to build large enclosures of brushy trees near caribou migration paths. Samuel Hearne, who travelled with the Chipewyan in the late eighteenth century, claimed to have seen some "that were not less than a mile round." Inside was a maze of fences, with snares placed in every opening. Long lines of brush fences, which Hearne claimed were sometimes "not less than two or three miles," funnelled the animals to the pound's narrow entranceway. Once the caribou had been driven inside, this entrance was blocked with brush. Women and children raced around the fence to prevent animals from escaping, while men speared those entangled in the snares and shot with arrows those that still ran loose. When such techniques succeeded, the hunters captured so many caribou that their group could remain in one place for much of the winter.

Out on the barrenlands during the summer the Chipewyan hunted caribou with bows and arrows or speared them from canoes as they crossed rivers and lakes. Small, light bark canoes were carried from the woods for this purpose.

Hearne also described Chipewyan using lines of sticks to direct the caribou to a narrow pass, where concealed hunters waited.

Caribou were essential for more than food. The Chipewyan relied on caribou hides for clothing and lodge covers, and they cut them into strips for snares, fish nets, snowshoe lacings and many other purposes. Antlers and bones provided raw materials for many of their tools, and the women used sinew to sew clothing. A complete suit of winter clothing, according to Hearne, required eight to eleven hides, which were obtained in August and September when they were thick and unmarred by warble-fly holes. Hearne stated that the Chipewyan killed many animals for their hides at that time, and took only the choicest portions of meat.

Although the caribou were the staff of life to the Chipewyan, much as bison were to the Plains tribes, other animals played a role in the diet. They occasionally hunted musk-oxen while out on the barrenlands, frequently shot or snared arctic hares and took waterfowl seasonally when they were abundant. Fishing was second only to caribou hunting in importance, the Chipewyan using nets or bone hooks to take large quantities. In 1785 David Thompson commented: "When the land is scarce of Deer [caribou]... they take to the Lakes to angle Trout or Pike at which they are very expert."

The Chipewyan did not participate in the historic fur trade as enthusiastically as the Cree, but it did cause changes in their culture and distribution. The northern transitional forest provided the caribou that sustained them but it contained few of the fur-bearing animals sought by European traders. Some bands responded to the traders' urgings and pushed into the boreal forests to the south and west, reaching as far as northeastern Alberta in their search for furs. Others, who remained in their former territory and maintained the traditional lifestyle, became known as the "Caribou-Eater" Chipewyan.

To the northwest were the Yellowknife, who spoke a dialect of the Chipewyan language. Their name comes from the copper tools they manufactured from deposits found in their territory along the Coppermine River. Although they were linguistically and culturally Chipewyan, they are mentioned in the historical literature as a separate entity. They were apparently considered as such by Hearne's Chipewyan guides who plundered them, taking young women, furs, and bows and arrows. The Yellowknife, in turn, harassed the Dogrib and other neighbouring groups. In the nineteenth century many perished through disease and the Dogrib's retaliatory attacks. Finally, they disappeared as a distinct group, and the Dogrib and Chipewyan absorbed the survivors and their lands.

The Dogrib occupied the land between Great Bear and Great Slave Lakes. Their culture was similar to the Chipewyan, though they did not venture as far out onto the barrenlands. Caribou were the essential resource, with moose, hare and fish being of secondary importance.

The Hare, between Great Bear Lake and the Mackenzie River, speak a language closely related to Dogrib and differ little from that group. They lived by hunting and fishing, pursuing the barren-ground caribou out onto the tundra in

Yellowknife

Dogrib

Hare

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summer. Big game was relatively scarce in their territory, so they relied on fish and hares throughout much of the year. This dependence on hares for food and clothing sufficiently distinguished them from their neighbours to give them their name, but it also led to a precarious existence. Since hares go through a popula- tion cycle every seven to ten years, this group suffered periodic food shortages and starvation.

Closely related to the Hare are the Bearlake and Mountain Athapaskans. The Bearlake or Sahtu Dene, today recognized as a distinct group, are a historic fusion of Hare, Dogrib and Slavey people whose ancestors settled around the fur trade posts near Great Bear Lake. The Mountain Athapaskans are the Aboriginal inhab- itants of the Mackenzie Mountains, where they hunted moose, woodland caribou and mountain goat. Winter living was challenging as game was scarce and there were few large lakes for ice fishing. Historic records show that starvation was common.

Another closely related language is Slavey. Their territory covers a large area of the Northwest Territories west of Great Bear and Great Slave Lakes, plus northeastern British Columbia and northwestern Alberta. Unlike more northerly Athapaskans, the Slavey were fully a forest people, hunting moose and woodland caribou. Unlike herd animals such as the barren-ground caribou, these species had to be hunted individually with bows and arrows or speared when crossing water. The Slavey also took both large and small game in snares, and they relied heavily on fishing. Although the many small bands speaking dialects of the Slavey language did not constitute any cultural or political unit, they have in recent times used the term "Slavey" to distinguish themselves from other Atha- paskans when speaking English. They are also known today as Dene-thah in northern British Columbia and Dene Tha' in northern Alberta.

To the south, along the Peace River of northern British Columbia and Alberta, are the people the traders called the Beaver Indians. They call themselves Dunne- za. The Dunne-za once dwelled farther to the east but, according to Alexander Mackenzie, gun-bearing Cree pushed them westward in the late eighteenth cen- tury. The Peace River apparently takes its name from the truce negotiated be- tween these two peoples. The Dunne-za lifestyle was based almost entirely on big-game hunting. Herds of bison came into the open lands along the Peace, and the Dunne-za drove them into pounds in a technique similar to that used by the Plains tribes. Moose were available throughout Dunne-za territory, and Native groups hunted woodland caribou in some areas. Beaver were abundant and were sought for both their meat and fur. Hunters considered fishing to be beneath their dignity and they resorted to it only when they could not find game.

Throughout the Shield and Mackenzie Lowlands, Athapaskan societies were small, simple and highly mobile. The basic unit was the family, composed of a man and his wife or wives, their children and perhaps an aged parent or two. Most groups were polygynous, but only exceptional men could provide for several wives and defend them from other men; Matonabee, the powerful Chipewyan

chief described by Hearne, had seven wives. Several families, bound by ties of kinship and marriage, lived and travelled together throughout much of the year. When fishing was good or more men were needed to communally hunt caribou, much larger groups might gather. Hearne encountered a Chipewyan summer camp of seventy tents, which he estimated "did not contain less than 600 persons."

Leadership was based on ability, and the best hunter or most experienced warrior took charge during that activity. The Chipewyan and Dogrib, with their communal caribou hunts, emphasized leadership more than groups such as the Slavey, in which hunting was an individual activity. Leadership roles were temporary, and all adults felt free to come to their own decisions or join another social group. Flexibility and respect for individual autonomy are at the core of Athapaskan culture.

Although the Athapaskans were not known as ferocious warriors, hostilities were common. Raids between Athapaskan groups were usually to revenge past wrongdoings or to steal women. The Athapaskans also had long-standing enmities with their southern Cree neighbours and with the Inuit in the north. Hearne recounted the savage slaughter of a small Inuit camp by his Chipewyan guides as they travelled to the mouth of the Coppermine River in 1771.

Housing was simple and lightweight so that it could be easily packed up and moved. Throughout the area the conical tipi covered with caribou or moose hide was the most common year-round dwelling. A few groups built more substantial winter structures of poles chinked with moss. In the summer, simple lean-tos were all that was required.

Most groups in the summer travelled primarily by water, in canoes covered with spruce bark or birchbark. In a few areas moosehides were used to cover the canoe frame. Lacking good navigable rivers, the Chipewyan walked out onto the barrenlands carrying small lightweight canoes. In the winter, snowshoes were essential. Goods were carried on toboggans, which were hauled by the women. Dogsleds were unknown until the fur trade period.

Clothing was generally made of tanned caribou or moose hides, and some groups also used hare skins. Both men and women generally wore long pullover shirts or dresses, leggings with attached moccasins and breechcloths. They added mittens, a cap and a robe in the winter. Some northern groups attached hoods to their winter coats, but this is thought to be a late Inuit influence. Fringes and designs in moose hair or porcupine quills were added for decoration. People also tattooed parallel lines on their cheeks or chin and occasionally perforated their nasal septum to insert a quill or other ornament.

The late-eighteenth-century explorers—Hearne, Thompson and Mackenzie—noted a lack of obvious religious practices or ceremonies. These early observers, however, did not delve into the spiritual beliefs held by their Native guides and acquaintances. Later anthropological studies revealed complex religious thought, centring on the relationship between hunters and the animals on which they depended. The Dunne-za sent children into the bush on vision quests,

ives. Several families, bound by ties of kin-
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ABOVE Slavey shaman at Fort Rae, 1913.
CMC 26080

to seek supernatural power from the ani-
mals. Such experiences were not to be re-
vealed but to be reflected upon and
nurtured as private knowledge. Hunters
slept near their medicine bundles, which
contained images or charms relating to
supernatural aid they had received as ado-
lescents. In their dreams they encountered
animals and gained assistance and knowl-
edge from their spirit power.

Young men entering puberty had few
restrictions, but young women were se-
cluded. They were placed in a small hut,
often at some distance from the main
camp, where they were attended and in-
structed by female relatives. They ate only
dried meat and had to take liquids through
a bone drinking tube; to avoid touching
their body they had to use a scratching
stick. Throughout most of their lives
women were periodically restricted, since
men believed that menstruating women
were offensive to the animal spirits and
thus threatened the hunting success and

survival of the entire group. Women saw their "moon sickness" as a sign of potent
power, and they used caution to avoid inflicting harm. At such times, women re-
frained from walking on hunting trails or on ice where men fished or hunted
beavers, and they could never touch or step over the personal gear of the hunter.
Among the Dunne-za, menstruating women could not even walk behind the
lodges for fear of severing the sacred link between the hunter or his medicine
bundle and the animals in the bush.

Old age was a difficult time in societies that had to follow game. Individuals
who could no longer keep up with the group were left behind. When a person
died, the Chipewyan might simply leave the body on the ground; other groups
interred their dead or raised them on scaffolds. Some personal possessions of the
deceased were burned or left behind and the camp was abandoned.

The supernatural helped many to deal with the uncertainties of everyday life.
Dreams provided guidance in making decisions. Shamans could call upon their
spirit powers to locate game or to overcome their enemies. Illness was treated by
blowing on the afflicted part of the body, or by sucking out a small object believed
to have caused the disease. As well as such individual practices, occasional group
ceremonies fostered social cohesion. Such gatherings featured feasting, singing,
drumming, dancing and gambling.

THE CORDILLERAN ATHAPASKANS

The mountains and plateaus of the Subarctic Cordillera extend from northern Yukon to central British Columbia. Vast stretches of boreal forest cover the rugged landscape, but there are also large areas of meadows, flood plains and muskeg, as well as alpine tundra at higher elevations. Climate varies from among the harshest in the Subarctic in the northern territory of the Gwich'in to more benign among the Carrier in the south. Latitude is not the only consideration; local climatic conditions vary widely according to altitude and proximity to the coast. In the south the Subarctic grades into the open country of the Plateau, and the Chilcotin have been placed in that culture area.

Rivers flowing to the Pacific teemed with salmon during their seasonal spawning cycles. All but the easternmost Cordilleran peoples had access to this reliable food supply. Hence, they could sustain a larger population density and a more settled way of life than the eastern Athapaskans. Other resources, however, played at least as large a role in the economy of most groups. Caribou were essential, particularly to such northerners as the Gwich'in. They also hunted or snared mountain sheep and goats, moose, bear and smaller game. Freshwater fish were important to many groups, and plant foods were more abundant and played a larger role in the diet than among the eastern Athapaskans. Local resources could also be exchanged for exotic foodstuffs, such as eulachon oil, in trade with their coastal neighbours. Many Northwest Coast influences pervaded the lives of the Cordilleran Athapaskans and distinguished them from their kin to the east.

In the north, bordering on the Inuit, are the Gwich'in. Their lands today are in Alaska, Yukon and the Northwest Territories. Salmon ascended the Yukon River system far into Gwich'in territory, though the Mackenzie River groups in the east relied on Arctic char and whitefish instead. Traps were the most productive means of taking fish; and the Gwich'in established summer camps to construct and operate them. Moose, smaller animals and waterfowl were also important, but caribou were paramount to the Gwich'in. They provided the most food, as well as hides for shelter and clothing. Although individual hunters could pursue them, the major technique was the communal surround. Long lines of posts directed caribou to roughly circular enclosures, in which they were snared, speared or shot with arrows.

South of the Gwich'in are the Han, a distinct though little-known society. Their territory is on the Yukon River drainage, straddling the Yukon-Alaska border. They ate mainly fish, particularly salmon, though they also hunted moose and caribou.

The Tutchone occupy the southern Yukon. Some bands depended heavily on annual salmon runs, whereas others primarily hunted. Native copper was found in Tutchone territory and was used extensively to make tools. When the historic fur trade began, the Tutchone were drawn into a trading relationship with the Chilkat Tlingit. Through these ties of trade and intermarriage, the Tlingit heavily influenced Tutchone culture. Tutchone society was divided into two moieties,

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arctic Cordillera extend from northern stretches of boreal forest cover the areas of meadows, flood plains and elevations. Climate varies from among northern territory of the Gwich'in to more Latitude is not the only consideration, according to altitude and proximity to the open country of the Plateau, and tundra area.

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LEFT Gwich'in hunter in the 1840s. CMC 73453

Wolf and Crow (the latter equivalent to the Tlingit Raven), each of which had several clans in the Tlingit style. Marriage partners had to be of the opposite moiety, and all children took their mother's affiliation.

The spread of Tlingit dominance into the Cordillera is most clearly seen in northwestern British Columbia and the adjacent southern Yukon—the territory of the Inland Tlingit and Tagish peoples. The local Athapaskans traded and intermarried with the Tlingit in the nineteenth century, adopting their language and social organization. They held potlatches, divided their society into Wolves and Crows, and used crests to denote their kin groups. The Tagish language gradually declined and is virtually extinct today.

Also in northwestern British Columbia, along the Stikine River drainage, are the Tahltan. The Stikine provided dependable salmon runs and a major trade route to the Stikine Tlingit on the west. The Tahltan established themselves as intermediaries in the trade between coastal groups and Athapaskans farther inland. They also interacted intensively with the Tlingit, including intermarriage and reciprocal potlatching, and they adopted many elements of Tlingit culture. They had matrilineal moieties (Wolf and Raven) that were divided into clans in the Tlingit fashion.

One group of Athapaskans, the Tsetsaut, breached the mountain barrier and reached the Pacific at the end of several long inlets on the British Columbia-Alaska border. Apparently they were not fully adapted to the coast, as they relied more heavily on inland game hunting than on fishing. Adjacent groups, particularly the Tahltan, harassed and raided them and the survivors were finally absorbed by the Nisga'a. By the early twentieth century the Tsetsaut were extinct.

In the eastern Cordillera of northern British Columbia and southern Yukon are the Kaska and Sekani. The Sekani are virtually indistinguishable from the Dunne-za and appear to have diverged from them only recently. To the north they are mixed with the Kaska, whose speech is closely related to Tahltan. Both lived by hunting moose, woodland caribou and mountain sheep, with fishing being of lesser importance. Since their rivers are in the Mackenzie drainage they did not have direct access to salmon but could take trout and whitefish. Although farther removed from the Northwest Coast than most Cordilleran Athapaskans, they felt some coastal influences. The Kaska divided their society into Wolf and Crow and traced descent through the female line, and several western Sekani bands briefly adopted the matrilineal clans of the Gitksan and western Carrier. Both held modest potlatches. Their cultures are transitional between the Cordillera and the Mackenzie Lowlands.

Occupying a large area of central British Columbia are the many groups known collectively as the Carrier. The name Dakelh is also used today, but it refers more generally to Native People. Variations in culture and language exist between these related groups. Those in the northwest, who today prefer to be known as the Wet'suwet'en, speak a dialect sufficiently distinct that some linguists classify it as a separate language. The upper reaches of both the Fraser and Skeena river basins extend through Carrier territory and provide teeming masses of spawning salmon. Salmon were the staple food for most Carrier groups and supported a relatively settled lifestyle and the highest population density in the Western Subarctic. When the salmon were running, many plant foods were also available and hunting was most productive. In the lean months of late winter, however, supplies of dried foods often ran low, forcing some groups to seek the hospitality of the Gitksan or Nuxalk to the west.

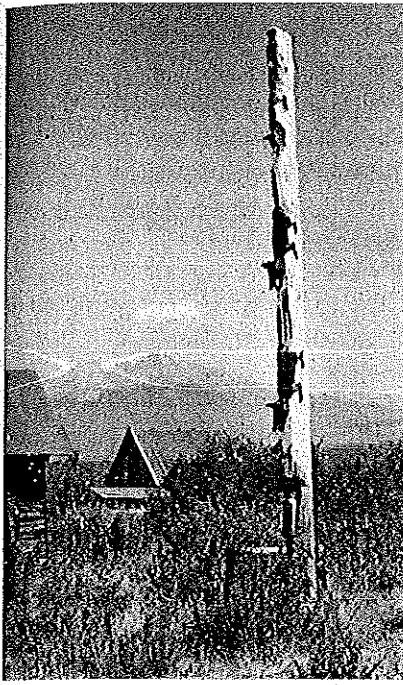
The basic Carrier social group was the extended family, usually consisting of several brothers, their wives and children. When the sons reached adulthood, they brought their wives and children into their family band. Each family held rights to a hunting territory and fishing sites. This typically simple Athapaskan organization began to be elaborated in the fur trade period, as extensive trade and intermarriage with coastal peoples brought in the potlatch and ranking systems. In the north the Wet'suwet'en, bordering on the Gitksan of the upper Skeena, adopted clan organization with descent traced through the mother. Southern groups, which were in contact with the Nuxalk in the Bella Coola Valley, lacked such clans and traced descent through either the male or female line. In both cases, they painted or carved crests, generally depicting animals, in Northwest Coast style to

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ABOVE Totem pole at the Wel'suwet'en (western Car-
rier) village of Moricetown. Photo by A. McMillan

denote particular kin groups. Those
closest to the Gitksan adopted much of
their ceremonial system. They raised
totem poles to display crest privileges,
the nobles wore the intricate Chilkat
blankets of mountain-goat wool on im-
portant occasions, and high-ranking
women slit their lower lip to wear a
labret as a badge of status.

The Carrier situation was typical of
most Cordilleran groups. Contact with
the Tlingit, Gitksan and Nuxalk led
Athapaskan groups, from the Gwich'in
to the northern Carrier, to organize
their societies into descent groups,
traced matrilineally. "Big men" or
"chiefs" amassed power as the rank sys-
tem spread inland, and they obtained
new wealth in trade and transformed it
into status through potlatching. Al-
though these "chiefs" had great pres-
tige and were accorded respect, they did
not have real political authority; the ba-
sic individual autonomy of the Atha-
paskans was retained.

Potlatches spread to all Cordilleran groups, though they were modest events
compared to the extravagances of the Northwest Coast. Each important event—
the naming of a child, the assumption of a family crest, a marriage or a funeral—
demanded a feast and the distribution of goods. Newly wealthy families could
purchase high-ranking titles or crests, or acquire them by sponsoring the funeral
potlatch of a former owner. Frequent potlatches, with distributions of wealth,
were required to maintain high status.

Trade relations between the coast and interior were of long standing. In ex-
change for furs and prepared hides, the Athapaskans received wealth goods, such
as dentalium shells and woven blankets of mountain-goat wool, and exotic foods,
such as eulachon oil, dried clams and seaweed. The "grease trails," so-called for
the many boxes of eulachon oil carried far into the interior, were major arteries of
trade and travel, along which Native People guided such European explorers as
Alexander Mackenzie.

When the Europeans arrived, with their shining array of metal tools and other
goods eagerly sought by Native People, trade between coastal and interior groups
intensified. Coastal groups denied the Athapaskans direct access to the foreigners
but sold them European goods in return for furs. In turn, the Athapaskans with

the closest ties to the coast became intermediaries in trade with those farther inland. Although the coastal peoples continued to regard themselves as superior, they found their inland neighbours to be important sources of wealth. Coastal chiefs made excursions far into the interior and sought to consolidate their influence through marriages, offering young women of high rank to Athapaskan leaders. Such kin ties brought many Cordilleran Athapaskans, particularly the Tagish, Tahltan and Carrier, into the Northwest Coast sphere of influence, and they rapidly adopted many elements of coastal social organization.

The requirement of mobility meant that housing was kept simple. The northern Cordilleran peoples—the Gwich'in, Han and Tutchone—made portable dome-shaped winter houses, with moose or caribou hides spread over a framework of bent and tied poles. The Han, like many of the Alaskan Athapaskans, also built rectangular pit-houses, heavily banked with turf to withstand the cold. In the south, the Carrier made winter homes of split poles covered in spruce bark. The Sekani in the east lived in conical lodges wrapped with bark or hide. All of the western groups, from the Gwich'in to the Carrier, constructed rectangular bark-covered structures at summer fish camps, which they used as living quarters as well as for smoking and drying fish. The Carrier borrowed two additional house types: the coastal-style plank house used for potlatches and, among the southern groups, the semi-subterranean pit-house characteristic of the Plateau.

The rugged lands and turbulent rivers of the Cordillera meant most groups travelled on foot. Only in the north was water transport practical for any distance. Most groups lacked birchbark and constructed their canoes of the heavier spruce bark. Many made small dugout canoes, but these were not steamed and spread like coastal dugouts. They also built rafts and other temporary craft to carry people and goods for short distances. In the winter, people snowshoed, dragging their loads on toboggans.

In clothing and appearance, the Cordilleran people differed little from other northern Athapaskans. Robert Campbell, travelling among the Gwich'in and Han in 1851, left a good description of their apparel:

Their dress which when new is pretty & picturesque, is made of the skin of the moose or the reindeer, principally the latter. The skirt [shirt] or coat is finished in a point, both before & behind, & reaches down to the knees, being frequently ornamented with coloured beads, porcupine quills or long hair. The coat has a hole large enough to admit the head, but does not open in front, & is provided with a hood which can be used, when wanted, as a head-dress. The trowsers or leg covering, & shoes are made of the same material, & the garment made with the hair inside for warmth. *Osgood 1971: 91*

Dentalium shells, which they obtained in trade with the coast, were also used frequently as clothing and hair decorations, and worn as necklaces and as ornaments in perforations through the earlobes and nasal septum. Tattooing, particu-

mediaries in trade with those farther inland continued to regard themselves as superior, the important sources of wealth. Coastal peoples were superior and sought to consolidate their young women of high rank to Athapaskan Cordilleran Athapaskans, particularly the Northwest Coast sphere of influence, and coastal social organization.

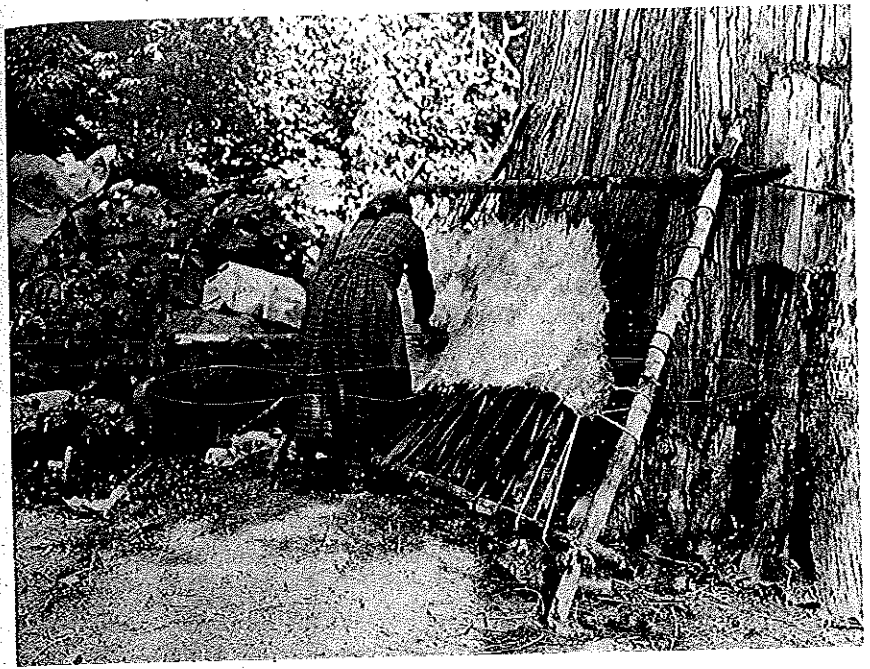
Carrier housing was kept simple. The northern Carrier, Han and Tutchone—made portable houses of caribou hides spread over a frame of many of the Alaskan Athapaskans, also covered with turf to withstand the cold. In the Northwest, split poles covered in spruce bark, bark wrapped with bark or hide. All of the Carrier, constructed rectangular bark-houses, which they used as living quarters as the Carrier borrowed two additional houses for potlatches and, among the southern Carrier, characteristic of the Plateau.

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Cordilleran people differed little from other Athapaskans travelling among the Gwich'in and Han people:

Carrier clothing, is made of the skin of the reindeer. The skirt [shirt] or coat is finished in reindeer skin down to the knees, being frequently ornamented with quills or long hair. The coat has a hole cut open in front, & is provided with a reindeer head-dress. The trowsers or leg coverings, & the garment made with the hair

in trade with the coast, were also used as ornaments, and worn as necklaces and as ornaments and nasal septum. Tattooing, particu-



ABOVE Carrier woman scraping moosehide with a stone-bladed scraper, 1922. CMC 56902

larly on the cheeks and chin, was common. The Carrier also donned unique ceremonial regalia, featuring elaborate wigs and breast-plates of dentalium.

In contrast to other Athapaskans, some Cordilleran groups cremated their dead. The Carrier derive their name from the custom that required a widow to carry on her back a bag containing the cremated remains of her husband. She had to transport this bundle throughout the mourning period (a year or more), which supposedly discouraged early remarriage. At the end of the mourning period, the remains were placed in a box on top of a post carved with the crest of the deceased.

In many other traits the Cordilleran people shared the basic Athapaskan lifeways. Shamans interceded with the supernatural world, removing some of the uncertainty of daily life. Religious concepts centred on the respect for animals and the hunter's quest to obtain at least one spirit helper. Girls were secluded at puberty, and menstruating women were isolated and subjected to taboos for fear of offending the spirits of game animals and fish. Oral traditions told by the elders described how the world came into being and stressed the relationship between humans and animals. Although stories involving Raven clearly originated on the coast, others reflect pan-Subarctic themes. Under the veneer of Northwest Coast influences, the simpler egalitarian Athapaskan culture was still evident.

INTO THE GLOBAL ERA

The Chipewyan were the first of the Canadian Athapaskans to come into sustained contact with Europeans. York Factory, a trading post established on southwestern Hudson Bay in 1682, provided trade opportunities primarily for the Cree. Shortly thereafter, the Chipewyan felt the effect of the new economy as the Cree used their newly acquired firearms to plunder them and the Chipewyan suffered severe losses in warfare. The English traders eventually became aware of these "Northern Indians," as they were called, through captives held by the Cree. In an effort to bring them into direct trade, the Hudson's Bay Company organized an expedition to Chipewyan lands and negotiated a peace with the Cree during the winter of 1715-16. This was followed in 1717 by the construction of Fort Churchill, at the mouth of the Churchill River, specifically for the Chipewyan trade.

The Chipewyan, however, failed to wholeheartedly embrace the fur trade lifestyle, as the Cree had done. The caribou herds provided for all their needs, and fur-bearing animals were scarce in the northern transitional forests. As Samuel Hearne noted: "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." He observed that those who went to the fort with furs risked starving on the long trip across the barrenlands and were not better off than those who remained behind with the caribou. Nevertheless, some of the Chipewyan joined their fortunes to the fort, controlling trade with groups farther west. Hoping to break this trade monopoly, Hearne made his famous journey in 1770-71, travelling from Churchill to the Arctic coast at the mouth of the Coppermine River on a mission to bring the "Far Indians" into the post to trade.

When the "free traders" who would form the Montreal-based North West Company arrived, both the Hudson's Bay Company and Chipewyan dominance in the fur trade were threatened. Peter Pond established the first post near Lake Athabasca in 1778. In 1786 a post, later known as Fort Resolution, was built on the southern shore of Great Slave Lake. In 1788 Fort Chipewyan was constructed on Lake Athabasca. Many of the Chipewyan had pushed south into this region for its more abundant fur-bearing animals and preferred to go to the new post rather than undertake the arduous journey to Churchill. The Hudson's Bay Company was forced to abandon its long-standing policy of requiring Natives to bring their furs to the coastal forts and began to establish numerous posts inland. A period of intense rivalry ensued, continuing until the two companies merged in 1821.

Alexander Mackenzie, as an agent of the North West Company, explored to the north and west, reaching the mouth of the mighty river that now bears his name in 1789. Setting out from Fort Chipewyan, he traversed the lands of the Slavey, Hare and eastern Gwich'in. Following this journey, the North West Company constructed several posts in the lower Mackenzie Valley, beginning with Fort Good Hope in 1805. The Gwich'in became intermediaries in trade with the

adian Athapaskans to come into sustenance, a trading post established on the river provided trade opportunities primarily for the Cree. The Cree felt the effect of the new economy as a threat to plunder them and the Chipewyan and Slavey traders eventually became aware of this. Led, through captives held by the Cree, to the Hudson's Bay Company organization, the Hudson's Bay Company organized and negotiated a peace with the Cree in 1717 by the construction of Fort Churchill on the Churchill River, specifically for the

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from the Montreal-based North West Company and Chipewyan dominance in the region. The first post near Lake Athabasca, Fort Resolution, was built on the north shore. Fort Chipewyan was constructed on the north shore and pushed south into this region for its strategic importance. The Cree preferred to go to the new post rather than Churchill. The Hudson's Bay Company policy of requiring Natives to bring their furs to the numerous posts inland. A period of competition between the two companies merged in 1821.

The North West Company, explored the river to the mighty river that now bears his name. When Hearne traversed the lands of the Chipewyan, he traversed the lands of the Chipewyan. On this journey, the North West Company entered the Mackenzie Valley, beginning with the same intermediaries in trade with the

Inuit, denying the latter access to the posts. They also obtained Russian goods through the Alaskan Athapaskans.

On a second ambitious expedition in 1793, Mackenzie set out to find a route to the Pacific. His travels took him through Dunne-za, Sekani and Carrier territory, and he finally reached salt water at Bella Coola. Although Mackenzie was the first European known to have reached the Carrier homeland, he met people who were already accustomed to European goods through trade with the Nuxalk. He saw iron and brass tools in their possession and he noted one man carrying "a lance that very much resembled a serjeant's halberd." His party fell in with a Carrier group heading to the coast to trade, taking beaver, otter, marten, bear and lynx skins, as well as dressed moosehides obtained from the "Rocky-Mountain Indians" (presumably Sekani). Again, trading posts soon followed exploration. A post existed among the Dunne-za of the upper Peace River by at least 1798. Further west, Fort McLeod was constructed among the Sekani in 1805, and Fort St. James and Fort Fraser among the Carrier in 1806.

Modern scholars have disagreed sharply in their assessment of the impact the early years of trade had on the Athapaskans. June Helm and other Subarctic ethnographers have championed a model stressing continuity. In this view, the Athapaskans remained essentially in their homelands, adjusting their territorial boundaries only slightly to secure more access to fur-bearing animals or European goods. The new trade items made life easier and were eagerly sought as status goods but they were grafted onto the pre-existing culture without drastically altering it. This stable fur trade era is seen as persisting without major disruptions until the federal government began to administer the Canadian north after 1945.

Some ethnohistorians, such as Shepard Krech III, hold an alternate point of view. They believe that cultures changed radically and populations were dislocated. For example, the Chipewyan, Slavey and Dunne-za lost land and large numbers of people in warfare with the Cree. Such northern peoples as the Dogrib and Hare once lived farther south but were forced into the relatively impoverished northern transitional forest. There they lived a precarious existence and later depended on the trading posts for survival. In this view, the Mackenzie Lowlands Athapaskan practice of tracing kinship bilaterally (through either the mother or the father) was not an ancient trait but a late adaptation to provide greater flexibility in times of decreasing populations.

Certainly one of the major disruptions Europeans brought was epidemic outbreaks of disease. How early such scourges as smallpox wrought their destruction, or how high the toll, cannot be known. By 1781, we have historic records of a devastating smallpox epidemic among the Chipewyan and Cree near Hudson Bay. Hearne estimated that nine-tenths of the Chipewyan around Churchill perished. Influenza, measles, whooping cough and scarlet fever also caused huge losses. Starvation often followed outbreaks of disease, as the survivors were too weakened to provide for themselves. Krech's study of the Gwich'in refers to the

"almost constant sickness, disease and mortality" of the nineteenth century and he estimates that approximately 80 per cent of the population died.

Aboriginal People also suffered through the widespread use of liquor as an inducement to trade. As early as 1785, David Thompson lamented that "brandy" was being liberally dispensed to the Native People of western Hudson Bay, commenting: "No matter what service the Indian performs . . . strong grog is given to him, and sometimes for two or three days Men and Women are all drunk, and become the most degraded of human beings" (Glover 1962: 36). The use of alcohol in trade was particularly prevalent during the years of intense rivalry between the two great fur trade companies, after which it was discouraged.

As trading posts continued to be established throughout Athapaskan lands in the nineteenth century, Native People depended increasingly on items from the global economy. Metal tools and European clothing rapidly replaced their Aboriginal counterparts. Firearms and ammunition were among the most important trade goods. Hunting became more of an individual activity, no longer requiring the communal effort to construct corrals or drive the herds to where hunters waited. Steel traps came into use but did not replace Native snares and deadfalls. Commercial twine fishnets supplanted laboriously produced Native examples. Hunters took enough fish and meat that they had a surplus to feed dogs, teams of which were trained to pull sleds or toboggans. Flour, tea and molasses became staples of the Native diet, and tobacco became part of everyday life. To obtain these necessities the Athapaskans spent the winters trapping, bringing to the posts furs valued in the global market.

A state of mutual dependence developed: the posts existed only for the furs brought in by Native trappers, and the Natives altered much of their traditional lifestyle to acquire furs to exchange for outside goods. Global market considerations rather than a sense of reciprocal obligation drove the fur trade companies, however. After the merger of 1821, they closed many posts as a cost-saving measure, despite the effect this had on local First Nations. A group of outraged Dunneza massacred five company employees at a post on the Peace River that was scheduled for closure. In retaliation, the company shut down all posts in the area, subjecting the local Native People to considerable hardship.

Throughout the rest of the nineteenth century most Athapaskans continued to be tied to the fur trade. In isolated northern communities, this way of life persisted well into the twentieth century. This complex of rifles, dog teams, traplines and a global market economy became the "traditional" Athapaskan culture Native informants described to anthropologists.

The latter half of the nineteenth century also saw the arrival of missionaries, predominantly Roman Catholic. Missions were established, generally at the trading posts; however, the priests had to travel extensively to bush camps and isolated communities to keep contact with their converts. Unlike the traders, the missionaries attempted to transform Native cultures to make them conform with Euro-Canadian practices. They introduced schools, which acculturated as much as

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educated Native children. Although most education was in English, an Anglican
missionary among the Gwich'in devised a writing system for their language. By
the end of the century, all but the most isolated Athapaskans were at least nomi-
nally Christian.

As more Euro-Canadian males moved into the Western Subarctic, a mixed
population, now generally known as Métis, grew. In the Mackenzie district, two
distinct groups emerged. One was the so-called "Red River Métis," descended
from French-Canadian workers in the fur trade and their Aboriginal, usually
Cree, wives. They settled in the area as the fur trade spread to the northwest and
were later joined by refugees from the Plains after the final defeat of the "Métis
Nation" in 1885. The second group was formed in the north from the union of
Scottish and English Hudson's Bay Company employees with Athapaskan
women. The Métis worked as post employees, interpreters and canoeists, and
acted as cultural intermediaries between Natives and Euro-Canadians.

The Cordilleran Athapaskans experienced massive cultural disruption when
gold was discovered in their lands. The Cariboo gold rush, which climaxed in
1862, brought a mass of gold seekers into Carrier territory. In the 1870s lesser
gold strikes occurred to the north, in the lands of the Sekani, Kaska and Tahltan.
Finally, the 1898 Klondike gold rush in the Yukon profoundly affected the Tagish,
Tutchone and Gwich'in and almost destroyed the Han, the Native occupants
around what became Dawson City. In a matter of months Dawson's population
swelled to an estimated 40,000 people, making it the largest Canadian city west of
Winnipeg. The few hundred Han were simply swamped by the newcomers. Al-
though Dawson was an ephemeral settlement, it boasted such amenities as sa-
loons, dance halls and brothels. These novel attractions, plus opportunities for
wage labour, drew many Athapaskans to Dawson. Some became prospectors or
packers, and others worked cutting cordwood or as deckhands on the steamers.
Unlike the essential role they played in the fur trade, however, the Athapaskans
remained on the margins of the new economy. When the gold rush waned, they
found themselves largely abandoned.

As more non-Natives moved into the north, the Canadian government negoti-
ated treaties similar to those signed across the Prairie provinces in the years fol-
lowing Confederation. Treaty 8, signed in 1899, covers northeastern British
Columbia, northern Alberta, northwestern Saskatchewan and a small portion of
the Northwest Territories (as far north as Great Slave Lake). Increased develop-
ment in the north and the discovery of oil in the Mackenzie Valley led to Treaty 11
in 1921—the last of the historic federal accords with Canadian First Nations. It
covers the lands from Great Slave Lake to the Arctic Ocean, including the entire
Mackenzie Valley. No agreements were ever completed in the Yukon or with the
Cordilleran peoples of British Columbia. Native leaders saw the treaties essen-
tially as pacts of friendship and assistance, rather than as deeds of sale. However,
the terms of the treaties specifically removed Aboriginal title to the land in ex-
change for small annual payments, reserves and guarantees of continued hunting,

fishing and trapping rights. Some promises have yet to be fulfilled, such as establishing reserves for all treaty groups in the Northwest Territories, whereas other rights were continually eroded before being protected in the 1982 constitution.

The "frontier" of Euro-Canadian settlement gradually moved to the north and west. Homesteaders took suitable farming and ranching lands in central British Columbia and along the Peace River of northern British Columbia and Alberta. Farther north, the transportation corridors opened up by the gold rush continued to attract new settlers. Mining camps and permanent towns sprang up throughout much of the Western Subarctic. As new roads were built, the pace of non-Native settlement increased. Construction of the Alaska Highway during World War Two made the formerly remote lands of the Slavey, Kaska and Tutchone accessible to a steady stream of Euro-Canadian arrivals. By the end of the war some Athapaskans, particularly in the south, had long since been displaced from most of their land and had become minorities, while in the north many remote groups were still living a life centred on the trading posts.

THE MODERN DENE

In the post-war years, non-Natives rapidly expanded into Athapaskan lands. Mining, logging and other extractive industries brought in a stream of transient workers from the south, and Aboriginal People progressively became minorities in their homelands. As the population grew, new government services were provided, improving living conditions for the Dene but increasing their dependency.

Particularly important were new government programs in health, education, housing and welfare. Medical facilities were established to combat high rates of tuberculosis and infant mortality. Schools were constructed in many Native communities, and elsewhere children were sent to residential schools in central locations. These schools separated children from their parents and their culture, educated them in a language their parents could not understand and instilled foreign values. Only recently has this trend been reversed. Financial assistance also became available, in the form of family allowances, welfare and old age pensions. All of these programs have encouraged a sedentary life in towns.

The typical Dene village includes a store, school and church. The original trading posts have become stores, which offer a variety of southern goods for cash sale. Wooden-frame housing built under government subsidy is gradually replacing the older log cabin homes. These permanent facilities discourage mobility, though men sometimes leave the villages for short periods to tend traplines or hunt, and whole families occasionally depart to fishing camps during the summer.

Modern transportation has made northern communities less isolated. Snowmobiles and manufactured boats with outboard motors have almost totally replaced snowshoes and canoes. Mining and oil exploration companies are cutting new roads into Athapaskan lands. More small chartered planes are flying people around the north. Hunters and trappers can now quickly travel from their villages to distant locations to find game.

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The Dene of the Northwest Territories have been very active politically in recent decades. The Indian Brotherhood of the Northwest Territories was formed in 1970, and later changed its name to the Dene Nation. Although it is dedicated to enhancing education, health and communication among the Dene, it has also focussed on their land claim. To advance their claim, the Dene have had to challenge the government interpretation of Treaties 8 and 11. The Dene position is that these were agreements of mutual friendship and that they surrendered neither their sovereignty nor their rights to their lands through treaties.

In 1973, the Dene filed a legal caveat to halt all further development on their traditional lands. Justice William Morrow of the Supreme Court of the Northwest Territories subsequently conducted a series of hearings in Dene communities. After listening to Native testimony, particularly from individuals who had actually attended the signing of Treaty 11, he concluded that the treaties had been misrepresented or inadequately explained. His ruling favoured the Dene, stating that they should be permitted to advance a claim for title to the land and that "notwithstanding the language of the two treaties . . . there is sufficient doubt on the facts that aboriginal title was extinguished." This judgement was subsequently overturned on technical grounds, but it forced the federal government to recognize that the Dene had a strong negotiating position. That the government has failed to establish reserves promised by treaty also strengthens the Dene argument. Shortly after this decision, the Dene and Métis of the Northwest Territories began their lengthy negotiations with the federal government over land claims and Aboriginal rights.

Meanwhile, oil and gas development threatened Dene lands. Particularly worrisome were plans for a pipeline down the Mackenzie Valley. Strong opposition by Aboriginal People and environmentalists led to a federal inquiry headed by Justice Thomas Berger. Beginning in 1975, Berger travelled to each Dene and Inuit community on the Mackenzie to hold hearings. Native opponents to the pipeline were primarily concerned with the impact on game and fur-bearing animals and the government's failure to settle land claims before any construction began. In his 1977 report, Berger recommended that any such project be postponed to allow time to settle Aboriginal claims. In his words:

If we build the pipeline, it will seem strange, years from now, that we refused to do justice to the native people merely to continue to provide ourselves with a range of consumer goods and comforts. . . . The pipeline, if it were built now, would do enormous damage to the social fabric in the North, would bring only limited economic benefits, and would stand in the way of a just settlement of native claims. . . . It would leave a legacy of bitterness. *Berger 1977: 200*

The pipeline plans were shelved because of Berger's recommendations and the heavy publicity they received, plus uncertain economic conditions. The Dene were left with a legacy of political organization and articulate leaders that could be mobilized to pursue other agendas, such as land claims.

In the Yukon, where no historic treaties were signed, land claims have been of paramount concern. The Council for Yukon Indians has vigorously pressed its case in negotiations with the federal government. Concern over surrender of Aboriginal title to their lands led individual Yukon First Nations to reject a 1984 agreement-in-principle. Finally, in 1993 an Umbrella Final Agreement was signed between the Government of Canada, the Government of the Yukon and the Council for Yukon Indians. The Yukon First Nations agreed to "cede, release and surrender" their Aboriginal claims to non-settlement land in return for title to over 40,000 square kilometres and financial compensation which will total over \$240 million. Yukon First Nations interests will also be protected through membership on various boards and committees dealing with wildlife management, resource development and heritage preservation. Separate agreements with individual First Nations deal with specific issues. This process is still ongoing: by the beginning of 2004 only nine of the fourteen Yukon First Nations had finalized their treaties. The Umbrella Final Agreement also commits the federal government to negotiating separate self-government agreements with Yukon First Nations.

The treaty process in the Northwest Territories remains incomplete. The Dene Nation and the Métis Association of the Northwest Territories negotiated jointly with the federal government, reaching a final agreement in 1990. However, an assembly of the Dene and Métis organizations rejected the agreement later that year, primarily due to concern over extinguishing Aboriginal rights and title to the land.

Not all Dene groups, however, supported that assembly's position. The Gwich'in of the Mackenzie delta withdrew from the broader Dene-Métis claim to negotiate on their own. The Gwich'in Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement was finalized in 1992. Its terms follow the model of the proposed Dene-Métis agreement, providing title to lands (over 20,000 square kilometres, with rights to subsurface minerals for only a portion), financial compensation (\$75 million), royalties on resources removed from Gwich'in land and membership on regulatory boards dealing with land and resources. It also called for separate talks on the issue of self-government. The neighbouring Sahtu Dene and Métis of Great Bear Lake also withdrew from the broader claim, striking a similar accord in 1993, which provides financial compensation, title to lands, resource royalties and a commitment from the federal government to negotiate self-government.

Separate self-government agreements have now been completed, both in the Yukon and Northwest Territories. They nullify the Indian bands under the Indian Act and replace them with First Nations governments, and specify local control over social programs as well as clauses to protect language and culture. They typically include, among other things, provisions for Natives to manage their heritage resources, such as archaeological sites. Some also stipulate that Dene place names supersede their non-Native equivalents. Following the Gwich'in Land Claim Agreement, for example, the community of Arctic Red River became

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Tsiigehtchic. This is just one of many name changes taking place across Canada's north, as our official maps come closer to Native reality.

Most recently, the Tli Cho Final Agreement of 2003 brought the Dogrib into treaty with Canada. It specified a self-governing Dogrib territory of 39,000 square kilometres, encompassing the four Dogrib communities. They have outright title to these lands, including surface and subsurface resources. A payment of \$152 million was compensation for past land use. With this agreement, the Dogrib First Nation Government replaced the four Dogrib bands. This legislative body will have wide-ranging regulatory authority over Dogrib lands, including hunting, fishing and industrial development on the land, and it will be responsible for heritage resources. Although the Dogrib First Nation Government will regulate local issues, it recognizes the primacy of Canadian courts and Parliament.

In British Columbia, where the Cordilleran Athapaskans lack historic treaties, land claims negotiations are proceeding through the B.C. Treaty Commission process. Athapaskan groups in British Columbia presently in talks include the Wet'suwet'en Nation, the Kaska-Dena Council, the Carrier-Sekani Tribal Council, the Cheslatta Carrier Nation and a number of smaller bands. In addition, such Yukon groups as the Carcross/Tagish First Nation and the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations are negotiating through this process for those portions of their traditional territories that fall within British Columbia.

Farther east, historic Treaty 8 encompasses the lands of the Dene and western Woods Cree. In northern Alberta the Lubicon Cree have been involved in a lengthy and bitter land claims dispute. This isolated group was apparently missed during treaty signing and did not apply for lands until much later. A proposed reserve in 1940 was never surveyed due to disputes about the number of band members and consequent reserve size. In subsequent decades oil exploration companies built roads that opened up what had been a remote area but destroyed much of the game upon which the Lubicon depended. Under Chief Bernard Ominayak, the Lubicon organized court challenges, roadblocks and highly publicized protests at the 1988 Winter Olympics in Calgary. The Lubicon maintained that they held Aboriginal title to the land and were entitled to compensation for the destruction of their hunting and trapping way of life. The government insisted, however, that this was simply a specific claim for reserve entitlement. After the bitter collapse of a near-agreement with the Lubicon, the government encouraged some of the Cree to form separate bands. It then negotiated reserve lands and financial compensation with those groups, leaving the remaining Lubicon in a difficult and unresolved position.

Dene leaders have played an active role in political struggles for Aboriginal rights on the national stage. George Erasmus, a Dogrib from the Northwest Territories, served as President of the Dene Nation before becoming National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations for two terms. More recently he was co-chair of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. Stephen Kakfwi, a Sahtu Dene,

also served as President of the Dene Nation. Most recently, he was the premier of the Northwest Territories.

Wage labour has replaced traditional activities as the economic basis for Native communities in northern Canada. Although transient non-Natives from the south take many jobs in the mining and lumber industries, more Dene are now finding employment through new economic partnerships. These include diamond mines in Dogrib territory, a copper mine in the Yukon, and oil and gas exploration among the Dene Tha' in northern Alberta. Guiding big-game hunters, fighting forest fires and building roads also provide seasonal income. Commercial fisheries exist in a few places, such as around Great Slave Lake, and cattle ranches have been established among the Dunne-za. The global demand for furs has declined, and few individuals still trap as a way of life. Many people, however, hunt and fish for subsistence, to put food on the household's table and to reaffirm Native identity.

Athapaskan languages are still in common use today. Although all are endangered, only Han and Tagish face the immediate threat of extinction. The Dene languages in the Northwest Territories are particularly strong, and some villages communicate primarily in Chipewyan, Dogrib, Slavey or Gwich'in. Six Aboriginal languages, along with English and French, are official languages of the Northwest Territories government. In British Columbia, the Dunne-za, Sekani and Kaska languages are endangered, though Carrier is in a stronger position. Modern school programs that teach Aboriginal languages are helping to ensure their survival, but globalizing forces such as television and the market economy tend to make English all-pervasive and to erode the use of Aboriginal languages.

The later history of the Dene was one of progressive loss of control over their own lives. In recent decades, however, the Dene have managed to reverse this trend. Unlike First Nations in southern Canada, which have lost most of their lands and traditional economy, the Dene still retain much of their heritage. Indeed, many envisage not just survival but an opportunity to flourish: they can follow a Dene lifestyle with the advantages of modern technology but without the traditional fears of winter starvation or the sudden appearance of enemy warriors.