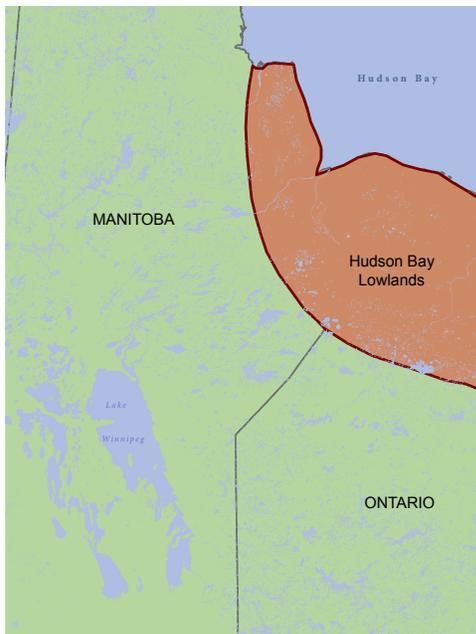




Barbara Gordon explores house foundations at Kaskatamakan, 2007.



PRE-CONTACT AND COLONIALISM

We have already shared that where we live today is not where we lived for most of our history. We want to add more about this and we have commissioned Dr. Virginia Petch, a professional archaeologist and anthropologist, to help us tell this part of our story.

Anthropologists refer to us, and other Cree communities of northeastern Manitoba as the Swampy Cree, who inhabited the area known today as the Hudson Bay lowlands. We have always called ourselves "Ininiwak".² To be Ininiwak was, and still is, to be a part of an ancient tradition that mastered and specialized in life within a most challenging environment. The intimate relationship that we, as Ininiwak enjoyed with the land did not come easy. Through many years of observation and experience our ancestors became experts in reading the lands and waters that they used and occupied since as long as they could remember.

The Hudson Bay Lowlands are a vast area of wetlands and across this expanse of low-lying, often frozen swamp are gravel beach ridges that outline former, ancient shorelines. Through these

² There are different terms used to refer to ourselves including Nehenow Ininiwak and Maskego Nehenow Ininiwak.





Kaskattama River.

physical barriers, large and powerful rivers and many streams have carved their paths, replenishing the living ocean and providing a network of accessible travel routes for our people.

Ground cover is mainly mosses and small woody plants and shrubs with pockets of spruce, and sometimes poplar and birch in well protected valleys. There is not the abundance or variety of wildlife found further south.

Only a few animals are hardy enough to survive the fierce and uncompromising winters. Those plants and creatures that do inhabit the lowlands have developed remarkable abilities to sustain themselves in spite of the odds. These modest gifts of the land and water have nourished us. We have come to know the land well and our survival has depended upon this.

Ininiwak have lived along the coast of Kihcikamîy (Hudson Bay) for a long time. So long ago in fact, that Kayas (long ago) is remembered only through Kayas Achimowina, the oral tradition and Kapesiwin, the scattered remains of former campsites.³

Our oral history speaks of a time when the great ice or glaciers (Kische Mus komi) covered the land. The great flood (Kischi Niskipewin), that followed and the gradual emergence of the earth are also documented in our oral history. As soon as the

We have come to know the land



Beach Ridges at Hudson Bay Coast.



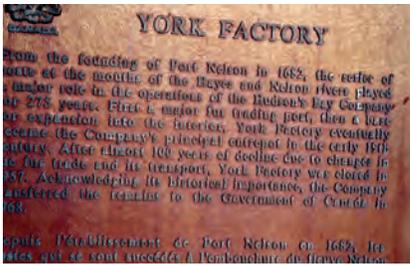
Four Mile Island, Hayes River.

³ Kayas ka ke pay che spa nik (the beginning of time), Mawac Kayas (ancient time), Kayas (long ago), and Unos ka is pa nik (recent past). (Flora Beardy, personal communication 2006).





York Factory Hudson's Bay Company Post



land was clear of ice and water, the ancient people (Keteyatisak), explored the landscape naming the lakes, rivers and other features in their own language.

While many signs of the Keteyatisak life have been reclaimed by the land there are some that have survived the test of time. Stone spear points (takachikana), arrowheads (che po kusk), and clay pottery (asiski askik), attest to the ancient and long-standing occupation and use of the coastal areas of Hudson Bay by Cree people. In association with these ancient tools are often found the fragile remains of animals that sustained life. The bones of caribou (attik), moose (mooswa), sturgeon (numa'o), jackfish (unjobayo), rabbit (wa'pos), beaver (amisk), Canada goose (nis'ka) and waterfowl (seesee-puk-ako-kotuk-pinasesuk) that have been recovered at some ancient campsites confirm that these were not only preferred foods but that they were also used for specialized tools such as fleshers, harpoons, awls and needles.



Cemetery at York Factory.

There are well over 200 ancient and historical sites, some up to 5,000 years old, identified to date across the Hudson Bay coastal area of Manitoba. Many of these are associated with our Ininiwak ancestors.



Our people have hunted, fished and trapped in specific areas out of an ancient tradition



Frederick McPherson and Charlie Bland

(Makaysew Sakahegan), Ten Shilling Creek (Seepastik), Crooked Bank (Wanatawahak), Fifteen Mile Esker (Kis chi Wa chee), and the Weir River (Kisaymichiskan Seepee). Although many sites are overgrown or no longer identifiable, we know that there are many, many more. It is important for us that the locations of burials and other sites be recorded so that good land management decisions are made. Knowing where culturally sensitive areas are located will help ensure that these areas will not inadvertently be damaged or destroyed. There is an unbroken cultural thread that runs through the nature of these sites, showing that the availability of local natural resources has not changed much over the past several thousand years and that our people have hunted, fished and trapped in specific areas out of an ancient tradition.

THE HOMEGUARD CREE, COASTERS AND INLANDERS

In historical accounts, we are referred to as the Homeguard Cree, or the Coastal Cree. We did not plan on going to the coast because of the Europeans; it was because the coast was part of our seasonal activities rooted in the ancient past. While much of the year was spent at the coast hunting, fishing and gathering, we, like our Ininiwak ancestors, wintered inland in the protection of the forest. Gathering together in the summer and dispersing in winter were two distinctive parts of our ancestors' seasonal activities. Each family would go inland to their customary, family wintering areas - the traditional lands on which the original registered trap lines under the Manitoba trap line system would later, in part, be based.

As the Homeguard Cree our role quickly changed from a transitory, short-term to a permanent and long-term relationship with the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC). As provisioners for the forts our people ensured a reliable source of food, clothing and many other services to the Europeans at the forts. We were critical to the success of the fur trade. Many Cree (Ininiwak) women took European husbands (country marriages) and





Hector Spence and Alex Spence

became their partners in the fur trade. The women not only took charge of managing their households but also were instrumental in cementing alliances with their Cree relatives throughout the coast and upland regions. The children that were born from these marriages went on to provide a continuing blood link with the HBC. Many fur trade names are found throughout the York Factory families and beyond.

Other terms such as “coasters” and “inlanders” were used by the European traders to distinguish between the geographic areas that people lived in. Our ancestors named themselves based on the river basins that they occupied. For the York Factory area, people living along the Ka pi na si way chi wak seepee (Lower Hayes River) and Ooho seepee (Owl River) were coasters while those inhabiting the Apet seepee (Hayes River) and Chackatinow seepee (Hill or Upper Hayes River) were inlanders.

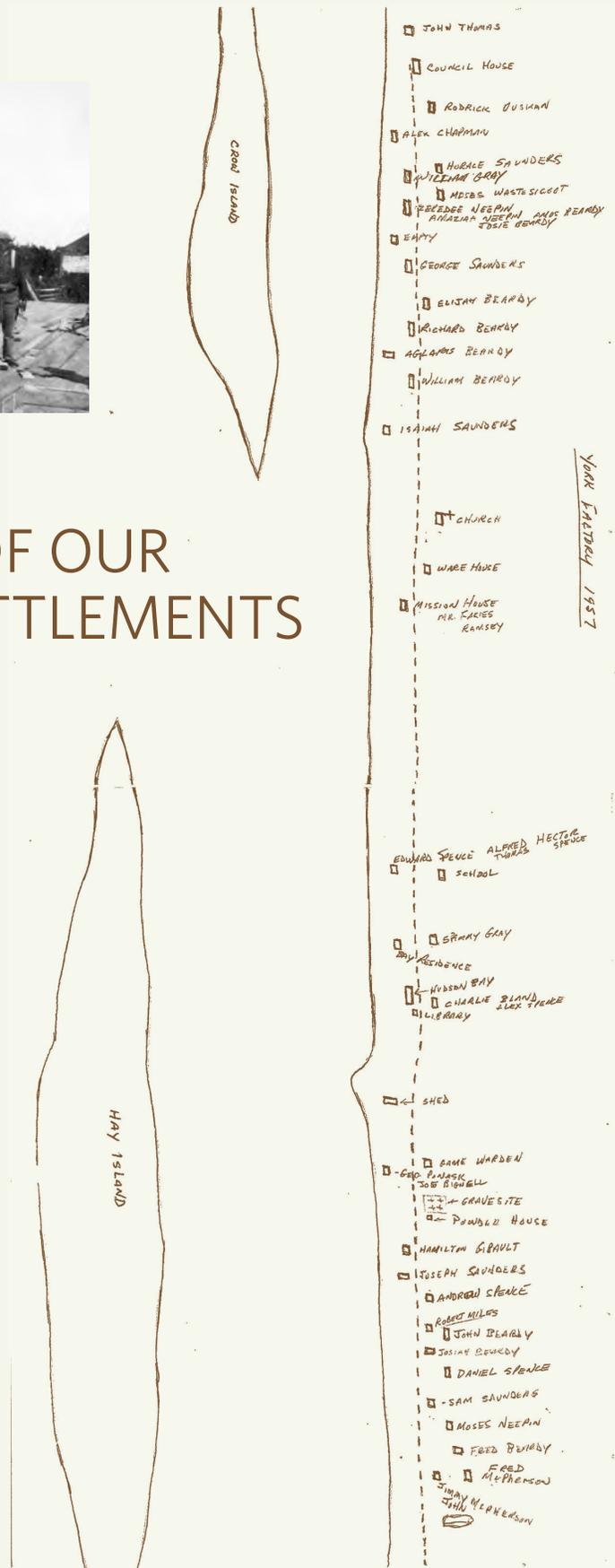
One of the distinctive features of our culture was a fluidity that allowed for free movement and autonomy. Whether on the coast or in the forest, our ancestors adapted their knowledge and technology to the environment. Our community oral history project confirms that within the living memory of present day Elders, our families regularly moved between Fort Severn (Wasahoo), Big Trout Lake (Namakoos Sakahegan), Kaskatamakan, Shamattawa, York Factory (Kischewaskahekan),





Building the Church at York Factory, 1933.

MEMORIES OF OUR COASTAL SETTLEMENTS



York Factory, circa 1957 by Eric Saunders.

The Omen of the Rabbit

I went to check my rabbit snares and I got one rabbit. This was at Shamattawa. I walked back across the river on the ice towards home. I decided to take a rest, so I sat down and laid the rabbit right beside me. The rabbit's coat was all frosted and its head was all covered with snow. It was dead. As I went to pick up the rabbit, it was gone! I noticed the tracks leading away and when I looked up I saw it running away! There was this one old woman that told us something's going to happen in your family. The rabbit was a sign. Not too long after, your [Flora Beardy's] father arrived and brought us the bad news. This is what this old woman had told us. She said that when someone arrived here, that person will have bad news. So it wasn't too long after that your father arrived. He told me: "It's your father. You do not have a father any more." That is what he said. That's why I had this sign.

It is a good power to have, to be able to know what these signs mean. But sometimes the omens can be bad.

Amy Hill: Yes, because it involves spirits.

Albert Hill: Not that anything would happen to the person who receives these signs; the spirits are usually friendly but knowing that someone in the family is going to die is the hard part. Some people are not able to handle this. This is what is called the ghost/spirit omen. This is what it was called, a long time ago.

Albert Hill

- From "Voices from the Bay" p. 73-74

Learning by Experience

The kids were out on this flat rock and they had just finished dancing. Anyway the tide was coming in and they were out on this flat rock. They were standing on this rock, not realizing that the tide was coming in! So I told my husband, "Those kids are going to get stranded out there." I wanted him to call out to them but he said: "Just wait. Don't say anything yet. They'll realize right away what's happening." So I didn't say anything. The boys were busy watching a seal swimming in the river. My husband said: "They'll find out in a minute to listen to what they were told! They were told to always watch out for the incoming tide." Frank was standing there too with the boys. The seal they were watching dove under and when it popped up again, it was right in front of them. You should have seen them. They started yelling, turned around to run for shore. Well, that's when they saw all the water around them so they had to wade through the water! They didn't take long to get to shore. They got scared of the seal. At that time, the chief was my late uncle Abraham Beardy. He was standing on shore laughing at the boys. He told them they wouldn't have been in that situation if they had listened to what they were told. Everyone that was watching laughed at them!

Mary Redhead

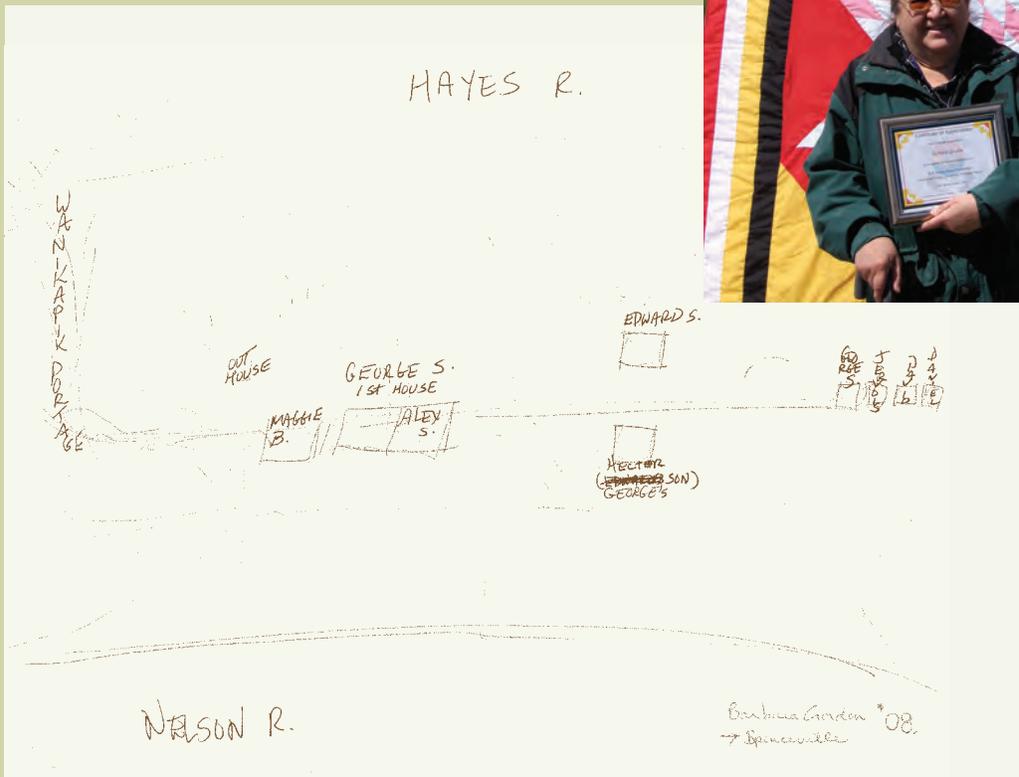
- From "Voices from the Bay" p.72



Kaskatamakan, by Dorothy Redhead.



Raised foundations still visible in the grass at Kaskatamakan, 2007.



Spenceville, by Barbara Gordon.



Barbara Gordon

Our relationships with the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) varied from positive to negative

Port Nelson (Pawinakaw), the Bay line (Otapan Maskanow) and Churchill (Mantayo Seepee).

Our Ininiwak ancestors who became known as the Homeguard Cree incorporated the needs of HBC into their seasonal hunting schedule. Initially, hunters were probably asked if they could provide some fresh meat for the men of the fort. Our traditions of sharing and exchange were extended to these foreigners, especially when some of our women married European men.

Our relationships with the HBC varied from positive to negative and changed us as a people. The HBC provided work and goods for our people and food during periods when country food supplies were less secure and available. At other times, company officials ignored our needs, leaving our ancestors to starve at the very doors of the fort. The HBC introduced liquor into the fur trade to take advantage of our ancestors. Alcohol abuse followed, since our people had no prior knowledge of alcohol and its effects. In turn, the historical record shows that certain HBC officials viewed our ancestors as “unruly untamable savages”. Such persons viewed our people as a nuisance at York Factory and sought to discourage our settlement there. When the company could use us, they did so; when their business economy declined, they no longer had any concern for our welfare. This story was repeated over and over again until the time of our relocation to York Landing (Kawechiwasik) in 1957.

TRADITIONAL USES AND ACTIVITIES

The seasonal resources of the coast drew our Ininiwak ancestors from the shelter of the forest. Geese, waterfowl and birds, bird eggs, spawning fish, mussels, small and large mammals, marine mammals, and seacoast medicinal herbs and plant foods provided vital nutrients and a welcome change from the winter menu. We hunted caribou all year round for food. While the spring caribou were lean they provided a much-needed source of protein. The spring migration of caribou to their coastal breeding grounds marked the beginning of our seasonal moves to the coast and the opportunity to intercept large herds for food.





Alex Spence and Hector Spence

Two hunting strategies were employed - "deer" fences and spearing. The people located fences along reliable and ancient migratory routes. Many people constructed and operated the fences and butchered, processed and stored the meat. The fall hunt used a much different strategy. As the caribou herds retreated to the forests our people speared them at the river crossings. The fall caribou were fat and healthy and provided both high quality food and skins for clothing and shelter.

The spring caribou hunt was followed by the arrival of migratory birds. Snow geese (wawao) and Canada geese (nis'kuk), ducks such as mallards (eninisip sese'p) and a variety of shore birds were hunted especially during the moult. Willow ptarmigan (wapinayo) were hunted all year round. We used snares, nets, bows and arrows and occasionally clubs long before European technology was introduced, and continued to use them throughout the historic period. Our people quickly mastered the use of the gun. Being attached to the fort meant that they were issued two guns: as one was being fired, the other was being loaded, usually by a man's wife or children. Specific locations were known to be prime waterfowl habitat, and brush stands or blinds were set up throughout the marshes. From these hiding places our people lured the birds by mimicking their calls, just as we do to this day. As our ancestors became an integral part of the operations of the fort, larger numbers of geese were



Frederick McPherson



Thompson Beardy





hunted. These were salted and shipped overseas or kept for post provisions. Our people continued to provide their families with geese and other wild foods in addition to supplying the forts. Geese are a favourite part of our diet to this day.

Fishing was a year round activity, but the most productive periods were during spring and fall spawning. We used many methods of fishing, depending on the type of fish and time of year. Spawning fish were usually speared or trapped in fishing weirs. Gill and seine nets, and hooks were also used. During the winter months we set nets under the ice. The sucker was the first fish to spawn in the lowland regions, closely followed by sturgeon and northern pike. These and other species of fish were netted during the summer months and provided a reliable source of protein and essential oils for our ancestors. The fall fishery was perhaps the most important. Spawning whitefish were usually caught in seine nets or in weirs. Net fishing continued all winter and was especially important in providing “survival” and dog food. Our Homeguard Cree ancestors provided the Europeans of the forts with fish throughout the year in addition to feeding themselves and their families.



Fred Beardy



Francis Spence



Seal in Hayes River

Species-specific fishing was very much a part of the seasonal round and extended families and friends of our ancestors moved according to the traditional knowledge of fish behavior. In addition to the fishery, whale and seal hunting frequently occurred. Whale and seal were also netted in hand-woven nets and seal skin was used for leather. Sealskin was also used to make rope and whale “grease” was sold to the HBC.

PLACES OF USE AND OCCUPANCY IN THE YORK FACTORY AREA

In the past, our families lived in small settlements at many of the river and creek outlets from Churchill to Kaskatamakan and along the Hudson Bay coast to Great Whale River. Five family groups lived in small settlements near York Factory (Kischewaskahekan): Port Nelson (Pawinakaw) (10 families);





Alex Spence, Hector Spence and Leonard Nippe

Crooked Bank (Wanatawahak) (4 families); Ten Shilling Creek (Seepastik) (4 families); Kaskatamakan (12 families), and Shamattawa (several families).

According to David Massan, he and Moses Neepin spent a good part of the winter at the Owl River (Ooho Seepee) trapping. Abel Chapman (Moses Neepin's son-in-law) and his family also trapped in this region. More recently, Joseph Saunders also recalled that whales were caught at "the portage"⁴ for oil and dog food. Some people ate whale meat. Joseph Saunders recalled life at Kaskatamakan with his family. The winter was spent hunting and trapping, with fishing and gathering more prevalent in spring and summer. A small HBC store at Kaskatamakan supplied basic staples to the families who wintered there. This store closed in 1951.⁵

 SARAH BEARDY

"We would stop along the way to Kaskatamakan and hunt. We had lots of food, geese and ducks. We liked our life. We felt we were rich because we were never short of food. We had lots to eat."

 ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH BARBARA GORDON, 2005

Barbara: That was, these were the people that went from York Factory

"We felt we were rich because we were never short of food."

-Sarah Beardy

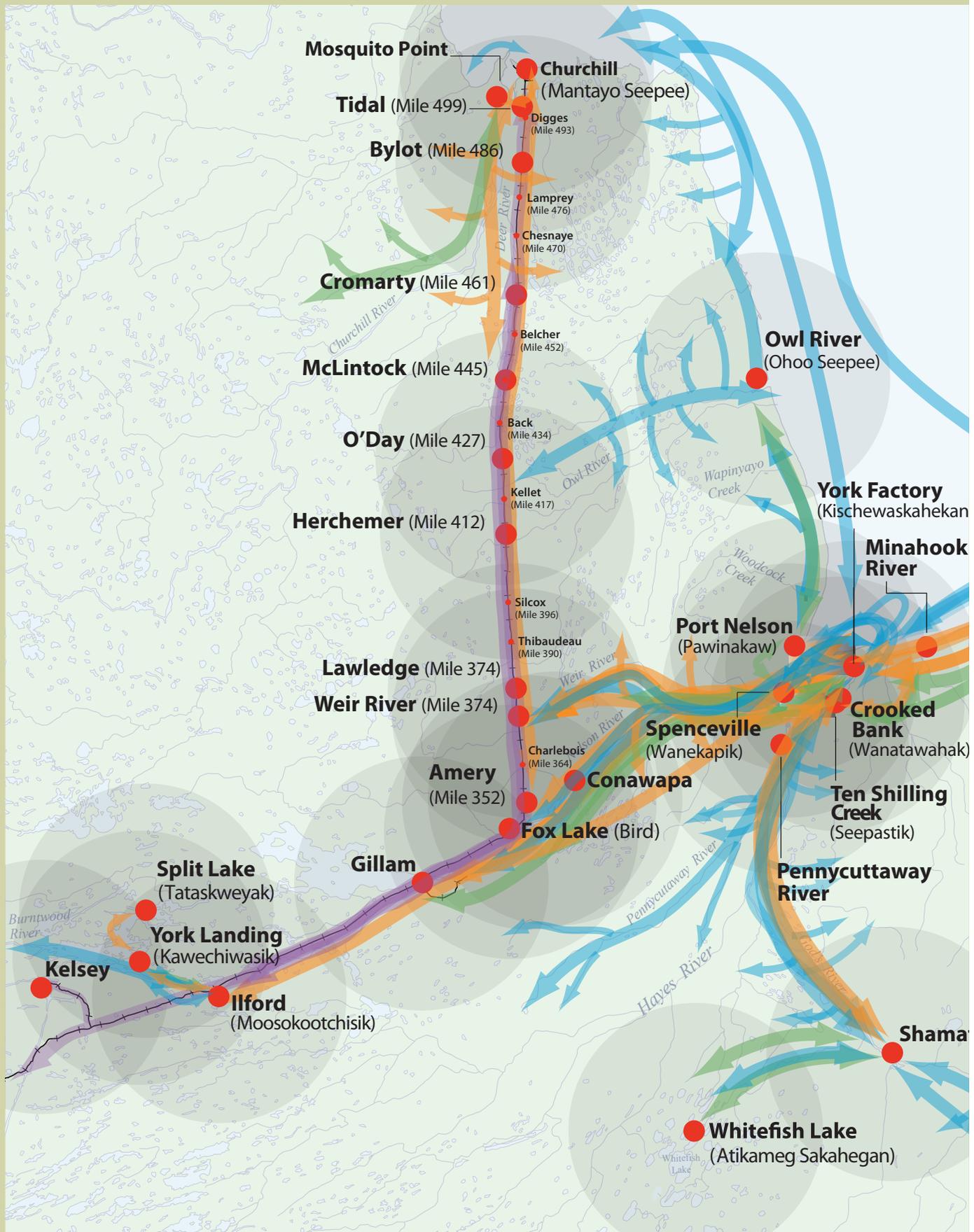


Spenceville, 2007.

⁴ The portage may be the one from York Factory that opens out on the east side of the Nelson River. A former settlement (Spenceville or Wanekapik) is located on the east side of the Nelson River at a portage.

⁵ Hill, D.N.W. (1993) History of the Reindeer and Nejanilini Lake District to 1820. M.A. Thesis, University of Manitoba Department of History.

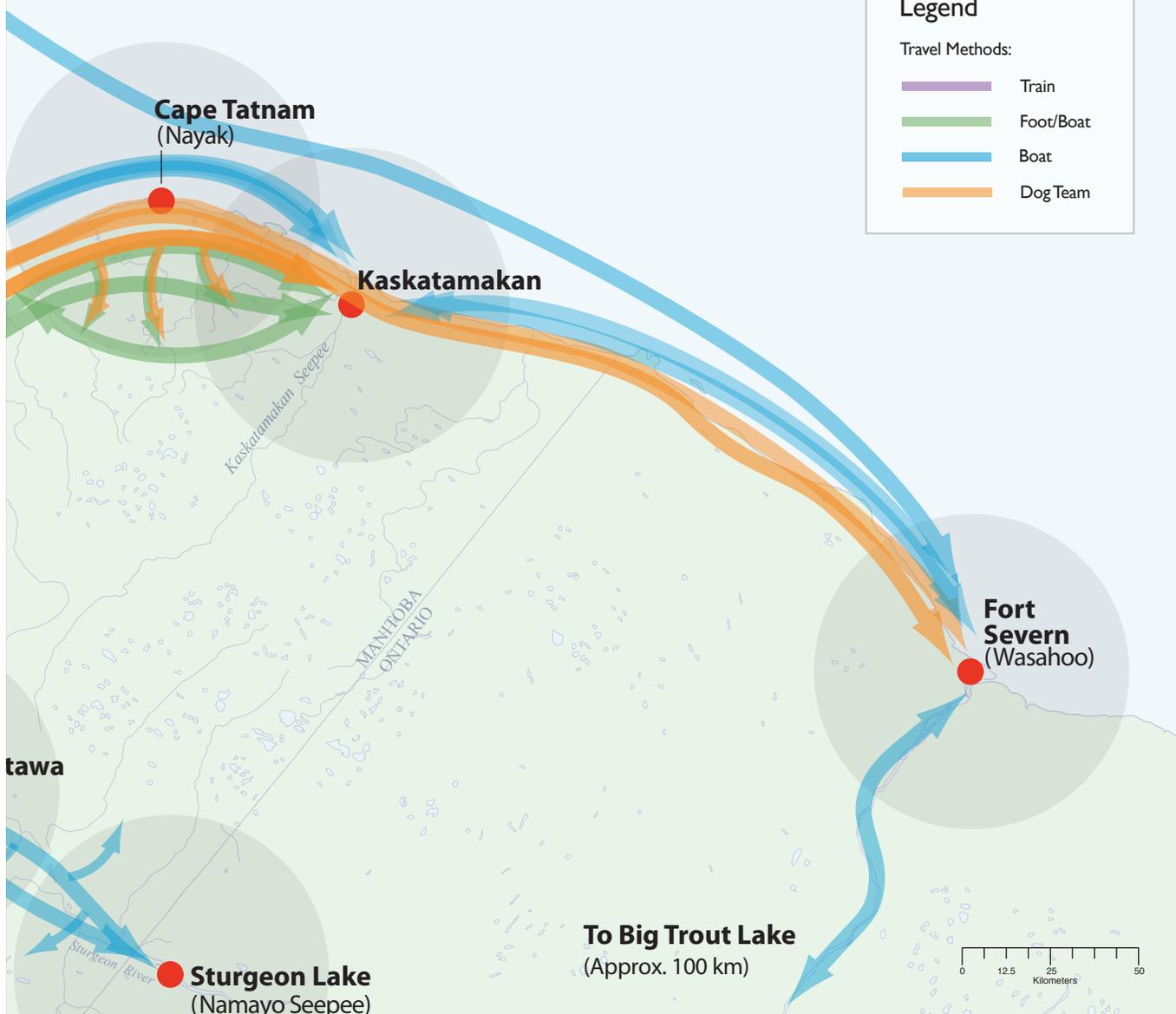




SETTLEMENTS, HARVESTING AREAS AND TRAVEL ROUTES

Identified in oral history interviews with 19 YFFN Elders.

*Hudson Bay
(Kischikamee)*





Bridge and Island at Port Nelson.



Eric Saunders and Douglas Chapman with Elly Bonny at Port Nelson, 2007.

to Kaskatamakan, to be near their trap line, their trap lines were close to Kaskatamakan so they didn't have to travel from York Factory to Kaskatamakan every time they want to go trap so they wintered in Kaskatamakan; and Dad used to have to go look after the Hudson's Bay Post that was there.

Evelyn: Ohhh.

Barbara: And they were very helpful, every one of those people that were there, they helped each other, even in York Factory, if somebody killed a moose or two moose, they'd share with everybody because there was no way of keeping it to themselves, it would go spoil, there was no fridges...so everybody, if Dad went hunting and got two moose, he would clean it and give it all away to all the people that as far as it would take to get rid of one moose or two moose.

Barbara: ...fish, you catch lots of fish in your net, you share with everybody, you can't keep it, some of them, they used to dry, dry fish and dry meat, that way would keep a little bit longer but not too well, 'cause it was too hot in the summertime to be keeping dry meat and dry fish that also would go bad or slimy or something from the heat, those people from York Factory or Kaskatamakan, they always helped each other, even when they moved, they help each other.

The settlement site at Pawinakaw, or Port Nelson, was considerably altered by the provincial government's \$6M effort to establish a coastal port at the site. Between 1912 and 1918, crews of up to 900 workers a year arrived at Port Nelson, developing a radio tower, residences, dry docks, a bridge and an artificial island, before abandoning the project in favor of the port at Churchill. York Factory members continued to occupy the Port Nelson site for another four decades, with some individuals purchasing and moving into the abandoned buildings of the work camp.

In 2007, we conducted coastal field studies of our old family settlements at York Factory (Kischewaskahekan), French Creek (Natahoto Sipisis) Ten Shilling Creek (Seepastik) Crooked Bank (Wanatawahak), Spenceville (Wanekapik), Port Nelson (Pawinakaw) and Kaska (Kaskatamakan). We took community Elders back to these places where they and their families had lived. They helped identify cabin sites and the artifacts of the past lives of our people, demonstrating their unbroken and deep ties to these places.

