Eastern Kutchin Warfare*

BY RICHARD SLOBODIN

To early European explorers, the Kutchin bands of the Mackenzie River drainage were known as "The Quarrellers". This was an attempted translation of an almost untranslatable Athapaskan phrase,[1] meaning something like "Those Who Look Here and There." As interpreted to mean "Those Who Look for Enemies," it appeared to justify the "Quarreller" appellation.[2]

A cultural gradient from simpler forms in the east to more complex in the west has been noted for the Northern Athapaskans (Osgood 1936a:2). Among the Kutchin bands this regional variation may be observed in a narrower range. Judged by eastern Kutchin standards, the social organization of their western congeners was relatively complex, rigid, and authoritarian. This held true also for the organization of intercommunity conflict. In turn, western Kutchin organization was simpler and more loosely structured than that of tribes to the west, especially those of the Pacific coast to the southwest.

The eastern or Mackenzie basin Kutchin bands are those of the Arctic Red River and Peel River. The western bands are the Yukon Flats, Chandalar River, and "Downriver" Yukon Kutchin. The Crow River Kutchin occupy an intermediate position geographically and culturally.[3]

* This paper is based upon fieldwork among the Kutchin in 1938-39 and 1946-47, primarily with the Peel River band. The Arctic Red River, Crow River, and Yukon Flats Kutchin were also visited, and the author had some acquaintance among the Mackenzie Eskimo.

[1] As transliterated by Alexander Mackenzie and John Richardson, the phrase does not appear to be Kutchin. It may be of Hare origin.

[2] It is probably from this epithet that the French term for the eastern Kutchin, "Loucheux", derives. As commonly employed in reference to these Indians, its pronunciation is anglicized as /'lucu/.

[3] The identity and distribution of Kutchin communities at the time of contact has been reconstructed by Osgood (1934). Following current Americanist usage (Kroeber 1955: 303-305), the communities are here designated "bands".

The eastern Kutchin do not consider themselves quarrelsome, and this view is shared, in a different spirit, by western Kutchin. To the western Kutchin, the Mackenzie people were of little account in warfare, either organizationally or as individual fighters. Members of the eastern bands see themselves as quiet, equable people, not seeking trouble but ready to defend themselves if need be. This conforms with the eastern Kutchin manly ideal: one who is quiet, modest, goodhumored, even gay, but tough enough when occasion demands. Physically, members of the Peel River band are generalized as rather short, chunky, and dark-skinned — tall or light-skinned band members, of whom there are not a few, are explained as of Yukon derivation. This alleged physical type is considered to be congruent with the ideal personality type.

The eastern Kutchin attitude toward inter-community conflict, and also toward the western Kutchin, is illustrated in a favorite Peel River story placed in the period shortly prior to European contact. A turbulent Yukon Flats Kutchin war-leader, driven into exile by a dispute with his band chief, formed an outlaw group of Yukon and Crow River men which crossed the mountains to the Peel valley, bent on plunder. Encountering a number of Peel River families on the move, the outlaws represented themselves as without food and in need of help. The Peel River people made them welcome, but the arrogant behavior of the visitors put them on their guard, and they moved camp to a hill overlooking the outlaws' location. So disdainful of Peel River prowess was the Yukon war-leader that he did not intervene as the easterners took the high ground.

On the following day the war-leader, seeking an excuse to open hostilities, taunted and insulted a short, mild-looking Peel River man. Although a formidable wrestler, this man made no retort. At length the exasperated Yukon warrior ripped the small man's upper garment off and tore it to pieces. At this the offended man threw the war-leader down, whereupon the Peel River people attacked, and after a desperate fight killed all of the invaders save one aged shaman.

There is a discrepancy between the self-image reflected in this tale and the known history of mutual aggression between

eastern Kutchin and "Mackenzie" Eskimo, their neighbors to the north. This discrepancy is not entirely explained by the fact that the aggressors in the story cited above were fellow-Kutchin, for the eastern Kutchin have the same pacific image of themselves in relation to the Eskimo, although their tradition does not imply that hostilities were forced upon them by the northern enemy.

Traditions on Causes of War with the Eskimo

Eskimo and Kutchin informants agree that relations between the two peoples were at one time friendly. Kutchin tales refer to combined Eskimo-Kutchin hunting camps "long, long ago" in the Richardson Mountains west of the lower Mackenzie. Three different explanations are given in eastern Kutchin tradition for the rupture of peaceful relations; 1. a contest of hunting magic between a Kutchin and his Eskimo trading-partner; 2. a deception practised upon an Eskimo by a Kutchin; 3. the ravishing of a Kutchin girl by an Eskimo. The first two explanations imply close relations between the two peoples. The Kutchin deception cited as the second reason occurred when Eskimo and Indians were camped together. A Kutchin boy shot a bird with his small bow and arrow. An Eskimo boy took the bird, and the ensuing quarrel involved their families. To restore peace, the close kin of both boys exchanged gifts. One of the Kutchin was called upon to contribute a beaded coat, but he was too poor to provide the shell beads proper for its adornment. He had his wife use feather quills cut to resemble beads. When the Eskimo recipient discovered the substitution, he was insulted, and a feud developed.

It may be noted that only one of the three alternative Kutchin explanations for the outbreak of hostilities assigns blame to the Eskimo, for, in reference to the second story, it is not considered that blame for so grave a consequence can be placed upon a child.

Mourning and Vengeance

Although the capture of women and goods, and the enhancement of a man's prestige as a warrior were incentives to the war-path, among the eastern Kutchin they were not "causes of war", as they have been termed by Osgood (1936b: 86). From the Kutchin point of view the immediate occasion for a raid was revenge.

Once the pattern of raid and retaliation had been established, there was always a death by raiding to mourn and to revenge. When a Kutchin died from any cause, his near kin mourned for him and dreamed about him constantly. Such dreams were ominous and disturbing. The dreaming and mourning could be brought to a close, in the case of death not at the hands of the enemy, by (1) a suitable memorial potlatch or (2) the rebirth of an aspect of the deceased's soul in a baby of the opposite sex. Such reincarnation occurred only occasionally. The deceased was recognized in some attribute or mannerism of a child of the appropriate sex born soon after the death. Upon such recognition, a small potlatch for the child was provided by the mourners.

Where a Kutchin was slain by the enemy, the resulting social imbalance was only partially restored by memorial potlatch or reincarnation. Mourning and dreaming could be terminated only by a death outside of the community, usually — although not always — a vengence upon the killers.

Informants differ as to whether the killing of women and children was avenged. From the important roles played by women in some war stories, it would appear likely that their deaths were avenged in some cases at least. This seems also to be true of children with high-ranking close kin. During the period of mourning, all close consanguineal kin of the victim — parents, children, siblings, parents' siblings — wore ragged clothes and tended to remain apart from other people. The chief mourner, i.e., the most influential man among the close kin, further signalized his condition by wearing suspended from his neck the head of a raven with the the windpipe pro-

truding. He camped at a little distance from the rest of the band.

Here, as in all aspects of Kutchin life, past and present, consideration was given to the prestige of the deceased and of his immediate family, and more especially to their place in the scale of wealth-ranking. The "wealthy" had many relatives, that is, many people who were willing and anxious to assert kinship. The "poor" had few.

In Kutchin society there are three matrilineal sibs; the tribe is at the northeastern margin of the distribution area for the Tsimshian-type sib system. However, there is no indication that sib membership played a significant part in the organization of vengeance among the eastern bands.

Vendetta raiding was a warm-weather activity. During the winter Kutchin and Eskimo were usually dispersed in small groups, the Kutchin high on either side of the Continental Divide, the Eskimo along the Arctic coast or on nearby islands. With the advent of warmer weather, the Eskimo came up into the Mackenzie delta and the eastern Kutchin moved in the direction of the Mackenzie. Moreover, at this time both peoples congregated in fish camps.

Kutchin informants agree that the best time for raiding was in the spring just before breakup. The Indians believed that they could travel more swiftly than the Eskimo at that season.

At some time after the spring ingathering, the chief of the band or the leading man of the fish camp (Slobodin 1959: 104, 124) would request the principal mourner to appoint three leaders for a retaliatory raid. The head war-leader recruited the war party and arranged for war medicine to be made by shamans. The bereaved family, through the principal mourner, gave the war-leader a wolverine pelt, or two pelts if a large party was to be assembled. The fur was cut into narrow strips one of which was given to each man designated for the raid. This was worn as a circlet around the head, bestowing upon the wearer, it was hoped, some of the cunning and ruthlessness of the wolverine.

One of the oldest Peel River informants, generally reliable, described a variant method of recruitment. The chief mourner himself distributed the wolverine strips. Four strips shorter than the rest were given to the four, rather than three, men were to lead the raid. The leaders were also given skins of the ermine weasel to wear as additional circlets, so that for them the craftiness of the weasel was added to that of the wolverine.

The size of the war party is not clear; "about a hundred" was given as an estimate, but this figure is almost surely an exaggeration. Two or three dozen seems more plausible.

On the day before the departure of the raiders, the entire encampment participated in a dance in which combat was mimed. Medicine was made to give the warriors a measure of invisibility to the enemy, to steal or render ineffective the enemy's arrows, and to reduce his watchfulness. Each warrior, or his close kin, might make medicine for himself, but, in keeping with the relative lack of specialization among eastern Kutchin, shamans did not accompany the party unless chosen for their fighting ability. War-leaders were not necessarily shamans.

The Raid

During most of the raiding season there was continuous or almost continuous daylight. The war party travelled during the cool hours when the sun was low. As the shadows lengthened on the appointed day, the principal war leader gave a loud whooping signal, and, if there was snow on the ground, each man threw his trail snowshoes down and leaped upon them, setting off immediately at a jogging run. Kutchin hunters were trained in getting onto their snowshoes and setting off in a hurry; even at present a skilled hunter can do this, wriggling his snowbooted foot into the snowshoe harness as he runs. Each man carried some pemmican or dried meat, a bow, a quiverful of arrows to the number ordered by the war leaders, and a club. Bows were generally of birch, strung with twisted caribou sinew. Arrows might be equipped with points

either firmly attached or detachable. The Kutchin did not have specialized war arrows, as did some American Indians. The club was the characteristic weapon of the Kutchin. The most favored club was a section of caribou antler between two and a half and three feet in length, from which the secondary tines had been cut, and which had been boiled and straightened. Many men preferred to keep a portion of caribou skull attached to the antler, giving the club a potato-masher design.

Lances were rarely used, while slat armor, mentioned by Osgood (1936b: 87) is cited only for the Western Kutchin. For infighting and the *coup de grace,* stone picks or daggers triangular in cross section were favored.

Some of the war party, but not necessarily all, would wear a single feather stuck upright in the fur headband. These were men who possessed, or who had been given for the time, the medicine of a bird: loon, any of several species of duck, duck-hawk, eagle, whistling swan. Painting of the face or jacket with red earth pigment, also varied individually.

If the ground were still snow-covered, the fighters had large smudges or vertical bands of soot under each eye eo reduce the glare of reflected sunlight, for this was the season for snow-blindness.

The march was rapid, usually single file along main river trails until well into what might be termed the combat zone.[4] No fires were lit. A good deal of security was maintained. Watches were set while the party slept, and evidences of encampment were concealed. Thus, while resting, men frequently passed the time in shaving down arrow shafts; the shavings were then concealed under rocks. Discipline was maintained. Some war leaders punished a breach of security by sending the culprit home in disgrace, or even, some say, by shooting him.

The pattern of the raid was the surprise attack upon a sleeping encampment.

[4] Jones (1864: 327) and Osgood (1936b: 88) state that the war party killed every living thing which it encountered on the outward march. None of my informants mentioned this practice.

In a Peel River attack upon Eskimo, three to five night marches would bring a party from one of the summer camps on the Peel to an enemy camp in the Mackenzie delta or on one of the Eskimo Lakes east of the delta. Shortly after midnight before the attack, the leaders would scout the enemy and mark a point overlooking his camp; some informants state that a short stick was placed in the snow as a mark. Each of the party would then advance to the mark and take a look. In some raids the leaders assigned particular tents to certain groups of men. In turn, each of the leaders would then advance again to the marked spot. It any of them went past the spot, this was the signal for a general attack. Leaders preferred to wait until the hoot of an owl was heard, followed by the call of a ptarmigan. Some men, it was said, could talk to these birds and induce them to give the signal.

The attack consisted of rushing to the dwellings, cutting them open or trampling them down if they were skin tents, and laying about with clubs. Bow and arrow were employed as a rule, not for preliminary fire but to pick off fugitives. As they attacked, the warriors would shout "Go upriver (or south)", which, as Osgood says, has the same force as "Go to Hell!" (1936b: 87). As a rule only one of the enemy was spared intentionally, unless captive women were desired, but an impression is gained from hearing a number of raid stories that in fact few if any Kutchin or Eskimo raids succeeded in annihilating the enemy encampment. The actual attack was not highly organized in a military sense. The surrounding of a camp and closing in from all sides is described only for the western Kutchin. This is striking in view of Kutchin and Eskimo experience in surrounding caribou. Moreover, while there is mention of assigning certain attackers to certain tents, discipline in this regard was not well maintained in the heat of the attack, and frequently the raiders would concentrate on the nearest dwellings, permitting occupants of others to escape or even to counterattack.

The one male enemy who was deliberately spared was usually a man who had witnessed much of the affray. He was

called "The Survivor."[5] He was spared so that he could spread news among his people of what had happened and the reason for it. One of the leaders would point to the chief mourner and say, "This is because you killed his brother." Sometimes a further announcement would be made that there would be another raid "when the sun is higher." This was done "so that the enemy wouldn't sleep well then."

Understandably, efforts were made at even greater speed and security on the return than on the outward march. However, as the party was burdened with loot and sometimes with captives, essential speed was not always possible, and there are tales of a returning party being overtaken by the enemy.

There is no indication that raided enemy or captives were tortured, and several informants deny it. At the time of the attack, bodies of victims were disjointed (cf. Jones 1864: 327; Hooper 1853: 366). This was sympathetic magic to reduce the speed and agility of the enemy. There was some ceremonial cannibalism; e.g., drinking of spurting blood, and eating part of the liver. The current practice of drinking blood from the artery of a freshly-killed or dying caribou is reminiscent of cannibalistic blood-drinking as described in the tradition of war. Both customs were followed by the Eskimo as well.

Defense Measures

If the summer was preeminently the time for Kutchin raiding, it was the time to fear raids as well. As an informant put it, "When the people were fighting all the time with the Eskimo, they were afraid to sleep soundly. The men used to hold a sharpened bone or stick in their hand which would jab their head if they nodded. When the white men came, and the people saw their soft, comfortable eiderdowns, they said, 'It would be easy to kill people who sleep so comfortably, if we had a war with them'..."

[5] The old shaman in the story of the western Kutchin marauders may have been spared in conformity with this custom. He was not, however, referred to as "The Survivor" in the institutionalized sense.

Another informant averred, however, that two characteristics of the Eskimo gave some forewarning of their approach: if the wind was right, they could be smelled ten miles away; and, since they were afraid of the bush, they made a good deal of noise going through the forest.

Fish camps were fairly large concentrations along the banks of principal rivers at or near good fishing locations (Slobodin 1959: 102, 111-112). Youths and young unmarried men, who were segregated in a special age-group, were frequently assigned to stay a few miles downriver from the main camp, serving as a sort of picket or guard to raise an alarm if Eskimo were observed.

With these alleged precautions, it might be supposed that surprise was minimized, but in fact both Kutchin and Eskimo did surprise the enemy not infrequently. A location on the Peel, in Yukon Territory some 80 miles above the mouth of the river, is known in Kutchin as "Eskimo Drawing Their Bows," the scene of a successful Eskimo raid, while Arctic Red River Kutchin claim to have raided scuccessfully on Aarctic Coast east of Toktoyaktuk. Both sides seem to have conformed to Turney-High's generalization that in warfare American aborigines relied heavily upon surprise but very little upon security (1949: 117).

Conflict with Indian Groups

It has been remarked that the Eskimo were not the only enemy. However, in eastern Kutchin tradition, it was only in relation to Eskimo that a self-perpetuating pattern of vengence raiding developed. Other encounters were said to have been very occasional, with the eastern Kutchin playing a purely defensive role as in the story of the outlaw raid cited earlier.

Traditional enemies of western Kutchin were the "Dwellers Among Beavers," probably not the historic Beaver Indians but the Tutchone of the Stewart River, who were said to have raided in order to obtain captives. They were great medicine men, able to steal Kutchin ammunition from a distance by means of sorcery. This could sometimes be prevented by covering the

arrows with a clean tanned caribou skin, endued with power by a shaman.

In the 1880's a large party of these people came upon an encampment of Peel and Arctic Red River Kutchin on the upper reaches of the Snake, a tributary of the Peel. The "Beaver" people numbered more arms-bearing men than did the Kutchin encampment, but the Kutchin were alerted and ready for them, so the invaders camped opposite them and began a dance. This might be preliminary to trading and games, or to a fight; even now, dancing in the presence of strangers may carry an agressive connotation. The Kutchin sent runners off to find two hunting parties of their young men, who arrived on the following day, whereat the encounter turned into a tradind-party.

Just at the turn of the century, the threat of a raid by the same people broke up a large camp of Kutchin, also on the Snake River. "When we heard they were coming," stated a Crow River man who was present, "we threw some rafts together and beat it downriver in a hurry."

Captives, Loot, and Honors

As remarked earlier, among the products of inter-community strife were captives, loot, and war honors. There is no Kutchin tradition, as there is among many peoples, of raiding specifically for the purpose of acquiring these valued objects. Undoubtedly, capture in war was one of the means by which material goods were diffused. The Kutchin, however, were involved in intertribal commerce prior to the advent of the Euro-american fur trade. Indeed the Kutchin maintained trading-partner relationships with Eskimo as with members of other Indian communities throughout the period of Eskimo-Kutchin conflict. The rapidity with which commodities of value were transmitted from one community to another across great distances in the Arctic has been described by Whymper (1869: 162) and Stefansson (1914) and has been noted by Sapir (1916: 35-36). There is no reason to suppose that warfare played a major part in such diffusion.

As with other peoples of simple economies, captives of the Kutchin and their neighbors were usually adopted into the band and became full members.

There are tales, however, of women, either Kutchin or Eskimo, regarded as particularly clever and tricky, who instead of becoming acculturated to the captors, deceived and betrayed them to their own people when occasion arose.

Among the eastern Kutchin, a horizontal line of dots or dashes was tattooed in blue-black pigment on the upper arm of a man for each enemy killed. The possession of such marks was honorific, and they would be displayed at suitable occasions. However, there do not appear to have been any war leaders or warriors of outstanding repute in the eastern bands. Whenever reference is made to great war leaders, eastern Kutchin refer to men of the Yukon area. The references are made with evident mixed feelings: regret that the band cannot boast of such great men, mingled with pride that their forebears were not subject to such bullies; for the war leaders are depicted as arrogant and insufferable toward their own people.

The Neutral Ground

Demographically, the principal effect of conflict between eastern Kutchin and Eskimo was that a considerable stretch of the lower Peel and the upper Mackenzie delta was rendered uninhabitable, certainly during the early and middle nineteenth century, and probably for some time before that. The danger of sojourning in this no man's land or neutral ground is illustrated in two stories. In one, an Eskimo with a painfully infected eye deliberately moved into the Middle Peel Channel, off the lower Peel, courting death at the hands of the enemy. The alleged site of his camp is still known as Rotten Eye Portage. In the other story, an aged Kutchin couple had lost their only son in an Eskimo raid. They were inconsolable, but too poor to organize a retaliatory raid. It was not uncommon for the bereaved family in such a case to move away from their people voluntarily and camp alone, becoming in the course

of time "bush people:" allegedly desocialized and partially dehumanized personages with a touch of the supernatural (Slobodin, 1960: 127). In this case the elderly parents moved right down into mid-delta. Through craft and hard work they succeeded in killing a large party of Eskimo, whereupon they left the neutral ground and rejoined their own people.

The hazards of life on the lower Peel reinforced the upriver orientation of the Peel River Kutchin. One effect of this was that beaver-hunting played a small part in the economy of this people, although the lower Peel was excellent beaver country. The members of this band were hunters and trappers of the high valleys and mountains. Neither before nor after the advent of European traders were family hunting territories established by Peel River people, as occurred among the Algonkian-speakng beaver hunters (cf. *inter alia,* Cooper 1939; Speck and Eiseley 1942; Leacock 1954). The writer has less information on Arctic Red River land tenure. Some families of this band apparently summered on the Mackenzie at the mouth of the Arctic Red River and did hunt beaver. There is a suggestion in the available data that family hunting territories for beaver were held, although not in perpetuity. Whether these were pre- or post- contact is not known.

Kutchin as Middlemen

During the early years of the nineteenth century, Mackenzie Eskimo and eastern Kutchin became aware of the Hudson's Bay Company trading post at Fort Good Hope; indeed, the explorer Franklin states that this post was moved down the Mackenzie to the Lower Ramparts in 1823 "for the convenience of... the Loucheux [Kutchin]" (1828: 23). The eastern Kutchin, especially the Arctic Red River people, thus found themselves in circumstances which have been experienced by a number of non-urban peoples in relation to the expanding economy of an urban civilization. They were in the highly profitable position of middlemen between the civilized traders and more distant aborigines, and were able to maintain this advantage for a time due to the possession of superior weapons obtained in trade.

The Kutchin evidently appreciated the advantages of their situation. Before the arrival of the Hudson's Bay Company at the Lower Ramparts, that canyon had been the scene of Eskimo raids. However, after the establishment of Fort Good Hope at the Ramparts, Eskimo were unable to get there due to intensified resistance by the Kutchin in their efforts to prevent the Eskimo from trading directly with the Europeans. This resistance has been recorded by Richardson (in Franklin 1828: 204 and Richardson 1851: 204, 223), Simpson (1843: 104), and Petitot (1889. 91).

With the design of bypassing the eastern Kutchin and reaching the Eskimo as well as other Kutchin bands, the traders established themselves on the Peel in 1840. The Peel River band chief earnestly requested that the new post be located at the principal summer rendez-vous of his people, seventy-five miles up the Peel from its confluence with the Mackenzie. This, however, did not suit the traders' purposes, and the post was built on the lower Peel. As it was on the dangerous neutral ground, for several years it was visited by few Kutchin or Eskimo. With the development of trade at this center, clashes between Eskimo and Peel River people were frequent. It cannot be stated with certainty that they were more frequent than previously, as there is no basis of comparison. However, between 1840 and 1856 there were seven major fights between the two peoples on the lower Peel or near the mouth of that river, as reported by European observers (Slobodin 1959: 41-42). All of these were departures from the usual vengeance-raid in that they were stand-up battles or melees, several occurring in the middle of the day.

Cessation of Hostilities

The Eskimo raid in 1856, in which four Peel River Kutchin were killed, is the last recorded instance of inter-group violence. However, throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century, relations between the two peoples remained tense. Fort McPherson, the trading post on the Peel, was a fortress in fact, with arms at the ready when parties of both peoples were trading at the same time. In the summer of 1904 armed conflict

between Kutchin and Eskimo was barely averted. The death of many Eskimo later that year in a measles epidemic is attributed by the Indians to the sorcery of an Arctic Red River shaman. As late as 1938-39, many elderly and middle-generation Eskimo and Kutchin remained hostile and mistrustful of the other group. Younger people, however, had already mingled at residential schools and elsewhere; with the passage of another decade the ethnic hostility was a fast-fading tradition.

Increasingly during the later nineteenth century, and more rapidly after the great rise of muskrat prices during World War I, the eastern Kutchin tended to occupy the downriver areas of their river basins, near the Mackenzie. In modern times they are predominantly lowland peoples, although there remains a strong emotional attachment to the mountainous section of their home territories.

Why did the two peoples stop fighting in 1856 when pacification was not imposed by *force majeure?* Missionaries, both Roman Catholic and Anglican, who had reached the region a few years earlier, claimed credit for the peacemaking, and undoubtedly their influence, as well as that of the fur traders, carried a great deal of weight. It is likely, however, that the natives, by this time adapted to the Euro-Canadian fur trade, saw trading and trapping as more profitable than fighting. For generations thereafter, there was a delicate balance between peace, or rather armed neutrality, and war, but it is significant that at the time of the threatened clash in 1904 peace was maintained through the persuasion of trading-partners on both sides.

Hypothesis on the Development of Raiding

It is quite possible, although there is no direct historical evidence on the matter, that there is truth in the Kutchin tradition of friendly relations with the Eskimo prior to the period of hostilities.

It is almost certain that the efforts of the eastern Kutchin to prevent the meeting of Eskimo and European fur traders were motivated by a desire to maintain a profitable position as

middlemen in trade. As has been pointed out, similar situations have been important throughout world history, and have undoubtedly played a major part in the history of American Indians. In the Canadian North, for example, Fort Churchill was established in 1717 as a deliberate move to circumvent Cree opposition to direct trade by the Hudson's Bay Company with Athapaskan peoples. The Chipewyans, earliest-contacted of the Athapaskans east of the Mackenzie, followed a course similar to that of the Cree, driving westward to the Athabaska and Peace Rivers and establishing a highly profitable position as middlemen between fur trade posts on Hudson Bay and the Beaver and Slave Indians.

The Kutchin middleman position appears to have antedated the advent of fur trade posts in their country. The stimulus given to trade on the north Pacific coast of America during the eighteenth century by the visits of European vessels had repercussions in intertribal trade.[6] Olson (1936 has described such trading between Tlingit and Athapaskans of their hinterland, and references are made to it by Goldman (1940) and McIlwraith (1948). The Yukon Flats Kutchin have traditions of large-scale annual trading expeditions, well-organized under high-ranking leaders, which crossed the "Icy Mountains" to peoples at or near the Pacific coast. The principal Kutchin exports were furs and skins; the commodities brought back included dentalium shells, copper work, and, later, hardware of European provenance.

Although Russian traders on the Yukon did not reach Kutchin territory, their trade-goods moved eastward in intertribal trade. "As the goods which the Mountain Indians [Crow River Kutchin] exchange with the Esquimaux at Herschel Island are very unlike those issued by the Hudson's Bay Company post, I conclude that they obtain them from the Russians," Richardson remarked in 1823 (Franklin 1828: 180). Indeed, nearly twenty years after the establishment of the Hudson's Bay Company post on the Peel River, one of that company's Chief Factors

[6] McCLELLAN (1950) discusses the effects of early European trade upon tribes inland from the Northwest Coast.

reported gloomily that the Russians controlled trade with the Eskimo "between Cape Barrow and the Coppermine" (Anderson 1858).

That the Kutchin understood the value of their commercial position in relation to the Eskimo is indicated by the violent reaction of the "Mountain Indians" against the distribution by Franklin's expedition of goods among the Mackenzie Eskimo, which they saw as a threat to their trading monopoly. This very nearly resulted, or so the explorers believed, in the ambushing of their party by the Kutchin (Franklin 1828. 177ff).

It is suggested that the commerce between eastern Kutchin and Eskimo was gradually intensified during the eighteenth century by the stimulus provided, at a distance, by European trade with tribes to the west of the Kutchin. This resulted in increased contact as well as increased friction between these peoples. "Trade", as Herskovits points out, "is often consummated with an underlying sense of hostility" (1952: 180). Yukon trading expeditions frequently turned into war-parties. The contact and the friction between Kutchin and Eskimo was further heightened by the approach of the European fur trade, until, with its establishment in the lower Mackenzie valley under direct European control the Kutchin middleman position eventually broke down.

The foregoing is admittedly speculative, but it conforms with the meagre historical evidence which is available. If valid, it provides a soci-economic explanation for the regularized vendetta raids between eastern Kutchin and Mackenzie Eskimo, a pattern of behavior not otherwise characteristic of either people.

Summary

At the time of European contact and for several decades thereafter, eastern Kutchin bands and the neighboring Eskimo engaged in mutual raiding. The raids were occasioned by need to restore personal and social balance through vengeance. The desire for loot, captives, and war honors appears to have played a secondary role. It is suggested that raiding was stimulated and perhaps initiated by intertribal trading in which goods from

more complex cultures, including the European, played an important part, and in which the Kutchin were middlemen to the Eskimo.

The eastern Kutchin did not occupy this position in trade with any people other than the Eskimo, nor do they have a tradition of aggressive action toward any other people. Their neighbors to the west were in turn middlemen to the eastern Kutchin and aggressors against them.

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