

***Indian Maps in the Hudson's Bay
Company Archives: A Comparison
of Five Area Maps Recorded by
Peter Fidler, 1801-1802***

by JUDITH HUDSON BEATTIE*

From the beginning, the success of the Hudson's Bay Company's fur trade depended on close cooperation with native North Americans. In fact, simply to survive in the unfamiliar conditions around Hudson Bay required an adaptation to Indian ways. To venture inland meant dependence on Indian and Inuit knowledge. Henry Kelsey may have been the first company employee to travel inland to the prairies, but he was successful only because he was accepted as a member of an Indian travelling party. Samuel Hearne met with frustration and failure until Matonabee guided him to the Coppermine River. Given the company's reliance on native knowledge of geography, it is not surprising that the Hudson's Bay Company Archives preserves an unusually large number of maps either drawn by Indians or of Indian origin which constitute a major source for study of native maps and mapping techniques.

D. Wayne Moodie has described native mapmaking as a "widespread and well-developed art," with the maps "usually drawn on the ground or in the snow" and "sketched from memory."¹ There are some thirty maps attributed entirely to Indian mapmakers, some recorded in more than one version, and a great many more maps in the archives executed by company servants but incorporating significant geographic areas and routes based entirely on Indian information. This may not seem to involve a large number of maps, but as a proportion of the Indian maps surviving, or at least identified to date, it is considerable. Malcolm Lewis, a geographer who has scoured the major North American repositories over the last decade in search of maps of Indian origin, has gleaned references to only several hundred items for the entire continent. Certainly if we restrict our area of interest to Western Canada, the majority of the surviving Indian maps are found in the Hudson's Bay Company Archives, Provincial Archives of Manitoba (HBCA, PAM).

Over two-thirds of the Indian maps in the company archives were recorded by Peter Fidler, who served as postmaster and surveyor for the company from 1788 until his death in 1822. From 1801 to 1810, when all his copies of Indian maps were drafted, he was exploring, mapping, and establishing posts on the inland waterways draining into Hudson Bay. He collected maps from Indians with various tribal affiliations and different hunting and travelling experiences. Some he knew well and others he simply passed on the trail, but all contributed to his knowledge about the location of the richest fur sources and the alternate routes into these areas.

* The author would like to thank the Hudson's Bay Company for permission to publish maps from the company archives and Wayne Moodie for encouragement and technical assistance in preparing the composite map.

1 D.W. Moodie, "Native Mapmaking" under "Cartography, History of" in James H. Marsh, ed., *The Canadian Encyclopedia* (3 vols., Edmonton, 1985) I, p. 294.

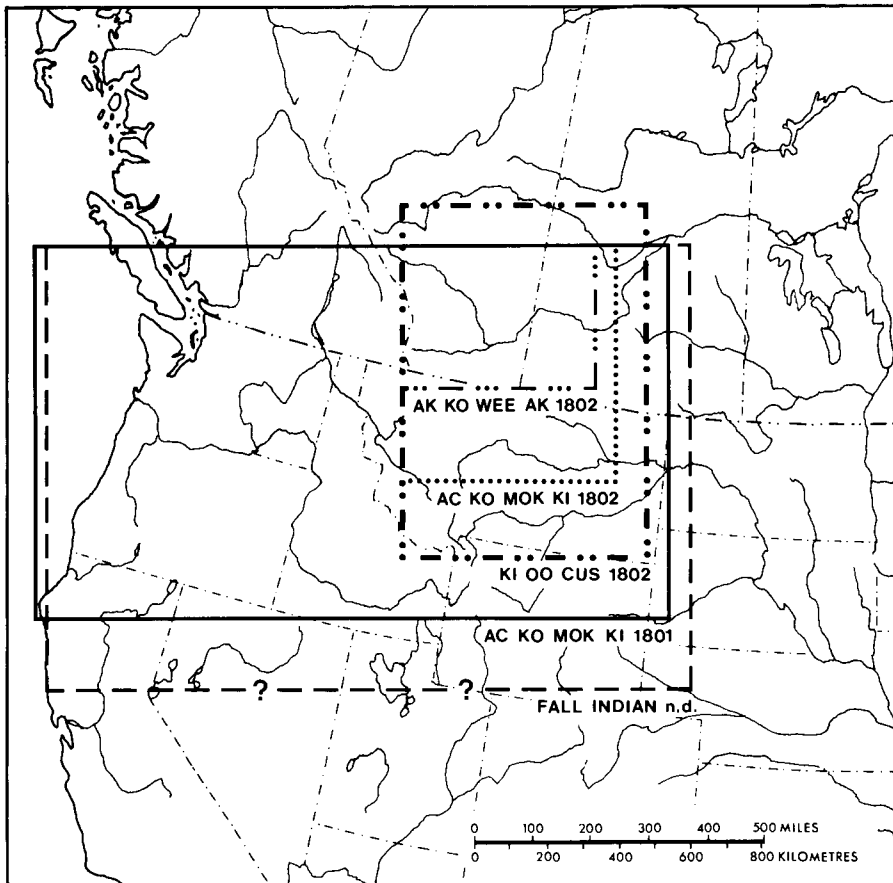


Figure 1: *Approximate coverage of Indian maps.*

There is no doubt that Fidler's questions and instructions to his informants affected the character and content of the maps he recorded. But the stylistic differences between the maps he attributed to Indians and Fidler's own indicate that he strove to reproduce faithfully the natives' creation rather than modify it according to his knowledge of the country and his drafting skills. In fact the pencil lines on some of his maps are so crudely done that it is possible that the pencil was wielded by an Indian who was unfamiliar with the limitations of pencil and paper.² Yet there are only minor differences between these drawings, in a rough notebook, and more finished versions of the same maps included in Fidler's "Journal of Explorations."³ One of these maps includes an inset enlargement of God's [Manito] Lake in Fidler's own style, but this was probably Fidler's own supplement to the Indian's map rather than his modification of the Indian's mapping technique.⁴

2 HBCA, PAM, B.39/a/2, fos. 85d-86, Ki oo cus, 1802; B.39/a/2 fo. 92d, Ak ko wee ak, 1802; B.39/a/2 fo. 93, Ac ko mok ki, 1802; and a number of pencil lines in B.34/a/1 fos. 13d-14, 17d-18, 18d-19, 20, 30.

3 HBCA, PAM, E.3/2 fos. 104d-105, Ki oo cus, 1802; E.3/2 fo. 103d, Ak ko wee ak, 1802; E.3/2 fo. 104, Ak ko mok ki, 1802.

4 HBCA, PAM, E.3/2 fos. 104d-105, Ki oo cus, 1802.

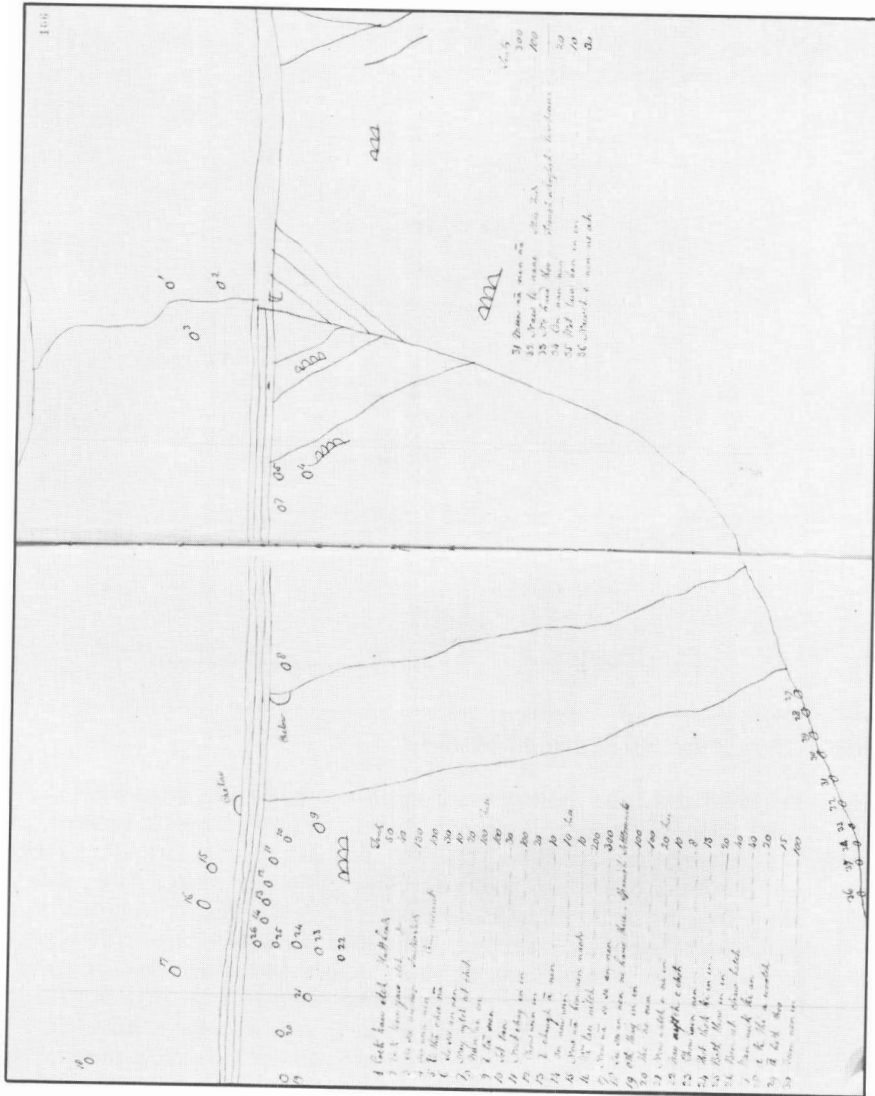


Figure 2: A Fall Indian Map, n.d. HBCA, PAM: E.3/2 fos. 105d-106. Courtesy HBCA, PAM, 4364.

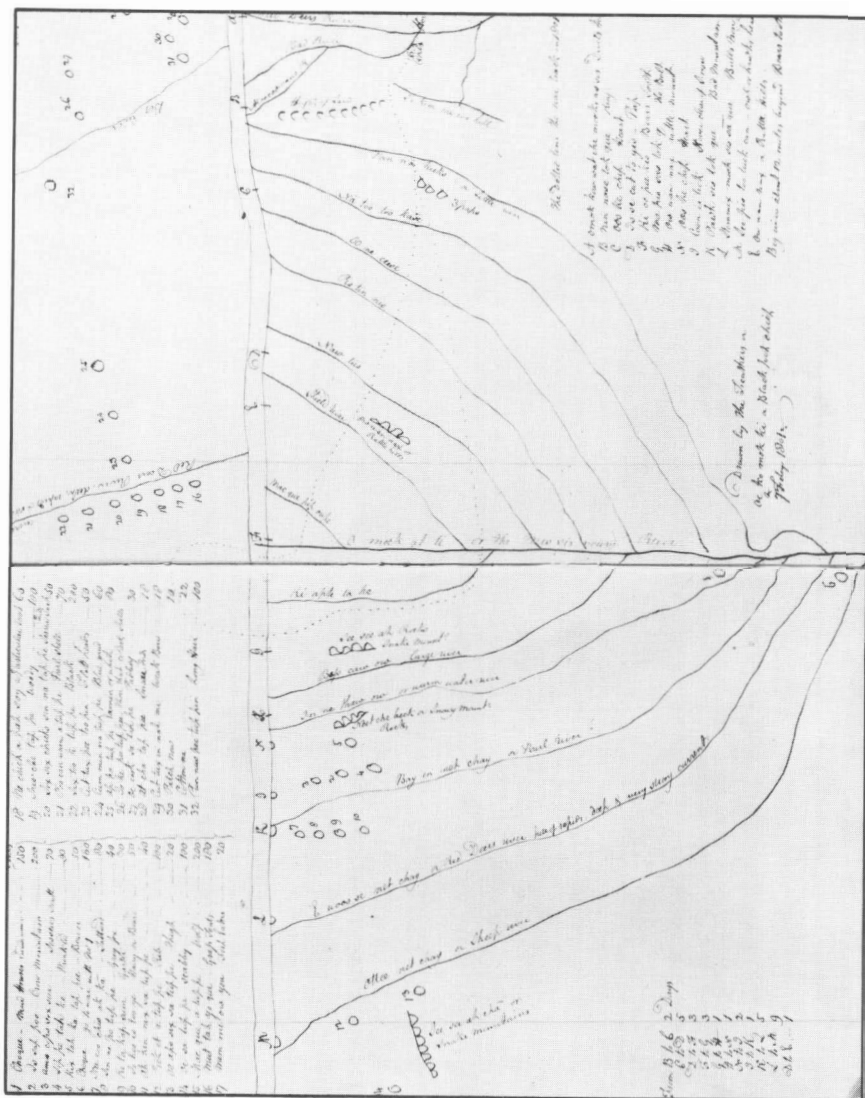


Figure 3: Ac ko mok ki map, 1801. HBCA, PAM: E.3/2 fos. 106d-107. Courtesy: HBCA, PAM, 4365.

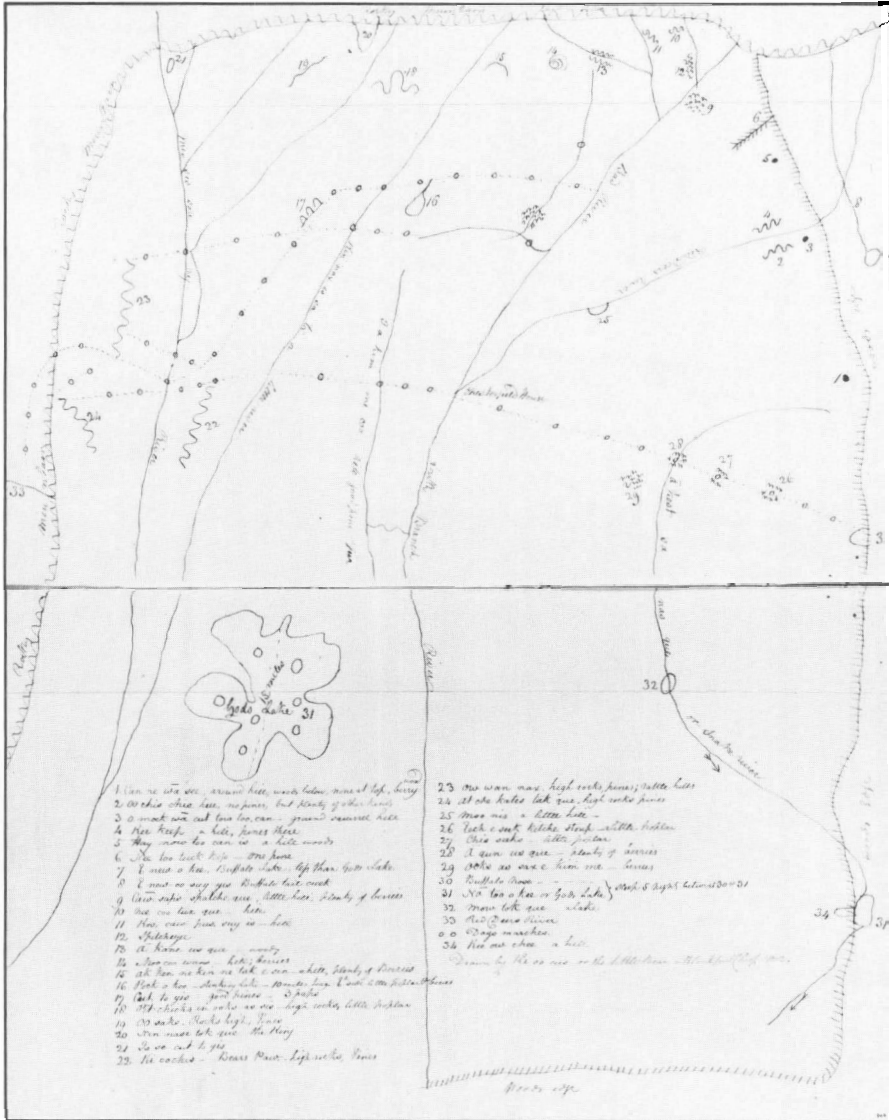


Figure 6: Indian map drawn by Ki oo cus or the Little Bear, a Blackfoot Chief, 1802 showing the Missouri and South Saskatchewan Rivers, and northwards in Peter Fidler's Journal. HBCA, PAM: E.3/2 fos. 104d-105. Courtesy: HBCA, PAM, 4363.

Apart from the three maps mentioned, it is likely that all the Indian maps in Fidler's book were drawn by him. The two versions of the 1802 Ac ko mok ki map are definitely copies since one is marked "reduced 1/4 from the Original size,"⁵ and the other measures

5 HBCA, PAM, G.1/25, Ac ko mok ki, 1801, 14½" × 18½".

almost the same dimensions.⁶ The original map would have been very large, about two and a half feet by three feet probably traced on the snow, the ground, or possibly on a large skin.

The maps drawn by Indians can be divided into two basic types — area or general maps and route maps. The area maps show a large region, indicating only the most significant features. Route maps trace the alternate tracks between two points, usually with detailed advice about portages and obstacles.

Fidler recorded four Blackfoot area maps at Chesterfield House, a post which he established in September 1800 at the junction of the Red Deer and the South Saskatchewan Rivers, just east of the present border between Alberta and Saskatchewan. A fifth area map, by a Fall [Atsina] Indian, is undated and may have been collected at Chesterfield House before it was abandoned in 1802, or later when some Fall Indians visited Edmonton House.⁷ These maps can be compared in figure 1 where the extreme points depicted by each Indian have been used to plot the approximate area covered. Because the Indians did not employ a uniform scale, exaggerating the unfamiliar or the complex, their maps cannot be accurately projected onto a modern map. Within each boundary some areas are blank in the south and west, and only Ki oo cus attempted to show the land east of Chesterfield House. But at least this method allows us to compare the maps more easily.

The Indian maps do not follow normal cartographic conventions. To someone familiar with a northern projection, it is disconcerting to see the Rocky Mountains shown as a band across the top of the page. The two major river systems, to the right the Bad (or Bow and South Saskatchewan) and the Red Deer with their tributaries, and to the left the Missouri drainage system, are shown only in a schematic fashion. There is no attempt to show all the physical features in the area, only those important to way-finding. But once these differences are understood, the maps can reveal a great deal about the area, with each mapmaker adding details according to his own interests and experience.

The largest area is portrayed on the unattributed and undated map by a Fall Indian. (Figure 2) No names are provided for rivers or physical features, although representations appear for the Sweetgrass Hills and Bearpaw Mountains in Montana and the Owl Creek Mountains and the Rattlesnake Range of central Wyoming, among others. The outstanding feature of this map is the location of thirty-four named tribes with their populations, as well as a Spanish settlement near northern California and a European settlement down the Missouri. Twenty-eight of these locations are south of the Sheep River [Big Horn].

The 1801 Ac ko mok ki map (figure 3) has already been analyzed in great detail by Wayne Moodie and Barry Kaye.⁸ Not only does it provide the largest number of named rivers, mountains, and peaks and the travel times between them, it also identifies and gives the population for thirty-two tribes, only four of them south of the Sheep River. On

6 HBCA, PAM, E.3/2 fos. 106d-107, Ac ko mok ki, 1801, 15" × 19".

7 HBCA, PAM, E.3/2 fos. 105d-106, no name, no date. For descriptions of the relationship of the three Blackfeet to the post and for a discussion on the possible origin of the Fall Indian map see Judith Beattie, "The Indian Maps Recorded by Peter Fidler, 1801-1810," paper presented at the International Conference on the History of Cartography, Ottawa, 8-12 July, 1985. To be published.

8 D.W. Moodie and Barry Kaye, "The Ac Ko Mok Ki Map," *The Beaver* (Spring 1977), pp. 4-15; D.W. Moodie, "Indian Map-Making: Two Examples from the Fur Trade West," forthcoming in the Association of Canadian Map Libraries *Bulletin*.

the version in Fidler's "Journal of Explorations," the war track in 1801 is sketched in from Chesterfield House south to the west of the Cypress Hills and Sweetgrass Hills to an area south of the Missouri and west of the Rocky Mountains, the home of the Snake Indians.

Ac ko mok ki's map of 1802 (figure 4) goes only as far south as the Snowy Mountains in central Montana. There are five additional rivers named on this map, but its most distinctive feature is the use of symbols for the major peaks. It is easy to relate the two hearts, the bear's paw and tooth, and the pap to their shapes on the map. This is the only known case in which Indian symbolism has been employed to such an extent.

The map by Ak ko wee ak in 1802 (figure 5) fits within the area portrayed like the smallest in a set of nesting Russian dolls. The area depicted does not even reach as far south as the Missouri River, restricting itself to southern Alberta. Within the area, the main addition is the much more detailed depiction of the Old Man and Bow River tributaries, with the addition of seven named rivers. One of the hunters for the post, Ak ko wee ak, indicates "steep rocks river where Buffalo fall before & break their skulls in pieces." And he uses the map to indicate where the Fall Indians were killed by the Blackfeet in 1801, precipitating a state of war between the two tribes.⁹

The final area map (figure 6) was drawn by Ki oo cus, a Blackfoot Chief who worked closely with Fidler as guide, hunter, horseman, negotiator, and protector. Although it fits into the general pattern, it is most interesting for its unique features. The only map to depict the country north and east of Chesterfield House, it provides a boundary between woodland and prairie. This is not only a sophisticated concept, but also an accurate one. The line is almost identical to one depicted by Palliser much later.¹⁰ The map shows three additional lakes and two rivers not previously included. Scattered over the region between the Rocky Mountains and Chesterfield House are an amazing number of notations on berry bushes, hills, poplar and pine sources, and travel routes. The level of detail on this map far exceeds that shown on any of the other area maps.

By collecting these overlapping versions of an area "hitherto unknown to Europeans," Fidler was able to verify and test the reliability of the information provided. On 10 July 1802 he sent some maps, including information from the Ki oo cus map and a version of the 1801 Ac ko mok ki map, to the London Committee. The committee passed the information on to Aaron Arrowsmith who incorporated most of the details in his revised map of North America of 1802.¹¹ Unfortunately Fidler and Arrowsmith, with no means of verifying the scale of the Indian maps, displaced features to the south of their true locations, leading to criticism by Lewis and Clark.¹² Still, as Fidler had written to the committee in 1802, the Indian maps "are of much use especially as they show that such & such rivers & remarkable places are, though they are utterly unacquainted with any proportion in drawing them."¹³

All the other Indian maps recorded by Fidler between 1806 and 1810 fall into the category of route maps. There are fourteen different mapmakers including the work of

9 For a discussion of this event see Judith Beattie, "Indian Maps Recorded by Peter Fidler."

10 D.W. Moodie has prepared a comparison of these two maps for his courses at the University of Manitoba.

11 HBCA, PAM, A.11/52, fo. 1; A.M. Johnson, ed., *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence* (London, 1967), Vol. XXVI n6, pp. 319-20.

12 Moodie and Kaye, "The Ac Ko Mok Ki Map," pp. 10-12.

13 HBCA, PAM, A.11/52 fo. 1d.

passing Indians as well as pilots and guides. They were described as Chipewyan, Bungee, Severn, Nelson River, and York Factory Indians. A few of the maps are dated 1802 to 1807, when Fidler's efforts were thrown into competition with the company's rivals in the Athabasca. The majority were collected during his surveys of the Churchill River in 1808 and the Saskatchewan and Nelson Rivers in 1809. From the dates assigned by Fidler, we can pinpoint where they were recorded.¹⁴

As in the case of the area maps, scale and orientation were distorted. Yet the amount and type of information conveyed was exactly what was needed for travelling in a confusing and unfamiliar area, with no extraneous details added. Notes were provided on the location and length of portages, distinctive topographical features near difficult connections, water conditions such as rapids and water depth variations, number of days for a journey, and the posts occupied by both the company and its opposition. Wayne Moodie has provided an informative discussion of a map of the water route from Lake Athabasca to the "mouth of the Deers [Churchill] River" which was "Drawn by Cot aw ney yaz zah a young man Jepewyan February 17th 1810."¹⁵ John Warkentin and Richard Ruggles have reproduced, with discussion, a sketch map of the routes between Cumberland House and Split Lake "Drawn by Cha chay pay way te May 1806."¹⁶

It is apparent from the present knowledge about Indian maps that they formed an invaluable tool for early explorers and fur traders, but the field is only beginning to attract a wider audience. At the Eleventh International Conference on the History of Cartography a number of papers touched on various aspects of Indian mapping and generated considerable interest.¹⁷ Malcolm Lewis has since circulated a letter to those interested in the field which proposes an interdisciplinary symposium to pool the expertise of not just the geographers, map custodians, and historians, but also linguists, cultural anthropologists, ethnologists, toponymists, and North American Indians. The idea is certainly attractive to me after my struggles over the past year to understand and explain to others one small but fascinating section of the Hudson's Bay Company Archives' Map Collection.

14 Reindeer Lake, HBCA, PAM, E.3/4 fos. 15d-16; Cumberland House, HBCA, PAM, E.3/4 fo. 15; Cross Lake, HBCA, PAM, E.3/4 fo. 11 (upper); York Factory, HBCA, PAM, E.3/4 fo. 11d, 12, 13; Owl River, HBCA, PAM, E.3/3 fo. 65d; Ile-à-la-Crosse, HBCA, PAM, E.3/4 fo. 11 (lower).

15 HBCA, PAM, E.3/4 fo. 14d; D.W. Moodie, "Indian Map-Making."

16 HBCA, PAM, E.3/4 fo. 13d; John Warkentin and Richard J. Ruggles, eds., *Manitoba Historical Atlas: A Selection of Facsimile Maps, Plans and Sketches from 1612-1969* (Winnipeg, 1970), p. 143.

17 Conrad Heidenreich, "The Mapping of Canada 1500-1760;" Judith Beattie, "Indian Maps Recorded by Peter Fidler;" G. Malcolm Lewis, "Euroamerican Misinterpretation of Amerindian Maps."