

Name the North Commuter Parkway Bridge

Sharing Places, Sharing Spaces

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 Office of the
Treaty Commissioner



Chief Mistawasis (miss-tuh-WAH'-sis)

"I for one will take the hand that is offered."

- attributed to Chief Mistawasis by Peter Erasmus, indigenous translator during Treaty No. 6 negotiations

Chief Mistawasis was head chief of the Prairie Tribe and was known to other Tribes as Sak-kaw-wen-o-wak. Traditionally, the way of life was to follow and hunt buffalo and depopulation of the herds required a survival change for the tribe.

*"Our way of living is gone,
there are no more buffalo,
we have to find a new way
to feed our people."*

- Chief Mistawasis, 1876

At this point in time came the signing of Treaty #6. At the signing the government pledged "We will never take your men across the great waters to fight our battles". The Treaty #6 signing occurred at Fort Carlton where a monument was erected to recognize the great achievement of the first chief. With the signing of Treaty #6, Chief Mistawasis brought about a new way of life for the future of his people.

MISTAWASIS NĒHIYAWAK



Mistawasis is located about 70 kilometers west of Prince Albert, and 120 kilometers north of Saskatoon. It covers an area of 125 square kilometers. In the past Mistawasis Nēhiyawak, formerly known as Mistawasis First Nation, has utilized its land base for agriculture, fishing, hunting, fur trapping, silviculture, logging, herbs and craft materials.

Mistawasis Nēhiyawak has a total membership of 2,800 with 1,600 living off

reserve. Off-reserve Band members live primarily in Saskatoon, Leask, and Prince Albert. Mistawasis has a mobile labour force, ready for training and deployment. Mistawasis is one of the seven members of the Saskatoon Tribal Council. The First Nation is also a member of the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations.

HISTORY

The Cree ancestors of the Mistawasis Band migrated to present-day Saskatchewan from the woodlands of eastern Manitoba and the Great Lakes area of Ontario in the 17th and 18th centuries. This migration was fuelled by the European fur trade, specifically by the establishment of fur trade posts on the western shores of Hudson Bay in the years following 1670. Although the Cree did not completely relinquish their woodland culture, they developed a new means of subsistence on the Plains, which involved hunting the buffalo on horseback.

They also developed a relationship of mutual dependence with the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC), the company that would eventually become the leading commercial concern in the inland trade. In the course of that relationship, the Cree became the dominant middlemen of the fur trade in western Canada, controlling European access to furs trapped by Indians in the more remote regions in the west, while making a profit on trade goods exchanged for furs.

The Cree occupied that position until the depletion of furs in the lands draining into the Saskatchewan and Nelson Rivers impelled fur traders to establish trading posts further inland and to the north of Cree territory. As the fur trade began to focus on the Mackenzie and Athabasca river systems, aboriginal groups located further north, such as the Chipewyan, took over what had been the exclusive domain of the Cree. As a result, the latter became progressively more involved with the provisioning trade,



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hunting deer and buffalo for meat to supply the employees of the increasing number of inland trading posts.

By the 1860s, the buffalo were disappearing from the eastern Plains, the homeland of the Cree. To find buffalo for their own subsistence, the Cree were forced to enter the territory of the Blackfoot, further west. Although the Cree and Blackfoot had been peaceful trading partners during the former nation's tenure as middleman in the fur trade, the depletion of their common food source increasingly led to violent conflict between them. Together with the devastating effects of periodic epidemics, the battles over buffalo territory began to decimate aboriginal populations on the southern Plains. Both the Cree and the Blackfoot recognized the futility of continued warfare, and, in 1871, a peace agreement was concluded between them. By this treaty, the Cree retained access to the buffalo in the Cypress Hills, the only place on the southern Plains where the buffalo were still to be found on a consistent basis. This, however, was a short-term solution to the problem of survival. The depletion of the buffalo signalled the beginning of the end of an era. The transfer of the vast HBC territories to Canada in 1870, and the prospect of agricultural settlement moving into the lands occupied by the Cree and other nations, was its death knell. The stage was set for the coming of the treaties, and the beginning of a settled way of life for the Cree of the Plains.