

In Centro

Collected Papers
Volume I

Motion, Movement and Mobility

Editors:
Guy D. Stiebel
Doron Ben-Ami
Amir Gorzalczany
Yotam Tepper
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Central Region



TEL AVIV UNIVERSITY

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The Jacob M. Alkow Department of Archaeology and Ancient Near Eastern Cultures

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Travelling with Subarctic Hunter-Gatherers

Adrian Tanner | Memorial University

Introduction

There is a common diurnal pattern whereby people alternate between indoors and outdoors; they spend nights indoors and move about or travel when they are outside. In this paper I will examine what I consider to be the special nature of these kinds of daily movements in one particular hunter-gatherer society. In agricultural and industrial societies, movement out from and back to habitations may be routinized, perceived as merely commuting to and from the day's more central and important activities. In a hunter-gatherer society, however, travel itself has a more central and essential role in the lives of hunters and their families.

Among hunter-gatherers we can distinguish two aspects to this pattern of travel. First, they undertake journeys for a specific purpose, like going to a harvesting site and returning, or visiting another group for socializing or trade. At the same time, hunter-gatherers usually harvest whatever they may come across along the way. Their travel also involves observing and learning from their surroundings, in part for indications of future harvesting possibilities.

* I am grateful for all the help I received in my work, most especially over the years by more of the Mistissini Eeyou than I can possibly name. Of these I only mention Charlie Jimmiken, whom I accompanied on many hunts and who taught me much of what I learned. I received many helpful suggestions on earlier drafts by Ran Barkai, Marguerite MacKenzie and Brian Craik. Any remaining errors are my own.

For those hunters who move their residence periodically, quickly assessing the land and the signs of animals and plants in a new area—one they may not have visited for some time—is an important aspect of their travel through the area. Travelling with an eye out for potential “gifts from the land” involves a particular way of moving and a special kind of relationship to the environment.

This paper is about the Eeyouch¹ of the subarctic boreal forest region of Canada, east of James Bay, also known as the East Cree. As noted by one author with respect to the Anishnaabwe, or Northern Ojibway, of two centuries ago, “Within each hunting range, emphasis was on efficiency of movement; the light, birchbark canoe, toboggan, sled, bark wigwam, and hemispherical hut were essential to this peripatetic settlement pattern” (Chute 1998: 12). To this I would add snowshoes and dog teams as other key components of traditional indigenous subarctic travel. By the 20th century canvas had replaced birch bark for canoes and the coverings of tents and lodges, but otherwise the technology of Canadian subarctic hunters was little changed at the time of my research with the Eeyouch, around 1970. In the paper I use the past tense to signify that my observations about travel refer to that period.²

Eeyou Hunting Trips

At the time of my research almost all the Eeyou families of the community of Mistissini, northern Quebec, were full-time hunters. They lived in small groups of several families in isolated winter hunting camps from about September to June of the following year, while in the short summer months they were based at the village of Mistissini, from where they would go to camps for such activities

1 Today the former East Cree prefer to be known by terms from their own language. While there are various spellings, I use the forms Eeyou (singular and collective adjective) and Eeyouch (plural) in this paper.

2 Since that time there has been widespread adoption of snowmobiles and other forms of motorized bush travel by the Eeyouch. However, recent research by Guidon has demonstrated that much of the Eeyou knowledge that I discuss here is still maintained (2013).

as fishing, berry-picking and the harvesting of waterfowl. Some had winter camps close enough to the village that people were able to make occasional trips there during the hunting season, although most were too far away for this. These more distant camps were visited by aircraft, usually once in mid-winter, by a trader who would bring in supplies and take out furs.

The hunting groups were distributed over the land, each on its own territory, within which a group moved camp every month or two. However, they did not always return to the same areas every year. The boreal forest zone is subject to various forms of environmental instability, including forest fires, diseases that periodically may affect certain plants or animals, and some fairly regular and predictable predator-prey cycles of abundance. Hunters and their families, including pre-school children, lived in tents or, for the coldest two months, in communal log-walled lodges. If they planned to be away from main camp for several days, hunters took small tents, made overnight shelters, or in suitable weather they even slept in the open, next to a fire.

Travel was central to the Eeyou conception of hunting. For most journeys there was a specific purpose, such as harvesting game, gathering forest resources, going to and from a large animal kill site to transport the meat back to camp, or moving camp. In most cases the intention was to return to camp before nightfall. However, every such trip provided the opportunity to investigate the land along the way, as well as to harvest game opportunistically. There were also journeys that were only indirectly related to harvesting, as when people visited an old camp site—either one they had used in the past or one that had been used by an ancestor—or when hunters went to a location that offered a panoramic overview of the land. While on the trail, hunters would sometimes stop, make tea and just enjoy the rest. Whenever travelling, either in a group or alone, each hunter would make sure they were fully self-sufficient, each with an axe, a gun, a fire lighter, some food and a tea pail. Should they have become separated or for some reason been unable to return to camp, each hunter would normally have been able to find food from the bush, make a fire and a shelter, and survive comfortably.

The term for “he/she hunts” is *nttuuhuu*³ in the Eeyou language. This contrasts with the English language term, with its connotation of “searching”; the verb literally means “he/she goes out to fetch something.” It is thus similar to the English term “harvesting” and applies as much to trapping as to hunting or fishing. *Minaahuu* is the general term for “to gather.” while there are more specific terms denoting what is gathered, such as *nikuhteu* for gathering firewood, *naatischeu* for gathering moss for insulation and diaper material, *naataasteu* for gathering boughs for the tent floor (added every few days) and *maausuu* for gathering berries. The root of the term for gathering is also found in the term for a good hunter (*souchiminaahuu*), literally “someone who harvests well.” Hunting failures occurred when hunters neglected to respect the animals, who consequently avoided the hunters. While hunting success required certain conservation practices, the above terms support the general notion that Eeyou hunters did not rely on luck but employed particular skills in order to be prepared to accept the gifts that the animals give of themselves to humans.

Travel by Eeyou hunters also involves a particular perception of the environment. Like many other hunter-gatherers, the Eeyou do not have a concept of “nature” in the sense of a domain distinct from human society. They do, however, have terms that distinguish between humans (*iyyuuch*) and animals (*wesiis*), between the camp (*kapeshuwin*) and out on the land (*nuuhchimiihch*), and between inside a dwelling (*pihtikamic*) and the outdoors (*wiyiwiiitimihch*). The term *nuuhchimiihch* also contrasts with village (*itaawin*), the place where the hunting groups assembled each summer. The general Eeyou term for land (*aschii*) encompasses the mountains, the rivers, the lakes and the rapids. The main geographic features, like lakes, rivers and mountains, were all named, and in many cases these names signal the specific relevance of the feature for travel or for harvesting.

3 For the Eeyou terms and orthography used in this paper, see The Eastern James Bay Cree dictionary; <https://dictionary.eastcree.org/> (last accessed on December 9, 2018).

For most urban Canadians, the subarctic boreal forest environment is a vast wilderness with a harsh climate. For the Eeyou it is home, a familiar patchwork of countless local mini-environments. Many of the animals that the Eeyou hunted were camouflaged (e.g., the arctic hare, the *ptarmigan* and the spruce grouse), but experienced hunters were able to pick them out from their surroundings. Similarly, hunters paid attention to signs of game animals, like studying animal tracks or observing such details as where twigs had been browsed by a moose, even by just a glance while walking past on snowshoes. A hunter's familiarity with the land was built up over a lifetime, as most returned, usually annually, to a specific hunting territory.⁴

This territory system ensured that resources were fairly evenly distributed. Membership in the particular hunting group associated with a territory was usually stable from year to year, while leaders of hunting groups might also invite others to join them. Occasionally the group did not use its own territory for a season, in order to allow animals and plants to regenerate. At such times group members became guests of groups occupying other territories. Anyone travelling through another's territory could harvest game on the way, although they were expected to acknowledge, in some way, the priority of the leader of the territory. Those territories in the northern parts of the Mistissini lands are large enough that groups usually went to different parts each year, sometimes only returning to a particular region after several years, by which time the local environment would have changed.

Hunters were continuously reacquainting themselves with the environments they occupied or through which they travelled. While much of this knowledge was equivalent to that of science, it was organized using the Eeyou non-Western ontology. In this world view, animals are persons with intention and memory, who can communicate with humans. Spiritual knowledge about animals,

4 After a period of scholarly controversy over the origins of this form of land tenure, ethnohistorians have shown that family hunting territories were in use in the earliest days of European contact. While prehistoric evidence of their existence may be difficult to establish, the territory system is indigenous, in the sense that it has no similarity to European land tenure practices.

which hunters and their families acquired from their dreams and through various divination techniques, was taken into account, along with whatever new environmental information was observed. The dreams themselves are understood as journeys, the out-of-body travels of the soul.

This environmental and spiritual knowledge was used in planning a winter's activities. Other factors could influence the making and carrying out of these plans, such as social obligations and other kinds of inter-community relations. The plans were not just of relevance to the groups themselves, but they were shared with those who would be hunting on nearby territories. The boundaries of hunting territories, which at the time of my research were fixed on government maps, were in practice somewhat more flexible, so that it was important for neighbouring groups to share plans for the upcoming winter, particularly with respect to the boundary areas. Plans were also shared with the trader, who undertook to visit camps at a specific lake and on a specific date—although it was only the earliest date to which the trader would commit, while most years the aircraft was late, and the Eeyouch would remain there, unable to go hunting for fear of missing this exciting event. This illustrates something of the role of planning in the lives of Eeyou hunters. While the groups would be moving camp many times during the winter, they were able to plan with certainty to be at a specific lake on a specific date, several months in the future. Calendars were used through the winter to tick off the days, partly since, for religious reasons, the Eeyouch observed certain restrictions on their hunting activities on Sundays.

Hunting groups were usually physically isolated all winter, since it was rare to visit another hunting group, except while passing through another's lands, or to seek assistance in the event of severe food shortage, an accident, or sickness. Despite this isolation, neighbouring groups and far distant friends remained part of a group's social world, as subjects of conversations and speculation as to their hunting success. Once in mid-winter, when I was on a hunting trip with an Eeyou hunter, we climbed to a lookout place, from where we could see a troop of caribou in the distance. I asked my companion if we should go

after them. Noting the direction in which the caribou were travelling, roughly towards the camp of a neighbouring group, he responded, “No, let George have those caribou.”

At the time of my research Eeyou hunters and their families were generally literate in their own language, using the syllabic script, and at times people would write letters. In some cases, letters arrived from friends or relatives with the trader’s visit. Letters might be sent out, for example if a traveller would be visiting another hunting camp. On the major trails used by several hunting groups, messages were sometimes left at cairns for others who would later pass that way. In the past a system of message sticks had been used for the same purpose, indicating to those who came later a group’s direction of travel and other pertinent information (Skinner 1911: 47–48).

In some cases hunters did not spend a winter on one specific hunting territory, but would travel and hunt further afield. In the early 20th century there had been a period of widespread shortages of many of the main animals on which Eeyou hunters depended, so that many families were forced to roam far and wide, beyond the boundaries of a territory, in order to subsist on whatever small game or fish they could find (Tanner 1978). Some hunters travelled and hunted over even longer distances, partly for the experience of seeing distant places or to trade where prices were better. Such travel included visiting relatives, who, through the common practice of intermarriage between regional groups, would have been living at far distant locations. Marguerite MacKenzie recounts an incident when she was working with a Naskapi elder in Schefferville, at the middle of the Quebec-Labrador peninsula, having herself just travelled by plane from Chisasibi (a large Eeyou village on James Bay) to Goose Bay, Labrador, and would be continuing to Davis Inlet (on the coast of Labrador). His response to her travels was: “I have seen all those places, but I walked!” (personal communication).

Spiritually, *nuuhchimiich* (“the outdoors”) was considered to be clean. Although camps were always kept tidy, as an area of human habitation it was spiritually polluted. This can be seen in the treatment of the inedible remains of

game animals. These were sacred materials, and as such, the bones of animals were not allowed to be discarded on the ground of the campsite. Skulls and other bones of land animals were hung in trees or on a special bone platform, while those of the water animals were returned to the water, out of the reach of dogs or other scavengers. Along with their animist beliefs and practices, most Eeyou were also converts to the Anglican faith. At the time of my research most Eeyou saw no conflict between their animism and Christianity. Because the spiritual aspects were associated with the bush, while travelling, hunters are not just on the alert for signs of the physical existence of animals, but also for indications of their ethereal presence.

Winter Travel

Movement was a central aspect of all of the most important hunting activities of the Eeyouch. In the period from October to the following June, snow covered the ground, the lakes were frozen, as were most rivers, except where there were waterfalls or large rapids. In urban Canada, a heavy snowfall disrupts the normal functioning of most forms of travel, at least for the time it takes to remove the snow from roads and parking lots. For Eeyou hunters, however, such snowfalls hardly disrupted normal activities. Fresh snow around the camp was simply trampled down by snowshoe, and some of the new snow was piled around the tent walls as added insulation. For the Eeyouch, winter was in many ways the time of plenty, in no small part due to their ability to travel easily on snowshoes. While wearing them hunters could walk virtually anywhere they wished, unlike in summer, when, in addition to the annoyance of the insects, they may have been excluded from certain areas, such as where the forest was too dense or where the land was too boggy. In winter, however, the frozen-over lakes, rivers and boggy areas were ideal for travel by snowshoe.

Eeyou hunters often spoke of their travel in terms of being on a trail (*yiskinuu*). This term was used whether they followed a path already in existence or one that they created by “breaking trail,” that is, by being the first to use that particular

route through the snow that winter. Breaking trail in snow requires more energy than following an already established one. The term *yiskinuu* thus referred to both a trail and a travel route.⁵ In winter, animal tracks would show up in the snow, and since there were usually snowfalls every few days, hunters would know how fresh the tracks were. However, when tracks of game animals were encountered along the same route as the hunters were travelling, they would walk alongside them, but not on the tracks. This was in order to avoid offending the animal, as well as to learn what they could about the animal's direction and speed by carefully observing the tracks.

The Eeyouch hunted both individually and in groups. On most days, individual hunters would go off in different directions, each setting traps and snares and checking previously set ones. At other times, two or three hunters would leave together, particularly when it was felt there was a chance of harvesting big game along with each of the hunter's individual trapping activities. Finally, when conditions were right, there would be communal hunts, when a group's hunters would go together for moose, caribou, or bear.

On the trips involving either individuals or small groups of hunters, new beaver colonies would be discovered, often by simply noting the frozen surface of a pond while walking past. If this surface, even under several meters of snow, had a concave appearance, hunters would go on their way without further investigation. If, however, the surface of the snow on the pond was flat, this indicated that there was an active beaver colony. The beaver builds and maintains a dam to keep the water level in a pond artificially stable, whereas in a natural pond the level drops as the water drains during the first part of the winter, giving the frozen surface a concave appearance.

While the big game animals, moose, caribou and bear, were generally hunted communally at particular times during the winter, beavers were harvested more

5 Today, long-distance snowshoe walks are of great symbolic significance to northern Canadian indigenous people, first as a form of healing to address social disfunction and more recently as a form of political action in support of indigenous rights and cultural survival (Everett-Green 2014).

regularly. Beaver was a key food item for the group, eaten almost daily, while its fur was also their main trade item. Each adult beaver brought in an average of 13 kg of meat, of particularly high nutritional value. This was because, unlike most northern game animals that lose their fat over the course of the winter, the beaver continues to feed every day on the supply it has stored at the bottom of the pond. Beavers thus maintain their thick layer of fat all winter long, and this is an especially prized form of food for the Eeyouch.

On these trips, other small animals or game birds were harvested opportunistically. The Eeyouch preferred not to travel at night, so that these daily journeys were generally of limited duration in the mid-winter period of short daylight hours, but later in winter, there would be long hours of travel. Each evening in camp the hunters would exchange information as to what they had encountered that day. The Eeyou language has a particularly elaborate vocabulary for geographic features and a grammatical structure that allows individuals to describe with precision places that are out of sight (Neacappo 2012).

Snowshoe Travel

Winter travel means walking on snowshoes (*asaam*). A basic ability is easy to acquire, but with experience hunters were able to use them with great facility. Some Eeyou snowshoers could do some amazing tricks while wearing them. Several styles of snowshoes are made in the hunting camps, some of which were mainly for use around the camp. But for travel the longer narrower snowshoes, called *chaahkuhweusaam*, were most suitable, particularly for breaking trail in fresh snow. A variety of skills came into play in snowshoeing, including manipulating them to take account of the appearance of the snow, in order to avoid hazards, like the hidden hollow areas next to trees. In addition to paying attention to all their surroundings, hunters had to continually watch where they put their feet. Running on snowshoes was a little more challenging, acquired with practice. The importance of snowshoeing in Eeyou culture was marked by a child's first walk on them, which was ritually celebrated.

Long days of snowshoeing, in some cases while pulling a loaded toboggan, also called for endurance, which for the Eeyouch was as much a psychic skill as a physical ability. Eeyou youth were taught to ignore tiredness, hunger and muscle pain. However, hunters did not need to practice such endurance every day. Some days only light work was done around the camp, and there were many other times when the whole camp did nothing but feast or rest, although the women did at least some work each day.

Snowshoeing is a moderately energetic activity, such that when walking with them the body generates heat. Consequently, except in cold weather (below -20°C), Eeyou hunters only needed to wear jackets without hoods, allowing them to be more aware of their surroundings than if they had been wearing hooded parkas. In fact, when travelling hunters often complained when the temperature rose higher than -5°C, because the snow became sticky and clogged the snowshoes. At such times the term *chichikamushitesihhk* is used when a person's ability to walk was impeded, referring to hard little balls of snow that would become stuck under the foot on snowshoes. Users had to stop frequently to remove clogged snow, often with the exclamation "It's so hot!" The Eeyouch have a number of rituals designed to change the weather, and those most commonly used in winter were directed to the spirit of the North Wind, to make the temperature colder. However, when stopping on the trail, hunters generally kept warm by making a fire and drinking hot tea.

Travel for the Eeyouch involved many kinds of skills. Trails over frozen lakes and rivers or through areas without trees was often more convenient than travelling on land, because it avoided hills or the need to hack a path through the trees. However, travel in open areas was not without hazards. During periods of blowing snow, visibility sometimes became restricted to near zero by whiteouts, to the point that even following an established trail became difficult. In such circumstances hunters would find their way by feeling where the snow had been compacted by the tracks of people previously travelling the same route, in some cases even after the trail had been covered by fresh snow. Small trees were sometimes planted at intervals alongside a trail, to help people

find their way on the return trip. Sometimes the wind blowing the snow left a slightly lighter sky on the horizon, which the hunters could follow using their knowledge of the landscape. There was also the danger of the wind freezing a person's cheeks or nose before they became aware of it, so that groups of travellers periodically checked each other's faces.

Hunters would judge the thickness of river or lake ice, even when covered with a thick layer of snow, to see whether it was dangerous to walk there. They did this by tapping the ice surface through the snow with a pole. The same technique was used to find the underwater entrances of a beaver lodge, where traps were set. The ice was thinner where the animals swam each day from the lodge back and forth under the ice, and hunters located these under-ice paths by listening to the sound made by tapping the ice with a pole. Walking on ice could be particularly hazardous during freeze-up and breakup, especially at the edges of lakes and rivers, and again travellers tested the ice to find places where they could cross.

Some winter travel by Eeyou hunters, particularly when moving camp or hauling the meat of large game animals to camp, involved the use of dogs for pulling toboggans or sleds. There were sets of dog commands, only one of which, *kuisk*, meaning "go straight ahead," is an Eeyou word that means the same in other contexts too. At times a toboggan was pulled jointly by a hunter on snowshoes along with one or more dogs running ahead of him, attached to a line from the toboggan passing between the hunter's legs. Dogs were well fed and seldom punished, although they were generally not allowed inside a dwelling.

While travelling, hunters would often be pulling a loaded toboggan or sled, which involved a whole set of other skills, including techniques for lashing the load so that it did not shift or fall off on the journey. In particular, ability was needed for maneuvering a loaded toboggan downhill. When young children were transported by toboggan, for example when the group was moving camp, they were carefully and tightly wrapped up, sometimes in a moss-bag attached to a cradleboard, so that they could not move, which otherwise might have allowed the cold to penetrate the covering of blankets. Some elderly people

were unable to walk long distances, and consequently, when moving camp they too were transported by toboggan or sled.

Travel Clothing and Technology

At the time of my research most of the clothes worn by hunters and their families were store-bought, but the coverings of the extremities were made by the hunters' families. The moccasins, mitts (or gloves with large cuffs) and hats were all made in camp, mostly from local materials. These particular items were of special importance for travel, as the body's extremities were vulnerable to the cold. Making these items in camp involved a complex and time-consuming process of tanning and sewing hides, with a lot of this work being done by women. A hunter would wear through several pairs of moccasins in a season. Most camps had hand-operated sewing machines, which were used for making canvas tents or lodge roof covers and for some repairs to clothing.

In the case of footwear, the combination of moccasins and Eeyou-made snowshoes was essential, because of the style of snowshoe binding they used. This binding is a simple loop behind the heel, with the toes tucked under a strap over an opening in the snowshoe netting. No kind of footwear other than moccasins could be used with this kind of binding, the combination of the two giving a particularly flexible attachment. This allowed for greater manipulation of the snowshoe by the foot than would be possible with the more rigid form of binding of commercial snowshoes made for boots. With this loose binding, snowshoes could also be removed or put on quickly, when quick action was needed, with nothing but a practiced flip of the heel.

Hunters wore moccasins year round, but in wet conditions, especially at freeze-up and breakup, waterproof boots were needed. Hunters were especially fastidious in taking care of their feet and their footwear. While moccasins would keep the feet warm and dry when outside, any snow on them was carefully brushed off upon entering a dwelling. Moccasins could

become damp with sweat, and were dried overnight and softened in the morning. Wearing moccasins was a very different experience from wearing shoes or boots. The Eeyouch made their own inner linings for moccasins, either from rabbit (arctic hare) fur or duffel, a blanket-like material obtained from the trader. When walking in moccasins, the foot flexed more than when wearing boots or shoes, so that foot muscles got more use and this helped to keep the feet warm.

Like moccasins, the mitts and hats that were made in camp were considered superior to any available commercial ones, in terms of keeping these parts of the body sufficiently protected from the elements, without impeding their use. Other items of travel technology made in the hunting camps included snowshoes, toboggans, sleds, snow shovels and handles for axes and ice chisels (Lévesque 1976). Hunters needed to know how to make these kinds of camp tools, beginning with selecting the right wood or other materials, in some cases using only using an axe and a crooked knife. As noted by Guidon, the term *aamahtaaukaschihtaa* was used for a person who was capable of doing many such things (Guidon 2013: 33). Depending on the context, this term can mean the ability to do something in an amazing, wonderful, magical, or even weird way. While the Eeyouch recognized that some hunters had particular abilities at such tasks, as each hunting group was self-sufficient all group members needed to have some such abilities.

An additional reason that moccasins, mitts and hats were made in the camp was because they were decorated with Eeyou designs. This practice stemmed from the Eeyou animist ontology, in which everything, including each of the game animals, as well as parts of the body, had a soul. Decorations were not only aesthetically attractive to humans, but they were intended to please the spirits and to ensure that the particular body part covered by them did its part efficiently in harvesting game. The Eeyouch had a rich history of the decoration of objects to please the spirits. Previously, shamans had worn special hide hunting coats with elaborate painted decorations when they were on special hunts. Many examples of these coats are now in museum collections in Europe

and North America (Burnham 1992). Another related use of decorated hides was the “Ceremonial Hides,” which, in the recollections of people I interviewed in the 1970s, had been in use one or two generations previously. A ritual had been held in which these hides had been ceremonially painted and “fixed” by exposing them to the rising sun, later to be displayed at the doorway of a feast tent (Tanner 1984).

Eeyou snowshoes were also decorated, with tufts of colored wool on the frames and with lacing painted with decorative patterns, again in order to please the spirits and to lead the hunter to the game. Toboggans and snow shovels were usually given painted decorations. Other items used in hunting, such as guns, gun cases, ammunition pouches and the hunting bags used for carrying small game, were also usually decorated, as was the tent door, in all cases in order to make them pleasing to the spirits. Small game was carried to camp in a decorated bag slung over the shoulder, and large animals were brought back on a toboggan or sled or, if none was available, by packing the meat in a bundle wrapped within the animal’s hide and dragging this back to camp over the snow. Another decorated item used in hunting was the *niimapan*, a colored cord used to transport certain animals back to camp. Mid-sized game like beaver, porcupine, or the forelegs of large game, brought to the camp as tokens of a large kill, were dragged behind the hunter on the snow using the decorated niinapan cord (Tanner 2014: 218).

Summer Travel

For the season of open water, a lot of travel was by boat. The main activities of hunters during this season were fishing (particularly at spawning places or at fish runs), harvesting geese and ducks, and gathering berries. At the time of my research, some hunters had factory-made boats or freight canoes equipped with outboard motors, but when crossing overland for travel beyond a particular lake, the small light canoe was essential. Camps in summer were

sometimes located on islands, to guard against devastation by forest fires and to prevent the people being bothered by insects.⁶

In the summer, travel on land was somewhat limited, whereas canoe travel was common. At times, such as when moving in later summer to their winter hunting grounds or moving the location of a summer camp, Eeyou travellers were often obliged to carry their canoes and their supplies across the portage trails that linked water bodies. In some cases, unloading and reloading a canoe could be avoided by shooting a rapid or by dragging and poling the canoe over the rapid against the flow. This was understood to be a dangerous undertaking, and hence, to ensure that a canoe would pass the rapids safely, an offering of tobacco was usually dropped into the water.

In some places the forest was too thick for a hunter to penetrate, particularly in summer. The more northerly parts of Mistissini lands contain more open-crown forest than further south. In this kind of forest, trees grow sufficient far apart that the ground between them is covered with moss, and travel through the trees is easier than was often the case further south through closed-crown forest. In some areas of closed-crown forest, large animals like moose, caribou and bear maintain permanent trails through the trees, which hunters could sometimes use when travelling.

Planning and Nomadism

My focus in this paper is on hunter-gatherer travel, which inevitably raises the topic of nomadism. Although Eeyou hunters moved habitations at least every few months, they maintained a kind of symbolic continuity of residence. This was manifest in the standardized internal dwelling arrangement and in the location of camps, generally on the western or northwestern shores of a water

6 In terms of travel, for some indigenous Canadians, summer is also a time to undertake religious pilgrimages. Many in the Quebec-Labrador region who adopted the Roman Catholic faith take the pilgrimage to Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré around July 26. The Eeyouch, however, were mainly missionized by Anglicans.

body, so that the tent doorways faced the rising sun. The Eeyouch were thus able to maintain the illusion that their dwellings did not change.⁷ This illusion is also fostered by practices such as a taboo on children counting the number of poles in a conical tent, allowing them to feel that they were always living in the same dwelling. In another sense, some Eeyou habitations were indeed fixed, in that either existing dwelling frames were revisited and reused or a habitation site was reoccupied by building new dwellings. In some cases, this kind of reoccupation occurred annually. A common location of camps that were reused annually was at one end of a portage trail, or adjacent to a known and reliable harvesting location.

The movement of Eeyou hunters was patterned so as to avoid over-hunting. The main food animals of the region, beaver, moose and fish, were relatively sedentary and vulnerable to over-exploitation. Beaver could have easily been trapped out in an area by skilled Eeyou hunters, unless they had practiced conservation, by purposefully allowing some animals to escape. Moose were also vulnerable to over-hunting, particularly during those winter months when the snow was deep. During that season, moose effectively penned themselves up in “yards,” areas within a stand trees in which the snow has been trampled down. If any moose had left these yards they would have soon become exhausted, walking through the deep snow, and then would have become easy prey for wolves (Estigarribia 2006: 33). Again, by practicing conservation, each year taking only one or two of a group of yarded moose, Eeyou hunters were able to return year after year to these areas to harvest. There are other harvesting places to which Eeyou hunters returned annually. On the coast of James Bay, thousands of geese arrive annually, and hunters went annually to favorable goose-harvesting sites. Another such example was at fish runs or places where fish were known to spawn. Thus, Eeyou nomadism was patterned by harvesting a succession of areas, as well as periodically returning to known reliable harvesting areas, either annually or on a longer cycle.

7 On the subject of the habitations used by Eeyou hunters, see Tanner 2016.

Wayfaring

Ingold contrasts two approaches to travel: wayfaring (in which the traveller goes from place to place within a region) and transport (in which the traveller moves from one specific location to another) (Ingold 2007: 75–84). He cites examples of hunter-gatherer travel as wayfaring. Aporta is cited as saying that for the Inuit “travelling was not a transitional activity between one place and another, but a way of being ...” (Ingold 2007: 76; Aporta 2004: 13). A tropical hunter-gatherer example of wayfaring is given by Lye, who writes that “Walking on a trail, the Batek are actively monitoring it. They are looking at changes in the vegetation, spotting animal spoor and traces, indicators of change, swapping information [...] a pathway is not just a line between departure and arrival. It is a route to knowledge” (Lye 2004: 64). Wayfaring travel is not destination-oriented—simply getting from one place to another—but more like “creating a path,” so that effectively, the hunters’ movements through space are an ongoing path of self-renewal.

The concept of wayfaring would seem to be exemplified by the second of the two aspects of hunter-gatherer travel that I noted at the beginning of this paper: that while travelling, Eeyou hunters were, at every juncture, observant, selecting their route on the basis of significant clues in the environment. Ingold also acknowledges that some hunters may at certain times engage in transport. He cites the example of the Orochon of eastern Siberia, in which a hunter travels in a zigzag pattern when he kills animals along the way (wayfaring) and takes a more direct route when he subsequently returns to collect his prey, travelling to where each animal had been cached and back by the most direct route to his camp (transport) (Ingold 2007: 81; Kwon 1998).

An Eeyou legend, “the boy who was kept by a bear,” places special emphasis on a distinction very much like that between “wayfaring” and “transport.” In the story, the father of the boy that a bear has taken sets out to get his son back. Both the father and the bear have shamanistic powers. The father uses his power to locate the bear’s den, and the bear uses his power to try to distract the father from approaching the den. In a sequence of three such distractions,

the bear first causes a beaver lodge to appear to the side of the man's trail, then a partridge to fly out from under the snow at another place near the trail, and finally a porcupine to appear on a tree at a third place. In each case, however, the hunter avoids being distracted from his quest and resists going after these animals. The legend emphasizes how despite each distraction, the hero keeps going straight to the den, where he kills the bear and retrieves his son (Charlie Etap, in Tanner 2014: 225–226). The father's progress towards the bear's den is in keeping with Ingold's concept of transport, that is, he single-mindedly goes directly from his camp to the bear's den, avoiding other kinds of opportunities—ones that a wayfaring-oriented hunter would normally stop to investigate or harvest.

Events in legends are often the opposite of normal, so that under most (non-magical) circumstances a hunter would have taken advantage of opportunities along the way, an attitude that exemplifies a “wayfaring” form of travel. But in their wayfaring, Eeyou hunters also carried out certain plans. Moreover, when travelling in unfamiliar areas hunters were influenced by what others told them to expect. For instance, a member of a hunting group with whom I lived had never previously been in that region, which was in the far northern part of Mistissini lands. Animal resources were more thinly distributed than in the areas previously used by this hunter. The hunting territories were larger, caribou were more often encountered, and hunters generally needed to travel more widely in their hunting trips. Most winter days the newcomer to the group would set off on his own, to areas selected for him by the hunting territory leader, and with the advice of the leader's son, who also knew the area. His wayfaring would have been influenced by features of the land that he had been told to look out for. Each night, particularly in the mid-winter period when the group lived communally, he would share his daily experiences with others in the group.

The travel of Eeyou hunters involved aspects of both “wayfaring” and “transport,” in Ingold's sense. I noted above that when on a route previously travelled by hunters, hunters would take care to follow the existing trail. When

hunters made a large kill, such as a moose or several caribou, they would eviscerate the animals and bury the meat under the snow, returning to camp with only “tokens” to announce the kill. The next day the active adults in the group would go together to the kill site to transport the meat directly back to camp. When a new camp site had been chosen and some preparations had been made there, on the day of the move the whole camp participated, hauling loaded toboggans directly to the new site, in some cases making two or three such trips. Depending on the distance, when moving camp it was usually necessary to travel quickly, in order to arrive in time for the camp to be put together in whatever daylight hours were remaining. This allowed little time for wayfaring along the way, although hunters did not ignore their surroundings. In their harvesting, hunters had certain objectives, to head to where it was known that game animals or trapping opportunities were likely to be found or where traps had been previously set. In carrying out these plans hunters also remained on the lookout for other opportunities on the way. The need to get back to camp by night also imposed some limitation on the “wayfaring” aspect of hunting trips.

Conclusion

A key metaphor for many cultures is a journey out from home (with an encounter, a crisis, a resolution) and a return home—from Homer’s *Odyssey* to each episode of the Eeyou “Tchikabes” cycle of myths (Preston 1988; Piastitute 2014). It is also a pattern of movement followed by Eeyou hunters almost daily. They had a goal and a plan, but each journey was a new experience, an adventure, as hunters were also on the lookout for, and often encountered, unplanned possibilities.

My motives in writing this paper have not been to propose generalizations about travel that apply to hunter-gatherer societies in general. Rather, in the context of observations with one group of subarctic hunter-gatherers, I wonder if any of the points in this paper resonate with what is known about other hunter-

gatherers and in particular about their ways of travel. Walking is probably an especially common and important form of travel among hunter-gatherers, an optimal form of travel for making observations *en route*, at the same time that the traveller can achieve the end purpose of the particular journey (Ingold and Vergunst 2008). “[...] something important about the phenomenology of walking for Batek, and possibly other hunter-gatherers: it is not really where one goes that is ultimately important; it is where one can return to. Moving forward in time and space is also about moving back—to old camps and pathways, the past, and history” (Lye 2008: 26). As most hunters walk in their journeys, it is likely that the feet have a special importance in these societies, as hunters are especially vulnerable if their feet or legs become wounded.

Travel among hunter-gatherers involves planning, along with detailed observation, which build up an individual’s environmental knowledge, aspects of which have been passed down from elders. In prehistoric times, long-distance trade journeys were especially important for many hunter-gatherers. While the kinds of travel skills employed may not be entirely unique to hunter-gatherers, I suggest that in such societies they are particularly well developed and are in use virtually on a daily basis. Hunter-gatherers have a special attachment to the land they occupy, as they know their surroundings in a holistic way, being especially knowledgeable about their environment.

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