



Aboriginal Veterans Autochtones

AVA History Fact Sheet No. 2: The Exploration of Canada

- Major exploration and discovery expeditions of the 18th and 19th centuries were dependent for their successful outcomes on the traditional skills and knowledge of Aboriginal scouts and guides.
- Various imperial and later post-Confederation national development initiatives throughout the 19th century including British naval exploration of the Canadian Arctic and numerous mapping & surveying projects of the Royal Engineers were facilitated by the expert local knowledge shared by Aboriginal peoples and by the adaptation or modification of indigenous innovations in transportation, clothing and food preparation technology.
- Pemmican (dried shredded buffalo meat with dried vegetables and berries suspended in buffalo tallow) was the staple food of the fur trade and numerous expeditions of discovery, while transportation technology including snowshoes and Aboriginal watercraft were fundamental to efficient travel by land and water. Expertly tailored Aboriginal fur & hide clothing and footwear were superior to European equivalents for extended use on the land.
- Those expeditions which through bigotry or ignorance chose to disregard Aboriginal traditional knowledge did so at their peril, as with the doomed Franklin expedition of the 1840's.
- During the westward and northern expansion of Dominion government, paramilitary organizations like the North-West Mounted Police and undertakings like the survey parties of the British North American Boundary Commission routinely engaged local Aboriginal people, both men and women, as civilian scouts, guides, trackers, outfitters, teamsters and translators.
- Métis scout Jerry Potts was the most famous of such guides employed by the NWMP, while the self-styled "49th Rangers" (after the 49th parallel of latitude) was the most colourful of such units, being composed of Red River Métis organized to provide an armed mounted escort to the civilian and military survey engineers comprising the British North American Boundary Commission in 1872-1874.
- Practical skills originating from within traditional Aboriginal daily living provided the basis for survival techniques which continue to be employed by the Canadian Forces and other armies operating in northern and boreal environments. These include the use of expedient shelter such as the igloo, and the use of transportation technology including the snowshoe, toboggan, canoe and kayak.

(Compiled by AVA member John Moses, Six Nations of the Grand River, from various sources)

"Lest We Forget"