

*XL. Particulars of the Country of Labradore, extracted from the Papers of Lieutenant Roger Curtis, of His Majesty's Sloop the Otter, with a Plane-Chart of the Coast. Communicated by the Honourable Daines Barrington.*

Redde, Feb. 24,  
1774. **T**HERE is no part of the British dominions so little known as the immense territory of LABRADORE. So few have visited the northern parts of this vast country, that almost from the straits of BELLEISLE, until you come to the entrance of HUDSON'S BAY, for more than ten degrees of latitude, no chart, which gave any tolerable idea of the coast, had hitherto been formed. The barrenness of the country explains why it has been so seldom frequented. Here avarice has but little to feed on.

Perhaps, without an immoderate share of vanity, I may venture to presume, that, as far as I have been, which is to the latitude of  $59^{\circ} 10'$ , the draught, which I have been able to form, is by much the best that has hitherto been made.

Others have gone before me, blest with abilities superior to mine, and to whom I hope to be thought equal

equal only in assiduity. But I had advantages of which they were destitute; with a small vessel, and having an Indian with me, who knew of every rock and shoal upon the coast, I was enabled to be accurate in my observations; and these are the reasons, why I deem my own sketch preferable to all others.

### Of the coast.

As this country is one of the most barren in the known world, so its sea-coast is the most remarkable. Bordered by innumerable islands, and many of them being a considerable distance from the main land, a ship of burthen would sail a great way along the coast, without being able to form any notion of its true situation.

Hence it is that all charts of it have been so extremely erroneous; and hence arose those opinions, that some of the inlets extended a vast distance into the country, if not quite into the sea of HUDSON'S BAY.

DAVIS'S INLET, which has been so much talked of, is not twenty leagues from the entrance of it to its extremity.

The navigation here is extremely hazardous. Towards the land, the sea is covered with large bodies, and broken pieces, of ice; and the farther you go northward, the greater is the quantity you meet with.

Some of those masses, which the seamen call islands of ice, are of a prodigious magnitude, and they are generally supposed to swim two thirds under water. You will frequently see them more than a hundred feet above the surface, and to ships in a storm,

storm, or in thick weather, nothing can be more terrible.

Those prodigious pieces of ice come from the north, and are supposed to be formed by the freezing of cataracts upon the lands about EAST GREENLAND and the Pole. As soon as the severity of the winter begins to abate, their immense weight breaks them from the shore, and they are driven to the southward. To the miserable inhabitants of LABRADORE, their appearance upon the coast serve as a token of the approach of summer.

#### Of the CLIMATE, SOIL, and NATURAL PRODUCTIONS of the country.

This vast tract of land is extremely barren, and altogether incapable of cultivation. The surface is everywhere uneven, and covered with large stones, some of which are of amazing dimensions. There are few springs; yet, throughout the country, there are prodigious chains of lakes, or ponds, which are produced by the rains, and the melting of the snow. These ponds abound in trout, but they are very small.

There is no such thing as level land. It is a country formed of frightful mountains, and unfruitful vallies. The mountains are almost devoid of every sort of herbage. A blighted shrub, and a little moss, is sometimes to be seen upon them; but, in general, the bare rock is all you behold. The vallies are full of crooked low trees, such as the different pines, spruce, birch, and a species of the cedar. Up some of the deep bays, and not far from the water, it is said, however, there are a few sticks of no considerable

considerable size. In a word, the whole country is nothing more than a prodigious heap of barren rocks.

The climate is extremely rigorous. There is but little appearance of summer before the middle of July; and, in September, the approach of winter is very evident. It has been remarked, that the winters, within these few years, have been less severe than they were known heretofore. The cause of such an alteration it would be difficult to discover.

All along the coast there are many rivers, which empty themselves into the sea; yet there are but few of any consideration, and you must not imagine that the largest are any thing like what is generally understood by a river. Custom has taught us to give them this appellation, but the most of them are nothing more than broad brooks, or rivulets. As they are only drains from the ponds, in dry weather they are everywhere fordable; for running upon a solid rock, they become broad, without having a bed any depth below the surface of the banks.

The superficial appearance of this country is exceedingly unfavourable. What may be hidden in its bowels, we cannot pretend to suggest; probably it may produce some copper; the rocks, in many places, are impregnated with an ore of that resemblance. Something of a horny substance, which is extremely transparent, and which will scale out into a multitude of small sheets, is often found amidst the stones. There are both black and white of this sort, but the black is the most rare. It has been tried in fire, but seemed to be no ways affected by heat.

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The species of wood here are not very various: excepting a few shrubs, which have as yet received no name from the Europeans, the principal produce of the country is the different sorts of **SPRUCE** and **PINE**. Of those, even in the more southern parts, there is not abundance; as you advance northwards, they gradually diminish, and by the time you arrive at the sixtieth degree of latitude, the eye is not delighted with any sort of herbage. Here the wretched residents build their miserable habitations with the bones of whales. If ever they cheer their aching limbs with fire, they gather a few sticks from the sea-shore, which probably have been wasted from **NORWAY**, or from **LAPLAND**. Here a vast quantity of snow remains upon the land throughout the year.

Although the winter here is so excessively rigid, in summer the heat is sometimes disagreeable, and in that season the weather is very moderate, and remarkably serene. It is but seldom foggy, speaking comparatively between this and **NEWFOUNDLAND**; nor are you so frequently liable to those destructive gales of wind, which visit many other parts of the globe.

It is, in general, high land, and sometimes you meet with mountains of an astonishing height; you are also frequently presented with prospects that are really awful, and extremely romantic.

There is no great variety of animals in this rocky country, nor are they at all numerous. Here are the **REIN-DEER**; the females have horns, which nature has given them to procure food, for with these they beat away the snow in winter, and, by that means, come at the tops of trees, which, during the inclemency of that season, is their only sustenance.

There are BEARS black and white, WOLVES, the CAR-KASHEW, FOXES, PORCUPINES a great many, the MOUNTAIN-CAT, MARTINS, BEAVERS, OTTERS, HARES, and a few ERMINE.

The female BEARS, especially the white, in defence of their young, will attack any thing; but at other times, unless you wound them, it is said they are not very dangerous. Many people affirm, and mention instances, that, being pursued by a bear, if you fall on your face, and remain immoveable, it will retire, without doing you any mischief. A single WOLF will never approach a man, nor need he be afraid of several attacking him together, unless in winter, when they are impelled to it by hunger.

A venomous reptile, or insect, is not to be found here, except TOADS, and they are extremely rare. The whole country is filled with very small flies, which are exceedingly tormenting.

Here are EAGLES, HAWKS, the HORN-OWL, and the RED-GAME, with a smaller sort which resemble them, called the SPRUCE-PARTRIDGE: these we may call the constant inhabitants of the feathered kind.

Of sea-birds, there are great variety.

In the summer, the woods are visited with many sorts of little birds, and some of them are of beautiful plumage. They breed here, but, towards winter, they seek a happier climate.

In the autumn, there come a prodigious quantity of birds, which are called CURLEWS. They are about the size of a wood-cock, shaped like them, and nearly of the same colour; extremely fat, and most delicious eating. They continue here but a very

little while, nor is it known from whence they come, or whither they go.

It is a very remarkable phænomenon, that several beasts, and some of the birds, change their colour with the seasons. In the winter, your eye scarcely beholds any thing but what is white. In this miserable climate, providence has armed most animals with a defence against the rigour of winter. The quadrupeds are cloathed with a longer thicker hair, or fur; to the birds are given soft down, and feathers of a closer contexture, than those of milder countries.

The principal fish are WHALES, the COD-FISH, and SALMON. Of SHELL-FISH, there are but few sorts, and these in no great plenty. LOBSTERS, there are none at all; which is very remarkable; for, at a particular part in the Streights of Bellisle, not more than five or six leagues from Newfoundland, there are great abundance.

Observing that the seal-darts of every Indian were headed with the teeth of the SEA-COW, I was led to inquire, how they came by them; and particularly, as upon these instruments they seemed to fix but little value. I was informed, that they purchased them from the Indians of Nuckvank, about the latitude 60°; and that those Indians were visited by multitudes of the sea-cows, in the winter, and that they killed a vast number of them.

My Indian, of whom I obtained this knowledge, could not tell me where the sea-cows went to in the summer, because he had never been beyond Nuckvank; but he told me, that he had often heard the northern Indians say, that, a good way  
farther

farther to the north, they went ashore upon islands, which was thought a very extraordinary thing.

If the situation of these islands was known, it is very probable, an extremely valuable sea-cow fishery might be carried on there.

### Of the INHABITANTS.

It is not surprizing, that such a country as has been described should be thinly inhabited. The human species upon this extensive territory are but few; and such as we know of are extremely savage. The populoufness of mankind generally bears an affinity to the soil they live on. Upon barren rocks, covered with snow for more than half the year, and where the winters are so rigorous, and of such long continuance, we cannot expect to find the inhabitants so very numerous.

The people of this country form various nations or tribes; and are at perpetual war with each other. Formerly the *ESQUIMAUX*, who may be called a maritime nation, were settled at different places upon the sea coast quite down to the river *ST. JOHN'S*; but, for many years past, whether it has been owing to their quarrels with the Mountaineers, or the incroachments of the Europeans, they have taken up their residence far to the north.

A good way up the country live a people distinguished by the appellation of *MOUNTAINEERS*, between whom and the *Esquimaux* there subsists an unconquerable averfion. Next to the Mountaineers, and still farther westward, you come to a nation



called the ESCOPICS. We know not much of this people: and beyond them, are the Hudson Bay Indians, with whom the world is but little better acquainted. There are, doubtless, in such a vast tract of land, a great number of other nations; but of whom we have not the least information.

We are ignorant as yet, why these poor people bear each other such implacable hatred; but it seems a melancholy reflection, that, in so large a country, and withal so badly inhabited, the few there are should be eternally solicitous to extirpate one another: though, perhaps, multiplying the species would augment the natural scarcity of provisions, and only serve to render them all more miserable.

The Mountaineers are esteemed an industrious tribe; and, for many years, had been known to the French traders. Their chief employment is to catch fur, and procure the necessaries of life. They are extremely illiterate, but generally good-natured; and are reckoned to be less ferocious than any other of the Indians. This softness of their manners is owing to their long intercourse with Europeans; and the other nations will doubtless lose their savage disposition, in proportion as they imbibe our customs.

They come every year to trade with the Canadian merchants, who have seal-fisheries on the southern part of the coast, and have the character of just dealers. They are immoderately fond of spirits; for which, blanketing, fire-arms, (in the use of which they are remarkably dexterous), and ammunition, they truck the greatest part of their furs.

Their canoes are covered with the rind of birch; and, though so light as to be easily carried, yet sufficiently

ently large to contain a whole family and their traffic. By means of the multitude of amazing ponds throughout this country, they convey themselves a vast distance in a very little time. Whenever they find a pond in their way, they embark on it, and travel by water; when its course alters, and by following it they would lengthen their distance any thing considerable, they land, place their canoe on their head, and carry their baggage on their shoulders, until other water gives them an opportunity of re-embarking. They are most excellent travellers. They bear inconceivable fatigue with astonishing patience, and will travel two days successively without taking any sort of nourishment.

These Indians are of a deeper colour than the Esquimaux. They are low of stature. Though of a robust constitution, their limbs are small, and extremely well adapted to the rocky country they are continually traversing. They have no hair, except on the head. For many years they have dressed their food, which they boil to a jelly; whereas the other Indians eat every thing raw. Their manner of feeding is certainly conducive to that hospitable disposition, which they are said to possess, and was doubtless originally a great cause of their civilization. Indeed the Esquimaux begin to imitate us; but it is no more than a year or two, that the business of cookery has been known among them.

It is their custom to destroy the aged and decrepid, when they become useless to the society, and burthen some to themselves. They have been questioned of this seeming inhumanity; and perhaps their reasons are not totally devoid of sound philosophy.

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They tell you, that as it is with difficulty they procure the necessaries of life, they can admit of none, who do not contribute towards acquiring it; that having no fixed residence, and it being impossible to carry the helpless with them, as they are obliged to be continually traversing the country; they ask you, if it is not better to put an end to miserable beings, than suffer them to perish with cold and hunger? The son generally does this kind office for the father; and, it having ever been a practice among them, they wonder at our considering it as an act of inhumanity.

#### Of the ESQUIMAUX.

The ESQUIMAUX Indians, inhabiting the sea-coast of the northern part of LABRADORE, are indisputably from GREENLAND. They are a very deep tawney, or rather of a pale copper-coloured complexion. Considered altogether, they are inferior in size to the generality of Europeans; and but a few among them are of good stature. They bear a very near resemblance to the LAPLANDERS, both in their persons and customs. It is not insinuated that they are a Lapland colony; but it is very probable, they came originally from Greenland. They have beards, so have the Greenlanders, and indeed so have the inhabitants of Lapland: whereas the Iroquois, the Hurons, the Escopics, and the Mountaineers their neighbours, have hair no where except on the head. It is true this is no proof. The Samojedes are no more hairy than the nations we have just mentioned; but

but who will believe that any part of the new world was peopled from Samojeda? All we know is, that the great Author of Nature has been pleased to diversify the human species upon every continent.

These Indians, in general, are not very disagreeably featured, though there are some among them who are extremely ugly. They are flat-visaged, and have short noses. Their hair is black and extremely coarse. Their hands and feet are remarkably small. The women load their heads with large strings of beads, which they fasten to the hair above the ears; and they are fond of a hoop of bright brass, which they wear as a coronet. Their dress is intirely of skins, except those who have trafficked for a little blanketing. It consists of a sort of hooded close shirt, breeches, stockings, and boots. They wear the hairy side towards them, according to the seasons; and between the dress of the different sexes there is no variety, except that the women wear monstrous large boots, and their upper garment is ornamented with a tail. In the boots they occasionally place their children; but the youngest is always carried at their back, in the hood of their jacket.

They have no sort of bread; but live chiefly on the flesh of seal, deer, fish, and of birds. Till very lately they ate every thing raw, and putrefaction was deemed no objection.

In the winter they live in houses, or rather caverns, for they are sunk in the earth. In the summer they dwell in tents, which are made circular with poles, and covered with skins sewed together. The house consists of one room, and though not

very large, yet it contains several brothers or other relations, with their wives and children. Their tents are still more crowded; because, as the whole summer they are generally rambling up and down the coast, they endeavour to diminish their baggage as much as possible.

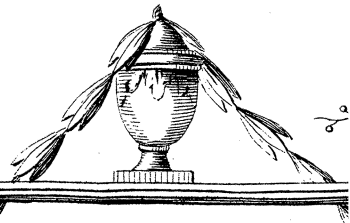
In the summer they find no difficulty in procuring food; but it is not so with them in winter, against which season they dry fish in the sun, and preserve the fat or oil of seals in skin vessels.

They have no sort of beverage among them, except water. They are not as yet fond of spirituous liquors, and there are but few that will taste of any. It is certain they are able to subsist a long while without eating; but when they have plenty, they devour a prodigious quantity. When they are pressed with hunger, and have nothing to satisfy it, they make their noses bleed, and suck the blood to support themselves.

They appear to be absolutely without any sort of religion; nor have they so much as an object of adoration among them. They live happy in their ignorance, and enjoy the blessing of being strangers to persecution and torture.

They are without any government; and no man is superior to another, but as he excels in strength or in courage, and in having the greatest number of wives and children. Being entirely without laws, general censure is the only punishment for the most detestable crimes.

They have no marriage ceremony. A wife is considered as property, and a husband lends one of his wives to to a friend. The wives are given very  
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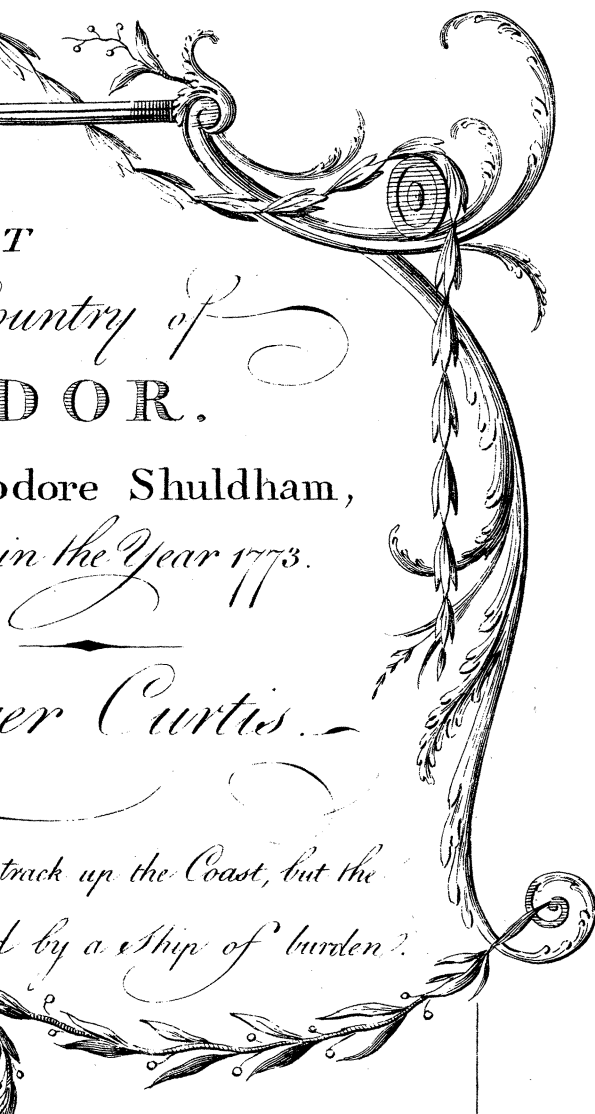
*Taken by order of Commodore  
in a Tour up the Coast in the*

*By*

*Lieutenant Roger*

*NB. the pricked line denotes M<sup>r</sup> Curtis's track up  
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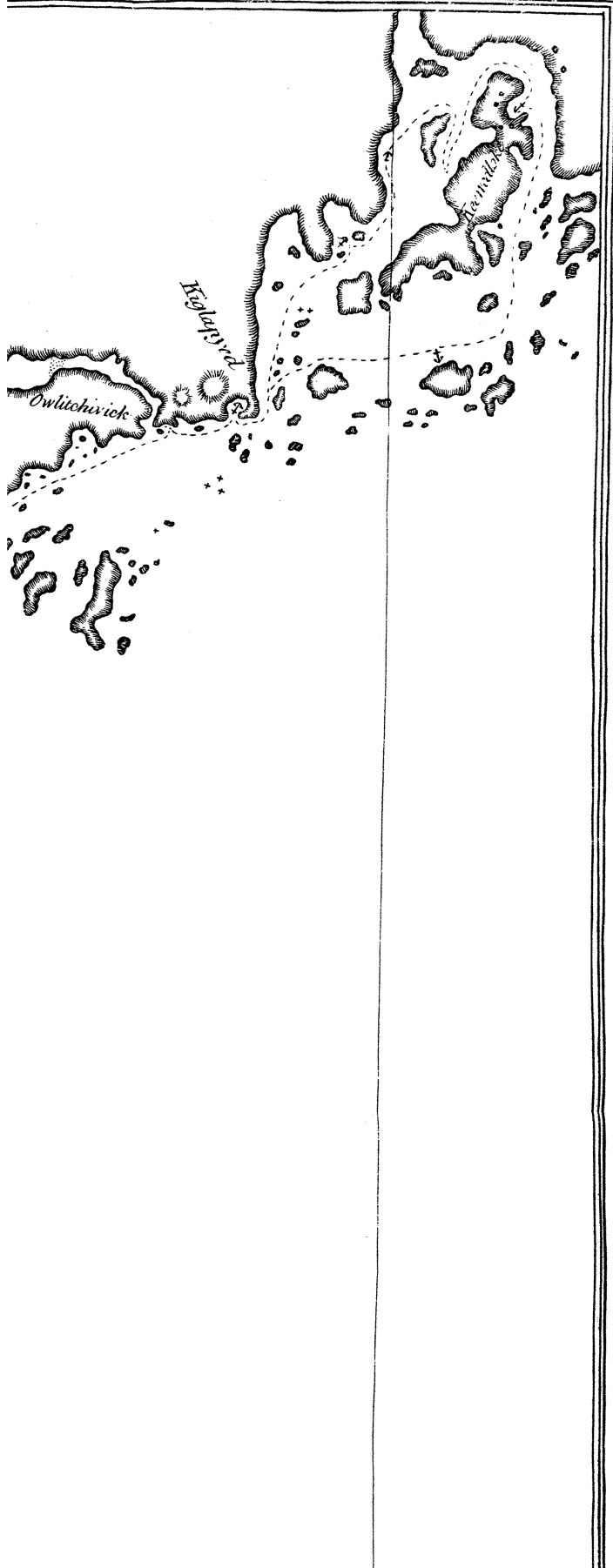
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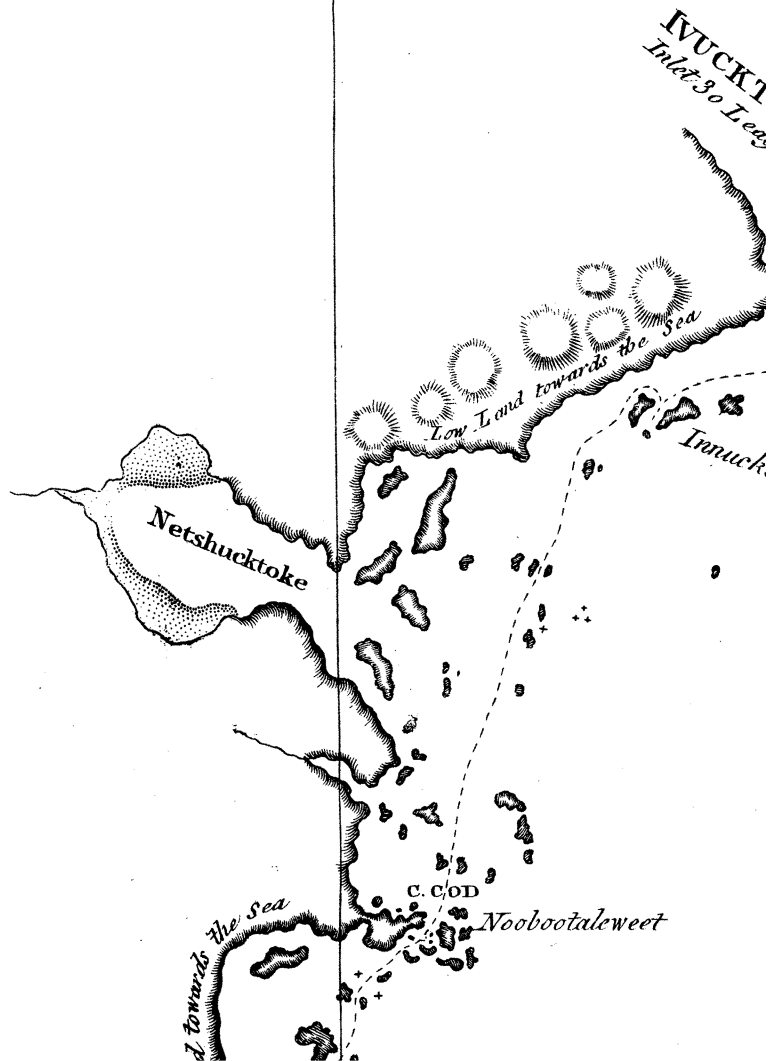
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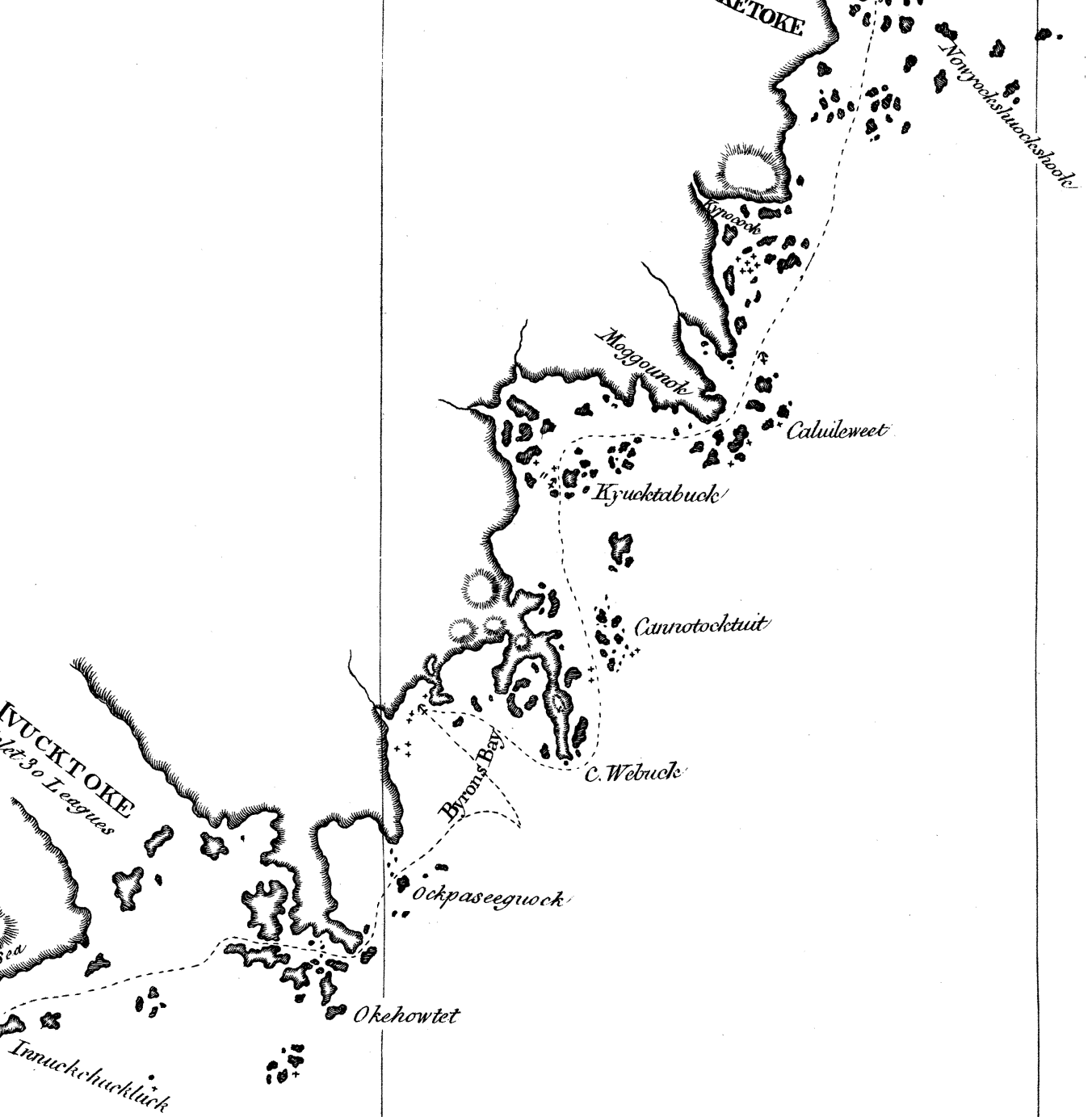








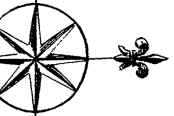


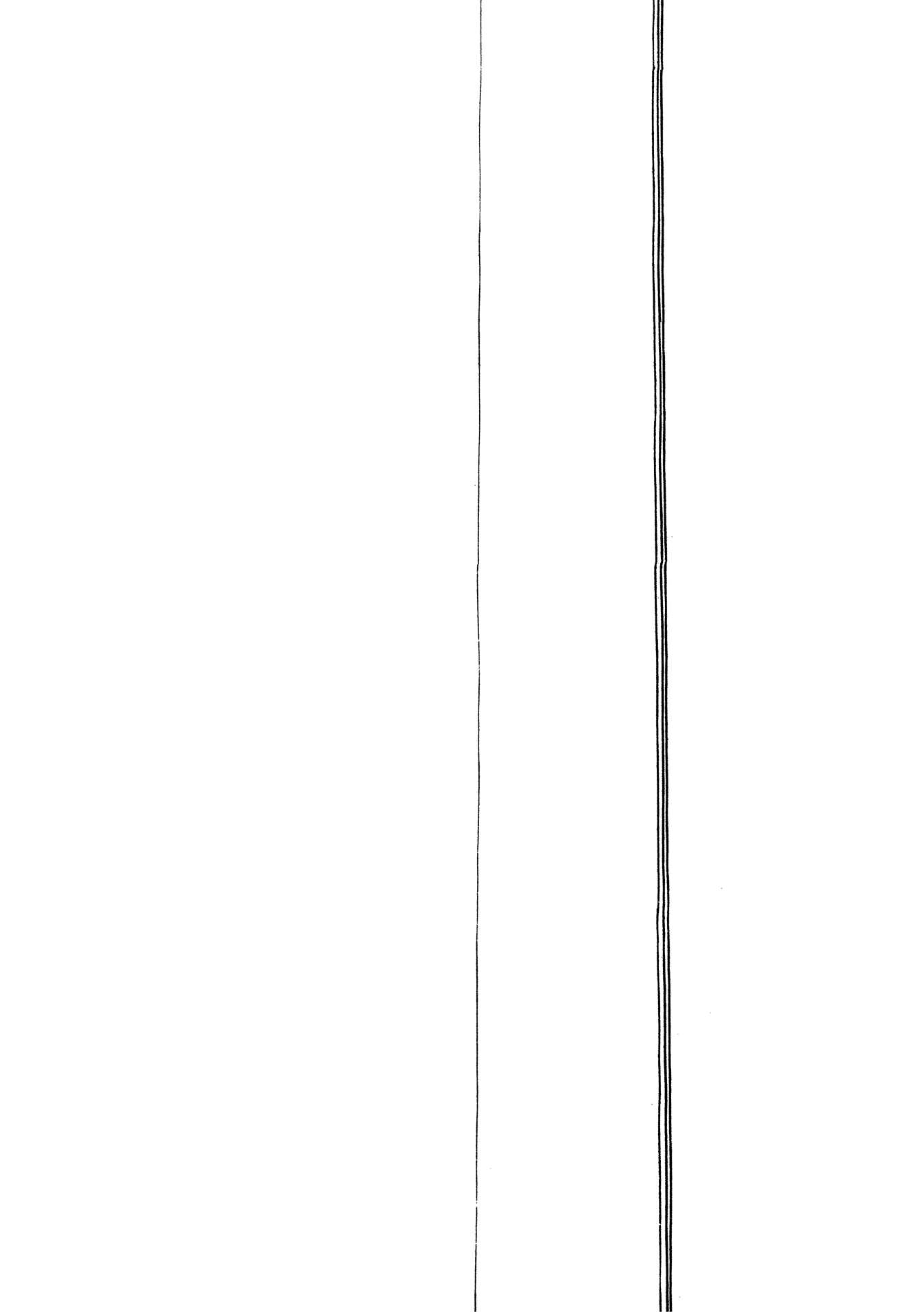


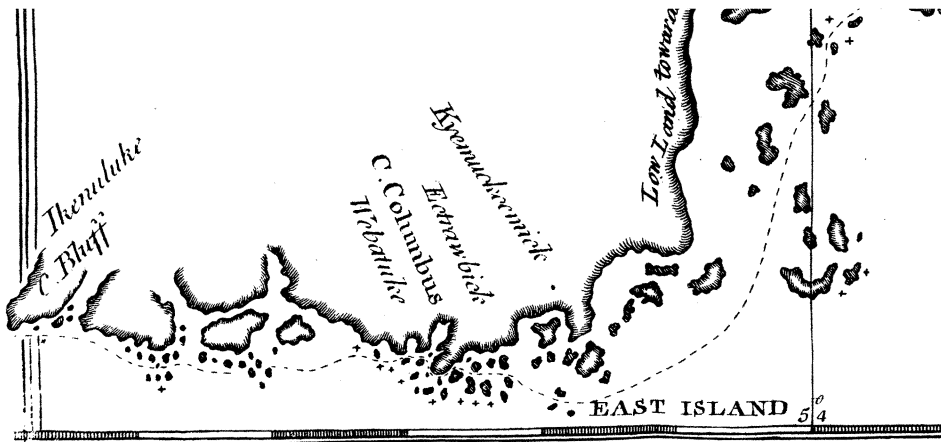
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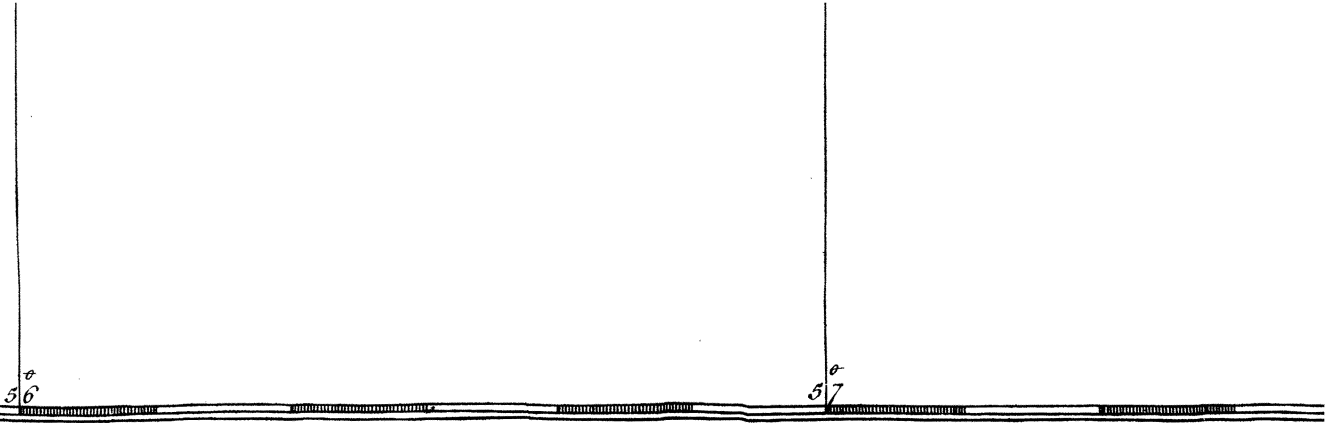




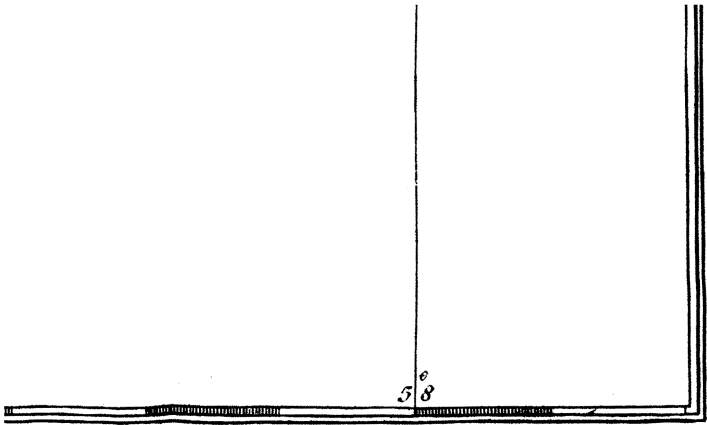


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early in marriage, frequently several years before consummation; and the reason of this is, because the girl's father, by that means, has one less in family to provide for.

The Esquimeaux men are extremely indolent; and the women are the greatest drudges upon the face of the earth. They do every thing except procure food, and even in that they are frequently assistants; so that they are at continual labour. They sew with the sinews of deer, and their needle-work is amazingly neat.

Their language is the same as the Greenlanders. It is not altogether devoid of harmony, and the women have very delicate voices.

These Indians are strangers to jealousy; they do not appear to be at all quarrelsome, and they very seldom steal from one another. They do not seem very passionate; but woe be to the woman that offends her husband.

If polygamy was not allowed among them, their numbers would be very few. Some of the women bear many children; but, in general, they are by no means fruitful. The wives live happily together; and, if deserving, share equally in their husband's favours.

They have but few diseases among them, and consequently are without physicians; they believe, that tying to their neck or wrists the particular part of some fish or animal, according to the complaint, will produce a cure. The most dreadful malady upon earth, has not as yet reached them: nor have they ever been visited by the small pox.

These Indians cannot reckon numerically beyond six; and their compound numbers reach no farther than twenty-one. Every thing beyond is a multitude.

They live always upon the sea-shores, from their dread of the Mountaineers. Their canoes contain only one person; they are extremely long in proportion to their breadth, being upwards of twenty feet by two; they are covered with skins, and are extremely light, so that they are overset with the least inclination to one side or the other. It is really a very extraordinary circumstance, that though these people are almost ever in their canoes, which are so excessively ticklish, there is not one among them that can swim.

They navigate their shallops without a compass in the thickest fogs, and are very good coasters. They have always a vast number of dogs in their camp, which are of several uses. These animals serve as a guard; they are food; their skins are valuable for cloathing; and they draw their sledges in winter. They have not the power of barking, but their howl is hideous; they are large, and have a head like a fox, whereas the dogs of the Mountaineers are extremely small. The Samojedes and the Laplanders train the rein-deer to their sledges. The country of Labradore produces these animals; but they are only serviceable to the Esquimeaux for food and raiment.

The weapons of these Indians are, the dart and the bow and arrow. They are not very expert in the use of either; although it is with these they defend

send themselves, and procure the necessaries of life.

Of their NUMBERS.

This is a calculation not easily formed. I have been at some pains to obtain information upon this head; and by the means which I shall pursue, of their populousness one may be able to make a tolerable estimation.

Leaving the straits of Belleisle, and proceeding northwards, the first tribe, or settlement, you come to, is that of Ogbucktoke. Here they have the most boats, by reason of their being nearest to the Europeans; and allowing fifteen persons to each boat, including men, women, and children, which is rather an under-rating, the boats being eighteen, the number of this tribe will be,

270

The next tribe is at Nonynoke, where the Moravians are settled. These have only five boats; but then they are more crowded, so admitting twenty to a boat their number is,

100

Keewedloke is the seat of the next tribe. Here they have no more than six boats; yet notwithstanding, they are the largest tribe upon the coast. My Indian imagined them to be one third more numerous than the Ogbucktoke tribe, so that they amount to about

360

Nepawktoot,

70

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800

	Brought over,	800
Cannuklookthuock, nearly equal to Keewed-	}	345
loke, suppose,		
Chuckluck, about		140
Chuckbelweet,		40
Noolatucktoke,		30
Nuckvauk,		60

Hitherto, as I was myself no farther than Keewedloke, I have been guided in my computation by the Indian that accompanied me; but he having never been beyond Nuckvauk, imagines, by what he has heard related, that at the following places, which are all the settlements he has ever heard of, there may be at each, upon an average, about thirty :

Cummucktobick,	30
Kidlenock,	30
Toogeat,	30
Congerbaw,	30
Ungabaw,	30
Ivevucktoke,	30
Igloo-ockshook,	30

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If this calculation comes any thing near the truth, the **ESQUIMEAUX** inhabitants of **LABRADORE** are far from being numerous; and those savages who inhabit the inland parts are still less populous.

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C H A R T

*of part of the Country of*  
**L A B R A D O R.**

*Taken by order of Commodore Shuldham,*  
*in a Tour up the Coast in the Year 1773.*

*By*  
*Lieutenant Roger Curtis.*

N.B. the prickled line denotes Mr Curtis's track up the Coast, but the same passage must not be attempted by a Ship of burden.

