THE MIDDLE TRACK & HAYES RIVER ROUTE

A young woman of the Swampy Cree Nation

Early Inhabitants: The junction of the "Quisisquatcheouen" (Nelson R.) and the "Apistibi" (Hayes R.) could possibly have been the first point of contact between the indian nations of these territories and the europeans. This first encounter must have been bewildering, akin to the appearance tomorrow of a legion of adventurers from outer space with great powers and different beliefs, languages and sets of values who would eventually have the ultimate say.

Prior to the appearance of these newcomers, the people here had a long unwritten history. Archaeological research made in 1961 at the tailrace bay of Grand Rapids, unearthed objects which were carbon dated back as far as 2500 B.C. These included bones, scrapers, knives, arrows, spear heads and pottery fragments. The pottery, being of different styles, affords some evidence of the story of the age, dating from 500 B.C. to the coming of the traders. The first migrants are reasoned to have been hunters coming with the receding of glacial Lake Agassiz some five thousand years ago.

At Fort York, Joseph La France met an old man who lived some distance to the west of the Nelson River. The elderly bronze-skinned veteran recounted an enthralling tale of adventure and misfortune. As one of thirty warriors with their families bent on avenging the enemy, he made an intrepid journey to the west coast reaching the Pacific Ocean in 1727 where the party met defeat and tragedy. Starting back as one of only three original survivors, he reached home barely alive, the last survivor, having travelled most of the way alone. This adventure, which took place a half a century before Captain Cook's west coast explorations, is given credibility by descriptions the old man furnished.

Henry Hudson

In the days of this navigator and explorer, the orient was like a magnetic force drawing european imagination. Columbus had been drawn by it, came upon a continent, but failed to reach his goal of India. Hudson would try a northern way in search of a dreamed of corridor to the tea, spice and silk capitals of the world.

On the 17th of April 1610, Henry Hudson sailed from London aboard "The Discovery" but on reaching the shores of the "new world", discontent had started fermenting among his crew. The Discovery groped its way into the bay which was later to bear its masters name. By freeze up they reached the mouth of a river (Ruperts River) where they wintered. As the food rations waned, discontent grew stronger. With the coming of summer the ice released its grasp on the Discovery and Hudson proceded northward. Somewhere in the vicinity of Charlton Island the crew mutineed and forced Hudson, his son and some half dozen or so others into a shallop. The mutineers who were by now near starvation turned back and eventually reached England. As to the destiny of Hudson and the others the only source of information is in the form of legends.

In 1612-13 Thomas Button came to explore the bay. With him were two of Hudson's former crew members and back for an encore was the Discovery now joined by a new ship, the frigate "Resolution". As allways, winter, the white ghost of the north, drifted in and the expedition searched shelter at the mouth of a river. They spent a very difficult winter with many dying of scurvy. The dead included Button's ship master after whom the river was named; the Nelson. With the thaw Button searched northward and as July came turned easterly back to England having found neither a passage to the Orient nor any trace of Henry Hudson.

Pierre Radisson

Early european expeditions in the Hudson Bay regioned the principal purpose of finding a way to the orient through the icy waters of the north. Then emerged two Canadien adventurers from Trois Rivieres who ignited the flame which was to spread swiftly throughout the northwest, the fur trade. They were Pierre Esprit Radisson and Médard Chouart Sieur des Groseilliers.

Sometime in the sixteen fifties they penetrated the continental interior, exactly how far is not known, but there is historical mention of the north shore of Lake Superior, the headwaters of the Mississippi and possibly the bottom end of the Bay. Along the way they met the Cree and the year 1660 saw the two return to Québec with several hundred Indians and fur laden canoes at which point they were promptly arrested and fined for illicit trading.

Subsequent eventualities led Radisson & Groseilliers into contact with King Charles II and Prince Rupert at London from whom they received sympathetic and financial support, the result of this confidence being the incorporation of the Hudson's Bay Company on May 2, 1670. So it was that a northern fur trade capital came into being at the mouths of the Nelson and Hayes River where trading continued for the next 2 3/4 centuries.

As for these two Caesars of the wild who never really mortgaged themselves to any country or company, they kept on pursuing adventurous dreams, dealing with the indians, english and french, Radisson for a time being the superintendent and director of fur trade for the Hudson's Bay Company. In 1710 this simple Coureur-de-bois who had lived and hunted with the indians, moved in court circles, wintered in the frozen north and gone campaigning in the Caribbean, died in England reputedly at the age of 74.

Henry Kelsey

Miss-Top-Ashish (the little giant of the prairies) Born in London in 1670, the young Kelsey, while engaged as apprentice with the HBC was sent to Fort Nelson. For some years he was closely associated with Radisson, Chouart and Thomas Savage, a fact which leads one to bring to mind that common expression about birds of a feather.

On the 12th of June, 1690 at the age of twenty, Kelsey left on an expedition into the interior. He travelled with a group of Assiniboines who were returning home from Fort York, the Middle Track being the main route then in use. On July 10th they arrived at the camp which was at or near present day The Pas, Kelsey calculating that they had come some 600 miles. He named the place Deering's Point and using it as a base Camp, continued his explorations penetrating the prairies and establishing good relations with the people.

In the Fall 1694 when d'Iberville captured Fort York, one of the captives taken was Henry Kelsey. Released in 1696, he was taken prisoner a second time during d'Iberville's attack of 1697. When, on Sept 5, 1714, after the treaty of Utrecht the English returned, Kelsey was sent as envoy to inform Jérémie. The transfer of Fort Bourbon was made and the name reverted back to Fort York. In 1718 Kelsey was made governor over all the company posts on the bay, but his apetite for adventure didn't wane and when he died in 1724 many unfulfilled ambitions died with him.

d'Iberville

Born at Montréal in the year 1661, Pierre Lemoyne d'Iberville began his naval career at the age of twelve as a midshipman, who was to become a renowned seaman and soldier. In 1686 an inland expedition under the command of Chevalier de Troyes attached and seized three Hudson's Bay Co posts on James Bay. It was in these encounters that d'Iberville as leader of a detachement made up largely of coureurs-de-bois revealed his military talents.

Later, as commander in chief of french interests on the bay, he played a major role in the conflict between England and France, both of who's prime and only interest on the bay was the very lucrative commerce in furs. The resulting competition set the stage for the intrepid naval battle to be fought on Hudson Bay, more precisely at the mouth of the Hayes River. On the 5th of September 1697 d'Iberville with a single ship, the Pelican engaged three adversary ships, the Hampshire, the Deering and the Hudson's Bay in the ensuing battle the Hampshire was sunk with the loss of some 250 men, the Hudson's Bay surrendered and the Deering fled. Shortly after, the Pelican and its captive ship the Hudson's Bay were caught in a violent gale and wrecked against the shore.

Following this episode d'Iberville's career for a time shifted more to one of explorer and colonizer in the lower Mississippi. He was appointed Governor of Louisiana and on July 9, 1706 died in Havana.

Joseph La France

Joseph La France was born in 1707 at "Michillimakinac" in what is now the State of Michigan to a Sauteuse mother from Sault-Sainte-Marie and a Canadian father. After his mother's death in 1712 he was taken by his father for six months to Quebec to learn french and from then until the death of his father in 1721 worked along with him learning the skills of a coureur-de-bois.

La France ventured inland west of the Mississippi River and south into present day Missouri. He attempted to get a fur trading licence from the authorities but failing, he continued trading outside the law. In 1738 he was arrested at Montréal and his furs seized but escaped with only his Gun & some ammunition. He spent a very difficult winter living mainly on beaver and on reaching Sault-Sainte-Marie was near death from starvation.

His great adventure to Hudson Bay, which was to provide an early written description of the Lake Winnipeg Country, started from Sault-Sainte-Marie in the winter of 1739. Travelling with the Sauteux he reached "lac la Pluie" on April 15, 1740 and "lac des Bois" in May where he met the "Kristinaux" (Crees). Going down "rivière Ouinipique" he arrived at "lac Ouinipique" (Lake Winnipeg) on Sept. 15. Spending the winter with the Cree at the north end of Lake Winnipeg, he was at "lac du Lien" (surmised to be the Saskeram Marsh area near The Pas) in 1741 and traversed "lac Caribou".

March, 1742 found him at "lac Pachegoia" (conjectured to be Cedar Lake) which according to La France was the traditional spring meeting place of the indians (See no. 173 on the map) where they made birch bark canoes, birch being abundant in the area. On April 4th he left with the Indians for Fort York with a flotilla of some 100 canoes, each canoe carrying 2 men and 100 beaver pelts. They likely used the Middle Track as it was the indian route of the time attaining Fort York (York Factory) on June 29, 1742.

Hired by the Hudson's Bay Company, he died in England in 1763. Joseph La France's travels are documented in "An Account of the Countries Adjoining to Hudson's Bay, in the North-West Part of America" by Arthur Dobbs - London 1744.

Miles Macdonell

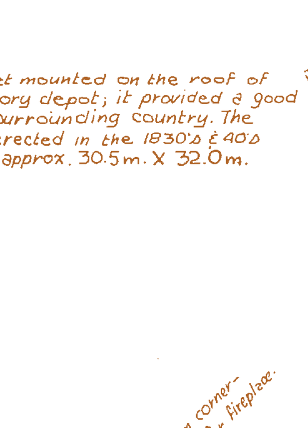
Born at Inverness, Scotland in 1767, Miles Macdonell, who was one day to be the first governor of Assiniboia, came to America as a young lad with his family in the year 1773. They settled in the Mohawk Valley of present day New York State, but with the advent of the American Revolution, remaining loyal to the crown, moved to Carlton Island in the St Lawrence. Later, Macdonell lived at St. Andrews near Cornwall Ontario and joined the Royal Canadian Volunteers, attaining the rank of captain in 1796. Engaged by Lord Selkirk to establish the Red River Colony, Captain Miles Macdonell left Scotland on July 25, 1811 with the first group of Scottish & Irish settlers. Reaching York Factory on September 24th, too late to proceed to Red River, they had to winter at the Bay. With accomodation unavailable at York Factory, they sailed around Marsh Point and took shelter on the banks of the Nelson across from Gillam Island. After an icy, bitter winter the party started up the Hayes River on July 6th and at noon of August 29th, 1812 reached their destination at the forks of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers. Many difficulties were encountered at the Colony, and Macdonell involved in conflicts with the North West Co was arrested in 1815 and taken to Montréal. In 1817 accompanied by Lord Selkirk he returned to the Red River Colony. He died on June 28, 1829 at Pointe Fortune, Lower Canada.

List of settlers who came to Hudson Bay in 1811 and left for the interior in July, 1812:

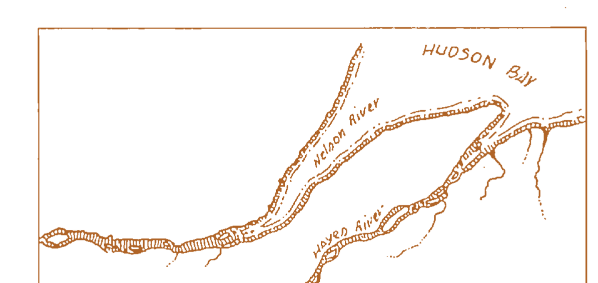
Name	Age	Whence
Colin Campbell	21	Argyle
John McKay	22	Rossshire
John McLennan	23	Rossshire
Beth Bethune	19	Rossshire
Donald McKay	17	Rossshire
William Wallace	21	Ayr
John Cooper	26	Orkney, came to Upper Canada
Nichol Harper	34	Orkney
Magnus Isbister	21	Orkney, probably father of A.K. Isbister.
George Gibbon	50	Orkney
Thos. McKim	38	Sligo
Pat Corcoran	24	Crossmalina
John Green	21	Sligo
Pat Quinn	21	Killala
Martin Jordan	16	Killala
John O'Rourke	20	Killala
Anthony McDonnell	23	Killala
James Toomey	20	Killala

A.B. McIvor

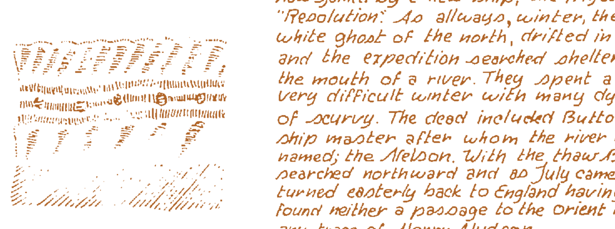
The last factor of York Factory (1954-57) was born in 1899 at Cross Lake and died in 1967 at Wabowden. Albert Bethume "Toots" McIvor, like his father before him, joined the Company as a young man starting as a store clerk and interpreter. Of his role in the history of York Factory he wrote: "It was in operation for 275 years and I have often wondered whether I should have felt honoured for being the last Post Manager or ashamed for being the one who closed it."



Lookout turret mounted on the roof of the York Factory depot; it provided a good view of the surrounding country. The depot was erected in the 1830's & 40's & measured approx. 30.5m. X 32.0m. overall.

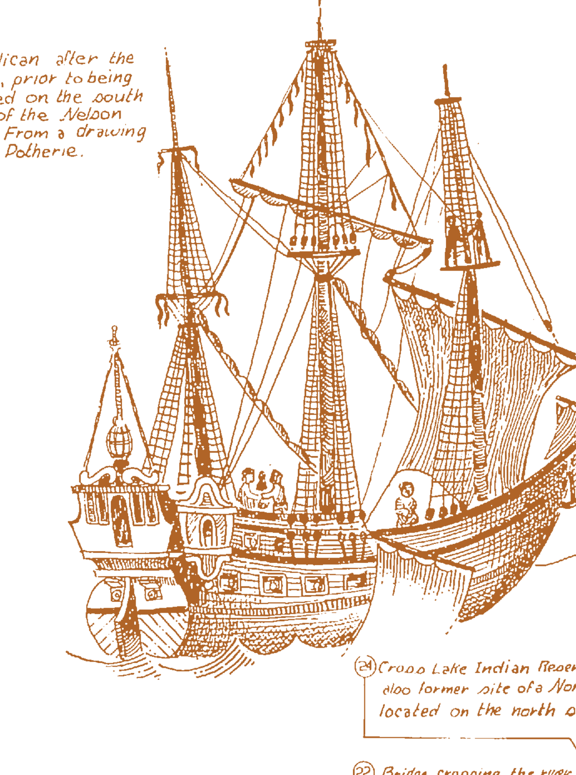


Polar Bears (Thalarctos maritimus) are often present at Marsh Point for it is on the migratory route of these arctic wanderers to and from nearby denning grounds.



Illustrations of pottery styles found at Grand Rapids. The type on the left dates from the 500 B.C. to 1200 A.D. era and that on the right from 1200 to 1700 A.D.

Petrographs from the Minago River site known to the local Cree as "Where the deer stands".



Le Pelican after the battle, prior to being wrecked on the south bank of the Nelson River. From a drawing by La Potherie.

North
West
East
South

Approximate Distance -
The Pas to York Factory via the Middle Track = 920 kilometres (570 miles)
York Factory to The Pas via the Hayes & Saskatchewan Rivers = 1100 kilometres (685 miles)
Return trip = 2,020 kilometres (1255 miles)

Kilometres

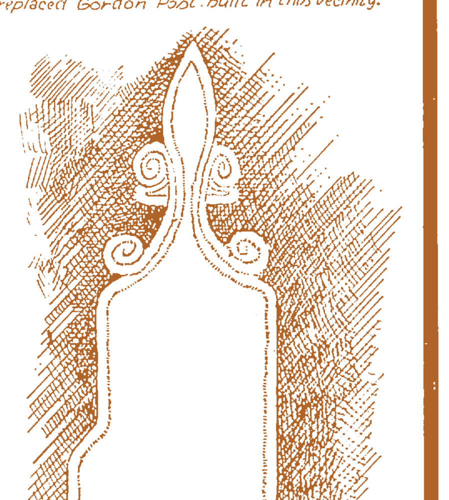
Miles

Tidal Information

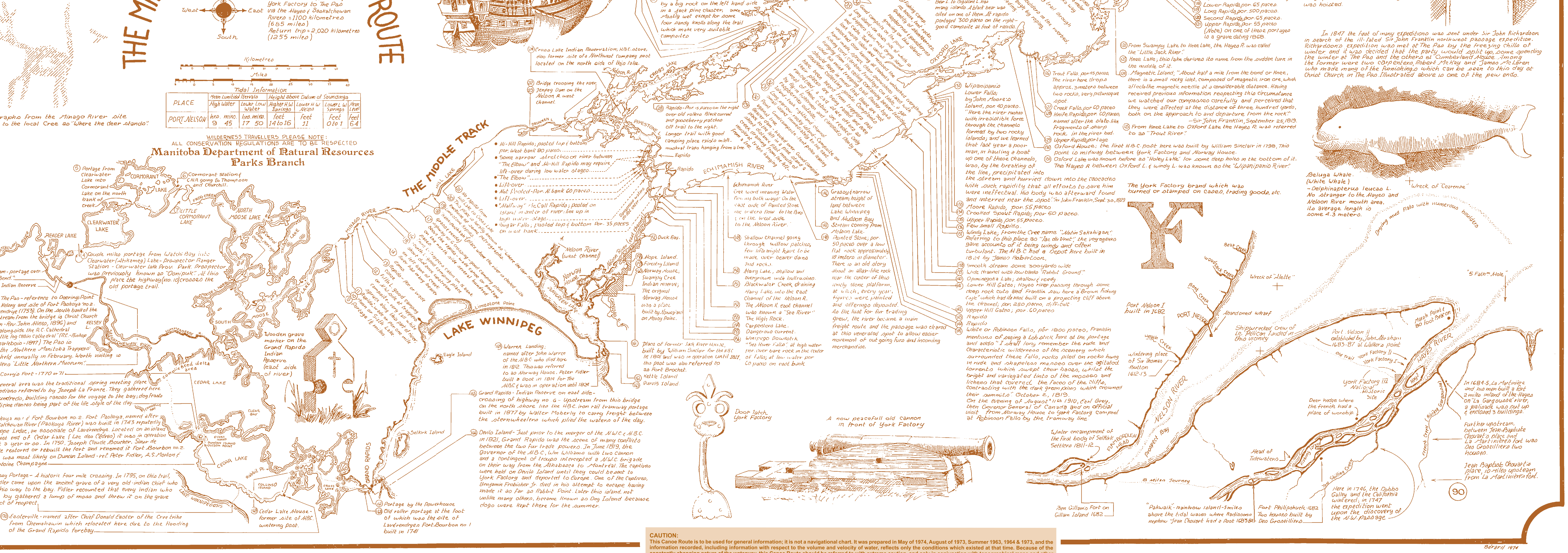
PLACE	Mean Lunitidal Intervals		Height above Datum of Soundings				
	High Water	Lower Low Water	Higher H.W. Springs	Lower H W Neaps	Lower L.W. Springs	Mean Level
PORT NELSON	hrs. mins. 9 45	hrs. mins. 17 50	feet 14 to 16	feet 11	feet 0 to 1	feet 6.4

WILDERNESS TRAVELLERS PLEASE NOTE:
ALL CONSERVATION REGULATIONS ARE TO BE RESPECTED

Manitoba Department of Natural Resources
Parks Branch



In 1847 the first of many expeditions was sent under Sir John Richardson in search of the ill-fated Sir John Franklin northwest passage expedition. Richardson's expedition was met at The Pas by the freezing chills of winter and it was decided that the party would split up, some spending the winter at The Pas and the others at Cumberland House. Among the former were two carpenters, Robert McKay and James McLaren who made many of the furnishings which can be seen to this day at Christ Church in The Pas. Illustrated above is one of the pew ends.



CAUTION:
This Canoe Route is to be used for general information; it is not a navigational chart. It was prepared in May of 1974, August of 1973, Summer 1963, 1964 & 1973, and the information recorded, including information with respect to the volume and velocity of water, reflects only the conditions which existed at that time. Because of the constantly changing nature of the waterway, this Canoe Route should be referred to with extreme caution, and only in conjunction with topographical maps and other available data.

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