The People

The Canadian north is the last great frontier of the North American Continent. It is generally conceded to be that part of Canada lying north of the 60th Parallel; it includes the Yukon and Northwest Territories. The Canadian north represents 44 per cent of Canada's total land area, or 1½ million square miles. It is peopled by approximately 30,000 Esquimo, Indians and Whites.

First inhabitants of the Canadian north were the Eskimos in the Arctic regions and the Indians farther south. Both these dark-skinned peoples are believed to be descendants of northern Asiatic tribes who emigrated to our continent more than 15,000 years ago.

For centuries the peoples of the north lived, multiplied and died in a timeless environment offering little more than survival against nature’s severest odds: long Arctic winters, brief summers, scanty vegetation, comparative isolation and the rigors of Arctic weather. They lived simply and within the limits of their environment. Hunting, fishing and fur trapping were the corner-stones not only of their economy but of their way of life.

Today, however, this way of life is undergoing a transition. The north has become more accessible. New occupations are being introduced by Canadian Government departments in defence and public works installations, by industry in mining projects and by shipping interests through North-West Passage. Native talent is being encouraged and directed into economic channels. Eskimo stone-carving and other handicrafts are finding profitable markets to offset the economic decline in the once-satisfactory trapping and fishing mode of livelihood. Schools are being established.

The Canadian North

Resources

The Canadian north is rich in mineral resources. Three significant dates mark the first industrialization of this fact. In 1900, gold was first produced at Norman Wells, N.W.T. In 1933, pitchblende for uranium was first extracted from the shores of Great Bear Lake. In 1957, thorium was found in the vicinity of Yellowknife, N.W.T.

Today, gold, lead, zinc and silver are among the minerals taken in increasing quantities from the Yukon Territory. Copper and oil also are believed to exist in the Yukon. From the Northwest Territories mineral extraction includes uranium (Port Radium is one of the world’s three most important sources of uranium), gold, lead, zinc, nickel and, to a lesser degree, oil. This last valuable resource is believed to exist in quantity under the surface all the way from the Alberta border to Elles Ringnes Island in the High Arctic. Minerals were recently discovered in the north are copper, tungsten, iron, coal, tantalum, beryllium and lithium, the lightest of all metals.

Other northern resources include the forests, fish, wildlife and the land. Forestry in the Canadian north is so far confined to small industrial development of lumber, pulp and plywood. The fisheries are limited industrially to Great Slave Lake. The fur industry, once the most profitable, is now of secondary importance. Agriculture shows possibility of development.

Defence

The Canadian north is the largest single physical expression of Canada’s sovereignty. Both administratively and from a national defence point of view its position is unique in Canada.

In the atomic age with high-speed aircraft and deadly guided missiles, Canada’s north has become a tremendous strategic area of defence for Canada and the North American Continent. In the struggle between East and West, Canada’s northern territories on the roof of the world has made this so.

Responsibility for northern administration is shared by the Canadian Government and by local agencies in the Territories. Two Councils, the Yukon Territory Council and the Northwest Territories Council, are the legislative bodies for the north. Except for natural resources and finances, the Councils enjoy powers similar to our provincial legislatures. The Yukon Territory Council is an elected body; the N.W.T. Council has four of its nine members elected and the balance appointed by the Canadian Government.

The past 15 years have witnessed the development of a whole new chapter in Canadian military planning and training. Members of the R.C.A.F., the Canadian Army and the R.C.A. are in ever-increasing numbers becoming acquainted with the north and learning to live and fight in Arctic conditions.

A particularly significant development in the past decade has been the construction of a joint Canadian-American air warning and defence system. In the Distant Early Warning (DEW) Line, the Mid-Canada Line and Pine Tree Line, the watchful eyes and ears of a whole continent have been concentrated in the most highly developed detection and communications systems devised by man.