Chapter 9

The Fur Trade

For about 60 years after Cartier's colony failed, France gave up the idea of settling along the St. Lawrence River. Europeans decided that the only valuable resource in the area was fish, and they didn't need to live there to catch them!

In time, the Europeans found that Aboriginal peoples had something else they wanted—furs. People in Europe were willing to pay a lot of money for furs, especially beaver fur. Soon people came to the St. Lawrence just to trade for furs.

In this chapter, you can find out how the fur trade got started and why it led to more exploration. You'll also see how the French finally started a colony along the St. Lawrence.

Fashionable Furs

Aboriginal peoples set up the first **fur-trading posts**. A trading post is a place where traders meet to exchange goods.

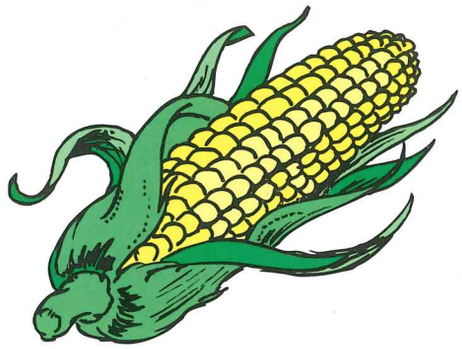
Tadoussac [TA-doo-sak], a place on the St. Lawrence River, was one of the early trading posts. Tadoussac had always been a place where Aboriginal groups met to trade in the summer. You can locate Tadoussac on the map on page 151.

Most of the trading was between Aboriginal peoples of the Subarctic region and peoples from the Great Lakes area. The Subarctic peoples had top-quality furs to trade. This is because the winters are colder in the north, so the animals grow thicker furs. People from the Great Lakes area had corn to trade. Ground corn is a good food for travelling, but it is too cold in the north to grow corn.

European traders fit into this system by coming to Tadoussac to do their own trading. By the early 1600s, about 1000 ships a year came from Europe to trade in the spring and summer.

For trade to work, each side must have something the other side wants.

Europeans had never seen corn before coming to North America.





This painting shows a trading post at Montreal. What details did the artist include to make the painting interesting?

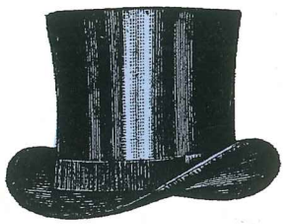
Luxury items are things that you don't need to meet your basic needs, but are fun to have. What luxury items are popular with your friends this year?

What Europeans Wanted

The main thing Europeans wanted to trade for was furs. Europeans made most of their warm clothing out of wool from sheep. Richer people, however, liked coats, trims, and hats made from fur. So furs such as lynx, fox, mink, and beaver were valuable **luxury** items in Europe.

Beaver hats weren't actually made from beaver fur. They were made from **felt**. Felt was made by scraping off the fine **under fur** from the beaver skin, then wetting and crushing it until it was matted together. This made a material something like thick, wet cardboard. This was then dried and shaped into hats.

Some Aboriginal groups made beaver coats with the fur on the inside. After a year or two, the outer hairs wore off and the under fur was matted. This was perfect for making felt, so these old coats were valuable to Europeans!



The Wellington (1812)



The Paris Beau (1815)



The Regent (1825)



The D'Orsay (1820)

The most fashionable piece of clothing in Europe was a beaver hat. By the 1600s, though, there weren't many beavers left in Europe because of all the hunting for furs to make hats.



Beavers were one of the game animals Aboriginal peoples traditionally hunted for food and clothing. Beavers have warm coats designed for cold climates. The under fur is thick. The long hairs of the outer fur trap warm air inside.

What Aboriginal Peoples Wanted

At first, Aboriginal peoples were most interested in trading for metal goods such as copper pots, knives, axe heads, and sewing needles. Once they understood how guns worked, these were highly prized, too.

These items helped Aboriginal peoples meet their basic needs. Once they had these things, they became interested in luxury items such as blankets, cloth, and beads. In time, they also came to like European foods such as biscuits and raisins. Later on, alcohol (brandy) and tobacco became important trade items.



Museums often display artifacts such as these trade items from the Hudson's Bay Company. What are the goods shown in this display?

Try This

Review the information about the goods Europeans offered in trade. Draw a picture of one of the tools Aboriginal peoples wanted. Write a caption to explain why you think it was useful. You might want to work in a group to make a "museum" display of trade goods.

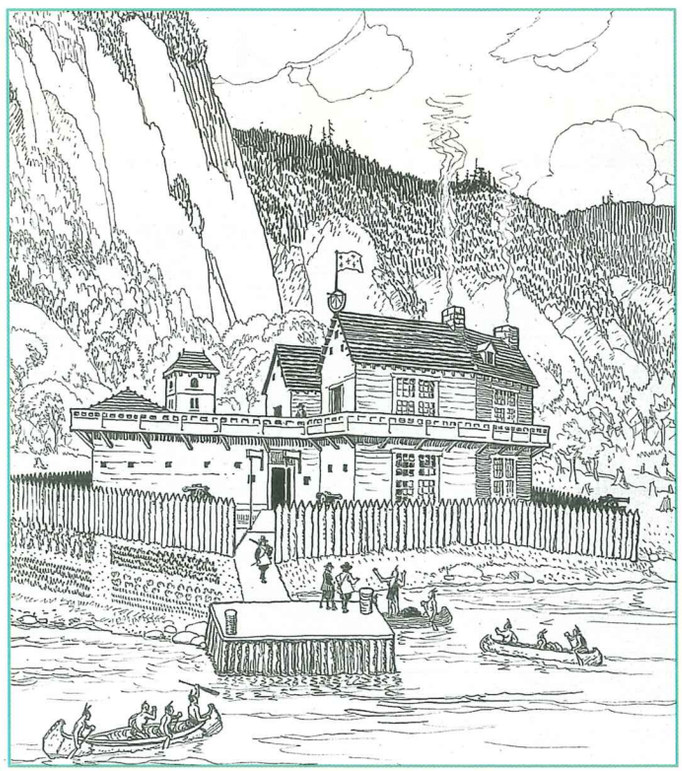
Before you start, think about what you already know about traditional Aboriginal technology. You might need to review what you know about awls, cooking pots, knives, adzes, and weapons used by different groups.

The Colony of New France

Donnacona's people, the Haudenosaunee, no longer lived in the area. Historians think they might have been driven south during wars with another group in the area called the Algonquin [al-GONG-kwun].

Europeans soon learned that if they got to Tadoussac in early spring they had the best choice of furs. Soon they decided to set up their own trading posts so that they could stay there all winter. Then they were sure to get the best furs.

Now the French king decided to try again to set up a colony along the St. Lawrence River. In 1608, a French map-maker and navigator named Samuel de Champlain [sham-PLANE] set up a colony close to where Donnacona's village had once been. They called their colony **Québec**.



The name *Québec* was the French version of the Algonquin word for "where the river narrows." This drawing was by the artist C.W. Jeffreys. In what way does Québec look like a Haudenosaunee village?

Champlain's Idea

The French wanted the top-quality furs from the Subarctic region. But they didn't know where to go to get the furs or how to travel there. Champlain decided that they would have to learn from the Aboriginal peoples. He hoped to find a way to fit into the **trade network** that linked Aboriginal groups from many different regions.

Getting Along

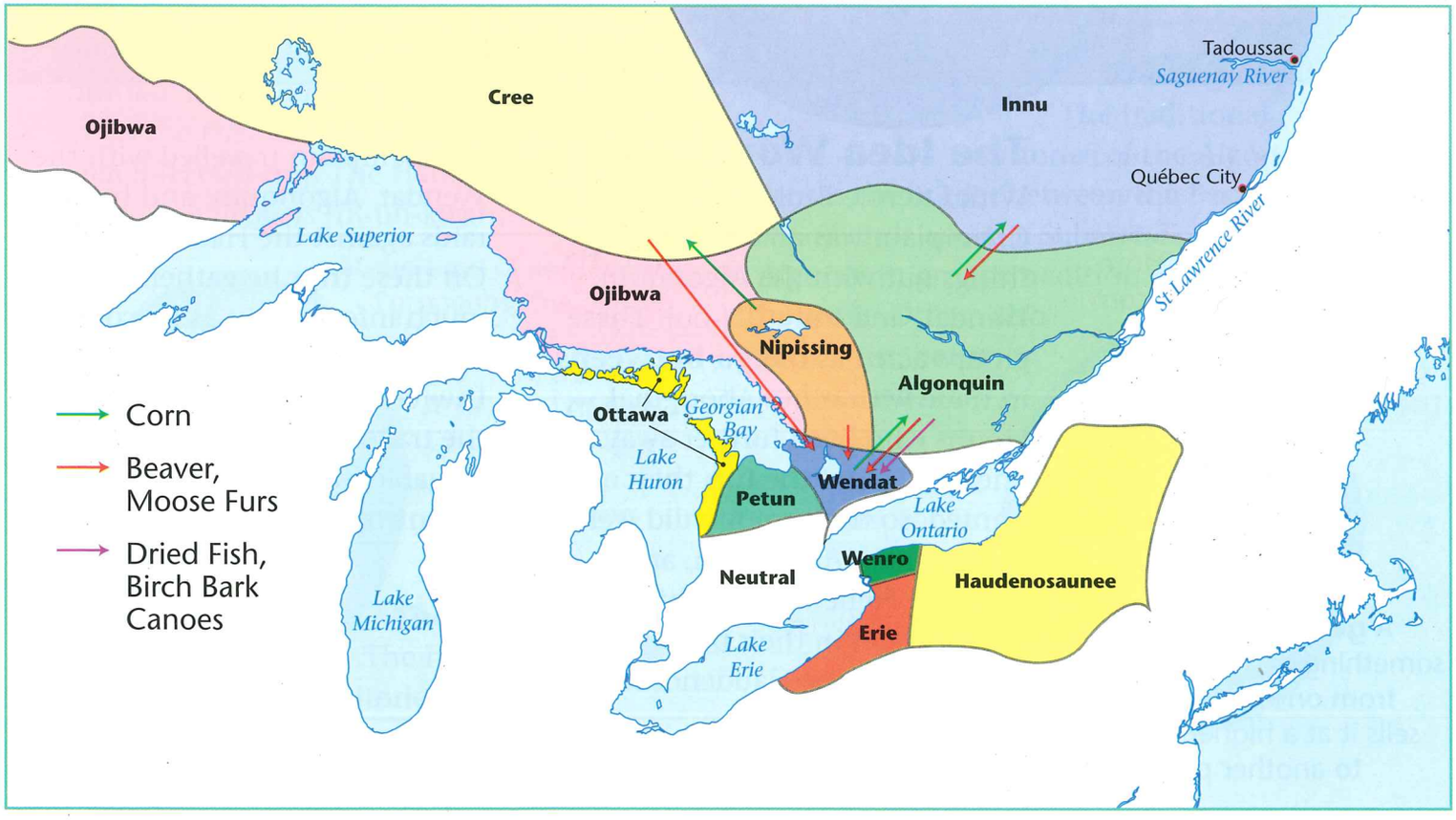
One of the first things Champlain did was to arrange an **exchange**. A 17-year-old French boy called Étienne Brulé [ay-TYEN broo-LAY] went to live with the Algonquin and then the Wendat [WEN-dat] to learn their language and customs. At the same time, a Wendat boy called Savignon [sa-vee-NOH(N)] went with Champlain on a trip to France.

Étienne Brulé grew to love the Wendat way of life. He returned to Québec only to help out Champlain and the fur traders.

Savignon wasn't as happy in France. He reported back that this was a strange place where children were treated badly. There were beggars everywhere and people argued loudly in the streets. Savignon was very glad to come home!

Today, young people often go on exchange programs. They live with other families in different parts of Canada or even different parts of the world. How do you think this might help people understand one another?

When you look at this map, it might seem easy to see where to go to get furs. But the French saw only the forests and lakes and rivers. They didn't have any maps to show them where to go.





When the French first arrived, the Wendat were the most powerful traders in the area. In this picture, women are pounding corn into grain in tubs made out of hollow tree trunks. The men are getting ready to go trading.

A **go-between** buys something at a low price from one person and sells it at a higher price to another person.

The Idea Works

With Étienne Brulé's help, Champlain was able to work things out with the Algonquin, Wendat, and Innu [IN-oo]. These groups acted as the **go-betweens** in trade with other Aboriginal groups who lived further away. The French got the furs they wanted, so their colony did well. The Wendat, Algonquin, and Innu got French guns, which helped them in their battles with their enemy, the Haudenosaunee.

Champlain travelled with the Wendat, Algonquin, and Innu on raids against the Haudenosaunee. On these trips he gathered as much information as he could. He made maps of the St. Lawrence area and learned how the trade routes worked. This was valuable information for the colonists.

A Closer Look

Some Aboriginal Traders

The Wendat and Haudenosaunee

The traditional territories of the Wendat and the Haudenosaunee are around the Great Lakes in the Eastern Woodlands region. Although the Wendat and Haudenosaunee were enemies, their cultures were similar. Both lived year-round in villages made up of wooden longhouses. (Turn to page 139 to see this type of village.) Women and girls grew corn, beans, and squash and collected wild plants. Men and boys hunted, fished, and traded.

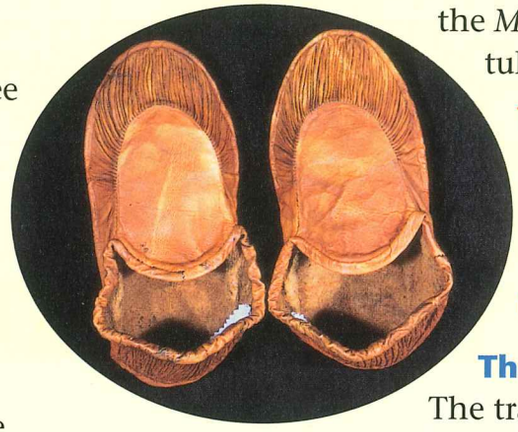
In the past, the Wendat were called the *Huron* [HYUR-on]. The Haudenosaunee were called the *Iroquois* [IR-uh-kwah].



At the time of contact with Europeans, the people of the Great Lakes area were the only Aboriginal groups in Canada who made pottery. This pot is about 500 years old.

The Innu

The Innu's traditional territories are in the Subarctic region. Their way of life was similar to other Subarctic hunters, such as the Dunne-za. In the past, the Innu nearest the St. Lawrence area were called the *Montagnais* [mon-tuh-NYAY].



These Innu moccasins are made from sealskin dyed with spruce roots.

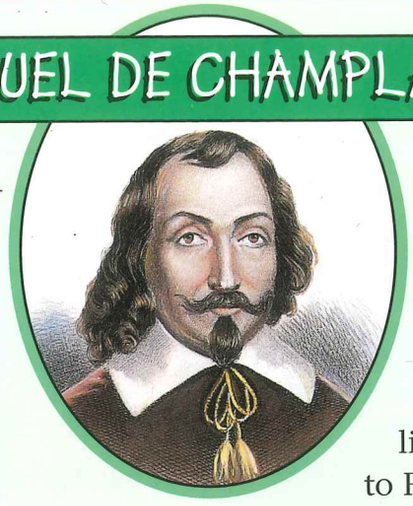
The Algonquin

The traditional territories of the Algonquin are on the border between the Eastern Woodlands and the Subarctic region. Some Algonquin groups traditionally lived by hunting. Others also grew corn, beans, and squash.



This Algonquin birch bark container shows how people decorated their everyday objects.

REAL PEOPLE: SAMUEL DE CHAMPLAIN (C. 1570–1635)



Samuel de Champlain set up the colony of New France. He worked hard for many years to keep peoples' spirits up and to get money from France to keep things going. He also got along with the Aboriginal peoples in the area, which made things easier for the colonists.

Champlain was a skilled map-maker. He also kept careful notes and drawings of the people, animals, plants, and places he saw on his travels. He was an expert navigator—he crossed the Atlantic 23 times during his life!

We don't know much about Champlain's personal life. He was married, but his wife didn't like life in the colony and returned to France.

By the time he died in 1635, Champlain knew he had gotten the colony of New France off to a good start.

Think For Yourself

Think back to the adventures of Jacques Cartier. In what way did Champlain have similar goals? What did the two men do differently? You might want to discuss your ideas with a partner. You could use a Venn diagram or another kind of chart to compare the two explorers.

Coureurs de Bois

At first the French relied on Aboriginal groups to bring them furs. As they learned more about the area, however, they realized they could buy furs for less if they travelled to the people who actually trapped the animals. This cut out the go-betweens.

The young men who set out to trade on their own were called ***coureurs de bois*** [koo-RUR-duh-BWAH], which means "runners of the woods." They learned to live off the land in the same way as Aboriginal peoples did.

Coureurs de bois set out by canoe in the summer. Sometimes they spent the winter in Aboriginal communities and returned to the colony in the spring. Other times they travelled "round trip" during the summer. They tried to travel in groups of three so that they had help if something went wrong.

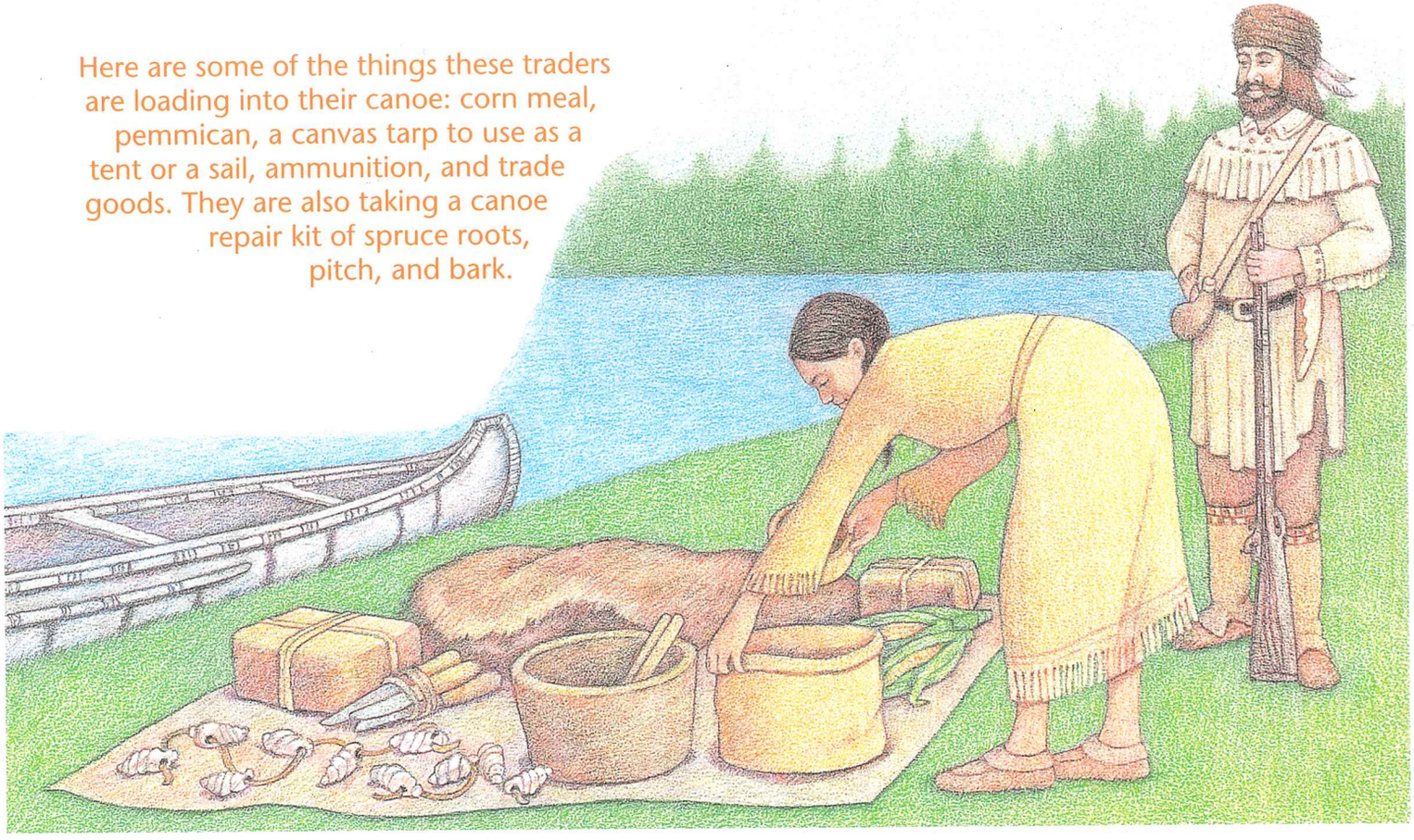
This way of trading worked well for the Europeans. It became the way things were done in the fur trade for almost 300 years.

Women in the Fur Trade

The *coureurs de bois* got along well with Aboriginal peoples because they married Aboriginal women.



The *coureurs de bois* bought the furs at a low price from Aboriginal communities, then sold them to merchants at a higher price. The merchants then shipped them to France and sold them for an even higher price!



Here are some of the things these traders are loading into their canoe: corn meal, pemmican, a canvas tarp to use as a tent or a sail, ammunition, and trade goods. They are also taking a canoe repair kit of spruce roots, pitch, and bark.

This meant they became part of the communities they traded with. The wives taught the *coureurs de bois* the local language and helped them understand the culture. They were also their work partners.

Women often went on trading trips. They had many jobs. They made the food, set up the camp, carried goods around rapids, and mended clothing and canoes.

Try This

Draw a picture to show one thing *coureurs de bois* learned from Aboriginal peoples. This might be a tool or a way of doing something. Write a caption that explains what you know about this and why you think *coureurs de bois* chose the Aboriginal way.

You might want to work in a group to make a display of Aboriginal tools and ways of doing things that were used by the Europeans. (You'll find more information about winter travel in the next section, "More Exploration.")

More Exploration

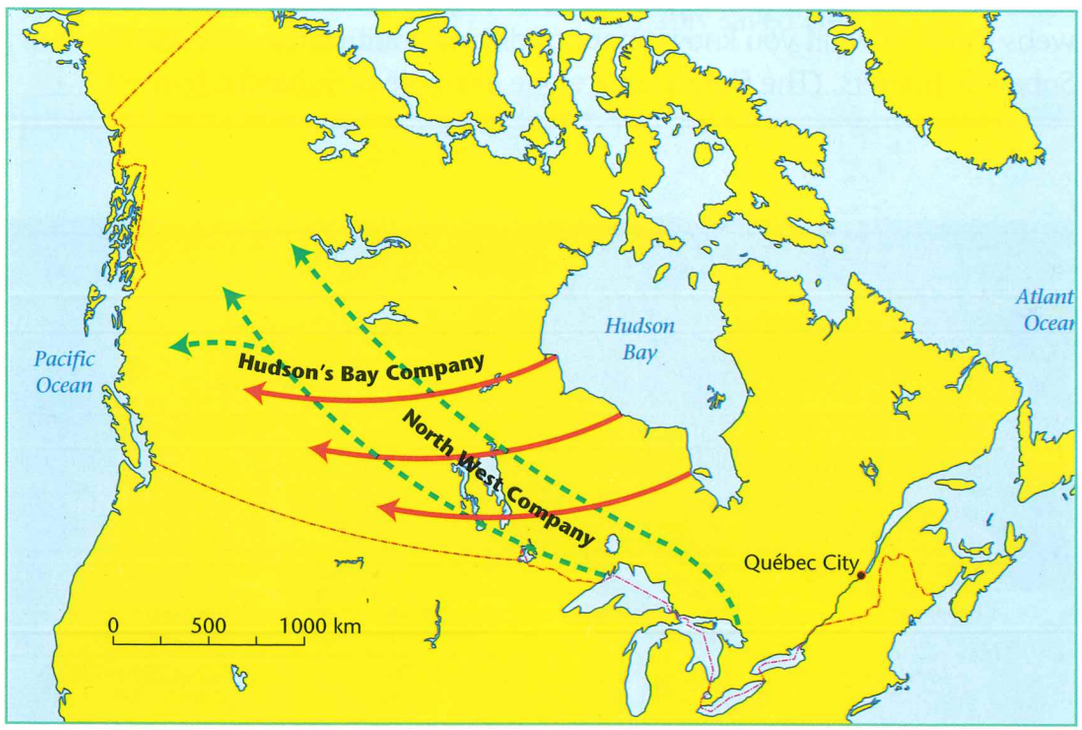
Over the next 200 years, Europeans spent as much time fighting each other over trade as they did finding furs!

The Trade Wars

For a long time the competition over trade was between the French and the English. The English had set up colonies to the north and south of the French. Both sides wanted to get the most—and the best—furs and to control the fur trade.

In 1763, the English took over New France. Now the competition over trade was between two companies: the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company. For many years they fought each other as they searched for the best furs. Traders attacked one another. Sometimes people were killed.

In 1821, the two companies joined forces. Then things finally settled down.



During the years of the trade wars, the fur trade gradually moved west.

Exploring

During the trade wars, the fur-trading companies paid for explorers to go with Aboriginal guides into new areas. There were three main reasons for this:

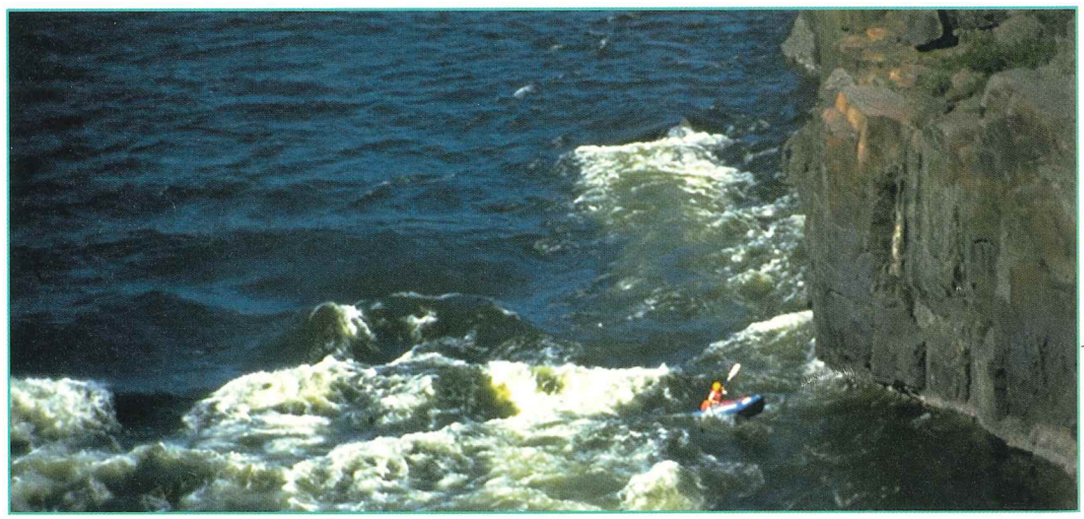
- Europeans were *still* looking for the Northwest Passage to the Pacific Ocean.
- The fur traders could get furs more cheaply if they didn't buy them from Aboriginal go-betweens.
- After awhile, most of the animals near the forts had been hunted and killed, so they needed to find new areas to get furs.

In the rest of this section, you can find out about a trip made between 1770 and 1772 by a Chipewyan [chi-puh-WY-un] leader called Matonabbee [mat-uh-NAH-bee] and an English explorer called Samuel Hearne. They travelled together through the Subarctic and into the Arctic. This is one example of how Europeans and Aboriginal peoples worked together to explore.

The Chipewyan and the Cree were two Aboriginal groups who were important trading partners for the Hudson's Bay Company.

Try This

Before you read about Matonabbee and Samuel Hearne, make webs showing what you know about the Subarctic and Arctic environments. Make two more webs showing what you know about traditional Inuit culture and the life of Subarctic hunters. (The Dunne-za are one example of Subarctic hunters.)



This shows the Coppermine River near where it flows into the Arctic Ocean.

Journey to the North

Samuel Hearne worked for the Hudson's Bay Company. Most of what we know about the trip he made with Matonabbee comes from a book he wrote about his adventures.

What region did Samuel Hearne explore in 1770 to1772?

Samuel Hearne explored the region between Fort Prince of Wales on Hudson Bay and the Coppermine River where it flows into the Arctic Ocean.

What was Hearne looking for?

Hearne was looking for a large river and a copper mine. Three years before some Chipewyan traders had brought large lumps of raw copper to the fort. They told of a great river that led to the sea. The Hudson's Bay Company hoped this was the Northwest Passage, or at least that its ships could travel up the river and bring back copper.

Hearne had tried to find the river and the mines in 1769 and 1770. Both of these trips ended before they had gone far. On his first trip, Hearne was robbed and deserted by his guides. He was lucky to get back to the fort alive!

Who showed Hearne the way?

At the end of Hearne's second trip he met a Chipewyan leader called Matonabbee. Once again, Hearne's guides had robbed him of most of his goods, and he was very cold in his European clothing. Matonabbee gave Hearne a warm suit made from otter skins to keep out the cold. He probably saved Hearne's life.

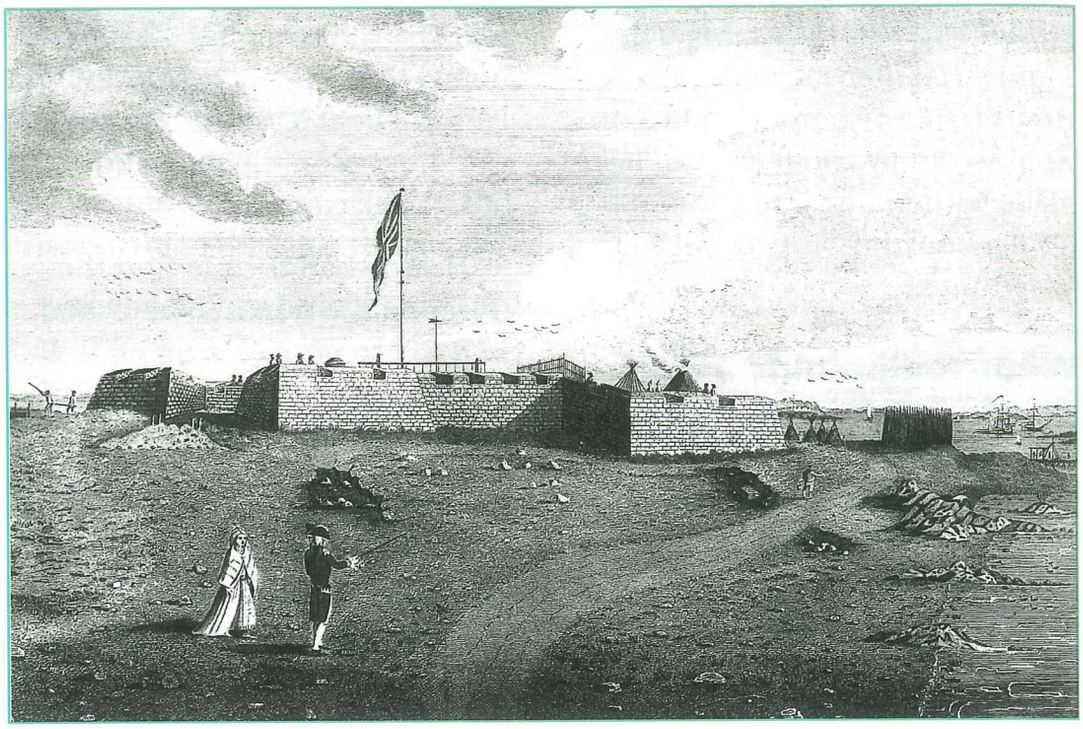


The map shows Samuel Hearne's journey in 1770.

Reading Hint

This section uses questions to organize the investigation. The questions are headings.

Matonabbee was part Cree and part Chipewyan. He was a respected Elder and trader. Hearne described Matonabbee as "the most sociable, kind, and sensible Indian I had ever met with. He was a man well known and generally respected."



Fort Prince of Wales was built in 1718. It was an unusual fort because the walls were built of stone, 11 to 12 metres thick and 5 metres high. Most forts were made of wood. This drawing is by Samuel Hearne.

When he learned how badly Hearne's trip had gone, Matonabbee told him it was because he had poor guides. He also told him it was a mistake not to take women on the trip. He explained that women carried supplies, prepared food, and mended clothing and canoes—it was impossible to travel without them! Matonabbee offered to be Hearne's guide if he tried to find the river and mines again.

Hearne did try again. This time he took a group of Chipewyan men and women with him, with Matonabbee leading the way.

One woman had a baby during the trip. The group stopped for a couple of days when the baby was born. Then the baby joined the party and they all moved on!

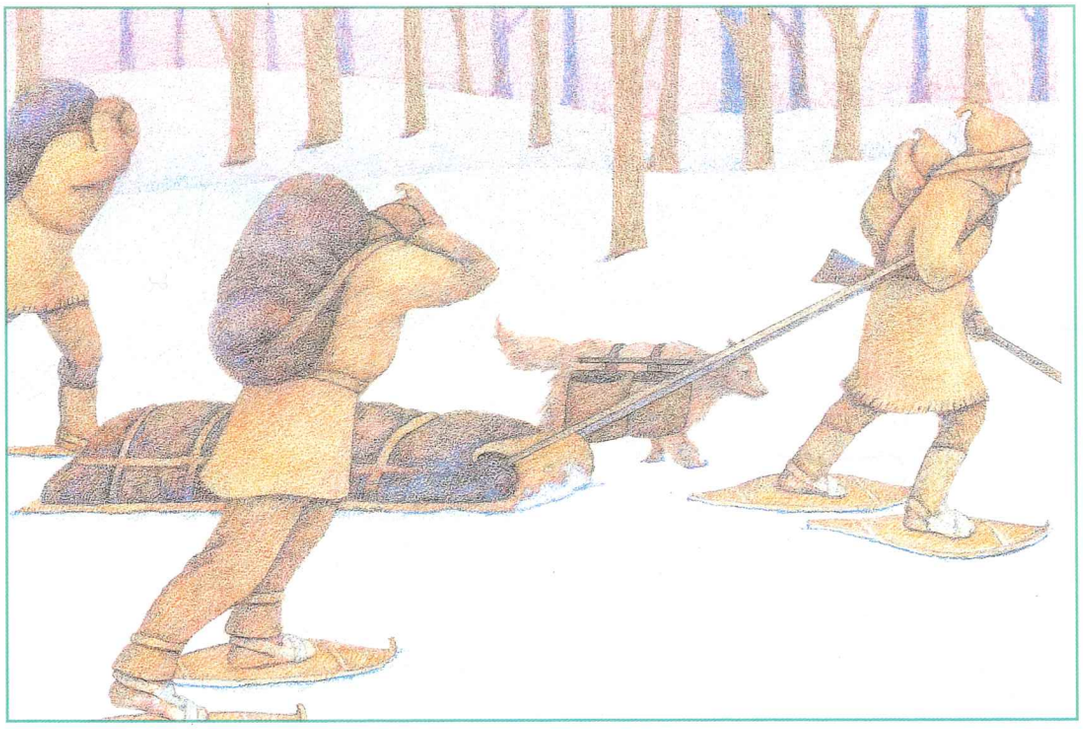
What technology did the group use?

The group used both European and Aboriginal technology to help them on their journey.

Women carried most of the goods and usually pulled the **toboggans**. (Sometimes dogs helped, too.) The group slept in deerskin tents on part of the journey. Other times they slept in the open or in the shelter of rocks or snow banks. The group also had European tools such as guns, ammunition, knives, and metal needles.

In spring, the Chipewyan made light canoes to help them cross wide rivers. They often had to carry the canoes 200 kilometres or more as they crossed over land.

Hearne used European technology to make a map of the area. Using a watch, he figured out how far he had walked in one hour. Then he could figure out the distance he travelled in one



This is what the group might have looked like when they set out in December. The sleds used by the Chipewyan did not have runners. They are called *toboggans*. What Aboriginal technologies do you see? What are the European technologies?

day. Hearne used a compass to tell him what direction he was travelling in. He also used a quadrant to check his location, the same way a sailor would.

What were some of the challenges they faced?

The two main challenges for the group were finding food and surviving the cold weather. In his book, Hearne tells of daily adventures. You can read about some of them here.

The group left Fort Prince of Wales in the snow and cold on 7 December 1770. Soon they reached the place where Matonabbee had left a cache of food, but it had been stolen!

From the nineteenth we traversed nothing but entirely barren ground, with empty bellies, till the twenty-seventh.

On December 27th, they came across a herd of caribou. Matonabbee told Hearne that they would travel with the caribou herd to make sure they always had enough food. This was the traditional way for the Chipewyan to meet their basic needs.

Hearne got used to the cold weather, but some days were worse than others. On February 7th, they crossed a lake that was about 22 kilometres wide.

It is impossible to describe the intenseness of the cold this day. We [crossed] in two hours, though several of the women who were heavy laden took much longer. Several of the Indians were much frozen.

What do you think it would be like to walk in the snow for eight days without any food?

Hearne was 24 years old when he made this trip. He later became an important person in the Hudson's Bay Company and set up the fort of Cumberland House. He married a woman named Mary Norton, who was part English and part Cree.

Why do you think the Chipewyan would leave a sick person behind? What would happen if the whole group stopped to wait for someone to get better?

Towards the end of April, the group was travelling at half their normal speed. This time it was because the weather was too warm!

The weather was in general so hot, and so much snow had been melted, it [was] bad walking in snowshoes, and heavy hauling.

They reached the Coppermine River in July. Hearne was surprised that the river was so shallow. They looked for copper, but only found small amounts.

They soon started the journey home. The Chipewyan were in a hurry to get back, so they walked many kilometres every day. Hearne's feet became very sore. He had to keep going, though, because it was the Chipewyan custom to leave behind anyone who wasn't well enough to travel.

My feet and legs had swelled considerably. The nails of my toes were bruised to such a degree that several of them fell off. The skin was entirely chafed off from the tops of both my feet, and between every toe. For a whole day I left the print of my feet in blood almost at every step I took.

Samuel Hearne's feet healed, but it took six more months of walking to get back to Fort Prince of Wales!

What did Hearne find out?

- He found out that a river led into the Arctic Ocean, but it was not large and there were no great copper mines.
- He collected enough information to make a map that other Europeans could use to find their way in the area.
- He recorded information about plants and animals in the region.
- He recorded information about the ways in which the Chipewyan and other groups lived.

Think For Yourself

Imagine you could travel back in time to interview Samuel Hearne, Matonabbee, or a member of their group for your television program *Great Adventures*. You'd like to talk to them about what happened on their trip and how they felt about it.

Decide who to interview, then make a list of three to five questions to ask. You might want to work in a group. You could then select members of your group to be the interviewer, the guest, and the audience. After the interview, you could invite the audience to ask questions.

HOW TO... Do an Interview

Get organized before you start! Think about what you want to know. *Who, What, Where, When, Why,* and *How* are the questions newspaper reporters use to make sure they get all the information they need. Here are some other hints for successful interviews.

1. Brainstorm what you'd like to find out, then pick three to five of your best questions.
2. When you ask questions, pay attention to the answers. Nod to show you are listening. Don't interrupt.
3. Sometimes ask for more information. Try *"Tell me more about ..."* and *"How did you feel when ...."*

Find Out

Research and report on a journey made by these European explorers: Alexander Mackenzie, Simon Fraser, or David Thompson. You might use the questions about Samuel Hearne in this section to focus your research. You might have other questions you want to investigate. Remember to include Aboriginal peoples' points of view.

Think of a creative way to report your findings. For example, you could role-play an Aboriginal woman telling what the trip was like for her. Or you could write a journal entry describing where the explorer went and what he found.

Looking Back

In this chapter, you discovered how Aboriginal peoples and Europeans worked together in the fur trade and to explore. You also saw how to use questions to organize an investigation.

Why is asking questions an important part of social studies?