

Sacrificial people

*Will Quebec's Indians
be driven from their land?*

JON BOWERMASTER
*reports on a classic
conservation conflict*

THE SINGLE-ENGINE OTTER BANKS hard in a tight circle over an explosive one-hundred-foot waterfall along the Eau Claire River. The pilot, a classically daring French Canadian named Pierre, dangles a burning cigarette out his vent with one hand as he drops the plane ever lower over the sprawling tundra of the Canadian Shield, affording his half-dozen passengers a first-class gaze at a wilderness few people have seen by land or air.

The hilltops below are smoothed from centuries of grinding by glacier ice and shifting of sand and stone. The granite plateaus are riven by crater lakes, meteor holes, fields of lichen, and three-hundred-foot-tall pines. Flying into the sun, we watch the late afternoon light dance off the surface of a hundred rivers and their thousands of tributaries. On the left are the Hudson and James bays that separate Ontario and northern Quebec. Guarded by barrier islands, sandy gravel banks lead from the blue-green shallows to whitewashed cliffs that line the coast. It is a landscape so raw, so untouched, you can literally see where the last great glaciers retreated three and a half billion years ago.

As we head farther north, we fly over one massive river after another, and my companion, Robbie Niquanicappo, deputy chief of the Great Whale Cree, reels off the names: the Coats, Domanchin, the Great Whale, the Little Whale, Nastapoka. Here it is so cold for most of the year that there is little evaporation, and the rivers run high and very fast. As they gain mo-

A prayer for protection: The James Bay hydroelectric project threatens Indian land and life-styles.

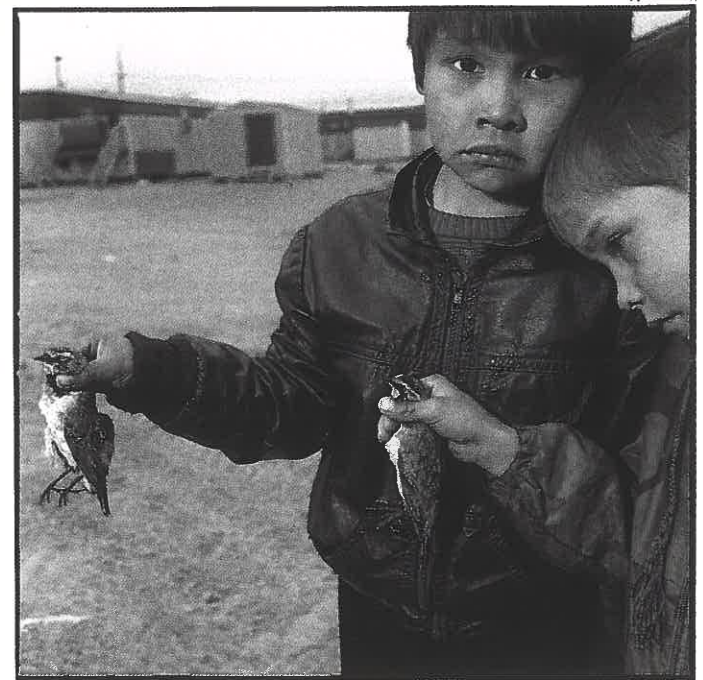
PHOTOGRAPHS By MARY ELLEN MARK



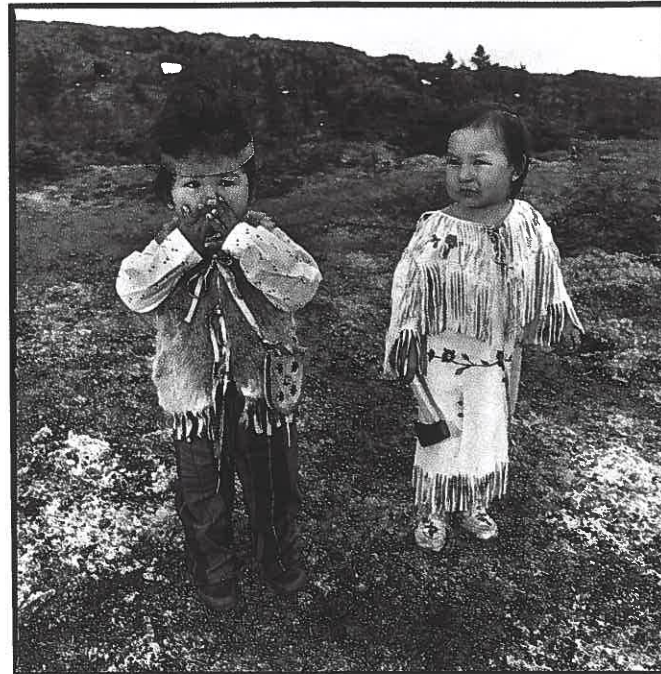




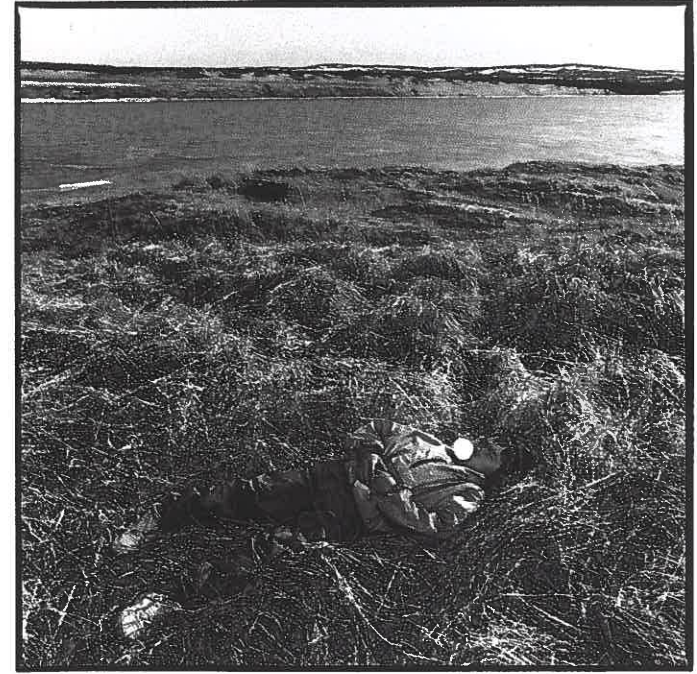
The Cree Indians fear that by the time this generation's babies are grown, traditional life will have disappeared.



These Cree boys shoot birds with slingshots and carry the carcasses around in their pockets.



Cree children still dress like this for special occasions but prefer the more universal jeans and T-shirts.



The Indians fear that this once-green and pleasant land is being pushed into a new era of pollution.

mentum, dropping ten feet per mile near the bays, they are increasingly marked by explosions of white water and waterfalls proper. Although even Robbie's eagle eyes cannot spot them from the air, he assures us that in the woods all along the rivers' banks are the game trails, traplines, and winter tepees that Cree hunters have used for generations.

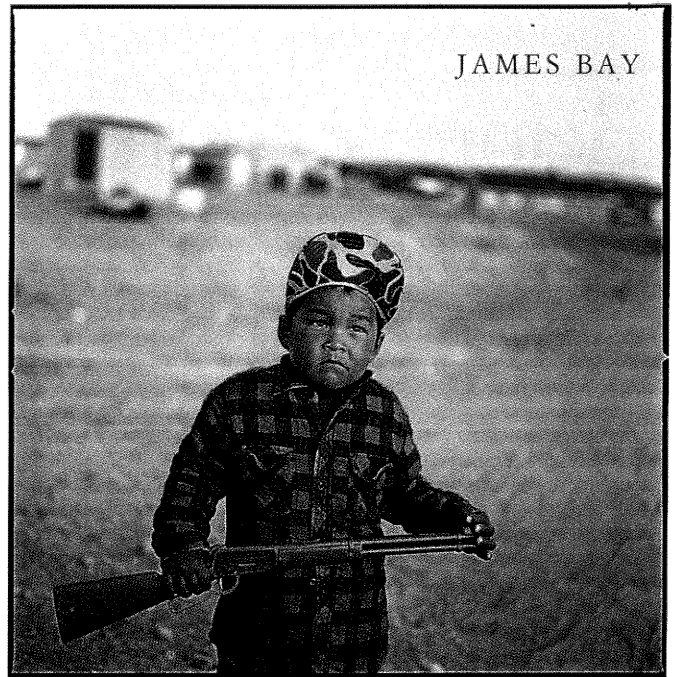
Our airplane circles back slowly to a point on the Great Whale River where we had left behind a pair of rafts and a half-dozen traveling companions. As we arc over James Bay, we catch one last glimpse of this serene, isolated wilderness, a landscape contoured over millions of years and now threatened with extinction in the next thirty. If the Quebec govern-

ment has its way, all the land we can see from the airplane will be altered—parts of it put underwater, other parts dried up forever. Forests will be flooded, riverbeds exposed. Wildlife will scatter, and some will disappear for good. Robbie and I shift our eyes from horizon to horizon. It is impossible to imagine.

THE BATTLE OF JAMES BAY IS A CLASSIC LATE-twentieth-century conflict between man and nature. Modern man is constantly in search of new sources of energy to sustain growth and development and, to do this, is required to tap rapidly diminishing natural resources. In Quebec the



Trapper Charlie Tootoo still makes a living selling hides—but for how long?



JAMES BAY

Buckley Fleming is typical of Great Whale children, and his toy rifle will soon be exchanged for the real thing.



Cree sisters Janet and Jennifer Masty, like many of their peers, bore children while still in their teens.



Eliza Masty, a 74-year-old great-grandmother, remembers when life was kinder and gentler.

trade-off is land for electricity, and its government-owned power company, Hydro-Quebec, is in the midst of the most expensive construction project ever undertaken in North America, its purpose to produce massive amounts of hydroelectricity. The three-phased James Bay project is intended not only to provide power for its citizens but also to create an export commodity worth billions of dollars. Several American states are considering buying the power, which has brought vigorous U.S. environmental lobbyists into the fray.

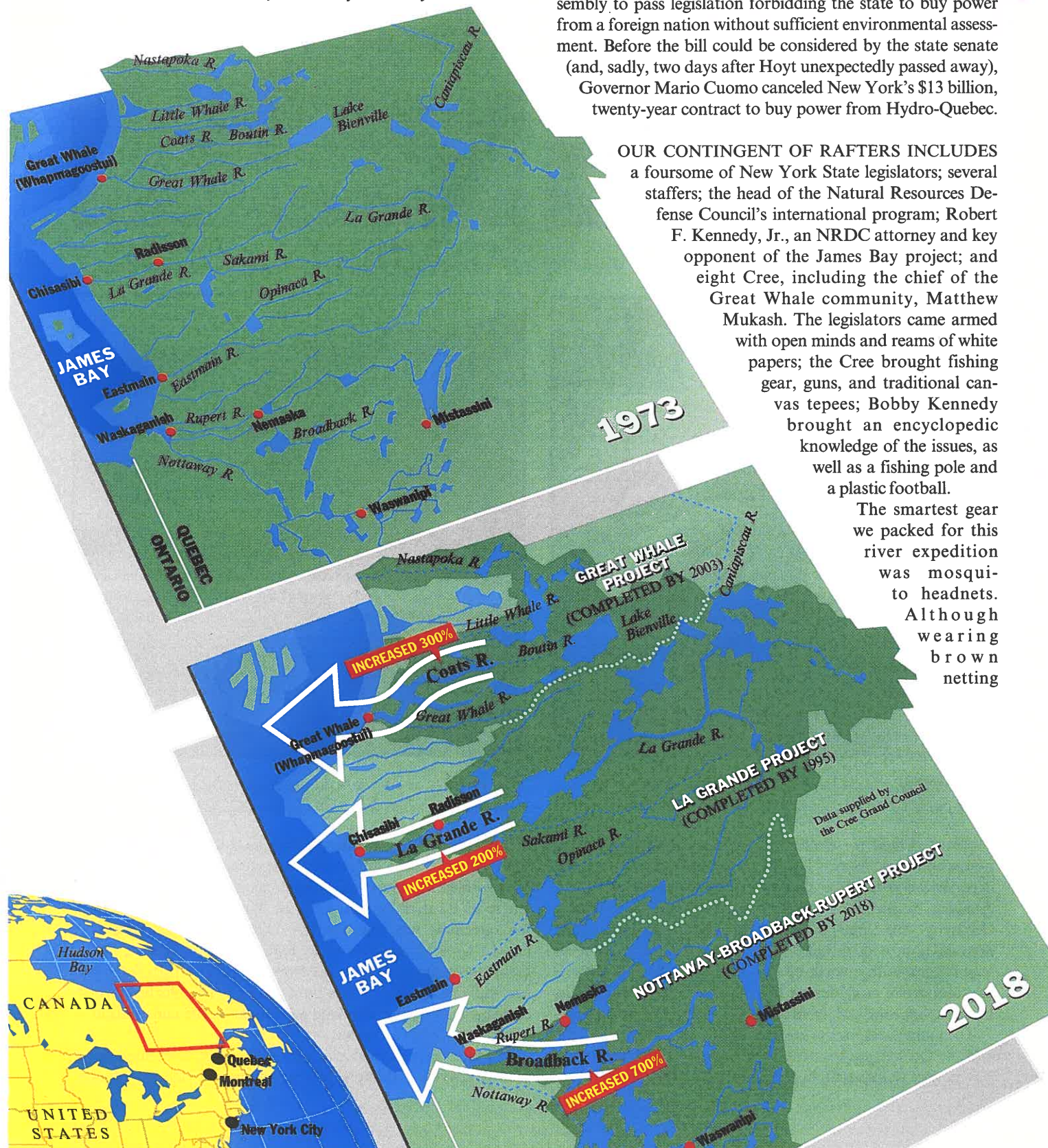
The main protagonists are the local Cree and Inuit Indians and the Quebec government. When phase one of the James Bay project was started, in the early 1970s, the Cree sold lim-

ited rights to eighty percent of their land to Hydro-Quebec. They used the \$135 million settlement for education, health care, a police force, and guaranteed incomes for Cree hunters, and to set up an airline, Air Creebec. Today, the Cree say that the agreement was negotiated by laymen—the first generation of Cree to graduate from high school—and that, like many agreements between the white men and North American Indians, much of it has been ignored. The Quebec government regards the 450-page agreement as the constitution governing northern Quebec.

The Cree have learned a lot since 1975. They have hired expensive lawyers and public relations advisers to stop any fur-

Before and after

In the next 25 years, the natural watershed (top) will be reengineered (bottom) into three drainage systems: Some streams will be rerouted, others will be turned into immense reservoirs, and three monstrous rivers will flow into James Bay.



ther land-for-cash trades. Last summer local activists, together with Eric Hertz, the proprietor of Earth River Expeditions, a New York-based outfitter, brought a group of legislators from various American states to see the wilderness that will be lost if the project is built. I went along.

A similar trip a year before proved effective. One of the New York State assemblymen, William Hoyt, who rafted the river and met with the Cree, succeeded in getting the state assembly to pass legislation forbidding the state to buy power from a foreign nation without sufficient environmental assessment. Before the bill could be considered by the state senate (and, sadly, two days after Hoyt unexpectedly passed away), Governor Mario Cuomo canceled New York's \$13 billion, twenty-year contract to buy power from Hydro-Quebec.

OUR CONTINGENT OF RAFTERS INCLUDES a foursome of New York State legislators; several staffers; the head of the Natural Resources Defense Council's international program; Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., an NRDC attorney and key opponent of the James Bay project; and eight Cree, including the chief of the Great Whale community, Matthew Mukash. The legislators came armed with open minds and reams of white papers; the Cree brought fishing gear, guns, and traditional canvas tepees; Bobby Kennedy brought an encyclopedic knowledge of the issues, as well as a fishing pole and a plastic football.

The smartest gear we packed for this river expedition was mosquito headnets. Although wearing brown netting

Data supplied by the Cree Grand Council

NOW OPEN

Introducing Acapulco's most elusive treasure. Seclusion.



When you discover the intimate new Camino Real Acapulco Diamante, you'll find a genuine hidden treasure. Nestled over the hill from Acapulco Bay on serene Puerto Marques Bay, the Acapulco Diamante will charm you with its elegant Italian design, tastefully appointed ocean-view rooms, terraced swimming pools, and calming beach. You'll discover intimate European-style service. The kind that has earned us more AAA Five Diamond Awards than any other hotel group in Mexico. So take a vacation you'll treasure forever. For more information on our packages, call your travel consultant or our Mexico specialist at 800-228-3000.



**CAMINO REAL
ACAPULCO DIAMANTE**

Represented by Westin Hotels & Resorts

James Bay

kibitz and watch videotapes. While hunting, fishing, and trapping are still the cornerstones of the Cree economy, fewer and fewer young people are satisfied to follow in their elders' footsteps. The unemployment rate among those aged fifteen to twenty-one is fifty-five percent, and many are leaving their villages for big cities. It is a modern dilemma, played out over recent years in many small communities across the sub-Arctic.

In many ways the James Bay project epitomizes the fate of the whole north and prompts the bigger question of whether all the additional power is even necessary. Quebec's population is expected to decline shortly after the turn of the century; conservation and economic recession in the United States are lessening demand for electricity. All the same, just how much wilderness can we expect to protect as the twenty-first century dawns, given the continual demands that mankind's exploding population makes on the planet?

OUR DAYS ON THE RIVER ARE spent paddling hard into the wind, thundering through monstrous white water, and occasionally floating with the current at our back. Great herons leap from the shore and flap gracefully overhead; fish the length of a grown man's arm jump alongside the rafts; traces of caribou and deer are spotted onshore. Lunches are made on granite outcroppings jutting into the river and eaten beneath centuries-old puckerbush.

Our Cree companions have packed delicacies of caribou tongue and goose bannock, which we augment with grilled cheese sandwiches and canned tuna. They catch half a dozen sizable bass, which we smoke over the fire and devour. Late into the night the legislators quiz the Cree on the history and future of the river we are exploring. Each day a Hydro-Quebec helicopter buzzes overhead. They are not used to traffic on this underexplored river and are no doubt curious about this bunch of floaters.

The rafting is particularly enlightening for the Cree. All their lives they have been taught that the rapids are life-threatening and that they should walk around them, not plunge through them. In the rafts, they dig their fingers deep into the rubber and grimace as waves swamp the boats. But they are thrilled by the new experience. "The white man has finally taught

wrapped around our faces makes us look like bank robbers from another planet, the two-dollar investments offer some protection from the voracious blackflies and mosquitoes.

On our first night on the river, we set up camp in the dark. The two-hundred-mile-long Great Whale River, dotted by class IV and V rapids, has been rafted only once before. As a result, it has taken us quite a bit longer than expected to line the rafts around perilous-looking white water that Hertz rightfully judges unraftable. This means lugging gear and food up rocky cliffs, through thick brambles, and back down to the river—time-consuming, arduous tasks that show us quickly why the Cree have, over the years, learned to use parallel lakes and rivers in order to avoid these turbulent waters.

Our camp sits high on a cliff overlooking a plunging waterfall. While dinner is being cooked by flashlight, I sit on the riverbank with Robbie Niquanicappo under the illumination of spectacular northern lights. Articulate and good-humored, Robbie was schooled in southern Canada, like most of today's Cree leaders. After university he returned home to Great Whale. His job as deputy chief is an elected one, but his plea to save this wilderness is more than a job. He and his people simply do not want to sacrifice this place; Cree homeland already provides forty percent of Quebec's power, and they believe they have given up enough.

“Our future is very much in doubt,” admits Robbie. “Our culture is based on the land. If it is destroyed, that is genocide”

Dressed in running shoes, sweat suit, and a SAVE JAMES BAY camouflage baseball cap and wearing tinted glasses, Robbie is only thirty-four but sounds like an elder statesman. “We’ve been here for five thousand years,” he told me that night. “We’re not going anywhere.”

If you listen to the Cree and their supporters, what you hear is war talk, and Robbie drops phrases like “cultural genocide” into his conversation with some regularity. Hydro-Quebec, on the other hand, talks of growth and development, as if they were the most natural and reasonable course. Behind its determination lie two key economic objectives: to increase its power exports twofold and to make available huge quantities of electricity for a series of new aluminum smelters along the St. Lawrence River and elsewhere. The Cree see James Bay as one of Canada's greatest wildernesses, while Quebec's prime minister, Robert Bourassa, sees it as a vast hydroelectric plant in the making—“the project of the century.” Bourassa's vision calls for dozens of relatively small rivers to be diverted into larger ones (see map), creating sufficient water volume to power a network of dams that would produce enough electricity to meet all of Quebec's needs, with

plenty left over for export to the northeastern United States. The development would extend over 135,000 square miles, encompassing the largest remaining unspoiled wilderness area in the eastern half of North America. The massive three-phased project would require the construction of 215 dams or ditches and would alter the flow of nineteen rivers.

The list of what would be lost if the project proceeds is long. Entire ecosystems would be destroyed, the flow of rivers changed 180 degrees. Thriving centers would become ghost towns; wildlife, spawning grounds, migratory routes, farm and hunting lands, would disappear. Vast wetlands and coastal marshes, important staging grounds for migratory waterfowl, including species of duck, teal, and goose, would be flooded or dewatered. The region is home to rare and endangered freshwater seals, beluga whales, walrus, such anadromous fish as brook trout and lake whitefish, and herds of caribou. The delicate balance of forest, flowing water, and marsh that support this rich web of life has evolved over tens of thousands of years, and National Audubon scientist Jan Beyea says the so-called project of the century is “the northern equivalent of the destruction of the tropical rain forest.”

Phase one of the James Bay project is already a reality. Begun in 1971 and only now nearing completion, it has resulted in the flooding of more than 4,500 square miles. What the Cree are trying to stop is the second phase, known as James Bay II or the Great Whale River Project. If this second phase gets the go-ahead, it isn't only the village of Great Whale (population one thousand) that will be affected. So will Chisasibi, Nemaska, and Umiujaq. And Hydro-Quebec does not intend to stop there. Next on the boards is the Nottaway-Broadback-Rupert Project—fourteen hydroelectric centrals, sixteen dams, ten major storage reservoirs, and more than seventy dikes diverting eight more rivers.

In a related case, this past January the Cree settled a suit against Hydro-Quebec that will allow two additional dams to be built on the La Grande River. To avoid a lengthy court battle, the power company agreed to pay the Cree \$50 million. The protest arose over whether a pair of dams were covered by the 1975 James Bay agreement (Hydro-Quebec insisted they were; the Cree contended they were not). Ultimately, representatives of the Cree Regional Authority decided that, since the La Grande had already been ruined by dams, the power company should concentrate its efforts on that river rather than on the Great Whale. Of the money, \$45 million will be split between the communities to be most affected, Chisasibi and Wemindji; the Cree government will receive \$5 million. It is exactly this kind of negotiation and cash payoff—which Hydro-Quebec is more than ready to accommodate—that cynics worry may foretell the future of the Great Whale River Project.

The mounting opposition to James Bay II is a major annoyance to the government. Motivating the unions, environmentalists, and the Indians is the fact that there has never been an environmental audit or damage assessment of the first phase. Hydro-Quebec has conducted the only “scientific” studies to date, and it claims that damage from James Bay II will be local, an assertion environmentalists (*Continued on page 169*)

James Bay

(Continued from page 99) find hard to believe, given that the plan is to alter an area the size of France.

The local Indians fear more than environmental damage. They say they are being pushed into a new era of pollution—a mercury age. Since the flooding of land for James Bay I began in 1971, high levels of methylmercury have been found in the livers of seals and beluga whales, both native delicacies. The high rate of mercury poisoning is the result of a complex and poorly understood biochemical chain reaction set off by contained waters on the Precambrian rocks of the Canadian Shield. Hydro-Quebec claims that the problem is “temporary” and will disappear within a few decades. Critics maintain that this unpredicted outcome of the first phase is just one sign that the mammoth dam project amounts to environmental folly on a grand scale.

What’s worse, there is a kind of double environmental whammy waiting in the wings. Electricity from James Bay II is seen as an important lever for stimulating economic development in Quebec. During the past two years, Hydro-Quebec has used the prospect of cheap electricity to develop an aluminum and magnesium industry along the St. Lawrence, agreeing to sell electricity to the smelters based on world prices for their products rather than at fixed rates. Two new aluminum smelters, worth \$2.2 billion, are already under construction, and a third is being expanded at a cost of some \$500 million.

“Our future is very much in doubt,” admits Robbie. “We do not value this place for its economic potential; our culture is based on the land. If it is destroyed, that is genocide.”

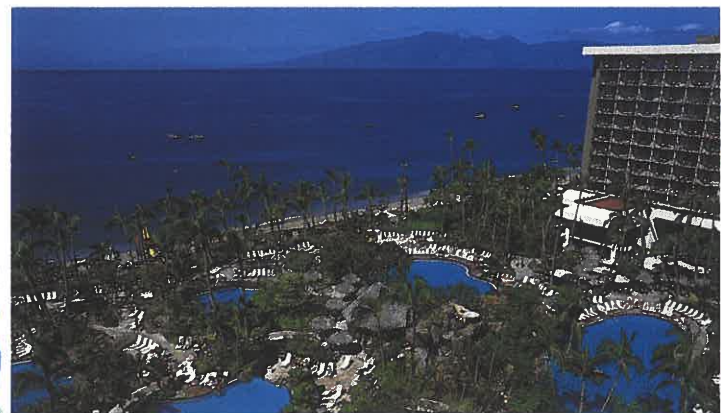
RECENT YEARS HAVE BEEN traumatic for the Cree. Just twenty years ago, most lived the traditional life of nomadic hunters. Their movements were determined by the habits of animals on their traplines, except in summer, when they gathered with other families in makeshift villages for religious and cultural activities. Today, Great Whale’s teenagers are as familiar with shopping malls as with traplines.

The Cree insist that they simply want to be left alone (albeit with the modern conveniences—“tools”—they’ve become accustomed to, such as VCRs, snowmobiles, and chain saws). If Hydro-Quebec

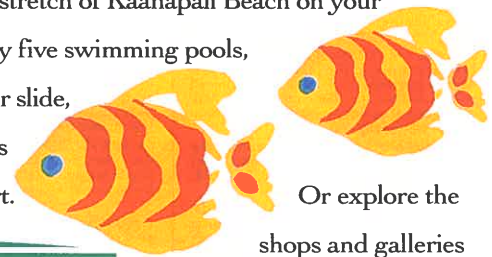
gets its way, a couple of thousand construction workers and ancillary hangers-on will soon be living cheek by jowl with the Cree, arriving via an expanded airport and an asphalt highway through the tundra from Radisson. They’ll bring with them the bane of all small Arctic villages—booze, drugs, prostitutes, and venereal disease. The government argues that the project will create sixty thousand jobs; the Cree contend that the total figure is six thousand over the project’s ten-year life, and that half of those will be secondary. “Those jobs won’t last

long,” says Great Whale native son John Petagumskum, “and then the land will be gone.”

An even bigger problem for the Cree is the diminishing role traditional life plays in the villages affected by encroaching westernization. In Great Whale they have prefab houses (built with money from the James Bay I settlement), a new multimillion-dollar hockey rink, and a grocery/videotape-rental store, but only a handful work for the local Cree office or on temporary construction projects. Some spend their days drinking; most



Wrap yourself in the luxury of The Westin Maui, with the most desirable stretch of Kaanapali Beach on your doorstep. Enjoy five swimming pools, a 150-foot water slide, private grottoes and priceless art.



Or explore the shops and galleries of Whalers Village right next door. *For reservations, call your travel consultant or (800) 228-3000.*

RESERVE
THE PRIME
SPOT ON
KAANAPALI
BEACH.



THE WESTIN MAUI
Kaanapali Beach

us something fun," laughs Robbie.

At each campsite the Cree make a point of predicting the future of that particular spot on the river if James Bay II is built: The place where we camped on the first night would be flooded; where we spent the second, in spongy, calf-deep lichen, the river would dry up. From thirty miles above the village of Great Whale the river would become indistinguishable from one spot to the next, beneath a string of reservoirs. And so on and on and on.

Government officials in Quebec claim that the prime motive behind the Cree's protests is to eventually negotiate a bigger settlement for the rights to their land. But Robbie insists that while there may be a handful of Cree willing to settle for the highest dollar, most would prefer to keep their land. "If not here, where are we to live?" he says, late one night, staring sadly into the blazing campfire.

The Cree insist it is not only the wilderness they are trying to preserve, but a quality of life as well. They don't want roads, construction workers, gas

stations, supermarkets, more video stores. They like their isolation. They like the fact that for three weeks each fall the villages shut down when whole families go into the bush for goose-hunting season. They like walking (or snowmobiling) the five-hundred-mile-long traplines established by their grandfathers' grandfathers. They get pleasure out of ice-fishing by net and enjoy caribou hunting for subsistence.

Hydro-Quebec's back is against the wall. The company has a mountain of debt and was depending on the U.S. contracts to keep it solvent. This is still a possibility: An oil shortage or some other energy crisis would make Hydro-Quebec's power an attractive, cheap alternative. Mario Cuomo and New York State backed out of their contract on economic, not environmental, terms; if offered a better deal, New York could easily sign a new contract with Hydro-Quebec. For now, the key to the project's proceeding is environmental approval, approval that is currently hung up in Cree-initiated court battles.

LATE ONE GRAY AFTERNOON we are paddling toward that night's campsite when one of our rafts up-ends, tipping the six-foot, two-inch, 240-pound chief of the Great Whale Cree into the river. Matthew Mukash has never before been immersed in the river that all his life he has been taught to fear, and he is clearly shaken by the experience. "When I went under for the second time," he tells me later, "I said to myself, 'I must see the sky one more time.'"

As he dries himself off in front of the campfire, Mukash also reveals a telling fact about the battle for James Bay. He admits that one of the major weaknesses the Cree have endured in their dealings with the white man is that in their language, there is no word for *politics*.

If the Cree have learned anything from their experience with encroaching Western civilization, it is never to turn your back on the establishment. Politics, they have learned, has a way of undoing even the most black-and-white decisions. Hydro-Quebec counts among its allies

MILLIONS OF DOLLARS IN RENOVATIONS, ALL DESIGNED AROUND A SINGLE STRUCTURE:



Announcing the Grand Reopening of America's #1 Spa Value.

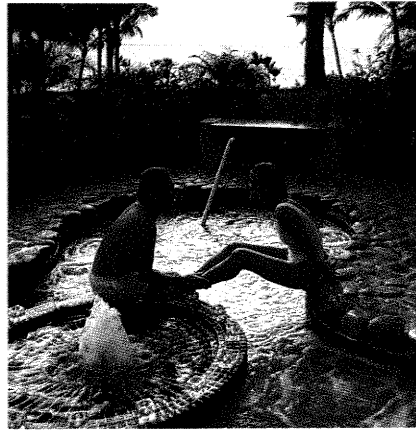
It's just about the best news a body could hope to hear: we've given the Safety Harbor Spa & Fitness Center a complete makeover. With bigger & better facilities. And four natural mineral springs for specially-formulated hydrotherapy treatments. For reservations & information, call your Travel Agent or 1-800-237-0155.

On Tampa Bay • 105 N. Bayshore Drive • Safety Harbor, FL 34695



A Natural
Mineral Springs Resort

Stouffer Wailea Beach Resort. Our Five-Diamond Resort On Maui Outshines Anything Else Under The Sun.



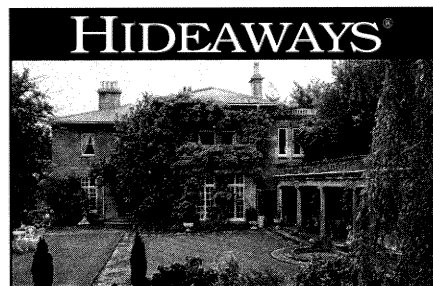
Gracious service. Barefoot elegance. Maui's most tropical beachfront. And a country club atmosphere.

That's why *Condé Nast Traveler* has rated us one of the Top 10 Tropical Resorts worldwide over the past two years.

Experience the Aloha spirit and warmth of old Maui. For reservations, call 1-800-9-WAILEA or 1•800•HOTELS•1.

STOUFFER HOTELS • RESORTS 
A Nestlé Company

©1993 Stouffer Hotel Company



Bath, England \$3,000/wk Accommodates 9

Villas For Rent—From Owners

Your European vacation fantasies are really out there—elegant castles, luxury apartments, country homes, spacious villas. **And they're affordable.** *Hideaways Guide* makes it easy. We investigate and, in colorful, semi-annual issues, profile hundreds of escapes in Europe, U.S., Mexico, and the Caribbean. Most are for rent from owners at big savings. **Quarterly newsletters** keep members posted on new discoveries and deals. The premier travel club for special escapes, we provide **personal planning** and **big savings** for you at the best small resorts, on condo rentals, airfares, cruises and cars. You've seen us recommended in *The New York Times*, *Money*, and *U.S. News and World Report*, now let us help you find your own castle.

FREE: Receive *Villa Vacations Made Easy*—our informative "how-to" book with one-year membership.

- ENROLL ME FOR MEMBERSHIP AT \$79 PER YEAR—INCLUDE MY FREE BONUS. (Enclose check, MC, Visa, Discover, or Am Ex card number and expiration date.)

- 4-MONTH TRIAL MEMBERSHIP AT \$29.95


Charge orders call: **1-800-843-4433**
(508-486-8955 in MA)

Name _____
Address _____
Phone _____ Zip _____

Hideaways International, Inc.
P.O. Box 4433, Dept. CN05 Portsmouth, NH 03802

FALL FOLIAGE SPECIALS:

RIVER CRUISING



COLUMBIA & SNAKE RIVERS ALONG THE HISTORIC LEWIS & CLARK ADVENTURE ROUTE

Spectacular Scenery along the **Great Rivers of the West**, cruising **Washington, Oregon and Idaho**. See nine National Scenic Areas & Historic Sites, along the **Lewis & Clark Discovery Route**. Transit eight unique **locks and dams**. Outstanding **shore excursions** included in cruise. Departures from Portland, Oregon; **6-Days/5-Nights**. Full-Service Deluxe Small Cruise Ship with **25 elegant staterooms**, fine Dining Room, Lounge and spacious observation deck. **Call or Write** for colorful brochures, and **discounts for Fall Cruise Dates!**

In USA & Canada
for Brochures, Call **1-800-451-5952**

COLUMBIA & SNAKE RIVER CRUISING WITH

 **ALASKAS
Glacier Bay™
TOURS AND CRUISES**

520 Pike St., Suite 1610, Dept. 1541, Seattle, WA 98101

James Bay

most of the Quebec political establishment, as well as the business lobby and many labor leaders, all of whom see these projects as the only way out of a crushing recession. The company, which has invested hundreds of millions of dollars in James Bay II, is not about to give up.

Neither are the Cree. Mukash vows they will fight on with all the resources at their disposal. "This dam will not be built," he warns late in the night, with the fire inside the tepee glowing red-hot. "It is not a matter of 'if.' It will not be built. We will prevent them, physically if we have to, from even starting that road." He expects up to three thousand Cree to join him near Radisson at the first rumble of a Hydro-Quebec bulldozer. If the Cree begin disobedience, Ovide Mercredi, leader of the Assembly of First Nations, the political voice of Canada's 700,000 Indians, says his group will join them, if only as a last resort.

Even if this conflict is settled to the Cree's satisfaction, their future remains sketchy. With the roar of the Great Whale River threatening to drown out our midnight conversation, Mukash echoes a sentiment I heard from several Great Whale residents. "Dam or no dam," he says, "things are going to change here, and fast. Many of us would prefer change to come slowly. But so much is out of our hands. . . ." □

Rare glimpses

THE LOCAL CREE ARE BEING trained by Earth River Expeditions to run their own tour operations, but until then, this eco-outfitter gives lawmakers, environmentalists, and paying customers firsthand looks at the endangered region and also sheds light on contemporary native life. The 16 rafters on the next trip up the Great Whale River will begin with an overnight in Cree homes in the village of Whapmagoostui (Great Whale), end with a briefing from the chief on the state of the James Bay project, and in between may opt to camp in communal tepees along the river.

This trip, slated for August, is one of many Earth River journeys to similarly imperiled places all over the world, from the tip of Chile to the Russian frontier (800-643-2784; weeklong trips start at about \$1,300).

-J. B.