

THE HISTORY OF THE SALT INDUSTRY IN WESTERN CANADA

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From the Mackenzie Basin southeastward across the Athabasca River into northwestern Manitoba, and thence along the eastern base of that escarpment of hills which terminates in the Pembina Mountains in North Dakota there stretches a line of salt springs, pouring immense quantities of sodium chloride into the rivers and lakes which the springs feed. These springs are notable features in the landscape, and can not fail to have attracted the attention of the early inhabitants of the country. The traveler comes quite unexpectedly to a bare spot in the forest, circular or oval in shape, half an acre it may be or many acres in extent, and fringed with dark green spruce with a background of lighter green poplar. Within such an area many springs may occur, which may have formed around themselves, volcano-wise, a rim a foot or two in height, due to the deposition partly of material out of solution but mainly of the fine clay which they have carried in suspension from below — for they usually come to the surface through a layer of clay, and only rarely is solid rock to be found in the immediate vicinity. Normally the salt water flows in rivulets from the springs to lake or river, but the surface of the ground is impregnated with salt to such an extent that these areas are absolutely devoid of vegetation. On the high ground, however, and around the margins of the springs the small red salt-loving plant, *salicornia herbacea*, occasionally grows in profusion.

In only a few localities has any considerable thick-