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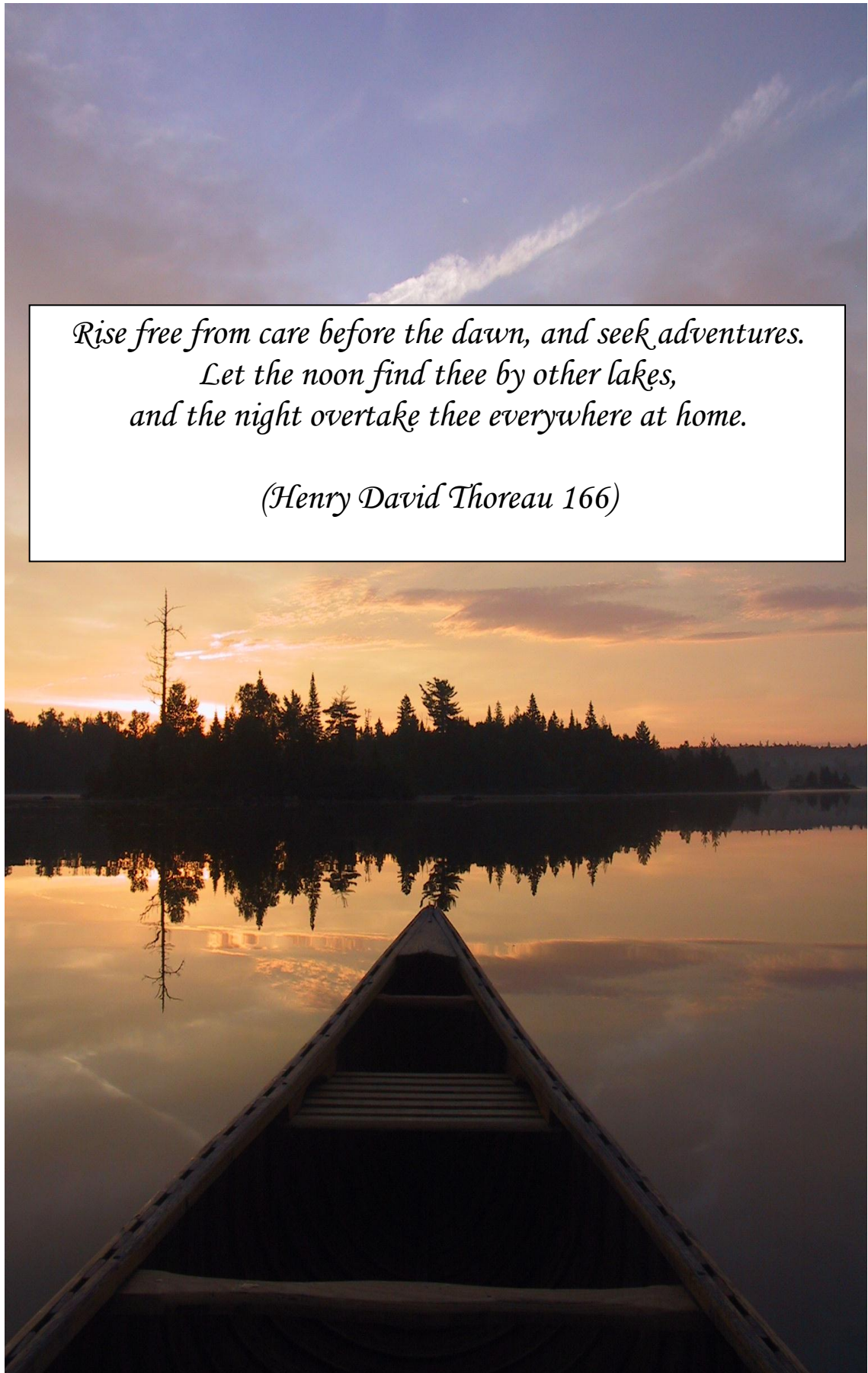


Figure 1: Dawn on Jean-Peré

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I want to dedicate this diploma thesis to F.M. Van Wagner, whose visions made this world a better place for so many people. May your spirit never leave the shores of Petit Lac Nominique!

...carve my name on a moss-covered stone...

Eidesstattliche Erklärung

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Table of Content

1. Introduction	p. 9
2. Historical Background. On explorers, voyageurs, canoes and fur traders	p. 13
2.1. Territorial conflicts	p. 13
2.2. The Fur Trade	p. 14
2.3. HBC and NWC	p. 16
2.4. Voyageurs and canoes	p. 18
2.5. The Explorers	p. 21
2.5.1. Samuel Hearne	p. 22
2.5.2. Alexander Mackenzie	p. 23
2.5.3. David Thompson	p. 25
2.5.4. Simon Fraser	p. 26
3. Challenges of the explorers	p. 29
3.1. Harsh weather conditions	p. 29
3.2. Supplies	p. 38
3.2.1. Food	p. 39
3.2.2. Tools and other articles	p. 42
3.3. Physical and Mental conditions	p. 45
3.3.1. Physical conditions	p. 45
3.3.2. Mental conditions	p. 51

3.4. Difficulties with the landscape and geographical features	p. 54
3.5. Economic rivalries	p. 66
3.6. Problematic interactions with natives	p. 68
3.6.1. Alcohol	p. 69
3.6.2. Violent skirmishes	p. 72
3.6.3. Sickneses	p. 79
3.6.4. Theft	p. 82
3.6.5. Unreliability	p. 85
4. Conclusion	p. 93
5. Bibliography	p. 97
5.1. Primary sources	p. 97
5.2. Secondary sources	p. 97
5.3. Picture credits	p. 99
6. Appendix	p. 101
6.1. Index	p. 101
6.2. Abstract	p. 103
6.3. Curriculum vitae	p. 104

1. Introduction

On June 30th 2005 I was standing on the shore of Lac des Grandes Baies in the Réserve Faunique de Papineau-Labelle, Quebec, Canada. In front of me were two things that mattered at that moment. One, a portage leading from Grand Baies to Lac Diamond going steeply uphill for some 300 meters and then slowly downhill for roughly 900 meters. On the map it says that the trail should be 920 meters, but that is, as we in Camp Nominique call it, '920 meters as the mole digs', not taking into count that you have to go uphill and then downhill at quite an angle. The other being a 16 foot canoe that needed to be portaged to Lac Diamond; and I was the one who was supposed to do that.

I had come to Canada four days earlier, starting my summer job at Camp Nominique, an Outdoor Camp for boys from eight to fifteen years, well known for their formidable Canoe trips. When I got there, I had no knowledge of or skills in paddling, tripping, steering or portaging. The general technique of getting a canoe on your shoulders in order to be able to portage is called 'roll up'. This technique enables you to lift up the canoe with the support of your hips. At that time I learned to do the easier version, where the canoe does not rest on your thighs before you roll up, but you put the bow on the ground, roll up at the stern and slide down with your hands until you reach the portage thwart.

I succeeded in doing this on the previously mentioned portage and was now facing the first steep uphill section. The first portage of my life proved to be a failure. I worked my way uphill, the thwart pushing all of the roughly 75 pounds of the canoe down on my Axis vertebra, also my legs were getting sore from climbing up the path. I tried to shift the weight in various directions trying to find a soft spot. Writing this I remember the words of Charles Texeira, also a Counsellor at Nominique, who said a couple of years later 'Soft spot? There is no such thing as a soft spot; there is just pain and more pain.' He was right. At least I haven't found the soft spot even after years of practice. That day I have to admit, and this is the first time that I actually mention it, I had to put down my canoe after the 300 meters uphill.

This first defeat that I had to suffer triggered off a lot. Inspired by my co-workers and comrades I wanted to succeed in portaging, rolling up and everything that is connected with canoe tripping. More than that, I wanted to excel.

This was the starting point for my love of canoes and canoe-trips. And I began to dig deeper into the matter. After having spent many nights under the stars in Papineau-Labelle and La Verendrye, and in Austria with my own canoe that I had bought in Canada, I also wanted to go back to the roots of canoeing. That way I came across the stories and journals of the likes of Alexander Mackenzie, Simon Fraser, Samuel Hearne, David Thompson, and others. The experiences I have gained that way and the lessons I have learned taught me that the true strength of a voyageur is not the strength of his body, but the strength of his mind.

These explorers, fur traders and voyageurs had an important impact on Canada as a country, on its society and its attitude. Those people travelled on most of the rivers and paths of contemporary Canada which were then only known to the natives of the First Nations, and sometimes not even to them. Always bound to go further than their predecessors, they managed to push through much struggle and hardship in the great wilderness between the Atlantic and the Pacific Ocean. William New claimed that these fur traders and explorers had a major influence on the perception of the lands that were to become Canada. He further wrote that the achievements of the explorers led to

[...] the growing signs of shared memories inside Canada and of memories shared through the art of literary allusion. Increasingly, landscape and even historical figures became familiar. [...] they became embodiments of shared cultural predicaments, representatives of cultural value, legends of a later time if not of their own, myths of persistence and circumstance. (New, *History of Canada* 46)

William Keith too stressed the importance of the writings of explorers, suggesting that their literary efforts were “necessary first steps towards coming to terms, imaginatively as well as practically, with the country as a whole.[...] some [explorers] –notably Hearne, Alexander Mackenzie, and David Thompson

– helped indirectly but palpably to initiate a Canadian literary tradition” (Keith 31).

Furthermore he stated that contemporary poets have used the explorations of these men as inspiration for their poetry, such as Don Gutteridge’s *Coppermine*, John Newlove’s *Samuel Hearne in Wintertime*, and parts of Newlove’s poem *The Pride*. Thus “gradually, then, their achievements are being incorporated into the Canadian literary experience” (Keith 33).

In addition to that also Kröller wrote about the influence of these explorers on contemporary Canadian literature saying:

Canadian literature and culture continues to draw inspiration from the journals, letters, and reports that record these travels, among them Rudy Wiebe, *A Discovery of Strangers* (1994), Fred Stenson, *The Trade* (2000), and Wayne Johnston, *The Navigator of New York* (2002) to mention only a few (Kröller 71).

Therefore I want to examine in this paper how these early explorers described in their journals and letters the challenges they had to overcome and how they managed to do so. In order to give an insight into this topic I will try to compare the portrayals of the real life accounts of journeys done by Alexander Mackenzie, Samuel Hearne and Simon Fraser, as well as the biography of David Thompson written by D’Arcy Jenish with each other. That way I want to shed light on the true spirit of the Canadian explorers that have inspired so many people including myself to push through rough times, may it be a portage or a diploma thesis.

2. Historical Background. On Canada, voyageurs, canoes and fur traders

This section will give a brief overview of the situation the explorers and voyageurs of that time were in. It will give an insight into the life of those people and a description of the circumstances they lived and worked in, both on a large scale, taking the political situation into account, and on a smaller scale depicting the everyday life of those men and the likes with whom they conversed, worked and lived in order to get a better understanding of the life and motivation of the Canadian explorers this paper is dealing with.

2.1. Territorial conflicts

In the 18th century Canada was still a young region and widely unexplored. The first permanent settlements - Port Royale, which was established on what is contemporary Nova Scotia in 1605, and Quebec City on the St. Lawrence in 1608 - were only a hundred years old. Explorations were often difficult because of the ongoing skirmishes that had occurred between the English and the French in the late 17th century, as well as rekindling hostilities with some native tribes. The tensions between England and France finally peaked in the conflict which was triggered off by the War of the Spanish Succession and was fought in Canada from 1702 to 1713. This conflict resulted in the Treaty of Utrecht, which led to the cession of Acadia, Newfoundland and the Hudson Bay to the British Empire (see Brown 142-147, Eccles, *Canadian Frontier* 139-141, Graham, 81-84, and Harris 48).

So the Explorers who form the center of this paper were dealing with a world that had seen and was about to see more struggles, fights and wars between two world powers, which progressively led to the loss of all French possessions in North America. After King George's War from 1744 until 1748 that left the territorial disputes once more undecided, Great Britain finally gained the upper hand in the Seven Years' War (1754 – 1763). This conflict ended with the Treaty of Paris, which proclaimed the cession of French Canada and Acadia to

the British Empire. Thus the people of the region who once were used to a French culture, the French language and the Roman-Catholic church, had to face a future under British rule (see Graham 90-94, Hallowell 579, and Harris 88-89).

While numerous educated French Canadians left for France, others remained, and thus a society of different languages and cultures evolved (see Graham 94). Many French Canadians, who were once working for the Kingdom of France, later played a major role in expanding the British territories in Canada.

2.2. The Fur trade

One of the reasons that triggered off the conflicts in Canada mentioned in the previous chapter was the desire for control over the fur trade, which had become substantial for this region in the 18th century. Hallowell assumed that „the fur trade, the earliest transcontinental business enterprise, was foundational to Canada“ (Hallowell 246).

Beside its economic importance, the fur trade also „served as the motivation for the great inland explorations of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries“ (Eccles, *French Fur trade* 207).

These extensive explorations, which were undertaken by individuals like Samuel Hearne in 1769, 1770 and late in 1770-1772, Alexander Mackenzie in 1789 and 1793, Simon Fraser in 1806 and 1808, as well as the various expeditions that David Thompson was on, had many motivations, one of which being the expansion of business. This was partially motivated by the increase of demand for Canadian furs. In addition to that, the Beaver was facing extinction in the east of Canada, so new regions had to be found and other tribes had to be contacted who could still supply the traders with the popular beaver products. Moreover, the fur traders sought for trails going deeper into the country to avoid tribes that functioned then as middle men who offered furs at a

more costly price than the Natives who lived in regions distant from the European settlements (Hallowell 246-247).

Another reason why these men undertook strenuous and often dangerous expeditions into unknown terrain was the search for a direct passage to the Pacific and thus a possible trading route to China and India without having to circumnavigate the American continent (see Jenish 122-123).

The history of the fur trade in Canada began in the early 16th century when cod fishers started to trade with aboriginal people in the Gulf of Saint Lawrence to gain an extra income to their occupation in the fishing industry. Owing to a change in fashion in Europe, the fur trade steadily increased from the late 16th century onwards to its peak in the 19th century (see Hallowell 246).

The increasing demand for fur in Europe soon triggered off tensions between various parties which often resulted in a violent conflict. On the one side the English and the French were constantly competing with each other in that business until the loss of the last French possessions in North America in 1763. On the other side, there were also several native tribes who were fighting each other in order to maintain or to gain profit in the fur trade. These intertribal struggles were often caused by Europeans who sought a further inland route to – as already has been mentioned - expand their business and/or to avoid middlemen and thus reduce the price for furs (see Hallowell 247). Later what once started out as a conflict between two nations, became a competition between several companies, most important of which the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company.

Trading with the natives made it necessary for the Europeans to get an understanding of the native cultures and languages in order to make profit out of this business. This intercultural contact included a ceremony where gifts between the two trading parties were exchanged - a process which sometimes lasted for days (see Hallowell 246).

The Indians generally traded all kinds of furs for tools, weapons, ammunition, blankets, tobacco and alcohol (see Harris 155). The latter was an often disputed

good amongst the traders, because some men like David Thompson refused to take any alcohol with them, since they were aware of the devastating effect it had on the natives (see 3.6.1.). However, whenever the competition between the Montreal-based traders and the Hudson's Bay Company was fiercest, the alcohol trade experienced a sharp increase (see Harris 155). In return for the various products they gained from the Europeans, the natives bartered all kinds of fur. In the beginning of the fur trade, beaver was predominant. In 1720 the different beaver products (parchments, coats and others) made up more than half of the amount of skins acquired by the Hudson's Bay Company; in the area of influence of York Factory even more than three quarters (see Harris 154). In later years muskrat and marten became more and more important, owing to the gradual near-extinction of the beaver in eastern Canada. (see Harris 157). One important factor that promoted the rapid destruction of the beaver was the introduction of the castoreum baited iron traps. These allured the beaver, having an irresistible scent for this precious rodent. D'Arcy Jenish depicted David Thompson's experience with this potent method of hunting as such:

Once, he [Thompson] and some companions found a trap with a severed leg in it, the beaver having gnawed its limb off in order to escape, but two nights later the same animal was caught again. On another occasion, a beaver managed to swim away with a trap fastened to its thigh and was later found caught fast in another trap. (Jenish 96)

2.3. HBC and NWC

Canadian clerks and tradesmen soon found out that the current situation where many private entrepreneurs laboured against each other was unsatisfactory for everyone. There was plainly too much competition and rivalry. Therefore they began to merge and form the North West Company in the late 1770s. They soon found out what the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC), the oldest commercial corporation in North America, had already benefitted of from their beginning in 1670. A large company simply had more possibilities of engaging in the fur trade. They were able to afford to employ more workers. Furthermore they could finance explorations and the founding of posts and forts farther inland which would later pay off (see Brown 153).

Ironically enough, it was two French traders who became the initiators of the Hudson's Bay Company. Pierre-Esprit Radisson and Médard des Groseilliers led the expedition that would later trigger off the foundation of the company in 1670. They travelled into the Hudson Bay and beyond under the British flag to establish business relations with the natives of that region. Radisson and Groseilliers were in charge of this British expedition because they had had some disputes with the governor of Trois Rivières who wanted to have a share in Radisson's and Groseilliers' impressive profits they had made in the fur trade. Those disputes resulted in a ban on their fur trade business and later even in a fine of 2000 dollars. Therefore they turned away from the officials of New France and sought help in Boston and England. The journey proved to be a success, leading to the foundation of the first permanent outpost in the Hudson Bay, Fort Rupert and later Fort Nelson, which became the headquarters of the HBC. From there the traders travelled farther inland on the Saskatchewan, the Red and the Nelson Rivers (see Dugas 8-10).

It then took more than a hundred years until a league of Montreal merchants founded the North West Company (also referred to as the NWC) to raise individual profits and to be able to compete with the Hudson's Bay Company who were the dominant power in the North American fur trade at that time.

While the HBC stopped exploring further inland, being of the opinion that their trading area was sufficiently large, the Nor'Westers - as the NWC employees and employers were nicknamed – pushed the limits of the fur trade farther and farther west. This peaked in the crossing of the Rocky Mountains in explorations undertaken by Alexander Mackenzie in 1793, Simon Fraser in 1806 and 1808 and David Thompson in 1807 and 1810. These explorations came from the necessity of finding an easier supply route, especially for those who remained in the remote outposts of the Northwest. Transporting furs from the Athabasca and Saskatchewan regions as well as delivering trading goods and food to these posts became more and more expensive, owing to the large distance that had to be covered to and from Montreal. Therefore, there were only two directions which could make the fur trade profitable again for the NWC. The first option

was the Hudson Bay, but this one was blocked by the HBC. The other one was to find an overland path to the Pacific Ocean (see Morton 163-164).

Those two companies were the main drive behind the explorations of unknown territories of Canada. Not only did their voyageurs travel on most of the river systems, they also mapped the country in all geographical details, including information on the latitude and longitude, thus creating an understanding of the country and producing maps that come remarkably close to our present day versions.

2.4. Voyageurs and canoes

One important group of French speakers who stayed even after the British Empire gained control over the French possessions in Canada were the voyageurs. Those people were mainly occupied in the fur trade, delivering trade goods to posts and forts in the wilderness to trade them for furs with the First Nations and returning those to their respective head quarters. Most of their travels were done by canoe, covering many miles in all possible directions.

The fur that included predominantly beaver, but also marten, lynx, otter, bear, fox, wolf and muskrat, was a popular product in Europe and Asia at that time that sold fairly well (see Nute 3-4). As mentioned in chapter 2.2., the fur trade originally took place close to settlements or along the coastline, but some eager men soon found out that it was more profitable to get in touch with the natives where they lived. In those times travelling on lakes and rivers was much faster and more efficient than undertaking the same journey on foot (see Nute 4). Those early traders were called 'Coureur de bois', which translated into English means 'woodlands runners'. These men were basically running their own business, and the trade soon got out of hand and was confusing for the French officials. Therefore, around 1680 they introduced more restrictions and controls to the fur trade by reducing the numbers of traders and handing out permits to the newly founded voyageurs who were licensed workers, in contrast to the from then on scarce coureur de bois. These new regulations, however, were

initially hard to realize and it took some time until the market was stricter under control. (see Eccles, *Canadian Frontier* 110-113, 145-146).

Eccles (*Canadian Frontier* 146) described the changed situation of those times:

It was strictly forbidden on pain of a 300 *livres* fine to make any changes in the crew list, for *voyageurs* to give false names, or to list as place of residence parishes other than those where they usually resided.

Thus it was achieved that a small number of merchants controlled the trade which later led to the merger of many traders to form the North West Company in Montreal. Furthermore, with that development an expansion to regions farther away was made possible and the amount of fur coming in was now under control.

The voyageurs soon gained much publicity and a formidable reputation. Nute (6) wrote: "John Jacob Astor, the prince of American fur-traders and the organizer of the largest American fur company, is said to have remarked that he would rather have one voyageur than three American canoemen".

He further claimed that "practically every exploring trip in western Canada after the British conquest made use of voyageurs" (Nute 227).

They were said to have a deep love for and great knowledge of the wilderness of Canada, and were willing to work outstandingly hard. A voyageur's day was generally 12-15 hours long in which they covered many miles, paddling at a rate of about 40 strokes per minute. Those who did not carry the canoes had to carry the supplies and the fur bundles. Those bundles weighed 90 pounds each and a voyageur was expected to carry two of those. However there are also reports of voyageurs who carried four or five, and legends speaking of eight bundles, which sums up to a load of 720 pounds (see Nute 27, 38).

Despite their hard life they were reputedly always in a good mood. Light-hearted and with a song on their lips they appeared to the inhabitants of Montreal

whenever they got a glimpse of them, which happened rarely, given that these men spent most of their time in the woods of Canada.

Baker (342) quoted an unknown voyageur who said:

I could carry, paddle, walk and sing with any man I ever saw. I have been twenty-four years a canoe man, and forty-one years in service; no portage was ever too long for me. Fifty songs I could sing. I have saved the lives of ten voyageurs. Have had twelve wives and six running dogs. I spent all my money in pleasure. Were I young again, I should spend my life the same way over. There is no life so happy as a voyageur's life!

Their canoes proved to be great means of transportation, given that they could hold much cargo, and carts or carriages to carry the goods overland were in those parts out of the question. Adney and Chapelle remarked:

The Indian bark canoes were most efficient watercraft for use in forest travel; they were capable of being propelled easily with a single-bladed paddle. This allowed the paddler unlike the oarsman, to face the direction of travel, a necessity in obstructed or shoal waters and in fast-moving streams. The canoes being light could be carried overland for long distances, even where trails were rough or non-existent. Yet they could carry heavy loads in shallow water and could be repaired in the forest without special tools. (Adney, and Chapelle 3)

The canoes were usually made by sewing and lashing birch bark onto a wooden frame. The bark gave the canoes their waterproof character. Later David Thompson would be one of the first to build canoes out of cedar, when he travelled west of the Rocky Mountains where the birch bark was too hard to come by and the few examples that could be found were of a lesser quality compared to the birches that grew east of the mountains. Jenish (172) wrote that "the milder climate west of the Rockies made the birch rind too thin."

There were two basic types of canoes that were used in the fur trade. The Montreal canoe was between 35 to 40 feet in length and it could hold up to 4500 pounds of cargo; excluding the crew. It was used to travel on large bodies of water, for example the Great Lakes or the Saint Lawrence River. Up to fourteen men paddled those canoes. The other type was called 'Canot du Nord'. It was used where the Montreal Canoe proved to be too difficult to carry and too

inflexible to paddle, which was basically anywhere past the Great Lakes. The Canot du Nord rarely exceeded 25 feet in length and four to five feet in width. It could also only carry roughly 3000 pounds of goods and only five men (see Jenish 90-91, and Nute 24). On the other side this made it easier to paddle in places that were harder to navigate, and two people were enough to carry them overland, when overland passages had to be mastered. “Due to the narrow bottom of these canoes, they became long and narrow on the waterline when not heavily loaded and so could be paddled very rapidly” (Adney, and Chapelle 137).

The canoes made it possible that large quantities of trade goods – mainly fur – could be moved from distant places to ports where they were shipped to foreign markets. Morton stressed the importance of the canoe, claiming: “This product [the birch bark] of the northern forest and the remarkable craft of canoe building was in fact to be the prime mover of the Canadian fur trade” (Morton 158).

2.5. The Explorers

In this section the four explorers that this paper is dealing with are briefly discussed in order to get an insight into their deeds and lives and the way they influenced the fur trade and Canada itself. There are various reasons why specifically these people have been chosen to be dealt with in this paper.

First of all, they were discoverers, fur traders, canoeists and explorers of great renown, having spent many days in the wilderness of Canada, paddling on a multitude of rivers and lakes and portaging around rapids and waterfalls in an ongoing urge to go farther and to satisfy their need for adventure. Second, they were active around the same time, in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Furthermore, they were contemporaries. And most important, all of those individuals played an important role in the search for an overland Northwest passage which was crossing the Rocky Mountains and finally leading to the Pacific.

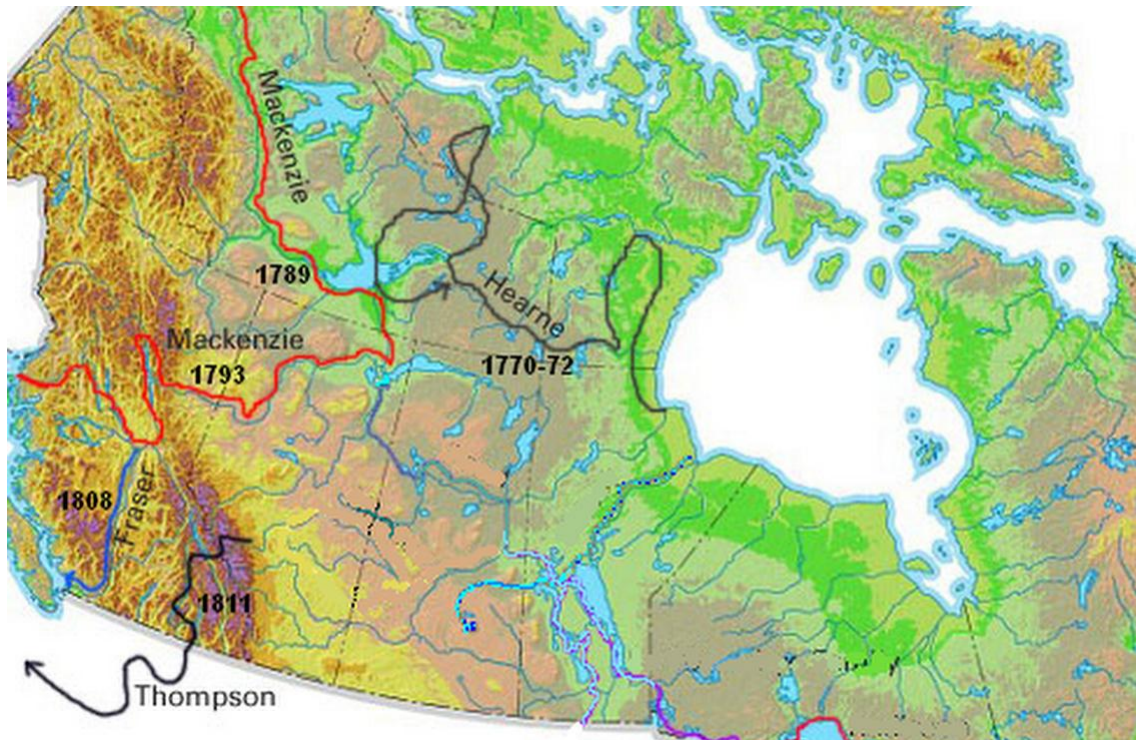


Figure 2: Exploration, Western Interior.

2.5.1. Samuel Hearne

Samuel Hearne was born in London in 1745. At the young age of twelve years he joined the Royal Navy, serving during the Seven Years War, which, as previously mentioned, sealed the end of French possessions in Canada. In 1766 he joined the Hudson's Bay Company working on a whaling ship in his first years which had its home base at the Prince of Wales Fort. There he learned the languages of the natives he traded with and gained much knowledge from them about this country. One particular piece of information was of special interest to him and his superiors: Some natives spread rumours of a promising copper mine and a passage from the Hudson Bay to the Pacific. From 1769 onwards he led three separate journeys to find one or the other, gaining vital insights into the geography of the land from Hudson Bay to the Northern Ocean, but failing to find either a passage to the Pacific or the mythical copper mine. He was also responsible for founding Cumberland House, the first trading post of the Hudson's Bay Company that was farther inland. After being appointed governor of the Prince of Wales Fort in the Hudson Bay in 1776, he became a hero back at home, when he surrendered to a greatly outnumbering

fleet of the French navy, thus saving the lives of his comrades and keeping the impact on the natives of the region to a minimum. He also managed to persuade the leader of the French ships, Comte de la Perouse, to set him free in return for navigating them safely out of the Bay back into the Atlantic. He was permitted to sail back to London. After returning to Hudson Bay he soon got tired of the fur trade, which was also caused by his worsening physical health. He died at the age of 47; three years before his journal was published (see McKoogan xi – xviii).

2.5.2. Alexander Mackenzie

Alexander Mackenzie was born on the Isle of Lewis in Scotland in 1764. In 1774 his father left for New York and took the then ten-year-old Alexander with him. There he was taken care of by his aunt after the American Revolution began. Alexander Mackenzie was sent to Montreal in 1778, since life became harder and harder for loyalists in the newly founded United States of America. There he went to school, but only for about a year because the fur trade had become a lucrative business that attracted many young men. He joined Finlay and Gregory, a partnership which had its business in the fur trade. Mackenzie soon turned out to be quite talented and he was offered a share of the company under the condition that he would take control of the post at Grand Portage. In 1785 he was sent to Île-à-la-Crosse where he remained for two years. In 1787 various violent incidents happened amongst the traders of what had become Gregory, MacLeod and company after the death of Finlay. Those incidents resulted in the incorporation of the partnership into the recently founded North West Company. After this fusion Mackenzie was reassigned to a post on the Athabasca River, where he learned much about the fur trade from the experienced explorer Peter Pond. When Pond left in 1788, Mackenzie took control of the Athabasca River fort.

In 1789 Mackenzie began his first journey in search of a way to the Pacific. He left Lake Athabasca to follow the Slave River to the Great Slave Lake. Soon after, the claims of explorers, who had been in that region before, proved to be

wrong. The Mackenzie River which they followed after the Great Slave Lake did not lead them all the way west, but it turned north and thus away from the Pacific (see Halpenny 537-539).

This journey, though unsuccessful, gained Mackenzie a second share of the North West Company and he was eager to prepare another journey in search of the Pacific, for which he set out in 1792. He travelled up the Peace River and built Fort Fork as a base where he could stay until the winter passed. Once across the Rocky Mountains he planned to search for a river that could be navigated all the way down to the Pacific. He did find a river, thinking that it was the Columbia. After some detours and many days of strenuous paddling and portaging, he finally reached the Pacific on June 19th 1793, being the first explorer who had actually found the western sea on an overland Northwest passage. On this journey, Mackenzie and his crew had covered 2300 miles (see Halpenny 539-541).

Although his efforts were remarkable, its use for the North West Company was limited. The routes discovered by David Thompson and Simon Frasier proved to be more promising and profitable than Mackenzie's. When he returned to Montreal, he directed his interest more towards business than exploring, suggesting cooperation between the North West Company, the Hudson's Bay Company and the East India Company. He failed though in his efforts over disputes with Simon McTavish, who had become a major figure in the NWC. Owing to his frustration at the differences, Mackenzie went to London where he published a book on his journeys. He was also knighted in 1802. In the meantime the XY Company had been founded and Mackenzie got heavily involved, but only for a brief time, because after the death of Simon McTavish, the NWC and the XY Company merged. Mackenzie was excluded from the fur trade and retreated to Scotland, where he died in January 1820 (see Halpenny 541-42).

2.5.3. David Thompson

David Thompson was born in Westminster, London in 1770. There he went to Grey Coat School until 1783 when he was appointed an apprentice clerk for the Hudson's Bay Company. In this service he learned the trade and all the skills of a voyageur under the protection of Samuel Hearne at Churchill in the Hudson Bay. Later, from 1786 until 1789, after being redirected to York factory he started his first longer journeys going as far as the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. When, by an unfortunate event in the year 1789, he broke his leg, he got the chance to meet Philip Turnor who was the first inland surveyor of the Hudson's Bay Company. Turnor taught the young apprentice everything about practical astronomy which not only became an important occupation but also a deep passion for David Thompson. This passion proved to be of great use when he ended his service under the Hudson's Bay Company and joined the North West Company in 1797. After this change of employment Thompson started his long term project of creating a map that stretched from the Fraser River west of the Rocky Mountains all the way to Lake Superior. He also helped establishing the NWC's presence west of the mountains and was the first one to travel on the Columbia River in its entirety (see Jenish 13-15, 50, 52-54, and Pollitt 2).

Jenish (7-8) wrote about Thompson:

He had spent twenty eight years in the fur trade, travelled fifty thousand miles, paddled up and down prairie rivers, crossed and recrossed the Rocky Mountains and followed the long, serpentine Columbia River from its headwaters [...] all the way to the Pacific.

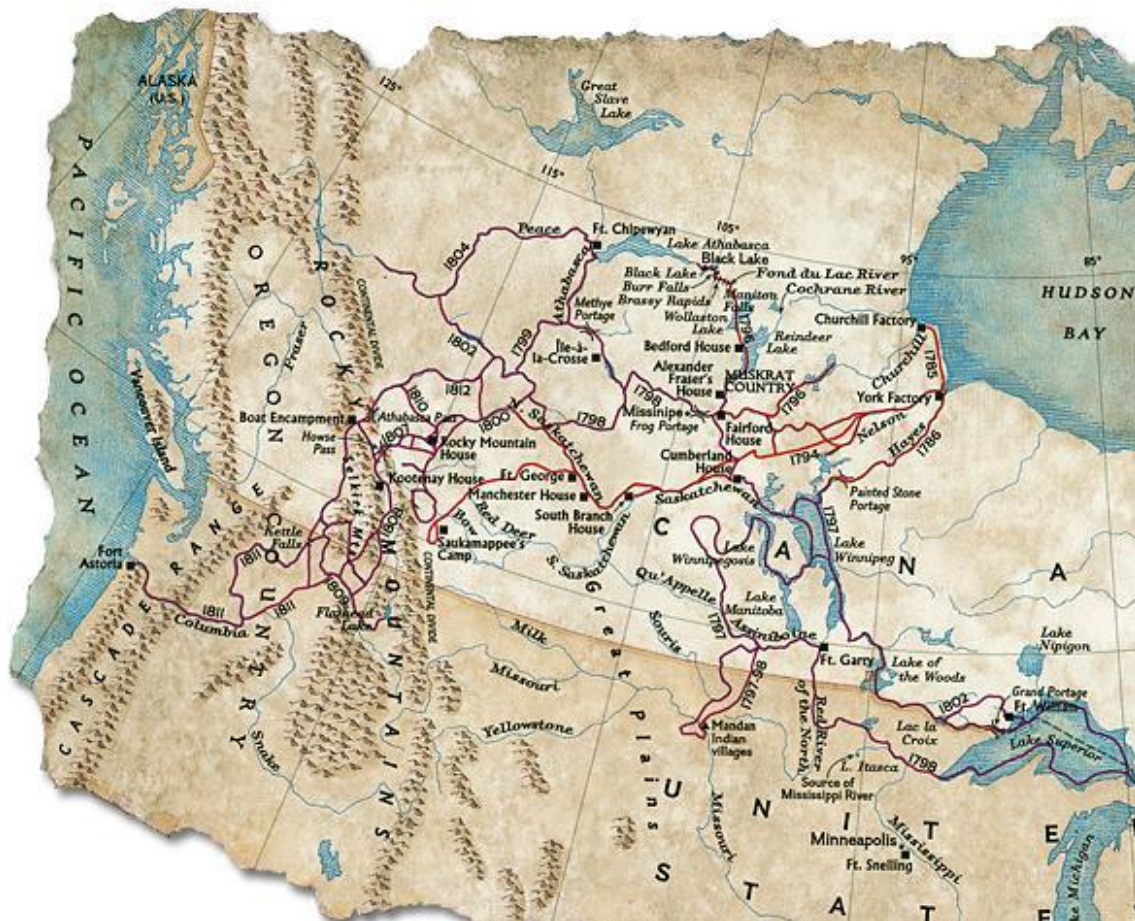


Figure 3: The travels of David Thompson

2.5.4. Simon Fraser

Simon Fraser was born at Mapletown, Vermont in 1776. His parents had emigrated from Scotland three years before his birth. The year Simon Fraser was born also saw the beginning of the American Revolution. The Frasers were dedicated loyalists. Therefore, Simon Fraser's father and his eldest brother, William, joined the British forces. Simon's father was taken prisoner by the Americans and died after being held at Albany for about a year. Soon the Fraser family decided to move to Canada and in 1790 Simon Fraser was sent to Montreal where John Fraser, an uncle of his and a respected judge in Montreal, took care of him. Only two years later he started an apprenticeship in the North West Company. For the following years information about Simon Fraser gets slim and blurred. During this period four different Simon Frasers were working for the NWC and it is often hard to say who is who when they are mentioned in

letters or reports. Apparently he had spent most of his time at the Athabasca region as a clerk. In 1801 he became a partner of the NWC, thus receiving one forty-sixth share. In 1805 the North West Company assigned Fraser the task to find a route over the Rocky Mountains, down to the Pacific Ocean that was feasible for a commercial fur trade. The same year he erected Rocky Mountain Portage House in order to have a base for this task. In 1806 he and his men started to journey down the Fraser River and up the Nechako River until he reached Stuart Lake. There he founded another fort. His plans initially were to return to the Fraser and follow it to the Ocean, but the lack of food made this expedition impossible. After two years, Fraser again set out in 1808 from Fort George to travel down the Fraser until it empties into the sea. He finally made it into the Strait of Georgia, but hostile Indians prevented him from going further. Therefore, he returned to Fort George being disappointed that the river he travelled down was of no use to the NWC. In 1809 Fraser left the Rocky Mountains and returned to the Athabasca region in 1810. On his travel to Fort William in 1816 he stumbled into the skirmishes between the NWC and Lord Selkirk who had founded a colony in the Red River region. The Company saw this as a threat to their business and a conflict arose. In the wake of this conflict Fraser was arrested and taken prisoner in Fort William. In York he was tried, but found innocent in 1818. The rest of his life he spent in retirement on a farm on the Raisin River. Simon Fraser died on the 18th of August 1862, only one day before his wife passed away (see Brown, Hayne, and Halpenny 282-285).

3. Hardships of the explorers

One aspect is predominant when examining the fur trading companies with their explorations. The people who were working in the interior had an incredibly tough life. As described in 2.4. the voyageurs spent most of their lives in the wilderness, paddling, portaging, erecting and maintaining posts and doing similar activities. However, the difficulties were even augmented, when fur traders went on an exploration. This meant that most of their ways were either only known through mostly vague and often inaccurate descriptions by natives, or they were totally unknown. This led the explorers often into critical situations which were often dangerous, if not life-threatening.

Alexander Mackenzie, for example, described his situation in the preface of his volume, which presented his journals to the public, as follows:

The toil of our navigation was incessant, and oftentimes extreme; and in our progress over land we had no protection from the severity of the elements, and possessed no accommodations or conveniences but such as could be contained in the burden on our shoulders, which aggravated the toils of our march, and added to the wearisomeness [sic] of our way. (Mackenzie 3-4)

The following chapters shed light on the various hardships that Mackenzie, Hearne, Thompson and Fraser had to overcome.

3.1. Harsh Weather conditions

One factor influencing the climate is the extensive landmass which leads to a predominantly continental climate with a high degree of temperature fluctuations. Also Hudson Bay has an effect on temperature because it is reaching far into the country, thus pushing the isothermal curve far south. In addition to that, the absence of any obstacles for air moving from the Arctic Ocean inland causes a decline in temperature. (see Lenz 39- 46)

Those factors are the main reasons for an average January temperature of below $-15^{\circ}\text{Celsius}$ north of the 50° line of latitude between the Atlantic and the Rocky Mountains (the only exception being the north eastern tip of Quebec, the Maritimes). From there on westward, the line of an average temperature in January below $-20^{\circ}\text{Celsius}$ gradually shifts northward, completely omitting the west coast, which has a more moderate winter with averages ranging between slightly above 0°Celsius and $-10^{\circ}\text{Celsius}$ all the way up to Alaska (see Lenz 44). David Thompson, for instance, had to endure temperatures of up to minus forty-five $^{\circ}\text{Celsius}$ in the winter of 1795 when he stayed at Sisipuk Lake. The temperature was so cold that “the mercury in his thermometer froze solid after an hour’s exposure” (Jenish 76).

This climate is very unpleasant for people living in a settlement, but may be life-threatening for people who are out in the wilderness in canoes or on snowshoes. Many travellers experienced very hazardous situations owing to the harsh climate that were often the cause for the failure of an expedition. The explorers who are discussed in this thesis were no exception as far as troubles with the weather are concerned.

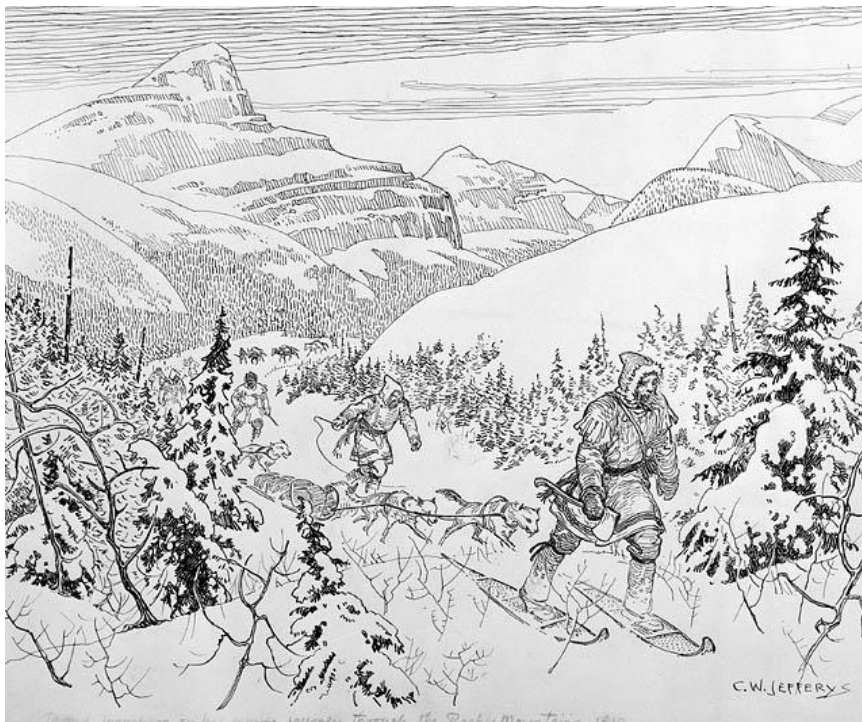


Figure 4: snow on the Athabasca Pass

For instance, Alexander Mackenzie showed the utmost respect to his men for dealing with the harsh weather without even showing the slightest sign of complaint. He wrote in his journal: “It would be considered by the inhabitants of a milder climate, as a great evil, to be exposed to the weather at this rigorous season of the year, but these people are inured to it [...]” (Mackenzie 208).

On Samuel Hearne’s first journey, he set out in early November, 1769 and was soon facing blistering cold weather that together with other factors led to the failure of this venture. Sometimes he and his men could not gather enough fuel so that they had to dig holes into the snow to have at least some kind of shelter from the wind and the cold (Hearne 18-19).

His second attempt in 1770 started out similarly. Hearne noted in his journal “The weather had been so remarkably boisterous and changeable, that we were frequently obliged to continue two or three nights in the same place” (Hearne 25).

The weather itself exposed the travellers of the Canadian wilderness to various threats. Beside the inconveniences of not being able to make a fire, or being forced to change the planned course, bad weather often put the explorers in great danger. On Hearne’s second attempt to find the copper mines and the Pacific, he and his crew got into such a bad gale that they had to stop, because they could not even see ten yards ahead. In the course of this storm on November 21st, 1770 Hearne’s dog froze to death and the crew was only barely better off (see Hearne 51).

The blistering cold did not only cause the death of his dog, but also his crew had to suffer from it. On February 7th, 1771 during his third and last journey to search for a way from Hudson Bay to the Pacific, the weather got so cold that his guide’s wife got so frozen that she had blisters “nearly as large as sheeps’ bladders” (Hearne 61). She suffered much pain from that injury, which interestingly enough caused amusement amongst the male natives.

At times the weather was so extraordinarily bad that some of the natives that were accompanying Hearne deserted the group. On July 6th, 1771 fifteen Indians left the expedition, because the past five days had been extremely arduous, due to the constant rain that left the whole group in a miserable state, not having a single item of clothing that was dry. Moreover, they could not find a proper place to rest and had to retreat to some caverns that were so damp that not the smallest fire could be lit (Heane 96). To make things worse, it started to snow and the caverns gave only little protection and “[...] the flakes of snow were so large as to surpass all credibility, and fell in such vast quantities, that though the shower only lasted nine hours, [they] were in danger of being smothered in our caves” (Hearne 97).

Cold temperatures, however, were not just solely connected to the winter season. Mackenzie reported on his journey across the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific Ocean that his men were suffering from the cold air at the end of May. Being in the middle of a river, where they had to fight against the current by pushing their canoes with poles, their hands and fingers soon became very sensitive to the coldness. Apparently the sun was shining throughout that day, but Mackenzie suspects that the high altitude was responsible for the low temperatures. He did not know for certain whether they were that high or not because the mountains around them appeared to be rather low, but he believes that the country itself was at such an altitude that his men were required to wear blanket coats in order to protect themselves from the cold to at least some degree (see Mackenzie 244-245).

Likewise Fraser and his crew had to endure cold temperatures in May. In 1806 when Fraser’s expedition started to prepare for their departure in search of a passage to the Pacific Ocean, he noted in his journal that on May 6th the lakes were still frozen, including the shoreline, where the ice usually starts to melt first. Two days later his assistant, Mr. Stuart, had to give up working on the canoe, because the low temperatures interfered with his plans. Moreover, on May 14th one of Fraser’s men arrived at the camp much later than he was expected, because the ice had destroyed his canoe and therefore he was obliged to continue his way on foot (see Fraser 194, 196, 200).

Mackenzie's expedition to the Pacific in 1793 also had to suffer from cold weather in the middle of the summer. Alexander Mackenzie reported that on July 11th the continuing rain got them so cold that they set up camp at five a.m. Also the next day brought no relief to the freezing travellers even though there was no more rain (see Mackenzie 334-336). Mackenzie attributes this to the fact that they were "surrounded [...] with snow-clad mountains," (Mackenzie 336) and even a day of hard walking could not warm them up. To make things worse, Mackenzie wrote that "[their] scanty covering was not sufficient to protect us from the severity of the night" (Mackenzie 336).

Rain also turned out to be dangerous, less than a month before Hearne's return to Prince of Wales' Fort, when he and his crew tried to set up camp on the east side of Cathawachaga river. The camp was set when the rain hit them, but the rain was so heavy that the river overflowed "to such a degree as soon to convert [their] first place of retreat into an open sea [...]" (Hearne 193). Thus they were forced to abandon their camping site and flee to the nearest hill, where they had to sit through the weather, holding the tent-cloth above their heads, since the wind was too strong to set the tents up.

Hard rains also made Mackenzie's journeys quite a challenge and at times dangerous. When he was making his way to the Arctic Ocean in the year 1789 he had to face such heavy rain that at times he had to pull to the shore to avoid any serious consequences. On June 7th, for example, Mackenzie's group had to leave the water because it was raining so excessively that the goods they transported were in danger of suffering damage from getting soaked. After an hour the weather got better and they embarked again, only to paddle back to the shore after another 13 miles of paddling, since the rain had returned in full strength. This time they were forced to remain there for the day although it was only 3.30 pm. The weather did not get any better the following day and therefore they remained on the same spot for the whole day until they could leave on June 9th at half past 2 am. (see Mackenzie 126).

However dangerous the rain, snow and cold were, they were not the only problems the explorers had to face on their various expeditions. Heavy gales

also caused them trouble. On May 1st, 1772 the wind started to pick up, when Hearne and his companions were on top of a large, treeless hill, far from any possible shelter. Thinking that it would not last for too long, they remained where they were, but soon it got worse and they had to use their sledges and other equipment to have at least some sort of protection. That way, however, “it only harboured a great drift of snow, with which in some places [they] were covered to the depth of two or three feet” (Hearne 189).

Sometimes storms were so strong that they presented a serious danger. Nute explained that head winds had the potential to break the fragile bark of their canoes (see Nute 27). Mackenzie described in his journal of his travels to the Arctic Ocean how the weather started to change at 7 o’ clock pm on July 25th, 1789. The colour of the sky changed swiftly and lightning was to be seen in the distance as well as thunder to be heard. Being aware of the possible danger of the oncoming storm, Mackenzie’s group got on shore half an hour after they first noticed the change in the weather. They reached the land too late, because before they were able to erect their tents which would have provided at least some sort of shelter to the travellers, they had to get the loadings out of the canoes and put the canoes on safe grounds to prevent them from receiving damage from the storm. Therefore, the wind hit them while they were trying to set up their tents. It blew so hard that Mackenzie’s Ridge Pole snapped; a pole which was according to Mackenzie, “9 ½ Inches in Circumference” (Mackenzie 170). Even though the men thought that the storm would take everything that was not pinned down they had to protect themselves by lying on the ground to avoid the stones that “were hurled about by the Air like Sand” (Mackenzie 170).

Only four days later, Mackenzie’s expedition had to face a similar threat. This time, however, the camp was already set up properly when a weather front hit them, which Mackenzie described as a “perfect Hurricane and heavy Rain [...]” (Mackenzie 177). The wind blew so hard that it almost took their canoe which was tied to trees. Moreover, the rain got them wet to the bones and also their supplies got drenched, which forced them to throw out some of their food (see Mackenzie 177).

Almost a month after this incident, Mackenzie and his comrades got hit by a strong wind again. Only this time they were not on land, but in the middle of the Slave Lake. The wind and the swell of the lake were so strong that their boat began to take up a lot of water. The men in the canoe had to bail out the water constantly to prevent the boat from sinking. The shape of the shore unfortunately made landing impossible and thus they had to push on until 3 pm before they were able to get off the water (see Mackenzie 190).

Strong winds also posed a danger for Simon Fraser's expedition to the Pacific in 1808. But while Mackenzie had his troubles with the wind on open water, Fraser and his men were on a river when, what Fraser called, a hurricane hit them coming from the south. This did not only slow down their progress on the river, but it also made it quite dangerous to keep on paddling. Fraser wrote: "At times our canoes were not manageable and within an ace of being dashed to pieces against the rocks, or of filling" (Fraser 88). While capsizing in the middle of a lake can have fatal consequences, capsizing in a river coming down from the Rocky Mountains may be considerably worse. If you escape the whirlpools in the rapids which might suck you down, you still might get crushed against the numerous rocks that can be found in such rivers. However, Fraser and his men braved the river despite the bad weather conditions.

Not only Hearne, Mackenzie and Fraser had to push through terrible weather conditions. Hearne's former subordinate, David Thompson, undertook many journeys where he and his comrades suffered from severely cold and exceedingly bad weather conditions.

When he first came to Hudson Bay in 1784, he had only experienced English weather so far and the first impressions of his new home were rather bleak. There the first snow was usually expected at the beginning of October which was followed by the freezing of the ponds, marshes and swamps until even the Churchill River was frozen in mid-November. And it became colder and colder. "As the cold became deep and prolonged, rocks shattered with a sharp crack that sounded like gunfire" (Jenish 14).

Winter turned out to be quite rough for the then 14 year old David Thompson, but spring was a challenge as well. The melting of the ice and snow turned the land into a pool of mud which made it hard to travel. Moreover, once the land was free of all snow, mosquitoes became active and they were more than just a nuisance to the inhabitants of Churchill in the Hudson Bay, where Thompson served in his first years with the HBC. Jenish (22) wrote: "Every puddle, every pool and pond spawned the voracious insects, which rose in roiling clouds to torment man and beast alike."

Later he would marvel at the tales of the travels of his superior, William Tomison at Cumberland House, a fort on Pine Island Lake on the Saskatchewan River. While Thompson had remained, Tomison had left for York factory in the springtime. On their return journey "Tomison and his men endured a wild assortment of weather – rain, hail, oppressive heat, high winds and swells on the lakes – and they buried three comrades on the way" (Jenish 43).

Thompson himself also had his troubles with the wind. After having left a post close to the Assiniboine and the Souris River on November 24th, 1797, Thompson travelled further southwest on the prairies where strong winds were constantly present and always a potential threat. Jenish (97) described the wind of the prairies with the following words: "The wind always blew in this part of the country. It hummed. It howled and sometimes it hit the prairie with a roar that sounded to Thompson like the sea crashing upon a rocky shore."

On December 5th, matters got worse, when they were trapped in the middle of the prairies. The wind had picked up, becoming a gale and Thompson's group could not see where they were walking, so Thompson had to lead the way in the direction where he thought he had seen trees from an elevated point. Only with the help of Thompson's compass did the group reach the actual forest which gave them shelter enough to make it through the storm (see Jenish, 2003, p. 98). Just five days later Thompson's men were again trapped in a heavy storm. At first, Thompson relied on his compass because he did not trust himself to guess the direction from the wind, but later he was forced to do so, because such a heavy gale picked up and night fell, so he could no longer see

his compass. Progressing slowly, he made it to a higher place, where some Oak trees gave shelter to the exhausted travellers. Having arrived there, he realised that his servant who was leading his horse was the only one who was close by and it took more than half an hour until nine other men from his expedition had arrived. One man was missing and so the group decided to go out man by man always staying within shouting distance until the farthest man could hear the missing man calling. He got rescued and was brought to the fire. Thus all of Thompson's crew made it out of the gale which was one of the most appalling days that he had witnessed in the wilderness (see Jenish 99).

The time of the year sometimes forced travellers to remain in one part of the country for a certain period of time. In Hearne's case, for example, his guide on his second journey advised him to stay on a lake on Seal River, because more barren lands were ahead of them and at that time of the year it would be too cold to walk farther north where they were heading to (see Hearne 27).

However, not only what common people would call bad weather could pose difficulties for expeditions. Hearne, for example, had his troubles with supposedly good weather on his first journey in search of a route from Hudson Bay to the Pacific. Owing to the good weather, Hearne's men had trouble hunting deer on November 30th, 1769, because they could be easily detected (see Hearne 21).

While hunting turned out to be a challenge, also advancing in arguably good weather was sometimes difficult. As soon as it got warmer, the snow became softer and started to melt. The soft snow made it strenuous to walk on with snow shoes. However, these devices were often necessary even under those circumstances, because "at times, and at particular places, the snow-drifts were so deep, that [they] could not possibly do without them" (Hearne 33).

In fact, walking in snowshoes on melted snow was a major setback for many expeditions. On Hearne's third journey, the hot temperatures and the wet ground made it so hard to walk that it took him eleven days to cover a distance

of an estimated 85 miles. This means they only walked an average of 8 miles a day (see Hearne 73).

Sometimes hot temperatures even forced Hearne's group to take a long break. Usually the rivers in the regions they were travelling in were covered by a reasonably thick layer of ice which made it possible to simply walk across them without having to resort to the use of canoes. However, on the 12th of May, 1772 it was so hot that the top layer of the ice on a river emptying into Doo-baunt Lake melted so that the amount of water on top of the ice and the possibility of the ice breaking made it too dangerous for them to walk across. It was not before the 19th of May until the water drained off the ice which made it safe again to walk across the river (see Hearne 191). Soon the previously hot temperatures proved once again to be a disadvantage, because when the temperatures sunk, the wet shoes and stockings the travellers were wearing froze, which not only made walking strenuous, but also put them in danger of getting frostbite in their feet and legs (see Hearne 192).

In addition to the troubles the fur traders and explorers had walking in too warm weather also food was affected by rising temperatures. In 1790 David Thompson experienced a rough year at York Factory owing to severe mice infestation. The rodents were far more numerous than in previous years simply because the winter of 1789/90 had been so mild. Thus many more mice had survived than usual, which also augmented the rate of reproduction. Soon the post suffered severely from these animals because they bit through everything and each attempt to kill as many as possible did little to actually decrease their numbers (see Jenish 62-63).

3.2. Supplies

When undertaking expeditions in the Canadian wilderness, either in a canoe, on a sledge or on snowshoes, it is always necessary to prepare for such a venture very thoroughly. Travelling in the vast Canadian lands is per se very laborious,

so when people made journeys in those regions, they would only take the bare minimum with them. Hearne (12) described them as follows:

[...] the nature of travelling long journeys in those countries will never admit of carrying even the most common article of clothing; so that the traveller is obliged to depend on the country he passes through, for that article, as well as for provisions.

This dependence on the resources of the country proved to be very distressful because the lands these explorers travelled in, were sometimes extremely harsh and resources like wood, shelter, herbs, game and other sources of food were hard to come by. On numerous occasions this led the explorers to the brink of death by starvation.

3.2.1. Food

Of all the hardships that the explorers described, the lack of food is probably the one that had the deepest impact on them because the passages in which the authors wrote about the sometimes inconvenient absence of meals, sometimes excruciating hunger are the most vivid and emotional excerpts from the life of those four adventurers. Hearne (35) wrote:

None of our natural wants, if we except thirst, are so distressing, or hard to endure, as hunger; [...] it not only enfeebles the body, but depressed [sic.] the spirits, in spite of every effort to prevent it.

When being out in the wilderness, they often were obliged to rely on hunting for their meals. This was the case because they could not carry many supplies with them as would have been necessary, either because of the weight, or because of the perishability of the food.

On Samuel Hearne's first journey, for instance, the food they had brought along from Prince of Wales Fort, was already consumed after having spent merely thirteen days in the wilderness (see Hearne 18). Even when Hearne's hunters were able to supply them with enough meat for days this was not a relief, since it was of little use as Hearne recollected: "[...] deer were so plentiful [...] but we

were all so heavy laden that we could not possibly take much of the meat with us" (Hearne 25). So even when game was abundant, Hearne's men could not take advantage of it to get through countries that could not provide sufficient supplies, or times of the year which saw a shortage in animals coming.

Another problem that Hearne encountered was due to the fact that after a certain period of time in which you do not consume proper food, your stomach cannot digest the usual quantities anymore which leads to a very painful digestion. Hearne stated that "when Providence threw any thing in my way, my stomach has scarcely been able to retain more than two or three ounces, without producing the most oppressive pain" (Hearne 35).

At times Hearne's companions were so desperately in need of food that they started to cut off that part of their clothing that seemed to be the most expendable and the easiest to digest and actually consumed it (see Hearne 36).

David Thompson was at times in similarly desperate situations. When he was returning from a journey to Lake Athabasca he lost a good deal of his equipment (see chapter 3.4.) and thus was forced to live off the land without the help of his gun or a fishing net. The first three days he and his two Indian companions could only eat young birds that they could forage from nests and even those were so scarce that it barely helped at all. Moreover, Thompson and one of the Indians suffered from dysentery which they caught from eating the fat of the birds. Things got worse and they could only find crowberries for their meals. At one point Thompson was so desperate that he wrote a note with charcoal saying that Kozdaw, the only one of the three who was not affected by dysentery, was not responsible for their deaths in case that they would perish. The day after they were rescued by Chipewyan Indians who happened to be close by. Thus Thompson barely escaped an almost certain death (see Jenish 80-81).

On Alexander Mackenzie's journey across the Rocky Mountains in 1793 his supplies diminished daily and his hunters could only do little to improve their situation. On June 21st Mackenzie ordered his men to bury some of the

pemmican in a hole which was deep enough to conceal it from animals and local Indians and to protect it from a possible fire. Thus he made sure that they would have food, once they were returning over the mountains. He gave the same orders on July 9th, when he once more found the game rather scarce in the lands he was travelling in. In addition to that, the journey was getting longer than he had expected and so he decided on July 11th that the rations of the meals had to be reduced. This was, of course, not well received by his men, but their situation did not allow any other decision (see Mackenzie 288, 332, 335). This choice proved to be a wise one. Besides procuring fish from various villages for the moment, they could do little to restock their provisions. By the time Mackenzie's expedition reached the Pacific Ocean, on July 21st, their situation was rather unpleasant. Mackenzie (366) pointed out: "Our stock was, at this time, reduced to twenty pounds of pemmican, fifteen pounds of rice, and six pounds of flour, among ten half-starved men, in a leaky vessel, and on a barbarous coast."

On July 28th when Mackenzie and his men were already on their way back, they came to the last place where they had hidden some supplies and found them in perfect condition. Over the next few days, every stash that they had buried was recovered (see Mackenzie 394). However, this did not prevent them from suffering from hunger. On August 13th Mackenzie (399) wrote: "We encamped at a late hour, cold, wet, and hungry: for such was the state of our provisions, that our necessary allowance did not answer to the active cravings of our appetites."

However, being out in the wilderness far away from any permanent settlement was not the only place where hunger was a major issue. Sometimes even the outposts and forts that supported the fur traders were not able to provide these men with the necessary nourishment, because gathering or hunting for food was at times rather unsuccessful. David Thompson, for example, experienced a very distressing winter of 1791 in York Factory, when game was so scarce that the hunters who were sent out to get food could barely hunt down enough to survive in the wilderness. The lack of fresh food became so bad that Joseph Colen, who was in charge of York Factory at the time, started handing out

molasses and Scotch barley in order to avoid an outbreak of scurvy. Nonetheless, the situation of nine men became so bad that surgical intervention was inevitable (see Jenish 64-65).

Suffering from hunger was a fate also well known to Fraser's expedition to the Pacific Ocean in 1808. Fraser noted that on June 22nd they were given three dogs for food by the natives. Such a meal was not uncommon in these lands and mostly well received. Fraser described their situation with the following words: "At this time we depended wholly upon the natives for provisions, and they generously furnished us with the best they could procure; but that best was commonly wretched if not disgusting" (Fraser 114).

Just as Mackenzie had made preparations for their return, also Fraser had placed so called *cachés* of food, so that they had something to eat on their way back. On July 18th, 1808, however, they found that one of their cachés had been eaten by animals. This news was so distressing to Fraser's men that some even suggested remaining with the natives. However, in the end everyone proceeded, even with the threat of starvation looming in their minds (see Fraser 141).

3.2.2. Tools and other Articles

Since travelling in the Canadian wilderness was strenuous enough on its own, travellers usually carried the bare minimum with them in order to keep the weight of the luggage as light as possible. Thompson, for instance, set out on June 10th 1796 on a journey into the Athabasca region, taking with him two Indians as companions and only the most essential tools:

A gun for shooting waterfowl, forty lead balls, five pounds of lead shot, five pounds of gunpowder, a fishing net a hundred and thirty feet in length, three flints, a small axe and a grey cotton tent. (Jenish 77)

With this equipment only, he travelled into lands that no white man and just a few natives had seen before.

As already mentioned, materials to replace any articles were scarce in some regions and thus the crew of the various expeditions had to keep a firm eye on all the supplies to avoid any unfortunate damages. However, on certain occasions they were not able to save some articles from being destroyed or lost.

Alexander Mackenzie, for instance, wrote that the native women who were accompanying him on his journey to the Arctic Ocean were constantly busy with making new shoes out of moose skin, because “a pair does not last [them] above one day” (Mackenzie 181).

Also the canoes were not immune to damage or abrasion. Mackenzie reported that the canoe of his Indian companions on his way back from the journey to the Arctic Ocean on August 28th, 1789 broke on a perfectly flat lake. Supposedly the Indians almost drowned and got back to camp only the next day. For some time it was even unclear whether the canoe could be repaired or not. This incident left the Indians in quite a miserable state, which affected their morale in such a way that they did not want to follow Mackenzie anymore, believing that it was too risky (see Mackenzie 191-192).

On Hearne’s third journey, his crew was facing such constant rain in September 1771 that most of their tents were rotten when they set out again (see Hearne 142). Tents were, however, crucial, because they protected them from the cold, wind and rain and being exposed to the weather with no shelter was extremely dangerous.

To make things worse, a couple of days later, on October 6th, a storm blew the tents over and a falling tent pole broke Hearne’s quadrant (see Hearne 143). This unfortunate accident made it impossible to obtain correct data of longitude and latitude of the position they were in and thus a crucial part of Hearne’s mission could not be fulfilled, which was the determination of the exact position of important geographical features (see Hearne 9).

Misfortunes were not the only reason for valuable tools to get lost or broken. In the first two weeks of December 1771 when Hearne and his men were travelling past a set of smaller lakes south west of Anaw'd Lake they came across numerous beaver lodges. Those the natives pried open trying to kill the beavers for their skins. However, the location of the lodges and the amount of stones in their construction left the natives with only a few killed beavers and quite a number of broken tools (see Hearne 152).

As already mentioned, the explorers were often obliged to rely on the country. This dependence turned out to be quite a struggle sometimes. When on June 13th, 1793 one of the canoes of Alexander Mackenzie's expedition in search of the Pacific Ocean received severe damage, some men had to search for bark in order to repair it. However, the surrounding lands were extremely rough and they were in a region where quality bark was hard to come by. Three men, one of them an Indian, were sent out and only the Indian returned before the next day, bringing with him only a small bundle of bark that was of little use (see Mackenzie 273-274). The other two returned at half past seven a.m. the following day. They were "hungry and cold, not having tasted the food, or enjoyed the least repose for twenty-four hours, with their clothes torn into tatters, and their skin lacerated, in passing through the woods" (Mackenzie 274).

In some cases not even the land could supply them with the necessary resources. When Fraser was on his way back from the Pacific Ocean, he returned to a place where they had left canoes behind. On July 20th, 1808 his men wanted to repair them, but they could not gather the necessary materials from where they were. Therefore they were obliged to cut up one canoe to mend the others (see Fraser 142).

Sometimes, though, they had to rely on the natives to provide them with necessary items. On July 16th, 1808 an Indian Chief gave them materials as a present with which they were able to repair their shoes, which were constantly worn out by the harshness of their journey. Fraser recollected his thankfulness in his journal: "We were much in want of this necessary article; continually

walking as we were among the worst of roads, our feet were covered with blisters, and some of the men were lame and in perpetual torture” (Fraser 140).

3.3. Physical and Mental conditions

One major issue that comes up, when discussing the hardships the explorers had to push through, is the physical condition of the explorers who were searching for a passage from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Being out in the vast Canadian wilderness in such a harsh environment requires the travellers often to push themselves to the very physical limits and sometimes beyond. This physical exhaustion is also often accompanied by a psychic one which may cause motivational problems.

3.3.1. Physical conditions

The physical challenges that await a traveller in the Canadian wilderness are numerous. The absence of a clear path, the difficulty of the terrain and the long days of hard labour made exploring unknown terrain not an easy task to accomplish. Moreover, the voyageurs who were crucial to Mackenzie’s, Fraser’s and Thompson’s expeditions were reputedly working hard day in day out. Nute described that they paddled at a frequency of an average of forty strokes per minute. This they kept up for about twelve to fifteen hours a day, usually with just a couple of 10 to 12 minutes’ stops and two longer breaks at breakfast and dinner (see Nute 27).

Paddling, though, was not the only tough task. Carrying their loads on portages that led from one lake to the other, around rapids or waterfalls was always a test to the body. Nute put it in simple, but fitting words: “Nearly everyone who has written of canoe travel remarks on the laboriousness of portaging” (Nute 45).

On his way to the Pacific, Alexander Mackenzie described the burden that he and his men had to carry over a stretch of land because they could not proceed on the waterways any further. The Indians who were accompanying him got the

lightest load which was weighing about forty-five pounds, in addition to the guns which they were carrying. The other servants of Mackenzie had the hardest lot, each carrying ninety pounds on their back, not including their guns and ammunition. He and Mr. Mackay had about seventy pounds to support on their back. Thus loaded, they had to walk from noon until half past six in the evening. The start of their path was "a steep ascent of about a mile; it lay along a well-beaten path, but the country through which it led was rugged and ridgy, and full of wood" (Mackenzie 323).

The challenge of physical labour was from time to time augmented in a very demanding way. Thus, for example, on June 16th 1793, Mackenzie described how hard his men had to work, carrying one of the canoes over a certain stretch of land. The weight of this particular canoe exceeded the usual weight, because this canoe had been repaired numerous times, having thus the extra bark and gum added to the total weight of a regular canoe. This extra weight made it very toilsome to the men who had to portage it. Mackenzie (276-277) depicted that challenge in such a manner:

I appointed four men to this laborious office, which they executed at the peril of their lives, for the canoe now had become so heavy [...] that two men could not carry her more than a hundred yards, without being relieved [...].

Portaging a canoe in itself is a very strenuous task, but since the canoes were made of wood and bark they also absorbed quite a lot of water which made them heavier day by day. On his journey in 1806, Fraser's men too could only carry their canoes for quite a short distance on July 8th before they had to put them down to get some rest (see Fraser 237).



Figure 5: A portage

Portaging was also very dangerous because the carriers were sometimes walking through unknown lands without any clear path upon which they could tread. Therefore, tree stumps, roots and other obstacles were omnipresent, always posing a threat for the men portaging the canoe, since falling or tripping over something might have had severe or even fatal consequences (see Mackenzie 276-277).

Fraser described the exhausting walks in a similar manner. “Walking was difficult, the country being extremely rough and uneven,” (Fraser 114) he wrote on June 23rd 1808. That day, one of his men got sick and also “one way or other [their] men were getting out of order” (Fraser 114). The constant physical strain took their toll.

The tough journey down the Fraser River also had its consequences for Simon Fraser himself. On June 5th, 1808, he was walking on shore with some of his men, while the others paddled the canoes through some bad rapids. The path on land was by no means less demanding than running down dangerous rapids because it was “along the declivity [sic] of a steep and high bank, without anything to get hold of” and Fraser overstrained himself, climbing up a hill on that path. He recollected his situation in his journal: “I feel a violent pain in my groins which prevent me from being able to walk any distance” (Fraser 169).

Around July 25th 1771 Samuel Hearne had been travelling under such hard conditions that his feet and legs suffered from swellings which made walking excruciating. In addition to that, also his ankles had become so stiff that he

often stumbled over rocks and bruise his feet when knocking against them. This way the skin on his feet got completely scraped off, so that sand and dirt could get into the open flesh. Thus “for a whole day [...] [he] left the print of [his] feet in blood almost at every step [he] took” (Hearne 128).

While Hearne was struggling with finding a path to the Pacific in the most northern parts of Canada, Fraser had his difficulties in getting to the Ocean by crossing the Rocky Mountains. The Fraser River on which he and his men travelled in the year 1808 was perilous and toilsome enough, but also the way on land brought the explorers to the brink of total exhaustion. Walking in those lands was at times extremely strenuous, since the landscape was rugged and broken. On June 6th, 1808, Fraser (95) wrote: “The high hills, the precipices, the difficulty attending *ravines* &c. rendered walking very painful and disagreeable. A pair of shoes does not last a day, and the men have their feet full of thorns.”

Likewise Thompson had to deal with harsh conditions that led to physical exhaustion. Being only sixteen years old, he joined an expedition led by Robert Longmoore in 1786 with the goal to erect a post on the southern branch of the Saskatchewan. This post was designed to keep the Hudson’s Bay Company in business, since the spreading influence of the North West Company proved to be a serious threat to their profits (see chapter 3.5). This journey turned out to be extremely strenuous. Thompson had to deal with hurting hands and knees and a stiff back from the long distances and hard labour they had to deal with. Moreover, the travellers in this group were not able to ingest the tiniest piece of food before their day began because Longmoore made them paddle from dawn until mid morning before they halted to have breakfast. This he deemed a necessary inconvenience since he wanted to be on the water before the mosquitoes and flies came out and before the wind picked up. Furthermore, each canoe was paddled by three men and laden with six packages of furs and other trading goods. Each of those packages weighed ninety pounds. In addition to that there were also 110 pounds of provisions in each canoe and also the personal gear of the paddlers. So portages around waterfalls or rapids were excessively tiresome to the body (see Jenish 33-34).

By the end of a day young Thompson was on the brink of collapsing. Jenish (33) described his circumstances with the following words: "David Thompson was sunburnt and sore and the back of his neck covered with insect bites, but after a day on the river he was too hungry and tired to care."

This particular journey would last for eight weeks in which they would cover a distance of approximately seven hundred miles.

While this journey had been a true test to the body of young David Thompson, it was far from being as disastrous as the incident that happened on December 23rd 1787. On his way back from bringing provisions to Manchester house, where Tomison and Thompson stayed at that time, Thompson fell while dragging a sled laden with meat down a river bank. His leg got caught between a branch and the sled which fractured his right thigh bone. There was no proper doctor present, and so Tomison took care of treating this injury. After having spent three months and six days in bed Thompson tried to move, but soon found his ankle and foot too swollen so that he had to lie down again. In spring, when Tomison and some of his men departed from Manchester House they took Thompson with him back to Cumberland House by his own wish. He was still unable to walk so "they brought Thompson out in a stretcher, laid him amid the luggage and embarked" (Jenish 51). It was not until mid August that he started walking on crutches; almost eight months after the incident. It took him even longer to return to his duties for the Hudson's Bay Company, when he started to work again on February 15, 1790 (see Jenish 55).

Mackenzie, on the other side, thought it important to stress how hard his men were working. He described in his journal of his travels to the Pacific Ocean how his men had gone to deliver the obtained furs and he vocalized that this job "from the immense length of the voyage, and other concurring circumstances, is a most severe trial of patience and perseverance" (Mackenzie 208). Moreover, once done with the deliverance, they hardly had any time to recover, before they had to return from whence they had come, laden with supplies for their winter habitat.

There they continued

[...] in very toilsome labour, with nothing more than a common shed to protect them from the frost and snow. Such is the life which these people lead; and is continued with unremitting exertion, till their strength is lost in premature old age. (Mackenzie 208)

The journeys that the explorers and their men had to perform were extremely demanding, but it got even worse when one man of the group got sick or injured. Fraser's journey over the Rocky Mountains in 1806 was truly special in this regard because he dedicated quite a number of lines to sickness and injury on his expedition. One of Fraser's men, Bazile Gervais, had an injured back from falling on a portage, as well as falling out of a tree. On June 23rd Fraser asked Bazile Gervais, if he was able to partake in the journey to which he replied that he would do his best. However, only one day after that it was clear that Gervais was of no use to the group and he had to be sent back to Saucier, one of Fraser's men who had been left behind. Saucier took Gervais' place, but Fraser lost six hours waiting for them (see Fraser 222-225). However, this was not the last incident. One day after they had sent Gervais back, La Malice started complaining, saying that he did not feel well. Fraser was rather displeased about this, saying:

It is really vexing that he did not inform us of being unwell before he left Trout Lake. [...] Our situation is really [sic] critical with the set of awkward men we have [...] and all the bad places are yet to be passed. (Fraser 225)

La Malice did not get any better the following days. On June 27th they had to go ashore, because of his situation. That day, Fraser also mentioned that many others had various complaints. La Malice was the one who stuck out, though, and Fraser did not believe that he would survive for much longer. The following day, they could not depart before seven in the morning because Malice did not feel well and they were obliged to take a break at noon (see Fraser 225-228). La Malice's health got so bad that he started to accuse Fraser and Mr Stuart, his assistant, of not treating him well. Fraser rejected this accusation to the fullest and reminded La Malice of how well he was attended. Nonetheless, La Malice wanted to go ashore and not continue on this journey any longer. Fraser

tried to fulfil his wish, but none of his men were willing to take him back and so they had to keep going with a sick and grumbling La Malice. It was not until July 10th that he finally got better (see Fraser 230-232, 240).

3.3.2. Mental condition

Besides physical conditions, travelling and/or living in the wilderness may also have a serious effect on the mental state. When David Thompson stayed at Cumberland House during the summer of 1787 he made quite an uncommon experience. Cumberland was a post of the Hudson's Bay Company which was located on the south shore of Pine Island Lake on the Saskatchewan. Living there was rather simple and monotonous for Thompson. He desperately longed for books to read in this isolation, but the master of Cumberland, George Hudson, took poor care of his men; as far as Thompson was concerned, there was no entertainment for the people living there and not even a Bible to read. He even barely talked with his men and thus the days were rather long and dull. The only item that kept the men at Cumberland entertained was a checkerboard. This particular checkerboard led to the rather strange experience mentioned earlier. Thompson played as often as he could to kill time and avoid being haunted by boredom. At times there was no one he could interest in a game and therefore he played against himself. One day as he was playing both sides, he claimed that the devil came and sat down next to him, playing numerous games and losing all of them. Thompson described the appearance of the devil quite vividly and when the devil disappeared again, Thompson could not tell whether he was dreaming or not (see Jenish 42-43). This incident may be indicating the consequences of a long and monotonous period of time, but going into medical detail would be beyond the scope of this paper. Suffice to say that the circumstances Thompson was living in had an impact on his mental condition.

Hearne, for example experienced a motivational low around Christmas 1770 when he and his companions had not had anything to eat and only melted snow to drink since December 19th. Each one of them was carrying a heavy load and

travelled long hours which brought them to the utmost exhaustion. Hearne (57) described his feelings on the 24th of December 1770 in all detail:

I must confess that I never spent so dull a Christmas; and when I recollected the merry season which was then passing, and reflected on the immense quantities, and great variety of delicacies which were then expending in every part of Christendome, and that with a profusion bordering on waste, I could not refrain from wishing myself again in Europe, if it had been only to have had an opportunity of alleviating the extreme hunger which I suffered with the refuse of the table of any one of my acquaintance.

A guilty conscience, on the other side, can also have an effect on your psyche when out in the vast wilderness of Canada, especially when being responsible for the safety of numerous men. After having passed through much toil and hardship travelling up a river towards the Rocky Mountains, Alexander Mackenzie found his men at a very low state of morale. They had worked extremely hard getting through rapids and around cascades and waterfalls for quite some time experiencing many near-accidents that would have ended most likely fatally, but they were very fortunate and thus no man got hurt and only some of the canoes received some damage. On the fifth of June, 1793 he left the canoes to walk up a mountain in order to get a view of what the lands in front of them looked like. When he got to the point where they should meet up with the canoes again, he could not see anyone and his gunshot signal was not returned (see Mackenzie 250-252).

The whole situation brought Mackenzie in so much distress that he started to worry about the crew and what might have happened to them. He pointed out in his journal:

As for myself, it will be easily believed, that my mind was in a state of extreme agitation; and the imprudence of my conduct in leaving the people, in such a situation of danger and toilsome exertion, added a very painful mortification to the severe apprehensions I already suffered. (Mackenzie 252)

Mackenzie was haunted by thoughts of having to abandon a journey which was extremely important to him, but he finally found his crew in the evening. They

reportedly were so far behind because that particular segment of the river had turned out to be more challenging than expected (see Mackenzie 253).

However, Mackenzie was not the only one on this expedition to the Pacific Ocean who had to deal with mental conditions. After having braved an extremely challenging time of paddling, portaging and towing, some of his men started to think that it was not worth it to keep on pursuing Mackenzie's goal. Murmurs started to arise as soon as May 20th, which was only eleven days after they had set out from their winter residence on Peace River. Two days later some Indians whom the travellers had met gave them a report of the lands ahead which sounded rather hopeless. Not only did these Indians claim that the path further ahead was supposedly full of toil and dangerous rapids, but they also spoke of other hostile tribes who were living in this region. That, of course, fuelled the attitude of Mackenzie's men. To make things worse, the report of the Indians suggested a return to a certain distance from whence they came in order to take an easier way (see Mackenzie 238, 298, 300).

Mackenzie foresaw the negative effect of such a venture and wrote down his thoughts in his journal:

[...] as in a voyage of this kind, a retrograde motion could not fail to cool the ardour, slacken the zeal, and weaken the confidence of those, who have no greater inducement in the undertaking, than to follow the conductor of it. (Mackenzie 300-301)

But when Mackenzie spoke to them about their route the day after, he managed to lift their spirits and persuade them to continue their journey. On June 25th, however, Mr. Mackay pointed out to Mackenzie that the men started to complain openly about him. At first, he did not give any heed to these conversations, but then one of his men openly displayed his unwillingness to work. This seemed to be so incomprehensible to Mackenzie that he approached the worker about it, saying that he was aware of their late complaints. By claiming that he would proceed in his journey even if he was the only one to do so, he managed to make his men feel ashamed so that they again dropped their complaints (see Mackenzie 303-304, 309, 315-316).

3.4. Difficulties with the landscape and geographical features

Travelling in unknown terrain is generally a risky business and Canada's unexplored wilderness proved to be no exception. While the four explorers who are discussed in this paper have much in common, one aspect that differentiates them is the landscape that they had to travel through. Mackenzie, Fraser and Thompson mainly travelled in western Canada and their most famous and important expeditions led them across the Rocky Mountains to find a passage to the Pacific Ocean. There they found a rugged and tough landscape which was different to everything they experienced before. Ormsby (29) described it as follows:

Beyond the Continental Divide they found that rivers formed a maze of waterways difficult to untangle [...] seldom did they flow directly westward and nowhere could the traders discover a long, wide river suitable for navigation throughout its length.

In Hearne's case one major issue was that his trail often led him through barren grounds, being far away from any woods that could supply them with fuel. Usually a small fire could be made with moss in order to cook their meals, but when the moss was too damp, they had to eat the meat raw. Hearne adapted to this necessity rather fast, however, he and his companions were sometimes forced to eat the flesh of musk-oxen which was described by Hearne (35) as "not only coarse and tough, but [it] smells and tastes so strong of musk as to make it very disagreeable when raw."

The nature of the landscape that Hearne's expeditions had to cross at times was so hostile that it was impossible even for natives to maintain a permanent settlement or post, since the only vegetation consisted of moss, grass and some occasional bushes. The lack of material, game and fuel caused great distress among natives and Europeans alike. Hearne described those lands as follows: "[...]There are many very extensive tracts of land in those parts, which are incapable of affording support to any number of the human race even during the short time they are passing through [...]" (Hearne 60).

While the absence of trees proved to be dangerous, their presence also could be a potential hazard. In case of heavy storms, trees are often uprooted, what can be fatal for a heedless traveller. Hearne's third expedition had good luck when they were marching through a heavy storm from the 28th to the 31st of March 1772. Hearne states that many trees were falling to the ground, but everyone came out safe "though several had narrow escapes [...]" (Hearne 187).

Thompson's journey in 1786, whose intended mission was to establish South Branch House, was way farther south to where Hearne used to travel, but it was nonetheless also quite a test for the expedition bound to expand the influence of the Hudson's Bay Company. While Hearne had to deal with a rather monotonous landscape, Thompson experienced the difficulties of a constantly changing landscape. The rivers Thompson had to deal with while serving under Longmoore's expedition posed a serious challenge. Most of the first part of their voyage had to be done by towing the canoes along the shoreline because the river was too strong to make paddling effective. Therefore towing the canoes was the main means of transportation. This meant that two men had to drag the canoe from the shoreline through shallow waters, wearing harnesses to make this job easier, and one being in the stern to keep the canoe on course. This technique itself seemed to be not too laborious to the sixteen-year-old David Thompson, "but the heat and the mosquitoes turned the work into a dreadful ordeal" (Jenish 35).

After this first part of the journey, the expedition led by Longmoore entered a patch of the Hayes River that was called 'Hill River' by Hudson's Bay men. It moved through much rockier and steeper terrain than before and thus proved to be a quite different from what this expedition had seen earlier. Over a stretch of fifty miles the expedition had to portage or tow around rapids, shallow waters or waterfalls. Ironically enough, after having coped with the difficult Hayes River, which forced the men of the Hudson's Bay Company to go to their limits, they faced a threat on open water which was no less demanding than the challenge the river had turned out to be. Reaching Lake Winnipeg they travelled along the north shore "ever fearful of a south wind that could raise powerful swells

capable of dashing canoes against the high clay cliffs at the end of the lake” (Jenish 35).

However, towing canoes turned out to be more demanding and dangerous than Thompson had thought. When William Tomison, another one of Thompson’s superiors in the year 1787, was on his return trip to Cumberland where Thompson had remained, an unforeseen and terrible incident happened. Tomison’s men were towing their canoes at the Grand Rapids on the Saskatchewan, when two canoeists, John Lynklyter and George Short, got pushed into the river by their canoe which had been caught by the strong current. While Short managed to undo his harness, Lynklyter was less lucky and got dragged away by the stream “and his twisted, broken body washed ashore downstream a short time later” (Jenish 44). So even for experienced canoeists the rivers, rapids and waterfalls of the Canadian wilderness were a possible threat that could easily cost their lives. This incident forced Tomison to take the seventeen year old Thompson with him on his travels further up the Saskatchewan (see Jenish 44).

About nine years after that incident Thompson himself would suffer from the consequences the current of strong rapids could have. When he was returning from his journey to Lake Athabasca, he and his two Indian companions came across a waterfall on Black River. Before and after the waterfall there were also very strong rapids. The group was able to portage around the first set of rapids and around the falls. Reaching the top of the falls Thompson decided to tow the canoe further upstream through the rapids. His two companions were instructed to tow the boat along the shore while Thompson steered it away from the main current. When the Indians got to a birch tree which was in the way, an argument arose about where to bring the rope around the tree. In the mean time, the canoe had been pushed back into the current and was moving sideways. Thompson recognized the danger of tipping or going over the waterfall, but his comrades did not hear him. Thompson tried to free the canoe by cutting the rope with his knife, but it was too late and he got pushed down the waterfall. After a drop of roughly 12 feet, he came back to the surface with his canoe on top of him. He managed to drag it to the shore, but could not move any further,

being completely exhausted. To make things worse, he had received a gash on his left foot and almost all of the equipment in the canoe was lost (see Jenish 79-80).

Alexander Mackenzie recollected a similar accident, which, however, ended with much less severe consequences. On his journey from the Athabasca region to the Arctic Ocean his group came to a waterfall on June 5th 1789. There all of the men were occupied with carrying the loading and canoes up a hill and it was only too late that they noticed that one of the canoes got loose and went down the waterfall. The Indian woman who was in charge of the canoe was able to jump out of it just in time, but the canoe was utterly destroyed; shattered into pieces at the bottom of the waterfall. Thus also all the cargo from this canoe was lost to the river (see Mackenzie 125).

Only a short distance away from that waterfall where the accident happened there are rapids which demanded a much more disastrous sacrifice, as Mackenzie narrated. In 1786 Mr. C. Grant travelled through these lands in order to get to the Slave Lake. He was not as lucky as Mackenzie because 5 men drowned in those rapids and two canoes with some of the load also got lost (see Mackenzie 125).

These experiences made Mackenzie very conscious of how dangerous certain rapids and cascades could be and this knowledge proved to be very helpful on his journey in 1793 which finally got him to the Pacific Ocean. On May 19th that year he was approaching the Rocky Mountains when they came across a stretch of rapids, waterfalls and cascades. The canoe in which Mackenzie was travelling was very heavily laden, but the river seemed deep enough to tow it for quite a while. First problems appeared though, when the boat got smashed onto a rock and was seriously damaged. So they lost quite a lot of time there repairing the canoe and drying the load. Soon after they proceeded to tow the canoe further, they had to halt and were forced to either go back the way they had come or traversing an, according to Mackenzie, extremely hazardous part of the river. There the current was very strong, which put the men in constant danger of slipping and being dragged down the cascades right behind them,

which would have caused some severe damage for both the canoe and the men (Mackenzie 231-232).

Still, venturing back to an easier crossing seemed to be too time-consuming, for Mackenzie and his men risked traversing at this point by moving from one small island to the other, which were situated in the river, giving protection to the travelers. The other members of that expedition who were still behind Mackenzie witnessed their crossing, and were on the one hand worried about their safety and, on the other hand, also alarmed for their own, since they still had to follow Mackenzie's lead. In the end, all got across safely, just to find the current there being almost as strong as on the side they had just fled. However, the river was shallower there and so they were able to tow the canoes for another while until they came to a cascade which forced them to portage the canoe around it for about one hundred and twenty paces. After that, they continued towing up a very steep part and Mackenzie being in the lead got to a point where he was so high up that his men could not hear him anymore, when he tried to warn them of the force of the rapids they were in. He tried to tell them to lighten the canoes by getting some of the load out, but without success. This situation worried him sincerely as he wrote:

And here I could not but reflect, with infinite anxiety, on the hazard of my enter-prise [sic]: one false step of those who were attached to the [towing] line, or the breaking of the line itself, would have at once cosigned the canoe, and everything it contained, to instant destruction. (Mackenzie 233)

Again, Mackenzie and his men braved this obstacle without any damage to man or boat. However, the next threat was imminent, as rocks were pushed down by the current, which might have caused some damage or even swiped one of the men off his feet. Mackenzie was at times in a situation where he could not see all of his men, which put him into even more distress. Ironically enough, the only incident that happened that day, occurred on a portage, where one of the canoes broke, but this was the last part of that strenuous day as they camped a mile and a half away from where the accident happened (see Mackenzie 233-234).

Portages were always quite a challenge, since all the canoes and goods had to be carried over a stretch of land which was sometimes just a narrow beaten path and sometimes even less than that. These paths were at times hard enough to walk without a load on the shoulders, so carrying a canoe or bundles of fur, provisions and other articles across it was very demanding. Some portages were even dangerous, as the one that Fraser and his men had to do on his way from the Thompson River to the Strait of Georgia on June 20th, 1808. The beginning of the portage went steeply uphill and the ground was full of loose rocks. More than just once one of these rocks was moved and came tumbling down. Thus one of Fraser's crew got injured and a kettle was lost. Still they were very lucky, because the natives that accompanied them told them that a couple of Indians had died here, having lost their balance. This story seemed to be true, because there were graves all over the place (see Fraser 109-110).

Sometimes the paths were made more accessible by the natives, who used ropes and other articles to build bridges, scaffolds or ladders. These were still quite a challenge to the explorers, who had no experience in using those devices, unlike the natives who built them. Fraser (136-137) described one of those constructions as follows:

[...] We had to ascend precipices by means of ladders composed of two long poles placed upright and parallel with sticks crossways tied with twigs. Upon the end of these others were placed, and so on for any height. Add to this that the ladders were often so slack that the smallest breeze put them in motion [...] while the steps were so narrow and irregular leading from scaffold to scaffold, that they could scarcely be traced by the feet without the greatest care and circumspection.

Fraser, however, was not the only explorer who had his troubles with a portage. Mackenzie's group faced a rock they had to pass in the morning of May 20th, 1793, not far from where they had set out that day. They managed to get up onto it by cutting steps into the base where the stone was soft enough and passed until they got to a point where the rock dropped off a bit, which made it hard to progress. Mackenzie passed this obstacle by jumping which he did, in his own words, "at the hazard of [his] life," where he "received those who followed [him] on his shoulders" (Mackenzie 235). They successfully managed

to jump without anyone getting injured, but the canoe broke again in the process of dragging it along this way. The rapids continued to be a challenge and they had to unload and reload the boat at four instances. After towing for a while, however, their luck left them completely, because a wave moved the bow of the canoe in such a way that the towing line snapped. Thus the canoe and the men that were in it were being taken down the rapids and Mackenzie and the others, who could do nothing but watch it happen, deemed their comrades in the canoe lost. However, further down the rapids they were incredibly fortunate, since another wave pushed the canoe out of the current where the men inside were able to step out of the boat and get it onto the shore. Being very glad that no severe damage had happened and worn out by the fright the incident had caused, they set up camp right there (see Mackenzie 235-237).

The following days were but slightly less exhausting for Mackenzie's crew since the river did not become any easier to master. However, one incident stuck out of these couple of days. On June 13th 1793, Mackenzie described how their journey almost ended in a complete disaster. They were again moving on the water, when Mackenzie wanted to walk onshore instead of getting into the canoe in order to make it easier to move it. His men, however, insisted that he should come with them, so that "if they perished, [he] should perish with them" (Mackenzie 270). Soon the fears of Mackenzie's men turned out to be quite justified, because the boat got pushed sideways by the current despite all paddling efforts, and in the course of this a bar broke. Everyone inside the boat jumped out to set it straight back into the course, but they soon got moved into waters which were too deep to pursue their intentions. Therefore they climbed back into the canoe, which then hit a rock breaking the stern and bouncing off to the other shore to break the bow as well. In the meantime one man was left behind, who was too exhausted to climb back into the boat and one fell out of the boat, when he tried to stop it by holding on to some branches of a tree which was on the shore. Mackenzie and the others who were still in the canoe could not take care of either of those men because they were pushed down further, into a cascade where the boat took some more damage. Mackenzie succeeded in persuading his men to remain with the canoe, even when his sternsman yelled at everyone to save themselves. This proved to be life saving,

because after a few hundred yards the canoe got to rest when it got stuck between some rocks. Mackenzie claimed that if the crew had abandoned the boat, trying to make it for the land, they would most likely have received severe injuries from the jagged rocks around, if not worse. There amongst the stones, they got rescued by the remaining crew, who had not been in this canoe. Mackenzie once more thanked his fortune for getting out of such a dangerous situation and even managed to lift the spirits of his comrades by lauding their courage and stressing the honor which they would receive if they would continue their journey (see Mackenzie 270-272).

A path across the Rocky Mountains was in those times in every circumstance toilsome. Fifteen years after Alexander Mackenzie first came to the Pacific Ocean on an overland expedition, Simon Fraser also pushed in that direction to gain a foothold in the West of the American continent for the Northwest Company. Fraser tried to find another route which would be better for the fur trading commerce than the river Mackenzie had travelled down in 1793. When he travelled down the Fraser River starting from Fort George, he came across some natives on May 30th 1808 who told him that his intended way ahead was difficult – if not impossible – to pass, “not only thro [sic] the badness of the channel, but also thro [sic] the badness of the surrounding country, which was rugged and mountainous” (Fraser 86).

David Thompson could only approve this description. A few days after he set out for his first crossing of the Rocky Mountains on June 25th, 1807 he found descending the mountains to be far more laborious than expected. Cutting their way through the woods they only moved two and a half miles in three days (see Jenish 128).

It did not take long either until Fraser’s expedition experienced a situation on the way down the Rocky Mountains which almost ended in a disaster. On June 1st, 1808 as they were travelling down the Fraser River, the canoeists lost control of their boat in a cascade and it was pushed in every possible direction, sometimes even spinning around. Only by sheer luck was the canoe washed ashore on a rock which happened to be in shallow waters. The others who were

still on land ran to their help, but the path to that point was so steep that they had to use their daggers to avoid falling into the river themselves. Finally they were able to go down, by cutting steps into the hill. Thus they were able to tie a rope to the canoe and partly drag, partly carry it out of its peculiar situation. However, this task was by no means a safe rescue as Fraser (90) recollected: "Our lives hung as it were upon a thread; for failure of the line [with which they pulled up the canoe] or a false step of one of the men might have hurled the whole of us into eternity."

This was by no means the last challenge that Fraser's group had to face in the rugged country west of the Rocky Mountains. Only four days later, on June 5th they again came across rapids which almost led the party to a disastrous end. At first upon visiting these rapids, the group discussed if they should avoid the rapid altogether and proceed on foot. This idea was soon abandoned because it would have meant having to leave their canoes behind. So they were unloaded and guided down the rapids by five men each. Despite the constant threat of being dashed into pieces by the rocks or sucked in by the numerous whirlpools, everyone made it out of the rapids safely. However, this was not the end of the dangers because the path on which the goods had to be transported was equally dangerous as the rapids. The ground of the precipice which they had to walk on consisted of gravel and small stones. Therefore, with every step the ground slipped a bit downwards. There, one of Fraser's men got lost and found himself in a situation where he could not move any further without risking to fall. Fraser himself came to his help, by carefully crawling towards him. The fellow could be saved, but at the same time his load fell into the river (see Fraser 93-94).

At times, Fraser's expedition even purposely tested their luck. On June 9th, 1808, for example, they paddled down rapids although they were not sure if they could make it. Fraser simply noted in his journal "Once engaged the die was cast" (Fraser, 2007, p. 97). Thus he described a situation in which they laid their destiny into the hands of the river because leaving it would have meant having to abandon the canoes. Whether the canoeing skills of Fraser's men or pure luck got them out safe cannot be said, but Fraser wrote that when they

escaped those rapids they “[...] stood gazing on [their] narrow escape from perdition” (Fraser 97).



Figure 6: Fraser shooting rapids

A similar incident did not end as lucky as the one on June 9th. On June 21st, 1808 Fraser and one of his assistants, Mr. Stuart, were alarmed by his men that some of his companions were dragged off with three canoes by the rapids. Those men were supposed to carry everything overland, but they deemed the way too long and difficult. So they decided to continue on the river. When Fraser and Mr. Stuart came to the river, none of those who were still there could tell them what had happened, so they left to search for the missing people. After some time, they saw one of their men, called D’Alaire, walking towards them. Fraser described that “he was so wet, so weak, and so exhausted that he could scarcely speak” (Fraser 111). When he recovered his strength, he told Fraser that the canoe he was in, filled up with water in the first cascade. The bowman and the steersman were able to jump out but the others stayed in until the current became softer. There everyone but himself managed to leave the

canoe. He himself was entangled and only could free himself when the canoe moved due to the other men jumping out. D'Alaire managed to get hold of the top of the canoe, but in the meantime he was pushed into the middle of the stream so that simply swimming ashore was impossible. While floating along he could perceive that the other two canoes got out of the cascades safely. Soon though the canoe went over another cascade and broke into two pieces. There D'Alaire lost consciousness, but soon regained it, finding himself holding on to one half of the canoe. In that position he was moved by the current over several cascades until finally a wave pushed him off the canoe and onto shore. When Fraser went to see where he landed he was astounded at his escape. He noted in his journal: "Continuing our course along the bank we found that he had drifted three miles among rapids, cascades, whirlpools, &c. all inconceivably dangerous" (Fraser 110). The ones who were in the other two canoes returned to their camp in the course of the day, because they were washed onto the other side of the river (see Fraser 110-112).

However difficult the distant wilderness can be, in Canada the explorers did not have to travel far to be confronted with challenges. Also the journey from Montreal was at various places more than just tiresome. Mackenzie vividly described the area of the first Portage de Chaudière on the Ottawa River.

[...] the body of water falls twenty-five feet, over cragged, excavated rocks, in a most wild, romantic manner. At a small distance below, is the river Rideau on the left, falling over a perpendicular rock, near forty feet high, in one sheet, assuming the appearance of a curtain; and from which circumstance it derives its name (Mackenzie 31).

The portage itself was quite a challenge because the landing there was so steep that twelve men had to get the canoe out of the water and six men were required to carry it across the six hundred and forty-three paces long path before it was possible to put it back into the water (see Mackenzie 31).

Another impressive challenge for the canoeists was the Petite Rivière, on which the paddling was interrupted by ten different portages which cover an accumulated 2401 paces. Moreover, there the travelers will also find Mauvais de Musique – a particularly difficult part of the Petite Rivière - where according

to Mackenzie “many men have been crushed to death by the canoes, and others have received irrecoverable injuries” (Mackenzie 33-34).

While strong rivers and high waters posed a serious problem, also low waters caused troubles to the explorers and canoeists. The bottom of a body of water can impose various difficulties to the travelers in the wilderness. Shallow waters, for example, were a constant threat to the canoes, since they were made exclusively out of wood, and bark thus being only little resistant to hitting rocks or logs that rest in the water. Therefore the canoeists and especially the bowman had to be constantly on guard to prevent the canoe from getting any damage (see Mackenzie 44). At times, however, obstacles in the water could not be seen or were not seen owing to the idleness of the steersman, and thus severe damage was done to the canoe. Mackenzie’s canoe was thus run into a stump. It did not break immediately, but it leaked and was full of water before the crew could go ashore. It took them two hours to repair the boat, but only two days later it broke again while being portaged on Portage de Chilique. Not only did this incident damage the canoe, but also what was in it. When Mackenzie and his men camped at the far end of Portage des Noyes, they finally were able to dry some of their belongings “some of which [were] almost rotten” (Mackenzie 194).

When Thompson and Malcolm Ross journeyed up the Paint River in September 1797, they soon found out that the river was barely navigable. Jenish described the river as a shallow body of water that afforded as much portaging and dragging as paddling. The numerous deadfalls which were lying everywhere, the strong wind and the narrowness of the stream only made matters worse. In many places there was hardly any water left at all. Thus they repeatedly had to get in and out of the canoe after only very short distances, which cost them a lot of time (see Jenish 83).

This river was not just a nuisance, it also lowered morale significantly and soon they had to return. Furthermore, they were forced to stay packed in a small house on Reindeer Lake, because the year had progressed too far to venture

further back. There they spent a harsh winter starving and freezing (see Jenish 83-84).

Fallen trees also were a nuisance for Fraser's men. When they had to cut many of them as they were obstructing their way down a river, one of the men lost an axe and almost drowned in the process (see Fraser 235).

There was also a possible risk concerning the bottom of the water when mud was involved. Sometimes this mud got so deep and its consistency became so thin that it could create a powerful suction, which turned out to be quite a nuisance to some people (see Mackenzie 45). In the vernacular of canoeists this particular soil is referred to as 'moose-shit' owing to its consistency, its looks and its smell.

Alexander Mackenzie warned his readers of such a muddy part on Petite Pêche, which was supposedly particularly dangerous. There the water was about three or four feet deep before the mud started, which according to Mackenzie had such a powerful suction that it was quite difficult to paddle over it. Moreover, as you proceeded on this lake the suction became stronger, and he wrote that he had heard that "loaded canoes have been in danger of being swallowed up, and have only owed their preservation to other canoes, which were lighter" (Mackenzie 45). At other places the mud was so deep on landings that improvised stages had to be erected, where piles were driven into the ground and branches laid on top of them to make the landing accessible. Thus they avoided sinking into the mud with the goods on the back or the canoe on the shoulders (see Mackenzie 47).

3.5. Economic rivalries

In his narration, Hearne pointed out the rivalry between the Hudson's Bay Company and the Canadian traders who started out from Montreal, which was soon to become the North West Company. He states that the southern Indians began to refrain from trading with the HBC and travelled instead to the

“Athapuscow [i.e. the Athabasca] Indians country, where they get supplied with every thing at less, or about half the price they were formerly obliged to give; [...]” (Hearne 132). Thus the HBC was bereft of a substantial part of their trade and Hearne claimed that this state remained until the Hudson’s Bay Company established a post in the same region as the NWC (see Hearne 132).

David Thompson experienced similar difficulties with the North West Company when he was still working for the Hudson’s Bay Company. In 1786 when he was serving under Governor Humphrey Marten at York Factory, a group of Indians came in fourteen canoes, bringing furs to trade with them. However, Martin was not satisfied with the result of the trade because the quality of the fur seemed to be rather poor, which indicated that the better furs had been traded off to the Montreal merchants of the North West Company. This made further actions necessary. The HBC was forced to move further West in order to avoid losing more trading grounds to the NWC (see Jenish 30).

Robert Longmoore, who led one of the first expeditions that Thompson was on, got into an even worse situation when he was stripped of his trade items by “Canadian pedlars – French speaking interlopers from Montreal, who travelled to the interior via the Great Lakes [...]” (Jenish 36).

Years later, in the summer of 1795, Thompson had to deal with a firsthand experience with the Canadian fur traders. He had left York Factory with four servants and had travelled up the Churchill, coming as far as Duck Portage on Sisipuk Lake. There they prepared for the coming winter. They erected a house and started trading with the local Indians from Cree and Chipewyan tribes. Having been at that place for about a month, they were deprived of a good deal of the furs that the Indians had to offer by Canadian traders who “erected a post thirty yards away [...]” (Jenish 75).

However, also the North West Company had to deal with economic conflicts. In the 1790s several shareholders left the NWC to form another company, called the New North West Company, generally known as the XY Company. The XY Company gained much influence and wealth, when in 1799 the renowned but

rather disillusioned Alexander Mackenzie left the North West Company to join the XY Co. Both parties knew that their commercial future would be better off if they joined forces against the Hudson's Bay Company, but the two main figures – Simon McTavish from the NWC and Alexander Mackenzie from the XY Co. - of the rivalling companies showed such animosity for each other that every call for unification was of no avail. This rivalry finally ended with the merger of the two companies in November 1804, being preceded by Simon McTavish's death on July 6th the same year. Following these events, David Thompson was finally able to pursue his plans to explore the lands beyond the Rocky Mountains (see Jenish 118-119).

Later, when Thompson was already working for the NWC, tensions with Americans also arose. While being on his first journey across the Rocky Mountains, he received a letter that was dated September 29th, 1807. In this letter an anonymous American threatened Thompson, telling him not to venture further, as he and his partners were ready to take more drastic steps if this letter did not suffice to make Thompson abandon his plans. Thompson, however, did not feel inclined to follow such a brutish bluff (see Jenish 136).

3.6. Problematic interactions with natives

One aspect of Canadian history is especially important when examining the interactions of French and British explorers and fur traders, and that is the fact that the First Nations of Canada did not face inhumanity on the same level as natives in other places of America. While it is true that the native tribes of Canada experienced various injustices, they did not encounter large scale dispossession or relocation as some tribes in the eastern United States in the 1830s, which was later called the Trail of Tears. Neither did they experience any large scale persecutions or conflicts. Furthermore, the use of native slaves in Canada was significantly lower compared with the United States. This made life for the explorers and voyageurs on the Canadian frontier considerably easier because relations were mostly based on trade and not on violence (see Greer 83).

However, there were still some incidents with violent acts between whites and natives and also other problems that will be addressed in the following chapter.

3.6.1. Alcohol

As mentioned before, 'vicious Indians' were not the main issue for the explorers when it came to the relations with the various tribes. Alcohol, though, soon turned out to be a big problem. At first it was one of the most important trade goods for the natives, but after some time the trading of alcohol became more and more problematic because the natives became uncontrollable under the influence of liquor. Nute (92) wrote about the Indians:

The fear of them was great, even though they appeared friendly. When they succeeded in getting the clerk to issue fire water to them, they became so quarrelsome and committed murder so easily that they became very unwelcome guests.

Nevertheless, its importance in the trading business with natives is indisputable. First of all, the Indians' desire for alcohol was incredibly strong, so strong that many Indians would do almost anything to get at it. And, secondly, the Indians had a constant need of it, as opposed to other trading goods, like tools or rifles for which the natives had a "limited need" (Eccles, *French Fur trade* 214). Therefore the traders had to handle the liquor with a particular delicacy as Morton pointed out:

Liquor, however, could not be used merely as a commodity, because drunken Indians were likely to become murderous and reduce their scant numbers at an alarming rate. Accordingly, the skilled trader used it as a treat, a loss leader, an inducement given freely to win the Indian to work (Morton 160).

When David Thompson, still being an unpaid apprentice clerk, undertook a journey from Churchill to York Factory he got to know the manners of the natives when being drunk.

Jenish (21) summarized Thompson's account:

Someone gave the Indians a gallon of liquor and they began drinking as soon as they were on their own. Before long, they were staggering, their speech became loud and incoherent and, a short time later, they lay down and went to sleep, leaving David to pass the day alone [...].

In 1802 the XY Company (also known as the New North West Company) was founded by Alexander Mackenzie. The rivalry, mentioned in chapter 3.5, between the XY Company and the North West Company was mainly fought with alcohol as a bribe for the natives in order to get their furs. At some places, the companies had forts that were in shouting distance, and there they handed out the alcohol which furthered the downward spiral of some native societies. Jenish (118) stated:

In 1803, the Montreal companies [i.e. the North West Company and the XY Company] alone hauled sixteen thousand gallons of liquor into the interior, and the Nor'westers shipped three gallons for every one of the XY Co.

Alexander Mackenzie expressed a similar opinion about the effect that alcohol had on the various native tribes of Canada. He regarded the initial prohibition of selling or trading alcohol to the Indians as a "very excellent tendency" and an "admirable regulation" (Mackenzie 11). Therefore, he was utterly displeased with the fur traders who soon found a way around this regulation, by giving it as a gift instead of selling or trading. Thus the traders could supply the natives with one of the most wanted goods, without having to fear punishment from the institution that had introduced this prohibition; the Catholic Church (see Mackenzie 11-12).

Furthermore, he also believed that the habit of drinking amongst the Indians would sooner or later have a disastrous effect on the whole fur trade business, because many of the formerly proud warriors and hunters then lingered around military posts in order to get to the rum they so desperately wanted.

Mackenzie pointed out:

The ammunition which they receive is employed to kill game, in order to procure rum in return, though their families may be in a starving condition: hence it is, that, in consequence of slothful and dissolute lives, their numbers are in a very perceptible state of diminution. (Mackenzie 36)

Thus formerly prosperous villages turned into devastated places where people moved between being drunk and being starved (see Mackenzie 36).

Mackenzie recollected an incident in his description of the fur trade in Canada where matters got quite out of hand. In the spring of 1780 a number of traders stayed at a post in the Eagle hills, which had recently been opened by Peter Pond who had led the first successful journey into the Athabasca region, thus giving the then troubled fur trade business a much needed boost. However, only a few days before those traders were supposed to leave with their goods, a group of Indians appeared and started drinking around their houses. One trader tried to get rid of a particularly annoying native by further instilling alcohol into the said person. This “effectually prevented him [the Indian] from giving further trouble to any one, by setting him asleep forever” (Mackenzie 17). This incident sparked off a fight in which several people were killed. The traders had to flee the scene, leaving behind a considerable amount of their goods and almost half of their furs (see Mackenzie 17).

Even though alcohol was an important trading item at that time, some men refused to take any liquor on their travels. David Thompson was one of those men who refused to do so. He was disgusted by the effect alcohol had on those people from whom he had learned so much and who had shown such virtue and pride. He even got into a quarrel with two of his partners on his way to the tribes west of the Rocky Mountains. They overruled him, but Thompson made sure that nonetheless no liquor whatsoever crossed the mountains on his journeys. As soon as they got to the Rocky Mountains, he took the liquor and put it onto the back of a rather untamable horse. It did not take long until that horse rubbed its back on a tree in order to get rid of the kegs of alcohol, thus destroying them. Thompson then wrote his superiors telling them that he would

proceed with this habit with every alcoholic item that was on his trips. He was able to convince his superiors and no keg of alcohol was transported over the Rocky Mountains as long as Thompson was in charge of this route (see Jenish 142).

Thus he proved that the trading business was to him mainly a means to an end, and that the end was to explore where others had failed and, which was Thompson's great passion, to produce the most detailed and extensive map of the lands which were to become Canada.

3.6.2. Violent skirmishes

Despite the rareness of violent interactions, there were some important events that had an effect on the fur trade and the relation between the traders and the natives. Eccles described the situation of the traders as very delicate.

[...] The Canadian voyageurs who transported trade goods and supplies to the western posts and took the furs back to Montreal always had to travel in convoy for protection against the Indians through whose lands they passed. One or two canoes alone were an invitation to extortionate demands or outright pillage.

(Eccles, *French Fur trade* 214)

One reason why Indians acted in a violent manner was because the fur traders' urge to move further west was perceived as a threat to some tribes. The Blackfoot Confederacy, for example, controlled the southern parts east of the Rocky Mountains and did not want the explorers to go beyond the Rocky Mountains, because "they were apprehensive that their native enemies would obtain European firearms" (Dickason 204).

The most prominent example of violent encounters that involved Canadian explorers in the 18th century happened in 1736 when a party of Sioux braves attacked a group of voyageurs led by Jean Baptiste de La Verendrye, the eldest son of Pierre Gaultier de Varennes, sieur de La Vérendrye, on an explorative journey into the west of Canada. The urge of French traders to move farther

westward had upset the Sioux because it affected their status and their trading relations with the Objiva tribe, who had to move west along with the French traders to secure their trading relations. One of the outcomes of those tensions was the attack on Jean Baptiste de La Verendrye's group that left 19 people dead including himself (see Innis 92; Ray 18).

Mackenzie claimed that one of the reasons for recurring hostile acts against some of the traders derived from French authorities. When Canada was still under French rule, before the French and Indian war concluded with the Treaty of Paris, which forced King Louis XV to cede almost all Canadian possession to the British Empire, many Indian tribes were allied with the French. Furthermore, the British were allied with the Iroquois confederacy whose people were the enemies of many of those tribes. So the words of French officers who taught the Indians to "entertain hostile dispositions towards the English" (Mackenzie 13) were received and lasted in the memory of those tribes long after all French authorities had left what used to be New France (see Mackenzie 12-13).

Some of David Thompson's men experienced a similar but less fatal incident. In the summer of 1810 David Finlay and two French Canadians joined the Salish Indians on their journey to the plains east of the mountains to hunt for buffalos. In previous years such a journey had been a risky business because they had not had any firearms, while the Piegans who lived on the plains were well supplied by the white men and took any chance to assault the Salish. This time however, things were different, since Thompson had brought along with other items some twenty firearms and hundreds of iron arrowheads to be traded for pelts. The Salish did, indeed, come across the Piegans, but being well armed and in the company of three white men, they delivered a good fight, killing several Piegans. The Salish were victorious, which was extremely humiliating for the proud Piegans. This triggered off a very complicated situation for the traders, because the Piegans felt betrayed by the white men.

They [i.e. the Piegans] had given these interlopers free passage through their country and, in return, they had not only armed the enemy but joined the fight. The Piegan were a proud people. They resolved that white men would no longer pass unmolested through their lands. (Jenish 151)

The trouble with the Piegans became serious. In fact so serious that Thompson had to look for a different route to the Rocky Mountains in order to avoid the blockade of the Indians (see Jenish 161).

Hearne as well had experience of violent situations, although he was only indirectly involved. The party of Indians that accompanied him on his third journey interrupted the search for the copper mines in order to ambush a small settlement of Esquimaux. Hearne, not being able to dissuade them from their plan, had to follow and became a witness when his native companions butchered the helpless Esquimaux in their sleep. Hearne himself stayed close to the attacking Indians to avoid being put in danger by possibly fleeing Esquimaux who could see a threat in him. Thus he was in the middle of the slaughter, which had a lasting impression of shock on him. In his narration he described the event with the following words:

My situation and the terror of my mind at beholding this butchery, cannot easily be conceived, much less described; though I summed up all the fortitude I was master of on the occasion, it was with difficulty that I could refrain from tears [...] even at this hour I cannot reflect on the transactions of that horrid day without shedding tears. (Hearne 113)

Alexander Mackenzie's journey to the Arctic Ocean in 1789 was not an exception, as far as violent natives are concerned. Nevertheless, he was rather fortunate, since he only once got into a situation which might have taken a bad turn. On July 9th he met natives in a village on the river that was to become the Mackenzie River. When these Indians perceived the strangers in their canoes approaching, their women and children fled to the woods while the men were yelling and running around along the shore. Mackenzie let the two small canoes with his Indian guides overtake him so that they could tell the upset Indians that Mackenzie and his men did not intend to do them any harm. Furthermore, they remained in the canoes until the situation was resolved. Mackenzie (153) later wrote in his journal:

I have no doubt, if we had been without people to introduce us, that they would have attempted some violence against us; for when the Indians send away their women and children, it is always with an [sic] hostile design.

On Mackenzie's journey to the Pacific Ocean in 1793, he was similarly fortunate. The first instance that came close to violent action happened on June 1st. As he was travelling towards the Rocky Mountains, his men heard gunshots in the distance. The Indians accompanying him thought this a sign that some natives of the Kisteneaux tribe had to be near. The natives of these lands did not possess firearms and so it was believed that the Kisteneaux were on the war path. This was deemed to be rather discouraging, given that in Mackenzie's small group was not a great number of people, and this particular tribe was believed to be merciless when coming across easy victims. Mackenzie claimed that he did not believe the assertions of his Indians, but the thought that there might be natives with an ill-will about, bothered him enough to take some precautions. "Our fusees [sic] were, therefore, primed and loaded, and having extinguished our fire, each of us took his station at the foot of a tree, where we passed an uneasy and restless night" (Mackenzie 248).

In that case, Mackenzie's expedition spent the night uneasy without anything to happen. However, later on his journey, things were not as harmless as that one time. On June 19th they came across some natives who instantly fled into the woods. When the Indians who were accompanying Mackenzie tried to follow them to convince them that no harm was meant, they were received with flying arrows. Owing to the density of the woods they could escape without taking any harm from the hostile Indians (see Mackenzie 283-284).

They were similarly received only two days later, when Mackenzie's interpreters told him that the natives they came across "threatened [them] with instant death if [they] drew nigh the shore; and they followed the menace by discharging a volley of arrows [...]" (Mackenzie 289). This time, however, the natives could be pacified by Mackenzie who walked alone towards them holding out various goods which he wanted to give them as presents (see Mackenzie 289-290).

It got even more serious three days later, when Mackenzie had to change his intended course, because this part of the lands he was in, seemed to be too difficult to travel through. Therefore, they decided to go back up the river they were on, until they would reach a lodge where they would meet their new guide

who had to make some preparations before he could leave with the expedition. Mackenzie sent Mr. Mackay and two Indians ahead to meet with this guide. When they regrouped, Mr. Mackay told Mackenzie that they had been attacked by Indians who were supposedly their friends, because they had met beforehand on friendly terms. However, when they saw Mr. Mackay and the others they were “in a state of extreme rage” (Mackenzie 306). The guide who Mr. Mackay had met on the appointed place talked to them and tried to calm them down, but soon started to run away at full speed. Mr. Mackay and the other two Indians that Mackenzie had sent, fled as well and followed the guide through quite rough terrain in order to escape the enraged natives. Running thus through the forest, they continued until ten at night and then they “all laid down, exhausted with fatigue, and without any kind of covering: they were cold, wet, and hungry, but dared not light a fire, from the apprehension of an enemy” (Mackenzie 306). The next day they were able to meet up with Mackenzie, but the situation was still tense, given that they did neither know what those Indians were up to, nor why they were so upset. Moreover, their guide had deserted them. Therefore, they made preparations for a possible attack. They took positions of defence, handed out ammunition and melted down metal in order to procure more bullets. In the meantime a single native appeared on the river, paddling in a canoe. He threatened them and told them that he would bring more of his kin and vanished. With the words of the lone Indian in their minds they kept alternating watch at night and slept rather uncomfortably (see Mackenzie 304-310).

The next morning they found an old, blind Indian lurking around their hideout and questioned him about the unexpected hostility of the local Indians. He informed them that other Indians had come after Mackenzie and his crew had left, who told them that he and his men were enemies. They thought that the reports were true, when they found out that Mackenzie was returning to their lands although he had claimed to go further. Mackenzie and his men took the old Indian with them so that he could communicate with other natives whom they might meet. After having seen Indians on some occasion without being able to talk to them before they fled, they finally met up with three natives on June 29th, one of them being the guide who had deserted them earlier. He

excused for his escape, telling that he had searched for his family who also had fled owing to the false information that was circulating about Mackenzie's expedition. Finally, the blind man whom they had taken confirmed that he was in good company which convinced the other natives that Mackenzie and his men were no threat to them (see Mackenzie 311-317).

Again, Mackenzie's expedition got into serious danger, when they reached the sea. Apparently they had missed a European ship only by weeks and some of the local Indians were in a state of uproar because they claimed that they had been ill treated by those white people. Now that they saw some more white men, they became quite agitated and Mackenzie thought it necessary to land on a small island so that they would have a superior position, if the natives indeed decided to attack. Other Indians, who were about, were less aggressive and invited Mackenzie and his men to their village, but the explorer was too sceptical to follow their invitation. The Indians, however, soon left, though not without having stolen some items of minor importance (see Mackenzie 367-369).

The following day, an Indian who had joined Mackenzie's men earlier out of curiosity, warned them from the returning natives. He claimed that they would return with the intention to attack them and that they "were as numerous as musquitoes [sic], and of very malignant character" (Mackenzie 370). This terrified Mackenzie's men, but he stayed calm and left the island after some time without any further incidents (see Mackenzie 370).

However, when Mackenzie was on his way back, he came across two Indians who ran towards him with knives drawn. Upon seeing Mackenzie aiming with his rifle, they dropped their weapons. Then more Indians came and among them was one of the natives who had threatened them on the coast. Apparently, he had come to a village near-by and had told lies about how the white men had killed some of his friends. Mackenzie described the situation he was in with the following words: "They certainly might have overpowered me, and though I should probably have killed one or two of them, I must have fallen at last" (Mackenzie 374). But he was lucky, as one of his comrades appeared, which

gave the Indians enough reason to fly to their tents. Soon all men of the expedition were about and Mackenzie ordered them to prepare for a possible fight, as he was determined to try to convince these people that they were wrongly informed about the intentions and the deeds of his expedition. At length he was able to explain to those natives that he had not done anything wrong and he reconciled with those natives (see Mackenzie 373-375).

Just as Mackenzie, Fraser too was welcomed at first very amicably by the natives west of the Rocky Mountains, only to find himself in a rather distressing situation when he got close to the sea. The first alarming incident occurred on July 2nd, 1808. Natives from a friendly village had warned Fraser's expedition from going further, since the Indians of the coast were malicious to them and would treat the white explorers likewise. They even tried to stop them from proceeding by damaging their boat, but Fraser insisted on going further. Soon the group found the warnings to be true, because several canoes approached them not soon after they had left the previously mentioned village, making aggressive gestures (see Fraser 124-125).

This first hostile encounter ended without any violence, but the canoes kept on following Fraser's group. They went ashore to take a look at a village, but soon found out that the canoes got stuck in the withdrawing tide. The hostile Indians seeing their problematic situation deemed this to be the perfect time for an attack and approached "howling like so many wolves, and brandishing their war clubs" (Fraser 126). But Fraser's men were able to scare them away, for some time at least, with their firearms. Soon, though, the Indians returned and got so close to Fraser's men that they had to be pushed off with the muzzles of the explorers' weapons. Those incidents and the lack of food made Fraser decide to return to the village where the natives were friendlier (see Fraser 126-127).

However, Fraser did not find the village as hospitable upon their arrival as it had been before. The Indians, who had pursued them before, also came to this village on July 3rd and persuaded the villagers to help them pillage the white men. Fraser, who had been invited to the house of the Chief, ran to the help of his people as soon as he heard of the hostile actions and managed to calm the

situation by speaking loudly and making aggressive gestures. The natives gave up on their intentions, but refused to leave a canoe in Fraser's possession which had been lent to him at an earlier time. Therefore Fraser's men had to take it by force, because they were in dire need of such a means of transportation and left a blanket behind to pay for the loss. The villagers, however, did not want to give up their canoe and followed Fraser's group. They caught up with them the next day, when Fraser and his men were received by another tribe (see Fraser 128-130).

By this time the encounter had reached a delicate point. Fraser (130) wrote:

It was then, that our situation might really be considered as critical. Placed upon a small sandy Island, few in number, without canoes, without provisions, and surrounded by upwards of 700 barbarians. However our resolution did not forsake us. On the contrary all hands were of one mind, ready for action, and fully determined to make our way good at all hazards.

Fraser could cool off the tempers once more by addressing the Chief of the village who once had been friendly to them. He even managed to buy a canoe and embark on it; not without threatening some natives who tried to steal some of their baggage, though. But Fraser and his men were still pursued by the ill-willed natives. On July 5th first shots were fired in order to keep the Indians at bay and the following day, the explorer and his companions had to assume a position of defence to get some advantage over their opponents and to show them that they were ready to fight to the last. It was not until June 7th that finally the natives abandoned their pursuit (see Fraser 131-133).

3.6.3. Sickesses

Sicknesses amongst natives also proved to be a challenge for the fur traders and explorers. On many occasions they were dependent on the First Nations to supply them with food. Moreover, sicknesses reduced the amount of pelts that were acquired and could be moved back to Hudson Bay or Montreal, thus

reducing their profit, which also had an effect on the advances of the companies further west.

Out of the many sicknesses the Indians suffered from, small pox was probably the most devastating. David Thompson described in his journal the account of his superior at Buskacoggan House, Mitchell Oman, writing about his encounter with a band of Indians who slowly and gruesomely died from that disease. Apparently approximately 60% of that tribe perished due to a small pox infection and the rest of the tribe was in such a bad state that they could not provide any food for the traders (see Jenish 40).

Hearne reported even more drastic losses, claiming that roughly 90% of the Northern Indians died from small pox, which - ironically enough – was only possible when they had interrupted their conflicts with the southern Indians and began to trade with them and the European traders. Thus a large number of possible trading partners got wiped out (see Hearne, 2007, p. 132).

The effects of the small pox epidemic also left an imprint on Alexander Mackenzie. The potency with which this disease spread throughout the country, killing families and even whole tribes, shook the explorer deeply. He later described the power of it in all detail, also mentioning the often occurring hopelessness of the survivors: “[...] such as to avoid the horrid fate of their friends around them, [they] prepared to disappoint the plague of its prey, by terminating their own existence” (Mackenzie 18).

Mackenzie also understood the “consequence of this melancholy event to [sic] the traders”, which was in his opinion “self evident” (Mackenzie 19). Since the small pox led to a considerable decline in the native population there was no one to gather furs or trade for goods (Mackenzie 19). This caused a significant decline in the fur trade business, which was of course a less severe fate compared to the victims of the small pox, but it was still threatening the existence of some of the men employed in this business. Matthew Cocking (297-299), a chief factor at York house, wrote in a letter:

I believe never Letter in Hudson's Bay conveyed more doleful Tidings than this. Much the greatest part of the Indians whose Furr's [sic] have been formerly & hitherto brought to this Place are now no more, having been carried off by that cruel disorder the Small Pox. ... the whole tribe of U'Basquiou Indians ... are extinct except one Child.

Fraser came across some natives who were infected with this disastrous disease, but he did not pay as much attention as Hearne, Mackenzie or Thompson did. He simply wrote on June 24th, 1808: "The small pox was in the camp, and several of the Natives were marked with it" (Fraser 115). This is the only entry that is to be found in his journal mentioning this sickness.

On Hearne's journeys, there were also troubles with sicknesses. In August 1771 many of his men got sick and according to their customs they were not treated by doctors (which was futile anyway, given the circumstances that Samuel Hearne was the only European on this journey), but "conjurers" (Hearne 133) who used "no medicine either for internal or external complaints, but [performed] all their cures by charms." Those charms consisted of rituals which seemed quite ridiculous to Europeans, like blowing into the patient's anus (see Hearne 133). On some occasions, the patients in fact recovered and continued the journey. But those who did not recover and were not able to walk, were left behind lest they slow down the whole party, which could very probably mean death by starvation for everyone (see Hearne 141).

While Samuel Hearne witnessed strange medical practices performed by the Indians, Alexander Mackenzie thought it his duty as a civilized person to use all his knowledge and experience to provide the people who were around him with at least basic medical care. At times this attitude led him into situations where he did what he deemed to be necessary without being sure and without having done anything like this before. Thus he once successfully cured a man who came to him with an injured arm that soon affected the whole body. Mackenzie (206-207) wrote that "he was in a raving state throughout the night, and the red stripe [on his arm] not only increased, but was also accompanied with the appearance of several blotches on his body, and pains in his stomach."

Therefore, Mackenzie (207) concluded:

The propriety of taking some blood from him now occurred to me, and I ventured, from absolute necessity, to perform that operation for the first time, and with an effect that justified that treatment.

According to Mackenzie, the patient soon fully recovered from the unidentified condition.

When he was on his way back from the Pacific Ocean, the Indian who had accompanied him all the way got quite sick. In fact he was in such a poor state that he could not master every path they had to tread on his own. Thus he had to stay in the canoe while the others were walking overland. It took the men in the canoe an hour to paddle only half a mile. This of course was excessively slow, but they had no other choice, because the Indian was in no condition to walk (see Mackenzie 376). Three days later the Indian had recovered a bit, but was still in a rather miserable state so that Mackenzie was obliged to carry him on his back, when they were fording a river (see Mackenzie 393).

3.6.4. Theft

Another factor that led to distress amongst the traders and natives were again and again occurring thefts. Many natives began stealing when they thought that they were not treated well, or when they could not afford the price of a trading item they wanted or needed.

Thompson reported once of an incident where Manchester House was robbed by Fall Indians. At first they had pretended that they had come to trade for tobacco, but soon they started taking horses and then even stole all the belongings of the men and got everything from the fort that was of some value to them (see Jenish 73).

Those incidents led in the best case to a general distrust between the two parties, which triggered off difficulties in the trading business. In the worst case,

however, people were left without any belongings, as in the situation that Thompson described, which put the men in danger of dying of starvation being deprived of all their properties including their food and their canoes.

On October 15th, 1800 Thompson himself became a victim of stealing natives. On his journey to seek a passage over the Rocky Mountains, he had been followed for a while by a band of Piegan warriors, a tribe hostile to the Kootenays with whom Thompson was dealing at that time. That night the Piegans stole five horses – Thompson's being one of them – and later tried to take the remaining ones, which only failed because the braves of the Kootenay tribe stood their ground until the Piegans left (see Jenish 112-113).

According to Alexander Mackenzie's description, the Stone Indians posed difficulties to other native tribes as well. He wrote that interacting with people from this particular tribe sometimes led to disagreements and they were hard to be convinced when they had a dispute with others. These differences occasionally built up to the point where the Stone-Indians simply stole horses or women off the other Indians and disappeared. The former were in their opinion of more value than the latter, because horses were direly needed as beast of burdens and a valuable help in the hunt on the prairies (see Mackenzie 62).

Sometimes, when Indians stole items from explorers, they did not even do so in secrecy, but stripped them of their valuables without showing the slightest sign of remorse or paying any heed to their situation. In Hearne's case, he was put in quite some distress because Indians took everything from him that they thought useful, leaving him with the bare minimum. They treated the southern Indians that accompanied Hearne slightly better because they did not want to risk a conflict with their tribes, but also they were deprived of much of their luggage. The question remains if this can be called robbery because they did at no time act violently or threaten the travellers. (see Hearne 45 - 46)

Alexander Mackenzie better managed to control Indians who wanted to take what did not belong to them because he, unlike Hearne, was in a situation of superior power. When Mackenzie stayed for the night with some natives on July

22nd, 1789, he had to guard a kettle of meat that had been put on the fire, because the local Indians tried a couple of times to simply take it off and be gone with it. Mackenzie prevented this from happening, and since he and his men were far better equipped, they did not encounter such difficulties as Samuel Hearne did. This, according to Mackenzie, was the first time that he witnessed natives trying to steal. He tried to explain the behaviour of those Indians by writing: “but I suppose they think provisions should be common Property among all People” (Mackenzie 166).

However, in another instance Mackenzie himself was in a more serious situation, when he was the victim of an Indian thief. When he and his crew were staying with a native tribe west of the Rocky Mountains, they were generally received very hospitably. But when they were about to leave the village, one of his men informed Mackenzie that an axe was missing. Mackenzie therefore instantly called for the chief of the village and demanded the axe to be returned. The chief, though, acted as if he did not know what he was talking about. In Mackenzie’s opinion it was very important that the axe was returned and therefore he sat down and showed the local Indians that he would not leave without the axe. The Indians saw that as an insult and the situation became quite tense, but the axe was after some time brought to them. Apparently it had been hidden under the chief’s canoe. Mackenzie wrote that insisting on the axe being returned was of the utmost importance, even though it was not worth a lot. He explained in his journal: “[...] I apprehended that the [sic] suffering them to keep it, after we had declared its loss, might have occasioned the loss of every thing [sic] we carried with us, and of our lives also” (Mackenzie 360-361).

So apparently Mackenzie analysed the situation as being so severe that any sign of weakness would give the Indians sufficient reason to take everything these men possessed and maybe even kill them.

Fraser had an encounter of quite the opposite kind. When he and his men were travelling towards the Pacific Ocean in 1808, one of his companions lost a pistol. Only a day later was it retrieved by a native of the Atnah Nation and was brought back to the owner. Moreover, while being in that region many articles

were lying about quite loosely, which would have made a theft quite easy. Nonetheless, nothing went missing and Fraser (93) noted in his journal “This was a piece of honesty we did not expect. [...] The Atnahs, therefore, are more honest than any other tribe on this side of the Mountains”.

Even though the Atnah Indians were so honest to Fraser, other tribes were less trustworthy. On July 2nd, 1808 Fraser mentioned for the first time that some things were stolen. A jacket which was taken out of a canoe could be retrieved, but a smoking bag was also gone and this item did not show up again (see Fraser 124-125).

3.6.5. Unreliability

While in many instances the Indians were important companions in the wilderness or as trading partners, their behaviour was in some cases displeasing, in some cases even threatening. David Thompson, for example, described in his journals a village of the Kootenays that spent most of their winter days gambling. That way many families lost most and sometimes even all of their belongings. This habit was threatening the venture because when the Kootenays were gambling, which could take days, they did not go hunting for pelts or food, and Thompson had to return with at least minimal profits to convince his superiors that further travels to the west would be to their benefit. Therefore Thompson had to spend much time on persuading the chief of the tribe to make his people abandon the gambling (see Jenish 134-135).

Samuel Hearne, on the other part, had his troubles with the lack of dedication of some natives on his journeys. His first attempt to find the previously mentioned copper mine, which lasted from November 6th until December 11th 1769, failed completely, partly because some of the Indians in his group forsook him after some initial difficulties. The first one deserted when the journey had only lasted three days. Not many days later Hearne found out that even his guide Captain Chawchinahaw did not meet his expectations. He described that his guide

[...] had not the prosperity of the undertaking at heart; he often painted the difficulties in the worst colours, took every method to dishearten me and my European companions, and several times hinted his desire of our returning to the factory [...] (Hearne 19)

Captain Chawchinahaw succeeded in demoralizing some of the Indians to such an extent that they left the group in the night, taking ammunition, tools and other items with them. The following morning the rest of the northern Indians abandoned Hearne, who was now left with two of his kinsmen and the two southern Indians (see Hearne 17-20).

The expedition was originally accompanied by two Europeans, two home-guard southern Indians and “a sufficient number of northern Indians to carry and haul my baggage, to provide for me [i.e. Hearne] etc.” (Hearne 7). Interestingly, it was the southern Indians who remained with Hearne until they returned to Prince of Wales Fort. In fact, Hearne was so fascinated by the Indians’ skills and spirit, despite his troubles with some of them, that he would not take any Europeans on his following journeys (see Hearne 24).

This, however, was not the last time Hearne had troubles with the Northern Indians. On his second journey, he made considerably more progress than on his previous journey. On August 9th 1770, Hearne set out with a couple of his men to hunt for deer, leaving the rest of his party behind. Before that he had given a certain amount of his load to an Indian who had been too weak for his original task, which was to carry a canoe. Since that particular man was not carrying a heavy load, Hearne thought him to be the best choice to take part of his package while he was gone hunting. But when he returned to the others, the Indian was gone with part of Hearne’s load. Apparently he had forsaken the expedition to travel with another party of Indians who were moving in another direction, taking with him the share that Hearne had entrusted him with. This was disastrous to the remaining men because all of the gunpowder was in this pack. They were lucky though because the next day they found a part of the powder further off, but the rest of it and some other articles were gone for good (see Hearne 40-42).

This put Hearne into great distress and his opinion of the northern Indians shrunk to a new low. He also complained about the improvidence of these people, when he wrote in his journal

So inconsiderate were those people, that wherever they met me, they always expected that I had a great assortment of goods to relieve their necessities; as if I had brought the Company's warehouse with me. [...] but when they found I had nothing to spare, except a few nick-nacks and gew-gaws, they made no scruple of pronouncing me a "poor servant" [...] (Hearne 40-41)

However, when Hearne himself was in want of something that he could not afford, the Indians that he met on his journey, who did not belong to his expedition, did by no means intend to aid him. Thus it occurred that when Hearne needed the help of some Indian women to dress the skins for his clothing, the men forbade their wives to help him. The naturalness with which the Indians refused to support Hearne and his men in their time of need deeply shocked Hearne (47): "I never saw a set of people that possessed so little humanity, or that could view the distress of their fellow-creatures with so little feeling and unconcern [...]."

Although one may assume that living in the wilderness for centuries should have molded the nature of the Indians into that of proud and tough people, this was not always the case. Alexander Mackenzie, for example, left a detailed description of many tribes that he had come across on his journeys. When giving an account of the Chipewyan-Indians he described them as being rather over sensitive instead of indifferent to any strenuous task:

They are also of a querulous disposition, and are continually making complaints; which they express by a constant repetition of the word eduiy "it is hard," in a whining and plaintive tone of voice (Mackenzie 113).

One instance where Mackenzie was rather displeased with native unreliability was when they got lost on the way to the Arctic Ocean in 1789. On a section of the Great Slave Lake they met with Redknife Indians and hired a guide to navigate them through the many islands and bays so that they would find the right outlet of the river, which was to become the Mackenzie River. Two others

from that tribe accompanied the guide, but it did not take long before they had to face their first problems. On June 27th the weather changed as a fog appeared veiling all the lands in impenetrable clouds. They paddled to the shore and stayed there until it cleared up so that they could continue. However, very soon they found out that their guide did not know which way to go and it was not until then that he admitted that he had not been in this part of the land in eight years. The following day he showed a similar ignorance of the route, and when they finally got to the end of the bay where they also believed to find the outlet, they only ran into bushes without there being any sign of a river. The English Chief, an Indian who had been on the journey from the beginning on, got so upset that he wanted to shoot the guide (see Mackenzie 132-136).

Interestingly enough, it was the English Chief himself who later caused Mackenzie trouble. For quite a time Mackenzie had the feeling that the English Chief did not do his job properly as he suspected him of withholding crucial information that he obtained from conversing with the local Indians. This feeling remained unuttered until the expedition came across the belongings of some local Indians who had fled to the woods at first sight of Mackenzie's men. The Indians from Mackenzie's expedition started to pick up the items instead of following the local natives which got Mackenzie to the point where he could not keep his temper anymore and started to accuse the English Chief of not telling him everything so that Mackenzie would not get enough intelligence to proceed on his journey, looking for a path to the Pacific Ocean. The argument that erupted from this accusation almost caused the English Chief to abandon the expedition and Mackenzie had to show greatest patience and much persuasiveness to make him stay (see Mackenzie 185-186).

Thompson as well faced troubles with his Indian guide when he started his first attempt to cross the Rocky Mountains, in June 1801. He and his companions were guided by a native from the Cree tribe who claimed to have gone past the mountains on horseback. Thompson and his superior James Hughes were not convinced that their guide could live up to their expectations. Jenish (113) described Thompson's feelings, writing that "he lied so often, about matters large and small, that the traders believed nothing he said". It turned out that he

had forgotten the path and in fact had not gone up to the mountains on horseback at all. Thompson and Hughes had to continue on foot, leaving their entire luggage behind. Soon afterwards they had to return and forsake their initial goal (see Jenish 113-115).

Sometimes the natives whom the explorers met also gave false information. Whether the reason for this was to do them harm or because they themselves did not know any better is not clear. When Alexander Mackenzie was on his journey to the Arctic Ocean in 1789, he encountered a small village of 26 to 30 inhabitants on July 5th. Some of these Indians were from the Slave tribe and some from the Dog Rib tribe. When Mackenzie told them that he planned to follow the river he was on down to where it pours into the ocean, they tried very hard to persuade him not to go. One reason why they deemed this venture a failure, was that they firmly believed that it would take them many winters to get to the Ocean and “[they] all should be old Men by the time [they] would return” (Mackenzie 142). Furthermore these Indians also told them stories of various monsters that supposedly wandered in these lands. In addition to those creatures there were reportedly two rapids or waterfalls that could not be passed. Mackenzie did not believe these stories at all, but nevertheless they had an influence on his journey because they did have an effect on the Indians that were accompanying him. Having complained before already that “they [were] not accustomed to such hard fatigue” (Mackenzie 139), these stories convinced them even more that the journey should end right there and that they should return instantly to the place from whence they had come. When Mackenzie showed his indifference to the stories, his Indian companions also pointed out that there were fewer animals the farther north they would go and that they would starve even if all those stories turned out to be false. Although the last mentioned objection had some value, Mackenzie still insisted on proceeding and managed to persuade his Indian companions. Even more than that, he could also persuade the local natives to send a guide with them (see Mackenzie 142).

However, this guide turned out to be more of a nuisance than a help. He was constantly whining and claimed that he was sick, so that he might be sent back.

But Mackenzie refused to release him from his service and so they had to set a watch as soon as they were off the water to prevent the guide from sneaking away. Two days after they had left the small village, they came across the supposedly impassable first set of rapids, which in fact turned out to be quite the opposite. They could be passed without any troubles, which strengthened Mackenzie's disbelief in the other information he had obtained from those natives. The guide kept on complaining nonetheless, and even warned them against the Esquimaux, who, according to him, would kill all of Mackenzie's men if they only came across them. The whining became so unbearable and keeping a watch on him so annoying that Mackenzie sent him home on July 8th, only three days after his service had begun. This day he was able to get another guide whom they found among the Hair Indians (see Mackenzie 146-149).

Mackenzie was just as unfortunate as far as Indian guides are concerned on his next journey on his way to the Pacific Ocean in 1793. His guide on this journey complained just as much as Mackenzie had experienced on the previous one. Thus Mackenzie even thought it necessary to set a watch at night so that this guide would not try to desert his service. On June 19th Mackenzie wrote: "Having sat up till twelve last night, which had been my constant practice since we had taken our present guide, I awoke Mr. Mackay to watch him in turn." (Mackenzie 277-278). However, only three hours later he was aroused from his sleep just to be informed that the guide had indeed escaped (see Mackenzie 278).

Just as Hearne, Mackenzie and Thompson had experienced before, Fraser's expedition too suffered from the unreliability of some natives. On his journey in 1806, one of his men got lost, when he followed Little Head, an Indian who was supposed to accompany Fraser, and some other natives. The Indians wore snowshoes and thus was able to walk on the snow at a decent speed. Fraser's man could not keep up with the Indians who did not wait for him and when he got to a space which was bereft of all snow, he could not follow their footprints anymore. It was only with the help of a native boy, whom he met by chance, that he could make his way back (see Fraser 202).

On Fraser's way down from Fort George to the Pacific Ocean three natives abandoned him on June 15th, 1808. They sneaked out even though Fraser's men took turns at watching them. Apparently one of them did not pay enough attention and thus their guide, his kinsman and their interpreter were able to leave without being noticed. This they did, according to Fraser, because they were too scared to continue the voyage. Having neither someone who knew the lands ahead nor someone who could facilitate effective communication between Fraser's group and the local natives put the explorer in much distress. Fraser (102) described their situation with the following words:

Here we are, in a strange Country, surrounded with dangers, and difficulties, among numberless tribes of savages, who never saw the face of a white man. Our situation is critical and highly unpleasant.

But he stoically added to this report: "What cannot be cured, must be endured" (Fraser 102).

4. Conclusion

What cannot be cured must be endured. As simple as these words may sound, they still seem to me to be perfectly fitting to summarize this paper and draw a conclusion. Samuel Hearne, Alexander Mackenzie, Simon Fraser and David Thompson braved rigorously bad weather; they overcame raging rivers and rugged mountains, pushed through evermore arduous and often painful exertions and endured dangerous, annoying or obstructing encounters with natives.

The hardships which these men had to deal with are difficult to describe for someone who is merely sitting in front of the computer trying to grasp the full scale of these adventurous journeys. I myself have spent more than 70 days in a canoe in the Canadian wilderness. Even though this gives me some sort of insight into the matter, it does not come close to the experience these explorers had in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. My days and nights on Canada's lakes were spent in Quebec in the 21st century. I have been rained on for days, I have sunk into 'mooseshit' up to my waist, I have cursed portages and yelled at beaver dams, but I was always conscious that this little adventure would be over soon and that I would return to the comforts of everyday life. Moreover, we did not walk or paddle on unexplored terrain and when in need there would have been help within some hours. Not to mention that we did not have to journey up the Rocky Mountains and down some dangerous rivers full of rapids and cascades. So even though I and all the other canoeists of our time have a better understanding of these journeys, we still cannot fully understand the situation these explorers were in. Even Simon Fraser found it hard to explain his feelings in his journal of 1808:

I have been for a long period among the Rocky Mountains, but have never seen any thing [sic] equal to this country, for I cannot find words to describe our situation at times. We had to pass where no human being should venture (Fraser 116-117).

They did all this, first of all to serve their company by finding a navigable overland Northwest passage to the Pacific Ocean.

Jenish (122-123) wrote:

Distance made the traders of the North West Co. dream of such a river [...] Distance was the curse of the Nor'Westers and it kindled ambitions to find the great river that would provide a western outlet to the sea.

However important the passage to the Western Sea was, it does not explain why those explorers loaded such toils upon themselves and their men with such a passion and showed such a drive to succeed in their journeys. It was far more important to them to satisfy their personal urge to go where others had not been before. Hence the willingness to face these hardships and even more, to be responsible for others facing it too. Mackenzie, therefore, stressed how hard his men worked to reach his goal.

Their toils and their dangers, their solitudes and sufferings, have not been exaggerated in my description. On the contrary, in many instances, language has failed me in the attempt to describe them. I received, however, the reward of my labours, for they were crowned with success (Mackenzie 407).

Even though Mackenzie and Fraser did not find a river fitting to transport a quantity of furs feasible for commerce, and Hearne altogether failed to find a passage to the Pacific Ocean, they still had a great influence on the people to follow them, and they provided an insight into the previously blank parts of the map of North America. Still their texts are mostly overlooked and scarcely read today. Hopwood (19) claimed that "the proto-form of our [i.e. the Canadians'] still largely unwritten foundation literature is of necessity the record of our explorers, fur traders, and pioneers". For a long time what Hopwood calls a "consciousness" of Canadian history had not been tackled, but it has gained more and more attention in recent years (Hopwood 19). He also stressed that there is a vast amount of sources from the fur traders and explorers, because they were required to keep records. Hearne's journals were published as early as 1795, and Hopwood (25) calls them „one of the best narratives of Canadian land exploration“and Greenfield (70) wrote it „is a literary landmark, the first fully realized travel narrative to be published about northern Canada“.

Journals of fur traders were often far more than simple descriptions but rather a „personal journal, mingling adventurous narrative and scientific description“ (Benson, and Toye 373). The ones that were published, like Hearne's and Mackenzie's journals, found a broad readership both in Canada and Europe. Benson and Toye (376) called Mackenzie's literary effort „[...] an accute tension between the drama of real events surrounding him and his men, and the compression and terseness with which he reports what transpired“, and Fraser, who did not manage to reach the fame of Mackenzie or Hearne, nevertheless delivered „a detailed, factual, and gripping record of one of the most hazardous [...] expeditions of discovery“ (377). Benson and Toye conclude their essay on exploration literature with claiming that the focus on this topic tends to shift from a simply topical one to a more interdisciplinary approach. They stated that „[...] we increasingly see links between the imaginations of the explorers and of our contemporary writers, links that suggest how much both are the product of the practical, mercantile, and scientific culture of middle-class men in the Romantic age“ (Benson, and Toye 379).

On the opposite side, there are other explorers who were far less successful or influential, but still they gained much more attention. One example in Canadian literature is Sir John Franklin, who perished on his 3rd expedition to find a way to the Pacific through the Arctic Ocean. His fate has inspired writers like Ken McKoogan who wrote two novels on the subject (*Fatal Passage* and *Lady Franklin's Revenge*). Even Jules Verne based one of his works (*Journeys and Adventures of Captain Hatteras*) on this fatal expedition. More recent fictitious releases which are written about John Franklin and his mysterious death include Dan Simmons' *The Terror*, and Clive Cussler's *Arctic Drift*. Most recently Gwendolyn MacEwen's *Terror and Erebus* (1974) and Margaret Atwood's *The Age of Lead* (1991) are based on the mythical death of John Franklin and his men. (see New, *Encyclopedia of Literature* 391-392)

Thus the search for a passage to the West is made relevant for today's literature. Franklin's expedition is probably more interesting to the reader since his journey climaxed in the death of every member of his expedition, which gave way to numerous speculations of what had happened at that time; whereas

Hearne's, Mackenzie's, Fraser's and Thompson's journals, with all their wealth of detail, do not leave as much room for mythical interpretation.

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5.3. Picture credits

Figure 1: © Johannes Maier: *Dawn on Jean-Peré*.

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Figure 3: Archives of Ontario: *Thompson's Travels*. Cartographic Computer Lab #503802 National Geographic Image collection.
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Figure 4: Library and Archives Canada: *David Thompson in the Athabasca Pass*. Acc. No. 1972-26-9.
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Figure 5: Archives of Ontario: *The Short Portage – The Carrying Place, La Salle on the way over the Humber*. http://www.archives.gov.on.ca/english/on-line-exhibits/franco-ontarian/big/big_23_short_portage.aspx

Figure 6: Library and Archives Canada: *Simon Fraser descending the Fraser River*. Acc. No. 1972-26-6.
[http://collectionscanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayEcopies&lang=eng&rec_nbr=2834441&rec_nbr_list=2834441,2898949&title=Simon+Fraser+Descending+the+Fraser+River%2C+1808.&ecopy=c070270&back_url=\(\)](http://collectionscanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayEcopies&lang=eng&rec_nbr=2834441&rec_nbr_list=2834441,2898949&title=Simon+Fraser+Descending+the+Fraser+River%2C+1808.&ecopy=c070270&back_url=())

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6. Appendix

6.1. Index

- Arctic Ocean, 24, 28-29, 38, 52, 69, 82, 84, 89
- Astor, John Jacob, 15
- Athabasca (region), 13, 23, 37, 52, 66
- Beaver, 10, 12, 14, 39, 87
- Blackfoot, 67
- Canoe, 6-7, 14-17, 25, 27, 29-30, 33, 38-43, 47, 50-62, 67, 69, 71, 73-74, 77-81, 87
- Chipewyan, 35, 62, 82
- Churchill (Post), 21, 31, 64
- Churchill (River), 30, 62
- Columbia River, 20, 21
- Cumberland House, 18, 31, 44, 46, 51
- Fraser, Simon, 7, 9-10, 13, 21-24, 27, 30, 37, 39-43, 45-46, 49, 54, 56-59, 61, 73-74, 76, 79-80, 85-90
- Fraser River, 21, 23, 42-43, 56
- Fur trade, 10-14, 16-17, 19-21, 23, 65-67, 75
- Fur trader(s), 7, 10, 17, 24, 33, 36, 62-63, 65, 67, 74, 88-89
- Great Slave Lake, 19-20, 82
- Hearne, Samuel, 7-8, 10, 18, 21, 24, 26-30, 32-35, 38-39, 42-43, 46-47, 49-50, 61-62, 69, 75-76, 78-82, 85, 87-90
- HBC, *see* *Hudson's Bay Company*
- Hudson Bay, 9, 13-14, 17-19, 21, 24, 26, 30-32, 74
- Hudson's Bay Company, 11-15, 18, 20-21, 31, 43-44, 46, 50, 61-63, 76
- Lake Athabasca, 19, 35, 51
- Mackenzie, Alexander, 7-8, 10, 13, 19-20, 24, 26-30, 35-42, 44-45, 47-49, 52-56, 59-61, 63, 65-66, 68-73, 75-79, 82-85, 87-89, 91
- Mackenzie River, 20, 69, 82
- McTavish, Simon, 20, 63
- Montreal, 12-13, 15-17, 19-20, 22, 59, 61-62, 65, 67, 74
- New North West Company, *see* XY Co.
- North West Company, 11-13, 15, 19-23, 43, 61-63, 65
- NWC, *see* *North West Company*
- Pacific, 7, 11, 14, 17-21, 23, 26-28, 30, 32, 36-37, 39-40, 43-44, 48-49, 52, 56, 70, 77, 79, 83, 85-89
- Piegian, 68-69, 78
- Pond, Peter, 19, 30, 66
- Portage, 6, 8, 16, 19, 23, 40-43, 45, 50-51, 53-54, 59-60, 62, 87
- Prince of Wales Fort, 18, 28, 34, 81

- Rapid(s), 16-17, 30, 40, 42-43, 47-48, 44, 46, 49-51, 54, 56, 60, 62-69, 50-53, 55, 57-59, 84-85, 87 75-78, 80, 83-85, 87, 90
- Red River, 13, 23 Tomison, William, 31, 44, 51
- Rocky Mountains, 13, 16-17, 20-21, 23, 25, 27, 30, 35, 43, 45, 47, 49, 52, 56-57, 63, 66-67, 69-70, 63, 67 73, 78-79, 83, 87 XY Co., 20, 62-63, 65
- Salish, 68 York Factory, 12, 21, 31, 33, 36, 62, 64
- Thompson, David, 7-8, 10, 13, 16, 20-22, 24-25, 30-33, 35-37, 40, 43-

6.2. Abstract (German)

Diese Arbeit befasst sich mit den Schwierigkeiten von vier der bedeutendsten kanadischen Pelzhändler, die sich Ende des 18., Anfang des 19. Jahrhunderts auf die Suche nach einer Landpassage begaben, welche quer über den amerikanischen Kontinent zum Pazifik führt. Samuel Hearne leitete drei Erkundungsreisen in den hohen Norden Kanadas, im Auftrag der Hudson's Bay Company. Während die ersten zwei Unternehmungen in den Jahren 1769 und 1770 scheiterten, erreichte er schließlich in seiner dritten Expedition von 1770 bis 1772 den Arktischen Ozean. Obwohl auch diese letzte Erkundung nicht die gewünschte Passage zum Pazifik eröffnete, so hatte er zumindest bewiesen, dass weitere Unternehmungen im Norden vorerst nicht das erwünschte Ergebnis bringen würden. Alexander Mackenzie scheiterte zunächst ebenso, da seine Expedition im Jahre 1789 auch lediglich im Arktischen Ozean endete. Doch er war es schließlich, der 1793 als Erster den weiten Weg vom Sankt Laurent Strom bis zum Pazifik über Land bestritten hatte, und das immerhin 12 Jahre bevor Lewis und Clark am Pazifischen Ozean ankamen. So überwältigend die Leistung von Mackenzie auch war, einen Fluss, der als Handelsroute dienen konnte, fand er nicht. Daher folgten im Jahre 1808 Simon Frasers Expedition auf dem Fraser River und 1811 David Thompsons Reise auf dem Columbia River.

Da es ihre Profession als Pelzhändler verlangte, genaue Notizen zu führen, gibt es heute noch detaillierte Beschreibung aus erster Hand von jenen Expeditionen. Diese Tagebücher und Notizen verschaffen einen genauen Einblick, mit welchen Schwierigkeiten diese Männer zu kämpfen hatten.

Der erste Teil dieser Arbeit befasst sich mit den allgemeinen Umständen und Lebensweisen der Pelzhändler der damaligen Zeit. Er gibt Auskunft über Hintergrundinformationen und Beweggründe für jene Expeditionen. Der zweite Teil betrachtet die Schwierigkeiten im Detail. Dabei werden klimatische, versorgungstechnische, geographische, physische, psychische, politische und interkulturelle Probleme beschrieben. Die Arbeit schliesst mit einer kurzen Reflexion über die dürftige literarische Verarbeitung jener Expeditionen.

6.3. Curriculum Vitae

Personal Data

Name	Johannes Maier
Date of birth	Sept. 22 nd .1984
Place of birth	Vienna

Education

Sept. 2004 – present	English and Physical Education at the University of Vienna
Oct. 2003 – May 2004	National Service
1995 – 2003	High school, Vienna Reifeprüfung
1991 – 1995	Primary school

Special training

2004 – 2005	Diving Instructor (UDI)
2002/2003/2006/2011	Medic First Aid (16 hours)
2006	Life Guard

Practical Experience

Oct. 2002 – present	Diving Instructor at Dive Center Vindobona (now ÖVUST)
May 2005/06/07/08	Assistant teacher for Language courses in Malta and Ireland, accompanying BG/BRG Biondegasse Baden
June – Aug. 2005+06 (Quebec/Canada)	Counsellor at Camp Nominique
June – Aug. 2007+08+09	Head Counsellor at Camp Nominique (Quebec/Canada)

Aug. 2008	Recipient of the Shannon Memorial Award 2008 (Award for embodying the true spirit of Nominique)
June 2011	Assistant LIT (Leaders in Training) Director at Camp Nominique (Quebec/Canada)
2008 – present	Soccer and Gymnastics Trainer, Afternoon Activities at the American International School, Vienna
Sept. 2010 – present	English and Physical Education teacher at Konrad Lorenz Gymnasium, Gänserndorf