

In 1926, with a view to improving the welfare of the native population, the Dominion Government undertook the introduction of a herd of reindeer to a suitable area in the Mackenzie District of the Northwest Territories. Reindeer have long had an important place in the economy of peoples in various parts of northern Europe and Asia, providing them with food and clothing and a means of livelihood at all seasons of the year. The introduction of these animals to Alaska from Siberia during the latter part of the nineteenth century relieved growing destitution among the natives along the Arctic coast and provided an industry that is still serving their needs and interests.

Previous attempts to introduce reindeer into Canada as a source of food and clothing were unsuccessful. The first important venture appears to have been made by the International Grenfell Association. Commencing in 1907, the late Sir Wilfrid Grenfell brought reindeer from Norway to northern Newfoundland with a view to their later use in Labrador. Although the original herd of 250 animals increased in a few years to more than 1,200 head, and many of the animals were landed on the southeastern coast of the Province of Quebec, a series of misfortunes culminated in the failure of the venture. In 1921, the Hudson's Bay Reindeer Company landed 550 reindeer from Norway on southern Baffin Island, but the animals soon scattered and dwindled rapidly in numbers, and the scheme was abandoned.

Notwithstanding these reverses, observers believed that there was a place for reindeer in the economic life of Canada. This opinion was supported by the successful introduction of reindeer into Alaska as mentioned above.

The Establishment of the Main Herd.—In 1919 a Royal Commission was appointed by the Dominion Government to study the possibilities of developing reindeer and musk-ox industries in the Arctic and sub-Arctic regions of Canada. A vast amount of information was assembled and studied, and in 1922 the Commission recommended the establishment of experimental herds of reindeer in locations to be selected.

Preliminary Investigation.—Following up the recommendations of the Royal Commission, the Canadian Government undertook an extensive investigation to ascertain if areas in northern Canada would be suitable for reindeer pasturage, and in April, 1926, a botanist experienced in Arctic travel was appointed to conduct the survey. Prior to the study of the Canadian range, the investigator and an assistant visited Alaska to observe the conditions under which reindeer were herded. A survey of the grazing possibilities of the area lying between the Yukon-Alaska boundary on the west, Coppermine River on the east, Great Bear Lake on the south and the Arctic Ocean on the north was made in the years 1926-28.

The report of the investigations showed that conditions in some parts of the region examined were very suitable for the maintenance of reindeer. Two separate areas, one situated between the Alaska-Yukon Boundary and Franklin Bay, and the other north of Great Bear Lake, were estimated to be capable of supporting several hundred thousand head.

The Purchase of the Basic Stock.—Steps were accordingly taken to arrange for the delivery, by an Alaskan reindeer company, of 3,000 reindeer to a selected range near the mouth of Mackenzie River.

The selection of the stock for the drive was made in Alaska by the investigator mentioned. The animals numbered about 3,400 head. The greater proportion was does, with some 300 bucks and about 250 steers for food and draught