

DOCUMENT NAME/INFORMANT: SUMMARY OF ELDERS'
INTERVIEWS
TREATY 6 & 8

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SUMMARY OF ELDERS INTERVIEWS - Treaty 6 and 8

By Richard Lightning

In doing this summary on the interviews of Treaty 6 and 8, the treaty area will be listed in order that the reader can have a full scope of what area is being discussed. All of the elders which were reinterviewed had previously been interviewed by some other TARR staff member, dating back two years or so. The only exception was Fred Horse from Frog Lake. I had previously interviewed him on December, 1973. Judging from the two interviews his attitude hasn't changed. He still feels that the Indians had been dealt with in a dishonest manner.

Basically, the interviews may sound humdrum and lack vitality, however the questions were tailored for specific reason. They dealt primarily with: Indian livelihood prior to treaty, the disappearance of the buffalo, and the influence the missionaries had with the Indians.

A questionnaire is difficult to follow in its standard procedure, as the Cree language is too unparallel with English in terms of phraseology. Unless the questions asked are the short "rapid fire" type. It is for this reason that some of the questions get a reply of, "I don't know anything about that."

Considering the time factor and the method by which contacts were made, most of the information received is consistent, bearing in mind that Saddle Lake, Cold Lake, Frog Lake and Sucker Creek are considerable distances apart. The Cold Lake interview with Harry Janvier appeared to have some discrepancy in which the way of life was mentioned. This however could be attributed to the lifestyle of the Chipewyan people in their pursuit to make a living.

It is to be noted that when elders are being interviewed, at one point or another legends will be discussed. They are held with great respect by the elders and have taken direction from them. Although at times it may appear to the reader that the legends are mythical and meaningless. My view on the matter is such, that as a person who understands the Cree language, I am inclined to support the beliefs of the elders. But this raises the point about non-native people who have heard or read about legends and be comprehensible about them.

It is also to be observed that interviewees often attach the wrong titles and names to the wrong people. For example, (the minister who negotiated the treaties) but in the end they are referring to the commissioner who made the shoddy transactions in each respective treaty area.

When references are made to the depth of land which was surrendered, the elders maintain their position within the treaty areas that six inches was all of the surface land they gave up. It is repeatedly stated as "just enough for the white man to make an agricultural living, just to turn over the soil." As far as the minerals are concerned not one person has stated "yes, we gave them up too."

The overcrowding of reserves in the north central part (Driftpile and Sucker Creek) is a major complaint or "why are we not getting more land." They gave the impression that there may have been an open clause stating that they could get more reserve land whenever they were becoming overcrowded. The interview with William Okeymaw indicates that his source of information came from his own recollections of what took place. He would have been approximately 11 years old at the time, his memory is remarkable.

To put it in a hypothetical question, how many 11 year old kids would remember what the Queen said during her visit to Calgary in 1973. The question could even be asked today, the response would be negative. So it can be said that the elders possess very keen memories.

In conclusion, the interviews from Hobbema and Pigeon Lake respectively contradict in some questions. However both implied that their land was taken away from the Indian through fraudulent transactions, and also maintain their stand that there was a breach of contract with the treaty promises.