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MOOSEX a Cape Breton Extinction It was a long journey, across both space and time, that brought the moose from its center of dispersal, somewhere in Asia, across the Bering Strait and on west across the North American continent. Then the Wisconsin Ice Sheet • the most recent glaciation • moved south leaving only pockets of suitable moose habitat. And in these habitats moose survived and interbred, creating the sub-species of moose we know today. As the ice receded, the range of the moose became larger and the animal moved north. Its present range then encircles the earth in mixed boreal coniferous forests, as far south as about halfway between the north pole and the equator. It was the sub-species *Alces alces americanus* that eventually came to Cape Breton. The moose is a strange, shocking animal to come upon • six feet tall at the shoulder and bearing an enormous block of body atop tall slender legs. Its appearance plus the usefulness of the creature for meat, clothing, lodging etc., kept man intimate with it and provoked legends. Pliny in the first century said that it had no joints in the hind legs, leaned against trees to sleep, and could be trapped by sawing part way through a suitable tree. He wrote, "Its upper lip is so extremely large, for which reason it is obliged to go backwards when grazing; otherwise, by moving onward the lip would get doubled up." The French called the moose *l'elan* and *l'originai*, and preserved for us Indian methods of curing themselves with portions of the animal's body, as well as the belief that to dream of moose meant one could expect long life. The Indians told of a Great Elk of monstrous size with legs so long 8 feet of snow was no problem, equipped with a sort of human-like arm proceeding from his shoulders • the other elks forming his court and rendering services he requires. Denys has left us reports of Micmac hunting practices in the mid-17th century. Winter was the best hunting season: "...Snowshoes were used, by means of which one marches over the snow without sinking in, especially in the morning, because of the freezing in the night. At that time it bears the Dogs, but the Moose does not find good going, because he sinks into the snow, which fatigues him greatly in travelling. To find the Moose the Indians ran about from one place to another, seeking wood that was bitten. For, at this time of year they eat only the twigs of wood of the year's growth. Where the Indians found the wood eaten, they met straightway with the animals, which were not far distant, and approached them easily, they being unable to travel swiftly. Then they speared them with the lance...at its end is fixed that large pointed bone which pierces like a sword. But if there are several Moose in the band, they made them flee. At that season the Moose arranged themselves one after another and made a large ring of a league and a half or two leagues, and sometimes of more, and beat down the snow so well by virtue of moving around, that they no longer sank into it. The one in front, becoming weary, dropped to the rear. But the Indians, who were more clever than they, placed themselves in ambush and waited for them to pass, and there speared them. There was always one person chasing them; at each circuit always one of them fell; but in the end they scattered into the woods ...There always fell 5 or 6 and, when the snow would



carry, the Dogs followed what? ever ones were left. Not a single one coty.d escape." The Jesuit Relations give ample evidence that the hunting of moose on snow was a mainstay of the Indian in winter, if the snow was soft or scant they were often reduced to misery if not starvation. Denys: "The hunting of the Moose in summer took place by surprising them....Having found (their tracks) they followed it, and they knew by the track, and even by the dung, whether it was male or female, and vdiether it was young or old. By its track they also knew whether they were near the beast; then they considered whether there was any meadow or thicket nearby where the beast was likely to be....They were rare- &&. PRINTERS LTD. 180 TOWNSEND STREET, SYDNEY, N. S. TELEPHONE (902) 564'245 Formerly Cape Breton Printers All Rooms Overlook Sydney Harbour Vista Motel King's Road, Sydney, N.S. RESERVATION NUMBER: 539-6550 Cape Breton's Magazine/17