In 1922, Harlan Smith photographed this Bella Coola man setting out on one of the Nuxaulk-Carrier grease trails with a box of valuable ooligan grease — rendered from a type of smelt.
With the Plains Indian Tribes, and I suspect the vast majority of the Indian groups, the most revered person was the scout. On his knowledge and powers of observation the rest of the community vested their survival. . . . Lying by a scout was a dreadful act punished by death or banishment.

Vine Deloria, Jr.
Red Earth, White Lies, 1997

There is nothing improbable in the supposition, that the Indians in the Upper Mississippi and Missouri may have had early intercourse with the Indians beyond the Rocky Mountains, or even visited the Oregon in person, and given it some significant name of their own.

Anonymous, 1839
quoted by Vernon F. Snow in
“From Ourigan to Oregon,” 1959
THE HISTORY OF A CULTURAL LANDSCAPE IS PORTRAYED IN its geographical place names. In North America, these place names reflect both European colonial and indigenous experiences. With such disparate heritage, the origin of many place names is quite complex. Although the colonial origin of a name may be clear from comparatively recent written records, the deeper history of an indigenous place name is sometimes more difficult to bring to light. The challenge involves finding ways to see through the veil of a North American geography created during the colonization of Indian homelands.

Although many historians have investigated the origin of the name Oregon, its original meaning has remained elusive. There is even uncertainty as to its origin in North American Indian or European languages. In recent years, however, Northwest indigenous communities have been the subject of unprecedented research, as Indians from Northwest tribes have increasingly participated in cultural heritage studies. These efforts have shed new light on many aspects of Indian history in the Northwest, including further insight on the original meaning of the word Oregon. In addressing the source of this place name, this research explores the extent of indigenous geographic knowledge and cultural interaction across the North American continent during the eighteenth century.¹

The place name Oregon first appeared in literature in 1778 when Jonathan Carver published Travels through the Interior Part of North America, a book widely read in England and the United States.² Carver reported Indian accounts of a great river in the Northwest known as the River Oregon. Soon Oregon appeared on published maps of the western continent, in some cases as a name for the river we know today as the Columbia. By the early decades of the nineteenth century, the name described the region in the Northwest that is now encompassed by the province of British Columbia and the states of Washington and Oregon. As boundary decisions were made between the United States and Canada, Oregon signified a northwest U.S. territory and finally the thirty-third state in the Union.

One of the first of several scholars to examine this question was T.C. Elliott, who demonstrated in the 1920s that Jonathan Carver's Oregon was almost certainly borrowed from Robert Rogers's Ourigan, a place name that appeared in four documents written earlier than Carver's book.³ As cartographer on an unofficial expedition that Rogers organized, Carver had seen Rogers's communications before writing Travels, and in his manuscript journal he uses Rogers's most frequent spelling of the river name, Ourigan.⁴ Rogers was a British officer serving in the Great Lakes region in the early 1760s, and while there he learned of a river route to the Pacific Ocean from Indians who had been to the Pacific Coast. He outlined this route in petitions submitted in 1765 and 1772 to King George's privy council, in which he sought funds to
support an expedition to find the fabled Northwest Passage for trade shipping, and also in two 1766 letters to his agents James Goddard and James Tute, whom Rogers intended to have explore the Pacific Coast.  

Rogers’s description of the route to the River Ourigan from the Great Lakes follows former Western Cree trade routes across the northern Rockies to the upper Fraser River. According to Rogers, “the great River Ourigan [flows] through a vast, and most populous Tract of Indian Country to the Straits of Annian, and the Gulf or Bay projecting thence north-easterly into the Continent.” Details of the River Ourigan’s location closely match the location of the Fraser River. Furthermore, the Fraser lies within what was once a vast indigenous trading network, known as the “grease trails.” The key commodity traded through this network, which stretched from the Pacific Coast eastward across the Rockies, was the highly sought-after oil, or “grease,” of the fish.

Traditionally, Northwest Coast peoples were known for their vibrant arts and wealth, including abundant natural resources. The interior of Tlingit Chief Klart-Reech’s house in Chilkat, Alaska, shows some of his riches. The two intricately carved bentwood cedar boxes on the middle level are similar to those used to store ooligan grease for potlatch feasting.
## Historical Occurrences of the Word Ooligan and Its Variants throughout the Northwest

Grouped by location and tribal group; date of use, author or source, and spelling

### Southeast Alaska (Tlingit)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Spellings</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1948</td>
<td>USGS</td>
<td>euchalon</td>
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<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>Orth</td>
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<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>Schorr</td>
<td>hulakon, eulachon</td>
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<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Teew</td>
<td>hooligan</td>
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### Nass River, B.C. (Tsimshian, Haida, Gitksan)

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<tr>
<td>1834</td>
<td>Tolmie</td>
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<td>'Ksan</td>
<td>oolichan</td>
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<td>1997</td>
<td>Miller</td>
<td>oolichan, eulachon, ulaken, hooligans</td>
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### Ulkatcho, B.C. (Nuxaulk)

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<td>1982</td>
<td>Kuhnlein</td>
<td>ooligan</td>
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<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Boyd</td>
<td>oolichan</td>
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### SOUTHEAST ALASKA


### NASS RIVER, B.C.


### ULKATCHO, B.C.


### VANCOUVER ISLAND


### FRASER RIVER, B.C.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Translation</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Vancouver Island</strong> (Kwakwaka’wakw)</td>
<td>1866</td>
<td>Lord</td>
<td>eulachon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1969</td>
<td>Sewid</td>
<td>olachen</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Fraser River, B.C.</strong> (Cowitchan?)</td>
<td>1829</td>
<td>McDonald–Ft. Langley Post</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1830</td>
<td>McDonald–Ft. Langley Post</td>
<td>ulachan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Columbia River</strong> (Chinook, Chinook Jargon)</td>
<td>1806</td>
<td>Lewis and Clark; Ordway; Gass</td>
<td>ol-then, oll-can, ulken</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1811</td>
<td>Franchère</td>
<td>outhelekane</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1811–1813</td>
<td>Ross</td>
<td>ulichan</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1812</td>
<td>Stuart</td>
<td>uthulhun, uthlechan, uthlecan</td>
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<td>1812</td>
<td>Astoria Post Journal</td>
<td>uthelcan, uthlecan</td>
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<td>1828</td>
<td>Fort Langley Post Journals</td>
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<td>2000</td>
<td>Johnson</td>
<td>ulxa’an</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Alsea River</strong> (Alsea)</td>
<td>1849</td>
<td>Talbot</td>
<td>olhuacan</td>
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**COLUMBIA RIVER**  

**ALSEA RIVER**  
Northwestern and mid-continent North America, showing the grease trails region and the homelands and canoe routes of Western Cree and Assiniboine peoples. Historical accounts and archaeological findings indicate that there was ongoing trade between these two spheres before the arrival of Euroamericans.

Thaleichthys pacificus, commonly known by First Nations and Native American peoples asooligan, oolichan, hooligan, and other variants.6

Probably because of its widespread trade and the great value placed on the grease throughout the region, ooligan was a common word in Chinook Jargon, the trade language used in the Northwest. Though radically changed during the nineteenth century, Chinook Jargon has strong foundations in the Northwest and includes several words that are shared with Algonquian languages such as Cree.7 Visitors to the Northwest Coast from east of the Rockies would likely have been familiar with trade-related words such as ooligan, but Cree speakers would have pronounced ooligan differently depending on their dialect. The [l] sound common to languages in the Northwest was not used in many dialects across the Rockies. For example, the Cree spoke various dialects that, according to linguists, had transformed a Proto-Algonquian *l sound into reflexes such as [n], [y], and [r]. The western-most Cree speakers used the [r] sound in place of the [l], and thus [uligan], or ooligan, would have been pronounced [urigan], or oorigan. Rogers’s Ourigan likely shared this pronunciation.8

The indigenous place name Ourigan may reflect Western Cree interaction with indigenous peoples west of the Rockies and awareness of
the astounding wealth of the Northwest Coast. On the central and northern Northwest Coast, this wealth was celebrated in great potlatch feasts where ooligan was used in nearly every dish. In fact, there may be an even earlier relationship between Algonquian and Chinook Jargon (or its antecedent) reflected in the word ooligan. In his 1959 analysis of the origin of the word Oregon, historian Vernon Snow recognized that variants of the word were used in several Algonquian dialects to refer to a vessel, plate, or “greasy bark dish.” Considering the two meanings of dish in English (the vessel and its contents), an earlier transposition of the noun’s meaning seems plausible.

Though Snow seems to have come much closer to Oregon’s meaning than previous researchers, even suggesting that it represented a trading commodity, he did not relate Rogers’s Ourigan to Chinook Jargon trade words and the Northwest Coast. His research may have been hampered by two widely held assumptions that now appear to be unfounded. The first is that the River Ourigan originally referred to the Columbia River and that the indigenous traders told Rogers of a more southerly Missouri-to-Columbia route across the Rockies. Rogers mentioned a Missouri River route in his second petition to the king but not in his more detailed instructions to James Tute, where he described a route across the northern Rockies. This discrepancy, along with Oregon’s later association with the Columbia River, led researchers to assume that Oregon’s original referent was within the boundaries of the United States.

We know of no accounts of indigenous traders traveling a southerly route between European posts and the lower Columbia River before 1765. There are, however, several accounts describing Western Cree journeys between Hudson Bay and the Great Lakes in the east and the Fraser-Columbia Plateau and Northwest Coast in the west. The North Saskatchewan River seems to have been the most frequently plied route. Later use of these routes by fur-trade canoes confirms the superiority of these over more southerly land routes. Furthermore, the distance from the east slope of the Rockies to the Pacific is much less in the north than at the head of the Missouri River, and the portage between navigable rivers is also much shorter there.

The second misconception limiting research on the River Ourigan was acceptance of David Mandelbaum’s 1940 model of eighteenth-century Cree expansion into the West. Researchers interpreted written accounts of Cree communities as evidence of migration westward from Hudson Bay in the eighteenth century. This fit with the mistaken notion that the Northern Plains was nearly uninhabitable until European goods and horses became available. In the last two decades, however, scholars of Cree history have shown that it was the Cree ethnic name that shifted westward, not the people, and they were well suited for life in the Northern Plains. Speakers of various Cree dialects, sometimes
grouped today as the Western Cree, lived in the region between the east slope of the Rockies, Lake Athabasca, Hudson Bay, and the Manitoba Lakes — now the provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba — from the time of the earliest records. Given the extent of their traditional lands and their skillful use of birch bark canoes in the region’s waterways, the Western Cree were well positioned to conduct trade between the far Northwest and the Great Lakes and Hudson Bay.11

The Western Cree were closely allied with the Dakotan-speaking Assiniboine peoples who lived between the vast parklands of the upper Saskatchewan branches and the southern Manitoba Lakes. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, and likely much earlier, Western Cree and Assiniboine trade networks formed a mosaic of interaction spanning much of the northern continent. Canoe routes were at the heart of these networks. Cree society in particular played such an important role in indigenous trade that the Cree language has been regarded as the lingua franca of the Northern Plains, southern boreal forest, and Manitoba Lakes regions.12

Written records of indigenous travels are limited, yet those we have encountered portray changing interaction between peoples east and west of the Rockies through the eighteenth century. Accounts of visits to the Northwest Coast seem to have decreased in frequency as the century waned. One reason for this change may be the spread of diseases brought to the region by Europeans. Western Cree communities were devastated by smallpox in the 1780s. Survivors coalesced as the Plains Cree, who were often involved in conflicts with neighboring peoples as they endeavored to rebuild their communities and deal with the pressures of Euroamerican expansion. During this period, fur-trade posts were established throughout the northern interior, and once far-reaching indigenous trade networks became more locally centered.13 In this context, place names for many faraway regions, such as Ourigan, may have gone out of use. At the same time, the common practice of Euroamerican explorers and mapmakers was to rename rivers, mountains, travel routes, and so forth after themselves, other Euroamericans, or new events and observations — a proclivity that led to the loss of many traditional place names in local vernacular.14

The Route Described by Rogers

DURING THE YEARS 1766 AND 1767, ROBERT ROGERS SERVED as governor and Indian agent at Michilimackinac, a British post located at the confluence of the western Great Lakes. As described in his two
petitions to King George, Rogers was actively pursuing exploration of a route to the Pacific Ocean, which he thought led to a Northwest Passage to Hudson Bay. Although his information on the Northwest Passage was inaccurate, it appears he had knowledgeable sources for the proposed travel westward. The route described varies in the four documents, but Rogers's letter of commission to expedition leader James Tute holds the greatest detail. The letter describes a route to the River Ourigan via Lake Winnipeg and the fur-trade post of La Prairie (spelled La Praire and La Parrie by Rogers), which appears to have been on the Saskatchewan River:

... from Fort La Parrie you will travel West bearing to the Northwest and do you endeavour fall in with the great River Ourgan [sic] which rises in several different branches between the Latitudes Fifty six and forty eight and runs Westward for near three hundred Leagues, when it is at no great distance joined by one from the South and a little up the Stream by one from the North; about these forks you will find an Inhabited Country and great Riches...

From where the above Rivers join this great River Ourgan it becomes much larger and about four hundred Leagues as the River runs from this town abovementioned it discharges itself into an Arm or Bay of the Sea at near Latitude of fifty four and bends southerly and enters into the Pacifick Ocean about forty eight, nine or fifty...15

The route from Fort La Prairie probably followed the North Saskatchewan, which has tributaries leading to passes that can be taken to both the Fraser and Columbia rivers.16 Rogers described the Ourigan as a large river, several hundred leagues in length, a description that fits either of these Northwest rivers, but the latitudinal positions he gave are astoundingly close to the actual location of the Fraser River.17 The latitudinal coordinates of the Columbia River are farther south, and of the two rivers, only the Fraser enters a large strait like the one Rogers described in other documents.

Rogers's description of the people living across the Rockies fits to some degree with Northwest Coast peoples and the residents of the Fraser Valley. In this "most populous tract of Indian Country," he noted, the people had "great riches," lived in towns, and traded over vast distances but did not work iron ore. As in other accounts from the period, the wealth of the Northwest Coast appears to have been transformed into gold through retelling: "the Inhabitants carry their Gold near Two thousand Miles to Traffick with the Japancies..." Although the Fraser goldfields lay along this route, there are no indications that Native people were trading this resource at this time, and Rogers's 1772 petition contains no references to gold possessed by Northwest peoples.
The detail of Rogers's information and particularly its close correspondence with Northwest geography indicate that his sources had extensive geographic knowledge of the region. Ethnohistoric material from northwest of the Great Lakes indicates that many Western Cree people traveled beyond the Rockies for trade and raiding. Rogers may have met some of these travelers before writing his first petition to the king in 1765; at least by 1767 there were Western Cree and allied Assiniboine traders at the Great Lakes who had previously been to the far Northwest across the Rockies. Rogers would have had opportunities to discuss geography with these people, along with their French-Canadian and Métis associates, while he served as governor and Indian agent at Michilimackinac in 1766–1767.18

As to the geographic accuracy of the route west, it was common for Indian traders and scouts to have detailed information about landscape and cultural features, and many early Indian maps maintained constant scale over vast areas.19 Route maps were often distinct from maps of regional geography, though it appears Rogers had both types of information. Historically, the Cree were expert canoeists; and, according to geographer David Pentland, they possessed “a profound knowledge of the drainage systems they used for travel.” Furthermore, “familiarity with the entire river system is reflected in Cree [place naming].” Geographic knowledge and place names were often shared among Cree groups at large annual gatherings.20 As early as the 1740s at Hudson Bay and in early records from the Northwest, latitudinal coordinates were estimated based on Indian reports, often with impressive accuracy. For example, while at Fort Simpson on the Nass River, knowledgeable Northwest Coast Indians told George Simpson that the Fraser falls into a strait at fifty degrees north latitude, which is within one degree of this river's influent. The breadth of this geographic knowl-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>Rogers's Ourigan</th>
<th>Fraser River</th>
<th>Columbia River</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Northern edge of river basin</td>
<td>56°</td>
<td>56.3°</td>
<td>52.8°</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern edge of river basin</td>
<td>48°</td>
<td>48.7°</td>
<td>41.1°</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First major southerly bend</td>
<td>54°</td>
<td>54.2°</td>
<td>52.1°</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provenience of river mouth</td>
<td>~49°</td>
<td>49.2°</td>
<td>46.3°</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
edge can be seen in Western Cree historic accounts and maps based on individual observations and tribal oral histories. 

Western Cree Travels to the Northwest

TRADE AND OTHER CULTURAL INTERACTION ACROSS THE northern Rockies has been conducted for several millennia. Northwest trade items such as obsidian stone tools and dentalium marine shell ornaments have been found in several sites east of the Rockies, even to the east of the Great Lakes. Archaeologists have proposed that these links between the Pacific Coast and the Northern Plains/Great Lakes may be the oldest long-distance trade patterns that Plains communities were involved in. Historically, the value of Pacific Coast trade ornaments among mid-continent peoples is well documented.

The earliest written accounts of Western Cree journeys to the Northwest appear in the journals and reports of French and British traders and military personnel at Hudson Bay in the early eighteenth century. Accounts of Cree travel to the Pacific Ocean were recorded in the context of the search for a Northwest Passage to the Pacific. French trader Nicolas Jeremie, who was at Hudson Bay from 1694 to 1714, later wrote that the Maskegon (Swampy Cree) people with whom he traded had told him of a cross-continental trip to the Northwest Coast,

... after several months travel to the west south west they have found the sea on which they have seen large canoes, (these are ships) with men who have beards and who wear caps, and who gather gold on the shore of the sea (they mean the mouths of rivers).

This and similar accounts have often been interpreted as references to Europeans, or "bearded white men from ships gathering gold." Yet many Northwest Coast men wore hats, had beards, and traveled in large canoes. They also harvested much of their wealth from the shores of the Pacific Ocean, though they are not known to have gathered gold. Use of the word gold in this account, as in Rogers's commission to Tute, may result from an inaccurate translation of indigenous terms for wealth or specific wealth items such as shell money, copper, and ooligan. Another influence on the translation of these terms would have been the proclivity of Europeans to seek gold when exploring uncharted regions. This issue aside, Jeremie's account of Cree observations shares wording with other accounts from the same period, suggesting that this may have been an ethnic caricature of Northwest Coast peoples by Cree scouts and traders. Another account is from Joseph Robson,
Map in the collections of the National Archives of Canada

Drawn by one of the members of the La Verendrye expedition in 1737, the “Carte Contenant Les Nouvelles Découvertes de l’Ouest in Canada” demonstrates the breadth of geographic knowledge held by Indians of the Northern Plains and Manitoba Lakes regions in the 1730s. The superimposed letters mark (A) Hudson Bay; (B) Lake Superior; (C) Lake Winnipeg; (D) Saskatchewan River; (E) “height of land,” or Rocky Mountains; (F) mouth of a river flowing into the Pacific in a region of inshore straits, large towns, forts of “the whites,” and a large, settled island; and (G) source of the Mississippi. Derived partly from expedition observations in the Manitoba Lakes region and more from Indian maps and accounts of more distant places, the map is probably a composite of Indian route maps rather than a depiction of the relative locations of and distances between geographic features. In this sense, locality F may represent the mouth of the Fraser River and Vancouver Island, while the two rivers between F and G may be the upper main branch and Snake River branch of the Columbia River.
who lived at Hudson Bay in the 1730s-1740s as an officer for the Hudson’s Bay Company. He spoke with

the Indians dwelling upon Nelson and Churchill-rivers, who say, that they have been upon rivers that run a contrary course to those in the Bay; and at the western sea on the other side of the land, where they have seen ships.  

Arthur Dobbs, who likely met Robert Rogers in the early 1760s, assembled accounts of a Northwest Passage and recorded the testimony of Joseph La France in 1742.  

La France was Métis, his mother Saulteaux, and his father French Canadian. He had spent most of his life at Michilimackinac and lived for a time with a Cree community in the Manitoba Lakes region. A Cree man at Churchill told him of a journey he had taken across the Rockies, apparently in the 1720s. Several Cree families had traveled for many months to the Northwest Coast to raid their enemies, the Tete Plat. La France’s account includes descriptive detail of the Northwest Coast: islands and tidewater channels, numerous orcas in the sea, and an encounter with people in a large coastal settlement who were surprised by the Cree party’s firearms. The name Tete Plat, or Flat Head, was later applied to a tribe in the Rocky Mountains; but in earlier times it may have been used to indicate people who practiced head shaping, including several coastal groups from Oregon northward to British Columbia, and tribes within the ooligan grease-trails region.

This extended journey by a Cree party to the Northwest Coast and back indicates that, decades before smallpox devastated communities along the rivers west of Hudson Bay, conflict sometimes superceded trade in tribal interaction among people in these regions. Environmental change may have played a role in this event. Only a generation before this undertaking, several Northwest Coast villages had been decimated by a massive Cascadia earthquake and tsunami, possibly setting the stage for the kind of outsider incursions described by La France.

In the 1730s, the French began to establish interior posts northwest of Lake Superior. French traders gained knowledge of the Rocky Mountains over the next two decades, and they continued to seek a route to the Pacific Ocean while establishing trading relationships with local communities. The initial effort was undertaken by La Vérendrye and his associates, who set up trading forts between the Great Lakes and the lower Saskatchewan River. La Vérendrye’s reports contain several accounts of people who crossed “the height of land” (i.e., the Rocky Mountains) and explored the interior and coastal lands of the Northwest. His 1730 report includes an account given by Crees from Lake of the Woods who related that a journey to and from the sea via the western river takes from March until November.
La Vérendrye also spoke with a chief of the Mongsoaeythinyuwok, an Algonquian band southwest of Hudson Bay that is closely related to the Cree. This chief had crossed the height of land in 1728 and in the Northwest saw “white” people who, with no axes, were able to saw wood into boards and had boats but no guns. He appears to depict the celebrated woodworking traditions of Northwest Coast peoples. This source is one of a handful in which apparent Northwest Coast indigenous peoples are described as being “white people.” This perceived racial difference may stem from Northwest peoples’ clothing, architecture, and large boats as well as their light skin color and common male facial hair.32

Seven years later, La Vérendrye reported:

The Cree who gave me a drawing of the Blanche [Saskatchewan] river have traveled five days’ journey beyond the height of land, going down the river, which they call the River of the West, and were surprised to find a quite different...
climate in respect to temperature, with different fruits and trees with which they
were not acquainted. . . . The upper part of the River of the West is inhabited by
wandering savages like the Assiniboin, called Pikaraminiouach, very numerous,
without fire-arms, but possessing axes, knives, and cloth like ourselves, which
they get from down the river where white men dwell who have walled towns and
forts. These whites have no knowledge of fire-arms or of prayer. The distance
from the height of land to the sea may be three hundred leagues. The Cree have
no knowledge of these men except through the slaves they have made after
having crossed the height of land; the tribe in question carry their tents or
dwellings with them like the Assiniboin.33

This account indicates that the Western Cree interacted with interior
tribes across the Rockies. In this case, they learned of Northwest Coast
peoples indirectly from captives, and they are again depicted as white
people. Other aspects of the account — fortified settlements and a lack
of European firearms and Western religion — imply that they were not
Europeans. There are several historic accounts of Native forts in towns
along the Fraser River but none that we know of from the Columbia.34
Indians wore woolen textiles and used metal tools in the Northwest at
this time, the tools possibly attained through trade from the coast or
from Western Cree traders.35

By 1749, La Vérendrye had determined that the Saskatchewan River
was the most suitable route from the interior lakes region to the Pacific
Ocean.36 The maps generated by his associates, in large part based on
Indian maps and accounts, illustrate the prominence of a Saskatchewan
route to the Rockies and the Pacific Coast.37 During the next three years,
La Vérendrye's successor, St. Pierre and associates, established forts on
the upper Saskatchewan. They may have established Fort La Prairie,
which Robert Rogers later identified as the launching point for travel to
the River Ourigan. While in the west, St. Pierre's party learned that
tribes from the Saskatchewan Valley carried hides to the Pacific Coast to
trade for metal goods and other items.38

Altogether, the records of European military personnel and traders
at Hudson Bay and in the interior, prior to the 1760s, demonstrate that
the Saskatchewan was a major route that the Western Cree followed
when crossing the Rockies to trade and sometimes to raid. The objec-
tives were often an interior river valley and ultimately the Northwest
Coast and a large strait or bay.

The war between the British and French, which lasted from 1753
to 1763, reduced the supply of French trade goods coming from the
Great Lakes. Following the British victory, trade supplies increased along
the St. Lawrence River, and tribes northwest of the Great Lakes took
steps to initiate trade contacts at former French posts such as
Michilimackinac.39 Major Robert Rogers played a key role in British
expansion into the region during the 1760s, and it is in this context that Rogers seems to have learned of the River Ourigan as a route to the Pacific Ocean. Carver’s Travels provides further support for Northwest travel by Cree and Assiniboine traders during this decade, and his interaction with the Cree is also recorded in his original journal. With the exception of Rogers’s and Carver’s documents, published records from Euroamericans during this decade provide little information about tribal interaction across the northern Rockies.

During the last decades of the eighteenth century and the early years of the nineteenth century, numerous fur-trade forts were established in the interior west of Hudson Bay and the Great Lakes. The Plains Cree appear to have shifted their economic focus, reducing their long-distance trade and intensifying buffalo hunting in the Northern Plains, though they continued to travel across the Rockies. The journals of traders such as Daniel Harmon, Alexander Henry, Duncan McGillivray, and Alexander MacKenzie depict the Plains Cree and Assiniboine raiding for captives, fishing, and trading along the Fraser and Columbia rivers. Captives may have been especially important at this time, as communities were recovering from losses due to disease and warfare. In this context, feast foods such as ooligan grease may not have been sought after as much as they probably were in earlier decades, when interaction between people at the Manitoba Lakes and the Northwest Coast appears to have been more extensive.

Ooligan and Northwest Coast Peoples

On the Northwest Coast, the effect of the Fur Company presence on some traditional economies was not as great. There ooligan grease remained widely valued through the nineteenth century, and it is still valued in many indigenous communities today. Throughout the region, anadromous fishes such as salmon were the foundation of Indians’ economies and culture, as they still are in many places. Salmon are the most well-known anadromous fish, but others such as Pacific lamprey, sturgeon, and many varieties of smelt (including ooligan) have also been key resources. Distant cousins to the salmon, smelt are small fish known for their migrations to spawn in sandy beach localities. Even today, Indians from California to Alaska return each year to outer-coast fish camps to take advantage of surf smelt spawns. The smelts are often caught on the beach using frame nets to scoop them from the surf. This is the case in northern California, where surf smelt are caught with A-frame nets and sun-dried by the Tolowa people of Smith River Rancheria.
Some smelts, including ooligan, are more often caught in estuaries, including the tide-water portions of the Columbia, Nass, and Fraser rivers. California's Klamath River also has a large run of ooligan, and this fish is known to run in many of the coastal estuaries of Oregon and Washington. On the Columbia River and in British Columbia, ooligan were harvested by men standing in canoes and hauling the fish into boats with dip nets or fish rakes, using “curved blades set with bone or wooden teeth. . . Chinooks, Clatsops, Wehkiakums, and Kathlamets rake in swarms of these tiny creatures, knocking them into the bottoms of their canoes.” Additionally, net traps, seine nets, and pens are also used to catch ooligan.43

Highly productive ooligan fisheries are still on the Nass and Skeena rivers of western British Columbia. For centuries, the springtime ooligan grease trade dominated cultural relations between the Tsimshian of this region and their neighbors. Every year vast schools appear, turning the estuaries “black with ooligans.”44 At the Nass River fisheries, large groups from the interior, the northern coast, and the Queen Charlotte Islands gathered in early spring to harvest and trade for ooligan and the valuable grease rendered from the fish.45 There, many families bagged between five and ten tons of fish by run's end and then spent the next weeks rendering the grease and preparing it for transport and trade.

On the northern British Columbia and southeast Alaska coast, the grease served as a respite in the harsh late winter months when food stores were depleted. For this reason, the ooligan is known as the “savior” and “preserver” fish.46 The grease was widely valued, and people traveled hundreds of miles to share in the bounty. Haida people traveled to the mainland to trade for the dried smelt and grease, and they often purchased mainland coastal fishing rights from the Tsimshian. In the 1820s, George Simpson termed the annual Nass trade fair “the grand mart of the Coast,” and John McLoughlin noted, “more Land Furs are traded at Nass than at any other place along the Coast.” Trade at the Nass River was comparable to that at The Dalles on the Columbia River, where ooligan oil was also a key trade item.47

The skins of beaver and moose, moose meat, freshwater fish, soap berries, and other items reached the Nass trade fair and Bella Coola through the ooligan grease trail network. Other items traded along this network include obsidian tool stone from Lake Adziza and Anahim Mountain, dentalium shell, pemmican and dried berries, and manufactured items, such as intricately carved bentwood cedar boxes, mocca-
sins, gloves, and buckskin coats.\textsuperscript{48} The grease trails were used for other purposes as well: to visit friends and family; to access important hunting, fishing, and gathering areas; and, at times, to wage war.\textsuperscript{49} The grease trails enabled the coastal Nuxalk and Gitksan and the interior Carrier, Sekani, and other Athabaskan speakers to travel through mountainous country to various camps as they pursued their seasonal rounds.\textsuperscript{50} Some segments of the route had suspension bridges and links to canoe routes in the lowlands, while others crossed over treacherous mountain passes in the Coast Range and the Rocky Mountains.\textsuperscript{51} These “highways of commerce and communication,” continuing in use “since time immemorial,” still exist in western British Columbia, some overlain by modern highways.\textsuperscript{52} Continued use of these routes is testament to the efficacy of indigenous trade networks through forbidding country.

On the Columbia River, ooligan had to take its place among many other highly productive fisheries. As a more southerly and warmer locality, the Columbia River region contains more diversity in its seasonal aquatic and terrestrial resources than British Columbia does. Ooligan was considered by Astorian Gabriel Franchère to be a “welcome change which we badly needed for our provisions were poor in

Stink boxes are used to ferment the ooligan for a week before rendering them into valuable grease. Wooden canoes are sometimes used as stink boxes. This image shows a Bella Coola woman in the 1920s.
quality and limited in quantity." Robert Stuart observed that "uthulhuns [were] taken in immense numbers from March to April on the Colum-
bia River. . . ."

The Astorians traded extensively with the Clatsops for fish and
game throughout the year. From February 2 to April 19, 1812, post
journal records describe canoes laden with ooligan going past the post
and many trades with the Clatsops for dried ooligan after the run ended
for the year. Alexander Ross of Astoria wrote, "the ulichans are gener-
ally an article of trade with distant tribes as they are caught only at the
entrance of large rivers . . . they are dried, smoked, [strung] and sold
by the fathom, hence they have obtained the name of fathom fish." For
Columbia River tribes, ooligan was a valuable trade item. The term
grease trail does not seem to have been used south of the Canadian
border, yet there is evidence that dried ooligan and ooligan oil were key
trade items in the extensive Columbia River trade network from the
tidewater fisheries to the interior; and it was the Columbia River tribes
who used the Chinook Jargon trade language, which spread the word
ooligan throughout the Northwest.

In 1840, James Douglas described how coastal tribes traded far
into the interior as part of the Chilcat "circle of life." In this world
view, the exchange of goods is part of the seasonal cycles, potlatches,
and clan relationships of the inland peoples, just as the trade goods of
the inland regions are a regular part of the coastal cultures. These long-
term relationships have ensured the cultural continuity of the inter-
related seasonal patterns of the coastal and inland indigenous peoples.
"The cultural significance of ooligan grease cannot be underestimated,
as it was, and continues to be, a prominent food and gift during feasts
and potlatch ceremonies." The ceremonial feast or potlatch, in which
ooligan plays a key role, is where the law is made and reaffirmed for the
Witsuwit'ên Athapascans. Clanship host intertribal feasts to affirm
their right to own land for hunting and fishing places, and intertribal
marriages form the basis for forging ties across languages and for shar-
ing ideas. Cultural continuity and relationship can be seen on the North-
west Coast in the clan relationships that extend from the Haida of the
Queen Charlotte Islands to the Sekani of the northern Rockies. Much
of the trade across cultural and language groups happened only within
the clanship. One example of cultural continuity is in the myth "Origin
of the Oolachen Fish," which is substantially the same for both the
Haida and the Tinne (Athabaskan) people of the interior.

For the Kwakwaka'wakw, ooligan grease is an important part of the
potlatch ceremony. Franz Boas recorded that tribal chiefs would hold
"grease feasts . . . in order to destroy the prestige of the rival" chiefs. The
ooligan grease feast was the most expensive of all the feasts, "at which
enormous quantities of fish oil [made of the oulachon] are consumed
and burnt. . . .” During a grease feast, the central fire is built up to the point of scorching the guests in order for the host to conquer them, and “grease is poured into the fire so that the blankets of the guests get scorched.”61 This serves to raise the prestige of the host who can afford to give such a feast, expending enormous quantities of the valued resource. If the rival chief is not able to respond with a similar potlatch and destroy an equal amount of property, then his name is “broken” and he suffers a loss of prestige. The Kwakwaka’wakw were a central group in the ooligan grease trade and traded with the interior Fraser River peoples for inland trade items.62

Ooligan grease was frequently packed in cedar boxes and carried into the interior by large parties of people. While surveying for the Pacific Railway in 1872, Charles Horetzky noticed that

more than one hundred [Kitseguecla Indians] must have passed us, and they were, without a single exception, not only the men, but also the women and children, laden with large cedar boxes, of the size and shape of tea-chests, which were filled with the rendered grease of the candle fish caught in the Nass waters.

The Tsimshian packed grease boxes using a tumpline, with men and
women carrying an average of 150 pounds of grease on their backs and children and dogs carrying loads as well.\(^63\) The ooligan grease also attracted the Haida, Tlingit, Kwakwaka'wakw, and northern Eyak to the Nass and Skeena rivers to trade with the Tsimshian. Much like the early accounts of Northwest Coast wealth from the Western Cree,

the lure of the grease was like the lure of gold, and every year most of [the Gitksan] trekked off loaded with all of the surplus meat or fur they could muster to exchange for the prestigious grease, and to enjoy the reunions and trade opportunities.\(^64\)

Ooligan grease can remain preserved for years; and, unlike most other animal oils, it has the consistency of butter or lard, thickening to a solid in cool temperatures. This facilitates transport and enhances its value as a condiment. The Tsimshian prepare the ooligan by allowing them to ferment in “stink boxes,” a term that reflects the potent smell of the fish during the rendering process. After a week, the fermented ooligan are cooked in canoes or wooden boilers at low temperature, and the oil that floats to the top is skimmed off. The oil is then cooked a second time to remove impurities and finally cooled in cedar boxes for storage and trade.\(^65\)

Ooligan grease is highly nutritious. There is a widespread preference for fatty meat among hunter/fisher populations, and fish oil and other fats were a fundamental part of the diet for Northwest Coast peoples.\(^66\) Besides ooligan, the oil of salmon, black cod, and other fish was important on the Northwest Coast, as was the oil of sea mammals. For interior peoples who relied heavily on hunting, the ooligan grease trade may have been part of a much larger need for extra fats during lean winter periods. In addition to being an important item in the diet, ooligan grease was used as a food preservative, a medicine, and a food supplement and to preserve leather. Among the Nuxalk, ooligan grease had diverse uses as a food, a medicine, a polish for wooden implements, and waterproofing for canoes. In the Tlingit village of Klawock, hooligan grease was a dietary staple, used in flavoring dishes such as boiled fish and seaweed. Traditionally, they considered it the “main reason the people were healthy.” Similarly, the Gitksan call it ha la mootxw, which means “for curing humanity.”\(^67\)

For centuries indigenous peoples of the Northwest Coast celebrated their region’s wealth through trade, potlatch feasting, giveaways, and flourishing art traditions. These economic systems were drastically changed with the arrival of Russian, Spanish, English, French Canadian, and American explorers and traders on the Pacific Coast. Initially, non-indigenous trade items such as metals and glass beads were traded through traditional networks; but as the region was charted, harbors
and posts were established that altered the center of trade for the whole region. The Indians near key trading locations became wealthy as intermediaries between foreign traders and other far-ranging Native groups. Eventually, the values of European or non-Native goods supplanted many indigenous wealth items. Ooligan grease, however, maintained its status as a wealth item and is still valued by many Native families in the Pacific Northwest. In 1978, for example, a gallon of grease was worth eighty-five dollars in Bella Coola.68

Because of the effects of the fur trade and Euroamerican settlement on indigenous trade networks, the value Western Cree peoples may have once placed on this resource can only be estimated. It is clear that these groups appreciated the wealth of Northwest Coast peoples and that they traded and raided for resources west of the Rockies along the ooligan grease trails. At the peak of its abundance in spring, when stored foods ran low and fatty meat was scarce in the interior, ooligan grease may have been especially welcomed by travelers from east of the Rockies. Whether it was pronounced Ooligan or Ourigan, this would have been a fitting name for the region and the great river that people followed to reach the wealth of the Northwest Coast.

Language and Trade across the Continent

LONGSTANDING TRADE AND OTHER INTERACTION AMONG Indian communities across the Rockies and throughout the Northwest is reflected in the languages of the Northern Plains and the Northwest. Perhaps the strongest linguistic connection is in the affinity of both Yurok and Wiyot on the northern California coast with the Algonquian language family east of the Rockies. The two western languages are thought to have split from Algonkian several centuries ago.69 Other indications of cross-continent interaction are seen in trade words used across language families and in jargons. The best known examples from these regions are the widespread use of Cree as a lingua franca on the Northern Plains and Chinook Jargon in the Northwest. Each facilitated trade and other interaction where numerous languages and dialects were spoken.70

The Northwest in particular held some of the greatest linguistic diversity in the world, and trade languages were especially important at large trade centers such as The Dalles, Lillooet, and the Nass. Other jargons were used during the maritime fur-trade years, including Nootka Jargon on west Vancouver Island and Haida Jargon in the north. Over the countless generations people have lived in the Northwest, many trade languages have likely come and gone, but Chinook Jargon seems to have
Northwest Native peoples have always held great respect for linguistic diversity, seeing language as a foundation for group identity and uniqueness. Traditionally, it was common for visitors to converse in the language of their hosts. Yet, through the first half of the nineteenth century, many traders and missionaries increasingly claimed hosts’ privilege when it came to language, though they were on land belonging to people of other nations. This practice set the stage for both the development of Chinook Jargon into a primary language for some people and its subsequent spread throughout the Plateau and Northwest Coast.

Just as the purported eighteenth-century migration of the Cree onto the Northern Plains has been heavily debated, so too is the genesis and extent of Chinook Jargon before the fur trade. Yet, the widespread use in the Northwest of certain “trade words” from Chinookan, Coast Salish, and Nootkan is evident in the earliest written accounts from the region, and many of these words became part of Chinook Jargon. This set of...
widely used trade words also includes a small number of Algonquian words, some of which were clearly in use before fur traders established interior posts in the Northwest. Whether these accounts represent use of a limited set of trade words, a full jargon, or a lingua franca may be debated; but they do indicate extensive trade and cultural interaction over great distances prior to European presence in the Northwest.

While these early inter-regional trade words signify a variety of cultural items and activities, three groups of words stand out in prevalence. These are words for starch-rich plant foods, hides and hide-related products, and special trade items sometimes related to currency. Each of these groupings includes trade goods that were abundant in some regions and limited or unavailable in others.

For twentieth-century North Americans it may be hard to envision that carbohydrates, and starch in particular, were once hard to come by. On the Plateau and in western Oregon and Washington, plants such as oak acorns, camas, wapato, and biscuit root supplied starch calories in abundance, especially where these were tended by harvesters and managed through controlled burning. In more northerly parts of the coast and interior, however, the land yielded fewer starchy foods, so they were valued trade goods. Some of the earliest records of the Northwest interior mention trade in camas bulbs and wapato roots, two widely valued nutritious plant foods. A third, related word is sapolil, which refers to a flour or bread made from wapato, biscuit root, and other edible roots. Linguists have shown that the word wapato is Algonquian in origin, and camas appears to be from Nuu-chah-nulth on western Vancouver Island. All three words were used from the Rockies to the coast in the earliest records, reflecting widespread trade.

Several words relating to hides indicate similar language influences. The word clamen, or clemel, for prepared elk hide or armor was used from the Chinook in the south, suppliers of the hides, to the Tlingit...
and other peoples in the north. The northern coastal peoples used clemels as armor during warfare. Similarly, moose and buffalo hides were traded westward across the Rockies in great quantities, frequently from Algonquian-speaking peoples. Hides were the key trade good moving westward on the grease trails. This trade is reflected in words of Algonquian origin appearing in many Northwest languages and Chinook Jargon, including mus-tus or mus-mus (buffalo), mitass (leggings), and pishemo (leather saddle blanket). 75

Some valued trade items served as currency. Typically these were items or materials that were of very limited availability. The word chik, or tsik, appears to be Yurok or Wiyot in origin and was used in much of the Northwest in reference to money, shell currency, and metal, sometimes in composite words such as chicamin (metal) and alacachic (shell money). The most common form of shell currency in the Northwest was dentalium, known as hiaqua. Variants of this Nuu-chah-nulth word were used by many different peoples, some as far east as the Great Lakes, where hiaqua was extremely valuable, especially before fur companies brought large supplies into the region. 76

Trade terms for starchy foods, hides, and currency reflect differing geographic availability and need through the Northwest and Northern Plains. Ooligan belongs on this list as well. As the cornerstone of a vast northwest trade network, ooligan grease was certainly among the most important trade items, particularly in British Columbia and southeast Alaska. Though the word ooligan became ubiquitous on the Northwest Coast, it did not supplant other words for this important fish or its grease in many local languages. 77 Yet, coupled with the intensive use of the valued trade good it represented, the ubiquity of this word suggests that ooligan was also a trade word known in much of the Northwest and even across the Rockies during the eighteenth century, when Robert Rogers and his associates sought a route across the Rockies to the Pacific Ocean. 78

Conclusion

PLACE-NAMING HOLDS ENORMOUS POLITICAL AND SOCIAL power, and Euroamericans used place names to define the landscapes they colonized. In 1765, Robert Rogers may not have perceived that Ourigan symbolized the wealth of the Northwest Coast when he heard this name from people living east of the Rockies, yet he seems to have passed this meaning on to others. Carver brought the word into the English lexicon, attaching Oregon to the legendary “River of the West.” By the nineteenth century, the meaning of Oregon had been transformed,
no longer referring to the wealth of Indian fisheries but to potentially vast farming and mining resources sought by Euroamerican colonists.

To Americans in the East, Oregon represented a route for exploration and an artery of commerce and economic development. It was a pathway for settlement, the key to perpetuating the Jeffersonian agrarian ideal. As James Ronda observed, “However it was spelled, Ouragon, Ourigan, or Ourgan — the invented place captured the imagination. It was the westernmost place, the Eden at the end of the rainbow.” In this sense, Oregon meant freedom and opportunity for Euroamericans leaving crowded eastern valleys. For Indians, this meant the loss of land and resources and, for many, the loss of their lives.

The Northwest holds vast natural resources, but prior to Euroamerican settlement, it was also a landscape of rich and interconnected societies whose traditions celebrated the region’s wealth in myriad ways. The heritage of the place name Oregon is part of this tradition, a fundamental aspect of indigenous Northwest Coast economies. Although ooligan is not used as widely today as it once was, Northwest fisheries are of great economic importance. While most of these fisheries are no longer in the hands of Native communities, fish and fishing are still a part of Northwest peoples’ cultural identities.

As a symbol of the wealth of Northwest Coast indigenous peoples, ooligan is a fitting namesake for a state that encompasses three hundred miles of the Northwest Coast. By acknowledging this meaning of Oregon we also honor the indigenous traders and scouts whose knowledge of a vast continent was immense. As the history of the name Oregon gives us the chance to consider traditional North American cultures and their interconnections in trade, technology, and oral tradition, it reveals that travel across the continent was more common than has often been represented. Long before European notions of wealth drew people west, indigenous wealth had done as much.

In setting out to investigate the meaning of the word Oregon, we found ourselves exploring new aspects of the history of pre-colonial indigenous cultures in the North American West. In one sense a place-name study, this research also contributes to a redefinition of indigenous history, which has so often been dismally portrayed. Native peoples are now participants in writing history; and as these relationships continue to mature, a vast, multifaceted heritage will unfold.

An expanded version of this article, including more detailed notes, copies of primary source materials, and links to related sites, is available on the Oregon Historical Society’s Web site, at www.ohs.org. Go to the publications page, and after selecting Oregon Historical Quarterly go to the “Featured Articles” section.
In exploring the historic processes that led to the place name Oregon, we have yet to consult with many indigenous people on the Northern Plains and Northwest Coast who will have much to contribute. We have, however, taken advantage of many published indigenous perspectives, and we have spoken with several Native people who were readily available for comment. They and several others provided invaluable advice on drafts of this paper. We especially thank Madonna Moss, Jon Erlandson, Caskey Russell, Dell Hymes, Scott Delaney, Beth Hege Platote, Tom Connolly, Tony Johnson, Harriet Kuhnlein, Sarah Thomason, Donna Ralstin-Lewis, and the Chinook Jargon listserv membership (CHINOOK@LISTSERV.LINGUISTLIST.ORG). Particular appreciation is extended to our anonymous reviewers and the editors of the Oregon Historical Quarterly. This article is dedicated to Saghaley Wayne Lewis, born March 6, 2001.

1. Examples of these collaborative efforts include a western Oregon Indian history project led by the Coquille Indian Tribe and the University of Oregon (Southwest Oregon Research Project) and language research programs such as those of the Tolowa and Grand Ronde tribes.

2. Originally published as Travels Through the Interior Parts of North-America, in the Years 1766, 1767, and 1768, printed for the author (London, 1778).


5. Rogers apparently lent his two petitions to Carver in 1775, three years before Carver’s Travels was published. See Elliott, “Origin of the Name Oregon,” 97.

6. Hilary Stewart lists eleven modern spelling variants of ooligan. See Stewart, Indian Fishing: Early Methods on the Northwest Coast (Vancouver, B.C.: Douglas and McIntyre, 1977), 95. The two most common spellings of the word in English are oolichan and eulachon (from the Chinook ulakan); Oxford English Dictionary, 2nd ed., s.v. “ooligan.” The latter English form is pronounced [yoo-len], but few Northwest Coast peoples seem to have pronounced it this way traditionally. First Nations peoples of the British Columbia coast (the coastal groups in closest proximity to the Cree) typically pronounce the word [uligan], spelled ooligan, and we have chosen to adopt this spelling for this article. See Harriet Kuhnlein et al., “Ooligan Grease: A Nutritious Fat Used by Native People of Coastal British Columbia,” Journal of Ethnobiology 2:2 (1982): 154-61. The Grease Trails also receive this name from the ooligan grease stains that appear on the rocks in the high mountain passes, the grease having spilled from the cedar boxes carried on people’s backs. See Sage Birchwater, Ulkatcho: Stories of the Grease Trail (Anahim Lake, B.C.: Ulkatcho Culture Curriculum Development Committee, 1993). 9. The most important trade route in southern British Columbia appears to have been the grease trail between Lillooet, a Fraser River tributary, and the Squamish villages at Howe Sound, north of Vancouver. Dorothy Kennedy and Randall Bouchard, “Lillooet,” in Handbook of North American Indians, vol. 7, Northwest Coast, ed. Wayne Suttles (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1990); personal communication with archaeologist Rudy Reimer (Squamish), April 2001.

7. See note 71.


9. The [r] sound was not used in most Northwest Coast regions; therefore, the Algonquian oorigan may have become ooligan in Chinook Jargon or vice versa. Vernon Snow, “From Ouragon to Oregon,” Oregon Historical Quarterly 60 (Winter 1959): 445–7.
10. Although there are several accounts of intertribal trade between the Pacific Coast and the upper Missouri, we have encountered none that portray journeys across this entire distance, with the exception of the spiritual quest of Moncacht-Ape, of the Yazoo Tribe, in the early 1700s. Andrew M. Davis, The Journey of Moncacht-Ape (Fairfield, Wash.: Ye Galleon Press, 1966).


17. The league of fur-trade canoe routes was less than the three miles of the British league. See Ralph Ehrenberg, “Exploratory Mapping of the Great Plains Before 1800,” in Mapping the Great Plains, ed. Frederick Luebke, Frances Kaye, and Gary Moulton (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 17. Although the Fraser does not discharged into the sea here, it is linked by grease trails to various inlets near latitude 54°.

18. Rogers may also have received the information indirectly from traders working between Detroit and Fort Des Prairies. His commission to Tute indicates that by 1767 he was in contact with traders at this remote post. See Atlas of North American Exploration, ed. William H. Goetzmann and Glyndwr Williams (New York: Prentice Hall, 1992), 110–11. It is likely that individuals at Fort La Prairie (Des Prairies) and other forts in the region traded with Western Cree people who had traveled across the Rockies.


24. The Douglas and Wallace translation of Jeremie’s account (Twenty Years, 21) adds the racial characterization, later reiterated by Glyndwr Williams in The British Search for a Northwest Passage (London: Royal Commonwealth Society, 1962), 6. Jeremie’s Cree sources did not identify the coastal
residents as “white people,” nor does it appear that they saw ships rather than large canoes, though Jeremie’s parenthetical remark adds to this interpretation. As George Simpson observed, hundreds of Indian canoes on the Northwest Coast were larger than HBC ships and carried forty to fifty men each. Merk, Fur Trade and Empire, 301.

25. Native accounts of cross-continent travel have largely been overlooked, misconstrued as fantasy or lies, or presumed to be local geography. See, for example, the notes in Journals and Letters of Pierre Gaultier de Varennes De La Vérendrye and His Sons, ed. L.J. Burpee, (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1927), 59, 62, 247; “Oregon Revisited,” Oregon Historical Quarterly 61 (June 1960): 214.


33. Burpee, Journals and Letters of La Vérendrye, 247–49.


38. Burpee, Search for the Western Sea, 271–80. See also Elliott, “Carver’s Source for Oregon,” 60.


49. Birchwater, Ulktacho, 3.


59. Mills, Eagle Down, 104.


63. MacDonald, Kitwanga Fort Report, 17, 22–23; Charles Horetsky, Canada on the Pacific (Montreal: Dawson Brothers, 1874), 117; candle fish is another name for ooligan. See also Gould, Archaeology of Point St. George.


65. Drake and Wilson, Eulachon, 23; Birchwater, Ulktacho, 6–9. The use of fish oils and fish grease extends to the Asian continent, which may indicate long-term cultural affinities that have existed between the indigenous peoples of the northern Pacific Rim. Ooligan grease is fermented using similar techniques well-known in Asia and on the Northwest Coast. MacDonald, Kitwanga Fort Report, 73.


67. Drake and Wilson, Eulachon, 8; letter from Caskey Russell (Tlingit), University of Oregon English Department, to authors, August 2000, quoting the unpublished memoir of Tlingit elder Grandmother Teew in Russell’s possession; Edwards, “Oolachen Time,” 32, 34.


69. William F. Shipley, “Native Languages in


72. Chinook Jargon continued in use well into the twentieth century, especially in reservation communities where people from different nations were confined. See Henry Zenk, "Chinook Jargon and Native Cultural Persistence in the Grand Ronde Indian Community, 1856–1907: A Special Case of Creolization" (Ph.D. diss., University of Oregon, 1984). Use of Chinook Jargon is being rekindled by the Chinook, Grand Ronde, and other tribes; see Tenas Wawa Web site, at www.geocities.com/tenaswawa.


74. Variants of sapolil were recorded by Lewis and Clark on the Columbia River as early as 1805, and the word occurs in Chinook Jargon and several Northwest Coast languages (Sarah Thomason, personal communication). See Moulton, Journals of Lewis and Clark, 5:380 n7.


77. The word oligan (or hooligan) even replaced the use of shrowton, of Haida Jargon, most often used by European and American fur traders on the Northwest Coast. See Gibson, Otter Skins, 231.
