

The Land of Perpetual Plenty



waters, and the mountains shut out the cold air from the east.

The richest and the most highly developed Indian foragers lived for thousands of years on the upper Pacific coast, in a land of perpetual plenty—a lush strip seldom a hundred miles wide, stretching south from Alaska between the ocean and the coastal mountains. The Japan Current warms the ocean

During the Indian's golden age—from perhaps 1000 BC to 1900 AD—the sea had whale, porpoise, seal, sea lion, sea otter, herring, smelt, huge halibut and huge sturgeon. A half dozen geoduck clams scooped from the tidal mud fed a large family. The eulachon, or candlefish, dried and threaded with a string, burned like a candle. The rivers were filled with spawning salmon seven times a year. The rain forest offered deer, moose, bear and fowl; and the mountains, goats and sheep.



The harsh reality of twentieth century industry has impinged on the traditional life of the Grassy Narrows Ojibwas of northwest Ontario. Fish in the mercury-polluted English-Wabigoon river system were once essential to their diet and their guide jobs. Several now have the early symptoms of Minamata disease (mercury poisoning). The incurable, irreversible disease destroys the central nervous system. The polluter, Dryden Paper Company, has stopped using mercury, and unpolluted fish are being trucked into the reserve; but it could take seventy to one hundred years for the river to cleanse itself.

