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Saskatchewan River Rendezvous Centers and Trading Posts: Continuity in a Cree Social Geography

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Abstract. In both historic and precontact times the aboriginal peoples of the Saskatchewan River valley formed several regional bands. As witnessed by European traders and missionaries, the members of each band usually assembled once a year in the spring and sometimes also in the autumn. Known to the Europeans as the "rendezvous," the gatherings involved days or weeks of intense social interaction, focused mainly on a series of religious ceremonies. On the basis of archaeological and historical evidence, six such aggregating centers have been identified in the Saskatchewan River valley. The fur traders recognized the centers' importance; as a result, the majority of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century trading posts were built at these centers or, on occasion, between them, at the borders of regional bands. In the late 1800s reserves were established at several of the centers, and they continue to be prominent habitation sites even today.

Introduction

The valley of the Saskatchewan River (Figure 1) lies within the southern edge of the boreal forest. Because its resources and aboriginal residents were important to the western interior fur trade of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (e.g., Ray 1974: 61), abundant historical documentation exists on the indigenous peoples. Also, over the last three decades, in response to the construction of hydroelectric generating facilities,[1] considerable archaeological work has been conducted in the area, providing much information on the material culture and lifeways of late precontact times.

For the late precontact, protohistoric, and early historic periods this essay describes a model of six aboriginal aggregating centers along the length of the valley. The French and English knew the annual aggregation as the *rendezvous*, and the term is employed here in this sense.[2] We use ethnographic information on Northern Algonquians and hunter-gatherers

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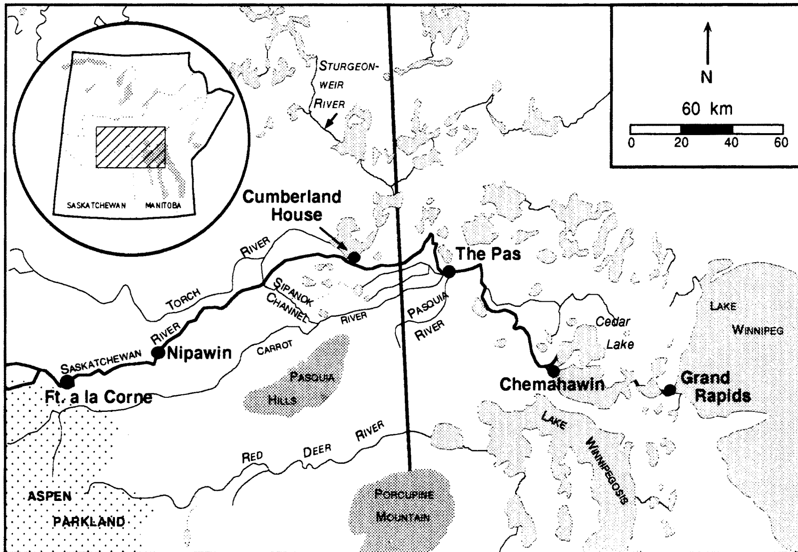

Figure 1. Map showing the Saskatchewan River, with some named places. Chemahawin was inundated by the creation of the Grand Rapids reservoir in the early 1960s.

elsewhere in the world, and archaeological as well as historical data from this region, to understand the characteristics and significance of these locations in the aboriginal settlement and subsistence patterns of the Saskatchewan River valley. Evidence to support the model of six centers comes from the positioning of trading posts, discussed in the context of three time periods: (1) ca. 1741–59, when French posts were operated in the valley; (2) 1767–1821, when various companies and individuals built competing posts; and (3) 1821–75, when the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) dominated the trade. We also examine aspects of the aboriginal social geography in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As described by Margaret Conkey, social geography reveals "the way in which people are distributed and the way in which they arrange and maintain their groupings and interrelationships within a region" (1984: 263).

When Henry Kelsey journeyed through the lower Saskatchewan River valley in 1690 and 1691, he found the residents to be Crees (Doughty and Martin 1929). The ethnic identity of the peoples of the upper Saskatchewan River valley is unknown; however, the protohistoric remains are Selkirk throughout the valley (except for the Grand Rapids region), suggesting that they were the product of one cultural group. The lack of

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protohistoric plains components (Meyer 1993: 63–68) in the upper valley indicates that the region was not the home territory of any plains group. Therefore, since it has been argued that the Selkirk material culture was the product of the direct ancestors of the Crees (e.g., Meyer 1987), it is likely that the Crees occupied the whole valley at the time of contact in the late 1600s.[3] Certainly, the aboriginal occupants of the valley later in the eighteenth century were Crees. Following the smallpox epidemic of 1781–82, many Crees from the east and north moved into the valley, along with some Ojibwa (Saulteaux) from southern Manitoba (Ray 1974: 102; Pettipas 1980). However, Cree culture, especially the language, remained dominant.

Physiographic Overview

Situated completely within the boreal forest biome, the Saskatchewan River valley extends some 470 kilometers, stretching west from Grand Rapids on Lake Winnipeg to the confluence of the north and south branches of the Saskatchewan River. The section from the confluence downstream to the head of the Sipanok Channel encompasses the westerly 160 kilometers of the valley. This portion, within the Saskatchewan River lowlands "landscape unit," is characterized by "level or gently undulating plains" (Richards 1969: 41). The uppermost part is only a few kilometers north of the aspen parklands (Figure 1).

The easterly 310 kilometers, to within 35 kilometers of Grand Rapids, flows through the Saskatchewan River delta, part of the Manitoba lowlands region (ibid.), which consists of marshes, lakes, and distributaries (Harper 1975). With a few exceptions, the only higher land within the delta consists of the levees that border active and abandoned stream channels. An important land form, The Pas Moraine, trends northwest to southeast through the delta's eastern half.

Aggregations and Northern Algonquians

No direct information on the late precontact/protohistoric peoples of the Saskatchewan River valley exists, but we accept that they were transhumant hunter-gatherers. This is reasonable since in this part of interior North America Europeans first encountered societies of such hunter-gatherers. Given the critical tenor of some recent social-anthropological literature on hunter-gatherers (e.g., Testart 1988), any generalizing comments must be made with caution; however, transhumant hunter-gatherers, wherever they are in the world, move with the seasons (Kelly 1983, 1992).

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Recently, Lieberman has referred to this characteristic as circulating mobility, "frequent residential moves from one seasonal camp to another in a circular annual movement" (1993: 600). This mobility also involves an ongoing pattern of aggregation and dispersion of social units (Gamble 1986: 32). In some seasons, hunter-gatherers may live in very small groups of only a few families; in others, there may be aggregations of the whole social grouping (cf. Lee and DeVore 1968: 12).

Hunter-gatherers throughout the world congregate at least once a year (e.g., ibid.). As Hayden has noted, the gatherings have been variously referred to as "'aggregation phases' of bands, or fandangos, or corroborees, or any of a host of other local names" (1993: 164). Such face-to-face gatherings are clearly necessary to maintain the social, political, and spiritual life of the local group (Rodseth et al. 1991: 134–35). Marriages are arranged, disputes are settled (perhaps simply by joining a different group for the ensuing year), and religious ceremonies are held (for an overview see Hayden 1993: 163–64). These aggregations are not simple gatherings of large numbers of people; rather, they are complex events with social, spiritual, political, and economic aspects and functions (but see Conkey 1985: 303, 315). They are the means by which a sense of community, of cultural oneness, is maintained.[4]

Detailed ethnographic studies of Northern Algonquian social and political organization, first available beginning in the late 1800s and early 1900s, were conducted among the aboriginal peoples of northern Quebec and Ontario. Information for northern Manitoba and Saskatchewan is more limited. The subsistence economies were characterized by two main adaptive patterns (Morantz 1986: 81–82). The first, hunting the migratory herds of woodland caribou, was followed by the peoples of northern Quebec and Labrador, as well as those of northwestern Ontario and adjacent northeastern Manitoba. The other involved a more generalized subsistence economy and associated settlement pattern, which was based on the resources of more southerly parts of the boreal forest (ibid.: 68). The latter pattern was followed by the Algonquians of the Saskatchewan River valley.

Northern Algonquian aggregations have not been the subject of detailed study. Difficulty in distinguishing between aboriginal and postcontact patterns is a consistent theme running through Northern Algonquian research for much of this century. Although Northern Algonquians did aggregate periodically, as known through historical and anthropological documentation, the gatherings were overwhelmingly at fur-trade posts; therefore, it is not clear whether these aggregations continued a precontact pattern or were a historical development. However, since periodic ag-

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gregations characterize hunter-gatherer societies elsewhere, they may also have been a feature of precontact Northern Algonquian societies. Because these peoples lived in small and isolated groups through long winters, annual aggregations of the whole social group would have been extremely important, and there is evidence that some postcontact aggregations did occur outside the context of fur-trade posts.

Before considering aggregations in greater detail, however, it is necessary to determine which Northern Algonquian social units were important for these gatherings. In an analysis of some of the earliest (seventeenth-century) historical information on social groupings among Northern Algonquians, the "Montagnais-Naskapi" of Quebec and Labrador, Eleanor Leacock (1969: 10–11) identified the band as a named group that ranged from one hundred fifty to three hundred persons. Known as "tribes" or "nations" to the Jesuit missionaries (ibid.: 10), the bands were composed of smaller social units, whose members lived in relative isolation through the winter. Edward Rogers's ideas regarding Northern Algonquian social units and seasonal movements were based not only on the peoples of Quebec and Labrador but also on the Crees and Ojibwas of northern Ontario. According to the results of his own historical and ethnographic studies, and earlier ethnographic research, Rogers (1969b: 30–31) divided early contact Northern Algonquian social organization into two significant units, the "band" and the "hunting group." The latter, a multifamily group of fifteen to thirty individuals, "was the paramount economic, social and political unit by default since for nine to ten months of the year it was the largest residence unit (Rogers 1965: 266). (For more recent discussions of the hunting group see Morantz 1986 and Feit 1991.)

Rogers defined the band as "composed of a number of hunting groups" (1969b: 31): "A loosely structured unit with a patrilineal bias, comprising seventy-five to a hundred and twenty-five people, inhabiting a drainage basin alone or in conjunction with other such groups" (1969a: 46). Rogers expanded this definition as follows:

> The band was under the guidance and "jurisdiction" of a so-called "leader." . . . He had religious power, perhaps more than any other male within the group, which helped him maintain his position.
> Band size throughout the Eastern Subarctic among the Cree and Ojibwa was roughly constant. It ranged from a minimum of approximately 50 to 75 to a maximum of 125 to 150 individuals. It appears that it was somewhat larger along the southern margins of the area. (1969b: 31)

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In particular, Rogers noted that in the southern boreal forest "group size seems to have been slightly larger, varying from perhaps a hundred people to several hundred" (1969a: 42). He also observed that bands among the northern Algonquians were typically named (ibid.: 38). In addition, there is some evidence of a sense of territoriality on the part of band members (ibid.: 41).

Evidently, the band of Leacock and Rogers is equivalent to that social unit variously known as the band cluster (Weissner 1983: 255), the nexus (Heinz 1979), or the regional band (Helm 1968: 119–21) (for an overview see Ingold 1980: 264–68). June Helm's term *regional band*, defined for the Dogribs, will be used here, since the term *band* without modifier can have many connotations (see also Morantz 1983: 99–104).

With the coming of spring, Leacock noted that the smaller wintering units assembled to form the whole regional band and, repeatedly in the spring, that the Jesuits met or took part in gatherings of one hundred fifty to three hundred persons:

> The 1681 record refers to the very short periods during which the scattered "tribes" assembled in greater numbers. The Mistassini are mentioned gathering, but only for three weeks, at Lake Kenogami, which is located further down the Saguenay than Lake St. John "after which they separate into small bands, for fear that, by keeping together in too great numbers, they may suffer from hunger." (1969: 11)

In this early period, therefore, the regional band assembled in the spring for a few weeks. Similarly, Rogers saw the members of each regional band as "uniting during the summer on the shore of a lake within the territory and dispersing for winter in groups to hunting areas" (1969a: 46).

As Leacock and Rogers have noted, among Northern Algonquians the members of the regional band congregated at least once a year, in the spring and/or summer, at some location within their territory where food resources were seasonally abundant. A regional band might have maintained only one rendezvous location or, perhaps, there were some alternative locations. Although some gatherings may have involved only the members of a given regional band, in other cases multiple regional bands may have met. This possibility seems to have been described in some of the Jesuit accounts (Leacock 1969: 11)[5] and, of course, could only occur when and where the food resources were abundant.

The gatherings may have represented the maintenance of an aboriginal pattern rather than a reaction to the activities of fur traders and missionaries. Indeed, referring to spring gatherings in 1652, Leacock wrote:

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"Although in this case the situation was somewhat influenced by the presence of a priest, it was doubtless similar to the older patterns" (ibid.). Over the past decade there has been a reassessment of the influence of European contact on the social and economic organization of the Northern Algonquians. For some regions, there is growing recognition of general continuity in Northern Algonquian social and economic patterns from precontact into contact times (e.g., Morantz 1984: 72; 1986: 81–82).

The Jesuit missionaries also described much larger gatherings of twelve to fifteen hundred persons at such fur-trade posts as Tadoussac (Leacock 1969: 11; Dickason 1992: 103–6). Gatherings of this size may not have been a precontact phenomenon; however, similar assemblages have been observed in many hunter-gatherer societies (Jackson 1991). This larger gathering, referred to as the "trade fair" (Burch 1970, 1984), involved the members of different societies. The main purpose was barter, the exchange of goods. These amalgamations of people, as among the Alaskan Inuit, could involve as many as two thousand individuals (Hickey 1979: 416). Such trade fairs have also been recognized in Australia (e.g., Lourandos 1985; McCarthy 1939) and in the western United States (Wood 1980).

The Archaeology of Aggregating Centers

It is very likely, therefore, that the seasonal aggregations of Northern Algonquians, as known historically, were maintained from precontact times. Such aggregations depend upon a seasonally productive food source, and they must also be convenient in terms of travel distances within the territory of a given regional band. Thus, only a few locations would be suitable for staging these aggregations and would be used repeatedly. The question then becomes how to recognize the aggregating centers archaeologically.

Some of the literature on the archaeology of hunter-gatherer aggregating centers relates to the European Upper Palaeolithic. Drawing on the results of ethnoarchaeological studies, Margaret Conkey (1980: 612) has proposed that an aggregating site should differ in certain ways from other sites in a region. It should be very large, simply because of the many people who take part in the aggregation; however, there may be other large sites that are simply the result of repeated occupation by small social units. An aggregating site should also be located where a productive food source would have been seasonally available. Therefore, the site materials should reveal occupation during the season when the food source was most abundant. There should be more different classes of artifacts, because a greater total range of activities occurs, since many individuals are present. There

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should also be a greater variety of features, a result of the larger camp size and the need for more arrangement or structuring of the space and more maintenance of the site (ibid.). However, when we turn to style, Conkey has observed that the decoration of material items in a given aggregating site should be standardized "in concept and in execution" (1985: 315).

Conkey (1980) has argued, based on an analysis of art styles in Upper Palaeolithic assemblages throughout contiguous France and Spain, that the site of Altamira in northern Spain was an aggregating location for a local social unit. Paul Bahn has also considered this topic, noting that Upper Palaeolithic "supersites" tend to be "spaced at intervals of around 50 km at the points where major rivers emerge from the uplands" (1982: 263). These sites are unusually large and contain numerous pieces of portable art. Indeed, individual sites may contain up to 30 percent of all the portable art found in sites in a given region. Randall White (1980) has gone even further. According to Conkey (1985: 314), he notes that "of the 86 known Magdalenian sites, 4 account for 80% of the portable art." He also notes that all are unusually large sites. Conkey has hypothesized that the emphasis on portable art at Upper Palaeolithic aggregating sites relates to its role as an integral part of the ritual that is so prominent at these gatherings, that "constitutes the social order in an aggregation context" (ibid.: 315).

Thus, aggregating sites can be expected to be large and positioned at seasonally productive food sources. They should have many different kinds of features (such as hearths) and many classes of artifacts. The styles of the artifacts, particularly of art forms, should be uniform. There may well be evidence of the religious ceremonies that dominate these gatherings, as known ethnographically.

Aggregating Centers in the Saskatchewan River Valley

Aggregating Centers in the Late Woodland Period

In discussing the evidence for late precontact/protohistoric aggregating centers in the Saskatchewan River valley, we will concentrate on the final precontact (Late Woodland) archaeological cultures of this region, the Selkirk (Meyer and Russell 1987) and Rainy River (Lenius and Olinyk 1990) composites. Selkirk remains predominate throughout the Saskatchewan River valley, with the exception of the Grand Rapids region, where Rainy River materials dominate.

Found in the boreal forests of northwestern Ontario and northern Manitoba and Saskatchewan, sites of Selkirk material culture are characterized by the presence of pottery, small side-notched arrowheads, and

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various other stone tools, including celt blades with carefully ground cutting bits (Hlady 1971: 22–25). The exteriors of the pottery vessels bear a smoothed fabric-impression; the decoration is simple, a line of punctates around the neck and, on occasion, cord-wrapped tool or other impressions on the lip. There is a well-developed group of bone and antler tools, with impressive unilaterally and bilaterally barbed harpoon points (e.g., Meyer 1981: 20).

The stone and bone tools of the Rainy River composite differ little from those of Selkirk; however, the pottery varies significantly. Vessels often are elaborately decorated with chevron patterns applied with cord-wrapped tools or with stamps of various shapes (Lenius and Olinyk 1990). This composite is found from the Boundary Waters region of northern Minnesota northwest to the lower Saskatchewan River valley.

Selkirk materials have been radiocarbon-dated at The Pas while, at Nipawin, both radiocarbon and thermoluminescence dates have been obtained. These dates fall in the period ca. A.D. 1350–1700 (Meyer and Russell 1987: 12, 17). One Nipawin site, Bushfield West, yielded two tiny pieces of metal, one iron and the other brass or copper, evidence of protohistoric Selkirk occupation of this area. There is also evidence that some Selkirk-style materials continued to be produced well into the fur-trade era. For instance, David Meyer has examined materials from graves disturbed during gravel quarrying in the vicinity of Old Cumberland House (1774–94). They include European trade goods such as tinkling cones, along with Selkirk items such as a ground stone celt and a distinctive elk antler tool. In short, Selkirk material culture in the Saskatchewan River valley is present by at least A.D. 1400, and elements of it were maintained well into the fur-trade period. The Rainy River composite was largely contemporaneous with Selkirk (Lenius and Olinyk 1990: 80), and, in general, the distributions of these two composites are mutually exclusive.

In the past twenty-five years several locations have been identified in the Saskatchewan River valley that have Late Woodland archaeological deposits fitting the expectation of an aggregating center. Perhaps the best known is a concentration of sites a few kilometers south of the town of Nipawin (Figure 2). The focus of this location is a series of clifftop sand deposits that line the valley rim for about a kilometer on the southeast side of the river. They rise about sixty meters above the (now inundated) river. The occupational history of this area is especially well understood, since it was subjected to a good deal of archaeological research prior to the construction of the Nipawin hydroelectric dam and the filling of the associated reservoir in late 1985. Large Selkirk sites were present on the valley bottom here (Meyer 1984; Meyer and Russell 1987: 17), the most

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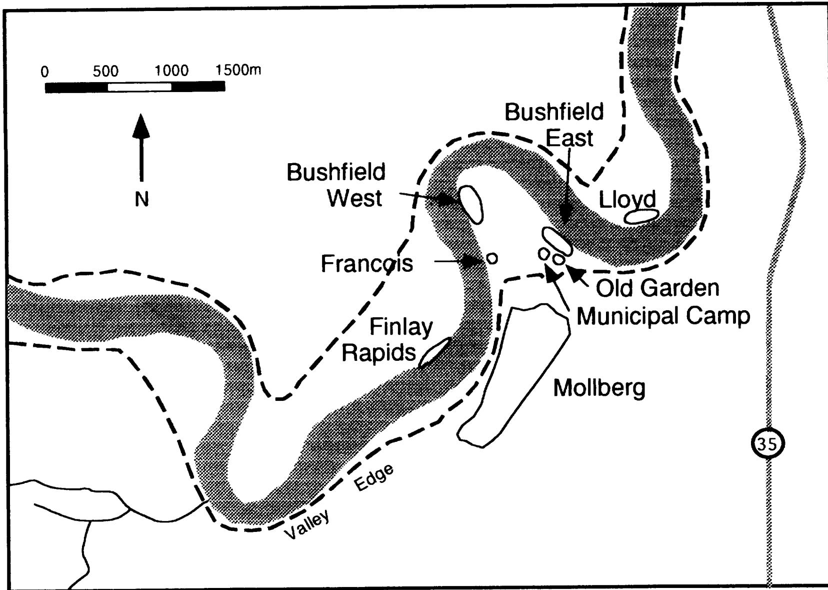

Figure 2. Selkirk sites at an aggregating center a few kilometers south of the town of Nipawin.

impressive of which were the Lloyd (Quigg 1983), Bushfield East (Burley et al. 1982: 55–62), and Bushfield West sites (ibid.: 235–89) (Figure 2). On the valley rim above, there is also extensive Selkirk occupation at the Mollberg site (FhNa-1). The extensive excavations at the Lloyd, Bushfield West, and Bushfield East sites produced evidence of large, dense occupations with numerous features (hearths, rock-filled pits). Many rare classes of lithic and bone/antler tools were present, including drill bits, worked steatite, fish gorges, and barbed harpoon points. Pottery was well represented. For example, the sample recovered from the Bushfield West site represented at least one hundred vessels. The good faunal preservation in the valley bottom sites has provided strong evidence (including egg shells) of spring/early summer occupations. Fish, beaver, and waterfowl remains are abundant. One site, Municipal Camp, yielded an elaborately incised and painted vessel that almost certainly functioned in a ritual context. In this regard, some of the rock-filled pits at these sites very likely were positioned within sweat lodges.

Employing Conkey's (1980: 612) criteria, therefore, these large Selkirk sites may reasonably be interpreted as those of a congregating center. Selkirk sites elsewhere in the valley in the Nipawin region were not numer-

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ous, and those that were investigated were relatively small with few features and fewer artifact classes. These sites typically produced sherds of only one or two pottery vessels. Although this Nipawin center is an attractive camping area, it is not certain what other features may have led to its importance as a "central place." It may simply have been a convenient central location to the hunting groups of this region.

At The Pas, Manitoba (Figure 1) the archaeological remains are extensive. Early collections, made by avocational archaeologists, revealed the presence of large-scale Selkirk occupations (Hlady 1971: 36; Mayer-Oakes 1970: 29–32). Dr. Morgan Tamplin (1977) has conducted important archaeological work at the stratified Pas Reserve site (FlMh-2) on the north bank of the Saskatchewan River. Here, Tamplin encountered, in his uppermost levels, a substantial Selkirk occupation, which contained much pottery and a number of features (ibid.: 135–36). Occupation of the Selkirk component at The Pas Reserve site began early in the spring, as evidenced by the substantial presence of burbot, the earliest spring spawner (ibid.: 154, 171). On the opposite side of the river, at the mouth of the Pasquia River, and also a short distance upstream at the mouth of the Carrot River, Tamplin tested other Selkirk occupations. Although the database is not as large as that for Nipawin, The Pas also appears to have been a precontact aggregating area.

The Pas is important for several reasons. The Pas Moraine is cut by the river here, resulting in well-elevated habitation areas on both sides of the river. Also, the Carrot River debouches here, as does the small Pasquia River. The central location of The Pas within the delta may also have been important, along with the fact that the moraine provided a travel route both to the north and the south.

A large amount of archaeological work has also been conducted at Grand Rapids, a massive set of rapids about four kilometers above the Saskatchewan River's mouth on Lake Winnipeg (Figure 1). Prior to the construction of a major hydroelectric installation here, William J. Mayer-Oakes (1970: 3) conducted an extensive survey in 1961 and one large-scale excavation in 1962. Numerous sites near Grand Rapids and upriver at Cross Lake produced pottery that we would now identify as Rainy River (e.g., the Harbour Bay site and Sites GRS-1 and GRS-34 [ibid.: 11–14]). Mayer-Oakes (ibid.: 374, 372) noted that Selkirk was uncommon below Cedar Lake, and we might note that some materials (N.B., Sturgeon Punctate pottery) that he considered to be Selkirk in the Grand Rapids sites would now be assigned to the Rainy River composite.

The major excavation was conducted at the massive Tailrace Bay site, on the north side of the river, 1.2 kilometers below Grand Rapids. The late

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prehistoric deposits were dominated by Laurel and Blackduck materials; however, a small amount of Rainy River pottery was present (Mayer-Oakes 1970: 197). The excavations at this site encountered few features, making its identification as a congregating site debatable. However, the sites in this area are large with much pottery, as at Nipawin and The Pas. Therefore, we have tentatively accepted Grand Rapids as a congregating center. Grand Rapids would have been (and was historically) an attractive gathering center simply because of the enormous numbers of fish (especially sturgeon) that concentrated below the rapids in the spring (e.g., King 1847: 49–50; McLean 1968: 133).

A fourth likely aggregating center is the Ft. a la Corne area, eighty kilometers upstream from Nipawin (Figure 1). Here, high sandy valley rims overlook a wide, deep valley through which the Saskatchewan River meanders, forming several broad river flats. Some archaeological survey and site assessment was conducted at Ft. a la Corne in the summer of 1985 (Meyer and Klimko 1986). One large Selkirk site (FgNe-11) was encountered and tested, and it is likely that more extensive work would identify others. Why this should have been an aggregating center is not clear. However, when traveling up the Saskatchewan River, it is the first place close to the aspen parklands and bison herds (Figure 1). As such, it would have been a location for plains bison hunters to meet with woodland peoples. It seems to have been the most westerly gathering center in the Saskatchewan River valley.

It is worth noting that at all these aggregating centers the Late Woodland occupation is embedded in an extensive complex of older sites. Particularly well represented are components of the Middle Period, ca. 3000–6000 B.P. It is conceivable, therefore, that these congregating centers are of great antiquity.

Early Historic Evidence for Congregating Centers

Additional early historic evidence exists for the presence of a fifth congregating center. In 1739 La Vérendrye sent his son, the Chevalier, to examine the lower reaches of the Saskatchewan River valley (Champagne 1971: 32). A memorandum on one early French map provides the following account of the Chevalier's trip: "It was the Chevalier de la Vérendrye who first discovered it [Saskatchewan River], and who ascended it as far as the fork, which is the rendezvous every spring of the Cree of the Mountains, Prairies and Rivers, to deliberate as to what they shall do—go and trade with the French or with the English. It was there that he was in the spring at the meeting of all the Cree" (Burpee 1927: 25). According to the cogent reasoning of Champagne (1971: 41–42), this rendezvous must have been

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located near the first major "fork" in the Saskatchewan River, where the main course and the Summerberry River join in the delta just above Cedar Lake, at the beginning of the important Moose Lake–Minago River route to Hudson Bay.

The Chevalier's account is supported by the experiences of Joseph La France three years later. In the spring of 1742 La France took part in an aggregation at Cedar Lake—perhaps at the same location as that described by the Chevalier. La France knew Cedar Lake as Pachegoia, "where all the Indians assemblage in the latter End of March every Year to cut the Birch Trees and make their Canoes of the bark" (Dobbs 1744: 37).

We interpret these observations, therefore, to indicate the presence of a rendezvous center at, or just upstream of, Cedar Lake (Figure 1). The Cedar Lake congregating center was topographically notable only in that some areas and islands of slightly higher land were present. Surrounding it were the extensive marshes and levees of the delta lands. Unfortunately, this location was not subjected to detailed archaeological study before the water level was raised following the completion of the Grand Rapids hydroelectric dam in the early 1960s. Most of the area has been inundated.

With the addition of Cedar Lake, we can identify five aboriginal congregating centers in the Saskatchewan River valley. Each emerges into history as a named location: Grand Rapids is known as *misīpāwistik*, "a large rapid" (Watkins et al. 1938: 327); the important occupation area at the entrance to Cedar Lake is known as *cīmawāwin*, "a seining place" (ibid.: 252); The Pas is known as *opāskweyāw*, "narrows between woods" (ibid.: 388); the Nipawin site complex as *nīpowīwinihk*, "a standing place" (ibid.: 358); and the Ft. a la Corne area as *pehonān*, "the waiting place"[6] (ibid.: 409) (Figure 3). It is apparent, therefore, that the traders regularly referred to the aggregating centers by their Cree names and that those place-names (apart from river, lake, and portage names) that do appear in the fur-trade and missionary documents refer to very special places—the most significant locations of the time period. In short, when a given location is named in the historical accounts, it is strong evidence that it was an aggregating center.

Given the place-name evidence, it is possible that there was a sixth congregating center. About one hundred kilometers downstream from Nipowiwinihk was a location named *paskwatinow*, "bare/bald hill" (Figure 3). Matthew Cocking referred to Paskwatinow in 1772 and 1777 (Meyer et al. 1992: 205); William Tomison named it as his camping place on 24 September 1774 (Rich and Johnson 1952: 66); and Peter Fidler discussed it in 1792 (Meyer et al. 1992: 205). Also, Alexander Henry the Younger described it in 1808 (Coues 1965 [1897], 2:478; Gough 1992, 2:

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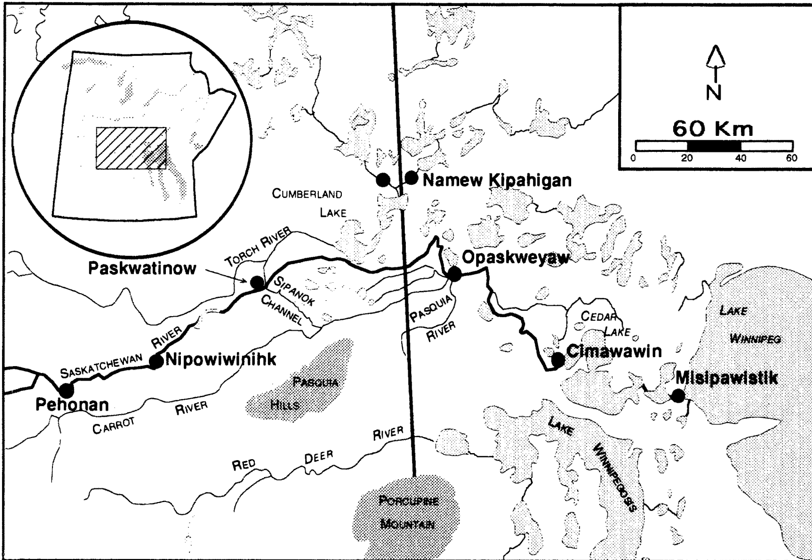

Figure 3. Named aggregating centers in the Saskatchewan River valley.

346), and it appears on John Franklin's (1970 [1823]) end map as "Pasquatinow." Paskwatinow is a well-elevated sandy valley rim on the north side of the Saskatchewan River, opposite the head of the Sipanok Channel. Rising some twenty-three meters above the river, it is the first "high" land on the west side of the delta, lying at the point of transition between the western edge of the Saskatchewan River delta and the higher terrain to the west. Like Opaskweyaw and Cimawawin, it was at the intersection of two routes, one east-west along the Saskatchewan and the other extending from the Torch River on the north and then south along the Sipanok Channel and Kennedy Creek (Meyer et al. 1992: 219–20).

An archaeological inspection conducted at Paskwatinow (ibid.) has shown that a large archaeological site is present, extending for at least a kilometer along the valley top. The evidence is insufficient to definitely identify the archaeological cultures present, although a potsherd and a ground stone celt blade have been recovered—and a broken steel file. At several places along the exposed valley rim, concentrations of fire-cracked rock and ash are eroding out, evidence of former hearths. Indeed, clusters of fire-cracked rock are visible even on the forest floor here (ibid.: 215–17). In short, features abound at this site, as would be expected of an aggregating center (Conkey 1980: 612).

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Therefore, for Late Woodland and early historic times in the Saskatchewan River valley, we are proposing a model that, as one aspect of its social geography, incorporates six named congregating centers. Admittedly, some parts of this model have extrapolated aspects of archaeological and historical interpretation from only one or two centers to the others. However, in our view the validity of this model is supported by the choices that the fur traders made for the locations of their posts.

Aggregating Centers and Fur-Trade Posts in the French Period, 1741–1759

The Positioning of Fur-Trade Posts

Although Henry Kelsey, an employee of the HBC, traveled through the lower Saskatchewan River valley as early as 1690 (Doughty and Martin 1929), and several other Englishmen and coureur de bois were guided through this region in subsequent decades, the first trading posts were established by the French, who were operating from Quebec. The French trade, initially under the command of Pierre Gaultier de la Vérendrye, was begun at the (repeated) request of the Crees of the lower Saskatchewan River valley. In this regard, on 4 March 1737, La Vérendrye wrote that "a Cree chief rose and asked me to keep my word and to take measures for establishing a fort at the [north] end of Lake Winnipeg, at the entrance to the great English river, saying that at that place there was abundance of game and fish" (Burpee 1927: 250). So it was that the first French post was built at the mouth of the Saskatchewan River, below Grand Rapids. Named Ft. Bourbon, it was constructed in 1741 (Champagne 1971: 31–35), but it is unclear how many years it remained in operation.

This family-based trading operation then began to expand up the valley, and in 1743 Ft. Paskoya 1 was built at the west end of Cedar Lake (ibid.: 44–45), evidently at or near the congregating center there. This post seems to have been maintained for only a year or two, and Champagne (ibid.: 47–48) has argued that Ft. Bourbon 2, which was operated here, about 1750–59, was a different establishment.

Upstream at Opaskweyaw, the French may have begun trading in the early to mid-1740s, but it was not until the early 1750s that they built a post, Ft. Paskoya 2, which was maintained until 1759 (ibid.: 52–53). Anthony Henday visited here in 1754 on his way inland and again in 1755 on his return (Burpee 1907: 325–26, 352–53). It may have been the remains of this post that Samuel Hearne visited on 19 August 1774: "Then came to Basquiau which is entirely bare from all kind of woods. where the house

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formally [*sic*] stood is all over with willows &c and not the least bit of the Building standing or Remaining except Part of the Fire Place" (Tyrrell 1934: 109–10).

Moving up the Saskatchewan, the next French post appears to have been positioned about forty-five kilometers downstream from Nipowiwinihk. Cocking observed a post here in 1772, writing, "in the afternoon passed by an old Trading house, belonging to the French pedlars before the conquest of Quebec" (Burpee 1908: 101). Champagne (1971: 50–51) has argued that this post was at or near a location known as Pemmican Point, and he has also proposed that it was the somewhat mysterious Ft. La Jonquière, which was built in 1751 and operated for an unknown period. He has also hinted at possible French activity at Nipowiwinihk (ibid.: 50). Upstream, at Pehonan, the French built a post in 1753 or 1754. Ft. des Prairies was visited by Anthony Henday in May 1755 (Burpee 1907: 352) and only operated until 1757 (Champagne 1971: 54–57, 225–29). Several eighteenth- and nineteenth-century observers noted that this was the most westerly of the French posts (Smythe 1968: 185).

In summary, in extending their trade into the Saskatchewan River valley, the French appear to have been attracted immediately to the most easterly Cree aggregating centers, Misipawistik and Cimawawin. However, it seems that there was lack of resolve whether the trade was sufficient to maintain posts at both centers, and their operation was discontinuous. Opaskweyaw was quickly identified as an appropriate location for a trading establishment, followed by Pehonan. Of the six aggregating centers, French posts were built at four; evidently, the traders were acutely aware of these places and their importance to the Crees. On the other hand, one post (Ft. La Jonquière?) was built about halfway between two of the centers, Paskwatinow and Nipowiwinihk.

The Nature of the Aggregating Centers, 1741–1759

The French documents, along with information from La France, indicate that the early historic Cree gatherings occurred in the spring and that important political and economic decisions were made at these congregations. This seasonality conforms to that evidenced by faunal remains from the Selkirk sites at Opaskweyaw and Nipowiwinihk. The French accounts also provide information that there were important technologically oriented activities taking place at these congregations. Certainly, La France noted the importance of canoe building at his rendezvous site: "They begun [*sic*] to make their Canoes the first of April N.S. which they finished in three Days; on the 4th, he being appointed one of their Leaders, set out with 100 Canoes in Company, for the Factory at York Fort" (Dobbs

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1744: 37). In any case, the early French accounts do provide some indication of the nature and rationale (in European eyes) for the congregations, although the lack of reference to religious ceremonies is surprising.

Rendezvous Centers and the Fur Trade in the Competitive Period, 1768–1821

The Positioning of Fur-Trade Posts

With the abandonment of the French trade after the fall of Quebec in 1759, some years passed before trading posts were again established. Two partners, James Finlay and Francois LeBlanc, initiated this process. LeBlanc had been employed in the trade here during the French regime (Champagne 1968: 454), and in 1768 he built a post at Nipowiwinihk (Morton 1944). Visited and described by Matthew Cocking in 1772 (Burpee 1908: 118), this post operated until 1773 (Morton 1944). Following this, through 1821, numerous posts were built and operated at Nipowiwinihk (ibid.). Those that we know of include Thorburn's House, a Northwest Company (NWC) post in operation from 1789 to 1791 (Klimko 1982: 143). Subsequently, a trading house was built here in 1793 by independent traders, the Grant brothers. An NWC post, Ft. Neepoin, was built beside the latter; both operated until 1795 (ibid.: 143–44; Klimko 1987). In the winter of 1794–95 there was even one other independent trading house here, operated by a Monsieur Pichet (McGillivray 1929: 19–20). Malchom Ross of the HBC occupied a tent here in January and February 1794 to compete for the trade (Morton 1944: 132), and the following winter James Bird built "Neippoiwin" House. The latter seems to have lasted only for the trading season of 1794–95 (ibid.: 133–34); however, in 1816 Bird described an outpost of Cumberland House that was operated at Nipowiwinihk (Klimko 1982: 147). At Nipowiwinihk there is also evidence of aboriginal occupation during this fur-trade period. This is best represented by the central part of the Mollberg site (FhNa-1) (Meyer 1977: 47–48) (Figure 2). Here, white clay pipe fragments, glass beads, etc., are scattered across the surface of a field.

During this period of intense rivalry, a plethora of posts was operated at Pehonan. Three independent traders may have built trading houses here in 1775 (Morton 1943: 138). More certain is an NWC post, Ft. St. Louis, which was active from 1795 to 1805 (Klimko 1982: 134). This operation was opposed by Carlton House of the HBC (1795 to ca. 1801) and, in the late 1790s, by posts built by the XY Company and one or more independent traders (Klimko 1982: 134). Following this, there was a hiatus until 1816,

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when both the NWC and the HBC built outposts here: the NWC post, Ft. Batoche, operated for only a single season; the HBC post for an unknown period (ibid.: 135–36).

Downstream, at Opaskweyaw, French traders were present by 1767 (Rich 1960: 17), and in 1769 James Finlay engaged William Bruce and "Fife French men" to operate a trading house here (Morton 1944: 121). This post was open at least until 1772 (MacPherson 1972: 38) and is probably the one noted by Samuel Hearne on 19 August 1774, on the north side of the river across from the mouth of Pasquia River: "Close by where we lay ware [*sic*] an Old Canadian House laying in Ruins" (Tyrrell 1934: 111). Events in the following years are not clear, but in 1778 there was an NWC post in operation here, under the management of John Ross (Rich and Johnson 1951: 211).

At Cedar Lake Thomas Curry, an independent trader, built a post in 1770 (Burpee 1908: 99). The success of this post prompted the HBC to establish inland (Cumberland House) (Rich and Johnson 1951: xxi). It appears to have operated until 1820. Downstream, at Misipawistik, a post was established, also by Thomas Curry, for a Montreal firm (Rich 1960: 61). This post became an important center for the NWC, and it was taken over by the HBC in 1821 (MacPherson 1972: 33).

During the early part of this period, therefore, the traders from Quebec returned to the Saskatchewan River valley and within a few years had made significant inroads into the HBC trade. Because of the stiff competition, the HBC eventually established posts here as well. The first was Cumberland House, begun in the autumn of 1774 under the direction of Samuel Hearne (Tyrrell 1934). Until 1794, this post operated here; however, it was then moved about two kilometers to the northwest, where it has remained permanently. The NWC had built a post at this same location in 1793 (Morton 1973 [1939]: 451). This NWC post remained in operation here until the 1821 amalgamation.

As in the French period, therefore, the posts during this period of intense trading rivalry were concentrated at those locations that we have proposed as aggregating centers. However, it is significant that Cumberland House and a few other posts active at this time were not at aggregating centers. One was Ft. Maranquin (Mosquito), 1816–17, situated 1.5 kilometers below the forks (Wilson 1982: 774). Another was Ft. aux Trembles, located about halfway between Nipowiwinihk and Pehonan (Morton 1943). Built by independent traders, it was in business from 1773 to 1777. Also, in 1791 William Thorburn built an NWC post at the mouth of the Petaigan River, about twenty-eight kilometers upstream from Paskwatinow (Klimko 1982:

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131–32). To compete, the HBC established an adjacent trading house in 1792, the last season these posts were in operation (Morton 1973 [1939]: 462).

The Nature of the Rendezvous, 1768–1821

The historical data available for this period are dominated by the writings of HBC employees. Significantly, these English accounts recognize by name several Cree sociopolitical units in western interior Canada. One prominently mentioned group is the "Basquia Indians"—those people who maintained a rendezvous at Opaskweyaw.

A major disaster occurred in the Saskatchewan River valley in the winter of 1781–82, when smallpox spread through most of the resident population. Its progress is well recorded by the clerk at Cumberland House, William Tomison, who believed at one point that all the Opaskweyaw people had died (Rich and Johnson 1952: 238). Although this was not quite the case, the epidemic did disrupt the existing social units and evidently led to both demographic and cultural change in the valley. After this time the "Basquia Indians" no longer existed as a discrete social unit, at least in the lexicon of the HBC. Indeed, many who survived the epidemic seem to have left, since in subsequent years these people are sometimes noted farther west, in the North Saskatchewan River region.

During this time period, there is surprisingly little direct information on the congregating centers, although the importance of Opaskweyaw as a rendezvous center is reflected in Matthew Cocking's observations of 31 July 1772: "Proceeded & came to Basquia. Here at a small river where the Natives killed Guinaids with hand nets: Many Natives had been here lately: This is a long frequented place where the Canadians rendezvous & trade with the Natives: Many of their Superstitious & Fanciful marks are seen here" (Burpee 1908: 99). Cocking also alludes to evidence of the religious ceremonies, which were such an important component of the spring gatherings. Two years later, he still identified Opaskweyaw as a congregating center, in a letter to Samuel Hearne in August 1774: "Basquis [The Pas] in their opinion would be [a] Better Place Being a great place of rendevous [*sic*] of the Natives in the Summer, and where they are more likely some of them to stay [during the winter] and provide for you than where you are [Cumberland House]" (Ray 1974: 45). This quote shows that people gathered at Opaskweyaw in the summer. Although some families could be found at the rendezvous centers throughout the open water season, the rendezvous proper was predominantly a spring phenomenon. In any case, Cocking, writing at Cumberland House on 13 May 1777, noted

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occupation of Paskwatinow during the latter season: "Two Indians arrived having left their Canoe in Saskachiwan [*sic*] River, brought little or nothing with them: They tell me that they came from the Place called Pusquatinow (i.e.) high bare ground" (Rich and Johnson 1951: 146). It would appear that these individuals had camped at Paskwatinow, perhaps attending a spring rendezvous there.

There is also information indicating that stored foodstuffs were brought to the spring rendezvous. For instance, on 13 May 1778 William Tomison, the HBC clerk at Cumberland House, wrote: "In the Evening an Indian Man and his Wife arrived from the Southd [*sic*]. . . . He says the Indians are all in a starving condition, having traded what Provisions they had procured for Canoe building with the Canadians at U'Bas,que,ah Hill" (Rich and Johnson 1951: 232). This passage confirms the importance of canoe building at these spring gatherings. Canoes, of course, were vital to the essentially aquatic lifeway of these Crees during the summer, but their prominent mention by the HBC traders relates to the fact that these craft were crucial for transporting the traders and their goods back to York Factory on Hudson Bay.

That the smallpox epidemic of 1781–82 affected the use of the congregating centers is indicated by Alexander Henry the Younger, who, on 24 August 1808, described Opaskweyaw in this way:

> Formerly the French had an establishment on this spot, some traces of which are still to be seen. It was also a place of general rendezvous for the different tribes of Indians previous to the smallpox, when they were very numerous and troublesome to the traders in passing. We found one tent, containing a Mashquegon family, from whom we got some dried meat, and continued on to Carrot River, at whose entrance we found a freeman tented. (Coues 1965 [1897], 2:470)

The available information, therefore, tends to be related to Opaskweyaw. It was a rendezvous center for regional groups ("tribes"), and religious activities occurred there. The importance of spring canoe building is also mentioned. Presumably, spring rendezvous were also maintained at Misipawistik, Cimawawin, Nipowiwinihk, and Pehonan. Certainly, the positioning of the fur-trade posts at all these centers indicates that the traders continued to regard them as important. As in the French period, Paskwatinow did not attract the attention of the traders, although there is evidence of its use by residents of the area.

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Aggregating Centers and the Trade during the "Monopoly," 1821–1875

The Positioning of Fur-Trade Posts

During this period the historical accounts relating to the nature of the rendezvous increase in number and detail, as missionaries became active in the 1840s. Following the 1821 amalgamation of the NWC with the HBC, the latter embarked on a process of rationalizing the trade, in part by reducing the numbers of fur-trade posts; in the Saskatchewan River valley, all the posts were closed except Cumberland House. Within a very few years, however, winter-spring outposts began to operate at several rendezvous centers.

At Pehonan there seems to have been no post present for a few years following 1821, but the HBC began to staff one on a year-round basis here in 1846. Apparently, it had been operated as a winter outpost for some years prior to this. It remained in operation until 1932 (Smythe 1968: 184). An Anglican mission was set up here in the early 1850s (Pettipas 1974: xxx).

No permanent post was opened at Nipowiwinihk, although the HBC may have maintained a winter outpost of Cumberland House. Certainly, there is evidence that independent (free) traders sometimes based themselves here through the mid- and late 1800s (Morton 1944: 134–35). Presumably, this was because a social group, of Cree culture, maintained Nipowiwinihk as its center during the first half of the nineteenth century. Two prominent members of this group, Mansack and Willock, were sons of the HBC trader Magnus Twatt (Thistle 1986: 81, 82, 89, 91–92).

Of course, through this time period, continuing to the present, the HBC maintained its trading operations at Cumberland House. It seems that there was an existing NWC post at Opaskweyaw, which the HBC took over in 1821 (MacPherson 1972: 39). It was maintained as a winter outpost of Cumberland House (Pettipas 1974: xx) until 1856, when the HBC began to operate here on a year-round basis, naming this post "Ft. Defiance" (Pettipas 1980: 220). By this time Opaskweyaw had become a pastoral village, focused on the Anglican Mission established here in 1840 (Pettipas 1974: xx). The HBC maintained a store here until 1930 (MacPherson 1972: 45).

Similar to some other congregating centers, Cimawawin seems to have been without resident traders for some years following the 1821 amalgamation. However, by 1884 an HBC winter post was in operation here (Klotz 1885: 20).[7] In 1886 this post was "upgraded" for full-time operation, in part by rafting some buildings from the existing post at Moose Lake, thirty-five kilometers to the northeast (MacPherson 1972: 44). At Misi-

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pawistik, the HBC took over the existing NWC establishment in 1821 and maintained it until the early 1900s (ibid.: 33).

During this period, only one post (besides Cumberland House) was not at an aggregating center. This was a winter outpost established just downstream of Cedar Lake by the HBC in ca. 1855, because of the local activity of free traders (Hind 1971 [1860]: 460). Named Cedar Lake House, its duration is unknown.

In the period 1821–75, therefore, it is apparent that the HBC's attempt to drastically reduce the number of trading outlets failed. After 1821, first winter outposts and then permanently manned posts were operated at Pehonan, Opaskweyaw, Cimawawin, and Misipawistik. Clearly, the HBC was being attracted (forced?) to reestablish at these locations. It is our contention that these locations continued to be the focus of the lives of the peoples of those regions and that the seasonal congregations continued to occur at these centers.[8]

The Nature of the Rendezvous, 1821–75

Much more detailed information on the nature and duration of the gatherings exists for this period, especially for the spring rendezvous at Pehonan. In 1857 the Rev. Henry Budd established a mission here and, year after year, recorded the progression of the spring rendezvous in his journals. For instance, in 1858 people had begun to arrive by 31 March: "The Thickwood Crees . . . having formed a considerable party, are preparing to commence their spring feasts, &c.; they have brought some of the best of their last winter's hunt for the purpose. They will be feasting and dancing for several days and nights together" (Hind 1971 [1860]: 403). The following day Budd noted that "the Indians are busy this morning putting up a large tent, where they intend to keep their feast and dance" (ibid.: 403). Drumming, feasting, and praying continued almost without break for the next few days, with the actual ceremonies, particularly the Goose Dance, beginning on 6 April. By 12 April the rendezvous had begun to break up: "We could see some of the Indian tents stripped of their covering, nothing but the bare poles standing, which intimates that those are going away" (ibid.: 404). Nine years later, in 1867, Budd recorded similar events at Pehonan. The first families arrived on 30 March, and by 15 April there were twenty tents present; Budd noted that "they are waiting for the whole band to come, when they will commence some of their heathenish rites and superstitions" (CMS 1867). This rendezvous began to disperse by 25 April.

Some information is also available on Cimawawin. John Fleming, a member of the Hind expedition of 1858, recorded a location on the so-called Muddy Lake, which was a bedrock outcrop some "four to five feet

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above the level of the water": "This island is a favourite camping and fishing place of the Swampy Crees, there being on it a clump of good sized poplar, the only timber fit for fuel for miles around; and here they hold their great councils, dog feasts, and medicine dances. Its name in Swampy [Cree] is Kash-ke-bu-jes-pu-qua-ne-shing, signifying, 'Tying the mouth of a drum'" (Hind 1971 [1860]: 456–57). Evidently, the local people continued to congregate here seasonally and to hold major religious ceremonies.

The HBC accounts of this period make it clear that Cumberland House had also become an aggregating center. Thistle has discussed rendezvous references in the Cumberland House journals: "James Leith also mentioned his sending men out to a Cree rendezvous in March 1825 in order to get them to split up 'as when So many of them together They never do think of Endeavouring for to kill a skin.' Congregations for goose feasting and dancing were also actively discouraged" (1986: 87). Perhaps because of the traders' harassment, there was considerable instability in the timing and location of the spring rendezvous at Cumberland House. For instance, post master Leith recorded that a man named Wappask, who lived on the Sturgeon (Torch) River, arrived at Cumberland House on 4 May 1828 and invited everyone to his camp to feast and dance because game was plentiful there (HBCA 1828: fol. 43). Many who had arrived at Cumberland House earlier to take part in rendezvous festivities departed for Wappask's camp the next day. In contrast, the following year, Leith noted that the celebrations were held at the mouth of the Bigstone River (on the Saskatchewan River, six kilometers southwest of Cumberland House) on 14 April (HBCA 1829: fol. 43).

The observations at Pehonan and Cumberland House, therefore, indicate that people began to gather at the rendezvous centers in late March. By mid-April the gathering had generally reached its peak, although in some cases the festivities did not occur until early May. Indeed, the historical writings suggest that religious celebrations dominated the rendezvous activities. In the nineteenth century the most important religious ceremony was the *niskisimowin*, "goose dance" (Meyer 1975), which, as known ethnographically, involved the construction of a Goose Dance lodge and several days of continuous drumming, singing, dancing, feasting, and praying—with pipe ceremonies (Meyer 1991).

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Approaches to a Social Geography of the Saskatchewan River Valley

Conkey has characterized social geography as "the deployment or mapping of social units and their members onto the landscape" (1984: 265). Also relevant to this concept are the "lattices of interpersonal cohesions among individuals" and the knowledge that the society members have of the deployment of other members and social units and of the lattices (ibid.). Although data relating to the latter are not readily available in the historical documentation for the Saskatchewan River valley, there is some information on camp sizes and locations during certain seasons. It is, therefore, possible to construct a general model of the social geography. The period after the smallpox epidemic of 1781 will be discussed separately, since during this time an essentially new society developed, of somewhat different Cree culture.

The regional band is particularly relevant to this discussion. Historical evidence for the presence of this social unit is circumstantial; however, as has been noted, the traders certainly did recognize (and name) distinct social groups in this part of the boreal forest. Indeed, Samuel Hearne noted, as one reason for his choice of the site of Cumberland House, that it was on the borders of three (Tyrrell 1934: 113) or four (ibid.: 193) "tribes," which may well have been regional bands of the Cree residents of this area. One "tribe" was likely that whose territory extended north from Cumberland House through Cumberland and Namew Lakes—probably occupying all of the lower Sturgeon-Weir River system. This group appears to have maintained aggregating centers, named Namew Kipahikan, around the mouth of the Goose River on the Sturgeon-Weir River, about fifty kilometers northeast of Cumberland House (Figure 3). The members of Hearne's party met their families there on 23 July 1774 at a camp of nine tents (ibid.: 104–5).[9] A second regional band was almost certainly that of the "Basquia Indians" centered at Opaskweyaw, downstream on the Saskatchewan, and a third may have comprised those peoples who maintained the aggregating center at Paskwatinow, upstream of Cumberland House.

The ethnographic literature suggests that an aggregation will involve the members of at least one regional band; however, it is possible for an aggregation to be composed of the members of multiple regional bands. In any case, given that there were six aggregating centers on the Saskatchewan River, we propose that there were at least six regional bands. Since the territory of one other social group, that oriented to Namew Kipahikan, also extended into the Saskatchewan River valley, the minimum number of regional bands would have been seven.

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An obvious aspect of the social geography of the Saskatchewan River valley is the remarkable regularity in the spacing of the rendezvous centers—generally eighty to one hundred kilometers apart. In all likelihood, this spatial regularity reflects a certain degree of uniformity in the size of regional band territories.[10] The greatest gap, 223 kilometers, is between Opaskweyaw and Paskwatinow, which, interestingly, was nicely bridged by Cumberland House. Although there was no aboriginal center here, this was evidently within the southern extremity of the territory of the Namew Kipahikan regional band.

The seasonal round of the peoples of the Saskatchewan River valley prior to 1781 can be determined in broad outline, although there was clearly some variation from one end of the valley to the other. During the 1770s the Crees of the Saskatchewan River valley were dispersed in relatively small groups during the winter (e.g., Rich and Johnson 1952: 236). Presumably, such groups can be identified with social units such as the "co-residential unit" (Morantz 1983: 90–93) or the "hunting group" (Rogers 1969b; Feit 1991: 232). At this time of the year, subsistence was based on moose and beaver hunting and, perhaps, angling in some of the larger lakes. With the most westerly bands, in particular, it is likely that some members spent the winters hunting bison in the aspen parklands to the south of the Saskatchewan River valley (Ray 1972: 114–15). Indeed, even some of the Opaskweyaw people occasionally spent their winters in the parklands hunting bison. For instance, in April 1777 Matthew Cocking was informed by a "Basquio Indian" that "he had been during the Winter moving about in the plain Ground" (Rich and Johnson 1951: 140). In the winter of 1779–80 some Opaskweyaw people even traded into Hudson House on the North Saskatchewan River (ibid.: 81, 87). These Crees may have joined camps of Assiniboine in the aspen parklands. In any case, the fact that these occurrences were noted in the daily journals indicates that they were unusual and, so, worthy of comment.

In late winter the hunting groups began the move to the congregating centers. Interestingly, this move often seems to have occurred before the spring melt and breakup, as was the case with the group with whom Joseph La France traveled in 1741–42. In this case, there would not have been an opportunity, as has been described among other Northern Algonquians (e.g., Rogers 1969a: 29), to retrieve the canoes that had been cached at the autumn camps. Some groups arrived at these centers while the lakes and rivers were still frozen, and there was still considerable snow on the ground (Meyer 1982: 231–37). Sufficient food to support this aggregation was often scarce, and there is evidence that stored food was important (Rich and Johnson 1951: 232). It is likely, therefore, that the arrival of first

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the swans and then the geese and other waterfowl was a crucial event, of great subsistence significance. With breakup and the onset of the spring spawning runs, the congregation could be amply supplied with food for a few weeks. As has been discussed previously, vital religious ceremonies were held at the rendezvous centers. Although they are not described in detail in the pre-1781 accounts, Matthew Cocking did allude to them at Opaskweyaw (Burpee 1908: 99). We may assume, also, that marriages were arranged and social problems were worked out. And, of course, trade was conducted, especially if Europeans were present.

Following the spring rendezvous, it appears that the aggregations broke up into smaller social groups of highly variable size. Often, the move was to good fishing locations, at the mouths of streams into the Saskatchewan River, where pole weirs were maintained through the summer. Samuel Hearne noted the operation of such weirs in August 1774 (Tyrrell 1934: 108, 111). However, some families remained at the aggregating centers for much of the summer, since they were productive fishing locations. For example, Cocking's party met a large camp at Pehonan on 11 August 1772 (Burpee 1908: 101). On occasion, there appears to have been a lesser autumn rendezvous. For instance, in October 1775 Alexander Henry the Elder encountered a village of thirty families at Opaskweyaw (Bain 1901: 259).

Following the population recovery in the early 1800s, the information available on social groups, subsistence pursuits, and religious ceremonies is much more detailed. Despite the disruption caused by the epidemic, there appears to have been essential continuity in the social geography. Certainly the spring rendezvous was maintained, and, although the available descriptions relate to events at the trading posts, there is reason to think that rendezvous were also held at those aggregating centers without trading posts. For instance, as quoted above, Fleming noted the importance of gatherings and religious ceremonies at Cimawawin (Hind 1971 [1860]: 456–57).

Also, as in the pre-1781 period, Europeans regularly encountered some families at the rendezvous centers in the summer. For example, Alexander Henry the Younger traveled up the Saskatchewan River in the summer of 1808. His party left Cedar Lake on 22 August, and he wrote as follows: "This place is a famous sturgeon fishery at all seasons. We ascended the channel to Lac Vaseux [Muddy Lake], and as the wind continued fair, we hoisted sail and came on through the lake. On Isle aux Festion there was a small tent of Mashquegons" (Coues 1965 [1897], 2: 468). Coues interpreted the word "Festion" as an error, writing: "I am inclined to read Isle aux Festins, Island of Festivals, also called Kettle isl.,

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and Drum or Devil's Drum isl" (ibid.).[11] In short, this location was where the great spring ceremonies were held at Cimawawin. Richard King, upon passing Misipawistik in 1833, observed that "at the foot of the cascade is an excellent sturgeon fishery, resorted to in the summer by a number of 'freemen,' with their [wives] and families; who during the winter retreat to Swan River to hunt the moose, and the other large animals" (1847: 49–50).

There is also evidence of autumn aggregations in the post-1781 period. On 13 October 1828 Cumberland House post master, James Leith, reported that two Opaskweyaw Crees, White Bear and Beardy, invited the Cumberland House Crees to come to feast and dance (HBCA 1829: fol. 17). As well, there is reference to the occupation of Cimawawin in the autumn. Captain John Franklin's expedition, traveling up the Saskatchewan River in October 1819, encountered "Indians" camped in at least two locations on Muddy Lake. Interestingly, Franklin's (1970 [1823]: 47) party camped on "Devil's Drum Island" in Muddy Lake. It appears, therefore, that some families were present at most rendezvous centers throughout the open-water season.

In addition to the social and economic imperatives emphasized to this point, it seems that these rendezvous locations were also imbued with considerable sentiment. The members of each regional band had an emotional attachment to their gathering place.[12] It was the focus of their world, geographically, socially, and culturally. In particular, vital religious ceremonies were held at the rendezvous centers. Cocking's observation of the material evidence of ritual at Opaskweyaw has been noted; however, the possibility that this location (and the other aggregating centers) were sacred places must also be considered. Supporting evidence is provided by the presence of a pictograph at Opaskweyaw: "About this time [1851] the 'Painted Stone', a large stone bearing a painted face—formerly worshipped, was levered into the river by Henry Budd and ten other Indians" (Greene 1931: 23).

Discussion

The view that the social and economic organization of the Northern Algonquians was intensively influenced by the advent of the fur trade has been challenged by researchers such as Morantz (1980a: 40, 45; 1980b: 4, 23, 70, 340; 1983: 10, 11; 1984: 72–75; 1986: 81–82) and Thistle (1986). The fur trade certainly did affect material culture, but its influence on the "social and economic organization" of some Northern Algonquians was evidently much more muted (e.g., Morantz 1984: 72). Thistle (1986: 33–

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50) has argued that (at least in the lower Saskatchewan River valley) the Crees exerted significant control over their involvement in the fur trade up to 1840 and that they chose to opt in and out of the trade as it suited their own requirements, rather than being "totally dependent" on it. Indeed, on occasion, the Crees of this region overtly demonstrated their independence and power in this regard, as reflected in the events at Opaskweyaw in mid-October 1775. Alexander Henry the Elder became embroiled in a confrontation after he and his party "found the Pasquayah village. It consisted of thirty families, lodged in tents of a circular form. . . . On our arrival, the chief, named Chatique, . . . came down upon the beach, attended by thirty followers, all armed with the bows and arrows, and with spears." After entering the lodge of the chief, the traders found themselves "surrounded by armed men" (Bain 1901: 259–60). In a speech to the traders, Chatique indicated that if they expected to pass, they should be "exceedingly liberal" in making presents, and he listed the items that were expected. The traders agreed to yield this "tribute," and, "This done, the pipe was handed round as usual; and the omission of this ceremony, on our entrance, had sufficiently marked the intentions of Chatique." Henry and party then set out, only to have Chatique personally accost them a short time later and successfully obtain an additional "present" (ibid.: 261).

It appears, therefore, that some of the rendezvous (especially Opaskweyaw) were centers from which power was exercised. Indeed, travel along the Saskatchewan evidently involved passage through the territories of distinct social units, whose members in some cases were concerned to control the travel of strangers through their lands, a pattern seen elsewhere in the boreal forest. For instance, northwest trade was severely restricted in the 1760s when the Ojibwa at Rainy Lake stopped traders and took their goods (e.g., Nute 1978 [1943]: 15). Similarly, the Algonquians of Allumette Island attempted to control the French trade up the Ottawa River in the early 1600s (Dickason 1992: 124).

The aboriginal influence on the fur trade in the Saskatchewan River valley dated from the very initiation of this commerce. The building of the first posts by La Vérendrye was at the repeated request of the resident Crees. Later in the eighteenth century, Samuel Hearne also commented on this topic: "As each Different Tribe are desirous of having goods brought as near their own doors as Possable, it is a Piece of Polisy in them to Praise their Part for the Plentifulness of Furrs and Provisions and at the same time condemn every other Part" (Tyrrell 1934: 117). Evidently, therefore, the Saskatchewan River Crees welcomed the trade and, indeed, exerted some pressure on the traders to place posts in regional band areas. However,

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once the traders did formally move into the region, the organization of the trade was clearly related to the existing aboriginal social geography. In particular, the French posts, and those built during the following one hundred and fifty years, were positioned, overwhelmingly, at the aboriginal aggregating centers. After observing the gathering of local peoples each spring, the European traders recognized the great importance of these congregating centers, which were clearly the most appropriate locations for maximizing trading contacts and, therefore, profits.

Given this model, variations do appear in the importance of the various centers. For instance, Opaskweyaw and Pehonan seem to have had the largest populations and certainly were awarded a great deal of attention by the historic writers. Also, they may contain the largest concentrations of late precontact archaeological remains—although this remains to be demonstrated. It is possible, therefore, that they may have been the aggregating centers of multiple regional bands. In contrast, a congregating center such as Paskwatinow may have been maintained by only a single regional band, which may explain why no post was ever built there—the local population was too small to attract European attention.

Of course, the positioning of trading posts at an aggregating center may have served to increase the importance of the location to the members of the regional band(s) attached to it. Although the latter scenario worked to maintain the existing socioterritorial organization, the placement of a permanent trading post at the borders of regional bands was potentially disruptive. Indeed, with repopulation following the epidemic of 1781–82 it appears that Cumberland House became the rendezvous center for a new regional band.

Although fur-trade posts were often located at the rendezvous centers, there were also a few posts built far from the congregating places. Because these posts were located about midway between the congregating centers, we submit that they represented a deliberate attempt to position trading establishments at the borders between regional bands. This is what occurred at Cumberland House—if we have correctly interpreted Hearne's comments about it being on the borders of multiple "tribes." Such positioning may have been attractive because of the possibility of trading with members of multiple regional bands.

Even though the rendezvous centers of the Saskatchewan River valley have their origins in precontact times and remained important through the fur-trade period, they have influenced the contemporary settlement pattern. When the reserves were set up in the late 1800s, Cimawawin (Chemahawin band), Opaskweyaw (The Pas Band), and Pehonan (James

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Smith Band) were all maintained as important Cree occupational foci—and, of course, a band and reserve lands were also recognized at Cumberland House.

It is likely that the members of regional bands throughout the boreal forest gathered together periodically—in those environments in which the peoples were engaged in a broad-based subsistence economy. Although we have identified precontact aggregation areas in the Saskatchewan River valley, there is some archaeological evidence that they occur elsewhere in the boreal forest. Particularly interesting is the Aschkibokahn site (FbMb-1), which is also located in the Manitoba lowlands, south of the lower Saskatchewan River valley. Here, Margaret Hanna (1984) and others (Snortland-Coles 1979) have excavated portions of the Aschkibokahn site on an island in Duck Bay on the west side of Lake Winnipegosis. The site contains a massive concentration of archaeological materials relating to the Duck Bay complex (of the Rainy River composite), which, according to Lenius and Olinyk (1990: 84), dates from ca. A.D. 1100–1350. Faunal remains indicate that a major fishery was operated near Aschkibokahn, especially in the spring, although it may have been used throughout the open water season (Snortland-Coles 1979: 122–26). Hanna (1984) has interpreted the distinctive ceramics from this site as relating to a discrete regional social unit. We would interpret Aschkibokahn as the aggregating center of a regional band positioned along the west-central side of Lake Winnipegosis. Significantly, the HBC established a trading post here in 1859 (Smythe 1968: 158).

Looking to the east and the southeast, there are several apparent rendezvous centers. Arthurs (1986) has described the massive Middle and Late Woodland archaeological deposits at the Long Sault site (DdKm-1) on the Rainy River. A major spring fishery operated here, with sturgeon as one important target species (see also Holzkamm et al. 1988). This site was almost certainly a rendezvous center, and the presence of large burial mounds reflects its spiritual significance to the peoples of the region. It is noteworthy that the NWC maintained a trading post here in the 1790s (ibid.: 251; Smythe 1968: 66–67) and that an Ojibwa band occupied a reserve here from 1873 to 1919 (Arthurs 1986: 22).

Farther to the east, a large fishery existed at the rapids in the St. Marys River at Sault Ste. Marie (Cleland 1982: 763, 772). Here, on the waterway connecting Lakes Superior and Huron, there are numerous Late Woodland sites, some very large (Conway 1980), and it is likely that this was also a rendezvous center. The fishery here was focused on the fall spawning whitefish, and, so, the annual aggregation would have occurred during that time of the year. The location attracted early European attention, be-

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ginning with a Jesuit mission in 1668 that was quickly complemented by a French fort (Voorhis 1930: 160). Beginning in the last half of the eighteenth and extending through the nineteenth century, the NWC, Americans, and the HBC built numerous trading posts and forts here (ibid.: 160–61).

Farther afield in the Canadian boreal forest, Jocelyne Séguin (1980) has described a large Middle Woodland site (FlFo-1) in the eastern James Bay region, dating ca. A.D. 500–1000. She (ibid.: 58) believes the site was occupied by one large gathering, perhaps three hundred persons, in the open water period (see also Morantz 1984: 70). Although a seasonal gathering appears to have occurred at Site FlFo-1, it differs from the aggregating sites along the Saskatchewan River valley in that it was only occupied once. More similar to the Saskatchewan River situation are concentrations of sites that Jack Ives (1993: 24–25) has noted at certain locations along the Athabasca and Peace Rivers in northern Alberta. Indeed, Ives notes that "it is in no way surprising to see a corresponding tendency for fur trade posts to cluster near these large concentrations of prehistoric sites" (ibid.: 25). Thus, the aggregating centers of the Saskatchewan River valley are examples of a pattern of hunter-gatherer social geography, present throughout the southern boreal forest, that exerted a major influence on the introduction and the organization of the fur trade throughout the forest region of northern North America.

Summary

For the end of precontact times and the beginning of the historic period, six locations have been identified as congregating centers along the Saskatchewan River: Misipawistik, Cimawawin, Opaskweyaw, Paskwatinow, Nipowiwinihk, and Pehonan. There is also evidence of a seventh aggregating center, Namew Kipahikan, to the northeast of Cumberland House. These aggregating sites evidently are the material evidence of one aspect of an indigenous social geography. Our hypothesis, that these sites were the product of the annual (or biennial—spring and fall) gatherings of regional bands, is supported by the manner in which the fur traders organized their operations in the valley, choosing the aggregating centers as the locations of trading posts. Dozens of fur-trade posts were built at the congregating centers, and a few posts were built in locations that were between the latter centers, at the peripheries of contiguous regional bands. It is assumed that ongoing archaeological and ethnohistorical research, both in the Saskatchewan River valley and elsewhere in the boreal forest, will confirm and modify this model as appropriate.

There appears, then, to have been long-term continuity in major as-

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pects of the social geography of the aboriginal peoples of the Saskatchewan River valley from Late Woodland times until the mid-1800s. Despite the massive social, demographic, and cultural disruption caused by the epidemic of 1781–82, it seems that basic aspects of the social geography were maintained and that the annual rendezvous were kept up—at least once the region's population began to recover. The major change appears to have been the development of a regional band centered on Cumberland House. These socioterritorial patterns and approaches to land use (which appear to have their roots deep in the past) also influenced the positioning of missions and of reserve lands—and so the effects of the aboriginal social geography can be seen in contemporary times.

Notes

This project was prompted by a conversation with "Jack" Ives of the Provincial Museum of Alberta in June 1992, during a lull in the official opening ceremonies of Wanuskewin Heritage Park. Ives asked Meyer whether there were any concentrations of archaeological sites along the Saskatchewan River, since he had noticed this phenomenon along the major rivers of northern Alberta. As it happened, Meyer and colleagues were then completing an article on Paskwatinow, one of the Saskatchewan River rendezvous centers, and Ives's comment indicated that a more substantial treatment of the topic was needed.

We are grateful to the Hudson's Bay Company Archives, Provincial Archives of Manitoba, for permission to consult and to quote from their documents. We very much appreciate communication with and encouragement from Ernest "Tiger" Burch Jr. and Toby Morantz. Dale Russell has been very helpful in identifying pertinent documentary sources. Discussions with him have helped to shape our ideas about settlement patterns during the fur-trade period. We also thank David Denton for identifying pertinent archaeological and ethnohistorical information relating to northern Quebec. Terry Gibson produced the base maps for some of the figures, and Shelley McConnell has provided invaluable advice about their final production.

1 Most of the Saskatchewan River valley has now been examined archaeologically, primarily through investigations preceding hydroelectric projects, the earliest being that related to the Grand Rapids installation, in 1960 and 1961 (Mayer-Oakes 1970). The latter involved the whole area around the mouth of the Saskatchewan River as well as portions of the shores of Cross and Cedar Lakes upstream. Also, about this time a reconnaissance was conducted of the reservoir of the E. B. Campbell Dam in Saskatchewan (Clendenen and Kehoe 1960). Then, in 1970 and 1971, Morgan Tamplin conducted a survey and excavation in The Pas area, which culminated in a large-scale excavation at The Pas Reserve site (Tamplin 1977). The prehistory of The Pas region is also known through the activities of avocational archaeologists such as Cecil Patterson and Joseph Robertson. They revealed the presence of extensive Selkirk (and earlier) occupation. In 1980 and 1981 the reservoir of a hydroelectric dam proposed for a location a few kilometers below the forks was surveyed (Wilson 1982).

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This was followed by intensive survey and excavation in the reservoir of the Nipawin Hydroelectric Dam, 1981–85 (Finnigan et al. 1983).

Although the surveys of the 1960s projects were not as intensive as those in the 1980s, and the resulting excavations were on a smaller scale, the greater part of the Saskatchewan River valley has been examined by professional archaeologists. Beyond this, the south side of the Saskatchewan River (and both sides in the Nipawin region) from the E. B. Campbell dam west to the Forks is agricultural land, much of which has been examined by avocational archaeologists.

2 The term *rendezvous* is well established in the northern plains states (and neighboring areas) where it refers to a kind of trade fair; however, as employed by the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century traders in interior western Canada, it was applied to the annual aggregations of hunter-gatherer groups—which might or might not have involved trade as a significant activity.

3 The location of the Woods Assiniboine at the time of contact in the late 1600s must also be considered (Russell 1991: 181–86). This group was evidently closely allied with the Crees of the Saskatchewan River valley and the region about Lakes Winnipeg and Winnipegosis. Arthur Dobbs's map of 1744 (based on information provided by Joseph La France) shows the "Assinibouels of the Woods" directly to the south of the River de Vieux Hommes and centered on the Cariboux River, perhaps the Red Deer River, which flows into the northeast side of Lake Winnipegosis. Supporting evidence is provided by a 1750 French map in which the "Assiliboille de canoet" are shown to the north and northwest of Lake Manitoba (Burpee 1927: 432). Therefore, Woods Assiniboine territory in the first half of the eighteenth century appears to have been immediately east of Lake Winnipegosis.

4 Johnson (1982) has described the phenomenon of "scalar communication stress," which characterizes large aggregations and, in hunter-gatherers, can be expected to lead to rapid dissolution of the assemblage. This is counteracted by the institution of intensive religious ceremonies, which serve "to reduce the scalar comunication stress of organizational growth or rearrangements" (Conkey 1985: 306).

5 In this regard, Leacock (1969: 11) wrote: "In March [1652], Buteaux visited about 40 Atticamegs, who split into two parties to make canoes. When finished, his group set out for a place where 'all' were gathered, arriving May 18. Several days later, the entire encampment embarked in 35 canoes (about 150 to 160 people), and arrived at 'another assembly, about twenty-five leagues hence.' Here they feasted on moose, beaver, and bear's fat, and departed for another gatherings, three days away, with 60 canoes (or approximately 260 to 280 people)."

6 Although the original Cree name for this location was almost certainly "Pehonan," in the course of the fur trade it also came to be referred to as *nihtawikihcikanis*, "little garden" (Watkins et al. 1938: 82).

7 A federal government surveyor, Otto Klotz, examined this location in 1884 and described it as follows: "About a mile before Cedar Lake, the channel that runs through Muddy Lake joins the survey channel. This distance is called Chemahawin, meaning the 'seining place', along it Indians are living and the Hudson's Bay Company have a winter post. The Indians are living almost solely on fish, chiefly sturgeon, which attain a length of 6 feet. Here outcrops of limestone are found" (1885: 20).

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8 One clear account of the spring aggregation and the associated ceremonies (Goose Dance), outside the context of a trading post complex, was provided by Reginald Beatty, an HBC employee who was sent from The Pas to trade at toponym) well into this century (Hutton 1993) and continued to hunt and trap in the region.
9 Hearne observed, "This Part is Call'd Ne-meo kip-a-hagon" (Tyrrell 1934: 105). This is a rendering of the Cree *namew kipahikan*, "sturgeon weir." Here, travel halted for a week, during which time "several Tents of Indians came and Pitch'd by us and some of those we found here went away" (ibid.). On his return trip to Cumberland House in 1775 Hearne again noted Namew Kipahikan (on 16 August): "This Day crosst Gray goose Lake, Paddled Down the little river call'd gray goose Rr, pass't the Ne-me-o-kipa-a-hagon, and at Night Put up at the mouth of the little River of that Name" (ibid.: 172). The prominent notation of Namew Kipahikan strongly suggests that it was a very important location—in short, an aggregating center. There appears to have been a second Namew Kipahigan on the adjacent Sturgeon-Weir River (ibid.: 484).
10 In any case, it is likely that the rendezvous location(s) would be central to the territory of the regional band, as has been discussed by Hayden (1980: 623). He has noted that in the western deserts of Australia "aggregation sites should occur approximately 300–780 km apart" (ibid.). However, he has suggested that in more productive environments aggregating sites could be expected to be as little as sixty kilometers apart.
11 It should be noted that Barry Gough did not include this useful point in his 1992 edition of the "Journal of Alexander Henry the Younger."
12 Some of this sentiment is reflected in a statement by a Red Earth elder, Eyistawan, who, as a teenager in the 1920s, traveled with relatives from Red Earth to Pehonan (Ft. a la Corne). In so doing, they passed near Nipowiwinihk: "One time I was out there [Nipowiwinihk] with my grandfather, Okimawipimotew, and his cousin from La Corne was with us. His cousin's name was Cecascapikapaw. [The towns of] Nipawin and Codette were there then and the trail [from Red Earth] came out at Codette. Cecascapikapaw was mad because the white people has not called Codette 'Nipawin.' He said that it was wrong to call Nipawin by that name. Codette should have been named Nipawin. Cecascapikapaw didn't like that" (related to D. Meyer, 28 March 1977). In short, the village of Codette is adjacent to Nipowiwinihk, whereas the town of Nipawin is eight kilometers away; therefore, in the opinion of Cecascapikapaw the name "Nipawin" had been applied to the wrong community—and this was of considerable concern to him.

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