MEANING AND REPRESENTATION: LANDSCAPE IN THE ORAL TRADITION OF THE EASTERN JAMES BAY CREE

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Telling a story is not like weaving a tapestry to cover up the world, it is rather a way of guiding the attention of listeners or readers into it. A person who can 'tell' is one who is perceptually attuned to picking up information in the environment that others, less skilled in the tasks of perception, might miss, and the teller, in rendering his knowledge explicit, conducts the attention of his audience along the same paths as his own.

Tim Ingold, "The Temporality of Landscape," World Archaeology 25,2 (1993): 153.

ABSTRACT

MEANING AND REPRESENTATION: LANDSCAPE IN THE ORAL TRADITION OF THE EASTERN JAMES BAY CREE

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This thesis is an investigation of landscape meaning for the Eastern James Bay Cree as expressed in their oral tradition. Existing landscape theory is critiqued for its Euro-centric bias and an attempt is made to reconcile the hunter-gatherer perspective with a relevant landscape concept.

From an interpretivist paradigm, emphasizing experience from the subject's point of view, this qualitative study applies grounded theory method to a narrative analysis of data.

As contextual support for the interpretation, the environment, culture, and oral tradition of the Cree are discussed. Core analysis focuses on how movement, mobility, and tracks, as indicators of cultural experience of the yearly cycle of life in the landscape, are represented in oral tradition. Themes include tracks as maps, language, and carriers of cultural values. In this un-built environment, cultural *meaning* is found to be expressed symbolically through the interactions of persons, and the representative cultural *form* is oral tradition.

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Many thanks to my informal thesis committee of expert scholars on Cree culture who reviewed my initial thesis proposal and were available for feedback on interpretation, including Brian Craik, Drs. David Denton, Harvey Feit, Toby Morantz, Richard J. Preston, and Colin Scott. Thanks also are due to members of the Cree community including John Turner and John Murdoch for reviewing the proposal, David Erliss of the Cree Trappers Association, and Florie and Sanders Weistche who acted as my bush guides during my field study period. The experience was made a great deal easier both by my Cree sister, Gerti Murdoch,[1] and by the warm feelings people in the community have toward my parents.

On a personal level, this research has provided me with an exceptional opportunity to pay homage to the lives and work of my parents. It was a way of establishing continuity with my past, and of giving my father a renewed vision of his own life's work. It was an opportunity to develop a deeper bond with my father as mentor, and to re-connect with my mother who was taken by cancer in 1991.

Thanks always to David Harper for his support and encouragement.

[1] Gerti lived with my family during 1968-9 transcribing my father's field recordings.

Meaning and Representation: Landscape in the Oral Tradition of the Eastern James Bay Cree

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title Page
Abstract
Cover Illustration
Acknowledgements ... *i*
Table of Contents ... *ii*
List of Tables ... *vi*
List of Figures ... *vii*

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION
1. **Research Subject and Context** ... 1
   A. Research Question ... 1
   B. Context of the Study ... 1
2. **Landscape Concept** ... 3
3. **Related Works** ... 12
4. **Methodology** ... 17
   A. Conceptual Framework ... 17
   B. Data Sources ... 18
   C. Paradigm And Perspective ... 19
   D. Research Method ... 20
5. **Structure of Thesis** ... 23
6. **Researcher's Relationship to Subject: A Personal Narrative** ... 26

CHAPTER 2: ENVIRONMENT: THE EASTERN JAMES BAY REGION
1. **Environmental Context** ... 29
2. **Topography and Hydrology** ... 31
3. **Vegetation** ... 33
4. **Climate** ... 35
5. **Animal "Persons"** ... 36
6. **Human "Persons"** ... 37

CHAPTER 3: CULTURE: TRADITIONAL YEARLY CYCLE OF ACTIVITY
1. **Cree Worldview** ... 38
2. **Impact on Environment** ... 40
3. **Contact and the Fur Trade** ... 41
4. **Coasters and Inlanders** ... 42
5. **Yearly Cycle of Activity for Inlanders** ... 44
   A. Overview of Cycle ... 44
   B. A Year in the Life: Details of the Cycle from Memory ... 46

CHAPTER 4: REPRESENTATION: INTRODUCTION TO CREE ORAL TRADITION AND ITS APPLICATION TO LANDSCAPE
1. Cultural Representation 52
2. Cree Oral Tradition 52
3. Function and Context: the Role of Oral Tradition in Cree Culture 54
4. Authority and Credibility 56
5. Language and Translation of Cultural Difference 57
6. Variation Between Tellers of the Same Story 58
7. Introduction to the Study Data 61
A. The Application of Grounded Theory: Coding Categories 62
B. The Application of Content Analysis: Typologies and Tendencies 63
C. Approach to the Interpretation 65

CHAPTER 5: REPRESENTATION: TRACKS AS INDICATORS OF LANDSCAPE IN CREE ORAL TRADITION
1. Introduction: Mobility, Movement, and Tracks 70
2. The Cycle's Affects on the Movements of People and Animals 71
3. The Nature of Movement Cycles and Patterns 75
4. Tracks: Function and Meaning 77
A. Tracks as Maps 78
B. Tracks as Language 83
C. Tracks and Temporality 108
D. Tracks as Carriers of Cultural Values 108
E. Summary: Tracks as an Indicator of Culture in the Landscape 114

CHAPTER 6: SUMMARY DISCUSSION
1. Landscape, Culture, and Representation 120
2. Strengths and Weaknesses of this Research Method 122
3. Application and Contribution to Research Landscape Architecture 124

APPENDIX 1: ORGANIZATIONAL CHART 129
APPENDIX 2: ADDITIONAL READINGS 132
BIBLIOGRAPHY 134

LIST OF TABLES

Table		Page
1.1	Thesis Structure	25
4.1	Application of Grounded Theory Procedure	63
4.2	Content Analysis: Types and Tendencies	65

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure		Page
1.1	Cumulative and cyclical structure of thesis.	25
1.2	Focusing structure of thesis.	26
2.1	Traditional subsistence area of the Eastern James Bay Cree.	29
2.2	Ecological zones of the James Bay Territory.	30
2.3	Zone of discontinuous permafrost.	30
2.4	Landsat image showing Rupert River and tributaries.	31
2.5	Narrow Falls on the Broadback River.	31
2.6	Coastal marshes along James Bay.	32
2.7	Lakes in the bush landscape.	32
2.8	Rocky outcrops from across frozen upland muskeg.	32
2.9	Vegetation regions of the study area.	33
2.10	Aerial view of river corridor.	33
2.11	Burned area of forest.	34
2.12	Muskeg in winter.	34
2.13	Willow thicket.	34
2.14	Closed crown forest.	34
2.15	Mosses and lichens growing on live tree.	35
2.16	Rapids on the Broadback River.	35
3.1	Bear skulls hung in a tree.	41
3.2	Abandoned wigwam poles.	41
3.3	Approximate and relative trapline sizes.	44
5.1	Overlapping snowshoe tracks of two people.	71
5.2	Mink tracks.	72
5.3	Fresh rabbit tracks in the snow.	74
5.4	Marten tracks.	76
5.5	Fox tracks in the forest.	78
5.6	Partridge tracks.	79
5.7	Moose tracks, about two weeks old, with fresh snow.	81
5.8	Evidence of porcupine browsing on tree bark.	84
5.9	Pole markings indicating relative distance.	95
5.10	A single set of adult human snowshoe tracks.	112

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1. Research Subject and Context

A. Research Question

If "landscape" is defined as the terrestrial environment endowed with cultural meaning, what is the representation of landscape in the oral tradition of the Eastern James Bay Cree?

B. Context of the Study

Historical Background

In the mid-twentieth century, the Eastern James Bay Cree population was undergoing the most dramatic cultural shift of their known existence. For hundreds if not thousands of years, a small population of perhaps one thousand individuals maintained a traditional nomadic hunter-gatherer life in the vast subarctic region that is now known as northern Quebec and Labrador. They moved through the landscape in small family groups in a yearly cycle that corresponded with the climatic and ecosystem cycles. In the summer, larger groups might gather for a brief time of socializing. When the fur trade began, trading posts became gathering places. Gradually, the time spent at the post for some of the Cree extended through the summer, with the bulk of the year still spent in the bush in the traditional manner.[1]

Social and political influences from Euro-Canadian culture during the 1950's began to set in motion a process whereby traditional ways of knowing began to be devalued. Traditional hunter-gatherer life-ways[2] were diminished in practice. Settlement

[1] R.J. Preston, *Cree Narrative: Expressing the Personal Meanings of Events*, Canadian Ethnology Service, Paper No. 30 (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1975), 2; see also Toby Morantz, *An Ethnohistoric Study of Eastern James Bay Cree Social Organization, 1700-1850*, Canadian Ethnology Service, Paper No. 88 (Ottawa, National Museums of Canada, 1983).
[2] Refers to the traditional way of life in the subsistence 'economy' of hunting and trapping in the remote subarctic, and all related activities including preparation of food, clothing and shelter, as

at the posts became permanent as towns were built up through the 1970's and '80's, with periodic sojourns out into the bush for hunting and trapping. As daily life patterns became westernized, the internal transmission of oral tradition all but ceased.

The traditional narratives and life histories of the last generation of 'old-timers' who grew up in the bush were collected on audio recording by anthropologists R.J. Preston and S.C. Preston during this period of intense transition, beginning in 1963. Most of their data was collected in Waskaganish, then Rupert's House, on the southeast coast of James Bay.

In more recent years, there has been a re-awakening of the importance of traditional life-ways and cultural values among many North American Indigenous cultures, including the James Bay Cree. The stories collected by the Prestons have been used to develop educational curricula for an elementary level program called *Cree Way,*[3] and continue to serve as reference for Cree-initiated programs of cultural development.[4] In addition, there has been a clear interest from the scientific community in traditional knowledge for its applications to natural resource management.[5] In contrast, resistance against some traditional beliefs and practices has developed locally from influences that have a strong foothold in Cree communities, such as the fundamentalist Christian religions.[6]

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well as traditional crafts and oral tradition. It also encompasses traditional spiritual beliefs and practices, and modes of social interaction. These occurred outside of and essentially independent of the capitalist economy of Western society and it's associated forms of survival and cultural expression.

[3] R.J. Preston, "The Cree Way Project: An Experiment in Grass Roots Curriculum Development," in *Papers of the Tenth Algonquian Conference*, ed. W. Cowan (Ottawa: Carleton University, 1979), 92-101.

[4] For example, a Land Skills Training Program currently under development in Waskaganish.

[5] Sources will be discussed under 'Related Works', below.

[6] I directly observed this resistance in my 1999 field research.

The Present Study

My interest is in the socially constructed meanings that people assign to places, and the ways in which those meanings are expressed. These may be represented physically in the landscape through structure or modification of the terrain, or they may be expressed symbolically, as in oral tradition. This thesis is an interpretation of the cultural perception and representation of the terrestrial environment, or landscape, as expressed in Eastern James Bay Cree oral tradition. Much of this original material is unpublished and it has not hitherto been considered for its potential to elucidate cultural meaning *as it pertains to landscape.*

While cultural landscape studies are currently dominated by the disciplines of cultural geography and (to a lesser extent) anthropology, they are also of great relevance to landscape architecture. These three fields may be thought of as a triad representing overlapping interests in aspects of culture, space, and place. I believe there is a need to strengthen the contribution of landscape architecture to research in cultural landscape studies. It is also my opinion that a stronger foundation in research and theory is needed within the discipline of landscape architecture for it to achieve a substantial level of academic recognition. In addition, theory can be used to inform and strengthen the processes involved in applied landscape architecture.

2. The Landscape Concept

Landscape, as noted by Stilgoe, "is a slippery word."[7] Loaded with historical, social, and personal meanings, this term has become a popular catchall for any aspect of environment. Indeed, its use is abstracted to refer metaphorically to conceptual realms,

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[7] J.R. Stilgoe, *Common Landscape of America, 1580-1845.* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 3.

such as the "political landscape," and "corporate landscape." Even within the scope of geographical descriptors a broad range of interpretations have been espoused.[8]

"Landscape" has been a focus of research and discourse in many disciplines beyond landscape architecture, including cultural anthropology, archaeology, sociology, environmental psychology, planning, art history, and geography. Among these, geography has maintained landscape as its primary focus of theoretical analysis since at least 1925, when Sauer proclaimed that "the term 'landscape' is proposed to denote the unit concept of geography."[9] When reviewing the theoretical literature on landscape to the present time, it is clear that the majority of it has been produced by geographers.[10]

The scholarship in landscape studies from the discipline of geography has evolved from a materialist perspective focusing on physical form, exemplified by Sauer[11] and Stilgoe,[12] through a more humanistic inquiry in two streams: perceptual, as in the study of "mental maps" by Gould and White,[13] and phenomenological inquiry into meaning and symbolism by writers like (J.B.) Jackson[14] and Tuan.[15] The current predominant orientation emphasizes critical social theory and social action as in the works of (Peter)

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[8] For reviews of the multiplicity of definitions, see K.R. Olwig, "Recovering the Substantive Nature of Landscape," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*. 86, 4 (1996): 630-53; Lester B. Rowntree, "The Cultural Landscape Concept in American Human Geography," in C. Earle, K. Mathewson, and M.S. Kenzer, eds., *Concepts in Human Geography*. (Lanham Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 1996), 127-59; and Eugene J. Palka, "Coming to Grips with the Concept of Landscape," *Landscape Journal* 14, 1 (1995): 63-73.
[9] Carl Sauer, "The Morphology of Landscape," in *Land and Life: A Selection from the Writings of Carl Ortwin Sauer*, ed. J. Leighly (Berkley and London: University of California Press, 1963): 321.
[10] This is discussed also by Nancy Pollock-Ellwand, "Planning for the Landscape Idea" (Ph.D. diss., University of Waterloo, 1997), 19-20.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Stilgoe, *Common Landscape*.
[13] Peter Gould and Rodney White, *Mental Maps*. 2nd edition (Boston: Allen and Unwin, 1986).
[14] Jackson was a prolific writer, with many articles in his journal *Landscape*; a recent example of his work is the book *A Sense of Place, A Sense of Time* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994).
[15] Yi-Fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1974).

Jackson[16] and Sack.[17] This evolution is not entirely linear; each of these theoretical perspectives continues to be represented in new literature.[18]

In the sub-discipline of archaeology known as landscape archaeology, researchers attempt to discover how people in the past engaged with the landscape by studying archaeological evidence.[19] Landscape has also attracted attention in the allied field of cultural anthropology; several writers have participated in the "space and place" dialogue,[20] while others have directed their landscape inquiries to ethnographic evidence from non-western cultures around the world. The theoretical positions advocated by geographers are often not applicable in these studies because of their inherently western bias. The goal instead is to discover how the "natives" conceptualize the landscape, in other words, to identify *their* positions on it rather than presume that they fit within a western framework.[21]

The present discussion reviews some of the key theoretical constructs of "landscape" and the associated concepts of "cultural landscape" and "place." The Euro-centric bias of current landscape theories is considered in relation to the traditional Eastern Cree context. Just as these academic constructs of "landscape" reflect the worldview of western culture, so too does the Cree worldview inform their perspective of what constitutes the entity I refer to as "landscape."

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[16] Peter Jackson, *Maps of Meaning: An Introduction to Cultural Geography* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989).
[17] Robert D. Sack, *Homo Geographicus: A Framework for Action, Awareness, and Moral Concern* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press: 1997).
[18] Rowntree discusses this evolution in "Cultural Landscape Concept," 134.
[19] For example, Michael A. Jochim, *A Hunter-Gatherer Landscape: Southwest Germany in the Late Paleolithic and Mesolithic* (New York: Plenum Press, 1998) and William M. Kelso and Rachel Most, eds. *Earth Patterns: Essays in Landscape Archaeology* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1990).
[20] For example, Tim Ingold, "Territoriality and Tenure: the Appropriation of Space in Hunting and Gathering Societies," chap. in *The Appropriation of Nature: Essays on Human Ecology and Social Relations* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1987).
[21] See discussion of *The Anthropology of Landscape*, below.

The Modern English concept of "landscape" has its origins in aesthetic appreciation of scenery, and referred to "the artistic and literary representation of the visible world."[22] In 1982 Stilgoe asserted that landscape is specifically land that has been physically modified for the purpose of human activity. He excluded land in its natural state, defining it instead as "wilderness."[23] This he juxtaposed with the traditional German term *landschaft*, which he translates as "the land shaped by men."[24] Such a view is seen as simplistic and narrow in the context of the present study, as will be shown.

Neuman argues that context is critical for qualitative research, "the meaning of a social action or statement depends, in an important way, on the context in which it appears."[25] This thesis is a study of a particular traditional hunter-gatherer society's relationship with their physical environment. The context of the data to be used is both culturally and geographically determined. As such, the terminology for conceptualizing this relationship must reflect this dual context. Stilgoe's definition, then, would not be appropriate, for although ecology is essential in the Cree experience of landscape, a strictly biological or physical descriptor is inadequate to describe the relationship these people have traditionally held with the land.

While debate over a definitive definition for the term continues, there has been a clear shift away from the simply picturesque to varying degrees of precision about the relationship between humans and land. "Landscape," according to Cosgrove, "denotes the external world mediated through subjective human experience."[26] Interpreting this statement abstractly, it could be taken to mean that landscape is the world perceived -

[22] Denis Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape*. (London: Croom Helm, 1984), 9.
[23] Stilgoe, *Common Landscape*, 3.
[24] Ibid, 12.
[25] Neuman, *Research Methods*, 325.
[26] Cosgrove, *Symbolic Landscape*, 13.

but it does not specify that the world so perceived is necessarily modified by human action. This definition is useful in the study of traditional Eastern Cree landscape, which was unmodified and was essentially in what westerners might call a "natural" state." Oddly enough though, when referring to unmodified landscapes, in particular the Polar Regions, he claims that their cultural significance is in their "savage unconquerability."[27] This may be so for people from warmer climes and members of western culture but it is certainly not the case for the indigenous peoples of the arctic, whose landscape it is, and who have evolved a complex relationship with and within it. A similar remark is often made of the inhospitable quality of the eastern subarctic territory that has been home to the Cree since pre-history.[28] There is a tendency for those external to northern cultures to see the arctic and subarctic landscapes as harsh and barren wilderness, but it is clear from ethnographic evidence that this does not reflect the indigenous views at all.[29]

An often-cited theoretical construct for discussing landscape is one developed by Meinig, where landscape is considered through different veils of social values. These veils are predicated on western European and North American cultural ways of conceiving of the world, where standards of perception are based in science and technology, a capitalist economy, and "man" as the point of reference for all else. Meinig suggested that the reader consider the values we as humans impose on landscapes, by deconstructing ten possible perspectives: *Landscape as* Nature, Habitat, Artifact, System, Problem, Wealth, Ideology, History, Place, and Aesthetic.[30] Of these, the one closest to

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[27] Denis Cosgrove, "Geography is Everywhere: Culture and Symbolism in Human Landscapes," in *Horizons in Human Geography*, eds., Derek Gregory and Rex Walford (Totowa, New Jersey: Barnes & Noble Books, 1989): 122.
[28] Morantz, *Ethnohistoric Study*, 25.
[29] Preston, *Cree Narrative*, 254-6.
[30] Donald W. Meinig, "The Beholding Eye: Ten Versions of the Same Scene," in *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes*, ed. D.W. Meinig and J.B. Jackson (Oxford University Press, 1979), 33-48.

being relevant for discussion of Cree constructs of landscape is "Landscape as System." In Meinig's terms, this view is presented as integrated, holistic, and not unlike the framework of ecological systems with all parts working in unison. However, he positions it within a schematic, pure science and technology perspective.[31] In the Cree context this holistic and integrated system is one based on a balance between ecological and spiritual interconnectedness.

It is evident from the preceding examples, and those below, that the issue here is the problem of transferring concepts from one culture onto another. "Culture" in this research refers to a socially constructed set of symbols, practices, and meanings through which people come to understand and represent themselves and the world of their experience. Hence we speak of culture groups as groups of individuals who share the same set of symbols, practices and meanings so constructed. Culture exists at both macro and micro scales, from an "entire society" to "small groups [and] families."[32]

It is literally the *relationship* between culture and land that I suggest defines the term "landscape." Tuan proposes that landscape is a construct of the cultural mind achieved through a combination of both physical and perceptual elements. It incorporates the objective, biophysical, and spatial with the emotional, aesthetic, and subjective.[33] Like Tuan, Hirsch sees landscape as an emergent "cultural process," one he describes as a relationship in which two polar perspectives of landscape interact in the human mind. These are "foreground actuality" (the here and now; the known and understood) and "background potentiality" (what might be; the anticipated, the

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[31] Meinig, "Beholding Eye," 38.
[32] W. Lawrence Neuman, *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. (Toronto: Allyn and Bacon, 1991), 427.
[33] Yi-Fu Tuan, "Thought and Landscape: The Eye and the Mind's Eye," in *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes*, ed. D.W. Meinig and J.B. Jackson, (Oxford University Press, 1979), 89-102.

uncommon).[34] This view de-emphasizes a static, reified definition in favour of one that is dynamic and experiential. In my opinion, the value in Hirsch's definition lies more in the recognition of its interactive (culture/mind/environment) conception than in his exploration of the process itself. His observations about the process appear to me to refer to a secondary experience of landscape, and do not address the core concept of what landscape *is*.

Greider and Garkovich define landscape as:

> [T]he symbolic environment created by human acts of conferring meaning to nature and the environment, of giving the environment definition and form from a particular angle of vision and through a special filter of values and beliefs. Every landscape is a symbolic environment. These landscapes reflect our self-definitions that are grounded in culture.[35]

This is consistent with my intentions in this thesis, and can be simplified into the following statement:

> *For the purposes of this thesis, "Landscape" is defined as a cultural construct wherein the external physical environment is interpreted through human perceptual filters to arrive at an entity endowed with both form and meaning.*

Such a definition can be broadly applied to any terrestrial environment that is being perceived from a human point of view, regardless of the particularities of culture. This must still be understood, however, as an intellectual construct formed within the context of the western scientific tradition; the Cree would not consciously have developed any such abstract conceptual definition.[36] Beyond this, the current emphasis on critical social

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[34] Eric Hirsch, "Landscape: Between Space and Place," in *The Anthropology of Landscape: Perspectives on Place and Space*, ed. E. Hirsch and M. O'Hanlon (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 3-5.

[35] Thomas Greider and Lorraine Garkovich. "Landscapes: The Social Construction of Nature and the Environment." *Rural Sociology* 59, 1 (1994): 1.

[36] Tim Ingold clarifies that this is the case for hunter-gatherer societies in general: "hunter-gatherers do *not*, as a rule, approach their environment as an external world of nature that has to be 'grasped' conceptually and appropriated symbolically within the terms of an imposed cultural design," instead, he says, "apprehending the world is not a matter of construction, but of engagement, not of building but of dwelling, not of making a view *of* the world but of taking up a view *in* it." "Hunting and Gathering as Ways of Perceiving the Environment," in *Redefining*

theory in many landscape studies is based on the premise that, as Peter Jackson claims, culture is inherently political, which translates into landscape being inherently political.[37] While the postmodern ideas informing this claim are broadly applicable to most if not all urban contexts, or any cultural context where there is a hierarchy of power or set of subcultures, it is not appropriate for the *traditional* context of Eastern Cree Culture.[38]

The term "cultural landscape" has been widely adopted in academic and professional literature to refer to landscape whose character has been affected by human culture, where such influence is traceable through physical or other documentary evidence. Sauer claimed that "[t]he cultural landscape is fashioned from a natural landscape by a culture group. Culture is the agent, the natural area is the medium, the cultural landscape is the result."[39] His use of the word "fashioned" *could* be broadly interpreted as a symbolic act not necessarily entailing physical modification; however, it is clear from his text that Sauer intended to refer to a literal change in land form. The emphasis is placed on the physical and spatial influence of culture on land/landscape.

In this thesis the focus is reversed and the balance shifted. The emphasis is more one of reciprocity between landscape and culture; culture for the traditional James Bay Cree was informed by their relationship with landscape, and the traceable influence is to be found in the culture itself rather than on the land.[40] This influence is expressed

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Nature: Ecology, Culture and Domestication, ed. Roy Ellen and Katsuyoshi Fukui (Oxford and Washington, D.C.: Berg, 1996): 120-21.

[37] Peter Jackson, Maps of Meaning, 4-8, although it is stated as the subject of the whole book.

[38] Certainly it is relevant today, as the Cree now live in communities with governments and several subcultures exist within them. I refer specifically to the historic and presumably pre-historic context of small extended family groups ranging in a nomadic fashion over an enormous geographic area. This is the context that was relevant up until early this century, and is the experience that informs the body of oral tradition examined in this study.

[39] Carl Sauer, "Morphology," 343.

[40] In his critique of the Western notion that nature is culturally constructed, Ingold suggests that for hunter-gatherers the situation is just the opposite - culture is informed by environment: "through the practical activities of hunting and gathering, the environment - including the

symbolically through a rich oral tradition both of stories Westerners might call "myths" and of family and group history.

More recently cultural landscape has been defined as an area of land upon which human cultural values have been placed, which has associations with human societal interests, and in which humans have intervened with natural processes.[41] This is closer to the mark, but still retains the perspective that natural processes are distinct from human action. Stilgoe claimed that this nature/culture dichotomy now informing western views was the result of Christian teachings.[42] In the traditional East Cree context humans were understood as one group in an extended family of participants *in* "natural processes."[43]

Cultural landscape, in this thesis, is landscape defined spatially, symbolically, or physically by its relationship to a culture group acting within it.

In addition to the concepts of landscape and cultural landscape, the allied concept of place has a complex set of meanings associated with it, as discussed by Eyles,[44] J.B.Jackson,[45] Sack,[46] and Tuan,[47] among others. In his discussion of language and place, Tuan recognizes the context of a hunter-gatherer culture's sense of place as it can be applied to the Eastern Cree in this study:

> Such people, with their simple material culture, tend to be described as "living in the midst of nature." They do, but the description is nevertheless misleading, for one can assert as truthfully that they live in a deeply humanized world. Outsiders

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landscape with its fauna and flora - enters directly into the constitution of persons, not only as a source of nourishment but also as a source of knowledge." "Hunting and Gathering," 145.

[41] Pollock-Ellwand, "Landscape Idea," 3.

[42] Stilgoe, *Common Landscape*, 8-9.

[43] Discussed fully in Chapter 3. Ingold argues that for hunter-gatherer cultures the Western concept of a nature/culture dichotomy does not exist; for them nature and culture are one and the same. "Hunting and Gathering," 117.

[44] John Eyles, *Senses of Place* (Warrington, Cheshire: Silverbrook Press, 1985).

[45] J. B. Jackson, *A Sense of Place, A Sense of Time* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994).

[46] Robert D. Sack, "The Power of Place and Space," *The Geographical Review* 83, 3 (1993): 326-9.

[47] Yi-Fu Tuan, "Language and the Making of Place: A Narrative-Descriptive Approach," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 81, 4 (1991): 684-96, and of course, his *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977).

> say "nature," because the environment seems barely touched. Insiders see "homeplace" - an environment that is familiar to them, not because they have materially transformed it but because they have named it. It is their place - their world - through the casting of a linguistic net.[48]

As other researchers have also found, Tuan explains that through the language of storytelling and songs, pre-literate, pre-modern cultures articulate the place of landscape in culture.[49] Hence, the cultural form of landscape is manifest in words rather than physical constructions.

In this thesis, for continuity and consistency, I privilege the term "landscape," with the understanding that it is a western concept being used to refer to the Cree understanding of their cultural relationship to the environment in which they have traditionally lived.

3. Related Works

The primary types of sources used in studies of the *cultural representation* of landscape meaning are typically painting and literature in the context of Euro-centric cultures,[50] whereas in studies of non-Western cultures oral tradition is looked to as a primary source of landscape representation.[51] In those studies based on art and literature, the representation of landscape is often seen as a vehicle for the expression of elite social and political values.[52] There are few cases of folklore or oral tradition being used in research on Western cultural landscapes. Ryden's *Mapping the Invisible Landscape*

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[48] Tuan, "Language," 686.
[49] Ibid. See also the discussion below in related works.
[50] For example, the articles in Douglas C. Pocock, ed., *Humanistic Geography and Literature: Essays on the Experience of Place* (London: Croom Helm, 1981).
[51] The focus here is on cultures rather than individuals or groups within cultures, and on existing forms of self-representation - I make this distinction to clarify that these comments are not directed at other studies focusing on meaning in the landscape that may involve the current responses of individuals and groups to existing environments.
[52] For example, Cosgrove, *Symbolic Landscape*, and "Prospect, Perspective and the Evolution of the Landscape Idea," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* N.S. 10 (1985): 566-75.

is an exploration of meaning in the landscape that integrates regional folklore (oral tradition) and literature in the American mid-west, bridging the experiences of the everyday man and the *literati*.[53] Bunkse's study of the representation of landscape in Latvian folklore addresses the experience of common folk.[54] He makes a strong case for the use of oral tradition in cultural landscape studies among geographers, particularly because of its representativeness of culture as a whole. Unfortunately, it seems that few geographers have followed his lead.

Studies of non-Western cultural landscape meaning and representation often look to ethnography and oral tradition as cultural forms of representation, although Vastokas has focused on aboriginal rock art as the medium of expression.[55] She argues that meaning emerges from experience in the landscape and is then projected back onto it in both physical representations (rock art) and in conceptual form (cosmology).

In the recent volume *The Anthropology of Landscape*,[56] ten authors each present a glimpse of their cultural landscape research in ten different non-Western cultures. Curiously, none of the studies focus on oral tradition as a source of representation. Instead, the emphasis is on the cultural relationship with landscape as documented through ethnographic field research. The themes of cultural and national identity are prominent in the collection, manifest in a range of forms from propagandistic

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[53] Kent Ryden, *Mapping the Invisible Landscape: Folklore, Writing, and the Sense of Place*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1993.
[54] Edmunds V. Bunkse, "Commoner Attitudes Toward Landscape and Nature," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*. 68, 4 (1978): 551-66.
[55] Joan M. Vastokas, "Landscape as Experience and Symbol in Native Canadian Culture," in *Perspectives of Canadian Landscape: Native Traditions*, ed. Joan M. Vastokas (North York, Ont.: Robarts Centre for Canadian Studies, 1990), 55-74.
[56] Eric Hirsch and Michael O'Hanlon, eds, *The Anthropology of Landscape: Perspectives on Place and Space* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

appropriation of landscape[57] to cultural integration with it. These include kinship ties based on acts of cooperative subsistence in land use,[58] efforts to transcend mortality by becoming "place,"[59] metaphorical association of human body parts and landscape,[60] beliefs that a person is a "material manifestation" of place,[61] and that place is a manifestation of human ancestors.[62] In each of these studies, the meaning of landscape is represented through cultural beliefs and actions.

An alternative approach to the use of aboriginal oral tradition in landscape studies is taken by Nash, who analyzed Micmac legends according to Jungian archetypes to identify meaning in landscape representation.[63] He suggests that [some] myths are "better understood in a transcendental paradigm," for example, interpreting the figure of a monstrous Ice King as a personification of the "glacial wasteland" archetype.[64]

Aspects of the cultural landscape of the Eastern James Bay Cree have also been investigated, and these works typically make use of oral tradition, but in a different way than the present study. Two distinct areas of this research are Traditional Ecological (or Environmental) Knowledge (TEK), and Toponomy (Place-Name) Research.

Toponomy studies focus on the traditional names assigned to places in the

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[57] Christopher Pinney, "Moral Topophilia: The Significations of Landscape in Indian Oleographs," 78-113; Tom Selwyn, "Landscapes of Liberation and Imprisonment: Towards an Anthropology of the Israeli Landscape," 114-134.
[58] Peter Gow, "Land, People, and Paper in Western Amazonia," 43-62.
[59] Maurice Bloch, "People into Places: Zafimaniry Concepts of Clarity," 63-77.
[60] Caroline Humphrey, "Chiefly and Shamanist Landscapes in Mongolia," 135-163.
[61] Christina Toren, "Seeing the Ancestral Sites: Transformations in Fijian Notions of the Land," 163-183.
[62] Howard Morphy, "Landscape and the Reproduction of the Ancestral Past," 184-209, and Robert Layton, "Relating to the Country in the Western Desert," 210-31.
[63] Ronald J. Nash, "Archetypal Landscapes and the Interpretation of Meaning," *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 7:1 (1997): 57-69.
[64] Ibid, 61-2. Other legends are similarly analyzed in relation to the archetypes of the "primordial sea" and the "forest labyrinth."

landscape, and their literal translations.[65] This has been done for the Eastern James Bay area by the Quebéc *Commission de toponymie*, at a remarkably detailed scale. Another study is underway as part of the research in preparation for the construction of a permanent access road to Waskaganish. Here again, the purpose is resource planning. A recent toponomy study focusing on the landscape of the Whapmagoostui Cree (eastern Hudson Bay) includes not only the place-names and their translations, but also the oral tradition explaining the cultural significance of individual places. From this study Denton has found that landscape is a repository for cultural beliefs and history. In other words, oral tradition *re-presents* the cultural landscape.[66]

In her work with the Athapaskans in the Canadian northwest, Cruikshank has engaged oral tradition and toponomy research for the purpose of ethnohistorical reconstruction.[67] Like Denton, she has found that place-names are often a verbal symbol, or metaphor, for information about a place: its physical characteristics, events that occurred there, and even the species of animal to be found there. The cultural treatment of history, then, has been to impress these metaphors on the landscape; "through words the landscape is fashioned into a world of manageable, human proportions."[68] Cruikshank has also suggested the benefits of using Native oral tradition in conjunction

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[65] For example, *Acimunaskanuch*, Lac (Lake) « breaking beaver lodges in the rain ». Enq. MA,1977, p.38, #36. CMI 87-04. Thanks to Christian Bonnelly at the Commission de toponymie for supplying this information.

[66] David Denton, "The Land as An Aspect of Cree History," in *The Waters, the Land, and the People: An Anthology of Writings on Hudson and James Bays*, ed. Greg Ioannou. Toronto: University of Toronto Press and the Sierra Club of Canada, Forthcoming. Thanks to David for sending me this document and for permission to cite it.

[67] Julie Cruikshank, "Getting the Words Right: Perspectives on Naming and Places in Athapaskan Oral History," *Arctic Anthropology* 27, 1 (1990): 52-65.

[68] Cruikshank, "Words Right," 63. Similar work has been done with the Western Apache culture by Keith H. Basso, "Stalking with Stories: Names, Places, and Moral Narratives among the Western Apache," in *Text, Play, and Story: The Construction and Reconstruction of Self and Society*, Proceedings of The American Ethnological Society, edited by Stuart Plattner (Washington D.C.: The American Ethnological Society, 1984), 19-55.

with Western scientific methods to achieve a "broader perspective on the natural environment," particularly for documenting the natural history of landscapes.[69]

Traditional Ecological (or Environmental) Knowledge (or TEK) is defined by Berkes as "a cumulative body of knowledge and beliefs handed down through generations by cultural transmission, about the relationship of living beings (including humans) with one another and with their environment."[70] The emphasis in these studies tends to be on aboriginal sustainable resource management strategies as alternatives to the (unsustainable) Western, or Euro-centric model of resource use.[71] This knowledge is often a part of oral tradition, often not as a distinct category, instead, it is fully integrated with the content of stories about experience in the traditional context. And, just as broader cultural meanings are expressed symbolically in oral tradition, so too are the beliefs and values that frame traditional ecological knowledge.[72]

While efforts to discover the content of indigenous knowledge have focused on cultures the world over, attempts are also being made to develop models for the

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[69] Julie Cruikshank, "Legend and Landscape: Convergence of Oral and Scientific Traditions in the Yukon Territory," *Arctic Anthropology* 28, 2 (1981): 67-93.
[70] Fikret Berkes and others, "The Cree View of Land and Resources: Indigenous Ecological Knowledge," TASO Report, Second Series, No. 8, (Hamilton: McMaster University, 1992), 3. See also Fikret Berkes and Carl Folke, eds. *Linking Social and Ecological Systems: Management Practices and Social Mechanisms for Building Resilience*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). TEK is also sometimes referred to as Indigenous Ecological Knowledge, to circumvent the controversy over the implications of the term "traditional." For example, Kayo Ohmagari and Fikret Berkes, "Transmission of Indigenous Knowledge and Bush Skills Among the Western James Bay Cree Women of Subarctic Canada," *Human Ecology*, 25, 2 (1997): 199, clarify their intended distinction between the two uses: indigenous knowledge refers to "local knowledge held by indigenous peoples" or "unique to a given culture or society," whereas TEK is defined as stated above, with the notation that "traditional" refers to "historical and cultural continuity, recognizing that societies are constantly redefining what is considered 'traditional'." (Berkes and Folke, *Linking Social and Ecological Systems*, 5.)
[71] Berkes et al, "Cree View of Land," 3.
[72] Ibid, 5.

application of this information to sustainable resource management.[73] The issues surrounding the decontextualization of indigenous knowledge from its original form are discussed by Kuhn and Duerden. While acknowledging its potential benefits, they argue that the further removed from its original context it is, the more the knowledge content is abstracted. In addition, they caution of the potential for the resulting product to be used in ways that are actually in conflict with the original indigenous values it emerged from.[74]

The primary difference in the handling of this traditional body of knowledge between TEK research and my own, is that the emphasis in TEK is on pragmatic environmental systems function and management, whereas my work focuses on the expression of cultural meanings that are associated with experience in the environment. TEK studies have been conducted in both East and West James Bay Cree contexts.

4. Methodology

A. Conceptual Framework

In this study there are two sets of concepts at work: the Cree social construct of the entity I refer to as "landscape" (or physical environment combined with cultural perception), and the researcher's intellectual construct of cultural symbolism. Traditional Cree narratives are concerned primarily with the relations between human persons, animal persons, and spirit persons. Very little direct descriptive reference is made to the landscape, and yet for hunter-gatherer cultures it is the most important contextual element in their lives. The stories do not appear to be about meaning, but rather are

[73] For example, Berkes and Folke, *Linking Social and Ecological Systems*, Part 4, contains four articles on this subject: two theoretical pieces focusing on integration with scientific systems and social systems, and two directed to application in forestry and fisheries.
[74] Richard G. Kuhn and Frank Duerden, "A Review of Traditional Environmental Knowledge: An Interdisciplinary Canadian Perspective," *Culture* XVI, 1 (1996): 71-84.

about events and social interaction. In order to interpret their meaning, one must develop an understanding of the context out of which they evolved. Following from Geertz' concept of culture as a symbolic system,[75] I examine landscape as a symbolic system in Cree oral tradition. The method of portrayal and characterization of landscape is symbolic rather than descriptive. It is embedded in the behaviour and interactions of the persons at the centre of the stories.

The intent of the research is to identify the symbolic expression of landscape and interpret its cultural meaning.

B. Data Sources

Core data for the research consists of original audio recordings and their typed transcripts. This material was collected primarily in the early 1960's by anthropologist Dr. R. J. Preston III. There are 195 separate items of oral tradition in the body of data used in this study.

Concentrating on existing recordings and transcripts as primary data means that the data collection method will not be affected by my bias or area of interest; it is unobtrusive. This purity is further enhanced because the data was not originally collected with the intent to analyse it for the purposes outlined in this proposal. It is of primary significance that the method of original data collection be clarified, to remove the question of original bias on the part of the ethnographer. The informant was asked simply to tell what he remembered: the selection of topic, content, and sequencing were entirely of the informant's choosing. The primary informant was Mr. John Blackned, then a man in his later sixties, who was recognized by his community as an authority on Cree

[75] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 89.

Oral Tradition.[76]

C. Paradigm and Perspective

Given the abundance of opinions presented in research literature on the currently recognized research paradigms and perspectives, and their individual and relative definitions and associated practices, I reluctantly position myself in the Interpretivist or combined Interpretivist / Constructivist paradigm of qualitative research. This reluctance is based on my non-acceptance of the validity of inventing a limited range of categories, each with their own sets of rules of membership, in which all perspectives are assumed to fit. I see this as a form of academic *hubris,* as constraining, and as a formalizing of oppositional camps.[77] Having stated that concern, I recognize the utility of informing the reader of one's orientation to the work.

The intent of the interpretivist approach, according to Schwandt, is to understand "the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it."[78] The interpretivist researcher believes that people assign meaning to experience on the basis of culture. Revealing and interpreting these meanings and their forms of expression is the task of the researcher. According to Geertz, this is achieved by "searching out and analyzing the symbolic forms - words, images, institutions, behaviors - in terms of which, in each place, people actually represent[ed] themselves to themselves and to one

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[76] See R. J. Preston, "Reflections on Culture, History, and Authenticity," in *Theorizing the Americanist Tradition*, ed. R. Darnell and L. Valentine. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, forthcoming). The importance of this is stated in Ruth Finnegan, "A Note on Oral Tradition and Historical Evidence," in Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology, ed. D.K. Dunaway and W.K. Baum, (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1984), 110, the content of elicited narratives tends to be influenced by current issues and attitudes.
[77] Derek Gregory also comments on the exclusivity with which paradigms have been adhered to in "Areal Differentiation and Post-Modern Human Geography," in *Horizons in Human Geography*, ed. Derek Gregory and Rex Walford (Totowa, New Jersey: Barnes & Noble Books, 1989). 69.
[78] Thomas Schwandt, "Constructivist, Interpretivist Approaches to Human Inquiry," in *Handbook of Qualitative Research,* ed. Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 1994), 118.

another."[79] Similarly, Social Constructionism, a "branch" of the Constructivist paradigm, proposes that knowledge is socially and culturally constructed. According to this paradigm, understanding of the world occurs "within shared systems of intelligibility" (culture).[80]

My view is that meaning is constructed both within the individual *and* the group, and that an individual is capable of expressing meaning as understood by themselves and by the group (both personal and collective). Further, I am in agreement with Geertz that these meanings are embodied in symbolic forms of cultural expression, and that they may be revealed by analysis of these forms (in this case, oral tradition).

D. Research Method

This research is a qualitative work, an approach that "focuses on subjective meanings, definitions, metaphors, symbols, and descriptions of specific cases."[81] As an interpretive work, it represents not only the expression of the original informants, but also my informed interpretation of it. Such research recognizes the potential multiplicity of interpretations in any study of human beliefs and expressions. Qualitative researchers must be very clear about their role in interpretation. They recognize that results are not inherent in the data alone, and that "there is no single interpretive truth." [82] In order to maintain clarity for the reader between my interpretation and the self-expression of the storytellers, my interpretation will be written in the first person.[83]

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[79] Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology*, (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 58.
[80] Schwandt, "Approaches," 127.
[81] Neuman, *Research Methods*, 322.
[82] Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln, "Introduction: Entering the Field of Qualitative Research," in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 1994), 15.
[83] Norman Denzin, "The Art and Politics of Interpretation," in *Handbook of QualitativeResearch*. ed. Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 1994), 503.

The research strategy is both exploratory and descriptive. It seeks to determine the "salient themes, patterns, [and] categories in participants' meaning structures" as well as "beliefs, attitudes, [and] structures," and to discover "how these patterns [are] linked with one another."[84]

To strengthen the validity of my research findings, I have made use of several different sources of information, a technique known as triangulation.[85] Triangulation is achieved in this study through the following activities:

Analysis of Core Data

The transcripts and recordings were initially approached using the Grounded Theory[86] method as a procedural guide, particularly the processes of coding and categorizing the data, seeking emergent patterns and relationships within the data, and developing theory on the basis of my interpretation of the meanings embodied in the data. Minor, informal use of frequency-count Content Analysis is also applied to the data for limited purposes. This method consists of "objective and systematic counting and recording procedures to produce a quantitative description of the symbolic content in a text."[87]

There are several important methodological issues to be considered when working with oral tradition, and in order to frame these issues in the context of this study they are discussed fully in Chapter 4.

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[84] Catherine Marshall and Gretchen B. Rossman. *Designing Qualitative Research* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 1995), 41.
[85] Pollock-Ellwand, "Landscape Idea," 95.
[86] As described by Neuman, *Research Methods*, 417-18.
[87] Neuman, *Research Methods*, 266.

Literature Review

Research of historical documents and current academic literature on traditional life-ways of the culture in question are used to establish a context within which to interpret the data. Comparable and relevant studies from the fields of cultural geography and anthropology are considered for their applicability to the process of interpretation.

I have intentionally avoided any "popular" sources of information about aboriginal culture, heritage, and landscape because of my concerns that these are often politically motivated and do not represent authentic tradition. This is a particular hazard at this time in history with the interests in alternative religions, environmental ideologies, and political agendas all looking to Native traditions for inspiration. While they may be relevant for some people today, this study is an historical one and my intent is to represent tradition for its meaning in context.

Luminary, or Expert Panel

A panel of eight recognized experts was asked to review and respond in writing to the proposal and first draft of the thesis. These experts were selected from both the academic community and the Cree community.

Additional informal discussions with specialists in Eastern James Bay Cree culture have been used to test my interpretations.

Details of Method

- First reading of data.
  Identify preliminary categories of landscape representation in the data.
  These could be considered 'coding categories' in Grounded Theory.
- Write and submit thesis proposal.
- Establish correspondence relations with experts on Eastern James Bay Cree culture. Obtain responses on thesis proposal from experts.
- Read extensively ethnographic material on the culture group.
- Read extensively cultural landscape literature from geography, sociology, and anthropology.
- Read theoretical material on interpretation, narrative, and cultural symbolism.
- Read biophysical data on the region.
- Second reading of data.
  - Create index chart of all data units as organizational tool.[88]
  - Make detailed notes on preliminary interpretations on the strength of all previous readings.
  - Revise coding categories to more intuitively and accurately reflect the content and meaning in the data.
- Organize notes and begin to write first draft.
- Obtain feedback on interpretations from experts (throughout).
- Field research to see, experience, and photograph the landscape being studied.
- Review and revise text for defense draft.

5. Structure of Thesis

Chapters 2-4 are not intended to be exhaustive analyses of their subjects, rather, as a group they establish the situational context for the primary focus of analysis presented in Chapter 5: the representation of landscape in oral tradition. Chapter 2 is a contextual overview of the physical environment, describing the geology, topography, and climate, as well as the flora, fauna, and human populations. Chapter 3 describes traditional Eastern James Bay Cree culture and outlines their traditional way of life as it relates to the environment. The emphasis here is on the yearly cycle of subsistence activities. Although a *detailed* discussion of belief systems for this culture group is not possible in this thesis, it is important to review some critical aspects of Cree world-view in order to approach the meanings inherent in the oral tradition, especially the Cree

[88] See Appendix 1 for sample page of index chart.

construct of landscape.[89] Chapter 4 discusses issues pertaining to the oral tradition of the Eastern James Bay Cree, such as typology, function, and authority, followed by an introduction to the interpretation of data in this study. Chapter 5 demonstrates one aspect of how landscape, as it was traditionally experienced by the Eastern James Bay Cree, is represented in their oral tradition, focusing on the role of tracks as an indicator of culture.

The study integrates excerpts from the significant volume of oral tradition recorded by R.J. Preston, with references to traditional lifeways in the region from documentary sources, in order to establish relationships between experience and representation of landscape. My interpretations are offered as possible ways of understanding, and have been formulated with constant diligence toward an empathetic and intuitive approach to the Cree expression, and an equally diligent critical eye on the interpretations generated by myself and the scholars to whose work I refer.

It initially appeared that there was only a small amount of material in the data that would contribute to the discovery of landscape representation and meaning, but further investigation revealed that there was, in fact, a vast amount incorporated in the stories. Because of this unexpected volume of data, I have provided a thorough examination of only one aspect of landscape representation: the role of tracks, and an overview of additional aspects for future exploration.

Chapter 6 summarizes the findings and overall research project.

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[89] By "the Cree construct of landscape," I mean how the Cree traditionally conceived of what I am calling landscape, as I have presented it above. Philippe Descola, "Constructing Natures: Symbolic Ecology and Social Practice," in *Nature and Society: Anthropological Perspectives*, ed. Philippe Descola and Gísli Pálsson (London: Routledge, 1996), 85, suggests that knowledge of a culture's world-view is necessary in order to be able to understand the "process by which each culture endows with a particular salience certain features of its environment and certain forms of practical engagement with it."

Table 1.1 THESIS STRUCTURE	
Ch. 1	introduction: subject, theory, method
Ch. 2	overview of the natural environment
Ch. 3	overview of the yearly activity cycle
Ch. 4	overview of oral tradition and introduction to the study data
Ch. 5	discussion of the representation of tracks as culture in the landscape
Ch. 6	summary discussions

In summary, the thesis structure can be described as simultaneously cumulative and focusing, as the following diagrams illustrate. The content of each of Chapters 2 through 4 are cumulative steps toward the content of Chapter 5; environment plus culture leads to representation. According to Cree legend, the landscape and all the animal and spirit persons in it existed before humans arrived; human culture was added to the landscape matrix. The chapter divisions here are not intended to imply a cognitive division of environment and culture as we would tend to do in western cultures, rather it is sequential and cumulative. This model is also cyclical in that the representation generated is of the environment through the perceptual filters of the culture. This is particularly fitting, as will be shown in the following chapters, the Cree relationship to the environment, discussed as landscape, also follows a cyclical pattern.

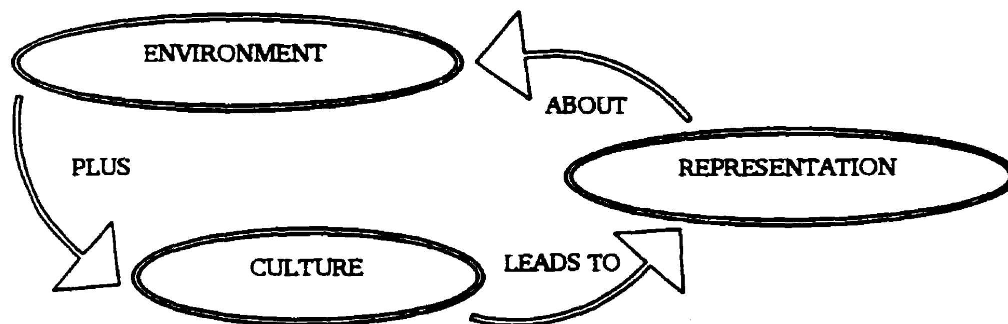

Figure 1.1 Cumulative and cyclical structure of thesis

The thesis structure is focusing in that the scope of information presented progresses from the all inclusive to the very specific. Beginning with the environment of which the Cree are but one aspect, the discussion proceeds to Cree culture within the environment, then to only that part of Cree culture which is oral tradition, and finally to

only that part of oral tradition which illuminates the cultural meaning of the landscape.

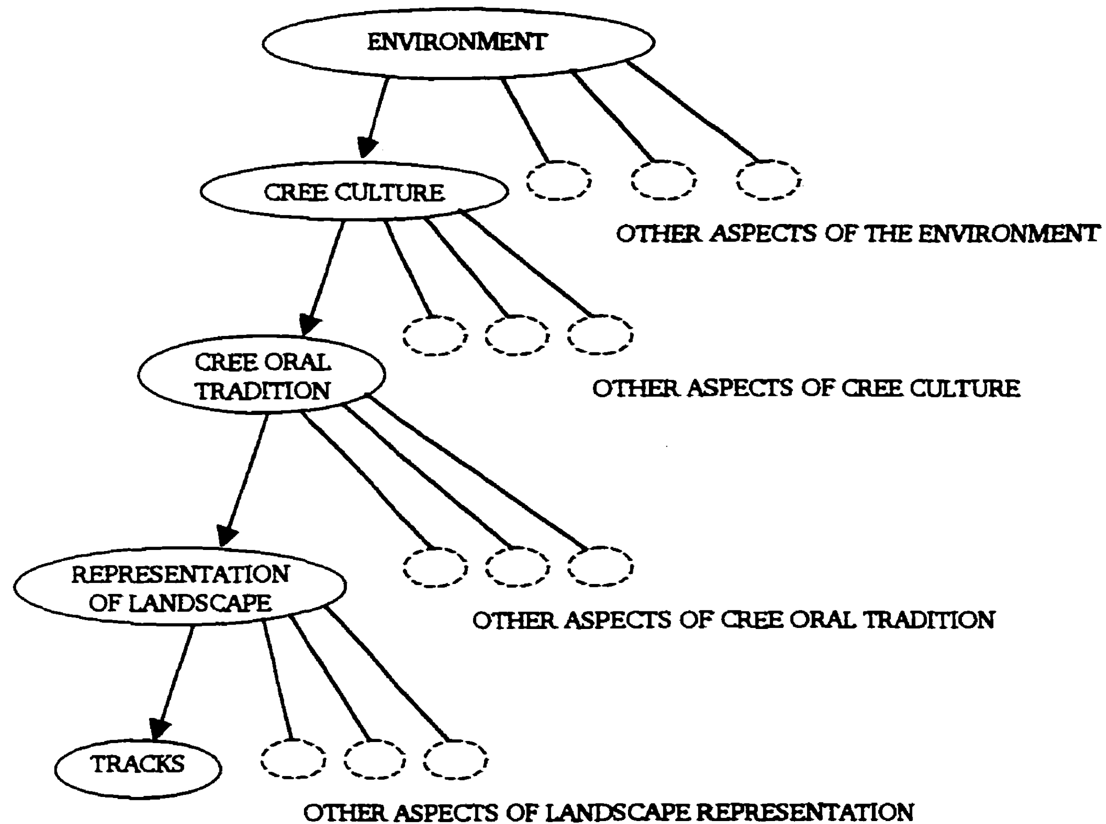

Figure 1.2 Focusing structure of thesis.

The preceding diagrams are of course simplifications; in order to appropriately discuss the representation of landscape in oral tradition, one must begin with an understanding of the environmental and cultural contexts within which such representations are created, and return to that context throughout the analysis.

6. Researcher's Relationship to Subject: A Personal Narrative

In the earlier discussion of the research method used for this study, I stated that qualitative researchers need to be very clear about their own role in research. Given this objective, it is not uncommon for qualitative, interpretive studies such as this one to be accompanied by a statement qualifying the researcher's relationship to the subject. It reveals the path between the researcher's own experience and the work, and suggests at

least part of the context within which the researcher makes sense of his or her work.

As a child I accompanied my parents to Waskaganish (formerly Rupert House) for summers of fieldwork in the early to mid-1960's. I was exceptionally fortunate to experience and imprint upon my memory a distinctive sense of place at a time when it was on the brink of unprecedented change. My time in Waskaganish was not experienced from the perspective of the ethnographer seeking to understand everything that could be learned - it was from the eyes of a pre-adolescent child keenly aware of sights and smells and sounds and everything that was different from home in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. The ground surface was sand, and there was a wooden boardwalk in front of the Quebec Game Warden's wood frame house. Dune grass with pink and green seeds waved in the breeze. The broad Rupert River was always in sight, and there was great excitement when the annual supply barge would come to the dock, or when one of the small airplanes would touch down on the river, with the sound of the propellers beating a rhythm against the splashing and lapping of water on the hollow metal floats. There was only one motorized vehicle in the settlement: a tractor belonging to the Catholic priest. In the settlement one could see hides being stretched on frames, and women working moose hide into moccasins or mitts, beading, making snowshoes for winter, or cooking over an outdoor fire.

Summers were hot and sticky, mosquitoes were plentiful and bothersome. I was afraid of the sled dogs, who were kept tied on ropes attached to posts near their owners' dwellings, and I dreaded the outhouses. I relished playing with frogs by the river, finding what turned out to be artifacts in the sand, and playing *Atoosh* (monster) with the Cree girls my age (who spoke little or no English).

As a child, I never went into the bush or saw the traditional hunting activities. Once I went out in the canoe, up river when the fishing nets were being drawn in, and

ate freshly caught fish cooked over a fire prepared on a huge boulder in the river.

After several years away, I returned to Waskaganish in the summer of 1973 and was surprised to find that the old nucleus of the community had been superceded by new housing on a ridge away from the river. Most people now had electricity and running water; I felt like it was a different place. It had become a permanent community, *Canadianized*. Returning again in March 1999, the community is larger still. The only old house still standing is John Blackned's, the primary source of data in the collection used in this study. It now has the informal status of a heritage structure and there is interest in preserving it.

The settlement of Waskaganish is *not* the landscape of this thesis. Waskaganish is one small node in the landscape, where only in the last century the Cree spent their brief summers after eight to ten months in the bush in small isolated hunting groups. It is the landscape of the bush that I explore through my study of Cree oral tradition. My knowledge of *this* subject is informed by exposure to the work of my parents and my periodic employment as their research assistant transcribing interviews, archival notes, and abstracts onto computer. During the preparation of this thesis I am employed through a grant from the Cree School Board to edit and transfer original reel-to-reel recordings of oral tradition onto CD-ROM format.

CHAPTER 2. ENVIRONMENT: THE EASTERN JAMES BAY REGION

The division of components of the environment into categories such as topography, hydrology, climate, flora, fauna, etc. is an approach based in western scientific thought, and is one that does not reflect ways of knowing in Eastern James Bay Cree culture, or in most other hunter-gatherer cultures.[1] For the purposes of this chapter, however, such categories are used to contextualize the study in a format familiar to Western readers. The Cree perspective is suggested in some of the categories, and is more fully elaborated in Chapter 3 in a discussion of their traditional worldview.

1. Environmental Context

As it was traditionally understood in East Cree culture, the landscape consisted of all of the biophysical and environmental components of the ecosystem. This included land and topographic features (e.g. muskeg, mountains, and islands), hydrologic elements (e.g. the bay, rivers, tributaries, creeks, lakes, marshes), vegetation, climatic elements (e.g. wind, snow), animal persons, spirit persons, and human persons.

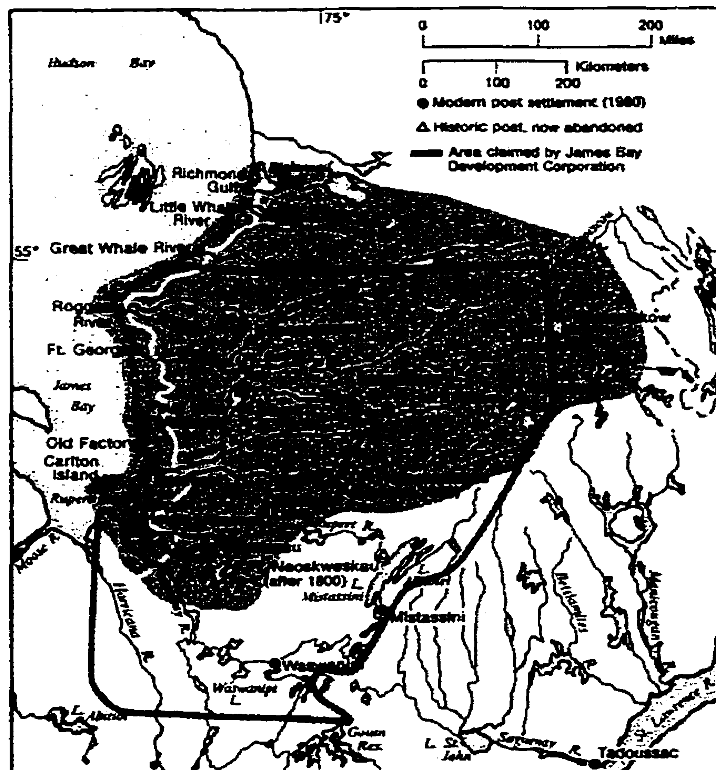

Figure 2.1 Traditional subsistence area of the Eastern James Bay Cree (highlighted area). (Preston, "East Main Cree," Fig.1.)

There is substantial biophysical variation within the Eastern James Bay region,

from boreal forest in the south to barren tundra in the north, and from flat coastal marshes in the west to rugged hills interspersed with vast areas of upland muskeg in the east. The unifying characteristics are the underlying Precambrian shield, shallow soils, and poor drainage resulting in a very wet landscape.

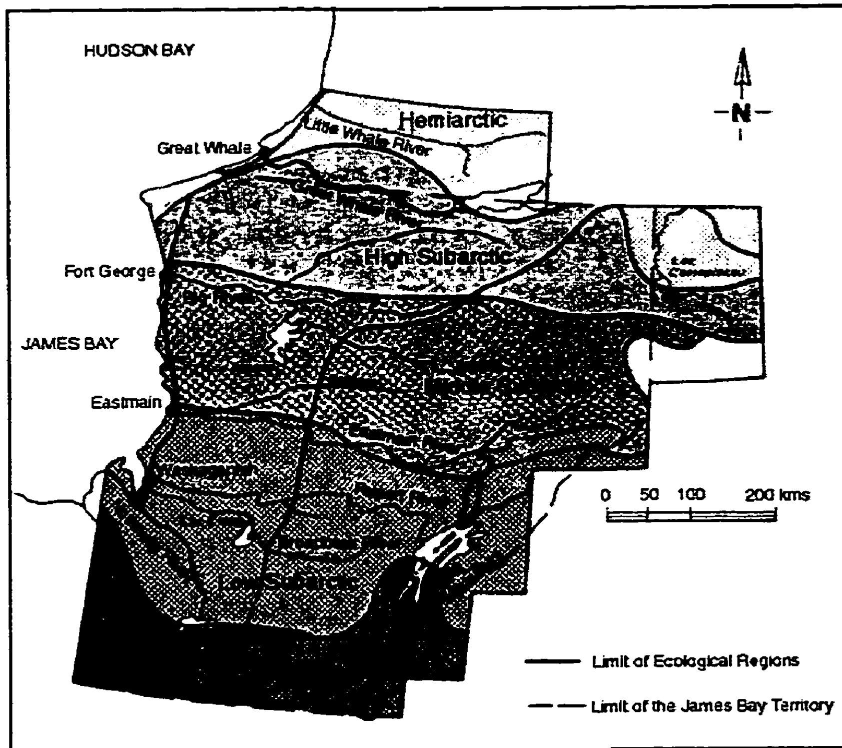

Figure 2.2 Ecological zones of the James Bay Territory. (Adapted from Centre d'etudes nordiques, Monograph, Carte 3.)

The traditional subsistence area of the East Cree is estimated to be about 340,000 square kilometres in northern Quebec (Figure 2.1).[2] It is nearly all classified as subarctic; the northernmost zone is arctic, and the southernmost zone is boreal (Figure 2.2). Most of this area lies within the zone of discontinuous permafrost (Figure 2.3).

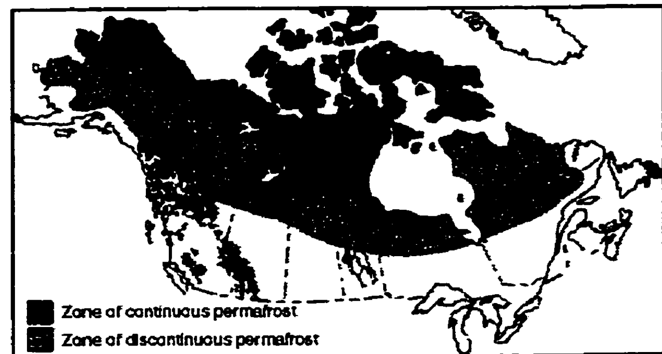

Figure 2.3 Most of the traditional subsistence area lies in the zone of discontinuous permafrost. (Adapted from Gardner, "General Environment," Fig. 1.)

[1] Ingold, "Hunting and Gathering," 117.
[2] The area of the territory officially designated by the James Bay Development Corporation was 144,000 square miles (372,958 square kilometres). The traditional area is not exactly known as there were no formal boundaries and it likely fluctuated according to need, but it is estimated to have been approximately 337,000 and 389,000 square kilometres. R.J. Preston, personal communication (April 1999).

The area represented by the majority of data in this study is bounded by the Eastmain and Nottaway rivers to the north and south, from the bay eastward at least three hundred kilometres. A small portion of the material originates north of Eastmain, from the Great Whale area.

2. Topography and Hydrology

The Eastern James Bay landscape is characterized by rivers and their tributaries draining east to west into the bays (Figure 2.4), with numerous rapids and waterfalls as they descend from an elevation of 215 metres (figure 2.5).[3] Chains of lakes and string bogs run throughout the land. The lowland coastal region adjacent to the bay consists predominantly of mudflats, broad tidal pools, and marshes from five to fifty kilometres wide (Figure 2.6).[4] As the land rises gradually upward away from the bay, there are large areas of muskeg interspersed with lakes (Figure 2.7) and rocky outcrops. Although the nearest mountains

Figure 2.4 Landsat image showing Rupert River and tributaries (in black). (Landsat #A14976-15)

Figure 2.5 The "Narrow Falls" on the Broadback River drop approximately thirty metres. (Author)

[3] Morantz, *Ethnohistoric Study*, 25.

Figure 2.6 Coastal marshes along James Bay. (R.J.Preston)

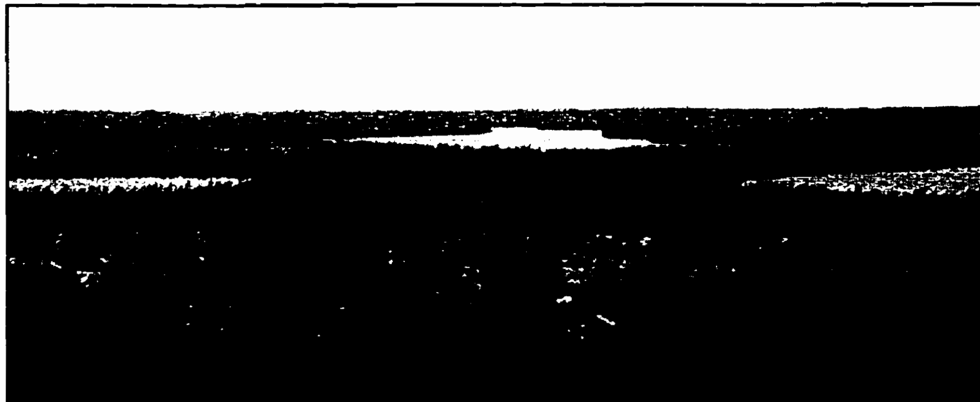

Figure 2.7 Inland from the bay the landscape is dotted with lakes. (R.J.Preston)

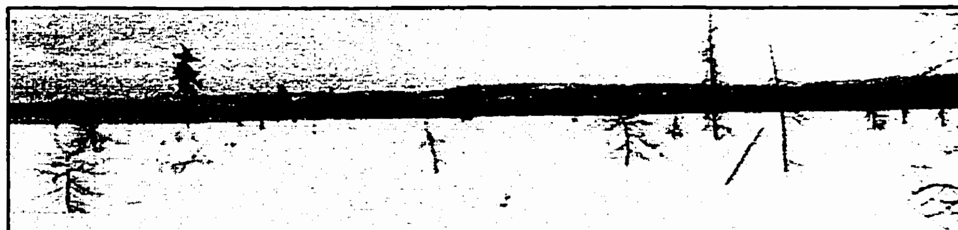

Figure 2.8 Rocky outcrops locally referred to as mountains, as seen from across the frozen upland muskeg. (Author)

[4] Steven Hardill, "The Physical Environment of James Bay and a Preliminary Assessment of Environmental Impacts," TASO Report No. 24. (Hamilton: McMaster University, 1986), 16.

(by Euro-scientific standards) are hundreds of kilometres to the east in the Labrador Peninsula, there are outcrops resembling foothills (and locally called mountains) between 30-166 metres in height (Figure 2.8)[5] found even within fifty kilometres of the bay in some places.[6]

3. Vegetation

"Tundra-open woodland" is the dominant vegetation zone in the Eastern James Bay region, with a large central swath of boreal forest (Figure 2.9).[7]

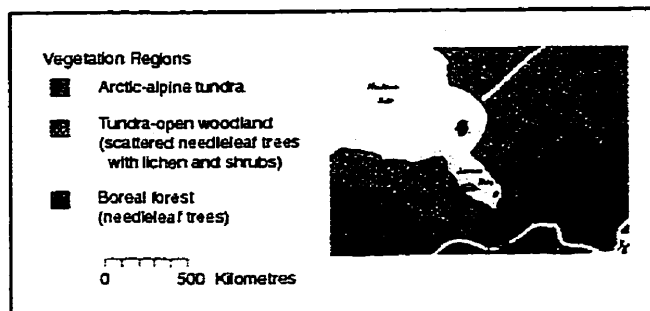

Figure 2.9 Vegetation Regions of the Study Area. (Adapted from Gardner, "General Environment," Fig.1)

Figure 2.10 Aerial view of river corridor. Greater densities of vegetation indicate improved drainage. (Author)

Drainage is best along river corridors, where the saturated ground gives way to the greatest densities of vegetation, primarily white spruce (Figure 2.10).

Eight different vegetation types are identified by Tanner: burned areas (Figure 2.11); bare rock, lichen; bog and muskeg (Figure 2.12); sedge and shrub tundra; shrub woodland; alder-willow thickets (Figure 2.13); lichen woodland; and closed crown forest (Figure 2.14).[8] The most common tree species are black spruce in wet areas and white spruce where the

[5] Hardill, "Environment," 15.
[6] As I observed south of the Broadback River.
[7] James S. Gardner, "General Environment," in *The Subarctic* Volume 6 *Handbook of North American Indians*, ed. June Helm (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1981), 6.
[8] Adrian Tanner, *Bringing Home Animals: Religious Ideology and Mode of Production of the*

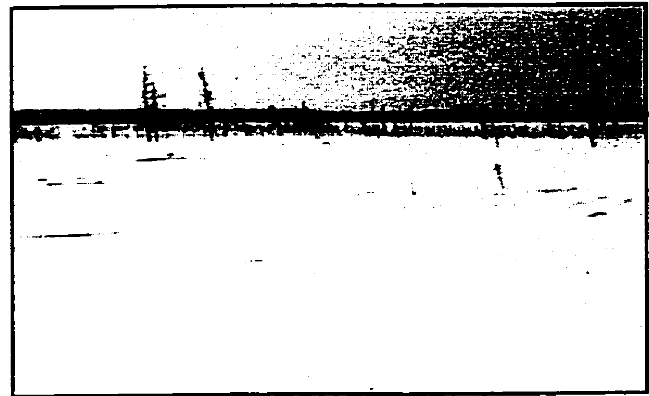

Figure 2.12 Vast areas of the landscape are covered in muskeg. In winter it becomes an open, frozen tundra-like environment. (Above) (Author)

Figure 2.11 Burned area of forest.(Left) (Author)

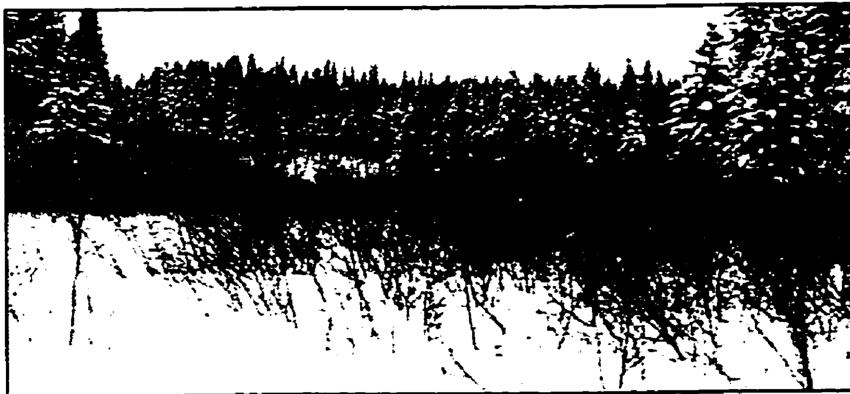

Figure 2.13 Willow thickets tend to be located near drainage channels, along creeks and rivers. This one surrounds a creek running through an upland forest.(Left) (Author)

Figure 2.14 Closed crown forest, here a combination of white spruce and poplar. (Author)

drainage is better. Secondary tree and shrub species are fir, poplar, alder, red willow, jack pine, tamarack, and birch.[9] Forest fires can demolish vast areas of habitat. A variety of lichens and mosses grow on

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Mistassini Cree Hunters. Social and Economic Studies No. 23 (St. Johns: Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1979), 39.

rocks and trees (Figure 2.15).

4. Climate

The Eastern Cree identify two main seasons in the year, based on the effects of climate. The short summer season is *niipin*, or "the period of open water," and the much longer winter is *pipun*, or "the period of frozen lakes and rivers."[10] In the south, rivers begin freeze-up in November, and spring break-up begins in May and can last through June.[11] The freeze/thaw periods are staggered depending on the size of the water body; small creeks freeze sooner than rivers. In areas of rapids on large rivers, the water may not freeze over at all or only for a short time in January (Figure 2.16).

Figure 2.15 Lichens and mosses growing on a tree. (Author)

Figure 2.16 Rapids on the Broadback River at the beginning of March. (Author)

There is snow cover on the ground from late October, "for at least six months."[12] Snow depth varies according to the vegetation pattern;

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[9] Gardner, "General Environment," 12.
[10] Tanner, *Bringing Home Animals*, 28-9.
[11] Morantz, *Ethnohistoric Study*, .25.
[12] Gardner, "General Environment," 10.

black spruce/peat bog areas tend to have the deepest snow, and in general, forested areas retain more snow than open areas where the wind causes secondary dispersal and scouring. This is particularly the case on lakes, rivers, and open muskeg.[13] Maximum snow depth for the region is between 130-190 cm.[14]

The mean monthly temperatures at Nichicun, in the east-central area of the region, were recorded as -23 C in January and +15 C in July; extremes over a 49-year period were -49.4 C and +32.2 C.[15]

5. Animal "Persons"

The Cree traditionally conceived of animals, humans, spirit beings, and some climactic elements as "persons." This will be discussed fully in Chapter 3 and again in Chapter 5. For the purposes of this section I identify the western scientific category of "fauna" as "animal persons" because it reflects the Cree point of view.

Among those animals of interest to the Cree, caribou and moose are migratory and travel the same route through the landscape for many years. Other species move about within much smaller ranges, such as beaver, snowshoe hare, marten, mink, partridge (ptarmigan), muskrat, lynx, otter, wolverine, skunk, porcupine, fox, black bear, and polar bear (farther north). There are at least twenty-seven species of fish in the rivers and lakes, sixteen of which were normally harvested by the Cree.[16] Among the waterfowl are Canada goose, ducks, lesser snow geese, and loons.

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[13] Richard Heron, Ming-ko Woo, and Peter Steer, "Snowmelt and Break-up of Small Rivers Along the Southern James Bay Coast," TASO Report No. 29 (Hamilton: McMaster University, 1988), 2-3.
[14] Gardner, "General Environment," 10.
[15] Tanner, *Bringing Home Animals*, 28, citing Wernstadt.
[16] Morantz, *Ethnohistoric Study*, 30.

6. Human "Persons"

This category is not typically included in bio-physical descriptions of the environment, however, as will be demonstrated in the following chapter, the Cree traditionally understood their presence as a component of the environment. Because the goal of this study is to reveal the representation of landscape meaning from the Cree point of view, I believe it is logical and appropriate to include the indigenous human population in this review of the natural environment.

An 1898 census indicates a total Cree population of approximately 1000 individuals (this does not include the very small population of Non-Native missionaries and traders in the area). They were widely distributed in small groups over an area of *approximately* 340,000 square kilometres.[17] It extended from the Nottaway River drainage south of James Bay to Richmond Gulf on the east coast of Hudson Bay, from the coasts of the bays to "the height of land, deep in the interior of the Ungava Peninsula."[18] A discussion of their culture and activity follows in Chapter 3.

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[17] Morantz, *Ethnohistoric* Study, 39.

[18] R.J. Preston, "East Main Cree," in *The Subarctic*, Volume 6, *Handbook of North American Indians*, ed. June Helm, (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1981), 196.

CHAPTER 3. CULTURE: TRADITIONAL YEARLY CYCLE OF ACTIVITY

1. Cree Worldview

The historical, traditional culture pattern for Eastern James Bay Cree was one of regional variation and commonality without clear boundaries of difference among groups.[1] They did not think of themselves as comprising one socially or politically defined "tribe," instead, they tended to identify themselves on the basis of their local or regional landscape context.[2] The designation of "Cree" was applied to the population first by Anglican missionary, E.A. Watkins, in the mid-nineteenth century, and later by non-Native scholars.[3]

Unlike the Cree peoples on the west coast of James Bay, who were influenced by the more formally structured culture of the Ojibwa, the Eastern Cree do not appear to have had a *unified, formally articulated* belief system relating to their place in the universe.[4] This is not to say that they lacked a complex set of beliefs and understandings about existence, just that it was lived in everyday experience, rather than formalized into a dogma and articulated as "sacred" in opposition to "profane". The Eastern Cree were traditionally working under the premise that all persons, including human, animal, spirit, are part of an inter-relational network involving direct personal communication and response through action. As hunters, the Cree saw themselves not as dominant over animals, but as ethical and moral participants in a form of community between themselves, the animals, the environment, and the spirit persons who were responsible for the animals.[5] Colin Scott offers this explanation:

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[1] Morantz, *Ethnohistoric Study*, 3-4; Preston, *Cree Narrative*, 2.
[2] Ibid, 12-13.
[3] Ibid, 12.
[4] Preston, *Cree Narrative*, 2; Morantz, *Ethnohistoric Study*, 12-13.
[5] R.J. Preston, "Le Relation Sacree Entre les Cris et les Oies," *Recherches Amérindiennes au Québec* 8 (1978) (cited from English translation TMs.); also R.J. Preston, "Towards a General Statement on

> In Cree, there is no word corresponding to our term "nature." There is a word *pimaatisiiwin* (life), which includes human as well as animal "persons." The word for "person," *iiyiyuu*, can itself be glossed as "he lives." Humans, animals, spirits, and several geophysical agents are perceived to have qualities of personhood. All persons engage in a reciprocally communicative reality. Human persons are not set over and against a material context of inert nature, but rather are one species of person in a network of reciprocating persons. [6]

R.J. Preston describes the Cree understanding of these relationships as a cultural "mental map."[7] The analogy is particularly apt in the context of *this* study, as an inquiry into the Cree way of experiencing the landscape. From the human point of view, the success of these relationships was predicated on the ability to accurately interpret received communication, and on the performance of appropriate gestures of respect.[8]

The formal concept of "sacred" may in fact have been missionized into the Ojibwa and Cree cultures; Jesuit missionaries were in the James Bay region as early as the 1670's.[9]

This east/west difference is illustrated well in their concepts of landscape. For example, Western James Bay Cree culture had a traditional term for land: *ashkii*. According to a Moose Cree source, there was an associated concept that the soil, vegetation, animals, people, snow, and other natural features were part of the dressing,

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the Eastern Cree Structure of Knowledge," in *Papers of the Thirteenth Algonquian Conference*, edited by William Cowan (Ottawa: Carleton University, 1982), 299-306. This is also indicated in Colin Scott, "Science for the West, Myth for the Rest?: The Case of James Bay Cree Knowledge Construction." In *Naked Science: Anthropological Inquiry into Boundaries, Power, and Knowledge*, ed. Laura Nader (New York: Routledge, 1996), 72-3, and echoed in Harvey Feit, Hunting and Metaphors: James Bay Cree Defense of Environments, Autonomy, and Inter-Cultural Dialogues," in *Indigenous Traditions and Ecology*, ed. John A. Grom and Lawrence Sullivan (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, forthcoming). Feit states, "For Cree hunters the concepts of "human" and "animal," "society" and "nature" are not radically separated, and there is no fundamental division of nature and culture or society," (TMs, 4).

[6] Scott, "Science for the West," 72-3.

[7] R.J. Preston, "Hunting Where We Please: Land and Territories, Ethics and Treaties in the Mushkegowuk Region, Ontario," Paper read at OSAA Conference, Brock University, (1990). TMs.

[8] The evidence for this is clear in the content of oral tradition used in this thesis. Also, R.J. Preston, "Some General Aspects of Eastern Cree Imagery," 1998 TMs.; R.J. Preston, "Some General Aspects of Eastern Cree Imagery Regarding Animals," Paper read at the 8th Congress of the Canadian Ethnology Society, Ottawa, 1981. TMs.

[9] Morantz, *Ethnohistoric Study*, 130 ; also see Preston, "East Main Cree," 199.

or clothing of the land.[10] According to another Western Cree source, this concept is similar to the Western (Euro-culture) notion of 'ecosystem' but with a spiritual epistemology attached, such that the complete package is understood to be sacred or holy.[11] While the Eastern Cree agree that these elements are included in their understanding of what constitutes land, they have not articulated it with a formal, abstract concept of clothing or dressing, with a stated sacred perspective.[12]

This way of thinking about landscape, and worldview is, I believe, indicative of the demographic and mobility patterns of the Eastern Cree, discussed below.

2. Impact on Environment

The traditional Cree landscape was un-built and virtually un-modified by the Cree – as hunter-trappers they were continually shifting throughout the year and erecting short-term, portable dwellings. They did not modify the landscape with permanent and symbolic structures (i.e. cairns, buildings, and earthworks). They did not engage in any land-altering activities like forest clearing, land drainage efforts, water diversion efforts, or selective breeding of plant species for gathering. Their physical impact on the landscape was literally minimal – to the extent of pathways worn around the summer campsites, and the localized collection of firewood, gathering a few rocks to surround the fireplace, cutting fresh fir boughs to line the floor of the tipi. When they shifted to a new location along the trapline, they cleaned up all traces of their habitation so as not to offend the animals living there. There were no long-term indicators of their presence;

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[10] Greg Spence, cited in R.J. Preston, "A Sustainable Life Perspective: The Whiteman View and the Cree View of the James Bay Treaty," Paper read at the annual meetings of the American Society for Ethnohistory, Toronto, November 1990. TMs.
[11] E-mail correspondence between G. Fulford, R. J. Preston, and F. Berkes, (April, 1998).
[12] My own inquiries among East Cree experts (including a Cree Elder) resulted in a non-recognition of this formalization of concepts.

animal skulls and bones hung in the trees as a show of respect (Figure 3.1),[13] human graves, wigwam poles (Figure 3.2), and rings of stones used to hold down tent coverings remained visible in the landscape for several years, but were allowed to gradually blend back into the land. And even these items were not dominant by their numbers in the landscape. If conditions permitted, it was normal to let an area of the trapline lie fallow for animal stocks to regenerate for a year or two after harvesting, so that even their impact on animal populations was moderated by conservation. Put simply, to look at the traditional Cree landscape, one would scarcely know that there was an active human population subsisting within it.

Figure 3.1 Bear skulls hung in a tree. (R..J.Preston)

Figure 3.2 Old wigwam poles are left standing after a family has moved to another location, and are not re-used. (Author)

3. Contact and the Fur Trade

The earliest recorded contact with non-Natives in the region occurred with the arrival of Henry Hudson in 1611. In 1668 the first fur-trading post was established by the Hudson Bay Company at the present site of Waskaganish, on the

[13] Harvey Feit, "Spiritual Power and Everyday Lives: James Bay Cree Shaking Tent Performers and Their Audiences," in *Circumpolar Animism and Shaminism*, ed. Takako Yamada and Takashi

southeast tip of James Bay.[14] Morantz and others have written about the fur-trade and its influence on the Cree people.[15] It has been effectively argued that the European traders inserted themselves into a subsistence pattern that was already well established and there are indications that the essential life pattern remained largely as it had been.[16] Hudson Bay Company records indicate that post managers complained that the "Indians" would often refuse "to hunt furs beyond their perceived needs or interests."[17] Morantz argues that

> (a)ll the Indians were, until the twentieth century, primarily subsistence hunters and not fur trappers in the commercial sense of the word. As such they planned their hunting strategies to meet first their biological and cultural needs. Fur hunting always played a secondary role... [18]

This may not have been the case to the west of James Bay; according to Morantz the HBC focussed most of its attention to the west. The east "was never considered by them a rich fur area." [19]

Nevertheless, the HBC established a total of sixteen trading posts in the Eastern James Bay region, ten along the coast and six inland. They were not all in operation continuously or all at the same time.[20] Of course there were other posts along the southwest and west coast of James Bay as well.

4. Coasters and Inlanders

The Eastern Cree had two landscapes – and two very different sets of experience of landscape by which they distinguished themselves from each other. Part of the

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Irimoto (Sapporo, Japan: Hokkaido University Press, 1997), 140. Also item #18 in data set.
[14] Morantz, *Ethnohistoric Study*, 14-16.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid, 33.
[17] Ibid, 18, 39.
[18] Ibid, 28.
[19] Ibid, 16.
[20] Preston, "East Main Cree," 200, Table 1, and I include Mistassini to the Inlander posts.

population lived along the east coast of James Bay year-round; they were referred to as "coasters," or more literally, "salt-water people" (*winipekuwiyiyu*).[21] The coastal landscape is one of lowland saltwater marshes and mudflats. The other part of the population were known as "inlanders," or "bush people" (*nuhcimiwiyiyuc*), who followed a yearly cycle of movement through the inland areas hunting and fishing in small groups of one to three families.[22] Inland terrain becomes progressively more rugged going eastward, but continues to be heavily interspersed with upland muskeg, rivers and tributaries.

Based on the 1898 census figures produced by the Hudson Bay Company, Morantz has calculated a total population for the Eastern James Bay Cree of 270 coasters and 723 inlanders.[23]

The inlander and coaster populations shared language, material culture, and oral tradition, and sometimes intermarried.[24] They had different roles in the fur trade from ca. 1700; trading posts were initially located along the coast, and were therefore much more accessible to the coasters, who were more frequent visitors to the posts and users of trade goods.[25] For the inlander population, there was normally only one short visit to the trading post each year around late June. At that time the coasters and inlanders would come together for their annual feast, sharing food, songs and stories.[26]

The subsistence area or hunting territories of the coasters tended to be significantly smaller than that of the inlanders; coasters tended to hunt within fifteen to

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[21] The "inlander" and "coaster" designations were how the Cree identified themselves - according to the landscape and associated life pattern. At some time after the establishment of the fur trading posts people also identified themselves with the post settlements that they traded at. Morantz, *Ethnohistoric Study*, 12.
[22] Preston, "East Main Cree," 196.
[23] Morantz, *Ethnohistoric Study*, 39.
[24] See Morantz, *Ethnohistoric Study*, 13; Preston, "East Main Cree," 198.
[25] Morantz, *Ethnohistoric Study*, 13, 31.

sixty-five kilometres inland of the Bay.[27] Inlanders, in contrast, traveled upriver by canoe as much as several hundred kilometres to reach their traditional hunting grounds.[28] The sizes of the inland hunting grounds varied

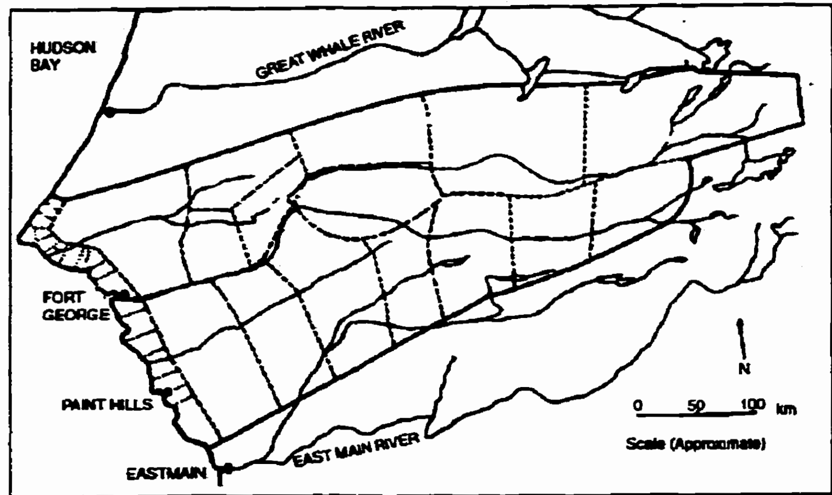

Figure 3.3 Approximate trapline sizes as indicated by Cooper for the 1930's. The coastal units are significantly smaller than the inland units. (Adapted from Flannery and Chambers, "Cooper's Investigation," Figure 5.)

considerably, being much larger in the north where resources were scarcer. Some indication of early twentieth century trapline size is given in the maps produced by Cooper (Figure 3.3). It was regarded as typical for an inlander family group hunting up the Eastmain River to cover 320 walking kilometres in their area over the winter.[29]

The data and interpretation in this thesis focus primarily on the inlander experience of landscape, and therefore, the results of my study will be representative of the inlanders to a far greater extent than the coasters.

5. Yearly Cycle of Activity for Inlanders

A. Overview of Cycle

In the fall, inlanders traditionally traveled up-river by canoe as far as possible prior to freeze-up. The initial grouping may consist of up to ten extended families. As

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[26] Ibid, 34 ; Preston, "East Main Cree," 197-8.
[27] Preston, "East Main Cree," 197.
[28] (Blackned, 1965 tape 4A - oral tradition recordings in collection of R.J. Preston)
[29] (Blackned, 1965, Index#18 - oral tradition recordings in collection of R.J. Preston)

the rivers branch into tributaries, the group divides into smaller sub-groups of perhaps three or four families, who continue by canoe in the directions of the individual family hunting grounds. By this time the rivers and tributaries are freezing, and no longer passable by canoe, so the canoes are all set on land in a group. During the canoe voyage the main food gathering activity is fishing, and before the smaller groups split up to individual extended families to go inland, they spend time drying fish for the winter.

When the ground is frozen and covered with snow, people can begin to move on snowshoes inland to their traditional hunting areas. Over the winter they will hunt large and small game, shifting residence as often as every three or four days to access the animal resources. In times of game animal shortage, they may shift to a lake where they can fish through the ice. During the course of one winter season, a family may come in contact with one or two other families, but they may not.

In spring as the temperature rises, the snow and ice begin to melt, and the families return to the place where they left the canoes, before the ground, which is largely muskeg, becomes impassable from thawing. It is expected that everyone will return to this place at about the same time. Once the rivers are open and free of ice, the group will choose a good fishing spot, preferably on a lake, but possibly along a river's edge as well. This will be the summer campsite, and subsistence activities revolve around fishing and some local hunting. In late June the families travel down river to the trading posts to trade their furs and engage in a brief period of social interaction with the larger population, including the coasters. Sometimes only the men would go down river to the trading posts with their furs in late June, while the families stayed inland.[30]

[30] The main source of this information is the body of oral history used for this thesis. In addition, the cycle is discussed in Regina Flannery, *Ellen Smallboy: Glimpses of a Cree Woman's Life*, (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 1995), and in Tanner, *Bringing Home Animals*, and Morantz, *Ethnohistoric Study*, and Preston, *Cree Narrative*.

B. A Year in the Life: Details of the Cycle from Memory

Below is a recollection of one full year cycle of traditional activity for an Inlander family, around the turn of this century (ca. 1900). It is included here to paint a vivid picture of the experience of movement and mobility in the landscape during what might be considered a 'typical' year. This text demonstrates that the life-experience was traditionally one of nearly constant movement through the landscape. Mobility, referred to in the text as "shifting," meant the dismantling of the current camp, packing up belongings, and the whole family moving to another location where the wigwam (*micwap*) was re-erected using freshly cut poles.[31] From the family campsite, men would go off hunting sometimes for the day, other times for two or more days, depending on how far they had to go to find animals. If they killed animals several days journey from the family's camp, the animals would be left 'in situ' and the men would return to shift the group to the kill site to prepare the meat and hides.

John Blackned, the narrator, would have been about 69 years of age at the time of this recording. I have edited the transcript for length (by more than half); the text here retains the actual wording of the translation. In editing, I have concentrated on evidence of movement and mobility in the landscape, and the activities associated with them. I believe there is great value in letting the experience speak for itself, and it is extraordinary to have this experience so precisely preserved. It begins in late summer, and follows in detail the travels and activities of the group his family was hunting with through the full year.

> I'll tell you about what they've been doing up the Eastmain River – I wasn't a very big boy yet, not grown up. My father got his stuff here, from the Rupert's House store. After my father buys his grub here, the boat would take it to Eastmain. We used a canoe along the shore. And when we start using the canoe, the first camp would be the Pontax River. Sometimes my father used to set one

[31] "Shifting" is the term used by the Cree translator in all of the recorded data used in this study.

net there when we slept there. (Then) he start to go away to look for some ducks. Sometimes, when he goes for his net in the morning he kills thirty [fish].

Then we went straight ahead again. At Sherrick's Mount that's where we have our dinner when it's a fine day. And where we had our dinner, we go again after we get up to the old man who's killing fish. They only stayed there at his place for one day.

There was only that one man hunting by himself all the way to Eastmain. Then we wouldn't go right to Eastmain – stop and kill some more fish. We stayed there about a week – two days were very nice, two days were blowing. Then we were very close to Eastmain where we stayed. We only stayed two weeks there at Eastmain, so we beat it off from there.

When we left Eastmain the first rapids were about twenty miles up the river. We left Eastmain early in the morning, it was pretty near sunset when we got to the rapids. We got there and start to set the net right away – it's sunset already. Sometimes one of the seals will go that far – right up to the first rapids. Then my father was setting nets at that time and the water was splashing. At last I saw someone in the water. I asked my father, "Who is that?" "That's a big seal," he told me. They used to have the old [*musket*] rifle – my father killed the seal. We couldn't take it in our canoe right away – he was so big. We dragged it under the water with a line on him. Dragged it ashore. We expect twenty or twenty-five other people to come right there tomorrow. Where we took it ashore we couldn't cut it in the sand, just where there was some grass that's where we cut it.

Then in the morning when we went out to check the net we killed ten fish. By afternoon we could see the other families coming.

We stayed there one week... So when we start from there the whole bunch of us went up. The next camp we couldn't set the nets. We just stopped in the middle of the rapids. Just where they went ashore at the foot of a rapids – that's where we slept. They had to carry their canoes through the bush, couldn't work up the rapids. The long rapids – we could just make it up and we slept there again. The men managed to set nets then, a little further up.

The next morning we left – not far from there the river branched – some them went up one branch, some the other. Before they were leaving each other, there were about fifteen married men [and] the young men. And there were some more coming up the river. We managed to get up two more rapids that day. We didn't kill very much fish where the nets were that morning.

Next stop from there is a very nice place for setting nets —nice fishing. Where we slept, where it was very good fishing, my father killed ten fish – some of them killed more. Before we could get over the next rapids, it took us two days. Since we left Eastmain about three weeks ago ... We must have gone forty miles up the Eastmain River... (Way far ahead in my story – we're not going to be very lucky yet. I'll try and tell you all I remember what we did that year.)

We took off again in the morning. We didn't travel all that day – we stopped about 4:30 p.m. So we start to set nets. At that time our bunch was still six married men, counting my father. The one that took off on the side to the branch, eight fellows, eight canoes.

Just when the sun was about to set we went to see the nets. They killed fifteen fish (of different kinds) – white fish, jackfish, suckers, and others. Then in the morning it was still better. My father killed about thirty (different kinds).

As we traveled up the river – every time where we stopped and set nets right away. We always make (a tipi-type) tent – women's job in the evening was to gather those poles. We got up way far at last. Took as far as one month, maybe more to get up the river where they wanted to go. At last they could go as far as where they wanted to hunt for deer. Sometimes you couldn't set nets in the evenings.

By that time we started to kill beaver already. The first one a man kills he doesn't skin it, he puts it in a fire and singes it in the fire [out of respect to the beaver]. At this time they would sing and drum, too. After they singe it in the fire, they make a feast out of it.

At last we could go as far as where we wanted to hunt. Then they started trying to kill fish – my father put out four nets at one time, they use different nets inland, bigger nets (larger mesh). Then in the morning, my father killed lots of fish.

While that time – some of the men would kill beaver at the same time. When they were trying to hunt beaver like that they would use canoes on the river – two men to each canoe. They would go two or three nights away. When they came home they may bring five, some four, some three beaver. At last they are going to have a bad luck time.

[long segment diverts away from normal activity pattern, an unusual incident involving a woman who lost her mind, then died. The event progresses through a period described as 'quite a while'.]

It was just starting to get snow now and again in the fall that this happened. They only killed one bear after that, before the winter came. After the woman died, in about a few weeks time, it started to be winter. The men started to hunt then. They started to kill fish and rabbits and beaver. They did the same thing they had done before (not because of the trouble, but because winter is coming now – they are going to meet cold weather, that's why they do that.)

That time, everyone would call the snow "my grandfather" [a term of respect]. Then when they start to eat the singed beaver they put a bit in the fire [as an offering to the snow]. They thought the snow would be pleased and they could make a good hunt during the winter. Some of them were just killing their first beaver of the season. They start killing marten too at the same time. Some men would go for one night and bring back five martens at a time, there were so many. Killing lots of rabbits at that time. Where we passed in the fall, nearby there were lots of rabbits. After they put their nets under the ice, it was better to kill fish. Pretty near New Years Day by now.

From their path that fall, they could see a ridge - about twelve miles, that's where there were lots of rabbits. Then they shifted to that place. After they made their wigwam, the next morning, nine men and six boys (even some women) start to make snares. Next morning everybody went to his snares. When you snare like that you would see lots of paths when you were looking.

Then the families start talking about they are going to leave each other. The men left again hunting - after that they are going to leave the place. While they have been hunting they picked up all their nets and traps. The first ones they went - six men to hunt deer, with their families. Round about the first week of January. Where we shifted to there were not many deer but lots of rabbits. We started killing more rabbits, beaver too, my father killed quite a few. Sometimes when we were hunting, I used to work at the hooks too, myself.

Some places there were very good for fishing in the river. They shifted all of them, to the river, so even the women were trying to kill fish. So we didn't stay one week, we left there again. When we left that place it was in February, already. That was the first time that winter they had some grub ahead when they went to shift. Next morning we shifted from there.

After we got where we were going to make the tent, the men went out to hunt the rest of the day. My father killed a bear, the next morning we went for him. Lots of beaver in that place, where my father found the bear. At last we had good luck. Lots of rabbits and beaver. They were hunting marten too, at the same time. That was about the 15th of February.

When we shifted from there we didn't bother to kill any rabbits and beaver.

Some places, a kind of bluff like, where deer are supposed to be that time, that's where we went. After we got near there my father didn't go right to that place, he didn't see any sign of deer. We went to a near place. They were looking for partridges that evening. The next morning they went to the place where there were supposed to be deer. They saw signs of deer there. They saw fresh signs all around, but they couldn't find the path were they had gone off. It took three days to walk around to look for them. The signs they found looked like quite a few deer. At last they knew there were only five, from their tracks. Then the next day they went after them. They hadn't found even ½ of all that they saw the tracks of. Then they found the tracks of another bunch, about ten tracks. The next day they went again, to get after them. Where they killed them, it wasn't very close, so they had to shift to go where they are.

We had to stay there for a week to fix everything, trim the deerskins too. After they finished they went for some beaver, they found three houses and killed all the beaver. After they killed all those beaver they went ahead on a trail where they wanted to shift again. When they left to make the trail they said that they were going to come back the same day, but they didn't come back. Next day they came back with another family, their wives too. We didn't stay far from the coast that year, about forty miles maybe. So other families going inland we would meet them there. About the 5th of March at that time. These people stayed with us for about one month, hunting around.

When we shifted from there we looked for some more beaver to kill. Those men started up from the coast just made a loop inland and back down, so we just followed them. When there were many people together and they would find three beaver houses, or two, they would try to get after all of them the same day. If there were three houses, maybe they could get two in one day. Then the next day they would all go after the other house - the whole bunch of them. Then after they killed all the beaver in the three houses we shifted again. When they got there the men just worked at the wigwam part of the day, then they spread out and looked for partridges and beaver houses, and let the women do the rest of the work on the wigwam. When they move about like that, and shift, they would only stay in one place about three days. Sometimes they would stay more than three days so the beaver skins would have a chance to dry. As we move around like that we killed a few martens too.

At last as we moved along we came to a nice place for rabbits. Where they were, there was a path the coasters were going to go right down to Eastmain. Where my family had passed that fall was about 100 miles inland. [His father took his furs to the trading post at Eastmain.]

They started to go up to where they passed their fall that year. So they have to shift every day to go inland, because they had to get up where they had their canoes, that was in April already. So we kept on moving every morning. As we went up to the place where we spent the fall, now that's the place where they started to kill beaver. Where we turned back, we were way up about 100 miles already.

As they went up, they only found four (beaver) houses that day. That place we stayed for about a week, then we shifted. Next day we found two beaver houses. Next day we started to kill those two beaver houses. Of course we (also) killed marten, rabbits, etc. now and again. When we shifted from there we traveled all that day until we stopped in the evening. We didn't move the next day, the men started to go around. They found six beaver houses this time. My father found three himself, we couldn't get them from where we stopped, we had to go nearer to the houses.

Then we went as far as a good place for fishing, too. That day when we went to shift to the beaver house we managed to set three fishnets. They couldn't

go after the houses the next day, all they did was to set a trap for them. Then they went around and looked for partridges, that day, one of my uncles found a bear and killed it. Long spring that year, about 20th of April and not summer yet. Next day they had to go for the bear. After they finished with the bear they went for their traps. Then we went to check the nets again, while the men were out checking traps. Last time they went for their traps they brought five beaver home. Next day they left to look for some more beaver houses. They didn't return that day. The reason they didn't come back that day was that they found another Indian, pretty near starving, they found one man, his wife, and two sons and one daughter. The man told my father that there had been lots of them in the group that fall. The ones that were starving were hunting way up inland, 200 miles like. It's a different group from the ones who went up the other branch of the river when my father went up the other branch. So my father brought them home. [They had been having no luck hunting, and several people had starved to death. The larger group split up into three smaller groups and spread out to hunt. This family was one of the three groups]

The end of April, we had only at last some snow, so you could see only some little spots of ground. My father hunted geese then. He killed lots of fish that time. My father had a stand [blind] to kill geese that he set up. Then at last lots of geese came and they would get as many as twenty in a day. They only tried to keep on killing geese about ten days. Then all kinds of different birds would start coming, loons, ducks, and [others]. Early spring, the place where we passed our spring, the ice lasted a long time, so they could run around and shoot them. Only some years can you kill so many, some years not so many. Nearly the end of May at that time.

So after they killed the birds, in open water they killed beaver and otter. It was a long spring that spring, lots of ice yet, kept hunting fur until the end of May. After we set the beaver and otter traps in the water, we didn't go for them very many times. After five nights, they went again, they slept out two nights at that time. Another five nights, they went again. So we started killing nothing but fish now, making dried fish.

We were going to come down now pretty soon. Quite a ways where my father was hunting anyway, over 150 miles. That time my father quit hunting fur already, didn't try for any more that year. Just going to leave to go down the river, the man my father found killed a bear. So we went down, hunting at the same time. All we do, when we come to a place where we could kill a few fish is stop and kill some now and again. We didn't go very far in a day, it took us quite a while to come down. [When they got to the place where they had split up from the other group in the fall] we stayed for a day and the other people we stayed with that fall came to the same place. So at last we started from there to go down. We slept three times, then we got to Eastmain. [When we left to go to Rupert's House] we only slept once on the way. Then we arrived here at last. I started from here. (#34)

The near continuous movement through the landscape is clearly described here, with travel by canoe in late summer up the coast of the bay from Rupert's House to Eastmain and from there up the Eastmain River and its tributaries. Once the ground was frozen the group moved about on land with snowshoes and toboggans, going where they anticipated the animals would be as the winter season progressed. In early spring

activities were focussed on hunting waterfowl until the ice broke up. When the rivers were open again they traveled by canoe back down river to Eastmain, then to Rupert's House by late summer. They never stayed in one location for very long, shifting always to follow the animals on their own cycles of movement through the landscape.

This example is the most clearly articulated reference to the process of the yearly cycle, most stories deal with shorter segments of time and fewer aspects of the yearly round of activities. But there is a clear continuity through the overall body of oral tradition in this study, one that situates activities and experience in the context of the yearly cycle of movement through the landscape. And so it is within the context of this yearly cycle that the oral tradition is to be understood.

CHAPTER 4: REPRESENTATION: INTRODUCTION TO CREE ORAL TRADITION AND ITS APPLICATION TO LANDSCAPE

1. Cultural Representation

> Authenticity is not equal to historical accuracy; tradition is not equal to truth. Instead, authentic traditions express the integrity of their cultural form/structure. Any given cultural form serves as a bridge between empirical reality, human nature, and culture. The actual processes for this bridging are found, as Sapir told us, in the interactions of specific individuals, and on the subjective side, in the world of meanings which each abstracts for himself from these interactions.[1]

Oral tradition is information transmitted verbally from generation to generation. It is normally a crucial component in the cultural stability of non-literate societies because it encompasses the transmission of cultural knowledge, history, and beliefs. As such, it is a cultural form of representation, and can be anticipated to be reflective of the culture pattern and its associated perspectives on being-in-the-world.[2]

Eastern Cree oral tradition focuses on the interactions between persons in the context of the traditional subsistence-hunting life. From a large sample of oral tradition, a researcher can attempt to reveal abstract concepts and meanings that are not the literal content, or details of the "interactions" depicted, but rather are found in the *way* experience is understood and described.

2. Cree Oral Tradition

There are four general categories of oral tradition in Eastern Cree culture, each with a distinct temporal context. "*Atiukan*" are 'very old stories, long ago, nobody remembers those people.' They are thought of as legends. "*Tepaciman*" are more recent, including remembered persons, and are understood as historical. "Life histories" are the lifetime recollections of the narrator. Life history content may become *tepaciman* if

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[1] Preston, "Culture, History, Authenticity."

repeated by another person, while the person is still alive, or during the lifetimes of succeeding generations. "Songs," which are always present tense, are sung as part of an activity related to traditional hunting lifeways.

There is also a general tendency for the different types of stories to reflect different emotional perspectives on experience. Songs tend to express optimism, anticipation, joy, pride, and pleasure in the traditional hunting lifeway. For example:

> When I start walking I don't miss a step
> My balance keeps me steady.
> When I'm running I feel so light and happy
> I am sure that I will catch what I am chasing. (#176)[3]

In contrast, *tepaciman* are often very compelling in their rendering of times of hardship and starvation. One reason for this emphasis is that hardship was a very real and not infrequent aspect of experience; the educational function of these stories was to teach coping strategies and attitudes. In addition, the bulk of the stories in this collection were narrated by a man whose own life had perhaps more than a typical amount of hardship. It is conceivable that his own experience would influence the selection of stories he would choose to tell.[4]

Atiukan, or legends, often follow the same themes as *tepaciman*, but can incorporate the intervention of spirit persons, with the typical result of survival. I believe this represents a culturally inherent and necessary optimism, that somehow, despite the hardship, life goes on. Some stories are even humourous, satirical representations of experience.

Life histories are often closest in feeling to *tepaciman*, although they can also include the optimism of songs and the humour of *atiukan*. I think this is likely due to the

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[2] Preston, *Cree Narrative*, 13; Scott, "Science for the West," 74.
[3] The numbers in parenthesis following data excerpts refer to the index chart developed for this study. It is fully explained in Appendix 1.

fact that the narrator is talking about his or her own life, for which they have a vested interest in continuing with a hopeful outlook.

Due to the traditional demographic and social context, (few people over a large area) the regional variation discussed in Chapter 3 is also an aspect of oral tradition. One extended family group's experience throughout generations of traditional activity was concentrated on a particular environmental range. The content of their *tepaciman* and life histories would emphasize the experience of life in that area, although at larger gatherings of the population stories from other areas would be shared and learned. The "local" content is referred to in Berkes, et al. as a "micro-cultural tradition of knowledge of their territories. Other families, having only partially similar lands and life experiences, have somewhat different mini-traditions."[5]

3. Function and Context: the Role of Oral Tradition in Cree Culture

Cree oral tradition functions as a mode of transmitting traditional knowledge, of teaching values, exchanging news, and entertaining.[6] The stories themselves reveal the contexts of narration, such as feasts and social gatherings:

> Of course, everyone listened. The large wigwam was full of Indians. Finally, while he was singing, his words were, "I am shy to sing. If I was giving out deer meat, I would not be shy. If I had a large feast before me, I would not be shy to sing." All of the people said to him, "Don't be shy. Keep singing the songs." (#77)

> They put everybody's rabbits all together to make a feast. ...They also drum and sing at the rabbit feast, just the same as the beaver feast. They made a rabbit song and a bear song too, they eat the bear's meat at the same time. (#34)

In the evening "if there was nothing else to do,"

> We used to ask our grandmother to tell us these Indian tales... she would tell us these stories when she was not busy. Long ago, the old men and women told a lot

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[4] R.J. Preston, personal communication (April 1999)
[5] Berkes et al, "Cree View of Land," 7-8.
[6] Preston, *Cree Narrative*, 14-15.

> of these tales. ...Not only did the children listen, also the older people. It was like going to school today. These old tales were passed down long ago. (#33)

Another context is when greeting others, strangers and friends alike,[7] as demonstrated in the following segment of the adventure tale Iasoe, where the hero's helper warns him of the perils ahead:

> Then she told him that he had a long ways to go yet. There were three places he had to go by which were very dangerous. The first one was where there were people with very long legs to trap him. She said that they would tell him Indian stories until he went to sleep, and then they would trap him with their long legs. (#68)

A similar example of the deceitful use of cultural norms in a story is found in the epic of Mamiteo, when the hero's spirit-helper advises him that when he enters the wigwam of a group of strangers:

> They will tell you a story. In the story they will tell you, they will call you "brother," because they will try to convince you to stay with them. (#143)

In addition to being performed at feasts, songs were sung during the activity they were about. For example, the running song above would have been sung by the hunter while he was running in his snowshoes, chasing an animal.

> It starts when they start running and they sing it over and over again. (#143)

Another distinctive feature of hunting songs is that the performance is understood as a communication to the animal, one that influences its actions so that the hunter may succeed in killing it.[8] Unlike the other forms, songs are property, belonging originally to their creator, they may be given to others as gifts or inheritance.[9]

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[7] The truly remarkable thing about this is that it parallels the evidence in Homer of social norms for story telling in Greek culture three thousand years ago.

[8] Preston, *Cree Narrative*, 207.

[9] R.J. Preston, Field Notes.

4. **Authority and Credibility**

In order to be reasonably assured of the authority of a rendering of oral tradition, the ethnographer's selection of an informant, is (ideally) based on the recognition of the informant *by his own community* as an individual with an exceptional ability to remember and recite with great detail, information learned and observed in the past.[10] The primary informant for the data in this collection was such a person.[11]

In addition to the authority of the narrator, there is the question of internal credibility and authenticity in the content of individual stories. From the academic's point of view, the details of individual stories may be less important than the deeper patterns of interaction and understanding that they express. From the narrator's point of view, however, the details are of some interest, and he will on occasion make comments as to the reliability of the information. This may be in the form of the simple statement that he 'didn't see it with his own eyes, so (he) isn't too sure about it,' to a much more insistent, and even repetitive assurance that events truly were as described. This assurance might be on the basis of known individuals having seen the places or events described, and reinforced by the presence of his own family members at the original first-hand telling of the story.[12] For example, at the beginning of a story about the "Boss of the Deer," John states,

> I had a grandfather in Eastmain, I heard him telling this story...
> I remember a man who came to Eastmain, he told my father that he saw this area.
> I can remember him telling my father, although I was very small.
> [again after several paragraphs of the story:]
> This man who told this story to my father lived north of Great Whale.
> [and at the end of the story:]
> The man had said that he saw the area where the deer lived. [REPEAT]. This is a

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[10] Preston, "Culture, History, Authenticity," ; Preston, *Cree Narrative*, 5.
[11] To the extent that his home, one of the very few old buildings remaining in Waskaganish, is the only building to have been imbued by the Cree community with heritage status, and discussions are underway to preserve it. Comments made to me by Waskaganish residents indicate that John Blackned is seen as a sort of icon of tradition.
[12] Preston, *Cree Narrative*, 280.

> different Barren Indian [from the one] who told the story to my father...
> This is the story my grandfather's father when he saw this area. He saw this area where the deer lived in the mountain. Also, Peter Kitchen's father saw this area...(#77)

It is clear from his repeated emphasis on witnesses that it was important *to John* that this story be understood as "true."

5. Language and Translation of Cultural Difference

In the course of listening to the original recordings, the Cree version is very musical and animated, even incorporating gestures and sound effects; where the English translation can sometimes be quite flat. However, on occasion the translator, a Cree man of the same generation as the narrator, will become clearly engaged in the story, and his rendering takes on a lively quality as well. This quality of sound is lost in a written transcript, and it is important to remember that it is an inherent aspect of oral tradition. For the purposes of my study it does not appear to be a loss that detracts from the expression of landscape because the meaning I am finding is not narrated directly, it is embedded in the events and actions described in the stories.[13]

A more subtle issue is that of the ability of one language to represent ideas and meanings conveyed in another. Realistically we must expect some meaning to fall through the cracks and gaps when crossing cultural conceptual frameworks.[14] I believe that is why it is important to look at a large body of data rather than a small one, and to study the culture from as many other sources as possible to try to achieve a contextual

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[13] For a discussion on this see Julie Cruikshank, *Life Lived Like a Story: Life Stories of Three Yukon Native Elders*, (Victoria: University of British Columbia Press, 1990), 15-18.

[14] Beyond the obvious pragmatic concerns, this is also an ethical question: Trevor Barnes and James S. Duncan, "Introduction: Writing Worlds," in *Writing Worlds: Discourse, Text and Metaphor in the Representation of Landscape*, ed. Trevor J. Barnes and James S. Duncan (London & New York: Routledge, 1992), 7, and James Duncan, "Sites of Representation: Place, Time, and the Discourse of the Other," in *Place, Culture, Representation*, ed. James Duncan and David Ley (London: Routledge, 1993), 43-7, 54.

apprehension which can then be used (with great care) to fill in many of the conceptual gaps left by translated words.[15]

Some of the stories are literal representations of activities; those stories that do not seem literal *to me,* I think of as metaphoric from the position of my ability to comprehend. While I am perfectly comfortable with the existence of the types of interrelations between human, animal, and spirit persons, and with the understood abilities of various persons, I am still limited in my ability to fully comprehend meaning because I am not of that culture, with their *experience of reality.*[16] So my interpretation is necessarily from the position of an interpreter between cultures. I can do my best to interpret in the context of the knowledge I am able to gain of the culture, so I say the meanings I interpret *reflect* my knowledge, rather than assuming a position of authority and claiming that my interpretation is fully *representative of that culture.*

6. Variation Between Tellers of the Same Story

The comment that oral tradition content varies with each story teller is often heard, even in the recordings of this collection the narrator mentions it occasionally. At

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[15] Jan Vansina, "Oral Tradition and Historical Methodology," in *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*, ed. D.K. Dunaway and W.K. Baum (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1984), 104, states: "study of the oral traditions of a culture cannot be carried out unless a thorough knowledge of the culture and of the language has previously been acquired." Since very few non-Cree people have fluency in the Cree language, and fewer in the dialect and conceptual structures of East Cree, scholars normally rely on Cree translators to make the material accessible. Further, Vansina argues that the scholar can attempt to compensate for the inherent limitations of oral tradition by using additional reputable sources of knowledge. A critique of ethnographic gap-filling is offered by Roger M. Keesing, "Conventional Metaphors and Anthropological Metaphysics: The Problematic of Cultural Translation," *Journal of Anthropological Research* 41, 2 (Summer 1995): 202. He cautions that the process of "rendering the implicit explicit" provides opportunity for significant error in interpretation across cultures. But of course this is one of the long-term criticisms of ethnography as a whole, see Robert Aunger, "On Ethnography: Storytelling or Science?" *Current Anthropology* 36, 1 (1995): 97-130, and the invited critiques by his peers following the article.

[16] Vansina, "Oral Tradition," 106, indicates that this is also a temporal issue; experience varies over time as well as across cultures.

the same time there is no question of the endurance and persistence of particular stories, and their overall plots and themes. What are the implications of this for the researcher attempting to reveal meaning, particularly given that access to all versions is essentially impossible?

In the process of my analysis, I came across an example of two versions of the same story, *Iaseo*, and found that although the details are different, the meaning is consistent. The versions are as told by John Blackned to R.J. Preston, and as told by his brother Charlie Blackned to Brian Craik.[17] Throughout this epic-style adventure, the two renderings were reasonably consistent up until the final sequence. In the former, the hero Nekiishan transforms himself and his mother into birds – she into a robin and he into a bird of prey. He tells her she will live half the year (summer) here, and half (winter) where it is warm. In Charlie's version, Nekiishan transforms his mother and brother into birds and himself into a newt, stating, "I will live half of the time in the water and half on the land" (paraphrased). It is the same story, with the same motifs and events throughout, told to brothers by their grandmother when they were children, and recollected on separate occasions when they were old men. The ending in Charlie's version would be interpreted in the context of this analysis as significant in light of Nekiishan's experience of landscape leading up to that point – on land, on water, stranded on an island, back on water, back on land, under the snow, and finally setting fire through his conjuring power to both earth and water, before the pronouncement of intending to live in both. Now my interpretation of John's version would also recognize the transformation into a bird as a significant resolution to Nekiishan's journey through the landscape, and in fact, after burning the land and the water, the air seems a more likely place to choose – the only other option available. Considered together, the two

endings suggest that the point is that Nekiishan becomes a creature of two worlds. A newt lives in water and on land; a bird lives in the air and on land. The potential importance of this theme would not have been apparent to me without the knowledge of the second version. The duality is expressed in both versions - that is where the meaning lies; in terms of interpretation, perhaps the key is to recognize that these are both culturally representative patterns and motifs appropriate to the rendering of this theme.

This case demonstrates that individual variation between versions of a story does not necessarily threaten the integrity of the inherent meaning in the story. It does point to the importance of not reifying the specific details of any one version, but rather looking to interpretation as a way to reveal broader patterns of meaning. This observation is supported by the remarks of Sarah Preston in her study of continuity and truth in Cree oral tradition: "continuity, and therefore truth, lies not in a particular version of a story, nor in the credibility of events, but in the meaning of behaviour as it is illustrated by a story."[18] Her analysis demonstrates that it is not the events themselves that convey meaning, but that the nature of behaviour, or action that accompanies the events is understood as a referent to cultural continuity. Further, she notes that the real power of narrative tradition is in the narrator's "ability to evoke a shared imagery,"[19] one which reinforces the cultural ways of comprehending and acting in the world. This continuity is maintained even with individual adjustments to the details, because, as R.J. Preston analogizes, "traditions are like icebergs; we only see the tip, unless we delve deeper. We can reinvent the appearance of the tip fairly easily, but all that other stuff is

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[17] Brian Craik, personal communication (February 1999).

[18] Sarah Preston, "The Old Man's Stories: Lies or Truths?" in *Papers of the Seventeenth Algonquian Conference*, edited by William Cowan (Ottawa: Carleton University, 1986), 253.

[19] Sarah Preston, "Variation in James Bay Cree Narrative Themes," In *Papers of the Nineteenth Algonquian Conference*, edited by William Cowan (Ottawa: Carleton University, 1988), 158.

still attached, underneath."[20]

7. Introduction to the Study Data

When we talk about human landscapes, or cultural landscapes, we tend to think of the cultural imprint on places; the roads, buildings, monuments, cultivated plantings – all the signs and indicators of a cultural presence. But these kinds of built indicators are not a universal human expression. The East Cree landscape in the traditional context was un-built; it had no fixed built features, no managed vegetation. Dwellings were temporary, rarely in the same place for more than a few weeks at one time. Still it was very much a cultural landscape, with a different set of cultural indicators.

When we think about way-finding in modern Western culture settings, we think about roads, sidewalks, signposts, maps – our path is laid our more or less permanently and it comes with rules and instructions for interpretation, often physically attached. Movement and mobility are highly structured in our culture, and have a temporal quality of stability and predictability. I know with reasonable certainty that the roads I travel, even as *in*frequently as once a year, will be there when I go to use them again.[21]

For the Eastern James Bay Cree, the traditional experience of life and landscape was guided by the yearly cycle of climate change and its influence on the land and the animals living within it. Human movement and mobility were based on the ability to find, interpret, and follow the tracks of animal and human persons. These "roads" were highly unstable, unpredictable, and ephemeral, and their location was determined by the sequence of activities that were dictated by the effects of climate. This seasonal cycle

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[20] Preston, "Culture, History, Authenticity."

[21] In addition to these "fixed" paths, however, there is a body of research literature based primarily in environmental psychology dealing with how people (in western culture) move through unmarked landscapes.

then, provides the logical framework for the study and interpretation of Eastern Cree oral tradition when seeking the representation of landscape meaning. This study focuses on tracks as indicators of cultural activity and experience in the landscape, and how that experience is represented in oral tradition.

A. The Application of Grounded Theory: Coding Categories

In the first reading of the data I was looking for any reference to landscape. What I found was reference to topographic features, such as mountains and lakes; places indicated by name or as the site of some event or action; attributes, for example the ability of a place or feature to be animated by an external force; and activity of persons relating directly to the landscape. These categories, in retrospect, represent the imposition of my category concepts for landscape emergent from the Western geographical perspective. They focus on the physical aspects of the landscape. The second reading revealed broader thematic issues pertaining to landscape in addition to the descriptive categories (Table 4.1). These themes are integrated into the yearly cycle of activity and the cultural experience of landscape, and originate from a more informed and intuitive sense of the Cree perspective. They emphasize a conceptual level of representation from which the interpretation of meaning can begin. The present study emerges from, but does not represent all of the content of data indicated in Table 4.1, "Second Reading," section "B. Conceptual [Representation]," item "2. Seasonal activity / endurance / travel / place."[22]

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[22] For example, this study does not explore the theme of 'place' or other aspects of seasonal activity. The theme of tracks is one aspect of section B, item 2.

B. The Application of Content Analysis: Typologies and Tendencies

The intent of this research is to reveal meaning expressed in the data, an interpretive effort for which a numerically oriented analysis is inappropriate. However, an informal content analysis indicates general tendencies for certain types of

Table 4.1 Application Of Grounded Theory Procedure

First Reading: Initial Coding Categories
- Place
- Feature
- Attribute
- Activity

Second Reading: Emergent Themes And Patterns

Landscape is represented both descriptively and conceptually:

A. Descriptive
1. Place
   a. Named
   b. Site of action or event
2. Feature
   a. Topographic - fixed
   b. Cultural – temporary (i.e. tracks/trails)
3. Weather (snow/fog/storms)

B. Conceptual[23]
1. Seasonal change / changeability / independent agency
2. SEASONAL ACTIVITY / ENDURANCE / TRAVEL / PLACE
3. Multi-species perception / transformation / animal knowledge / communication between species / reciprocity

representation. The results provided here are not intended to be applied to the body of Eastern James Bay Cree oral tradition as a whole; they apply only to the data used in this thesis. Nonetheless, they are of interest when considered in the context of the interpretation that follows. Of the 195 items, 41 are *atiukan*, 66 *tepaciman*, 51 life history, 24 songs, and 45 general ethnographic information, often given in addition to,

[23] There is some overlap between A and B; place, feature, weather are all dealt with conceptually in the stories and are discussed not as isolated elements but as part of the systems of relations and activities that are the basis of the stories.

and in explanation of items belonging to the other four categories.[24] Some items include more than one type of information. Where this occurs, all types are counted (Table 4.2). The most useful aspect of these results is the demonstration that each type of story is well represented, with a sufficient number of examples to support the development of interpretation.

What is noticeable in all of these accounts is that the dominant landscape reference and contextual elements are the tracks and trails, with occasional reference to bodies of water (lakes, rivers, and their shorelines) but rarely reference to terrain or surrounding vegetation unless they are critical to the events of the story. In my mind's eye, I visualize tracks and trails on snow but with no peripheral context, as if it were all foggy. I think this emphasizes the criticality of tracks and trails as the most important part of this landscape of activity. Direct, literal reference to tracks and trails occurs in 60 of the 195 items. The broader theme of mobility, defined here as the activity of shifting the site of dwelling from one place to another, occurs in 47 of the items. Human movement through the landscape for purposes of mobility and hunting, both of which involve following and creating tracks and trails, is a theme in 143 of the 195 items (Table 4.2). From these tendencies, I think I can safely say that the experience of movement through the landscape is a dominant element in Eastern James Bay Cree oral tradition. Based on this finding, I have chosen to orient my interpretation and discussion around the references to tracks and their function as an analytical vehicle for revealing meaning.[25]

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[24] It is sometimes difficult to know if a story was historically considered to be an *atiukan* or *tepaciman*, as the criteria seem to follow more of a continuum than a decisive barrier between types: Preston, *Cree Narrative*, 288-9. The designation here was discussed with R.J. Preston, and set on the basis of his expertise.

[25] Tracks are discussed under the conceptual category of seasonal activity in Table 5.1.

Table 4.2 Content Analysis: Types and Tendencies	
Total Number of Items:	195*
Oral tradition types represented in the data	
Atiukan (myth):	41
Tepaciman (history):	66
Life History (of the narrator):	51
Hunting Songs:	24
General Ethnography:	45
Thematic occurrences related to selected aspects of item B2 in Table 4.1	
Tracks and Trails:	60
Human Mobility:	47
Human Movement through the Landscape: (for hunting and mobility)	143
*some items include more than one type of information	

C. Approach to the Interpretation[26]

I have identified several themes in the over all interpretation that are not mutually exclusive, a situation that poses a logistical challenge in the presentation of findings. The discussion is organized in a sequence (that is not hierarchical), where the themes overlap at the edges, as has historically been the nature of ethnographic analysis.[27] For purposes of discussion I have arbitrarily segmented and labeled the following themes in my interpretation (concentrating on landscape) on the basis of emergent patterns in the data:

- Multi-species perception of landscape
- Inter-species relations
- Representation of Water
- Representation of Land
- Representation of Mountains
- Representation of Climate

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[26] Use of the terms "theme" and "category" in the following discussion do not refer to specialized meanings associated with a particular research method. They are intended to be understood in their common forms.
[27] Preston, "Culture, History, Authenticity."

- Seasonal change / symbolic transformation
- Place concept
- Mobility / movement / tracks

A brief comment on the meaning and orientation of each theme follows, with the exception of Mobility / movement / tracks, which is the subject of Chapter 5.

Multi-species perception of landscape

In order for a hunter to be successful in actual practice, he must know the mind of his partner in the game – the animal he is pursuing. He must know how that animal moves about in the landscape, how he makes his decisions, what he *thinks* about the cues around him: essentially, the animal's construct of the landscape. This means that the Cree hunter achieves a multi-species perception of landscape.[28]

Inter-species Relations

The relationships between human, animal, and spirit persons is conceived as one of reciprocity involving communications and appropriate (and expected) respectful action. These activities are, of course, played out in the landscape, and are a fundamental part of how the landscape is experienced. In stories they are represented through inter-species marriages (between animals and between humans and animals), supportive familial relations (an animal assists a human through a struggle), and the (usually) supportive guidance of spirit helpers.

Representation of Water

This theme reveals more questions than answers, and is very intriguing. According to Flannery, the Cree traditionally did not swim.[29] The reasons for this are unclear, but surely include the simple fact that the water temperature was barely ever

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[28] Tanner begins to explore this in *Bringing Home Animals*, 136-7.
[29] Flannery, *Ellen Smallboy*, 23.

above freezing, so that hypothermia and drowning were real concerns.

Representation themes include the heightened tension of conjuring activity when on water, species transformations occurring in water, water as an impassible barrier except to the very powerful (spiritually); the nature of water as transformative (still/moving, frozen/semi-frozen/thawed, solid/liquid). Water is portrayed as a different realm, where strange things can happen.

Bodies of water are the only landscape features (aside from mountains) that are given as descriptors of topography when movement through landscape is discussed.

Representation of Land

Land itself is not mentioned in any of the stories. The surface for human and animal movement is either snow or sand (both hold tracks), or bodies of water. When moving about on land it is the track or trail that is mentioned as the landscape context.

Representation of Mountains

Mountains are the only land-based topographic features that are mentioned (with two minor exceptions: one incidence of a "bluff" or "ridge," and one of a "big rock"). They always play a specific role in the events of the story, like a topographic punctuation mark to emphasize the significance of the events.

Representation of Climatic Elements

In most stories the presence of snow is taken for granted unless otherwise specified. When it is mentioned, it is to clarify the characteristics of it (e.g., fresh, blowing) because of their significance to the events of the story. "Snow" in the abstract, was considered a "person," that is to say, respectful action towards it, in the form of an offering, might contribute to a hunter's success.[30]

[30] (Blackned, index #34, research data)

References to temperature are rare, and are expressed according to its influence on landscape. For example, the condition of water surfaces is sometimes given as a reference to the time of year (and therefore the temperature): 'at this time the river was open,' or 'it was break-up,' or 'the ice was just forming,' or 'the ice was very hard.'

Seasonal change / symbolic transformation

Transformation in stories may be reflective of the inherent change and transformability of some aspects of the landscape, particularly regarding the effects of climate. The most dramatic examples of this are the freezing and thawing phases of rivers, lakes, and tributaries, as water transforms from liquid to solid and back again. This particular transformation is of critical importance to the traditional experience of landscape, dictating the routes and modes of transportation and the availability of particular food animals.

In stories transformation typically involves the conversion of a human person into an animal person or vice versa, or a human into a cannibalistic monster. In some cases the conversion is literal, in others it is symbolic and related to conjuring activity, and in still others transformation is only implied. A person adopts the perspective of the species he or she becomes; that is, they now experience the landscape through the eyes and 'culture' of someone other than their original species-self.

Place concept

Place changes through time. "Place" is associated with activity; a certain person (animal or human) will be at a certain place at a certain time in the yearly cycle. The meaning of that place is inherent in the action occurring there at a particular time. The same location has a different place-association meaning when some other person passes through at a different time. It changes the character of the landscape experience. Therefore, place identity is temporal, a location for human and other interaction for a

limited time predicated on human survival in the context of the seasonal cycles of all participants in the landscape.

In this collection of over 195 items, there are no stories *about* places. All of the stories in this volume are about action. One possible explanation is indicated in Cruikshank's work with the Western Subarctic Athapaskans. Cruikshank found that her informants had a strong visual association with places and their associated stories, and in some cases needed to be in the landscape and able to see the places in order to tell the stories.[31] This may have been the case for the East Cree as well; the stories in this collection were all recorded indoors.[32]

There are no indications of places or features in the landscape having sacred meaning or possessing power. There are no places that should be avoided or are considered threatening. When extraordinary events occur and the location is mentioned, it is typically either on a body of water or a mountain. The extraordinary character is associated with a person (either a conjuror or spirit person) who charges the location with their power for the purposes of manipulating the activity occurring there.

Specific places are not generally identified in the context of ordinary events with one notable exception: the place where they leave the canoes in the fall, when they move inland to hunt for the winter. It is an important place, a focus of social activity and the symbol of the beginning and ending of the winter hunting season. The topographical location is not the important factor in the attribution of place-meaning, rather it is the activity and social significance that define it as a "place." I have not encountered any other examples of this type of attribution being specifically mentioned in the stories.

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[31] Julie Cruikshank, "Words Right," 57.
[32] The themes of stories from the toponomy study in Whapmagoostui are consistent with those in this body of data, with the addition of specific place associations.

1. Introduction: Mobility, Movement, and Tracks

I have chosen this theme as the focus of my detailed discussion because it is the one pervasive element in the traditional Cree experience of landscape. There are sub-themes within this discussion, and again, they are not mutually exclusive, nor are the excerpts from the data representative of only one theme at a time. They are organized here, as above, into arbitrarily defined categories and labels, on the basis of the patterns that emerged from an intensive study of the data.

> **Sequence of Themes**
> **in this Interpretation of**
> **How Tracks are Portrayed in Cree Oral Tradition**
>
> 1. Introduction
> 2. The Yearly Cycle's Affects on the Movements of People and Animals
> 3. The Nature of Movement Cycles and Patterns
> 4. Tracks: Function and Meaning
>   A. Tracks as Maps
>   Directional and locational information, and the psychological impact of "lost"
>   B. Tracks as Language
>   Information about the character of activity as indicated by tracks
>   Evidence: degrees of complexity
>   Confirmation of events
>   Dreams and metaphors
>   Intentional communication
>   Conduit (for transmission of power or knowledge)
>   C. Tracks and Temporality
>   Evidence of past events, and anticipation of future events
>   D. Tracks and Cultural Values
>   Endurance
>   Competence
>   E. Summary: Tracks as an Indicator of Culture in the Landscape

The discussion begins with an overview of the yearly cycle and its influence on the movement of humans and animals in the landscape. The nature of mobility and movement are described, followed by the detailed presentation of the data on tracks according to their role in the experience of landscape.

How do tracks reveal cultural meaning in the experience of landscape? They represent experience at a micro-scale, and the way the experience is described contains the meaning, like a code (Figure 5.1). Because tracks are only one aspect of the total

experience of landscape represented in the oral tradition, it is difficult to try to put a summary meaning to the data on tracks alone. They have to be understood in the context of the complex relations occurring in the landscape between its component parts, especially between human persons and animal persons (who are understood to be part of the landscape), and the dynamics of their interaction being influenced by the effects of climate. I anticipate that such an understanding could be achieved by integrating the interpretation on tracks with those themes briefly described in Chapter 4.

Figure 5.1 Overlapping snowshoe tracks of two people. (Author)

2. The Cycle's Affects on the Movements of People and Animals

The Cree experience of landscape was based on mobility within the context of the yearly cycle of change in the natural environment. The cycle is driven by yearly weather patterns, which dictate the conditions of the land surface, thereby placing very real constraints on the direction, location, and extent of both human and animal movement and mobility. In the historic context, mobility occurs specifically for the purpose of getting food to survive on; human mobility entails the tracking of animals for food. The landscape indicator of movement and mobility, or the physical manifestation of activity in the landscape, is tracks (Figure 5.2).

Each species has its own cyclical movement patterns; a route of travel by which its members acquire the resources they need to survive. Individual resources are available in

specific places at particular times within the yearly cycle, dependent largely on the conditions of weather. Each 'person' (human and animal) is moving at the same time, overlapping in the landscape, and creating a pattern of intersecting layers of movement. The points of intersection are opportunities for interaction; if a hunter knows the cycles of different animals, he will know where to meet them to engage in their traditional subsistence roles.[1] Some animals are more predictable than others, and variables such as irregular climate or improper action on the part of a hunter, may cause the interruption of the anticipated presence of animals.[2]

Figure 5.2 Mink Tracks. (Author)

For the human hunter, movement oriented toward accessing animal resources for food and the additional materials they may provide was near continuous, for once an area is harvested, they must move on to the next. From the references in the oral tradition, it appears that such an area might consist of the amount of land traversable on snowshoe within two to three days walk. Once that area had been trapped, the family group moved on to the next adjacent area. This may be once every few days if there is a shortage of animals, or every few weeks if they are very successful.

This winter shifting pattern is limited to the period when the ground and waterways are frozen, providing a stable surface to move about on. Because so much of the landscape is muskeg (swamp), when it is thawed it is nearly impassable.

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[1] R.J. Preston, "Relation Sacree" (translation TMs).
[2] R.J. Preston, "Getting to Know the Great Community of Persons," in *Papers of the Twenty-eighth Algonquian Conference*, edited by David H. Pentland (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba, 1998).

> There were four men hunting around at one place. At last they couldn't travel anymore when they're shifting now and again through the spring, because the snow melts all the way in the spring. So they went for their canoes when they couldn't move around any more [on land]. That's where they passed that fall, where the canoes are. (#79)

In addition, in spring and fall when the waterways are either forming ice or the ice is breaking up, they are also impassable. This puts considerable restraints on movement in the larger landscape. The edges of rivers and lakes are typically well drained, and not swampy, so they provide a suitable place to camp for the non-winter season. A lake may be preferable because of flooding that can occur along rivers.

Because of the constraints on mobility during freeze-up and break-up, these are traditionally times of starvation. At these times, the surfaces of rivers and lakes are unstable and dangerous to attempt to cross on foot, or by canoe. Likewise, in the winter, if there is an unseasonable thaw and then a sudden re-freezing of the snow, glaze-ice forms on the ground surface and neither humans or animals can move about, and even animals may starve to death.[3]

The difficulty of moving about in an unfrozen landscape (late fall – later than normal freeze-up) is described in this excerpt:

> The ice was not freezing, not even during the night. There was no frost in the mornings. The large rivers, creeks, and small streams did not freeze, only had specks of snow. We had to make bridges across the creeks. I spent a week making bridges as we were trying to go to a lake. The lake was not far, but building the bridges took a lot of time. I was alone when I was leading the way. Finally, there was a lot of snow, but the rivers were not frozen. I had to start wearing snowshoes. It was not very easy. (#151)

When the creeks and rivers are finally frozen, and there is a good snow cover over the landscape, movement on foot becomes possible, and the hunter can go wherever he needs in pursuit of food. In a particularly intriguing comment, John Blackned gives an insight into the importance of snow in the winter cycle of activity:

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[3] R.J. Preston, personal communication (March 1999).

[At] that time, everyone would call the snow "my grandfather." Then when they start to eat the singed beaver they put a bit in the fire. They thought the snow would be pleased and they could make a good hunt during the winter.[4] (#34)

"Grandfather" is a term of respect used by persons of all kinds in the East Cree oral tradition. When a person (animal, human, or spirit) has the role of special helper to another person, they are often referred to as "grandfather," and the recipient as "grandson." Likewise, if a person hopes to engage another as their helper, they may address them in this way. It does not have to be interpreted literally as a familial term, rather the emphasis is on respect and deference to the senior person's greater wisdom and ability, and on the appropriate humility of the recipient. The reference to snow in this manner indicates that it was also regarded as having personhood to the extent that it was to be respected, and that proper gestures of deference could influence its willingness to be helpful to the hunter.[5] If the condition of snow is favourable, tracks will be readily visible (Figure 5.3), and travel on snowshoe will be made easier. If however, the snow blows continuously, or melts too quickly, tracks will be lost, and travel is complicated. Without tracks to follow, the hunter cannot know where to find animals for food.[6]

Figure 5.3 Fresh rabbit tracks in the snow. (Author)

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[4] "At that time" was around 1900, when John was a child.

[5] The personhood of snow is confirmed by Harvey Feit, "Hunting and Metaphors," forthcoming.

[6] Additional insight is offered in the following comment from Brian Craik, who recorded oral tradition with John Blackned's brother, Charlie. "In one of Charlie's accounts he told me that the people used to say that sound of the crust of snow falling in the spring as the sun rotted the underlying layers was the sound of our collective grandfather [*schicuuomshuuminiw*] being burned back [*ehchiïweyaksot*]. This was a good thing as it was a sign of the more relaxed, less exigent times to come. Similarly in the fall people would speak of the first snow as the arrival of our

The yearly cycle of activity, then, is guided by the changing weather patterns and their influence on the land and movement patterns of animals and humans. The characteristics of these movement patterns are discussed in the following section.

3. The Nature of Movement Cycles and Patterns

As previously noted, *mobility* refers to movement for the purpose of shifting the site of dwelling from one place to another. Mobility through the winter is frequent, and is motivated purely by the need to access animal resources for food. Additional movement through the landscape revolves around hunting and subsistence activities.

The pattern of human movement and mobility was described in Chapter 3; in the present discussion attention is on the *nature* of movement cycles. The hunter's cycle of movement is designed to intersect with the movement cycles of the animals he relies on for his living.

In John Blackned's recollection of his own life experience in the bush, he gives an indication of the extent of his family's mobility during his childhood:

> We must cover about 200 [walking] miles traveling during the winter. We only stay on one area for three or four days, then we moved again, as there was no food. If we had a lot of meat such as killing ten caribou, then we would stay in the area longer. (#18)

He also gives a sense of the extent of local movement patterns associated with hunting activity:

> The men leave their wives in order to hunt. Sometimes they would be out for one night, three nights and sometimes ten nights if they are trying to trap beaver. [or follow caribou as described above.] (#18)

> The women don't do much walking compared to the men. The women don't go very far from the wigwam. The men are always busy, they have to break a trail

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grandfather. This was not a bad thing, it just was a reminder that the cycle of life was starting again, the game was afoot, the details of the tradition would become important to survival of another cold season." Personal communication (January 1999).

> whenever they hunt. It is very cold. They always hunt no matter how cold it is. They have to try to hunt as they have no meat. (#1)

The knowledge of animal movement cycles and patterns informs the hunter's strategies for where to anticipate finding tracks, and how to go about trapping the animals. Some animals are migratory, such as caribou and moose; bears hibernate in winter, so their "track" is the breathing hole of their den. Other animals move about within a small region, and may be available at some times over the winter cycle more so than at others. This excerpt illustrates the seasonality, or periodic aspect of the availability of marten (Figure 5.4):

> Sometimes we were able to bring home two marten. Sometimes we would spend the night out. I think we were able to kill over twenty that winter, although we could not see their tracks very much. In the months of January and February you could hardly see their tracks. By April, we were able to see a lot of marten tracks. Again in the fall, we used to see a lot of marten tracks. (#128)

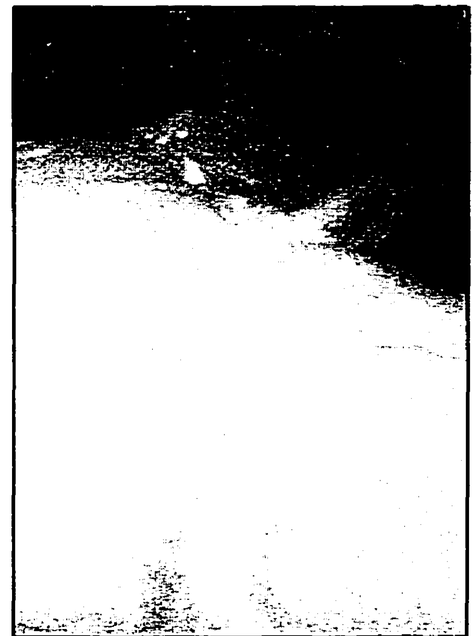

Figure 5.4 Marten tracks.(Author)

Woodland caribou tend to travel in small herds, and when moving through heavily treed areas they walk in a line, along a trail. Knowing this, hunters use the caribou trail as the place to set their snares:

> Well after they are finishing making their snares, as many as they want to, well they make it right in the deer track. Usually the deer has one big track and it's coming there, well one would go where the deer is, and chase them this way. And when the deer goes to the same tack, where those snares are, they are sure that they will get the deer. (#96)

> The snares would be over a deer's tracks....One time he snared forty deers. He knew there were a lot of deer (*from their tracks*). He would set a lot of snares all over the deer's tracks. He snared forty deer in one day. Some of the snares, he was able to snare two deer. (#31)

A similar strategy works for setting lynx snares:

> And sometimes the lynx would go back on the same track, sometimes three times, sometimes they just run around (in circles). And they made a snare

> where the lynx tracks were, and he got in the snare....A lot of people used to do that, the lynx would go in a circle, and they would put their snare there. (#96)

Movement and tracks are inextricably linked – one implies the other. Movement creates tracks, following tracks requires movement. Movement is the basis of human experience of the landscape, and tracks are the spatial sign, or indicator of that experience.

4. Tracks: Function and Meaning

Tracks function as a sort of peripheral vision. Through them, news of what is going on around you can be had without seeing the events themselves. The stories emphasize the winter hunting experience – most refer to tracks and trails in a snow-covered landscape context. During the time of year when there is no snow, the primary hunting activities are fishing and hunting geese and other waterfowl. Neither of these requires following tracks.[7] The one exception to snow as the medium for retaining tracks is sand. Sand has similar qualities to snow, it consists of small granules that are very pliable, and the tracks left in it are just as ephemeral as those left in snow – wind and water can remove all trace in a very short time.

The following interpretation and discussion of the data pertaining to tracks is organized into a sequence of themes that, while not mutually exclusive, seem to be the most representative of the different ways that tracks are incorporated into the stories. When more than one theme is present in an excerpt, I have placed the piece in the section that best addresses the issues I am attempting to articulate. The themes are: tracks as maps (wayfinding), tracks as language (degrees of complexity, confirmation of events, dreams and metaphors, intentional communication, conduits of transmission),

[7] (Blackned, index #34, also cited in chapter 3 of this thesis.)

tracks and temporality, and tracks as a carrier of cultural values (endurance and competence).

Figure 5.5 Fox tracks in the forest. (Author)

A. Tracks as Maps

At the most basic level, tracks are maps. They provide directional and locational information. As each person moves through the landscape they leave tracks which will serve as a map for those who seek them. It was traditionally believed that if an animal was willing to be killed, it would allow the hunter to see its tracks.[8] The inability to find tracks puts extreme pressure on a hunter, because the energy required to break trail through virgin snow is substantial. It is considered analogous to blindness, for if you cannot see, you cannot find food. The presence of tracks assures that someone is ahead (Figure 5.5). If a direction is chosen without tracks to guide a hunter, his energy will be expended at a much greater risk than if there are fresh tracks to follow. Tracks are the most critical aspect of knowing where to go.

Most typically it is the human hunter following the animals tracks for the purpose of getting food for his survival. The relationship was traditionally understood to be one of mutual awareness, affection, and reciprocity between the human hunter and the animal, and one of humility on the part of the hunter.[9] Variations on the relations involved in hunting or following tracks include people following people in times of crisis,

[8] Preston, "Cree Imagery Regarding Animals." (1981)
[9] Preston, *Cree Narrative*, 207, 227.

or in acts of hostility, and animals following human tracks.

Sometimes this information is convoluted, as when there are many sets of overlapping tracks (Figure 5.6):

> The next morning they went to the place where there were supposed to be deer. They saw signs of deer there. They saw fresh signs all around, but couldn't find the path where they had gone off. It took three days to walk around to look for them. The signs they found looked like quite a few deer. At last they knew there were only five, from their tracks. Then the next day they went after them. (#34)

Figure 5.6 Partridge tracks wander all around, making it difficult to follow their direction. (Author)

With effort and skill, the hunters were able to unravel the clues and discover what direction the deer had gone.

In this story, two brothers are out hunting when their wives see a group of enemy Indians called *Nottaways* (from the south along the Nottaway River) approaching their camp. For help in this crisis, the women must follow their husband's tracks:

> The old man told his daughters-in-law to follow their husbands' trail as their husbands could not have gone very far. The women started running, following their husbands' trail as they were frightened by the Nottaway Indians....At last, the women were yelling for their husbands as they were following their trail. Finally the two men heard their wives calling from behind. The men stopped and started running back on their trail. (#2)

The trail tells the women exactly where to find their husbands. Consider the outcome of the same scenario without snow, and therefore without clear tracks.

In another story, a man discovers he is being followed because of strange tracks following along his own trail:

> While the old man was out hunting, he came back to his trail and saw that the Nottaway Indians were following his trail. (#3)

Alternative forms of mapping and way finding are scapulimancy and scrying. The former involves the use of the scapula, or shoulder bone of the animal species a hunter wishes to find. On it are marked the campsite, landmarks, and major topographic features,

> then heat it and talk to it and see where the tracks go – it looks like tracks there, and if they lead to the camp then they will find deer where the track goes, but if the track doesn't lead to the camp, they won't find them even if they look for them. #120

Scrying (or seering) involves the use of a mirror, bowl of water, or other reflective surface. The seer gazes into the surface and sees images of the landscape directing him to those he seeks. In the following example, a surveying party of white men had gone missing en route between two trading posts. Winter had set in and they had no snowshoes or other winter gear. They were not experienced in hunting or survival in the bush.

> The manager was from an area where Indians lived ([he was a] half-breed). He was very interested in people conjuring and people who looked into a mirror seeing other people. One of the Whitemen was a very important man. They did not know where these Whitemen were surveying land.
> The manager decided to ask a conjuror to see if he could see them. He had seen a man conjuring also seering. He wanted to find out where they were. ...
> ... The old man was able to seer the men. He said to the manager, "they are all still living. I cannot see [any] food. I can see something sitting on a plate. It looks like a piece of wood that was boiled. It also looks like white moss, too." (#111)

The manager asked the old man to take a rescue party out to find the surveyors, and

> After two days, they still weren't there, and the old man looked again (in the mirror) and he saw that they were very close. He said they would come to a lake and right across the lake was where the Whitemen would be camped, and they were still all alive. This old man had never been in this area before. So they went on, and they came to a lake and across it they saw the Whitemen. They went around and they saw the trees where the men had got the bark off.... (#111)

That the conjuror had never been there before is stated as a validation of his scrying ability, that he was able to find his way without physical tracks on the land and to know

where features were (such as the lake). In addition, the physical tracking activity of recognizing where the bark had been removed from trees validates the alternative tracking activity in which the conjuror had seen that the men were eating boiled tree-bark and moss to survive.

Just as the presence of tracks guide movement in the landscape, a loss of tracks is equal to a loss of direction: no map. Tracks are not permanent, their presence is dependent on the type of ground surface, so that in snow melt or fresh snowfall tracks are lost (Figure 5.7). If there are no tracks, the hunter has no clues as to where to find animals for food, or where to find other humans. If you cannot find food for long enough, you will starve to death.

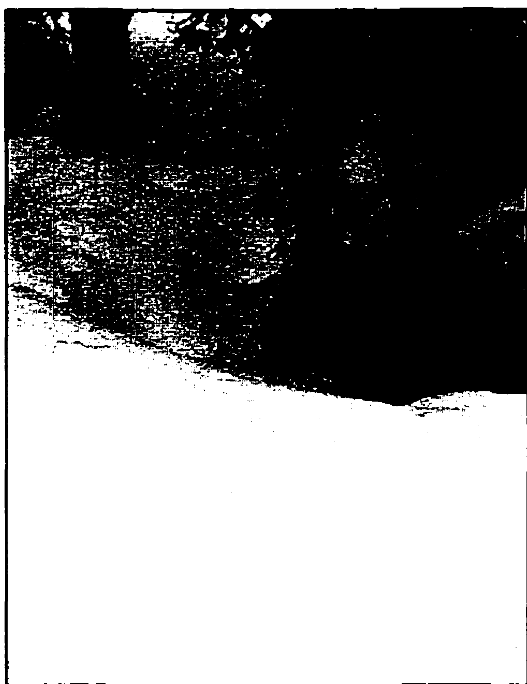

Figure 5.7 Moose tracks, about two weeks old, with fresh snowfall on them. (Author)

The word 'lost' is a very potent one in this landscape of temporary maps, and given the importance of wayfinding, it is significant that there are no references in this collection to individuals finding themselves in a situation of being lost (as in not knowing where they themselves were). There are, however, stories where a person becomes lost to those seeking them. When there are no tracks, it is the information about where another person is that is lost.

The psychological impact of losing someone's tracks is illustrated in the following two examples, and in a third in the final segment of the interpretation. The first was an

historical event (*tepaciman*) in which the narrator's brother perished in a gun accident.[10] The three brothers were out hunting, and one did not return that night. People were concerned that he may have drowned in the rough water along the shore where his tracks were last seen.[11] One of the brothers decided to go looking for him the next morning:

> I decided to go where I saw his tracks [the day before]. (REPEAT). I thought, "his trail will be visible if he went to visit the other group." When I reached the area where I saw his tracks, I followed them. His trail led to areas where the ground was still visible [*and therefore you wouldn't leave tracks*]. Finally, I could not see his trail; I was very surprised. (REPEAT). I did not see his trail again. I hesitated what to do. I decided to walk along the shore, in case he had fallen in. I continued to walk along the shore. The snow was very soft. I started to walk where the rocks were very slippery. Then, I saw something partly buried in the snow. (#133)

When the tracks are lost, so is the information about his brother. He is at a loss, and his discomfort is understated by the word "surprised." In all likelihood, "very surprised" should be read as 'deeply worried' and 'shocked'. This kind of worry turns to panic when a child disappears during a fire, the mother is frantically looking for the child's tracks and cannot find them:

> The woman followed the trail as she thought that the older child could have ran away as she could have been scared of the fire. She could not see her tracks. The woman had told her to run out of their wigwam starts burning, also to drag her young brother out. Since she could not see her tracks, she looked for her on top of their clothing and bedding on the cache, there she found one of her children. (#26).

These excerpts illustrate the importance of tracks as the way to find someone, and the loss of tracks is nearly equivalent to having lost the person. It is portrayed in the stories as a source of great anxiety. The intensity of this is perhaps best depicted in the *atiukan* (legend) of The Birds that Flew Away with People, which is discussed later as a

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[10] The gun had fired when the man had not intended it (accidentally). Apparently a common accident caused by forgetting to remove the "percussion cap from the musket." Preston, *Cree Narrative*, 184.

[11] Historically, the two main causes of accidental death were starvation and drowning. Accidental injury and death by weapons and tools was not uncommon. R.J. Preston, personal communication (April 1999).

story that incorporates most of the themes identified for this study.

Not to be able to find animals is likened to being blind, for if you cannot see, you cannot follow tracks. So it is understood as extraordinary for a man who is literally blind to be able to successfully get his living as a hunter. In the story of The Old Man who was Blind and Married his Own Daughter, we are presented with such a case.

> Many men asked for the hand of his daughter but of course, he would not let her go because he was blind. Many people came to visit him, but he did not seem to know who they were. He was very capable of hunting. (repeat). Finally he married his own daughter. Of course, he was capable of hunting and killing beaver even though he was blind. He also caught a lot of fish. He made snowshoes. Of course he was completely blind. (repeat) He made everything as if he was able to see just like in his younger days when he was able to see. He also could kill a bear. He acted as if he could see, as he would head straight for the sight of the bear. ...he could kill everything, such as marten, beaver, bear and even travel all about. Also he was very capable of getting water during the winter besides fishing during summer and winter. When he killed a bear, he was very sharp. He found his way by using a stick and this way he seemed to sense his path. He was always the leader even if his daughter was with him. (#108)

That the old man was able to sense tracks in the snow, which is soft, with a stick implies exceptional – to the extent of beyond human – ability. This is compounded by the fact that the information a hunter interprets from tracks goes far beyond the simple existence of an impression in the snow going a particular direction. The clues as to the characteristics of the person who left the tracks are subtle and require great visual and interpretative skill, which is the subject of the following section.

B. Tracks as Language

Tracks are language in the landscape. The signs by which the hunter knows who he intersecting with in the landscape are tracks left in the snow. Primarily footprints, tracks also include evidence of vegetative browsing and damage, as well as fecal remains. Tracks convey a vast amount of information: who is ahead, where they were and where they are going, what their condition is, how many there are, how long ago they were

here, how old they are, how fast they are moving, how heavy and how big they are by their footprint size and spacing of steps. Without seeing the person themselves you can know them by their tracks. It is the central way of knowing who is in the landscape with you. This applies to all the 'actors' moving about in the landscape, including other humans, animals, spirit persons, and *atooshes* (cannibal-monsters). It is a matter of skill, for in a culture where life depends on hunting success, the young learn early in life how to read the language of tracks.[12]

> For East Cree, the typical activities have traditionally been associated with hunting, particularly in the steps of finding traces of animals and approaching to within range for making a kill. These steps may take the bulk of time and careful concentration, with the actual killing as a swift and practical final step. I suggest, then, a strong emphasis and value on hunting-by-clue, or tracking (Brown and Watkins 1978) with an attitude of playing (Preston 1975). Much of this is playing with looking, and building visual images on the basis of actually seeing rather little.[13]

Evidence: Degrees of Complexity

The excerpts in this section demonstrate an increasing level of complexity in the amount of information that can be gathered from reading tracks. At a very basic level, tracks tell you *who* you are going to meet up with:

> Then I noticed someone's tracks, it was eating trees. I thought it must be a porcupine which the Indians call an animal. Finally, I saw it. (#27) (Figure 5.8)

Figure 5.8 Evidence of porcupine browsing - they eat the bark off of trees. (Author)

Tracks can also reveal *how many* there are, and *what their condition is* as they move onward:

> There was another man who was hunting in the area. While he was out hunting, he saw their

[12] Preston, "Cree Structure of Knowledge," 300.
[13] Preston, "Cree Imagery." (1998)

> fresh trail. He followed them. As he was following them, he noticed that the one man had stopped walking and noticed he was being pulled on a sled. Finally he saw another man's tracks disappearing. He knew there were three men, hunting together. Then he noticed that all three men were unable to walk. Finally, all he noticed were tracks of three women. Then he saw smoke from a fire. He went towards it. He did not see a wigwam. The people had made a shelter where they were all sitting. He went up to them. All of them said to each other, "Look." (#29)

All of this information about the diminishing strength of the men, and that they were being pulled on toboggans by the women is interpreted by reading the tracks. It is not until they have stopped moving that he actually sees the people, and their condition is confirmed. When the people say to each other, "Look," it is a powerful, and highly understated remark. They are saying, "Look, we are not going to starve to death because someone has found us."

Tracks as confirmation of circumstances will be discussed later in this text with additional examples, as will the issue of endurance in a life pattern of continual movement for survival. For the present discussion on the amount of information retrievable from tracks, it is important to note that in the above excerpt the man did not speculate about what had happened to the group. He was working with the knowledge that he could see before him in the tracks.

In the next example, speculation about events not indicated in the content of tracks proves incorrect. The Story of a Lion is a rare example of animals hunting humans.[14] In it, two brothers seek to kill the lion that killed their father, and in the process they kill many lions, all of whom come to the young men's tent by way of following their tracks.

> And not too long after, again, another one came to their tent. And sometimes they used to see tracks when they were out. They could see the lion

[14] " 'Lion' is the term applied by the H. B. C. Store manager to the description of the strange and unusual animal killed by George Gilpin's grandfather. No necessary identity with African Lions is to be implied in the use of the term." R.J. Preston, notes in transcript. We do not know what kind of animal is actually being referred to.

> tracks following their own tracks, when they were coming back to their tent. Their father used a bow and arrows to get rid of them. And before he got rid of the lion, the lion got rid of their father. (#70)

After killing many lions, their *Mistabeo's*, or spirit helpers, warned them against excess, that if they were not careful the lions would kill them. The following segment adds to what can be known for certain by the tracks, as two brothers speculate about the events they expect will occur on the basis of the tracks they find. One day they went to visit an old man, and

> when they went to see the old man, they came to the old man's tracks first. He was moving someplace else [*shifting*]. The *Mistabeo* had told these brothers, "You won't notice any lions any more for quite a while." There were lion's tracks near the old man's tracks. The lion had been going the other way. He wasn't following the way the old man was moving. And he said to his brother, I guess this lion already killed the old man." He told his brother, "We'll go this way anyway, where the people went." They didn't follow the track too long, they saw where the lion's track had come up to the man's track. And he said to his brother, "I guess they are still living, I guess the lion didn't get them yet." And he said to his brother, "We should hurry to follow the old man there, so we can hurry to make a tent when we catch up to him. The lion will come back, after he comes to the old campsite where the old man has moved from." (#70)

It turns out that they were incorrect in their initial assumptions, and this may simply be because they were anticipating more than the tracks could reveal. As in the previous example, all of the interactions and events encompassed in this excerpt are indicated by tracks. At no time in this sequence of activity do the brothers see the lion or the old man.

<u>Confirmation of Events</u>

In many cases the information interpreted from tracks is used to anticipate events. Here the accumulated information provided by tracks is sufficient to reveal the full circumstances, so that the tracks function as confirmations of circumstances and actions. By careful examination of all clues, and by not jumping to conclusions with only partial information, a child's bizarre behaviour is confirmed as *atoosh*. An *atoosh* is a cannibal, a former human who has gone insane, lives alone in the bush, has become hairy and lice

infested, and eats human flesh. It is perceived as a threat to social stability; once a person has eaten human flesh they become an *atoosh* to some extent, and will continue to eat that way. The Eastern Cree view of this is well illustrated here:

> There was a man and his wife, hunting around for their living, and one day he came to a lake, and while he was there he saw a little boy run down to the ice and drink some water from a hole there. Then, after the boy ran back up, the man went down to see his path. He saw his tracks, and he saw that the boy had no shoes, even though it was in the snow, and winter. Then the man went to the hole in the ice where the boy was drinking, and he saw some blood there. So he went up the trail and he saw a tent there and he didn't see any tracks of old people near the tent. He went right inside, and he saw the boy there, and right away the boy tried to fight him. But the man didn't do anything to the boy right away, he looked around and saw the mother there, dead. The boy had eaten from her breasts, quite a lot of them. The man figured the boy's father must have starved out, and he figured this boy would be an *atoosh* if he grew up. So he killed the boy. (#65)

It is by tracks that the man begins to piece together the circumstances of this situation. First, the boy is exhibiting disorderly or irrational behaviour by going barefoot in the winter, a situation made more bizarre by the blood left where he was drinking from the lake. Blood is a track that should not be left; animals do not like to see their blood. Normal practice was to cover over the blood-saturated snow where an animal had been butchered. It was believed that if animals saw such blood left exposed they would be displeased and leave the area, thus making a food shortage and hardship for the hunter.[15] So it was as part of a reciprocal relation that the human respectfully removed the traces of blood from sight. Given this social context, the blood left exposed at the drinking hole is a 'track' or trace interpreted as an additional indication of irrational activity. This is compounded by the lack of adult tracks outside the tent, which suggest a further estrangement from the normal conditions one would expect to find when children are present. The picture is by now very suspicious and only awaits confirmation when the tent is opened.

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[15] R.J. Preston, personal communication (March 1999).

In another *atoosh* story, involving known people, the tracks of the creature are again discussed as a confirmation of its abnormality and irrational nature. Note also that the tracks are left in sand, not snow. With one exception, discussed below, sand is the only context other than snow where tracks are mentioned.

> ... His Mistabeo told him that they could see the *Atoosh* tracks in the morning. In the morning after they ate they crossed over to the sandy part of the beach. The person who had killed the *atoosh* (Peter Trapper) was sitting at the bow. He got off the canoe and saw footprints which were twice the length of a man's foot. The *atoosh* had been barefooted. ...

Tracks are also used here as evidence that events, which were only heard and not seen, did indeed occur, and that it was in fact an *atoosh*.

The use of tracks as confirmation is found in another *atoosh* story, the epic cycle of Mamiteo. The cannibal Mamiteo has many followers who were originally his captives, and who became *atoosh* by being forced to eat as he did. In this segment, his group is being tracked by the hero and his family, just as a hunter would track animals. They are planning to kill the *atoosh*es to stop them from eating Indians. Normally an Indian hunts to kill and eat animals. This situation is a variation on normal hunting relations intended to restore normal life patterns.

> Of course, he traveled with his whole family and all of the women. They moved into the area. The women told him that Mamiteo's followers always move inland, rather than to the coast. Finally they could see their tracks. They started to follow them. Along the way, he could see where they ate as there were a lot of human bones left behind....#143

The human bones are considered part of the track left by Mamiteo's followers, and confirm not only that they have been there, but as in the previous story, that they are in fact *atoosh*, which confirms the importance of their capture and justifies their destruction. So in this example, it is shown that tracks can be an important moral guide to action as well.

In this last example of tracks as confirmation of events, deviant behaviour of

another sort is the focus. Here a young man has heard that his new father-in-law has the abnormal (read: repugnant) habit of eating giant worms the size of beavers. It seemed to him unbelievable, and he had to see with his own eyes:

> The man thought he would find out exactly what his wife's father did. Sometimes, he followed his father-in-law's trails. Many times, he could see his tracks on a slightly frozen area. The area where the old man was working, the man could see other worms, he left behind. The old man was not there. (#105)

Without confronting the old man, he was able to confirm the story.

A variation on the theme of confirmation is the use of tracks to try to explain suspicious behaviour. The difference here is that the event or situation is already known in some incomplete way, and the person following the tracks does so to fill in the blanks, as it were, of how the situation has come to pass. In this example, a young man and his grandmother are hunting together, and when they shift their camp it is the old woman who "builds" the wigwam. She always sent her grandson ahead to chose a site for their next camp, telling him to mark the spot with a stick, and then leave the area promptly. She would then sing to their wigwam, and by her conjuring power it would follow her along the trail to the new location. The grandson was suspicious, and wanted to discover how it was that the old woman was able to build their wigwam alone, and using the same poles they had before (new poles would normally always be cut each time a wigwam is erected).

> The young man started looking for her trails, he wondered how his grandmother found his wigwam poles as he could not see her trails (*no indication that she went out to cut new poles*). (#104)

He asked her to move again, so that he could keep up his investigation:

> Again, the young man made a stick stand in the new treeless area for the wigwam. The young man went off, hunting for partridges and porcupines. When he came back, he started looking for his grandmother's trails. Again, he hardly saw her trails. He thought, it is very strange, how the old woman can manage to have the wigwam poles....there is no sign of an area where she cut the wigwam poles. (#104)

Finally, after a move, he stood and watched her coming with the wigwam:

> His trail was very close where his grandmother was singing. His grandmother was passing his trail as she was still singing. Finally, he saw a wigwam moving along the trees, as he looked at it for a little while, the wigwam started falling apart.

With her power to move the dwelling disrupted by the young man's impetuous actions, the grandmother gives him a reprimanding and says that from now on, he will have to build their wigwam when they move (which was a regular part of the winter cycle of mobility and hunting).

> "I know also, that you looked for my trails when I was building a wigwam. I know you were doing that to me. Why didn't you leave me alone, when you thought I was up to something? ...see how busy you are, when you wanted to see a wigwam moving." (#104)

There are two additional aspects of this story that I wish to discuss, and because they relate to themes addressed below, the comments will be saved for those sections. Both pertain to the relationship between conjuring power and tracks.

<u>Dreams and Metaphors</u>

Dreams played a significant role in traditional Cree culture; through dreams a Mistabeo may provide guidance, an animal may communicate its location to a hunter, and songs are conceived. All of these are forms of assistance to the hunter, even though they may come in obscure representations that require interpretation. In this way dreams are a form of tracking, of getting information about where to go to find animals or other people.

The story of Louse and Wide Lake is about two old men conjuring against each other. At one point Wide Lake sent his power to work on Louse through seaweed on Louse's canoe paddle, when he touched it his arm swelled painfully. The next day Louse said, "when I went to sleep, I tried to find out why it had been like that. I tracked it and I saw Wide Lake going up my arm to my shoulder..." (#51). Here tracking is used both

literally and metaphorically – He uses his dream-state to follow the trail, which is the swelling on his arm that traveled from his hand up to his shoulder, just as a person moves through the landscape, in order to gain information about the person who left the tracks.

In another story about a man who was thought to have been killed through the conjuring power of another man, the following segments describe the narrator's first-hand recollection of the incident:

> I thought, myself, that someone was conjuring against him.
> Not long after this, there was a strange animal with strange tracks. This strange animal was eating our rabbits. We could not kill the strange animal. Sometimes, we followed the animal, but would disappear into an ice opening. The animal was only out at night. I saw it clear one night, it had stripes. It looked like a porcupine.
> At last, the strange animal ate a lot of our rabbits off our snares. We decided to follow it, up the river. When it reached the open water on the rapids, it disappeared. This was the last time I saw it. We tried to kill it.

Here is a situation where experienced hunters are unable to identify the tracks of a strange animal that is causing them problems, stealing their food, and thereby at least symbolically being a threat to their living. At the same time, one of the men is having dreams that "Albany Indians were throwing stones at him. He dreamt that the stone almost hit him as it traveled inside their tent. He dreamt that the stone was coming from this island." The beleaguered man sleeps restlessly. Shortly after the disappearance of the strange animal, the man died "just like someone had shot him."

The pairing of the mysterious animal sequence with the dream experience and death of the man reinforces the sense that strange powers were at work. The presence of an animal no one could identify by its tracks or its appearance is implied as a validation of the suspicions that the man was being conjured against; the animal was the metaphorical *track* of the conjuror. The animal was working away at removing the 'living' (food) of the group, while the conjuror was believed to have been working on removing the life of the man (killing him). The afflicted man's dreams might be

understood as his own way of tracking his assailant, which the dreams identified as Indians from Albany Island. Alternatively, or in addition, the dreams may have been the assailant's way of tracking and finding/attacking his victim. (#118)

The two previous examples of the relationship between tracks, dreams, and metaphors are relatively compact, and I believe it is intended to be obvious. In this third example the relationship between tracks and dreams is more subtle, and perhaps also more complex. It is gradually played out with a quality of mystery and anticipation, and finally a poignant and unexpected resolution. The full account is given here in part because of the way it conveys the pace of experience and the sometimes tenuous nature of "knowing," and also because of the narrator's compelling eloquence.

> I heard many people having dreams which actually happened. I had many dreams, myself. I will tell you one of the dreams which I had. I had this dream about the first of January before my wife's death. I was married to this woman for a long time. We were out along the coast. I had just returned to the wigwam after a hunt. That night, I dreamt about a woman (REPEAT).
>
> When I used to go hunting, sometimes I would wander off from the trails which lead to my traps as I would try hunting for partridges. I used to do this a lot. In my dream, I dreamt I was doing this. I dreamt I was wandering off among the trees. I dreamt I was wandering off and finally I reached a woman. I imagined the woman was sitting inside a wigwam, although my dream was not clear if she was in the wigwam. The woman looked very old. She had two children. As I looked at her, I did not feel very comfortable, I had a sad feeling towards her. I dreamt I was unable to speak to her. Finally, I dreamt about one of my children who had passed away. I dreamt she was here with her mother. Finally, I woke up from my dream. When I woke up, I did not tell my wife about this dream. I was thinking about my dream and I thought maybe I was dreaming about a big kill. I never did tell this dream to my wife or anyone else.
>
> There was no marten near the area, we were only trapping mink. I used to set traps for mink. There were plenty of rabbits, too. My oldest son Albert was a fully-grown man then. He used to accompany me when I was setting traps far away. My second oldest son was able to hunt too. I only have two sons and one daughter living of all the children my wife had.
>
> Albert and I were checking fox snares. My other son was out checking rabbit snares with his mother. We were going to go with him [take him with us] but he was out with his mother. It was February 5th, when we were checking the fox snares. I told my son to check some of the fox snares. It was very far from the camp, where the fox snares were. I was carrying my gun. I had my gun loaded, as I thought I would shoot at partridges if we see any. The gun was able to hold six shells. As we were walking, I shot at a partridge, which left five shells. I checked the next fox snare and took it down. Then we stopped and made a fire. It was a very clear day with a slight wind. While we were eating, I had a very strange feeling. I had a feeling which wanted me to continue walking. I was very

anxious to continue. Quickly, I packed our bags and I continued [without the son] on the journey. I came to a lake which I crossed. The night before, it was snowing very heavily [*so there was new snow on the ground*]. As I came to the middle of the lake, I saw a person's tracks. I wondered who the person could be. (REPEAT). I did not worry about it. Then, I thought it was snowing very heavily the night before. When I realized it was a person's tracks, my wife came to mind, first. As I came close to the tracks, I recognized they were not a human's tracks. I followed the tracks and then I saw another set of tracks. Then I realized it was a white polar bear's tracks. I decided to follow them. The tracks led up a river towards the coast.

My son had gone to check fox snares along the coast, very close to where the bear was heading. I thought the bear would reach my son before I could catch up to it. I thought if the bear was walking in the woods, I could probably kill it. I kept following it and soon, I saw my son Albert's tracks. His tracks were heading back inland. Then I saw the bear tracks going the same direction my son was going. The bear had followed him. I knew my son had not built a fire because he was going very fast. I had left the earlier fire before he did.

As I came close to one of the fox snares, I could see the polar bear at the trap. Then the bear started to walk towards another lake. It was going across the lake. There were two cubs, following the mother. Sometimes the bear would look back at me.

Just before the bear went across, I saw my son Albert's tracks again. The bear started to run towards the woods. I continued to follow it and I loaded my gun. It was going to where the trees had fallen. I followed it. I did not want it to go any farther into the bush. I had a very light load with me. I did not want to let go of my axe, in case it attacked me. I shot it. I hit one of her eyes, thinking she would not be able to wander very far. Then I could shoot her elsewhere.

People believed if you talk to a bear, it will understand you. I started talking to the bear, saying, "What are you trying to do?" Then the bear started to walk away and moved back a bit. I moved to an area where there were many fallen trees. The bear started to walk away with her cubs. I looked at them; the mother was not moving. I could not see the cubs. I only had one bullet in my gun, as I had shot her again. The bear was not very far when I shot her. I left my bag, still carrying my axe. She started to move then, I followed her across a very clear area.

When my son was young, he was very short. I used to encourage him when he was out hunting with me. The bear was hopping along in the snow in the clear area [*like his son's movements*]. I said to the bear, "Albert, why are you leaving me behind?" The bear sat down. When I reached her, she was just looking at me. I was very close to her and she was hardly moving. All of a sudden, I felt sorry for her.

I was wondering what I was going to do with her. I did not have a strong rope with me [for hauling the body]. I had some very thin string, but it was very weak and I figured it would break. I decided to hit her with my axe and she did not move but still looked at me. I decided not to use my axe, as I had never killed a bear before, so I decided to use my gun. I shot her right under the arm. I went up to her, it was about the size of the very large husky dogs. I buried her in the snow and covered it with boughs. When I returned to my son, he was making a fire. He said, "Did you kill a lot of meat?"

After I finished eating, I made a trail leading to the bear. I built another fire. Then I followed this trail back and followed another trail leading to the snares. When I finally reached home, I told everyone I had killed a bear. Apparently, there were people living south of us who had seen the bear first. They were following the bear north.

> I gave the mother bear to my father and the young cubs to my son. This is when I finally told about my dream, the dream that I had. I told them about my dream, "There was a woman with two children. I reached this woman and her children." This was the dream which I had when we returned after New Year's for supplies. "I dreamt that I was walking among some trees when I reached her and her children. She had two children. She acted very strange. I felt very uneasy with her. Then, I started to dream about my wife. Then I woke up." My father said to me, "Your dream meant you were going to kill the bear and her cubs." I was really convinced about this dream. Then, in February, my wife died. When she died my dream came back to me. (#129)

In dreams information is given to you about who you are going to find, just as a track does. It is your task to decipher the track, and as this example shows, it is not always completely clear. The interweaving of Albert's and the bear's tracks through the chase generates tension not only in emphasizing the possible threat of Albert being attacked, but also in suggesting a relationship between Albert and the bear. This is further emphasized by the comparison of how both of them hopped along in the snow. Family relations are the context of this interaction: Charlie (the narrator) and Albert (his son) are paired with the bear and her cubs, both spatially and socially. A social interpretation of this story is not my purpose, as compelling as it is. The nature of tracks as information and experience in landscape remains the focus of attention here. The tracks of the bears and Albert are physically present in the snow, but the dream of the woman and children is the metaphorical track of the bear and her cubs. Charlie dreams that he is wandering off of his trails (to the traps) to shoot partridges when he meets the woman and two children, and this is the same context when he meets the bear and her two cubs. This seems to be anticipated *without* knowledge (not knowing why) when he felt strangely compelled to keep walking.

Although a relationship is implied when he thought that the bear tracks in the fresh snow were his wife's, the dream is confirmed as the track between his wife and the bear when it comes back to him after his wife dies.

So even though, as his father assured him, the dream meant that Charlie would

find and kill the bears, it also seemed to have a more complex meaning directed at family connections between persons in the landscape.

Dreams like the one in this story are considered intentional communication, although the source is not always clear. Other forms of intentional communication via tracks are discussed below.

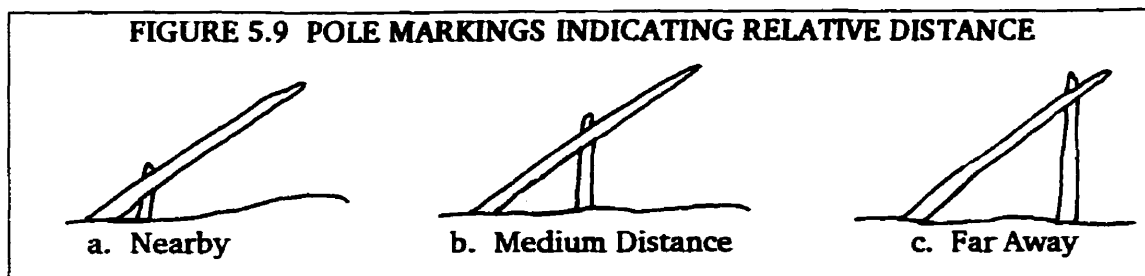
Intentional Communication

Tracks can be left as forms of deliberate communication to assist, deceive, or otherwise redirect action. For example, in situations where there are so many tracks that a person would be hard pressed to know which ones to follow, pole markings were left to indicate your direction and distance of travel to others behind you. This would be the case around a campsite, or anywhere there had been a lot of activity, as described here:

> They came to the deer tracks too, and they noticed that the man was chasing the deer too. ...The next morning they moved their tent to the place where they had killed those deer. They thought that the man will meet them there. They didn't meet him when they came to the place where they killed those deer. And they put marks on the bush. (#87)

"Marks on the bush" refers to pole markings that were made to assist others to find them, as shown in Figure 5.9. The diagonal piece indicates the direction of travel, and the vertical piece indicates the relative distance.[16]

FIGURE 5.9 POLE MARKINGS INDICATING RELATIVE DISTANCE



Intentional communication with tracks can also be achieved by pre-arrangement, as in the story of the Boss of the Deer. The deer were said to be kept in a mountain by

[16] Explained and shown to me by Sanders Weistche, my Cree bush-guide during field research in 1999.

their boss, bounded by a river that was thought to be empowered by the boss to prevent anyone from successfully returning from the other side. Finally one man decided to try to approach the boss to ask for some deer, as the hunters and their families were starving.

> The man told the men that as soon as it is dark to climb the mountain and look for his return tracks on the shore. This mountain on their side of the river is straight across the large mountain with all the deer.
>
> The sun was setting and the men decided to return to the mountain. They could see the large mountain [across the river] from the mountain [they were on]. They could see deer coming across the river. The deer looked as if they were coming out of the mountain. They could see a lot of deer tracks in the snow across the river. ... As they looked at the large mountain they could see the man's tracks in the snow leading to the door in the mountain. They could see his return trail on the left of the trail he took heading to the large mountain.
>
> ...The man who crossed the river started telling a story that the mountain looked like a house with a door. There were a lot of tracks at the door of the mountain, you can see the deer tracks on the rocks. This showed there were a lot of deer in this mountain....(#77)

Because the man is undertaking a treacherous mission, one from which no one else has ever returned, he tells the men how they can know if he has been successful. He uses his tracks as a visual signal to them, a sort of "one if by land, two if by sea" approach. Normally a person would return on the same set of tracks they went out on because it is much easier to walk on snow that is already packed than to break a new trail. But he tells them "look for my return tracks," a second set intentionally used as communication.

An additional point of interest here is the reference to deer tracks on the rocks. I interpret this to be a validation or confirmation motif as discussed earlier. People (in the story and in the audience) might not be entirely convinced that the deer all lived inside this mountain with their 'boss'. Given the context of life and interaction with others in the landscape, I think it is fair to say that tracks were accepted as *the* reliable evidence of events, and this is indicated by several of the excerpts used in this study. This particular set of tracks can be interpreted in three possible ways, the first one presented here is, in my opinion, most likely the intended use. The other options are also discussed.

As a confirmation motif, the man states that he has seen deer tracks at the door to the mountain, and the narrator clarifies that "this showed there were a lot of deer in this mountain." He had already demonstrated his competence and credibility by succeeding where others could not. That he saw deer tracks on the stone at the entrance to the mountain suggests visible, *permanent* evidence confirming the presence of the deer. I am convinced that the intent is to show that such a large number of deer over a long period of time have gone through the doorway, that permanent tracks are embedded into the rock. An alternative interpretation would be to say that the tracks were mud on the rocks, which would eventually wear away, or prints in the snow that was covering the stone. I doubt either of these as the intended meaning because the ground surface is never mentioned when it is snow; that is, snow is taken for granted, and there is no reference to the surface beneath it. This applies to all of the stories in this collection. If there is no snow and the ground surface being directly tread upon is sand or rock, they are specifically indicated, although this occurs in only a very few stories. The possibility of mud tracks on stone is valid, but under the circumstances where confirmation is the essence of the comment, and has been shown to be a function of tracks in stories, something more permanent would carry greater validity with the audience.[17] Everyone would be well aware of the durability of tracks under normal circumstances - in snow or sand, for a brief period of perhaps days, or weeks at best. And under normal circumstances, even along a migration trail, deer would not leave tracks on stone. I think the idea here is to say that there are more deer here than anyone has ever seen in one place, that this is the *source* of the deer. Also, there are no other cases in this collection

[17] Validity and credibility are unusually important aspects of this story. My reference in Chapter 4 to John's repeated emphasis on the truth of a story is directed to this one. So there is internal (to the story) and external (from the narrator) emphasis on credibility in this story, which is definitely worth noting.

or any other sources I have read where tracking mud over another surface is mentioned. This does not completely negate the possibility, but for the reasons here presented, I am inclined to support the "*in* stone" interpretation.

The above examples of tracks as intentional communication focussed on the intent to assist, but there are also cases where misinformation is intentionally provided in tracks. Because of the reliance on tracks for information about who is nearby and what they are up to, a person wishing to deceive another person as to their actions may deliberately modify their tracks, or offer an alternate explanation for the apparent information they suggest.

In the story of The Child That Wasn't Born Naturally, an *atoosh* raids the tent of a pregnant woman, kills her and throws away the fetus, which is rescued and raised by mice. The woman's other child survived by being hidden under the boughs lining the wigwam wall. After a time, the older child discovers his younger brother living with the mice. They tell him to come each day to play with his brother, and how to keep it a secret from their father:

> The mice know that the father will see the different footprints, one set larger and one set smaller. They told the older brother that if his father asks about the smaller footprints, he should tell him that he was just putting his foot down on the front part. And the man came back from his hunting and saw the footprints in the snow, and he said to himself, "I wonder why some of them are big and some are small?" So his father asked the boy how come his footprints are like that and the boy remembered what the mice told him and he said, "Well, I put my feet like that." And he showed him. (#116)

Here it was the explanation for tracks that was false, but tracks can be used to create an intentional loss of information, as in the story of Meskino and Petawabino. It is an historical case of extreme starvation conditions. When a man who knew that his death from starvation was imminent, told his sons to eat of his body so that they might survive. Those who did, became *atoosh* and eventually ate each other. In order to

prevent them from eating the body of their brother who had also died from starvation, his widow made tracks all around the burial site. In this way she used tracks to confound; just as finding no tracks at all is likened to blindness, too many tracks also generate a loss of orienteering information:

> ... At last some of them couldn't walk. At last one of his sons, who was out looking for partridges, starved while he was out (couldn't come home). That was the husband of the woman from Waswanipi. *[who later related these events to the post manager]* When he didn't come back the old man didn't even say to follow his tracks *[to try to find him and possibly save him]*. Then this woman, when her husband didn't come home, and she heard that the old man was going to shift the next day, she went out to follow her husband's tracks. She found him starved. She thought the old man would say to bury his son before they shifted. When she got home she told the old man. But the old man didn't even say to bury his son, he still said they were going to shift. [18] (#165)

She went out alone to bury the body, and after several more days had passed without any hunting success, the old man resorted to letting his own blood, and cooking it to sustain his remaining family. The woman declined, and went off on her own. She was able to kill partridge and rabbit for herself, and after several days returned to see how the family was doing:

> When she got there, all there were left was two men. All the rest were dead. She saw the bones of what these two had eaten, their father and their mother....
>
> This woman remembered that she had told the men where her husband had starved, and she thought that they would go there and eat him... At last it was a stormy day, and she took the toboggan to go for her husband's body. She made circles to hide the place where her husband's body was. Then she managed to dig a hole for her husband's body. (#165)

Normally if someone does not return from hunting, others will go out to find

[18] The phrase "at last some of them couldn't walk," is what I consider a standard phase, representing what I have labeled *an endurance motif*. This is discussed in a later section, with examples. Briefly, it refers to a state of extreme exhaustion associated with a lack hunting success, and starvation conditions. In other forms of oral tradition and oral poetry the use of standard phrases to represent culturally understood situations is common, and is evidenced at least as long ago as Homer, in the Iliad and Odyssey. Although light-years apart culturally, chronologically, and geographically, the similarities in oral tradition style between the 8th C., B.C., Greeks and the Eastern Cree are surprising.

them along their trail. When old man Petawabino neglected to send someone after his son, his actions were culturally inappropriate, foreshadowing the gruesome events to come. But the son's wife went out on his track and found him. This brings us back to the theme of "lost"; before she goes out, the younger man's disappearance suggests he is lost to them, yet she finds him at the end of his track, when he is literally lost to her. By making a confusion of tracks in the bush all around the place where she buried his body, she creates a condition whereby he will be lost to the others, who she fears may have wrong intentions toward his remains. She has intentionally used her tracks to *un*-inform, and to deceive.

Another way to prevent someone from finding you is to walk where no tracks will be left. When the land is covered with snow, this would be a real challenge. In legend, however, special landscape features can provide the needed setting. Mountains have a fascinating role in East Cree oral tradition, where they seem to be used as spatial punctuation marks. They are normally the site of some extraordinary event or the dwelling of monstrous creatures, as in this story of the Giant Porcupine who Stole a Woman.[19]

> There was a big mountain, surrounded with rocks. The porcupine took this woman into the mountain, way down into the mountain. The porcupine took the woman into this mountain in case the man (*her husband*) tried to look for his wife. This way, the man will be lost following their trail. They came out from the other side of the mountain. Again, they entered another mountain, again, they wandered down into the mountain. Finally the entered a third mountain. The porcupine said to the woman, "This is where I stay."
>
> The man was on his way home when he saw the tracks of the porcupine. The tracks were very large. (*hence, a giant porcupine*) As he came to his wigwam, he saw all of his wife's wood scattered. He thought this person must have killed her. He looked for her snowshoes, they were not around. As he entered the wigwam, she was not there building a fire. At last, he saw their trail. [his *Mistabeo* had warned him that someone was carrying off his wife] ...He started to follow their trail. He saw a mountain which he entered. This man used to kill a lot of porcupines. As he entered the mountain, he thought to himself, I will be able to go where you (porcupine) go. (#106)

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[19] Alas, a subject for later exploration. See "Representation of Mountains" above.

Knowing that the woman's husband will come after her by following their tracks, the porcupine attempts to deceive the man by entering three successive mountains. The snow outside would lead him to the entrance of the mountains, but once inside there would be no soft surface to imprint a track on. It would be understood by the audience that it was due to the man's significant experience hunting porcupines, as noted in the story, that he was able to anticipate the animal's actions, and successfully track him down.

When the narrator says, "he thought to himself, 'I will be able to go where you go,' " it is more than *just* thinking to himself. This is a form of communication, like telepathy, that is typical in Cree hunting relations. When a hunter speaks (in his imagination or through hunting songs) to an animal he hopes to find, he believes that the animal can hear him,[20] and they engage in a hunting process that I envision as a sort of psychological dance. The communication is a form of tracking, because it reaches the animal and may convince it to reveal itself so that the hunter may kill it.[21] In this particular case, I think it is also a statement of competition and confidence, since the porcupine has taken on the role of a rival husband by stealing the hunter's wife.

A third context for using tracks as intentional communication is for the purpose of re-orienting activity, as illustrated in this brief excerpt from the Chou-a story:

> So he went to track the caribou. On his way he saw the tracks of another man that followed the same caribou, coming to the tracks of the caribou from one side, and then following the caribou tracks. He could tell from the tracks that the man was traveling very fast.
>
> Chou-a knew it was his *Mistabeo*, and he thought to himself that all of his *Mistabeo's* didn't bother about him when he was starving. But he turned away from the deer's trail and followed the trail back up to where the *Mistabeo* had come from, and he came upon a tent. ... (#162)

This is the only case that I have seen where a *Mistabeo*, or spirit-helper has left

tracks of any kind on the landscape. As spirit-persons they have the ability to appear and disappear, moving about by will rather than by physical action. In this situation the *Mistabeo* is intentionally leaving tracks for Chou-a to find, so that he will get his attention and divert him from his hunt, which is exactly what happens. The Mistabeo could have simply appeared and intercepted Chou-a in person, but his way of communicating was to leave tracks as a message. This form of interaction relied on Chou-a's ability to read and recognize the tracks, and gave him the choice of whether or not to respond.

Tracks as a Conduit

Tracks as a conduit for the transmission of information (an abstraction of language) in the form of knowledge or power is a theme in three examples discussed here. In a sense, knowledge is power in tracking, for if a hunter is highly skilled at reading and interpreting the various kinds of tracks he is then well equipped to act effectively in response to them. The relationship between power and tracks is of interest here because of the ways it can be manifest. One story illustrates a clear use of tracks as a conduit for sending power. In another, tracks act as a conduit for receiving information due to power associated with the tracks of a particular person. In a third example, the relationship is somewhat vague, but there is still a sense that power is channeled through tracks.

In addition to the power/conduit aspect of tracks, the first of the three examples contains many significant references to tracks and their function. The interpretation following this excerpt discusses all of them and their significance in the story.

Aside from *atooshes*, the other threatening-persons encountered in stories of the past are *Pawts*. This name seems to refer to unscrupulous white trappers and who raid

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[20] As indicated many times in the body of oral tradition and ethnographic information provided by Cree informants in this collection.

and kill the Indians.[22] Here, a lone hunter is tracked by *Pawts*, who plan to attack and rob him:

> ...he started to doubling back (not down his trail, though) to a place where he remembered that he had gone under the trees. He thought he would be able to tell how many there were. But they were not there yet. So he sat up in the tree, (which was bent over the trail) and soon he saw these men coming. He just sat there and they didn't see him, but he could see that there were many of them. After they had all gone past, and he knew he couldn't control them all, so he started straight home, without following the other trail. So these *Pawts* got to where he had his fire. But it wasn't burning. These *Pawts* had something to use in a kind of power; they put it down on the trail and it followed the man, finally he could feel it – a queer feeling in his legs. Finally, he could hardly walk, and he came to a small lake. He fell down but he couldn't get up again. He thought, "I wish I could get two otters, then I could put the otter skins on my feet and then I could walk again." Finally, his wish came true, he saw two otters coming from across the lake, right straight at him. One went on one side of him, and one went on the other side, and he speared them, one, then the other. Then he skinned them as quick as he could. He only skinned them half way down (the front half), and put them against his legs and the pain left him right away. So he said to himself, "You robbers will be lucky if you can catch me now, I feel so light." It was his grandfather's power, sent to help him. The *Pawts* are following him, and they saw where he had been sitting, and then another, and more, 'til they thought they would get him very soon. They were pleased to see that he hardly walked, that they could get him soon. Finally they came to the lake, and they thought they would kill him there, and when they came to the lake they saw the otter bones, and they cold hardly see the tracks, he was going so fast. Then he got home and told his grandmother what to expect. That these *Pawts* were coming. (#45)

The antagonists are tracking a man along his trail, as a hunter tracks game animals. In anticipation, he makes a new trail (that will be unknown to the enemy) to check their tracks in order to find out what he is up against. From their tracks he expects to discover how many of them there are, as well as information about their condition.

When they don't find him at his camp, they send power along his trail to find him, which it does, and cripples him. Conjuring power, in this sense, can be thought of as an energy that is controlled by its user, to cause physical events to occur at some distance,

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[21] Preston, *Cree Narrative*, 220: animals hear and understand the words of the hunting songs.
[22] Although Colin Scott suggests the ethnic identity of *Pawts* is vague, and that the emphasis is on antisocial, marginal behaviour associated with them rather than their ethnicity, "Encountering the Whiteman in James Bay Cree Narrative History and Mythology," *Aboriginal History* 19, 1(1995): 29.

without the direct and implicit involvement of the conjuror['s body]. Like men and animals, the power in this story must follow the track to find its prey. The trail acts as a conduit for the power to travel and enter into the man through his feet. This is a distinctive reference to the sending of power to do harm, a motif that occurs in many stories. This is the only case in the study data or in any other documented Cree oral tradition that I am familiar with where the power is physically connected to the land and travels through the trail. In other cases, the reference is simply that power is sent to someone, and the impression I get is that it just travels through the air. In those cases, the conjuror knows who the person is they are acting against, and here, the *Pawts* do not know who this man is that they are following. This may be the reason the power has to follow the track, to efficiently locate the right victim. It also creates greater tension in the story, by continuing the active pursuit and increasing the quality of the threat against the hunted man. The power is unseen, and it leaves no track.

The man had already outwitted his enemies by doubling back to check their tracks; he knew from physical evidence that they were there, where they were going, what their condition was, and how fast they were going. The power they send provides none of this information, it arrives unexpected and unexplained. When the hunter is struck lame, the track he leaves will be noticeably different, indicating the place where the contact occurred. His struggle to walk will be clearly evident from the markings in the snow. All of this information can be read by the *Pawts* as they follow, without ever seeing any of the action occur.

Finally, his regained self-control, through the benefit of his grandfather's power, generates a set of track information that baffles his pursuers – not only do they not find a 'sitting duck' by the lake, they can barely see his tracks, so they cannot interpret how he managed to get away. The dynamics of this entire scenario rely completely on

information provided by tracks and the control of persons through the information thus collected. At no time do the *Pawts* ever see, with their own eyes, the man they are engaged in a complex hunting strategy with. In the end, the hunter takes control by leaving an unexpected and illegible message by the nature of his tracks, thus confounding his enemy, at least for the time being. This reversal is analogous to the controlled lack of information the *Pawts* were able to generate through the use of *their* power.

As in the excerpt from the story of Chou-a above, this piece refers to the speed of the traveler being known from the tracks he leaves. In both cases, the speed is related to extra-ordinary power, in the former from a spirit-person associated with conjuring, and the latter from conjuring power.

At a broader conceptual level, this story illustrates the reliance on tracks for informing activity in the landscape, and emphasizes the potential hazards when that information is not available, whether it be due to changes in weather conditions (fresh snow fall, snow melt, wind, or rain removing tracks) or due to the intentional actions of persons. When this critical information is lacking, it can have the most serious repercussions, and be the cause of great hardship.

In the story of Big Skunk and Wolverine, the information-providing role of tracks is reversed; the skunk, through his power, knows when someone looks at his track:

> At one time the skunk wasn't the same size as it is now – they were larger than they are today. He used his *widui* (musk glands) to defend himself, and because of his enormous size he could kill with his *widui*. He didn't use any other defense. One time all the animals were in one tent because of being scared of the skunk. These were: wolverine, mink, fisher, lynx, weasel, squirrel, and any other animal that runs in the forest.
>
> And at one time there were no human beings. And they thought of themselves as the humans of that time, and gathered into one tent. When the skunk is far off, and an animal crosses its trail, it knows what happens, [because] its *widui* quivers. If the other animals are certain that it is the skunk's trail, they would always back away from the trail.
>
> ...
>
> Wolverine was the boss, and he made the conjuring tent. He was in charge of all the other animals. The wolverine had a *Mistabeo*, and his *Mistabeo*

> told him, that if the skunk reaches them through their travels that he would kill them all. That is why the wolverine was the boss, because he had a *Mistabeo* and also made a conjuring tent. They still made a mistake. As the wolverine told them, that if they see tracks, "if you go near its tracks even if the animal is far away, he will still know."
>
> The weasel is the one who saw the tracks. The weasel did not go on top of the snow but traveled under the snow and took a glimpse of the skunk's track, and the skunk still knew it. The weasel saw the track, but the weasel thought the skunk would not know since he traveled under the snow.
>
> The skunk had conjuring in his *widui*, and if anyone saw his tracks, his *widui* would quiver [inside him and thereby tell him]. As soon as someone saw his track, he would start following him. Then he finally finds where that person saw his tracks. He even knows if the person who saw his tracks is far away, as his *widui* tells him, depending where it quivers. He made a conjuring tent, and he knows the exact place where the weasel saw his tracks. He finally comes to the weasel's track, then follows them. Of course, Wolverine's *Mistabeo* told him all that Skunk was doing along the way. Wolverine told his brothers, as all the other animals were his brothers, that someone was following their trail. (#155, 156)

Due to the skunk's conjuring ability, he knows when someone crosses his trail. He has endowed his track with power, so that information travels along it from the site of the incursion to himself. It acts as a conduit for information in association with his musk glands, and he uses additional conjuring skills to track the person down. In a conjuring tent the spirits of various persons are called upon to communicate with the conjuror, and may provide knowledge of events and persons who are far away.[23] In this story, its tracking function is similar to scapulimancy and scrying, discussed above.

In a curiously similar way, power of another sort was traditionally associated with the tracks of a girl during her first menstruation. Males are not allowed to see the menstruating female(s), and are told not to follow the trail to the seclusion wigwam.

> "They put wood (like a bridge) on the trail leading to her parents' wigwam. She walks only on the wood, not touching the ground... The wood leads right to the door of her parents' wigwam. ...the wood which she walked on [is] quickly burned as the men are not allowed to touch or be close to the wood." (#112)

The reason for this seclusion is given as being 'sacred' equivalent to 'frightening',

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[23] Harvey Feit, "Spiritual Power," 125, 127. R.J. Preston, *Cree Narrative*, documents the details of a conjuring tent performance he observed in the 1960's in Waskaganish. The ceremony has not been repeated since that occasion, and comments made to me in Waskaganish in 1999 indicate that a modern mythology has started to build up around that final performance.

and the danger perceived was that if a male looked at a first-time menstruating female he would be afflicted with boils, and possibly die. Two examples of cases where this was the result are given. This was no longer the practice in the 1960's when this information was recorded.

It would seem that there was a potentially lethal power associated with first menstruation, to the extent that the place where the girl walked would become charged with the power via her tracks. On a boardwalk there would not necessarily be visible tracks, but the footfalls, which are here equivalent to tracks, act as a conduit to carry this frightening power from the girl to any male who touched them.

There is a striking parallel between this and the power in the Big Skunk's trail. Although his is known and controlled, and hers is not, both empowered tracks demand appropriate respectful action. The consequence of disregarding this, in both cases, is that the power associated with the tracks directly or indirectly leads to the punishment and death of the careless individual.

In the story of the old woman who sang to the wigwam, discussed previously, there is also a sense of connection between her conjuring power and her tracks. It is not clearly intended to be understood as a 'conduit' association, as I believe these three other examples are, but my sense is that there is a vague implication to that effect. Literally, it is the singing that is the conduit for transmission of power, but that the wigwam follows her trail hints at a connection that may be more than the simple logic that she is leading the way. Again, when she tells her grandson that she knows he has been looking at her tracks, the knowing reminds me of the Big Skunk's knowing - that her power is connected to her track in a similar but unstated way. My response in this case is more intuitive than provable, so I suggest it as a speculative interpretation.

C. Tracks and Temporality

In this next brief segment I want to draw attention to the temporal aspect of tracks, with an example from a later segment in the Wolverine story cycle. After humans had entered the landscape, they captured Wolverine's children. In retaliation for their mistreatment of them, Wolverine

> followed the trail of the Indians who went for the caribou meat. He climbed up a tree which was overhanging on the trail. One of the Indian children told him that his father will be home soon. As the man was heading back with a toboggan full of caribou meat, the wolverine shot an arrow at him, at the back of the head from the tree. He knocked him right down. The wolverine took the toboggan of meat and pushed the Indian on one side of the trail. He came back on the trail pulling the toboggan of caribou meat. When they saw the track, the other Indians said, "Our brother is back." The wolverine dragged the toboggan of meat to the small wigwam where his children were. ... When the other Indians came on the trail, they found their boss lying on the side of the trail. They knew that the wolverine did the harm on their boss. (#155, 156)

Hiding in the tree above the trail is a strategy we have seen in the *Pawt* story above. The idea of hiding in a place where you know you will see someone, whether you intend to ambush them as Wolverine did, or to gain better awareness of your situation, is based on *anticipation of future events* to occur *at this site*. Later in the sequence, the tracks of Wolverine and the Indian convey information about what has *happened in the past at this site*. Most of the references in the stories of this collection fall into the second of these two temporal contexts. It is interesting that these two rare examples of future-tense use of tracks both involve conflict rather than hunting and subsistence activities, and both involve the same strategy of hiding above the trail in a tree.

D. Tracks as Carriers of Cultural Values

The last theme to be discussed in this study represents a shift away from the practical uses and functions of tracks, to consider how cultural values might be associated

with them in oral tradition. Two of the most important values in traditional East Cree culture were endurance and competence,[24] as illustrated below.

<u>Endurance</u>

The presence of tracks of a large animal like caribou carries the "deep hope"[25] and promise of substantial food, and in times of food shortages, a caribou trail could be followed for many days under extreme duress:

> ...On the fifth night they reached the lake and they could see the caribou trail still....The eighth day the men went on, and still nothing. [The ninth] night the men stopped and the tenth morning they couldn't go on, they couldn't walk anymore, so they had to stay the day in the tent. (#12)

On the brink of death from starvation, they succeed in killing some partridge, and set out to follow the caribou trail again, this time succeeding and killing twenty of them. After five days of shifting – the whole group following the caribou, the men left the women behind and went after the deer alone. It was many days more before they found the herd. Not knowing if the women had gotten any food during this time, they returned to their camp:

> As they were nearing the place they saw the women's tracks, and knew that they had been looking for partridge. *[knew from the location of the tracks what the women had been doing – information without direct dialogue]* And when they went past the lake where the women were staying, they saw the smoke from the fire and knew that at least the women were still alive. (#12)

This story draws attention to the very important aspect of endurance in a life-pattern of mobility; in order to survive on game animals in the traditional context, the Cree hunter was constantly on the move. Endurance was a skill and an ethic of social competence, taught to young boys as soon as they were able to accompany their fathers out on the trapline.

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[24] Competence as a cultural value is explored in depth in Sarah Preston, *Let The Past Go: A Life History*, Canadian Ethnology Service, Paper No. 104 (Ottawa: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1986).
[25] Preston, *Cree Narrative*, 194.

A motif that recurs throughout the oral tradition is that of endurance under exceptional duress, expressed often with the phrase "at last he could go no further." This is not to be taken lightly, given that the normal audience for the stories was Cree, they understood the motif within the context of their cultural norms to mean "things are at a crisis stage, and can't get any worse."

While periods of hardship were not rare, it seems that there were a few winters of extreme shortages of food animals during the 1930's. This may be attributed to erratic or abnormal weather patterns, which in turn would have significant influences on the life-cycle patterns of animals and the people who relied on them. The extreme duress is recalled in this excerpt:

> This is another survival story. We were very poor. [*poor=no food*] I was swaying back and forth because I did not eat for a long time. I was falling everywhere. I had my snowshoes on. I had to go and hunt for something to eat. This story took place far inland. I could not gather food to eat as I had to kill it first. As soon as I killed meat, then I could eat. Two days after, we were able to kill a caribou. Now, we were able to eat. This was a very hardship winter. I don't think there was another winter as hard as that winter was. It was a very difficult year. ... ...Long ago, there were many people starving. We had a lot of starving winters, but we were able to survive.

Put bluntly, you keep moving or you die. The hunter must seek out his survival on foot. Think about what this young man's tracks would have looked like, wavering, 'falling everywhere', and the information they would convey. Endurance is not an option, it is an imperative. It is a prominent theme is the stories contained in this collection. Descriptions are poignant and vivid as the balance shifts from success to a loss of ability to succeed:

> After the man ate the beaver with his children, he went out hunting, but he didn't find anything. For many days he couldn't kill anything to eat. And the man was very hungry. At times he shifted from the place where they were staying and went to another place, taking his family with him. It had been several nights and they hadn't eaten. They were becoming very weak from starvation. The man told his wife, " We should move on while we can still move." They went for some distance and finally the man couldn't walk any further. When the woman came up to her husband, she found that he had fallen to his knees from weakness. He

told her that he couldn't walk anymore. The woman was already pulling her children on the toboggan, and she put her husband on the toboggan and went on. They were still traveling; the man was under the covering of the toboggan. Then he heard his wife crying. The man asked his wife, "Are you crying because the way is hard?" The woman replied, "No, it is because I see the tracks of the caribou." She was crying because she thought her husband would not be able to kill the caribou even when they had found the tracks. (#162)

Closely related to endurance is competence, and it is competence as a hunter in the Cree culture that contributed to one's ability to endure.

Competence

The stories typically illustrate both the normative function and experience of tracks and tracking, and the potential problems when normal circumstances are suspended, and the ability to read tracks is lost. In some cases the results are very serious, as shown above, and in others, humourous, as in the story of The Rabbit that Married the Treefrog. In this relationship, the husband (rabbit) and wife (treefrog – both hopping animals) behave essentially as a human couple would. He goes out hunting during the day, and she stays at the camp and engages in traditional women's work. The twist here, is that whenever the rabbit sees indications of food-animals, he runs home terrified:

> They lived there, traveling and hunting. The rabbit went out hunting, suddenly, she heard him running home. As he came running in the tent he was shaking of fright. She asked her husband, "What is the matter with you?" He told her, "I saw very huge tracks of someone." She told him, "You are probably scared of moose tracks. Tomorrow morning we will go where the tracks are." (#101)

As a husband, the rabbit's role is to be able to read tracks and kill food for his wife and family. The humour here is in showing what a poor man the rabbit is, not just in his inability to read tracks, but in his outright fear of them. In an interesting commentary provided after the story ended, it was explained that when the couple went after the moose, the treefrog (a very small animal) killed the moose by entering its rear end and traveling along its spine to the heart, which she bit. It was then explained that if you look

at the inside of a moose (any moose), the little marks along its spinal cord are the tracks of the treefrog, and the notch on its heart is where she bit it. It is remarkable that this etiological component is offered *after* the story is officially ended, bringing this *atiukan*, or legend, into the realm of real experience by way of physical evidence (as etiological stories are intended to do).

A similarly humourous misunderstanding of tracks occurs in the Wolverine cycle. His *Mistabeo* tells Wolverine that humans will be arriving on the land, and that animals will be the food for the Indians. Eventually, Indians capture Wolverine's children, so he goes out to retrieve them:

> Finally, he came to a tent where they were. There were huge tracks. He thought that was the size of the people, not realizing they were wearing snowshoes. (#155, 156) (Figure 5.10)

Figure 5.10 A single set of adult human snowshoe tracks. (Author)

Competence in reading tracks was of the utmost importance. When a human fails in this skill, the results are likely to be serious. These animal stories offer a bit of comic relief by placing a serious issue into a humourous context. But the real difficulty of interpreting tracks and the related information a hunter may receive is always a factor in experience.

The following excerpt is from a story in which competence is the focus, so it provides a good opportunity to consider how the relationship of tracks and competence are represented.

Here an exceptional young man is determined to avenge his uncle's deaths and at the same time demonstrate his superior ability over a notorious man who has captured all of the animals and fish and keeps them in a lake inside his tent. His goal is to out-do the

man at his own game and then release all of the animals so they will be available throughout the land, and people will no longer go hungry. After reviving his uncles, the three men venture out toward the tent of Nenimso:

> The boy said to the two men, "We will go and see him." The men are not very anxious to go as they were killed when they went [before]. Both men thought that he will probably be able to survive. They all left to see him. They said to him, "we slept half way from his wigwam." The boy said to them, "I am going to lead the way. Don't look back at our trails. We will all make a different trail but going the same direction." It was very dark, the boy asked them, "Is this about where you slept?" They answered him, "Yes, we passed it." They walked a few feet away and he said to them, "We will sleep now." The boy was looking for a place to sleep, and he said to them, "This is meat's (animal's) tracks." The men went to him, here, there were a lot of bear tracks. The boy was busy on the tracks and he said to them, "Here is the meat." (#145)

The boy is demonstrating his competence by his skill in both the intentional creation of tracks as strategy against an enemy, and in reading tracks as strategy in getting food. He does not say *why* they are not to look back at their trails, so the intent here is unclear. Earlier in the story it is explained that the boy was conceived mysteriously when his mother handled a small, unusual looking stone, and that he grew from birth to manhood in a matter of days. He has already demonstrated exceptional control of conjuring power by bringing his uncles back to life, and it may be that he is channeling his power into their tracks for some unstated strategic reason. Again, this is speculation, but it is based on a demonstrated pattern both in this story and in the larger body of oral tradition used in this study.

Either way, his authority is clearly indicated and respected by his uncles, and his comments show that he is aware of the possibility that someone else, perhaps their adversary, could attempt to follow them. It could be that he is using tracks to deceive, or planning that if one of them is tracked down, the others might not be.

To be "busy on the tracks" of the bear is a way of saying he is engaging his skills and competence as a hunter to interpret and follow animal tracks to get food for the men

to eat. It is a fitting expression to conclude this interpretation with, because it reflects in few and simple words, the nature of tracks and experience in the landscape. 'Busy' in this context is a word of action, movement, and attentiveness to detail. These are the embodiment of a life based on continuous movement through the landscape in rhythm with the yearly cycles of change.

E. Summary: Tracks as an Indicator of Culture in the Landscape

In this analysis, I have attempted to demonstrate the different functions of tracks in Eastern James Bay Cree oral tradition as a reflection of cultural experience in the landscape. I began with a basic consideration of directional and locational references including using tracks to find animals and people, alternative forms of tracking related to conjuring, and the circumstances associated with a loss of tracks. Then I took a more detailed look at the ways of reading tracks and the kinds of information they provide. Through examples, I explored the larger theme of tracks as language in the landscape through a sequence of sub-themes, demonstrating the degrees of complexity in the amount of information that tracks can provide, the use of tracks as confirmation of circumstances and events, the connection between tracks, dreams, and metaphors, the use of tracks as intentional modes of communication to assist, deceive, or redirect activity, and the role of tracks as a conduit for the transmission of knowledge and power. In addition, the temporal aspect of tracks was discussed. Shifting from functional aspects to tracks as carriers of cultural values, I discussed how endurance and competence are illustrated in the representation of tracks. These themes were all self-evident in the stories, and became clear to me after many readings, through a gradual process of pattern emergence as my comprehension of both details and broad cultural constructs began to coalesce into an intuitive grasp of meaning.

One story remains to be discussed: The Birds that Flew Away with People. I have saved it for the summary because, quite remarkably, it incorporates most of the representational themes that have been explored in this study. It is a long story, with an 'epic' quality to it. The excerpt here is from the opening sequence, focusing on the importance of tracks:

> There was a man who was lost, suddenly. The Indians thought he could have flown away but they were not sure. They would find his tracks ending, suddenly. Where his tracks ended, was the load if he carried one. The Indians wondered about him....
>
> That man that was lost disappeared on his return home in the evening. There was a woman who disappeared too, she disappeared on her way home after checking traps with her husband. Her husband did not find her and he did not see where someone could have killed her. She was lost.
>
> ...When a person disappears, their tracks are very clear in the snow until they end, suddenly. ...
>
> There was a young man. His mother and father were still living. The young man was the only child. One night, his father did not return home. They had a lot of food. His mother said to him, "I wonder what happened to your father, he did not return home, yet." This young man had a dream. He dreamt that he was following his father's tracks, then, someone carried him off. In his dream, he was thinking that his father was carried away by a very large bird. He decided to follow his father's tracks to see if his dream was true.
>
> He started to follow his father's tracks. He saw an area where his father had killed two porcupines. His father had left from the side of their wigwam and was circling to go home. His father's tracks were very close to their wigwam, the tracks looked like his father was heading home. He wondered where his father disappeared (lost) as he was almost home.
>
> There was a lake very close to their wigwam. He knew his father came across the lake when it was very dark. His father's tracks disappeared half way on the lake. At the end of his father's tracks were his bow and arrows and axe. This is all of his father's belongings he found, he did not find the two porcupines. ...
>
> ...He started hunting around with his mother. He killed some beavers and told his mother to pull the beavers on the sled. It was getting dark out. Their wigwam was very close. His mother will be walking across the ice. His mother went home. He thought, "probably, my mother will have a cooked beaver ready for me." He started home. When he reached home, his mother was not home. He wondered what happened to her as he returned where he came from. He could not find her.
>
> The next morning when he got up, he went to where they went that night. She did not return home. As the young man came across the lake, all he could see was the end of his mother's tracks. He was looking around on the lake, looking for his mother.
>
> Then he saw something very clear, as he went towards it. Here were the beavers his mother was pulling on the sled. The beavers looked as if they fell down from the sky. He decided to find out what it was that he dreamt his father was carried away by. ... (#142)

Lost, suddenly. These two words are packed with meaning. At the most basic level, the directional information required to lead others to them is gone. Without tracks they cannot be found. As a prelude to the story, the narrator and translator were trying to explain that in Cree there are two words for when something strange and surprising happens; they were emphasizing the importance of the unexplainable in the story. It was translated into English as "suddenly." Recall the earlier discussion on the psychological impacts of "lost." To be without information about where someone is or where they are gone is to be at a loss oneself.

As the story goes on, the details of track language come into play, as we see in the following phrase:

> *He did not see where someone could have killed her.*

There is no physical indication at the end of her tracks of any evidence of struggle, or the tracks of another person, or blood. She was just gone.

> ...*When a person disappears, their tracks are very clear in the snow until they end, suddenly.* ...

Again, the strangeness of the event is repeated so that the listener is clear about what is and is not able to be known from the tracks: they are there, clearly, and then they stop. The situation as indicated by the tracks is understood to be perfectly normal and then suddenly, the extreme opposite of normal. It creates a situation where people are without clues, or the language of physical evidence to piece together what has happened.

When the young man's father does not return home in the evening, there are a number of normal possibilities that could explain his absence. When someone does not arrive where they are expected to be, someone else normally goes out to follow their tracks to find them. It can be a difficult task because of the chances of finding them starved to death, as happens in many stories. But the expectation is that the tracks will

lead you to the person and the answers about their condition.

> *One night, his father did not return home. They had a lot of food.*

By indicating that they had a lot of food, he is saying that the man would not have collapsed from exhaustion and be in a condition of a loss of endurance, and starvation. That eliminates one of the few standard possibilities.

> *This young man had a dream. He dreamt that he was following his father's tracks, then, someone carried him off. In his dream, he was thinking that his father was carried away by a very large bird.*

To try to find out what has happened, the young man intentionally enters a dream state to track his father's movements. It is an alternative, metaphorical form of tracking, and suggests he has already achieved a high degree of competence in tracking and in knowing how to manage in difficult circumstances.

> *He decided to follow his father's tracks to see if his dream was true.*

When he sets out to follow his father's tracks he is using them as a confirmation of the events depicted in his dream. He adds to his knowledge by the pieces of evidence accumulated along the way:

> *He saw an area where his father had killed two porcupines. His father had left from the side of their wigwam and was circling to go home. His father's tracks were very close to their wigwam, the tracks looked like his father was heading home.*

The temporal aspect of knowledge from tracks is illustrated by the recognition that the tracks were close to home (past tense) and that it appeared that he was heading home (future anticipated).

Later, we learn that the father had been using a bow and arrow:

> *At the end of his father's tracks were his bow and arrows and axe. This is all of his father's belongings he found, he did not find the two porcupines. ...*

so his disappearance would not have been due to a gun accident (nor was there any body). Again, it is given in the amount of evidence that is visible, part of the "tracks" are the personal belongings left there. It would not be normal to leave without one's tools, so

their presence adds to the suspicious nature of his disappearance. We also learn that he has walked across a lake, and there is no mention of open water or soft ice, so we can presume that he has not drowned:

> *There was a lake very close to their wigwam. He knew his father came across the lake when it was very dark. His father's tracks disappeared half way on the lake.*

As indicated earlier, the two most common reasons for accidental death were starvation and drowning, and gun accidents were also common. The evidence of tracks has ruled out each of these.

The sequence is repeated when his mother is lost to him.

> *As the young man came across the lake, all he could see was the end of his mother's tracks. He was looking around on the lake, looking for his mother.*
>
> *Then he saw something very clear, as he went towards it. Here were the beavers his mother was pulling on the sled. The beavers looked as if they fell down from the sky.*

To say that the beavers looked as if they fell from the sky is to imagine something outside of the logical realm of reality, but it fits with the young man's suspicions that his parents were carried away in the air.

> *He decided to find out what it was that he dreamt his father was carried away by.*

Again, the young man's competence is emphasized when he decides to find out what it was that carried his father (and mother) away. He uses a combination of dreams and physical evidence to confirm the information each provides. The evidence of tracks indicates that they are not on land or in the water, so the only other option, no matter how strange or surprising, must be the air.

In the context of a life where people rely every day on all of the signs around them to piece together circumstances and events that they have not seen first hand, the loss of a normal pattern of recognizable signs would severely limit the ability to know

and participate in culture. Tracks are the primary indicators of culture in the landscape. Tracks are maps, they are language, and they carry meaning. They are the result of movement and mobility patterns in the yearly cycle of life in the subarctic.

1. Landscape, Culture, and Representation

In Chapter 1, I stated that the intent of the research was to identify the symbolic expression of landscape in Eastern James Bay Cree oral tradition, and to interpret its cultural meaning. This effort was informed by concepts such as landscape, culture, and representation, to which I now return.

Geertz wrote that his understanding of the culture concept was that "it denotes an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life."[1] I see oral tradition as a macro-scale "symbolic form" in this context, and within that at a micro level, tracks are another "symbolic form," an expression or reflection of the broader theme of movement and mobility in the yearly cycle. Oral tradition and tracks are both aspects of how people "communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life."

Landscape, I have argued, is land perceived and valued through the cultural mind. The process of converting land into landscape involves both the attribution of meaning and symbolization. As stated by Greider and Garkovich, "(t)he symbols and meanings that comprise landscapes reflect what people in culture groups define to be proper and improper relationships among themselves and between themselves and the physical environment."[2] This observation is particularly appropriate in the context of East Cree culture and oral tradition, where landscape meaning is indicated symbolically through the actions and interactions of persons *including* the landscape.

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[1] Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*, 89.

In their exploration of symbolism and cultural landscapes, Rowntree and Conkey suggest that the cultural landscape is the result of symbolic action, and as such, is a cultural product. And just as symbols "store" meaning, so too does the cultural landscape.[3] In built landscapes these symbols may take the form of monuments, earthworks, or other structures, but this is not necessarily the case. It is particularly in cultures with un-built landscapes that the symbolic representation of meaning is manifest in other forms, such as oral tradition. This is also a cultural product, one in which actions function as symbols or vehicles for the expression of beliefs and values. Within these narratives lies the meaning of their cultural landscape. Commenting on this ontological divergence between Western culture and hunter-gatherer cultures, Ingold states:

> In Western ontology, as we have seen, the landscape is not so much a course to be followed as a resistance to be overcome, a naturally given, material substrate that is 'humanized' by imposing on it forms whose origins lie in a separate domain of the imagination, to yield an environment that is 'artificial' or 'built'. Hunter-gatherers are seen as people who have failed to achieve this, whose designs are not translated into action, settings thought but not built. Hunter-gatherer ontology, however, asserts the precise opposite. Action does not serve to translate pre-existent form from one domain (the mental) to another (the material); rather, form arises and is held in place *within* action: it is movement congealed.[4]

To this I would add that oral tradition is a cultural form, and it is both embedded in and representative of action in the landscape. Rowntree and Conkey use narrative as a metaphor for discussing the symbol-bearing quality of the cultural landscape, and their comment takes on additional significance in the context of this discourse:

> The cultural landscape in part functions as a narrative, a symbolic legacy conveying, if not realizing, information from one generation to another, information about subsistence ways, cosmology, territory, or historical position.[5]

Cultural landscape is a landscape that is integrated with the cultural practices of a

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[2] Greider and Garkovich, "Landscapes," 2.
[3] Lester B. Rowntree and Margaret Conkey, "Symbolism and the Cultural Landscape," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*. 70, 4 (Dec. 1980), 459-60.
[4] Ingold, "Hunting and Gathering," 145-6.

people. Such integration can be built or made but does not have to be. It can be achieved through other forms of construction. In either case, what happens is that a cultural representation of values and meanings about the relationship between society and land is created in some form. Typically and most familiarly it is in built form. But in the Cree context the relationship between culture and land is represented in oral tradition, which is a construction as well. Both built and un-built representations are symbolic expressions of meaning.

In this study of traditional Cree narrative, I have attempted to peel open the cultural symbols of experience to discover the meaning of landscape "from the Native's point of view."[6] The interpretation of tracks as indicators of movement and mobility is one facet of the larger study necessary to achieve a comprehensive understanding of this subject. When similar studies of the other themes I have identified are completed, I believe that a full picture will emerge.

2. Strengths and Weaknesses of this Research Method

It is my opinion that the interpretive approach is the most suitable for analyzing this kind of material to reach this kind of goal. In the case of the Eastern Cree, the major form of cultural representation is oral tradition; any effort to discover the historical perspective must look to these narratives. This is not seen as a limitation by any means, quite the opposite, I see it as an exceptional advantage that this material exists and can be studied. The benefits of using oral tradition and folklore in cultural landscape studies should not be considered applicable only to aboriginal cultures. Indeed, over twenty

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[5] Rowntree and Conkey, "Symbolism," 461.
[6] Clifford Geertz, "From the Native's Point of View: On the Nature of Anthropological Understanding," in *Interpretive Social Science: A Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow and William M. Sullivan, (Berkley: University of California Press, 1979).

years ago there were a few geographers who recognized this; Bunkse noted its value, "because it reveals, by definition, deep and shared views and attitudes; the actual, not the ideal."[7] Because of this, he suggests, folklore is a more effective source than the questionnaire when attempting to reveal cultural values. Oral tradition and folklore are cultural *self*-representation, rather than representation of culture as viewed from the point of view of the researcher.[8] This makes it an ideal source of data for interpretivist research, as noted in Chapter 1, the intent is to understand experience from the insider's point of view.

The interpretive, intuitive approach using a large body of data as I have done is also supported in Bunkse's writing: "As expressive culture, folklore does not lend itself to reduction and summary; a theme comes to life only through the unification of many minor folkloristic details into a gestalt."[9]

Unlike many subjects of research for which existing literature suggest frameworks and models that can be imposed externally onto data for analysis and interpretation, there is not an established theoretical model for discussing tracks as an indicator of cultural experience and meaning pertaining to landscape. I am glad this was the case, for it gives me a sense of reassurance that the results came from within the data, and should therefore be more truly representative of it. This is one of the real benefits of the concept behind Grounded Theory - essentially immersion in the data until it reveals its inherent

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[7] Bunkse, "Commoner Attitudes," 560.

[8] Ibid, citing Alan Dundes, "folklore... provides... a view from the inside-out, rather than from the outside-in."

[9] Ibid, 563. E. Estyn Evans also reflects on the benefits of folklore to landscape studies, stating: "the corpus of folklore in each region, serving as a bolster to established ways and as an educative device, is a reflection of the cultural landscape." He suggests it is a resource the cultural geographer can not afford to neglect. "The Cultural Geographer and Folklife Research," in *Folklore and Folklife: an Introduction*, ed. Richard M. Dorson (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1972), 517, 527.

patterns and themes. It is not a fast research method compared to many, but neither is it perfunctory - it is truly exploratory, a process of discovery and revelation. The real trick of it is that the coding categories must come from the data, not from the goals or anticipations of the researcher.

This last point brings up one area where this type of approach might reveal a weakness in the researcher's application of interpretive methods. That is, without a formal framework for the analysis of data, it is up to the researcher to use the utmost in self-control, avoiding unfounded speculations and the urge to anticipate meanings without substantial evidence to back them up. As for the method itself, when applied appropriately to a study where the sought-after results are qualitative, expressive, and unstandardized, I cannot think of a better approach.

3. Application and Contribution of this Study to Research in Landscape Architecture

Direct application of my research findings is anticipated to benefit the community of origin in two significant community-based cultural development programs. The first is a land-skills training program initiated through the Chief Malcolm Diamond Memorial Training Centre. Under this program young Cree adults would be taught the traditional life skills with the bush as their classroom; they would learn their cultural heritage *in* the landscape. Due to budget constraints the program has been shelved, and is now being re-configured through a private college operated by a member of the Waskaganish community. It is my hope that my research will be useful:

- for its potential to identify aspects of traditional experience of landscape that may not presently be remembered within the Cree community;
- and / or to present aspects of traditional experience of landscape in a way that reinforces their cultural value;

- and that by so doing, the research will contribute to the reclaiming and re-teaching of cultural heritage.

In a similar way, my work is also being offered as historical documentation for the planned development of the Waskaganish Cultural Institute, which emphasizes both oral traditions and traditional activities in the landscape. The thesis is based on the relationship between these two significant aspects of traditional Cree culture, and should therefore provide useful insights into them.

As heritage issues take the forefront in many cultures, research like this can provide a significant contribution to community-based programs and to educational awareness for those who share in multi-cultural landscapes. Within their professional capacities as consultants, landscape architects are being called upon to facilitate the re-connection between community and place.[10] This study is one example of how such efforts may be approached.

From an academic standpoint, this thesis is intended as a contribution to the literature on cultural landscape studies. At this time there are no comparable studies focusing on oral tradition as an indicator of the meaning of landscape for the Eastern James Bay Cree. This is especially relevant as the Supreme Court of Canada has recently ruled that the oral traditions of (historically) non-literate cultures must be recognized by the courts, in part for what they reveal about the traditional relationship of culture and land.[11]

I believe that it is important for the landscape architect to have an understanding

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[10] For example, Nancy Pollock-Ellwand's (and this author's) involvement in the development of *Point of View* educational software incorporating cultural landscape inventories and oral histories. Nancy Pollock-Ellwand, "Blair Cultural Landscape Inventory Project: Final Assessment" (Ontario: Ministry of Citizenship, Culture and Recreation: 1988), photocopied.
[11] Delgamuukw v. British Columbia, 23799 (1997): 85-87.

of how people perceive, value, know, and represent their landscapes; to have a sensitivity to and comprehension of the meanings places have for people. Landscape architects claim to have the landscape as their professional realm of expertise, and are primarily interested in its function and design. I believe that in order to claim such expertise, one must delve deep into what landscape means; understanding the ways of knowing and valuing the environment in which we live is critical to our ability to effectively and appropriately address function and design. This study, then, is one approach to revealing the meaning of landscape for one particular culture group, broadening awareness of the diversity of human relationships to landscape. By analyzing recorded oral tradition of the Eastern James Bay Cree, I hope to have contributed to a greater understanding of *their* traditional ways of knowing and valuing, or ascribing meaning, to their landscape.

In Chapter 1 I indicated my belief that the analytical and theoretical aspects of the discipline of landscape architecture deserve greater attention than they currently receive. This work is an effort in that direction, and it is my hope that the discussions on theory and ontology throughout the study will draw attention to the limitations of the current Euro-centric approaches to landscape theory. This is an area ripe for future research; there are hundreds of cultures in the world, each with their own constructs of landscape and associated meanings. As landscape architects find themselves practicing in all corners of the earth, awareness of these meanings becomes imperative for appropriate action. Research like the present thesis may become a necessary preliminary to major design assignments. A multicultural appreciation for landscape meaning and representation can only strengthen the disciplines involved, both in research and practice. As research tools, this thesis draws attention to several significant sources of culturally-based landscape representation; oral tradition, toponomy studies, and TEK research can be used to inform some aspects of the existing Euro-centric research and theory, to bridge

the resources of both and promote a more holistic approach.

This study relied on access to a body of original ethnographic material collected over many years. While a graduate student typically does not have the time to engage in comparable fieldwork to facilitate such a study, ethnographers have been collecting data on cultures around the world for many years, and some of these collections are archived and available for study. Others may still be in the hands of the original researcher, but it has been my experience that advanced scholars welcome the opportunity to disseminate their knowledge to a broader audience. To that end, I would recommend that a researcher in landscape architecture wishing to pursue similar studies as this, seek out those archives or ethnographers who have worked in their interest area.[12] The present thesis serves as a case study for the use of such materials in landscape research, and demonstrates their applicability for graduate research in both scope and scale.

I would not recommend an accelerated program of data collection in the context of unfamiliar cultures because of the great conceptual chasms that can exist; as Geertz has shown, it is through committed, enduring immersion in a culture that a researcher is able to generate a "thick description" of its values and beliefs.[13]

Even in familiar cultures, if the goal is to discover embedded cultural meanings, I would still recommend archival data at least as supporting evidence. One of the greatest differences between ethnography and both questionnaire and interview data is that ethnography takes in information on all aspects of culture indiscriminately. From the vast volumes of data generated, the researcher can evolve an intuitive comprehension of the perspective of the subjects, thus managing his/her interpretation of specific

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[12] An effort also recommended by Tuan: "an extensive body of data, oral and written, already exist and that these can be examined with an eye to their role in the creation of place." "Language and Place," 695.
[13] Geertz, *Interpretation of Culture*, Chapter 1.

information in the context of the informants culture - or as Geertz would say, "from the Native's point of view."[14] If a researcher neglects this critical aspect of interpretation, the results of their study risk being unrepresentative. Interview and questionnaire data tend to be more narrowly focused on specific ideas, and so need to be supplemented with additional supporting contextual data to provide the greatest opportunity for accurate interpretation by the researcher.

Ultimately, I believe that the key to discovering the meaning places have for people (in culture) is asking, "what is of interest to *them*?" rather than "what is of interest to me (the researcher)?" This is the essence of interpretive qualitative research.

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[14] Geertz, "Natives Point of View." Tuan also commends the cultural approach, stating that it "draws on narrative and descriptive techniques that in their fundamentals are intuitively understood and employed by all story-telling humans, and has the merit of being more inclusive and faithful to the complexities of actual experience," "Language and Place," 695.

APPENDIX 1: ORGANIZATIONAL CHART

The data used in this study consists of original audio recordings and their typed transcripts. The transcripts are not catalogued or indexed. In order to manage the vast amount of information in them, I developed an organizational chart, assigning index numbers to each item in the transcripts. These are cross-indexed with the folder (A, B, C, etc.) the transcript is stored in, and title or first few words of each transcript. The chart lists 195 units of data, and is fifty-two pages long. A sample is provided in Figure A-1.

The first column is the index number applied by me to the item. These appear in parenthesis at the end of each excerpt included in the thesis text.

The second column represents the story typology. There is a typical range of story types, or subjects, in the data. These include:

- hunting, with sub-themes of hardship, success, endurance
- conflict, usually with persons external to the local group. This includes Pawts, Nottaways, Huskies (Inuit), *Atoosh(es)*, or less frequently other Cree people. In few cases conflict is within the local group.
- conjuring, for various reasons including hunting and conflict
- fur trade, including trading, freighting for the company, relations with the trading posts
- social life
- ethical behaviour, especially towards other "persons"

Many stories include more than one of the above subjects, but one will generally be prominent over the others.

The third column is the oral tradition category abbreviation. H = life history of the narrator, T = history (*tepaciman*), A = legend (*atiukan*), S = song, and E = ethnographic information (not stories - usually given in explanation of story content).

The forth column is the story name as indicated on the transcript. Where no name is given, the first few words of the transcript item are used.

The fifth column in the chart indicates the location of the transcript in the files, for example "B 71-3" is folder "B" numbered pages seventy-one to seventy-three.

In the sixth column the intent is to indicate a typology of landscape representation for the content of each item of data. The terms are brief, such as:

- features, such as mountains, lakes, and rapids
- activities (in the landscape), such as hunting, traveling
- tracks and trails
- places (identified by events) / place-names

The final column in the chart is an abbreviated synopsis of those aspects of each item of data that point to representation of landscape. They are *not* a summary of each whole item.

row #	story "type" (what the story is about)	H T A S E	story or text name or first line if no title present	folder & page #	landscape typology (categories of landscape representation)	comments & summary of landscape components of stories. NOT A SUMMARY OF THE STORIES - ONLY LANDSCAPE REFERENCES
48	hunting - endurance - hardship - success	T	Story of man who had no luck at all…	B-E1	activity: hunting feature: lake endurance	endurance - hardship; man goes to lake to check lines, somebody (mistabeo?) appears and helps, tells him where to go for success w/caribou.
49	hunting - hardship - success	T	Another *tepaciman* told by Samson	B71-3	activity: hunting feature: big hill water = time - cycle	hard luck boy, they were staying w/ bro-in law in the fall, who told him to stay w/fa. while b-l-l went elsewhere. boy has no luck hunting, sits on a big hill, hears voice telling him he will learn to be a great hunter. so he went out in canoe, set net, fish jumped in; = in hunting; 'when it was frozen over' he went to see his sister, they went back with him.
50	conflict - different group of Indians	A	The man's name was MiKoju	B74-81	activity: fighting, traveling tracking - scrying power tracks - trail pole markings (directional information) feature: lake vegetation: tree	M's wife killed by hostiles, he sets out for revenge - 'he could see in his mind where they were', he went on snowshoe, saw moose tracks, and someone following the moose - chased moose back to men, closed trail w/tree, made a sign where they sh go off trail to find the moose; rescues women and tells to follow trail; chases after fastest smartest enemy running toward lake, when *M got there E was ½ across, came to a* bigger lake E was all way across, came to 3rd bigger lake and M could only see E's track.
51	conflict - local men conjuring - competition	T	George Head - The man's name was 'the louse' (Louse and Wide Lake)	B81 lower-86	tracks / tracking symbolic hunting - power feature: the sea, underground	W sent his power to L through his paddle and it went up his arm - 'I tracked it and I saw W going up my arm to my shoulder'… [a dif context for tracking] to retaliate - 'I don't think he has power underground, so I went underground and came out at his tent….L blinded by bone chips, told his friends to make a canoe,' when the sea opens in the spring I'll paddle around…I'll float around the sea and kill seals by sound, and in the fall

In addition to the sources cited in the text and listed in the bibliography of this thesis, there are further readings that contributed to my ability to complete this work. They are listed here as supplemental sources.

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