

THE EARLY INTRODUCTION OF IRON AMONG THE FIRST NATIONS OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

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This article documents both the historical and archaeological evidence for the movement of European manufactured iron goods across Canada from the 16th to 18th centuries and overviews the late 18th century accounts of Iron observed in the possession of First Nations in British Columbia.

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Introduction

It is a commonly held belief that iron was not used by aboriginal peoples of British Columbia before the arrival of Europeans in the late 18th century. The evidence indicates that this is not the case.

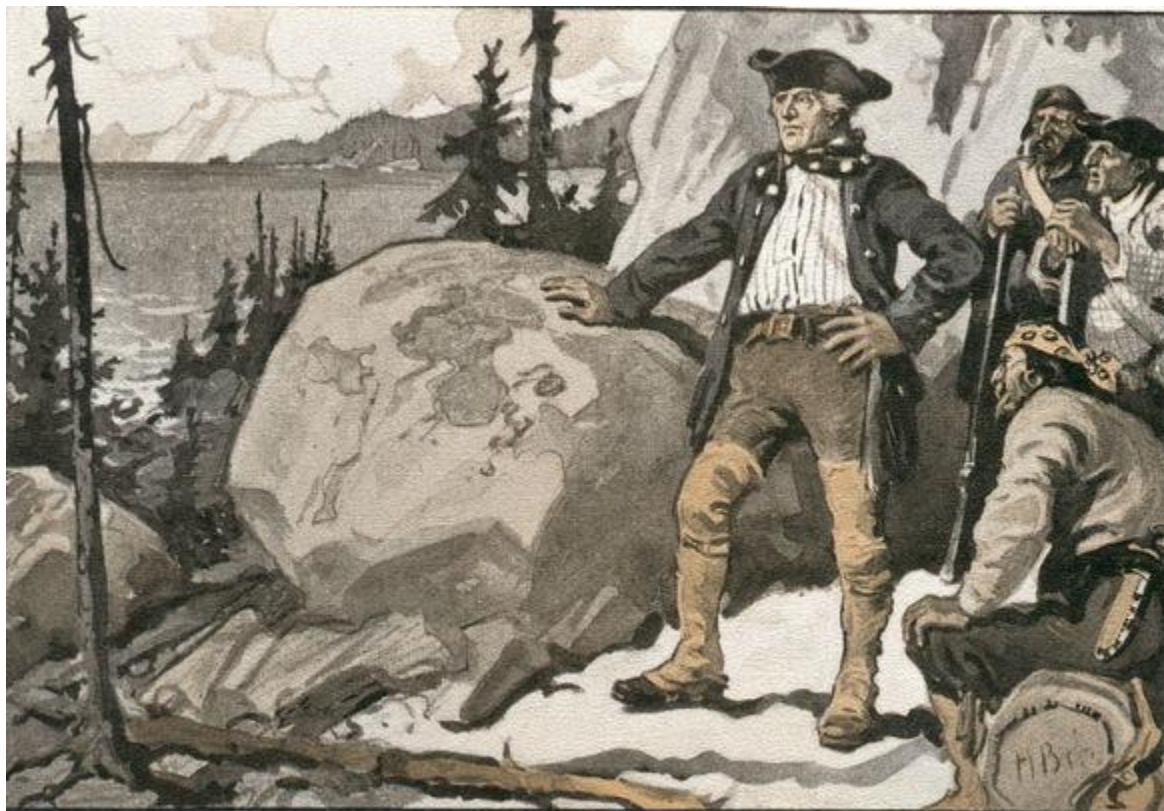
The following is an overview of the evidence for the movement of iron from various directions toward British Columbia in the period before European contact and during the very early contact period. After 1799 the trade market with First Nations of British Columbia was saturated with European iron goods. Accounts of First Nations with metal goods after 1799 would mostly pertain to trade goods received in the previous 10 years - and will therefore not be dealt with here.

This research examines the movement of iron from the 16th century in eastern Canada as it begins to make its way closer and closer to the interior of British Columbia. It also provides an overview of First Nations and early European observations of iron on the Pacific coast – with an emphasis on British Columbia.

The writing of this paper stems from my Royal B.C. Museum research project on the famous Kwah's dagger, as well as my earlier work (see The Question of Asiatic Objects on the North Pacific Coast of America : Historic or Prehistoric?).

The former paper outlines the history and the metallurgical analysis of one dagger originally believed to have been acquired before the period of direct European contact. It also presents an overview of the main types of daggers found in museum collections with historical commentary that complements this paper.

18th Century commentary on the origins of iron



Sir Alexander Mackenzie's arrival at the Pacific Overland
from Canada, 1793

From the drawing by C. W. Jefferys

Figure 1. Alexander MacKenzie who observed and obtained information on iron tools among First Nations in the Northern Interior of British Columbia in 1793. From the drawing by C.W. Jefferys. Keddie Collection.

In 1793 when Alexander McKenzie was at Narcosli Creek on the Fraser River (upstream from Alexandria) he observed that the First Nations in the area:

“Now procured iron, brass, copper, and trinkets, from the westward; but formerly these articles were obtained from the lower parts of the river, though in small quantities. A knife was produced which had been brought from that quarter. ... We understood that this

instrument had been obtained from white men, long before they had heard that any came to the westward. One very old man observed, that as long as he could remember, he was told of white people to the southward; and that he had heard, though he did not vouch for the truth of the report, that one of them had made an attempt to come up the river, and was destroyed." (Sheppe, 1995:161-2). In 1808, Simon Fraser was shown a location at the south end of the Fraser canyon where the local First Nations said men like he had come. A map summarizing the travels of David Thompson and Simon Fraser is marked: "To this place the White men come from the sea". There is no known European record of such visits (Lamb 1970).

James Cook and others on his voyage of 1788 suggested that the iron they observed on the coast must have come from the Interior. John Ledyard stated that "it was generally thought they came from a great distance and not unlikely from Hudson's Bay" (Munford, 1939:77). Cook observed:

"Their great dexterity in works of wood, may, in some measure, be ascribed to the assistance they receive from iron tools. For, as far as we know, they use no other; at least, we saw only one chisel of bone. And though originally, their tools must have been of different materials, it is not improbable that many of their improvements have been made since they acquired a knowledge of that metal... The chisel and the knife, are the only forms, as far as we saw, that iron assumes amongst them. ...their singular form marks that they are not of European make" (Cook, 1784:329-332).

While visiting the west coast of Vancouver Island, Cook observed that iron was common:

"uses of it (iron) were too well known, for them to have had the first knowledge of it so very lately; or indeed, at any earlier period, by an accidental supply from a ship. Doubtless, from the general use they make of this metal, it may be supposed to come from some constant source by way of traffic, and that not of a very late date; for they are as dexterous in using their tools as the longest practice can make them. The most probable way, therefore, by which we can suppose that they get their iron, is by trading for it with other Indian tribes, who either have immediate communication with European settlements upon that continent, or receive it, perhaps, through several intermediate nations" (Cook, 1784:329-332).

Cook's ideas may have been influenced by his observations in the Bering Strait:

"For although the Russians live amongst them, we found much less of this metal in their possession, than we had met with in the possession of other tribes on the American continent, who had never seen, nor perhaps had any intercourse with, the Russians" (Cook, 1784(2):511).

In the 1790s Etienne Marchand made this more thorough observation, which saw metal coming from several sources:

“The first navigators who visited the North West coast of America, in ascending from the forty-second degree of latitude to the sixtieth parallel, found that the knowledge and the use of iron had long since arrived there; and they saw, in the hands of the natives, various instruments and tools of that metal: it is probable that the latter received it from the interior, by communicating, from tribe to tribe, with the nations which receive it immediately through the medium of the Europeans, either from the English settlements of the Hudson's bay or from the Spanish presidios. The trade of the Americans of the North West Coast with the Russians must, for upwards of half a century past, have made them acquainted with iron and copper.” (Fleurieu, 1801:341).

Are we any further along today in answering the question of where the iron came from?

The movement of iron goods from east to west in Canada

Factors affecting the spread of iron

Traditional aboriginal trade networks in Canada were extensive and covered vast distances (see Wright and Carlson 1987). I have identified a micro-blade core made from a piece of mahogany obsidian that was traded all the way from the state of Oregon to Francois Lake (at 54 degrees latitude) in the central Interior of British Columbia. I have also observed several pieces of turquoise found in the Penticton area of the southern Interior of the Province that came either from Nevada or further south. These are found in private collections, except for a single piece in the Penticton Museum that was associated with a late prehistoric burial at Skaha Lake . These objects represent the evidence of the furthest south to north trade found to date in British Columbia.

However, evidence for East to West trade covers a much greater distance. I have identified artifacts made of Knife River flint from the state of South Dakota from archaeological sites in the southern Interior of British Columbia, the lower Fraser River area and on the east coast of Vancouver Island. These specimens would have traveled up to 2000 km taking the route up the Missouri River and across the Rocky Mountains to the Columbia River drainage.

The introduction of iron likely served to expand the extent of the already existing trade systems. Iron spread mostly through established trading partners – where members of one group visited the village of a neighbour, obtained goods, and returned home. Over time this changed to a system where First Nations middle-traders went beyond their own territories to trade with other groups further from the European trade centres. The pace of movement of iron goods increased as the latter system was implemented.

In parts of Eastern Canada, the spread of used European iron was likely slowed down before the 1630s by the First Nations practice of burying iron goods with their

owner. Competition, warfare and population movements also hampered the expansion of the fur trade until the 1660s. The later “French and Indian wars” from 1754-1763 would have also slowed the movement of east-west trade on the more southerly routes (see Schwartz 1994). Population decline due to disease and/or warfare decreased the demand for iron, but also allowed traders to move more rapidly through de-populated areas and increased the desire to obtain European weapons on the part of those without guns to defend themselves.

Jangsuk Kim argues that when a new technology of economic importance is introduced: “elites of adopting societies try to avoid the initial cost and risks of adoption, actively intervening in the process of its spread” (Kim 2001:442). The examples we see in the Canadian historic record, suggest that this process tends to more often speed-up the process of diffusion rather than slow it down.

Looking at the trade in iron from the perspective of those who adopt it as an innovation, there are risks that they are taking. Risks can be avoided by passing on the new iron goods to the next group at considerable profit. The records of the Euro-American traders demonstrate that aboriginal peoples usually had to dispose of their surplus iron investment before they would purchase more. This often meant trading it quickly to populations further away from the trade centres.

The Proto-Historic Period

The historic or contact period commences when First Nations encounter fur traders in their own territories. The proto-historic period begins with the influx of trade goods or influences such as disease or when First Nations travel outside of their traditional territory to obtain European trade goods (Bishop and Ray, 1976). I am concerned here with the beginning of the proto-historic period in northern British Columbia. The time when iron goods began reaching over the Rocky Mountains from Eastern Canada before the visits of European explorers along the Pacific coast in the 1770's. The following is an overview of the trade movements relevant to formulating the timing of the proto-historic period in Northern British Columbia.

Iron in eastern Canada

Small amounts of iron were likely traded by Vikings and remained in the far eastern parts of Canada and the U.S. It was the Voyages in the first fifty years of the 16th century that saw the beginning of regular trade contact with the Beothuk of Newfoundland and the eastern bands of Micmac and Montagnais. By the 1530s Breton voyages came to the Strait of Belle Isle for cod fishing, followed by French Basques. By the 1540s Spanish and French Basques established season whaling stations along the Labrador coast. English fisherman established themselves on the

coast of Newfoundland by the 1570s. By 1578 there were 350 European ships fishing cod in the new lands and 30-40 in the whale hunt. By the 1550s European trade goods were passing up the St. Lawrence River. The fur trade and trade in metals had begun as an accessory to the fishing industry (Barkham 1977 & 1984; Bailey 1937; Mannion and Barkham 1987; Proulx 1993).

The Spanish movement northward from Florida after the establishment of St. Augustine in 1565 and other European activities (see Snow 1976) resulted in the expansion of iron both along the coast and through the interior. Iron appears in the state of Georgia in the 1540-60 period (Pearson 1977). Bourque and Whitehead (1985) argue that, in spite of a few earlier coastal voyages, trade goods were reaching the coast of Maine via First Nations overland trade from the St. Lawrence River before 1602. By 1605 iron axes were common in the Gulf of Maine.

European goods were reaching southern Ontario via the northern Lake Nipissing route by the mid-16th century (Trigger 1985:188). When New France was founded in 1608, the French gained control of trade routes to the Interior by forming alliances with tribes along the existing trade routes. They traded iron arrowheads, knives, hatchets, awls, and kettles. The Montagnais controlled the route to the Interior by way of Saguenay. Direct trade was made with the Huron in 1609 and contact made with the Iroquois in 1615, although we can be certain that at least small amounts of iron goods were coming to this area of the St Lawrence by the early 1500s. In the late 16th century Algonkin traders carried European goods up the St. Lawrence Valley to groups living around Lake Ontario and the Hurons of the Trent Valley. Some of the earliest European metal trade goods to reach Ontario would be iron celts, awls and fragments of cut-up brass kettles bent to make beads (Bailey 1937; Trigger 1987; Trigger 1996). By 1615 the Hurons had consolidated their position as the hub of intertribal trade in the Upper Great Lakes Region (Trigger 1985:205).

Earlier aboriginal trade networks included long distant movements, such as copper from Lake Superior traveling west to the Saskatchewan border. Shells were traded 3000 years ago from the Great Lakes area to Manitoba – over 700km to the west (see Wright and Carlson 1987).

Although iron goods began to trickle west of the Great Lakes area in the early 1600s, it is unlikely that any would have made it as far as the future British Columbia. About 1635 the French contacted some groups near the west end of the Great Lakes who had no iron tools (Bailey 1937; see Heidenreich 1987). Excavation of the Hood site, a historic Neutral First Nation town, located just S.W. of Lake Ontario revealed Jesuit artifacts that date to the visit of Jean de Brebeuf and Joseph Chaumont in 1640. Earlier visits were made to the area, such as that of Etienne Brule in 1615, and some metal goods were likely already being traded by Huron traders, but in very small quantities (Lennox, 1984).

In the period from the 1620s to 1650s traders and Jesuits provided iron arrow points, knives, rings, awls, needles, medals, small crucifixes of iron and brass, hatchets,

bodkins, swords, ice picks, kettles and barbed iron darts for beaver hunting. With the establishment in 1673 of fort Michilimackinac (see Miller and Stone 1970) where Lakes Superior, Huron and Michigan come together, these iron goods became common around and to the west of the Great Lakes – probably extending as far as the present area of Manitoba. A burial of a woman from northern Manitoba was associated with a birch bark container with two metal blades and an iron awl. It has a suggested date of 1665 A.D., although the excavators suggest that glass trade beads found with the burial may date to the early 1700s (Brownlee and Syms, 1999).

In the 1720s the French trade movement spread into the Northwest (see Voorhis 1930). Anderson compared the inventory from 70 French trade outfits in the period from 1715 to 1760 with archaeological evidence. He shows that clothing was the most important trade item – but substantial numbers of metal goods associated with hunting, cooking and eating, adornment and woodworking were also moving into the upper Mississippi drainage and the area west of the Great Lakes (Anderson 1994).

The westward approaching fur trade period

In western Hudson's Bay local First Nations were acquiring iron goods in the 1612 to 1620 period – mostly from the wrecks of two abandoned ships (Russel 1991:64). More regular trade started in 1682 with the establishment of York Factory on the Nelson River (see Kenyon, 1986).

For years after the creation of the Hudson's Bay Co. charter of 1670, direct trade with First Nations was mostly confined to the shores of Hudson's and James Bay. British trade iron had to move from one First Nations to another from the trading posts. In 1684-85, a Jesuit, Antoine Silvy reported that Assinboin and Cree came to trade at Hudson's Bay from beyond Lake Winnipeg (Silvy 1968:68).

Inland excursions took some trade items direct to the interior and encouraged more First Nations to come to the coastal trading posts. These inland excursions included the visits of Henry Kelsey to Northern Manitoba and the plains of Saskatchewan in 1690-91. In 1715 William Stuart was guided by Thanadelthur (a Chipewyan woman) up the Churchill River and across the tundra to the area near Great Slave Lake. They met with the Chipewyans to try and encourage peaceful relations with their Cree neighbors. A follow-up visit was made by Richard Norton two years later accompanied by another Chipewyan woman who had been captured by the Cree (Smith 1981; Russel 1991). In the period from 1700 to 1720 the indirect trade area from York Factory extended to Eastern Alberta and by 1750 to Great Slave Lake (Ray 1974:57).

In the 1720 – 1774 period York Factory, on Hudson's Bay, traded 14,780 Kettles, 39,365 hatchets, 110,624 knives, and close to 7000 lbs of beads (Ray 1974:85). These and other items such as ice chisels and files found their way into central and southern Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

The 67 Hudson's Bay Company ships that brought goods for the Inuit trade between 1738-1757 included a wide range of iron goods which included, in addition to knives, sword blades (1741-49), whaling lances (1747-57) and bayonets (1751-57), and as a common commodity – old barrel hoops which were often sectioned into knife blades (Barr, 1994). Small amounts of these materials were likely making their way far to the west.

Ray (1974:59) suggests that the Sarcee of northern Alberta visited York Factory on Hudson's Bay in 1728-30 and possibly as early as 1715-20, but this is disputed by Russel (1991:190). Northern visitors before 1717 were Athabascan speaking Chipewyan but “included among these parties were Northern Indian Strangers who came from beyond Lake Athabasca toward Great Slave Lake ” (Ray, 1974:59).

Long distant trade via the Cree and Assiniboine was likely accentuated by 1740 with the introduction of horses to the parkland belt in central Alberta. Horses had reached Washington State and Southern Alberta by the early 1700's (*Horses were introduced into Eastern Canada from European sources only about 1665).

The Assiniboine and Cree had a monopoly over the inland trade. They traded with both the French and, after 1670, the English via Hudson's Bay. They traded iron knives to the Chipewyan of northern Saskatchewan, the Gros Ventre of southern Saskatchewan and the upper Missouri, and the Blood, Blackfoot and Sarcee of Alberta. The Assiniboine took trade guns and other goods south to the Mandan and Gros Ventre on the upper Missouri, who traded for horses, corn and tobacco. In 1753 Anthony Henday made a trip from James Bay to the area north of Calgary, Alberta, observing the use of guns and horses. After France yielded its claim to Canada in 1763, Scottish merchants began to expand the Montreal fur trade beyond the earlier French trade routes [*Note].

The story of Saukamappee, an elder Cree who lived with David Thompson at a Piegan village in southern Alberta during the winter of 1787, provides an account that gave specific information on the presents of iron weapons. Saukamappee, who was adopted by the Piegan, said that when he was a young man (c.1723-1733) at his old home village at the junction of the Pasquia and Saskatchewan rivers (now The Pas Manitoba), his people had a few guns. When he set out with a group of 20 warriors their lances were “mostly pointed with iron, some few with stone”. His quiver of 50 arrows had ten with iron points and the rest of stone. Most of the group carried an iron knife and axe. In later years he explained that most warriors had guns and more iron tipped arrows. (Thompson 1968:328-30).

Aboriginal accounts of journeys to the Pacific Ocean

Since the late 1600s individuals in New France were interested in finding a route overland to the Pacific Ocean. In 1731 Pierre La Verendrye and his sons came to the

Lake Winnipeg area to establish trading posts as a their base for searching out this route. They came during a period of stability in the expanding French fur trade and established a solid French presence in the Interior to compete against the English who had taken over the French posts on Hudson 's Bay.

Everywhere he went La Verendrye asked First Nations about their knowledge of routes to the Pacific Ocean. He was told by a man that visited Lake Nipigon, that his ancestors had gone overland up a River to the north and visited the ocean beyond the mountains. This story could pertain to a trip up the Saskatchewan River and over the Rocky Mountains, but this and similar stories may pertain to Lake Winnipeg as the “big lake” or “western sea” and the Manitoba escarpment as the mountains (see Russel, 1991:56).

Father Degonner, a Jesuit missionary to the Sioux, claimed that prior to 1731, a man named Giguere traveled beyond the Sioux country to a River that flowed west. Earlier in 1729 Beauharnois writes that he had learned from “different Indians” of a western route to the ocean: “All report the same thing, that there are three routes or rivers which lead to the great Western River ” (Combet, 2001:39-40, 43).

Maps produced by the La Verendrye expeditions show potential routes across the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific Ocean (see Combet, 2001). One of these dating to 1737 may show a River in B.C. and its exit to the Ocean (Combet, 2001:70-71). Byram and Lewis interpret the later as showing the Fraser River and Vancouver Island opposite its outlet. They document cases of earlier travels such as one told to a French trader at Hudson 's Bay from 1694 to 1714 that a Swampy Cree “told him of a cross-continental trip to the Northwest Coast ”.

Another story tells of a Cree man at Churchill who crossed the Rockies “apparently in the 1720s” (Byram and Lewis, 2001:137-139). By comparing the 1737 map with others of the La Verendrye trips it would appear that the route shown over the mountains into the B.C. was via the Saskatchewan River. Given the known route used by the Kootenay peoples across Howse Pass and down the Blaeberry River, it is more likely that the two Rivers shown on the west side of the mountains are the Kootenay and Columbia Rivers (see Moodie 1987, for other First Nations maps).

Trade goods from the Missouri River

In the early 1740s La Verendrye and his sons traveled to the Mandan/Hidatsa territory on the upper Missouri River. These groups had already been trading with the Assiniboine for guns, kettles, axes, knives and awls that came from trading posts in Hudson 's Bay. In the Missouri valley of North Dakota metal and glass objects are found in archaeological sites dating from about 1675 to 1700 (Ray, 1974:88; see Wood 1977). Some of this metal may have originated with the French forts on the Mississippi in the 1680s. French iron goods were being traded from Fort St. Joseph

near the south end of Lake Michigan about 1700 (Quimby 1939). As early as 1712 to 1718 Etienne Veniard de Bourgmont traveled up the Missouri and Pierre Antoine and Paul Mallet traveled close to the Rockies in the Mid West by traveling west of the Mississippi (Combet, 2001:17).

Between 1690 and 1721, the development in eastern Texas and Western Louisiana of Spanish missions and presidios, may have resulted in some trade goods reaching the Missouri River - but trade on a commercial bases did not occur until after 1762 (see Perttula, 1994).

Limited information is available, but it is reasonable to assume that by the early 1700s some of these European goods were being traded west by various Gros Ventre groups – the Hidatsa of southern eastern Saskatchewan and Atsina to the southwest (see Russell 1991; Wood 1977; Hatton 1990).

Goods were being traded up the Missouri and Milk River drainage systems of Montana and southern Alberta – first to the Gros Ventre groups and later to the Blackfoot (see Kidd 1986). These goods were likely traded further north, as well as to south-western Alberta and across the Rockies to the Kootenay of southern British Columbia.

On November 21, 1742 Louis Joseph La Verendrye asked a Mandan chief about the white men that lived near the sea. He was given an account of the Spanish colonies. The Mandan had received their information from the prisoners of the Shoshoni (Combet 2001:123). The Mandans and Hidatsas of North Dakota traded guns, ammunition and other metal goods as well as their local crops of corn, pumpkins and tobacco with the Crows to the S.W. in exchange for horses, robes and leather clothing. The Crow in turn received horses from the Shoshoni in exchange for metal goods. Horses had reached the Shoshoni by the late 1600s (Burpee 1910; Murphy and Murphy, 1986; Shimkin 1986; Hughes and Bennyhoff 1986).

The Shoshoni traded south to the Utes who obtained metal knives and hatchets directly with the Spanish in the American Southwest by at least the early 1600s (Calloway et al 1986). The Shoshoni also traded north to the Flatheads and Nez Pierces. The Hidatsas also had indirect trade links south to the Spanish of Colorado via the Cheyennes, Arapahoes, Comanches, Kiowa Apaches and Kiowas.

In 1743, Louis visited the Arikaras to the south of the Mandan. The Arikaras also had trade links with the Cheyennes. Louis reported: “There was a man with them who had been raised by the Spaniards and who spoke Spanish as if it were his mother tongue. The man told him that the Spanish “worked iron and did a lot of trade in cattle hides and in slaves for which they gave in return horses and trade goods, according to the Indians wishes but not guns or ammunition”. He was also told of a Frenchman who lived 3 days away to the south (Combet 2001:127). It is interesting that the Spanish Colonies referred to are those far to the south along the Colorado River and not those of California – As the first Spanish settlements in

California were not established until 1769.

Jean Baptiste Trudeau, while among the Cheyenne of Wyoming in 1795 was told that a war party had gone beyond the mountains two years before and observed rivers where the waters ran west. The people they attacked did not have any European goods but had dentalia shell ornaments that came from the ocean (Abel, 1921). This was likely in Shoshoni territory near the headwaters of the Snake River In Idaho. Ogden was told in 1826 the peoples on the Upper Snake River made annual visits for leather at a Spanish Settlement after a six-day march from Salt Lake Utah (Ogden, 1961).

The ease at which Spanish goods moved to the north can be seen in the 1805 diary of Larocque. While near the Big Horn River in Wyoming he noted: “A Snake Indian arrived, he had been absent since the spring and had seen part of his nation who traded with the Spaniards, he brought a Spanish Bridle and battle ax, a large blanket...” (Burpee, 1910:42).

Spanish trade goods were likely coming into S.E. Oregon by the early 1780s. Earlier trade cannot be ruled out, given the evidence of east west trade going back at least 1000 years when Dentalia shells were moving from the Pacific coast to the upper Missouri River area (Wood 1974). There is also evidence for the movement, at the same time, of the western tobacco plant *N. bigelovii* var. *quadrivalvis* to the Missouri region (Haberman 1984) from the west. By 1400 A.D. Olivella shells from the Pacific coast were being traded all the way to eastern Oklahoma (Kozuch, 2002).

The northern sub-arctic routes

In the area of what is now the North West Territories and Northern Alberta, from about 1717-1759, the Cree were the middlemen with the Beaver, Dogrib, Hare and Slavey for the disbursal of trade goods (see Ray 1987, Pl.60). In 1754-5 Henday traveled to eastern Alberta on the Red Deer River where he observed that the Blackfoot already had guns and were skilled horsemen.

The period from 1770 to 1790 saw the establishment of direct trade in the upper drainage of the Mackenzie River. In 1778 Peter Pond of H.B.C. established Pond's Fort 60 km south of Lake Athabasca - the first fur trade fort in Alberta. The same year Roderick McKenzie of the Northwest Co. built Fort Chipewyan on western Lake Athabasca. The next year the Northwest Co. established Hudson House on the North Saskatchewan River in the parkland area. In 1786 David Thompson visited the Peigan of southern Alberta and in 1792 Duncan McGillivray established Fort George on the North Saskatchewan River in eastern Alberta - visited by Sarcee, Cree, Piegan and Blood First Nations.

In 1789 there were still groups of Dogrib and Slavey along the Mackenzie River

with no European trade goods. Although, the Mackenzie Inuit to the north were already trading for iron, presumably through middlemen who had direct contact with the Russians (Yerbury 1986:39).

The North West Co. had a brief post at Moose Lake in 1789. To the south in 1792 they established Ft. George and the H.B.C built Buckingham House - both about 200 km east of Edmonton on the North Saskatchewan River. After the opening of these posts Iroquois and Ojibwa hunters were brought out from the east to work for the trading companies. They settled along the Athabasca and Peace Rivers and on the east side of the Rockies between the Athabasca and North Saskatchewan Rivers.

These eastern First Nations often were the first to make contact with peoples on the West side of the Rocky Mountains. Chief Michel Callihoo of Alberta was interviewed in 1903 when he was over 70 years old. Chief Michel said, "His father came to this country at least a hundred years ago". Of the group that came out from Quebec with his father "the majority appear to have gone up to the Jasper Pass country" (Gibbons 1904:125-126). This group became known as a Shuswap, Cree, Iroquois mixed band that was living in the Tete Jaune Cache area on the Upper Fraser River in the 19 th and early 20 th century (see Milton and Cheadle 1970:241-250; Teit, 1909:450, 468). It was the Iroquois trader named Pierre Bostonais (nicknamed Tete Jaune) who was the first recorded easterner to cross the Yellowhead Pass. The 1819 journal of Colin Robertson recorded that "Tete Jaune, the free Iroquois, has given me a chart of that country across the Rocky Mountains " (Gates 1933 & Smyth 1984).

Movement up the Peace River

In the early 1700s the Beaver of Alberta were raided by the Cree coming from the east. A peace agreement was made, possibly about 1715-1721, marking the boundary between the two groups at Peace Point 80km west of Lake Athabasca (Russel, 1991:166). Before 1780, the Beaver obtained all European articles from the Cree who brought them from Fort Churchill. The Beaver obtained firearms by 1782.

Before the appearance of Europeans there were Cree intrusions along the Peace River above the junction of the Finlay and Parsnip Rivers (Lamb 1970:271, 279-80).

In the lower Peace River and Lake Athabasca region many posts were established and abandoned between 1774 and 1805 (see Moodie, Lytwyn and Kaye 1987, Pl. 62). Fort Chipewyan on Lake Athabasca was the main distribution center for the Northwest Company at this time. The establishment of the North West Company around Great Slave Lake brought in a much larger supply of iron and other trade goods potentially destined for Northern British Columbia. This process was undoubtedly slowed down for a while by the depopulation resulting from the 1780-82 smallpox epidemics. But it may also have been de-population that allowed for the

westward expansion of Fur trading posts.

A trading post was established on Great Slave Lake in 1786 and at Boyer's Post up the Peace River in 1788. In 1789 the construction began on Fort Vermillion on the Peace River and in 1790 Fort MacLeod was constructed downstream from what is now Peace River Alberta. At the confluence of the Peace and Smoky Rivers, Fort Fork was established in 1792 and Ft. Dunvegan further up the Peace River the same year. We know from later accounts that the Sarcee traded via the headwaters of the Smoky River to Carrier in the Rocky Mountain trench. This was a route used first by the "free Iroquois" traders. In 1818, they crossed "to New Caledonia where they have been in the habit of hunting".

Direct trade by Europeans in northern B.C.

In 1793 Alexander McKenzie traveled from Fort Fork up the Peace River to the junction of the Parsnip and Finlay Rivers and south up the Parsnip to the Fraser River and overland to Bella Coola. It was during this voyage that we have the first written accounts of metal tools in the Northern Interior of British Columbia. This event led to the establishment of the first trading post in British Columbia in 1794, at Rocky Mountain Fort near the mouth of the Moberly River – located about 8km upstream from the present Fort St. John. This post served both the Beaver and Sekani, who often were in conflict with each other (Burley and Hamilton 1991; Burley et al 1996:30-31). In 1797, James Finlay traveled up the Finlay River and retraced McKenzie's trip up the Parsnip River.

A rapid expansion of forts began. In 1803 the XY Company established a second Fort Fork at the Smoky River the year before they amalgamated with the Northwest Company. Rocky Mountain Fort was abandoned in 1805 for the new Rocky Mountain Portage House established the previous year by James McDougall. It was located at the east end of the Peace River Canyon opposite what is now Hudson Hope. In the southern N.W. Territories – the H.B.Co's Fort Liard was opened in 1805 and Fort Resolution the same year. In 1806 Fort Dunvegan was built downstream from the Alberta-B.C. border and Ft. St. John was established at the mouth of the Beatton River.

In 1805 Simon Fraser went up the Parsnip and Pack River to Lake McLeod and built Fort McLeod. In 1806 he went up the Nechako to Stuart Lake to establish a post first called "Nakazlen" and then Stuart Lake Post. In 1822 it was named Ft. St. James. It became the main center for the fur district of New Caledonia - stretching from the Rockies to the Coast Mountains between 52 and 57 degrees north latitude. The same year he built Fort Fraser on Fraser Lake and, in 1807, Fort George at junction of the Nechako and Fraser Rivers.

Southeastern B.C Trade

Early trade in European goods between First Nation groups on the Columbia Plateau and coastal regions was facilitated by the introduction of the horse, first to the Plateau, and then via Sahaptin speaking groups, over the Mountain passes to coastal regions by the mid 1700s (Boxburger 1984). We know that European trade goods were reaching the mouth of the Fraser River before 1792 - the year Pantoja reported that horse back riders had been coming to the mouth of the Fraser River with iron, cooper and blue beads (Wagner 1933:187).

Later, European traders started closing in on southern B.C.

In the 1700s the territory of the Kootenay First Nation extended along both sides of the British Columbia border to the headwaters of the North Saskatchewan River. The fur traders were anxious to trade directly with them but the horse riding buffalo hunters of the plains were not interested in supporting this endeavor. Duncan McGillivray noted in his journal of October 5, 1800 that the Blackfoot groups do not trap beaver and that many families were “destitute of either a kettle or an axe”. They did, however, have guns and knives for hunting and warfare (Coues 1897:723-4).

In 1792 Fidler went with the Peigans of Alberta to visit the Kootenay – the first European to do so. The Peigan had interacted with the Kootenay through both trade and warfare. Kootenay prisoners were observed among the Blackfoot. Fidler mentions in a postscript that La Gasse and LeBlanc crossed the Mountains near the source of the Saskatchewan – probably Howse Pass (about 1800 according to Schaeffer, 1966). In 1799 Rocky Mountain Fort and Acton House were established on the upper North Saskatchewan River. In the fall of 1800 a group of 28 Kootenay came across Howse Pass to visit the Acton House Trading Post. It was this year that Thompson asked permission of the local Blackfoot groups to bring Iroquois and Cree to trap in the mountains (Belyea 1994:193).

The Blackfoot of the Bow River complained to David Thompson on November 22, 1800 about the Kootenay having guns, but Thompson said it was their fault for trading guns to the Kootenay for horses. The traditional passes may have been the Crows Nest Pass, Kicking Horse Pass and Howse Pass for trade between the Peigan, Blackfoot and the Kootenay.

In 1807 Thompson crossed the Rocky Mountains himself by traveling up the North Saskatchewan River, crossing Howse Pass and descending the Blaeberry River to arrive on the Columbia River on June 30, 1807. Near Windermere Lake, on Toby Creek, he built Kootenae House - the first trading post in the Columbia Valley. Two years later Thompson observed one group of Lakes people who had guns but “neither Axe or Chisel among them”. These people drew Thompson a chart of the Columbia River and noted that other Lakes groups had visitors among them from the

Spokane and others who lived further south (Belyea 1994:113-115).

There is considerable dispute regarding the territory of First Nation groups in Alberta that revolves around the distribution of the Blackfoot (see Russel 1991). Magne argues for the likelihood of “widespread Athapaskan distribution along the east side of the Rocky Mountains” in late prehistoric and proto-historic periods, and suggests contact between Athapaskan speakers of Alberta and the Kiowa who traveled to the Calgary area from the Yellowstone area – possibly around 1700 A.D. (Magne 2001). Magne suggests that the Beaver occupied the territory north of Edmonton and moved to the Rocky Mountains during the early fur trade. The Beaver prior to the 1700s were just south of Lake Athabasca and the Sarcee to the west of the Lake and later to the south in the upper headwaters of North Saskatchewan and Athabasca Rivers.

*** Note.** [Ray argues that “Prior to the 1750s there is little evidence that the Assiniboine and Cree acquired many goods at York Factory” for trade with their neighbours, but “Rather, they bartered their furs for items that they intended to use themselves” and passed them on later as second hand goods (Ray 1974, 68-69). Pyszczyk (1997) argues from his examination of 40 archaeological sites that iron goods occurred in smaller quantities than suggested by Ray. However, Pyszczyk himself suggests the samples may be too small, too mixed between proto-historic and historic and too highly curated and re-cycled, thereby distorting their proportion in the archaeological record].

Iron movement from west to east

Across the Bering Strait

The wide use of iron began in the Middle East in the 12th to 14th centuries B.C. It spread to Eastern Europe and western Siberia where it was being smelted locally by the 7th century B.C. In China small amounts of iron were present by 800 B.C., and larger amounts of both wrought iron (low carbon iron) and cast iron (high carbon iron) were present from 500 B.C. onward. Moulds were being used for casting large numbers of iron knives. Steel was common in China after 300 B.C. To the north the Scythian cultures of the middle Asian steppe lands were smelting iron by the 3rd century B.C. Iron spread by

trading or invasion to the Lake Baykal area and throughout the Lena River valley. Between 500 and 1000 A.D. iron was worked by local blacksmiths and smelted from local ores in the Lena valley. Further east, the 19 th century Yukagirs of Siberia made axes, knives, lances and scrapers from imported iron. Yukagir smiths used a tool kit composed of bellows, tongs, anvil and hammer, “but they did not know how to temper iron. They worked it but did not know how to smelt it” (Graburn 1973:44).

The making of stone tools continued only to the east of the Indigirka River valley to the Bering Strait - but even here iron tools began to appear among Punuk and Birnirk cultures and even across the Bering Strait to the Ipiutak culture of Alaska by 400 A.D. The sources of this iron may be western Siberia or China – the latter, especially after the large-scale growth in the iron industry of the Song Dynasty from 907-1276 A.D. Another source for iron in the Bering Strait region is Japan. Small amounts of iron are now dated as early as 800 B.C. in Japan and iron was plentiful after the 4th Century A.D. (see Keally 2004; Okladnikov 1970; Sulimirski 1970; Barnes 1999).

Trade across the Bering Strait has occurred, at least intermittently over thousands of years. Iron was traded across the Strait in small amounts by the 4th century A.D. and in larger quantities by the 13th century A.D. (Keddie, 1990). In his classic study on the “Prehistoric and Present Commerce Among the Arctic Coast Eskimo” Stefansson demonstrated the importance of the Coast/Inland trade. The survival of coastal peoples of the arctic was often dependant on their obtaining wooden trade goods such as bows, arrows, lances, spears, snow shovels, dishes, dippers, buckets, and wood for sleds and snow house floors (Stefansson 1914). Iron was a commodity that played an important role in some of these trade relations – especially in the last 1000 years. European and Asian metal was an integral part of Inuit technology in both the eastern and western Arctic prior to European contact (McCartney 1988). Just how far this early iron was traded south from Alaska remains to be discovered.

The Dutch came to Hokkaido in 1643, but it is not likely that goods from their visits were reaching the Bering Strait. Big changes would likely have occurred in 1649 when the Russians established the Anadyrski post at the mouth of the Anadyr River. By this time the Chuckchi groups of Siberia had became established as middlemen in the trade of Russian goods in the Bering Sea area (Hickey 1979:420-21). It is possible that the Chinese or cultures under their influence in the Amur River region where making trips to the Aluetian Islands (Keddie 1990:16-18).

At Anadyrski in 1711, Peter Popov gives an account of America, known to them as Bolshaya Zemlya (The Great Land). By 1732 Ivan Fedorov and Michael Gvozdev landed on and explored Prince of Whales Cape. Of most interest here, is this later trade in European or Asian goods – for surely some of these must have made their way into British Columbia.

The Russian, Krasheninnikov, observed in 1741 that people of the southern Kurile Islands who wore “long silk cloaths like the Chinese” traded regularly with the Japanese. Japanese silk, cotton and “all sorts of iron household furniture” are brought to the

southern islands via Hokkaido. These were traded for objects made of stinging nettle fibre, furs, dried fish and whale fat. The Japanese even obtain ore from one of the Islands “in large vessels”. The established trade on the more northern Kurile Islands saw the exchange of lacquered wood items, broad swords, silver rings and cotton clothing from the south; in return for “chiefly, eagles feathers” for their arrows (Krasheninnikov, 1791:40-42,35-38).

During the Alexei Chirikov expedition of 1741, Steller observed, among the Aleut of the Shumagin Islands, two men who had “hanging on their belt, like the Russian peasants, a long iron knife. It was easy to see that it was of iron and, besides, that it was not like any European product” (Golder, 1925 (2):97-98).

We know that by this time Iron was being obtained from the Chukchee who obtained it from Russians at Anadyrsk in return for American furs. The iron was likely coming from the north and spreading from east to west along the Aluetian Islands.

During the Chirikov expedition, iron knives were exchanged for food off the Aleutian Island of Adak and a Copper and iron kettle, 200 beads, one piece of Nankeen (porcelain), and 10 ruble pieces were left on Kayak Island at 60 degrees North. In Prince William Sound, Chitrow (ship-master on Commodore) saw in a house “a wetstone on which copper instruments had been sharpened” (Burney, 1819:165).

In Lisianski Strait near Chichagof Island, Chirikov lost 15 men and two boats that traveled ashore. It is assumed (but not certain) that iron weapons, and/or the iron from the boats, was recovered by Tlingit living in this area.

A group of Russians who spent the years 1759-63 among the Aleuts of Unimak and Unalaska Islands noted that the inhabitants made knives out of iron, which they obtained from wooded islands to the eastward in exchange for furs and clothing. In a report of a Russian hunter c. 1765, the Aleuts told him a large ship had been driven ashore to the eastward – possibly this was at least one source of the metal observed earlier (Golder, 1925, note 216). Kamenski, while living among the Tlingit in the late 1800s stated that: “According to their legend, they saw copper for the first time when a Spanish vessel was wrecked near their shores” (Kan 1985:28). Since the Tlingit already knew about native copper, this legend may in fact pertain to the introduction of iron (see Keddie, 2002 for commentary on Japanese Shipwrecks).

Observations of Iron among First Peoples on the Northwest Coast of North America 1774– 1799

The first recorded encounters 1774-79

The observations by the First Europeans known to visit the coast are crucial – as the iron they observed cannot, for the most part, be assumed to have been from previously known trading visits. The early observations of iron were made at different locations along the North West Coast - but with a greater frequency toward the northern regions.

It is important to know when and where the observations were made. Some written material represents the authors' direct observations. Several individuals had been on previous voyages and this fact needs to be considered in their comments. A few authors' statements on the subject of iron use were copied from the journals of other participants or represent a later summary extraction from several journals.

The time frame of this section ends in 1779 – the time of a hiatus in trade. The English did not visit for 6 years and no further Spanish voyages occurred until 1788.

Observations on the presents of iron covered in this section include sources from four expeditions:

The four accounts by participants of the Juan Perez voyage of 1774 (Juan Peréz, Esteban José Martínez, Juan Crespi, Tomás de la Peña); the six accounts of the 2 nd Bucareli Expedition of 1775, lead by Bruno Heceta (Bruno Heceta, Juan Peréz, Fray Miguel de la Campa, Fray Benito do la Sierra, Juan Francisco de la Bodega Quadra, Francisco Antonio Maurelle); five accounts of the James Cook voyage of 1778 (Cook, James King, John Ledyard, Johann Forrester, Georg Forrester) and the nine accounts of the 3rd Bucareli Expedition of 1779, under the command of Ignacio Arteaga (Arteaga, Bodega, Juan Bautista de Aguirre, Josef Camacho, José de Cañizares, Fernando Bernardo de Quiros y Miranda, Fray Juan Riobo).

On August 8, 1774, Juan Peréz, in the vessel Santiago , came to Estevan Point off the West Coast of Vancouver Island. Here Peréz met some Hesquiaht people with whom they exchanged; “furs for shells which our men brought from Monterey. . .There is copper in their land, for various strings of beads were seen . . .that were made of animal teeth, and at their ends they had some eyeholes of beaten copper, which had certainly been grains extracted from the earth and later pounded, implying that they had some mines of this metal” (Beals, 1989). At this time Fray Juan Crespi observed; “some pieces of iron and copper and pieces of knives” in canoes of those visiting the ship (Bolton, 1927:350; Griffin, 1891:203). On July 21 at Langara Island near the northern tip of the Queen Charlotte Island , Perez's states:

“I noticed among them some things made of iron in the canoes, . . .like half of a bayonet and a piece of a sword. Knives do not please them, and by signs they asked for long swords or machetes; but finally they settled for some knives that the sailors gave in exchange for pelts”.

Several of the officers observed that many of the women in canoes were wearing bracelets and rings of iron and copper. The 2nd officer, Esteban José Martínez noticed some “small plates of iron” and was surprised “to see among them half of a bayonet and another [person] with a piece of a sword made into a knife. . .they asked by signs for Swords and large knives”. He speculated that these “may be relics from the unfortunate men” lost on Aleksei Chirikov's 1741 voyage 33 years earlier (Beals, 1989:47; 78; 228).

Juan Crespi also noted; “two very long harpoons and two axes, . . .made of iron, but I could not be sure. We saw that the point of one of the harpoons was of iron, in the form

of a pike” [Shaped like a pike – not necessarily made from a pike – Griffin's translation (1891:188) quotes: “it looked like that of a boarding-pike”]. Crespi “saw these metals, though not to any great amount, in their possession, and we noted their appreciation of these metals, especially for large articles” (Bolton, 1927:329-31; Griffin 1891:192).

In 1775, iron was observed in different places than the previous year. Bruno Hezeta in command of the Santiago and Juan de Ayala in command of the Sonora, composed the 2nd Bucareli Expedition that stopped at Trinidad Bay, North of Eureka, California (N. 41 03'). Mourelle, the second pilot of the fleet, recorded that the local First Nations [Yurok] had copper and iron arrowheads procured from the north - one of these was marked with the letter C and 3 short slanting lines in front of the lower part of the C. The Yurok and those further north (41 18' N.) valued iron the most and particularly knives or hoops of old barrels. A few had “curious ill-made knives of iron, like cutlasses, with wooden handles; these were sheathed in wood and hung by cords from the wrist or neck” (Mourelle, 1781:488-9).

At the latter location, Miguel de la Campa, said the one man showed them his sword made “from a nail he took out of a mast which had grounded on the shore; by beating it with a stone he had flattened it”. They said no ships had came to this area, but further to the south, “pointing in the direction of Monterey, they knew that large vessels came” ...A few of them had also some pieces of sword blades about a span long [23cm] which they told us by signs came from the north. On our asking them if they obtained any from some other part they answered no and that they only obtained them from the north where there were larger ones”. (Campa, 1964:28-33; Wagner, 1930:218-221; La Sierra, 1930).

At 47 degrees 23' N. La Campa saw “a huge cutlass, almost new” in a dugout canoe (Galvin, 1964:41). At 47 degrees, 25' the expedition ship, the Schooner Sonora had 7 men killed on shore and their small boat taken. Both Fray Benito de La Sierra (Baker, 1930:218) and Miguel de La Campa (Galvin 1964:43) comment on how the boat was smashed and every piece of iron taken away.

A Puget Sound story told by Snuqualmi Charlie refers to a Snoqualmie River chief named “Slo'wat” who “possessed much wealth, many articles of metal; even his hat and other garments were of metal, shining like the sun”. War groups tried to steal it (Ballard, 1929:126). This story may pertain to armor taken from one of the Spaniards.

While off Vancouver Island at (49 05') La Campa noted “the Commander gave them a cutlass in exchange for one of their dugouts.” (Galvin, 1964:52).

In 1778, the Cook expedition observed the use of iron that could only in part be attributed to the earlier limited and sporadic Spanish trading. At Nootka Sound, Cook observed bracelets “of iron and others of copper and thick brass wire was much coveted for the same purpose”. One officer saw “the rim of a broken metal buckle” which had just been purchased for a sea otter skin. Cook saw a man with “two small silver table spoons... round his neck as an ornament”. The latter were assumed to be from the Perez expedition, but Cook noted they had no makers mark. On March 25, Lieutenant James King noted

the high value of copper “rolls”. Cook stated that the copper came from “the country somewhere to the Northward”. Midshipman, Riou was told – “it came from other Indians farther to the southward” (Beaglehole 1967:314; 303fn; 322).

Crescent shaped nose rings of copper, iron and pewter (some made from trade button rims) are described by King and others (Beaglehole 1967:1405-06; 314; 303fn).

Cook notes that:

“The chisel and the knife, are the only forms, as far as we saw, that iron assumes amongst them. The knives are of various sizes; some very large; and their blades are crooked, somewhat like our pruning-knife; but the edge is on the back or convex part. Most of them that we saw were about the breadth and thickness of an iron hoop; and their singular form marks that they are not of European make. Probably, they are imitations of their own original instruments, used for the same purposes. They sharpen these iron tools upon a coarse slate [sandstone] whetstone; and likewise keep the whole instrument constantly bright” (Cook, 1784:329-30).

At Yuqout, John Ledyard noted:

“We found a few copper bracelets and three or four rough wrought [iron] knives with coarse wooden hafts ...but could not learn from the appearance ...or from any information they could give us how they became possessed of them” (Munford, 1939:77).

Unlike the two earlier Spanish expeditions, Cook traveled to Prince William Sound near Valdez Alaska. At Snug Corner Cove, Cook saw that the people were:

...“desirous of iron; but they wanted pieces of eight or ten inches [20—26cm] long at least, and the breadth of three or four fingers [6-7cm]. For they absolutely rejected small pieces. Consequently, they got little from us; iron having, by this time, become rather a scarce article. The points of some of their spears or lances were of that metal, others were of copper, and a few of bone, of which the points of their darts, arrows, etc. were composed.” (Cook, 1785(2):357).

“They have a great many iron knives; some of which are straight; others a little curved; and some very small ones, fixed in long handles, with the blade bent upward, like some of our shoemakers instruments. But they have still knives of another sort, which are sometimes near two feet long, shaped almost like a dagger, with a ridge in the middle. These they wear in sheaths of skins, hung by a thong round the neck, under their robe; and they are, probably, only used as weapons; the other knives being apparently applied to other purposes.” (Cook, 1785(2):373).

“The metals that we saw were copper and iron; both of which, particularly the latter, were in such plenty, as to constitute the points of most of the arrows and lances” (Cook, 1785 (2):379). “From their possessing which metals, we could infer that they had either been

visited before by some civilized nation, or had connections with tribes on their continent, who had communication with them" (Cook, 1785(2):270-271).

One of Cook's naturalists, Georg Forester also noted that the people of Prince William Sound traded furs "for the smallest trifle made of iron. ... They also had lances, the points of which were mounted with iron and were of beautiful workmanship, like well-polished knives; these they refused to barter, although we offered them a great deal" (Forster, 1781:236-37).

After visiting further north around the Bering Strait region, Cook made an interesting observation on the subject of iron:

"For although the Russians live amongst them, we found much less of this metal in their possession, than we had met with in the possession of other tribes on the American continent, who had never seen, nor perhaps had any intercourse with, the Russians" (Cook, 1784(2):511).

The next year, and much further south, Ignacio Arteaga (in command of the Princesa and Favorita) visited the Henya Tlingit at Bucareli Bay (off Suemez Island west of the larger Prince of Wales Island). Here, Juan Riobo said they "possess many lances and knives". The iron spearheads were about 8 inches, but some were wide and up to 24 inches long. Knives were "short with double cutting edges like a carpenters plane", and some "longer than a bayonet with spiral or v-shaped handles" (Gormly, 1971:158-164).

Bodega's Pilot, Antonio Maurelle also made reference to lances "longer than an European bayonet, but not common among them ... Their arrows are finely made: some of them are pointed with flint, some with bone, but most of them have heads of copper and iron" (Maurelle, 1791).

Quiros y Miranda observed women wearing their hair "plaited in one long braid or as a chignon at the back of the neck which they adorned with pieces of copper and iron". Camacho, Maurelle and second in command, Juan Francisco de la Bodega y Quadra, all saw women's necklaces, bracelets, and rings of copper and iron. Earrings were of flat or twisted pieces of copper or abalone embossed with a resin and jet beads. Spanish pesetas obtained in trade were also pierced and used as earrings (Gormly, 1971:160-161; Barwick, 1865:37).

Bodega commented that the iron and copper may be metals extracted:

... "by them from the ore, or that they were brought to this creek (harbour) by other ships, or that a trade must be kept up with people who can supply them; and in order to ascertain this we omitted no indications or experiments that seemed necessary, but we never got any further result than to fall into greater confusion, for sometimes it appeared to us that they had seen ships, at others that there were places on the borders where people dwelt with whom they traded; and sometimes they pointed to the mountains to

signify that they got it from there, which is most likely [unlikely?], though anything is possible.” (Barwick, 1865:42).

Bodega understood that “other large vessels” had been seen by First Peoples in the area at the foot of Mt. St. Elias. This could have been Cook the year before, or Bering or Chirikov in 1741.

The period of intensive trade 1785 – 1789

Iron observed in the possession of First Nations during 1785-89, is likely to include material that originated with European traders since 1774. European observations switched from comments on what First Nations groups already had in the way of metals to an emphasis on what they were interested in trading. Iron was still an important item desired by First Peoples, but interest fluctuated at the main trading centres.

Southern Coast

On June 26, 1785, Alexander Walker, on the west coast of Vancouver Island (17-18 miles N. of Brooks Peninsula), noted:

“They seemed to exhort us strongly to furnish them with Iron”. At Yuquot, he wrote: “These Americans showed great inconstancy in their desires after different commodities, an article of Trade being one Day in high estimation, and next Day totally despised. Sometimes unwrought Iron was in most request, at other times cutlery. Brass Buttons, and Bells, were generally of some value: but Copper alone continued a staple, and retained to the last a high price. ...A bit of Copper six inches long, and one broad, was preferred to the best Tool in our Possession, but large pieces of Iron, Hatchets, and Chisels, were nevertheless prized. Nails and Knives they had no great regard for. They were much dissatisfied with the shape of our tools, that they generally altered it after buying them. On this account they came to prefer unwrought Iron to our Steel Instruments: for not being able to give them a proper degree of heat, in attempting to alter their form they generally broke them. A Chisel, five Inches long, and very broad towards the end, they preferred to all other Tools, even to a Saw, Hatchet, or Sabre, although we had instructed them in the use of these Instruments.” (Fisher and Bumstead 1982:40; 108-109).

In July of 1786, James Strange noted the changing interest in metal goods. The people at Yuquot rejected his “ironmongery” and even items of copper “which had hitherto been in great repute”. When he displayed knives, chisels, axes and swords, Strange was “greatly astonished at the seeming indifference with which they were viewed”. However, after showing off some brass cymbals and their use as dancing music, these items were readily traded for.

Away from the main centres trade was of a different nature. On August 4 th when in the Cape Scott region a canoe with four men came alongside Strange's ship. He noted: "The extravagance of their joy on viewing the iron I gave them, was little short of madness. They appeared to be totally destitute of any European article whatever" (Ayyar 1982:85-91).

A month later, a different account of Nootka Sound is given by Elliot (second mate with Hanna in the Sea Otter). Here they traded furs "for knives, small hatchets, and trinkets ...we found no other tools among them but small knives crooked, made of iron hoops or some other thin pieces of iron and good for nothing" (Galois, 1994:85-86).

The next year Portlock met Meares on the Snow Nootka after Meares had wintered in the area:

"The only articles the natives would even look at were green and red beads, and unwrought iron, in pieces nearly two feet long; but hatchets, howels, saws, adzes, brass pans, pewter basins, and tin kettles, would not be taken in barter ever for fish ...[armors] were busily employed in working up iron into toves about eighteen inches long, and spearheads, near two feet in length; these being the articles the Indians were very fond of". Later, when the ships Sea Otter and Nootka were at Nootka, he wrote: "Both these ships had traded with unwrought iron and small transparent beads, the same kind as those we saw amongst the natives of Cook's Bay" [Red and Green]. Meares told them "several other ships [European] have at different times been trading on the coast from India and China " [Portlock, 1789:218-20].

Taylor also noted in 1787, the people of Yuquot would trade ... "nothing but copper ...every other article of trade was rejected" (Galois 2004:118).

In 1788, Robert Hazwell indicated that copper was in great demand at Nootka Sound. Because the ship did not have copper, the only substitute was iron worked into the shape of local adze blades. Even these were soon reduced in value - as ten chisels were wanted for goods previously acquired for 3 chisels. Clothes were soon in more demand than iron. John Hoskins noted the Ditidaht near the entrance to Juan de Fuca Strait "now demand muskets, powder and shot for their skins" (Howay, 1990:44-45).

Again at Nootka in 1789, Robert Haswell notes "parents of Chiefs generally purchase their sons Wives from distant tribes at a very exorbitant price of Iron, Cooper, Canoes etc". At Opitsat "they have plenty of skins which they told us they would readily part with for [iron] Chizles or Copper but the former they demand an exorbitant price ten for a skin". At Kendrick's Cove (4 miles N. of Friendly Cove) Haswell observed that Kendrick and Robert Gray had a blacksmith forge erected in a house they built on shore and "the smiths were immediately employed to furnish us with another Cargo of Chizels" (Howay, 1990:59; 65; 69; 82).

In 1789, North of Cape Scott (52 deg. 37'), Haswell wrote that iron was the “only article of trade held in high estimation”. They were able to purchase “between twenty and thirty sea otter skins” for a “very trifling number” of iron chisels (Howay, 1990:96-97).

To the south, near Yaquina Bay, Oregon (Aug. 10, 1788) Robert Haswell saw both iron and stone knives. Near Gray's Harbour, Washington, they purchased several sea otter skins “at a very reasonable rate for iron but they expressed a great desire for copper”. The following year near La Push, Washington, Haswell purchased sea otter skins for five iron chisels each (Howay, 1990:41; 81). Don Joseph Cordero, while inside the entrance to the Strait of Juan de Fuca (1789), reported that the Ditidaht “prized cooper highly and cared little for knives”. The Makah, of Neah Bay, were not interested in either Monterey abalone shells or iron and they “do not even place much value on copper” (Jane, 1971:25-27).

Queen Charlottes to Cape Fairweather

While at Kungit Island in August of 1787, James Colnett, identified copper in a sketch as “under armour” and said the Haida frequently showed him their 20 foot spears with Iron points. When he first arrived among the Haida “iron was very scarce” and most of their stone tools were “laid aside, & Iron substituted” and that in the short time since Dixon left “most of the iron was “work'd up” and fitted for spears and knives form'd like Bayonets & so neat that it remain'd a doubt with us whether it could be their own work” (Acheson, 1998:107; Galois 2004:129-138). Andrew Taylor, at the same time, noted: “Many of their spears and knives, are shaped like a bayonet, and most of them iron barbed”. He also noted that twisted iron and copper collars and bracelets were common (Galois 2004:136).

The next year to the north of the Queen Charlotte Islands, Andrew Taylor saw among the people of Etches Isles, “some iron and copper …their arrows & spears all barb'd with bone” (Galois 2004:229). July 8 of that year, on the west coast of the Charlottes, Taylor “did not see any quantity of iron or other articles among them which might incline us to believe some vessel was before us. Some few of their spears only was iron barb'd an adds [adze] or two which we concluded they must have got from capt. Dixon last year” as well as women with bracelets of copper and “some of iron” (Galois 2004:242).

As Haswell moved further north in 1789, he noticed a distinct difference in the value of iron. On June 11, at Anthony Island iron was of “far less value with them than with those natives we were last with” and that clothing “was most in demand”. Off the village of Kiusta, at the North end of Graham Island, they purchased about two skins for one chisel each (Howay, 1990:96-97).

In 1787, Francis Barkley said that at Sitka Sound – “Powder & shot was always the first demand, (arms they had plenty two or three Muskets in every Canoe) then blankets, Cooking Utensils and tools or other Iron weapons with which they are very expert”

(Barkley 1787:44). In September of this year Colnett observed among the Tsimshian of the Estevan Sound area that iron was “the most desirable article, & what they had very little of” (Galois 2004:145). In the Pitt Island area he observed a brass replica of a Maori club that was one of a number traded on Captain Cook's third voyage in 1778. Colnett speculated that the item had been traded to this area in the subsequent nine years (Galois 2004: 46; 145; 356).

In 1786, La Perouse visited Lituya Bay, north of Chichagof Island where there was “no great desire for any thing but iron ... Every one had a dagger of it suspended from the neck, not unlike the cross of the Malays, except that the handle was different, being nothing more than an elongation of the blade. Rounded and without any edge. This weapon had a sheath of tanned leather, and appeared to be their most valued moveable”. La Perouse “examined these daggers very attentively”. He bartered with hatchets, adzes and bar iron. Salmon were traded at first for pieces of old hoops and then only for nails, or “small implements of iron”. Arrows were “commonly headed with copper” and they made “scars on the arms and breast with a very keen iron instrument, which they sharpen by rubbing it on their teeth as on a whetstone”. La Perouse was under the impression that local peoples “know how to forge iron”, but most came from Russian sources (La Perouse 1799:1:369,402-407).

In August of 1787, Portlock (in the vessel King George) observed that the Sitka Tlingit of Baranof Island had a tin kettle and iron “towes, exactly, the same as ours” – he speculates that they came from the vessel Queen Charlotte. Portlock observed the north to south direction of trade. He “saw two daggers in the possession of two men belonging to old Sheenawaa's tribe, which were made exactly in the same manner as those worn by the natives at this place, and they gave me to understand that they had bought them at Wallamute” [from Qwelhyet Kwan - Eyak-speakers of the Kaliakh-Controller Bay area of Prince William Sound].

He notes that:

“The dagger which the people hereabouts use in battle are made to stab with either end, having three, four, or five inches above the hand tapered to a sharp point; but the upper part of those used in the Sound [Prince William] and River [Copper] is excravated” [ends in a spiral?] (Portlock:1789:259-61).

He saw that “these Indians had a number of beads about them of a quite different sort to any I ever saw; they had also a carpenter's adze made in a different manner to ours, with the letter B and, three fleurs-de-lis on it. The chief informed me that he received these articles from two vessels which had been with them to the North West ”. He observed “visitors” with “hawk bells”, tin kettles, buckles, rings “with our own” pattern. Portlock's trade items included caps, woolen blankets, and 18 to 20 inch iron “towes”. Items such as buckles, buttons, and beads “could not procure even a piece of skin ...they only were given by way of concluding a bargain, as were tin kettles, brass pans, and pewter basins; but hatchets, adzes, and howels, they would scarcely take for any thing whatever”(Portlock, 1789:276-85).

Iron trade north of 59 degrees

From August 30 to September 15, 1785, at Prince William Sound, Alexander Walker saw various kinds of iron knives – “Some of them a foot and a half long” - suspended from necks or in a sheath worn at the thigh. Their needles were “made of Bone, or of Iron, and although they have no eye, yet the work performed with them is astonishingly fine” (Fisher and Bumsted 1982:152).

Esteban Jose Martinez, in the frigate Princesa, visited Unalaska Island (in 1788) where he asked Russian officers about the uniquely designed iron knives he had seen among various First Nations. Zaikov reported to him the wreck of a Japanese vessel further west on the Aleutian Islands in 1786 that had 10 survivors who were sent to Siberia. “He explained that iron salvage from this vessel had been traded eastward to Prince William Sound and that this plus the iron introduced recently by foreign expeditions accounted for the Native inventories. He said that the Russians never traded iron to the American Natives – only beads, tobacco, and other items in exchange for their furs” (Archer 1999:187)

La Perouse spoke of iron and cooper in regard to his S.E. Alaska visits between June of 1786 and 1789:

“It was a matter of great question with us whence they procure these two metals. There was no improbability in supposing this part of America to contain native copper, which the Indians might reduce into sheets or ingots: but native iron perhaps does not exist, or at least is so rare, that it has never been seen by the majority of mineralogists. ...the day of our arrival we saw necklaces of beads, and some little articles of brass, which, as is well known, is a composition of copper and zinc. Everything, therefore, leads us to presume, that the metals we saw came either from the Russians, from the servants of the Hudson's Bay company, from American merchants traveling into the interior parts of the country, or from the Spaniards: but I shall hereafter show that it most probably came from the Russians” (La Perouse, 1799:369-370).

In 1786-7 he saw iron lance points and daggers at Yakutat and Lituya Bays.

In 1786, at Cook Inlet, Portlock saw a Chinese gown he assumed was from the Russian Trade. There he traded an iron knife, a gimlet and some beads (Portlock 1789:115-16). The same year Dixon traded for skins of land and sea otter, bear, raccoon and marmot for iron “toes and blue beads, but the toes are held in the greatest estimation, a middling sized tow fetching the best otter skin they had got” (Dixon, 1789:62;68).

In 1787, near Yakutat Bay, Dixon observed Tlingit iron spearheads on poles and “short” daggers in leather cases. A leather thong was tied to the dagger, wrapped around the wrist, and looped onto the middle finger so the knife would not be dropped (Dixon 1789:244&Pl; 188,figs 3-4).

Dixon emphasized that iron toes were the prime trade item “but they always refused small ones, wanting them in general from eight to fourteen inches long. Besides these, we traded with pewter basins, hatchets, howels, buckles, rings, &c. Of these the basins were best liked; for though the hatchets and howles were obviously the most useful tools ...they were only taken in exchange for furs of inferior value”. Iron was the “staple commodity, every thing else depending, in great measure, on fancy and caprice” (Letters of William Beresford - Dixon, 1789:182).

Further north at Prince William Sound, Dixon commented that the “small blue beads” used as ear ornaments “were procured from the Russians, as some knives and iron weapons which they showed us, were evidently of Russian manufacture” (Dixon 1789:147).

The same year (1787), John Meares confirmed that iron was the most esteemed item, but the Chugach “would prefer such pieces, as approached, ...the form of a spear ...Green glass beads are also much sought after, and at times those which were red and blue. ...They were very fond of our woolen jackets, or any of the old clothes belonging to the seamen” (Meares, 1790:34). Portlock noted: “Their weapons for war are spears of sixteen or eighteen feet long, headed with iron; bows and arrows, and long knives”(Portlock 1789:253-55.) The next year, at the head of Cook Inlet, Douglas noted that local traders “would take nothing except broad bar-iron, two feet of which were paid for each skin” (Douglas,1790:309).

The next year (1788), Andrew Taylor found that spears, arrows and lances were “mostly arm'd with iron and copper” and saw iron needles as well (Galois 2004:219). Further south at Cape Edgecomb their spears “were many of them iron pointed, but the generality of bone nor did they seem very desirous of iron, rather preferring Utensils for cooking for barter ... most of them provided with a large sharpe iron dagger” (Galois 2004:232).

At Montague Island, on April 28, 1788 Colnett wrote that: “They had not much iron in their possession the only pieces I saw were procur'd from Catn. Portlock” in addition to a three foot dagger that was shaped like a bayonet. He noted the “lances of long pieces of iron” and that the price of one otter skin was “a piece of Bar Iron two feet long & 2 Inches broad & a fathom of small Red beads”. Many arrows were pointed with copper that came from a mountain to the north (Galois 2004:211-217).

Shortly after, on June 18, Jose Narvaez (pilot to Gonzalo Lopez de Haro aboard the packboat San Carlos) saw, near the S.W. point of Montague Island, that the local people “hold iron in high regard” and “carry iron daggers on some long sticks like iron-pointed staffs. They ground the iron until it is shaped and they use it for cutting things” (McDowell 1998:115). Narvaez made an important observation on the east side of the same Island - there were forty Russians with a galliot who were said to have “roamed the coast as far as Nootka Sound collecting furs” each summer (McDowell 1998:128). If this was true, the Haida may have been getting iron directly from the Russians by the mid 1780s.

In 1788, Gerassim Ismailof, of the Russian Shelikof Company, visited Yakutak Bay in the Galleon - The Three Apostles. Ismailof said that the Yakutat Tlingit “made their daggers themselves (whether of iron or copper is not stated) on a stone anvil” (Peter Pallas (1781-83) quoted in Krause, 1956:148).

Ismailof made an important observation at Yakutak. There he saw a chief named Ilchak from the Tatshenshini River (a tributary of the Alsek River) who had come to trade. He noted that the Yakutak traded to the east with the Tatchenshini and to the west with the Eyak at the mouth of the Copper River and the Chugach further west (Krause, 1956:28 & 66).

This information fits with the oral history told to De Laguna. It was told that the original inhabitants of Dry Bay at the mouth of the Alsek River, and possibly those at Yakutat Bay, were Athabaskan speakers related to the Southern Tutchone on the headwaters of the Alsek River. In more recent times, these people were replaced by the Tlingit (De Laguna 1972:18). These previous social relationships would have facilitated the more rapid movement of Russian trade goods into the N.W. corner of B.C. and the Yukon, via the Alsek River drainage.

Menzies, who was on the coast in 1787-88, with Colnett in the Prince of Wales, wrote to Joseph Banks on April 4, 1790 in response to Bank's question about appropriate trade goods to take to the Northwest Coast. Menzies indicated that every vessel “ought to be supplied with two Black Smiths & a Forge together with the necessary Utensils for working iron, copper & brass into such forms as may best suit ...the natives” (Dillon, 1951:155). Menzies outlines the regional differences in preferences: “At Nootka we found Copper the article most Sought after ...At Prince William's Sounds the natives preferred Iron & put very little value on Copper or anything else - they were so overstocked with Beads as to ornament their Dogs with them. At Queen Charlotte's Isles & Banks Isles, Iron, Cloth, Beads with Brass & Copper trinkets answered best. At Cape Edgecombe [Sitka area], Iron Frying pans, Tin Kettles, Pewter basins and beads formed the chief articles of Trade.” (Dillon, 1951:156).

The items recommended by Menzies include: bar iron, iron rods, hoops, wires, case knives, fish hooks, harpoons, fishing lines, axes, adzes, saws, nails, gimlets, brad awls, files, rasps, scrapers, bodkins, needles, frying pans, sheets of tin, tin kettles, pots, jugs, tinder boxes, pewter pots, pewter basins, copper sheets, brass sheets, in metals – kettles, goblets, rods, wire, bracelets, earrings, buttons, thimbles, spoons, daggers, old bayonets, muskets, powder, ball, and cloth. Banks added soldering irons, augers, gunflints and grindstones (Dillon 1951:156).

The market saturation of iron 1790-1799

By 1790, European iron had been widely distributed along the Northwest Coast. At Cheslakees Village, at the north end of Vancouver Island, Vancouver observed two or three Spanish muskets in “most of the houses” and saw 18 men “each bearing a spear or lance sixteen or eighteen feet in length, ...and pointed with a long flat piece or iron,

which seemed sharp on both edges, and was highly polished" (Vancouver, 1798(1):348; 396).

In June of 1791, at Nootka Sound, John Hoskins reports that cooper and clothing were the main trade items. Iron "they would scarcely take as a gift; for a sheet of cooper we got four skins; ...knives, buttons, fish hooks, gimlets ...We procured a few sea otter tails, fish an vegetable" (Howay 1990:187).

In a memorandum of John Hoskins, of January 6, 1792 he indicates that the people of Nootka Sound "now demand muskets, powder and shot for their skins which now supplants copper and cloathing" (Howay, 1990:258). Only iron chisels could be traded for fur and copper bangles were traded for fish and deer. He indicates that "to the Northward of this place they like Iron and ...to the Southward they esteem Chizzels very much yet all these places have the same liking for copper and Muskets that they have at Nootka Sound ". The price of a sea otter skin at Nootka Sound was 10 chisels, or a 6" square of sheet copper, or ten copper bangles or a California abalone shell. A pistol was worth four skins and a Musket six skins. To the south at Tattooosh Island near Cape Flattery a skin was worth 5 chisels, a piece of Copper "as big as your hand", or 6 copper bangles. Clothes were valued according to the size and number of Buttons on it (Howay, 1990:486). Further north at Tuwartz Inlet (s. end of Pitt Is.) Jacinto Caamano saw that "chief Jammisit" had on his shoulders "Two large burnished iron rings, twisted in rope fashion" and at Parry Passage, he saw the Haida, Cunneah wearing Chinese cash on his clothing (Wagner and Newcombe, 1938:273; 219).

While the Ship Jefferson was at Nootka Sound in 1793, the smith and armourer were busy making daggers and swords. Magee wrote that iron collars were now of little value compared to three years ago. At this time an iron sword traded for 1½ fathoms of dentalium (Bernard Magee quoted in Malloy, 1998:34).

On May 18, 1795 John Boit (in command of sloop Union) made the significant statement that iron chisels were wanted during his visit 7 years earlier, but now "they won't take as presents" (Malloy, 1998:35).

Eastern Vancouver Island and the Strait of Juan De Fuca

In the early 1790s trade in the southern inner coastal areas had not seen the saturation of iron as had occurred further north by this time. In 1792, Eliza wrote that the Snuneymuxw of the Nanaimo area still "valued the necklaces and the Monterey shells; ... They showed more appreciation of rough pieces of iron than such as was fashioned into knives or nails" (Eliza, 1792). In Admiralty Inlet, at the entrance to Puget Sound, in 1792, Menzies saw that: "Amongst them were some whose faces we recollect seeing in Indian Cove, this was better confirmed by finding in their possession some of the trinkets we had there distributed – They had also Iron Chinese Cashes ...& beads which clearly

showed that they had either a direct or indirect communication with the Traders on the exterior part of the Coast”(Newcombe 1923:29).

North Coast

Iron was common on the northern coast in the 1790s and plentiful after the settlement of the Russian American Co. at Sitka in 1799.

Etienne Marchand, in 1791, saw only a few muskets without ammunition among the Sitka Tlingit, but all were armed with a 15 to 16 inch metal dagger (2 to 2.5in. wide) that was sharp on both sides. These were carefully preserved and kept “polished and bright”. They were worn in a leather scabbard on a shoulder belt and were “never without it”. They also had iron tipped pikes and lances, adzes and muskets (Fleurieu 1801, 1:342). Suria mentions the short lance, knife and stone hatchet as the equipment of the warrior. The point of the lance was the “blade of a great knife which they obtain from Englishmen” (Wagner 1936:255-56, pl. III)

During the same year, further north at Yakutat Bay, Malaspina observed hatchets, cooking pots, silver spoons and books – assumed to have been left by Dixon.

Jacinto Caamano saw that the double pointed daggers of the Sitka Tlingit were “about a foot long and four inches wide. The handle was of the same metal, ...They are well tempered and worked that I did not believe at first the Indians had made them, but afterwards I was assured that they make these weapons in the fire, from the iron they have received and they can quite easily beat them with rocks in water”. Iron was common by 1792, as Caamano stated: “never did they request copper or iron, which I saw they did not regard at all highly, and of which they had a plentiful supply” (Wagner and Newcombe, 1938:320-1). He also observed near Sitka, the used clothing decorated with Chinese copper coins and sky-blue baubles” (Archer 1978:50).

Among the Sanya Tlingit or Niska (Tsimshian) in Observatory Inlet, Vancouver (1793) saw seal and fish spears and arrows with iron points. Every man had an iron dagger in a leather neck sheath. One of Vancouver's boats was attacked in Lynn Canal by the Chilkat Tlingit who Lieutenant Whidbey observed to have “seven muskets, and some brass blunderbusses”. The Chief had a “speaking trumpet and spyglass”, and every man has “a short handy dagger” (Vancouver, 1801:4:136-37).

Queen Charlotte Island

In 1791, off of S.E. Queen Charlottes, Hoskin was trading iron and cloth, but “Copper was not in demand”. He observed

Chinese coins and thimbles sewn on clothing (Howay, 1990:205). John Bartlett (under Captain Douglas of the Schooner Grace) observed many Haida men wearing red jackets and showing a lack of interest in iron (Howay 1925:306).

In 1791, Joseph Ingraham set up a forge for the smith to “make iron collars of three iron rods twisted together about the size of a man's finger. These I had made from a pattern I saw on a women's neck alongside weighed from five to seven pounds and would purchase three of the best skins”. At this time heavy iron rings or bracelets were preferred to polished copper ones (Malloy, 1998:32)

In September of that year, Ingraham saw arrows pointed with bone, mussel shell and iron, as well as broad, double edged, iron spear points fixed on poles from 30 to 40 feet long. All the men had iron daggers “a foot to 18 inches long”. He drew sketches of the three “general” types in his diary (Ingraham, 1791).

In 1792, John Hoskins noted that copper was of no interest in Queen Charlotte Sound, but a chisel of bar iron “a foot long or any thing that is iron that they can use” were traded for a skin (Howay 1990:486). In July of the same year Haida chief “Cunnyha” told Joseph Ingraham that six vessels had already visited, that tablespoons were eagerly wanted and an iron collar was worth one skin (Malloy, 1998:33-34).

Northern Interior

On May 24, 1793, McKenzie observed trees felled by iron axes on the north side of the Peace River Canyon. A Sekani on the Upper Parsnip River had an iron knife and people at the Cottonwood Canyon area of Fraser River were “armed with long knives” (Sheppe, 1995:102; 117;142).

McKenzie met Sekani traveling to the mid-Parsnip River who had bows “with a short spike at one end, and [which] serve occasionally as a spear. Their arrows ...barbed, and pointed with iron, flint, stone, or bone ...They have two kinds of spears, but both are double edged, and well polished iron; one of them is about twelve inches long, and two wide; the other about half the width, and two thirds of the length ...Their knives consist of pieces of iron, shaped and handled by themselves. Their axes are something like our adze, and they use them in the same manner as we employ that instrument. They were indeed, furnished with iron in a manner that I could not have supposed, and plainly proved to me that their communication with those, who communicate with the inhabitants of the sea coast, cannot be very difficult; and, from their ample provision of iron weapons, the means of procuring it must be of a more distant origin than I had at first conjectured.” (Sheppe, 1995:122-123).

McKenzie reported that these people acquire iron goods after an 11-day overland trip to a tributary of the Parsnip. This would likely be the Nation River and Lakes - “Their ironwork they obtained from the people who inhabit the bank of that river, and an adjacent lake, in exchange for beaver skins and dressed moose skin” (Sheppe, 1995:118). The Nation Lakes people, in turn, obtained the trade goods after a months journey to

people that lived in permanent houses – this would likely be at the trading centre near the intersection of the Babine River and Skeena River where the Gitksan came to trade after obtaining goods from the Coast Tsimshian.

When McKenzie was near Alexandria he indicated that First Nations “now” procure metal trade items from the westward but had earlier obtained iron in small quantities up the Fraser River from the south.

On the route from Alexandria to Bella Coola, McKenzie reported that interior groups “barter iron, brass, copper, beads” with the Bella Coola for “dressed leather, and beaver, bear, lynx, fox, and marten skins”. He describes the iron as “about eighteen inches of two-inch bar. To this they give an edge at one end, and fix it to a handle at right angles, which they employ as an axe. When the iron is worn down, they fabricate it into points for their arrows and spikes. ...The copper and brass they convert into collars, armbands, bracelets, and other ornaments. They sometimes also point their arrows with those metals. They had been informed by those whom they meet to trade with, that white people, from whom these articles are obtained, were building houses at a distance of three days, or two nights journey from the place where they met last fall. With this route they all appeared to be well acquainted.” (Sheppe, 1995:162-3).

At Bella Coola “They had heard that great canoes came two winters ago, and that the people belonging to them, brought great quantities of goods and built houses” (Sheppe, 1995:181). This would likely refer to the trade missions of Robert Gray – who built houses and wintered at Fort Defiance, on the west coast of Vancouver Island in 1792.

On his journey McKenzie made many observations regarding iron trade. Before Punchaw Lake – going down West River a man just returned from the coast with a new axe he exchanged for a dressed moose skin. At a village before Punchaw Lake a man “bore a lance that very much resembled a sergeant's halberd. He had lately received it, by way of barter, from the natives of the sea coast, who procured it from the white men”. These people had several European articles and Mackenzie gave them some beads and a brass cross for a strip of otter fur. At the next encampment he “exchanged two halfpence here, one of his present Majesty, [Geo III – 1760-1820] and the other of the State of Massachusetts Bay, coined in 1787. They hung as ornaments in children's ears”. Past Punchaw Lake they met a man married to a coast women who had beads and “bracelets of brass, copper, and horn”(Sheppe, 1995:188-193).

On July 6, a man from the coast said that at the mouth of the Bella Coola River: “ A great wooden canoe, with white people, arrives about the time when the leaves begin to grow. I presume in the early part of May” (Sheppe, 1995: 194). This was likely a reference of the visit of Captain Vancouver to Dean Channel a month earlier on June 2.

On July 7, McKenzie saw a man coming from the coast with an iron axe. On July 13, at Ulgako Creek near headwaters of West River, the local people had left to trade with others three days distant [probably down Dean River]. On July 15, some interior Dene passed on the way to trade with the Bella Coola. They brought beaver coating and

parchment, otter, marten, bear and lynx skins. They also brought dressed moose skins they procured “from the Rocky-Mountain Indians” [Sekani]. The latter being the “most preferred” by coastal peoples (Sheppe, 1995:194;202). Moose skins were a favoured item to use in making body armour.

On July 18, while at a Bella Coola Village – McKenzie's men were not allowed to put kettles into the river as “the salmon disliked the smell of iron”. On July 19, McKenzie reports that the chief had blue cloth and “a flowered cotton, which I supposed were Spanish. Copper and brass are in great estimation among them, and of the former they have great plenty: they point their arrows and spears with it, and work it up into personal ornaments; such as collars, ear-rings, and bracelets, which they wear on their wrists, arms and legs. I presume they find it the most advantageous article of trade with the more inland tribes. They also abound in iron: I saw some of their twisted collars of that metal which weighted upwards of twelve pounds. It is generally in bars of fourteen inches in length, and one inch three quarters wide. The brass is in thin squares: their copper is in larger pieces, and some of it appeared to be old stills cut up. They have various trinkets; but their manufactured iron consists only of poniards and daggers. Some of the former have neat handles, with a silver coin of a quarter or eight of a dollar fixed on the end of them. The blades of the latter are from ten to twelve inches in length, and about four inches broad at the top, from which they gradually lessen into a point” (Sheppe, 1995:222; 226-7).

At another village the headman “produced many European articles, and amongst them were at least forty pounds weight of old copper still”. One woman had “two pieces of copper in her under lip”. On July 23, he noted the Bella Bella “were inhabitants of the islands and traders in various articles, such as cedar-bark, prepared to be wove into mats, fish spawn, copper, iron, and beads, the later of which they get on their own coast”. At another Bella Coola village, it was noted that “hatchets” were made of “about fourteen inches of bar-iron, fixed into a wooden handle …their spears are about ten feet long, and pointed with iron. Their daggers are of various kinds, being of British, Spanish, and American manufacture”. On his return journey McKenzie observed that First Nations living at the junction of the Fraser and West Rivers “preferred large knives” in exchange for their beaver robes (Sheppe, 1995: 228; 247; 259; 264).

At the time of McKenzie's visit, there were likely other interior-coastal trade routes between those he mentioned.

Wilson Duff reported that the Cheslatta Dakelh (Carrier) traded via a route from the head of Tahtsa Lake via a trail over the coast Range to Keman, a Haisla village on Gardner Canal. Another trade route led to Pendosy Bay, near the west end of Eutsuk Lake, over the Sakumta Pass to the Bella Coola village of Kimsquit at the head of Dean Channel (Borden, 1952:34).

Conclusions

For thousands of years trade goods moved through numerous routes between the coast and the interior of British Columbia. From the interior came obsidian, dressed elk, caribou, and moose skins, babiche and sinew, fine furs of ground squirrel, marmot, and mountain goat, quillwork, lichen dyes, ochre and raw cooper. From the coast came abalone and dentalium shells, dried seaweed, clams and eulachon grease, steamed wood boxes and spruce root basketry.

We know that iron was coming into the northwestern Interior of British Columbia by at least 300 years ago. It would be highly unlikely that the Tatshenshini iron specimen was the only one traded during this early time period.

When the first iron from Asian or Russian sources moved south down the Alaskan coast, the northern interior of B.C. would be expected to be a recipient of this material within a short time frame, due, in part, to the large number of trade routes.

Historic observations from 1774 to 1779 indicate that iron was already common at the larger coastal centers – especially on the northern coast. The use of larger pieces of iron for making wrought iron knives and chisels as well as smaller pieces used as carving knife blades, iron bracelets and hair ornaments was an established practice. Some ready-made weapons such as bayonets and swords appear to have been present and the demand by First nations for larger pieces of iron suggests an established pattern for their trade and use.

On the southern coast of British Columbia, I have observed many bone artifacts with distinct iron tool cut marks from archaeological sites dating within the last 500 years and earlier. This includes evidence for the use of both small iron cutting blades and rasp files. Further study of the prevalence of these types of marks is necessary. Tools with small blades of iron may have played an important role in the manufacture of bone artifacts well before the period of contact with Europeans.

The evidence from long distance trade across Canada from East to West, long before the coming of Europeans, opens up the possibility of the first European goods traveling rapidly from East to West. As iron moved westward since the 1540s, small pieces of iron may have made there way into British Columbia by the late 1600s.

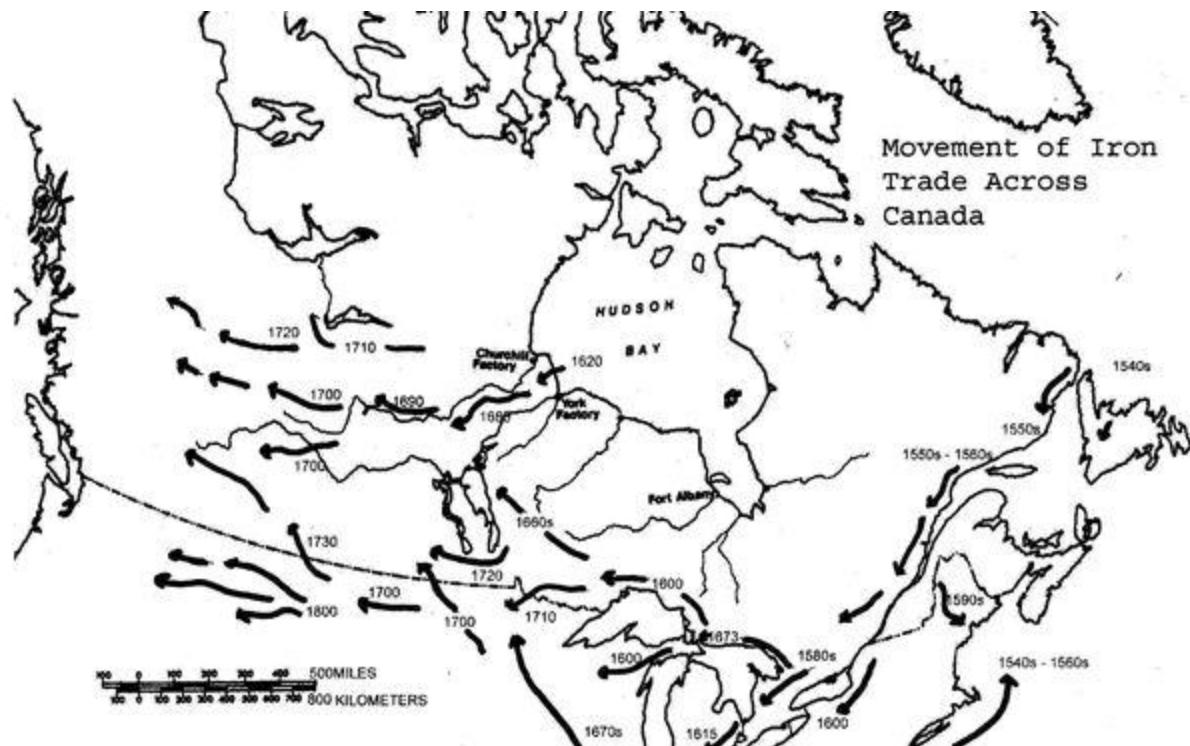


Figure 2. Map showing the chronological movement of trade iron across Canada. Based on oral history, historic documents and archaeological evidence.

By the early 1700s iron trade goods were in the hands of First Nation groups in Alberta. Byrne (1973:298) defines the historic period III of Alberta as beginning in 1700 A.D. By this time small amounts of trade iron were likely trickling into British Columbia.

With the establishment of direct trade in northern Alberta after 1778 it is almost certain that trade goods would have already been filtering into Northern British Columbia. It would appear that iron goods were coming into the interior of B.C. from the east as much as 100 years before known visits of Europeans to the West Coast.

It would also be expected that the first trade goods coming east from the Atlantic Coast followed the earliest fur trade routes along the boreal forest zone and reached British Columbia via the northern Interior.

A glance at a map of Canada shows that travel between the headwaters of the Churchill River and northern British Columbia represents a relatively short distance that trade goods would need to travel - compared to southern routes.

Iron coming from shipwrecks along the coast would present a different scenario (see Keddie article on Japanese Shipwrecks – this web site). There would be an equal or greater likelihood of iron arriving first on the southern coast and then spreading up the rivers to the Interior of the Province, as well as in both directions along the coast.

At present there is little evidence of trade in iron coming to the central Northwest Coast or Interior of British Columbia from the early Spanish settlements in the American S.W. More research is needed in this area – especially in light of the extensive ancient trade from this direction.

Future archaeological fieldwork and laboratory analysis will undoubtedly piece together parts of this story on the early use of iron tools by First Peoples.

Appendix

Iron goods - example of 1796 cargo remains

On the manifest of the ship Ruby's Cargo (going to China on March 1796), Captain Charles Bishop lists a large amount of European products that were not traded:

“16 half barrels gunpowder; 125 trade guns; 23 pistols; 5000 flints; 34 copper rods; 2 copper tea kettles; 32 brass guinea kettles; 16 quart pots; 18 copper sauce pans; 75 copper neck Maneillas; 20 brass Maneillas; 4 pewter screw jugs; 10 pewter tankards; 7 dozen pewter spoons; 197 - 3 lb. Pewter basins; 83 cutlasses; 122 bars Swedes iron; 90 bars steel; 9 boxes tin plates; 21 (3 cwt) block tin in bars; 10 iron pots; 13 pie pans with covers; 10 cwt of lead shot and ball; 5 tiny bound hats; 379 yards fine striped cloth; 352 yards broad brown cloth; 70 yards baize; 54 gallons rum; 14 cwt old iron; 24 pairs bellows; 24 grindstones; 150 stone jars; 26 coopers adzes; 40 hatchets; 546 razors; 276 fire steels; 1 trunk; 174 files; 14 looking glasses; 372 mane combs; 12 scissors; 108 tin japan powder flasks; 6 leather spring flasks; 6 leather shot belts” (Roe, 1967:156).

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