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Indians in the Fur Trade:
their role as trappers, hunters,
and middlemen in the lands
southwest of Hudson Bay

1660-1870

p. 203

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TABLE 8
Fur quotas for 1826*

Beaver Assorted	Athabaskan	Saskatchewan, Lesser Slave Lake, and Ft Assiniboine	English River	Cumberland	Swan River and upper Red River	Lower Red River	Winnipeg	Lac la Pluie	Norway House	Island Lake	Severn	Nelson River	Churchill	York Factory
Outfit 1823	7726	7800	1757	272	663	30	44	826	138	352	660	794	447	504
Outfit 1824	5479	6493	1201	303	644	37	123	735	7	187	368	1033	317	370
Outfit 1825	6186	6896	1078	397	433	80	76	501	26	152	211	702	342	285
Total returns in beaver for 3 years	19,391	21,189	4036	972	1740	147	243	2062	171	691	1239	2529	1106	1159
Average per year	6463	7063	1345	324	580	49	81	687	57	230	413	843	368	386
Less	1292†	1412‡	673**	162**	145‡		27†		20**	115**	207**	422**	184**	193**
Quota not to be exceeded in Outfit 1826	5771	5651	672	162	435		54		28	115	206	421	184	193

* HBC D 4/89, and Fleming, *Minutes of Council*

† Less approximately one-fifth of average

‡ Less approximately one-quarter of average

** Less approximately one-half of average

tomed to long-range planning and saving. Rather, they lived on a day-to-day basis and believed that if the animal spirits were given due respect there would always be enough game for the future.²⁵ If the traders managed to convince particular Indian bands that they should conserve their resources and that various species should not be hunted year after year when they were being endangered locally the neighbouring bands would often move in and trap the animals. This occurred because traditionally there was no well-developed sense of territoriality or trespass among these groups. Band territories were not sharply defined, but rather bands tended to return to the same general area year after year. However, neighbouring groups could encroach on any portions of a band's hunting range which was not being exploited in a given year. Likewise, unexploited resources in a territory were considered to be 'free resources' which any party could use.²⁶ Under these conditions game management was not possible because whenever a group agreed not to hunt beaver, muskrat, or some other animal for an extended period, bands living in the adjacent country had every right to move in and hunt them.

In an effort to deal with this problem Governor Simpson initiated a new company policy that was to profoundly affect the lives of the Indians. He proposed settling Indian families in well-defined territories on a permanent basis. He fully realized that this would involve changing a basic feature of the Indian life style – mobility – and that a family territory system was not well suited to all areas because of varying cultural and ecological conditions. Regarding these matters, in his 1828 report to the directors in London he wrote:

On the subject of nursing the country ... the plan suggested in ... my Dispatch from Moose [Factory] of allotting certain tracts of country to the different Bands can only be carried into full effect in extended Districts such as Albany, where the population is very thin; but in small districts frequented by Rein Deer and where the Fisheries are not numerous the Indians are under the necessity of going sometimes from one extremity thereof, to the other, in search of the means of living ... We are endeavouring to confine the natives throughout the country now by families, to separate and distinct hunting grounds, and in a few years, I hope it will become general, but it is a very difficult matter to change the habits of Indians although they may see the ultimate benefit thereof to themselves and families.²⁷

As Simpson thus recognized, population densities, game conditions and the economic orientations of the various bands determined whether or not the new scheme would work.

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