

Yukon. There are eight territorial highways in all, covering roughly 2,000 kilometres.

History and people

The earliest settlement of the Americas occurred probably between 25,000 and 30,000 years ago, when Asians crossed the Bering Strait land bridge. This migration brought forth many early Indian cultures. The ancestors of the Athabaskan Indians of northwestern North America are believed to have come from eastern Asia some 10,000 to 14,000 years ago. A third migration about 5,000 years ago is thought to have brought the ancestors of the Eskimo peoples, now known as the Inuit, "the people".

Canada's northern Inuit descend directly from the Thule culture, which was famous for its whale-hunting skill.

Today, the North is the home of many indigenous cultures, which have survived an inhospitable climate for thousands of years. Their survival depended on skills as travellers, hunters and gatherers. The network of social systems is complex.

The Indians of the Mackenzie Valley and the Western Arctic are part of the Athabaskan language and culture group. They are separated into the Kutchin (or Loucheux), Hare, Slavey, Dogrib and Chipewyan. The Athabaskan people are one of the most widely dispersed groups of Indians in North America. In addition to the Indians of

the Northwest Territories and the northern Yukon, they include the Koyukon and Tanana of Alaska, the Tutchone of the southern Yukon, the Beaver and Carrier of British Columbia, and the Navaho and Apache of the southwest United States, among others. Collectively, northern Indians call themselves the Dene, "the people".

The native peoples also include the Inuit, all of whom, from Siberia to eastern Greenland, speak dialects of the same language. There are, nevertheless, important social and technological differences among the various groups — the Inuvialuit, the Copper Eskimos, the Netsilik, the Aivilik and Igloodik — such as patterns of land use, dialect and hunting techniques.

During the past 150 years, the Métis have joined the Dene and Inuit as one of the groups now included among "northern native people". The Métis trace their ancestry to the unions between the "coureurs de bois" (the French Canadian trappers and explorers) and Indian women in the early days of the fur trade. Other Métis are the descendants of unions between Hudson's Bay Company men — mainly of Scottish origin — and Dene women. (The children of these unions usually intermarried with the original Dene inhabitants.)

European contact with the northern peoples began as early as 1508 with Sebastian Cabot, who was seeking the Northwest Passage to Asia. Other