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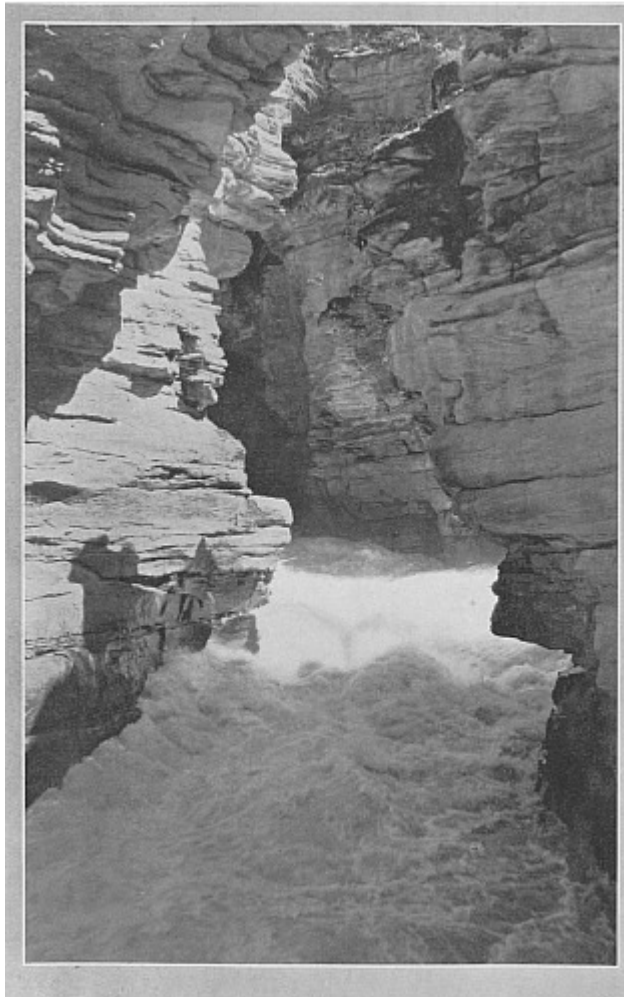
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On the Old Athabaska Trail



ATHABASKA GORGE [To List](#)

ON THE OLD ATHABASKA TRAIL

By
LAWRENCE J. BURPEE

With Nineteen Illustrations

**TORONTO:
THE RYERSON PRESS**

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**DEDICATED TO
MY VERY GOOD FRIEND
THE WARDEN**

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PREFACE

[Pg 9]

The pages that follow are an attempt to hang upon the somewhat slender thread of my own experiences the story of the Old Athabaska Trail, for many years the main thoroughfare of travel through the Rockies from the Athabaska to the Columbia. While the book was going through the press Dr. Thorington was good enough to send me a copy of his very entertaining and valuable narrative *The Glittering Mountains of Canada*, and I learned for the first time that we had conceived the same idea of rescuing from oblivion the story of some of the fur-traders and other travellers who many years ago travelled over Athabaska Pass. In Dr. Thorington's case these tales of the past are merely incidental to his own quite substantial achievements in the mountains. In my own case the book finds its excuse in the adventures of David Thompson, Ross Cox, Gabriel Franchère, Paul Kane and other western travellers in the days before the railway swept away a good deal of the romance of a journey and gave in its stead the by no means negligible advantages of speed and comfort.

OTTAWA, 1926.

On the Old Athabaska Trail

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CHAPTER I

UP THE WHIRLPOOL TO THE PUNCHBOWL

One afternoon, late in August, I sat on an inter-provincial boundary monument at the summit of Athabaska Pass, with one leg dangling in Alberta and the other in British Columbia. Before me lay a diminutive lake, whose curiously oval form perhaps suggested the odd name given to it a hundred years ago by fur-traders the Committee's Punchbowl. On the other side of the lake towered a gigantic cone once known as M'Gillivray's Rock, and behind me rose a series of terraces, culminating in the peak which David Douglas the botanist named Mount Brown. From either end of the Committee's Punchbowl ran a tiny stream. One ultimately found its way to the Arctic by way of the Mackenzie, and the other to the Pacific through the Columbia.

As I sat there, enjoying the view and cursing the mosquitoes, my mind ran back over the history of this once-famous thoroughfare, and I thought of the men who had travelled the Old Athabaska Trail since the days of David Thompson fur-traders, voyageurs and Indians, scientists, missionaries and travellers a few remembered because [Pg 12] of their books, a few more identified because mentioned in those books, and a thousand whose only record is the ancient trail through the woods below the pass and the deep, overgrown blazes in the trees along the trail.

My friend the Warden and I had left Jasper three days before, with our saddle-horses and a couple of pack-animals, and had made our way in leisurely fashion up the Athabaska and the Whirlpool to the pass. As far as the summit this was all in Jasper Park, but lay somewhat off the beaten track. For the most part of the way the only trails were the half-obliterated tracks of the fur-traders, for the Athabaska route was abandoned many years ago, and in recent times has been used only by an occasional trapper or a still more occasional traveller or alpine climber. Where the trail ran through heavy timber it was easily followed, but there were times when it petered out in a meadow or river-flat, and could only be picked up again after an exhaustive search.

The Warden's purpose in making the trip was to study the possibilities of the Whirlpool as a route for tourists into this remote corner of the park. My own was to follow the footsteps of David Thompson, and those who came after him, from the Athabaska up to the pass. I had already been over the old trail from Jasper down to the site of Jasper House and the two peaks that guard the entrance to the park, Roche à Perdrix and Boule Roche. [Pg 13]

We camped the first night in an old cabin, a few miles up the Whirlpool, and got away early the following morning. The trail led for some time through virgin forest, where in some of the larger spruce we found old blazes almost buried in the growth of the tree, mute witnesses to days long past, cut perhaps by fur-traders in the early days of the last century. Here also we encountered that most pestiferous and bloodthirsty scourge of the mountains, the bulldog, most aptly named, for he (or she, for aught I know) bites with all the viciousness and tenacity of a fighting pup. And between, behind, and before the bulldogs came companies and battalions of mosquitoes. But, after all, every human journey worth the trial must have some compensating disadvantages and discomforts.

It was while we were packing the horses after lunch that day that the Warden took me by surprise. He was usually the most mild-mannered of men, too even-tempered and philosophical to allow the ordinary annoyances of camp-life to disturb him. Indeed, he had roughed it in so many different quarters of the world that most of the things that irritate the pampered man of the town when he gets out in the wild made no impression upon him. It was a hot day, the horses were unusually restless, and the Warden, after three unsuccessful attempts to get the pack on one of them, had just managed to make everything secure and was completing the last stage of a diamond-hitch, pulling on the [Pg 14] rope with both hands and bracing himself against the animal's rump, when an evilly inspired bulldog lighted on his upper lip.

I saw it coming, from the other side of the pack, too far away to be of any help. Anyhow, what could one do under the circumstances? It is *infra dig.* to slap another man on the mouth, even to rid him of a bulldog, and no less forcible measures would have had any effect on that pertinacious insect. The Warden himself was so absorbed in his task that for a moment he was not conscious of the attack. When the fact was made painfully evident he gritted his teeth and hung on to the rope, pulling savagely to complete the hitch, determined that no mere fly should force him to yield.

Over the pack I watched the horrible conflict, the battle of wills, with fascinated interest. One moment I felt that the bulldog must win, the next it became certain from the way the Warden's teeth were clenched that it was a case of No surrender. He would complete the hitch at all costs. He glared down his nose. Sweat poured off his face. The bulldog was digging in his forceps with savage energy. One could almost see him bracing his feet for the effort. Finally the rope was made tight, and the Warden swung the first free hand around against his own mouth. The bulldog died in his moment of triumph, but surely none of his tribe ever had such a whole-hearted imprecation hurled at his departing spirit. [Pg 15] The silent Warden was for the moment inspired. And his audience could do nothing but look on with mute sympathy and understanding.

During the afternoon we crossed one or two branches of the Whirlpool, and nearly came to grief on a very steep and insecure slope of rock and shale, that finally brought us down to the main stream again, which here flows for several miles in a number of winding channels through a wide flat of pebbles and small boulders. We rode upstream, crossing and re-crossing the river, which even here lives pretty well up to its name. On our right was the ridge that divided the main stream from the Middle Whirlpool. To the left rose a number of fine peaks, Ross Cox, Scott, and Evans, with the impressive Scott glacier coming down from what is known as the Hooker Icefield.

Leaving the river-flat, we picked up the trail after half an hour's hunt, and climbed up over a ridge through the bush. In the distance we could hear the music of a small waterfall. We kept on hour after hour, hunting for feed for the horses. Finally a little meadow on the left bank of the river tempted us to make camp, under the shoulder of Mount Evans. Here for some reason we were comparatively free from both flies and mosquitoes, and, having turned the horses loose, pitched the tent, and eaten our supper, we lighted our pipes and made ourselves comfortable in front of the camp-fire.[Pg 16]

It was very restful, after a long day's pull over rough trails, to lie on the ground and listen to the wind in the pines, and the grinding of boulders in the Whirlpool beside us, sometimes like voices in drowsy conversation, sometimes like the distant growling of bears, making an odd undercurrent of sound beneath the soft monotone of the running water. Every little while the music of wind and water would be punctuated by the muffled roar of some distant avalanche, one of the most awe-inspiring sounds that one hears in the heart of the mountains.

Speaking of bears, I said, do you see many grizzlies in the park?

We weren't speaking of them, replied the Warden. However, we do run across them occasionally, and occasionally they run across us. One of our fellows had a queer experience last spring. He was working in the corner of his cabin with his back to the door. Heard the door open and slam to. He called 'Hello!' thinking it was one of the men. Getting no answer, he glanced over his shoulder and made a quick grab for his gun. A grizzly had pushed in through the door, which shut to after him. The bear could see no way out, felt he was trapped, and turned savagely toward the man. The man was in a devil of a scrape. The bear was between him and the door, and he knew that if he tried to wriggle through the window the bear would certainly get him. Fortunately he[Pg 17] was a good shot, and kept his head. The skin made a fine floor-mat.

That reminds me, I said, of a story Ross Cox tells in his *Adventures on the Columbia*. It appears that in the spring of 1816 a party of fur-traders had been sent down the Flathead River. One evening while they were quietly sitting around a blazing fire eating a hearty dinner of deer, a large, half-famished bear cautiously approached the group from behind a large tree, and, before they were aware of his presence, he sprang across the fire, seized one of the men round the waist with his two forepaws, and ran about fifty yards with him on his hind legs before he stopped.

The man's comrades were so thunderstruck that for some time they lost all presence of mind, and ran to and fro in a state of fear and confusion, each expecting in his turn to be kidnapped. At length a half-breed hunter, Baptiste Le Blanc, seized his gun, and was in the act of firing at the bear, but was stopped by some of the others, who told him he would certainly kill their friend in the position in which he was then placed.

Meanwhile the bear had relaxed his grip of the captive, whom he kept securely under him, and very leisurely began picking a bone which the latter had dropped. Once or twice Louisson attempted to escape, which only caused the grizzly to watch him more closely; but, on his making another attempt, he again seized Louisson round the waist, and[Pg 18] commenced giving him one of those infernal embraces which generally end in death.

The poor fellow was now in great agony, and gave voice to the most frightful screams. Seeing Baptiste with his gun ready, he cried out, '*Tire! tire! mon cher frère, si tu m'aimes. Tire, pour l'amour du bon Dieu! À la tête! À la tête!*' This was enough for Le Blanc, who instantly let

fly, and hit the bear over the right temple. He fell, and at the same moment dropped Louisson, but gave him an ugly scratch with his claws across the face, which for some time afterward spoiled his beauty. After the shot Le Blanc darted to his comrade's assistance, and with his hunting-knife quickly finished the bear, and pulled Louisson out from under him, pretty thoroughly frightened, but otherwise not much the worse for his experience, barring the scratch.

Humph! grunted the Warden. Where d'you say you got that yarn?

Ross Cox, I replied, the old fur-trader after whom that peak above the flats was named. He came through here in 1817, going east, and wrote a pretty good book on the fur trade. More human than some of them. Don't you believe the bear story?

Oh, may be, said the Warden cautiously. A bear might do that sort of thing if he was starving. Usually they keep away from a fire. Of course rum things sometimes happen. There was a trapper who [Pg 19] had a narrow escape last year. He had had a heavy day, found himself a long way from camp at sundown, and slept behind a log. He was tired, and slept later than usual. Finally a noise woke him, and he found himself looking up into the gaping jaws of a huge grizzly, which was straddled over him.

He knew that if he made any sudden movement he was done for. His gun was beside him, but the chances of using it were mighty slim. However, he must make the attempt. It was that or nothing. Very slowly and cautiously he drew it into position, freezing into rigidity whenever the bear grew suspicious. Finally he let fly, and pretty near blew the old fellow's head off. By great good luck he kept clear of the claws, but pretty nearly had the life crushed out of him when the heavy body came down on top. Managed to pull himself clear finally, more dead than alive, and an awful sight.

The Warden refilled his pipe, lighted it with a burning twig, and remarked, Bears certainly are queer cattle. There was Pete, now, over on the Miette. He walked into his cabin one morning an' found a bear lying on his bed. Pete slammed the door after him and ran round to the front, only to meet the bear coming through the window. He yelled and the bear growled, and they both beat it in different directions.

I glanced at the Warden reproachfully. Whose leg do you think you're pulling? I asked.

The Warden got up, stretched himself, knocked [Pg 20] the dottle out of his pipe and put it in his pocket. A man, said he disgustedly, can tell lies by the yard, and get away with it; but when he's telling nothin' but God's unvarnished truth some tenderfoot is sure to doubt his word. And he vanished into the tent.

We took our time the third day, knowing that, barring accidents, we could make the summit easily before nightfall. We stopped for lunch in a beautiful meadow, where the horses had a good feed. The Whirlpool, now reduced to a mere creek, rushed down through the middle of the meadow. We found a pool, and, as the day was hot, enjoyed a plunge into its depths.

The trail again managed to lose itself, and took a good deal of finding. Eventually we stumbled across it, up among the rocks on the hillside. We rode on toward the summit, the timber getting smaller as we advanced. Marmots whistled their peculiarly mournful note, and one particularly fat old chap sat on top of a boulder watching us superciliously as we went by.

The trail ran through a meadow, full of alpine flowers, and an occasional patch of snow. Finally we surmounted a little hillock and saw before us three little lakes, one in Alberta, one in British Columbia, and the middle one, the Committee's Punchbowl, straddling the summit, half in one province and half in the other.



THE OLD

ATHABASKA TRAIL

From a water-colour in the Canadian Archives by Captain Warre [\[To List\]](#)

[Pg 21] We rode on and pitched our tent beside the third lake, in British Columbia, facing M'Gillivray's Rock and Kane Glacier, with the peak that has been named Mount Hooker in the background. The four horses, Highbrow and Bill, the saddle-horses, and Rastus and Ginger, the pack animals, were turned loose to try the merits of British Columbian grass. For some time we saw nothing of them, as they were feeding in a meadow beyond the lake and behind some trees. They were too hungry to think of mischief. Finally, however, the maddening attentions of clouds of mosquitoes and bulldogs overcame all other considerations, and, under the leadership of Highbrow, they started back along the trail for Jasper. Fortunately I caught a glimpse of the leader as he rounded the end of the lake, and by sprinting along the hillside just managed to head them off.

The following morning we moved camp up to the Punchbowl. This historic spot was covered with the remains of previous camps, ancient and modern, from the old days of the fur trade down to the recent inter-provincial boundary surveys. Before lunch I tried a swim in the Punchbowl, and found a wonderful spot to dive from a rock covered half a foot deep with moss, and the moss almost hidden under a softly glowing mass of pink heather. The water was deliciously clear and cold, but one had to hustle into one's clothes, with only a most perfunctory attempt at drying, to escape being eaten alive.

In the afternoon, thinking to get some pictures of the pass and the peaks on either side, I climbed up [Pg 22] the rocks to the first terrace, only to find that the next terrace offered an even finer prospect. Leaving the camera here, on an exposed rock, I clambered up one terrace after another, gaining an ever wider and more glorious view of the mountains. Finally I thought I might have time to get up to the summit of Mount Brown, but the declining sun and an imminent

storm made it wise to turn back. As it was, I could not find the camera in the failing light, and had to climb up for it the next morning. But there was compensation in some wonderful effects of low-lying clouds swirling down the pass into Alberta. And when the storm finally broke, and one great peak after another was blotted out, one stood spellbound by the splendid pageantry, as the royal reverberations crashed up and down the pass. It was worth a wetting.

The fifth morning we started back down the Whirlpool, making a long day of it to reach a good camping ground that is to say, ground with good feed for the horses, for, after all, if one travels on horseback that must be the first consideration. We passed on the way an old trail to Canoe Pass, which the Warden promised himself to look into at some future time. The pack-horses, by the way, offered an unfailing source of amusement by their transparent attempts to excite sympathy whenever the loads were put on their backs. It mattered not what you started with, light or heavy, they immediately began a heart-breaking moan, and kept it up^[Pg 23] until the pack was finally roped. It sounded as much as anything else like a decrepit foghorn, and was pure bunkum, as both Rastus and Ginger knew perfectly well, and probably knew that we knew, but kept it up either from force of habit or on the very off-chance that they might fool us some day.

After the tent had been pitched and everything made snug, I wandered up a little tributary of the Whirlpool looking for rainbow trout, but without much success. The fish were there, but they were not hungry, or were otherwise engaged. However, there was compensation in sitting on a mossy bank at the edge of the stream after sundown, and enjoying the always gorgeous panorama of the mountains. I remember one peculiarly effective picture an extraordinarily jagged peak with a woolly cloud poised on its very summit, and immediately above it the evening star. Then one turned to earth, and found wonderful shadowy vistas down long aisles of pine, with somewhere in the distance the wild note of the whiskey-jack. That night, too, we were awakened about midnight by coyotes shrieking in chorus like a band of lost souls. About as uncomfortable a sound to listen to in the depth of the night as can well be imagined.

The following day we were unlucky. Rode all morning through one shower after another until we were pretty well soaked. The trail ran through heavy brush, all of it saturated and dripping; the^[Pg 24] footing was bad for the horses, boggy ground with boulders underneath, and a good many fallen trees. Altogether we had a rather uncomfortable time. Also we were worried about the ford at the West Branch, which was bad enough at any time, and decidedly dangerous at high water.

We got there about noon, and, as the rain had temporarily stopped, decided to unpack the horses and give them a rest, and get some lunch ourselves. With some difficulty we managed to coax fire out of the very unsatisfactory fuel at hand, and made a pot of tea. Only just in time, too, as the rain came down again harder than ever. Hastily packing the horses, we rode down to the river. It looked bad, and under ordinary circumstances we would not have thought of attempting it. But we had had several hours' rain, and there was every reason to believe that it had been coming down hard up in the pass. The river was rising very rapidly, and, if we did not attempt the ford now, we would probably have to camp in that very uncomfortable spot, with practically no feed for the horses, for two or three days. That was out of the question, so we made up our minds to get across somehow.

The packs were given an additional tightening, and we made sure that everything was snug both on them and the saddle-horses. Then the two pack-animals were roped together, and, the Warden leading, we started across. It is always difficult to realise, until you are actually in it, the [Pg 25] extraordinary force of water running down a narrow, tortuous channel at a very steep slope. This little stream, never anything but boisterous, was now a roaring torrent. Its bed was of large round boulders, and, with such footing and the terrific force of the current, it seemed almost inconceivable that any horse could manage to keep on his feet.

The Warden, coaxing his own horse along, and dragging the pack-animals after him, gradually edged his way across, and finally reached the opposite bank. As he did so, however, the first pack-horse was struggling through the worst part of the ford, and the little one behind was for a moment or two swept completely off his feet. It was a nervous moment, as if the animal should be rolled over by the current he would be done for; the heavy pack would keep his head under, and probably the first horse would be pulled down with him.

Fortunately the gallant Highbrow stood the strain nobly, the first pack-horse kept his feet, and finally the Warden succeeded in getting all three ashore, with no worse damage than a little water in the provisions. Meanwhile I had watched the performance from the other bank, unable to give any practical assistance. My own horse did not like the situation at all, and only entered the stream with great reluctance. When finally we got out to the middle, he stood shivering, looking wildly to one bank and the other. No amount of coaxing would induce him to move forward another step, so that [Pg 26] I had to let him turn back. After a little rest, I persuaded him to try it again. When we reached the middle Bill decided that he might as well make the best of a bad job, and with a wild scramble we finally made the bank, wet but contented. One felt more for the horse than oneself, while the current was swirling wildly past, and Bill groped for a footing on the tops of slippery boulders several feet under water; but after I got safely ashore, it suddenly struck me that, if Bill had got adrift, my chances of coming out alive would have been too slight to be worth reckoning.

Fortunately for us the rain stopped soon after we crossed the West Branch, and, although we were now thoroughly soaked between the rain and the river, we were so relieved to have come out of the affair with everything intact that this seemed a negligible discomfort, and we rode on quite contentedly to an early camp, where a big fire soon dried our clothes and restored our tempers.

This was our last evening in camp, and, as we sat around the fire, talking over the events of the trip up to the Committee's Punchbowl, the Warden said, "They tell me that a chap named Thompson was the first man that went through Athabaska Pass. I was deeply interested in David Thompson and his work as a geographer and explorer, as well as in the history of Athabaska Pass, and had stuffed a lot of notes into my bag when I left home so that I might study certain doubtful points on the spot." [Pg 27] Consequently I was better armed than a man usually is to answer the question.

As a matter of fact, I said, "Thompson is the first man who left any narrative of his journey through the pass, or, at any rate, his is the only account that has survived or of which we have any record. But he is not the first man who travelled through the pass. His own narrative shows that on his famous journey of 1810-11 he took as a guide one Thomas, an Iroquois, who, of course, must have gone that way before or he could not have acted as guide. Also Thompson's

contemporary in the fur trade, Alexander Henry, who met Thompson as he was starting out on his journey, mentions in his journal that a party of Nipissing Indians and 'freemen' (that is to say, fur-traders who were not connected with any of the trading companies, but hunted on their own) had followed the same route over the mountains some years before, and Thompson found traces of this party when he himself went through. Also Gabriel Franchère, another fur-trader, who went through Athabaska Pass in 1814, makes the positive statement that 'J. Henry first discovered the pass.' He probably means William Henry, who built Henry House near the mouth of the Miette.

Excuse these very learned remarks, I said, which don't amount to much after all. Thompson was the real discoverer of the pass, because he is the first man to have left any account of his journey.

The Warden grunted, and got up to replenish the [Pg 28] fire. Since you know so much about it, he remarked ungraciously, who was Thompson, anyway?

But, I said modestly, I'm afraid I am only boring you.

Even if you are, he retorted, it's too early to turn in yet. Go ahead. I might as well suffer in the interests of posterity. You're probably trying this stuff on me before putting it in a book. Who was Thompson?

David Thompson, I said, was born in Westminster, England, in 1770. He was a Welshman by origin. Got his education at the Grey Coat School, and entered the service of the Hudson's Bay Company at the age of fourteen. He sailed from London in the Company's ship *Prince Rupert*, and reached Fort Churchill, on Hudson Bay, in the autumn of 1784. He spent the winter under Samuel Hearne, the famous explorer, and was then sent down the coast to York Factory. In July, 1786, he says in his journal that he was sent inland equipped with a trunk, a handkerchief, shoes, shirts, a gun and powder, and a tin cup, as one of a party to establish trading-posts on the Saskatchewan. He had picked up a little mathematics at the Grey Coat School, and later learned practical astronomy and surveying under Philip Turnor at Cumberland House.

Thompson was really a very extraordinary man. He remained with the Hudson's Bay Company for [Pg 29] thirteen years, doing his duty faithfully as a trader, but all the time travelling to and fro throughout the unexplored and partly explored regions of the west, making careful surveys of the country, and never missing a chance to take astronomical observations and fix the positions of trading-posts and other definite points. One of these was Cumberland House. Listen to what J. B. Tyrrell, himself an eminent surveyor and explorer, has to say about his work at that particular place: 'At that time there were very few other points on this whole continent of America whose positions on the earth's surface were as accurately known as this remote trading-post on the Saskatchewan. On the maps of Canada its position has been changed many times, but the latest surveys have brought it back to the place to which it was assigned by this young astronomer one hundred and twenty-five years ago.'

At the end of thirteen years Thompson became convinced that the Hudson's Bay Company was not interested in exploration, and decided to transfer his services to its great rival, the North West Company. He remained with the latter company until 1812, and while with them carried out some of his most important work as an explorer and surveyor. In fact, even to-day much of

the information on the maps of Western Canada and the north-western part of the United States was obtained originally from David Thompson.[Pg 30]

He is said to have resembled John Bunyan in appearance, to have been bold and fearless both physically and morally, and to have had an extraordinary capacity for hard work. One who knew him in his latter years says he had a very powerful mind and a singular faculty for picture-making. 'He can create a wilderness and people it with warring savages, or climb the Rocky Mountains with you in a snowstorm, so clearly and palpably, that only shut your eyes and you hear the crack of the rifle, or feel snow-flakes on your cheeks as he talks.'

Thompson seems to have been one of the first of Canadian prohibitionists. He tells this story in his journal: 'I was obliged to take two kegs of alcohol (in his expedition to the Columbia valley in 1808) overruled by my partners, for I had made it a law to myself that no alcohol should pass the mountains in my company, and thus be clear of the sad sight of drunkenness and its many evils; but these gentlemen insisted upon alcohol being the most profitable article that could be taken for the Indian trade. In this I knew they had miscalculated; accordingly when we came to the defiles of the mountains I placed the two kegs of alcohol on a vicious horse, and by noon the kegs were empty and in pieces, the horse rubbing his load against the rocks to get rid of it. I wrote to my partners what I had done, and that I would do the same to every keg of alcohol, and for the next six years I had charge[Pg 31] of the fur trade on the west side of the mountains no further attempt was made to introduce spirituous liquors.'

Well, that's that, said the Warden. But I wish we had a little of his liquor here tonight.

CHAPTER II

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OUTWITTING THE PIEGAN

To understand how David Thompson happened to be up in this part of the mountains I said.

One moment, interrupted the Warden, as he ran across the meadow and relieved Highbrow from a rather embarrassing situation. Highbrow had been tied to a bush with a long rope, to check his weakness for wandering down the trail. He had grazed completely round the bush several times, and had finally succeeded, in some mysterious way known only to horses, in tangling himself up in what remained of the rope, fettering one leg after another, until finally he collapsed in the midst of the bush, looking the picture of injured innocence.

As I was saying, to make the story intelligible one must go back a bit and see what brought Thompson up here into the Athabaska country. He had been established for some years at Rocky

Mountain House, on the North Saskatchewan, near the mouth of the Clearwater. Here he had traded with the Piegan and other tribes of the Blackfeet confederacy. The Piegan were very haughty and overbearing, but Thompson had got along very well with them, and their War Chief, Kootanæ Appee, was his firm friend.[Pg 33]

The time came, however, when Thompson who was never satisfied to stay long in one place, and particularly was not content to have an unknown country lying within reach without making an attempt to explore it had made up his mind to cross the mountains and find out what lay on the other side. Also, as a fur-trader, he intended to get in touch with the Kootenay Indians and other tribes west of the Rockies, and build trading-posts in their country.

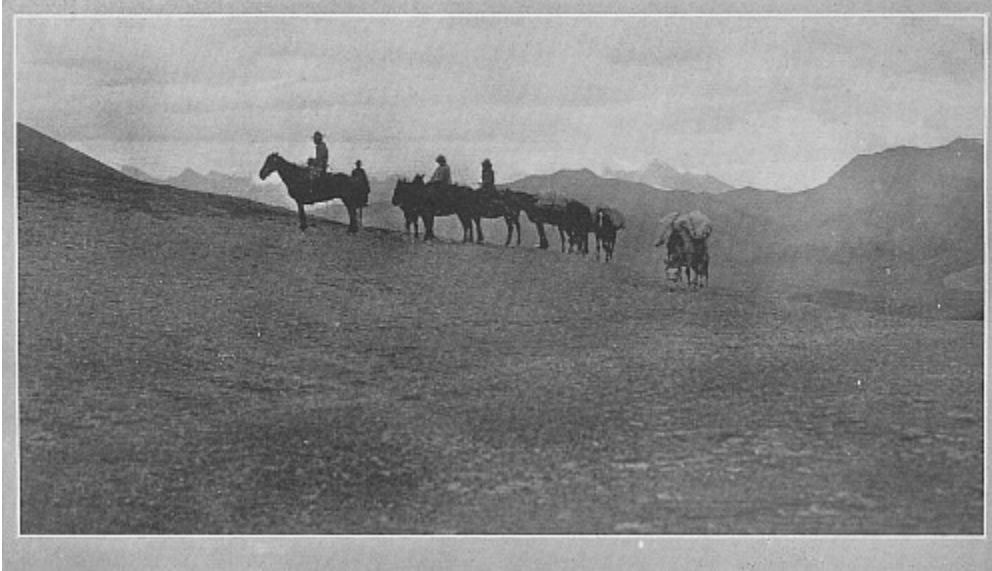
These plans in time became known to the Piegan, and aroused fierce indignation. After all, you could hardly blame them. If Thompson was allowed to cross the mountains, he would trade with the Kootenay, and would certainly supply them with guns and ammunition. The Kootenay and Piegan had been mortal foes for generations, the bone of contention being the right to hunt buffalo in the prairie and foothills east of the Rockies. This region the Piegan considered their own peculiar territory, and the herds of buffalo that roamed about it their own property.

For many years the Kootenay had been able to hold their own, and defend their right to hunt the buffalo. When the Piegan got firearms from the white traders, the situation immediately changed. The Kootenay, with their bows and arrows, were no match for the Piegan, and the latter finally drove them through the mountains, and kept them there. Now, if the Kootenay were armed by Thompson,[Pg 34] the superiority of the Piegan would be wiped out, and they would again have to fight on practically even terms for the monopoly of the buffalo. They made up their minds that the fur-traders must not be allowed to cross the mountains, and from that time kept a close watch on Thompson.

Being, like all the Blackfeet, fierce and intolerant of opposition, they would probably have taken effective means to check the operations of the fur-traders by wiping out Rocky Mountain House and its inhabitants, but were deterred partly by the fact that they had become dependent upon the traders for many things, and particularly for firearms, and partly by the influence of their War Chief, Kootanæ Appee, who was, as has been said, Thompson's warm friend.

As it was, they set a watch on Howse Pass, which was then the main thoroughfare through the mountains, and made it known that neither Thompson nor any of his men would be permitted to go up to the pass.

David Thompson, however, was a patient man and he knew the Piegan like a book. Sooner or later they would grow tired of watching the pass, or would be drawn away by some more urgent business. The latter happened. News came to the Piegan that some of their warriors had been killed by traders on the Missouri. With native fickleness, they forgot Thompson, and turned all their energies to equipping a big war party to avenge the insult.



CROSSING A

PASS IN THE ATHABASKA COUNTRY [\[To List\]](#)

While they were away Thompson got his trading goods together, and, with a party of men, slipped through Howse Pass and down to the upper waters of the Columbia. Here, a little below what is to-day known as Lake Windermere, he built the first trading-post on the Columbia Kootenay House. This was in 1807. The building of this post, which marked the beginning of Thompson's splendid work as an explorer west of the mountains, was commemorated in 1922 with memorial ceremonies and the building on the shores of Lake Windermere of a monument to Thompson in the form of a reproduction of a typical trading-fort of the days of the fur trade.

Thompson knew that the Piegan would not be content to accept defeat meekly, and therefore spared no pains to make his fort safe against Indian attack. It was built in a commanding situation, of heavy timber fit to resist any weapon the Piegan could bring against it.

Here Thompson spent the winter comfortably enough. While they were building the fort game had been scarce, and they had been reduced to eating one of their horses. He says, by the way, that the meat was better than that of the wild horse, the fat not being so oily. Throughout the winter they had plenty of game, deer, and antelope, with a few mountain sheep, also some mountain goat.

He tells a good story in connection with the latter. In the spring he sent some of his men back through ^[Pg 36] the mountains with the skins collected during the winter, and included with them a hundred mountain goat skins, which, with their long, silky hair, he thought might prove a novelty in the London market. Some of the partners of the North West Company, however the 'ignorant, self-sufficient partners,' as he indignantly calls them poked fun at him, ridiculing the idea that mountain goat skins would find any sale in England. On his insisting, the skins were sent over to London, and, to the amazement and chagrin of the partners, were snapped up immediately at a guinea a skin, and the company was offered half as much again for another lot. The partners hurriedly wrote Thompson to send a further supply, but the latter, who was not without a certain strain of obstinacy, dryly replied that the hunting of the mountain goat was both

dangerous and difficult, and 'for their ignorant ridicule' he would send no more and he kept his word.

Ross Cox, one of Thompson's contemporaries in the fur trade, tells a somewhat similar story, the particular commodity being bear-skins instead of mountain goat. 'About twenty-five years ago,' he says (that would be about 1805), 'the company had a great number of bear-skins lying in their stores, for which there was no demand. One of the directors, a gentleman well known for the fertility of his expedients as an Indian trader, hit upon a plan for getting off the stock, which succeeded beyond his most sanguine expectations.[Pg 37]

He selected a few of the finest and largest skins in the store, which he had made into a hammer-cloth splendidly ornamented in silver with the royal arms. A deputation of the directors then waited upon one of the Royal Dukes with the hammer-cloth, and respectfully requested that he would be graciously pleased to accept it as a slight testimony of their respect. His Royal Highness returned a polite answer, and condescendingly consented to receive the present.

A few days afterwards the King held a levee, and his illustrious son proceeded to Court in his State-coach, with its splendid hammer-cloth. It attracted universal attention, and to every enquiry as to where the skins were obtained the answer was, 'from the North West Company.' In three weeks there was not a black, or even a brown, bear-skin in the company's warehouse, and the unfortunate peer who could not sport a hammer-cloth of bear was voted a bore by his more lucky brethren.

Talking of bears began the Warden.

Now, look here, I cried, I can stand anything in reason in the way of a bear story, but yours are out of reason. A reasonable bear story may be compounded of fact and fiction, but the proportion shouldn't run more than twenty-five per cent. fiction. Yours are about ninety-nine per cent.

All right, retorted the Warden, go ahead with your alleged facts.

If these are not facts, I said, the fault is with [Pg 38] old Thompson, for I'm quoting his own narrative. He had built his fort solidly, knowing that before long he would have to try conclusions with the Piegan. He learned that, when they discovered how he had slipped through the pass during their absence, they were furious, and, after a stormy council meeting, determined to send an expedition to destroy the trading-post. Knowing nothing of its sturdy proportions, they considered a party of forty men under a secondary chief sufficient.

The war party in time appeared before Kootenay House, and pitched their tents close to the gate. Thompson had six men with him at the time, with ten guns. He had bored large auger-holes through both the main walls and the bastions, by means of which he could command every approach to the fort, while he and his men remained under cover. He had a stock of dried provisions; not enough, it is true, for a long siege, but he was sufficiently versed in the ways of the Indian to know that that need never be anticipated. The Piegan had hoped to force them to surrender through lack of water, the fort standing on the summit of a high and steep bank above the river. But Thompson was too much for them. 'At night,' he says, 'with a strong cord we quietly and gently let down two brass kettles, each holding four gallons, and drew them up full, which was enough for us.'

The Piegan were at a loss what to do, for Kootanæ Appee had publicly warned the leader [Pg 39] of the war party, which had been formed against his advice, that he must bring back the warriors entrusted to his care, and that he must find means of destroying the enemy without losing his own men. As Thompson was always on the watch, and the walls of the fort were impregnable so far as they were concerned, the Piegan finally raised the siege and decamped, their retreat being hastened by the appearance of a party of Kootenay who were out hunting, and, being too weak to attack them, had hurried away to warn the tribe.

As Thompson afterwards learned from his friend Kootanæ Appee, the return of the war party to the Piegan village east of the mountains created a sensation. It was clear that the crushing of Thompson was not to be as simple a matter as they had supposed. Sakatow, the Civil Chief of the tribe, immediately summoned the chiefs and warriors in council and harangued them. He hated and feared Thompson, and was jealous of the popularity of Kootanæ Appee. Here was a way of striking at both, a way that might lead to the death of one or both, and in the meantime would, as he thought, turn them from friends into enemies.

With native cunning he advised that a strong war party must now be formed, and who so capable of leading it as the great War Chief, Kootanæ Appee? We must crush the Kootenay, he cried, and with them the white men who have put firearms into their hands. The Kootenay have been our slaves. [Pg 40] Now, if we are not careful, they will learn to be our masters. Let us crush them before they learn to use the firearms of the traders. The War Chief shall lead the warriors against our enemies.

Kootanæ Appee realised at once the dilemma upon the horns of which Sakatow had thrust him. If he consented he must lead a war party against his friend Thompson. If he refused he, the great War Chief he was disgraced, and his influence in the tribe would be a thing of the past. Rising to his feet, he said, 'I shall lead the battle according to the will of the tribe; but remember,' he cried, 'we may not smoke to the Great Spirit for success as we have done in the past. It is now ten winters since we made peace with the Kootenay. They have tented and hunted with us; yet, because they now have guns and iron-headed arrows, we must break our word of peace with them. We are now called to go to war with a people better armed than ourselves. Be it so, let the warriors get ready. In ten nights I will call upon them.'

On the ninth night the War Chief made a short speech to his warriors. Each man was to take with him ten days' provisions, for they would soon be out of the buffalo country and in the land of their enemies, where not a shot must be fired lest they be discovered. On the tenth night Kootanæ Appee made his final speech, exhorting the warriors and their chiefs to have their arms in good order and not to forget the provisions. He named a rendezvous. [Pg 41] 'There,' he said, 'I shall be the morrow evening and those who now march with me. There I shall await you five nights, and then march to cross the mountains.'

At the end of the period about three hundred warriors, under three chiefs, had assembled. They made their way through one of the passes of the Rockies, and came to the banks of the Columbia about twenty miles from Kootenay House. As was their custom, Kootanæ Appee sent a couple of men by another route to approach the fort and report in what condition it was for defence. The spies came to Kootenay House under the guise of hunters. Thompson, however, was not deceived. He knew what the men were there for, and, while apparently playing into their hands, laid his plans to use them to serve his own purposes.

He showed them around the fort, in such a way as to emphasise its natural strength and the facilities for defence. 'I plainly saw,' says Thompson, 'that a war party was again formed, to be better conducted than the last, and I made my preparations to avert it.' The following morning two of the Kootenay arrived. They glared at the Piegan like tigers. This fitted in perfectly with Thompson's plans. Telling the Kootenay to sit down and smoke, he called the Piegan outside and asked them which way they intended to return. They pointed to the north. Thompson told them to go to Kootanæ Appee and his war party, and gave them a message to the War^[Pg 42] Chief that he would understand. He also sent presents: six feet of tobacco to the chief, to be smoked among them, with three feet and a fine pipe of red porphyry and an ornamented pipe-stem for himself and eighteen inches of tobacco for each of the subsidiary chiefs. In the fur trade, in Thompson's day, tobacco, known as Brazil tobacco, was made up in long twists and sold by the foot or inch.

Giving each of the spies a small piece of tobacco for himself, to ensure his fidelity and perhaps protect the presents, Thompson told them to be off quickly, as he could not protect them from the Kootenay. 'Remember,' he said, 'you are here on their lands as an enemy.'

'I was afterwards informed,' says Thompson, 'that the two Piegan went direct to the camp of the War Chief,' who was in council with the other chiefs and the principal warriors. The scouts delivered Thompson's message, laid the presents at the feet of Kootanæ Appee, and sat down.

Thereupon the War Chief that wily old savage proceeded to play the hand that Thompson had dealt to him. 'What,' he exclaimed, 'can we do with this man? He is too wise for us. He knows everything that we do. Our women cannot mend a pair of shoes but he sees them with his magic.' Then he thoughtfully picked up the pipe and stem and the tobacco, looked at them, and laid them down again where all the warriors could see them. 'What is to be done with these?' he asked. 'If we attack^[Pg 43] the fort, nothing of what is before us can be accepted.' Alluding, of course, to the Indian code which would not permit the acceptance of a gift from an enemy, or conversely, hostilities after a gift had been accepted.

To appreciate the humour of the situation, it must be understood that the war party had come away with an insufficient supply of tobacco, and that this precious commodity was now exhausted. Thompson had drawn this interesting fact from the spies, and was quite aware, as was also Kootanæ Appee, of the peculiar potency of the bribe offered in the interests of peace.

The eldest of the minor chiefs eyed the tobacco wistfully. 'You all know me,' he cried, 'who I am and what I am. I fear no man. I have attacked tents my knife could cut through them; our enemies had no defence against us, and I am ready to do so again. But to fight against logs of wood, that a ball cannot go through, to fight against people that we cannot see, to fight against people with whom we have been at peace that is what I am averse to. I go no farther.' He then cut a piece off the end of the tobacco, filled the red pipe, fitted the stem, and handed it to Kootanæ Appee, saying, 'It was not you that brought us here, but the foolish Sakatow, who himself never goes to war.' Kootanæ Appee solemnly lighted the pipe and took a puff or two, then passed it around the circle. They all smoked the pipe of peace, and, having done so, picked up their belongings, not forgetting the^[Pg 44] precious tobacco, and turned their faces homeward, 'very much,' says Thompson, 'to the satisfaction of Kootanæ Appee, my steady friend.' And he adds, with quite genuine and characteristic piety, 'thus by the mercy of good Providence I averted this danger.'

It would have been interesting to witness the meeting between Kootanæ Appee and Sakatow, when the war party returned to the Piegan village, with the honours nicely divided between the War Chief and the white trader, and both still alive to annoy the Civil Chief and interfere with his plans.

That's all very fine, said the Warden, but I don't see what it has to do with Athabaska Pass.

You will presently, I said. It was the direct result of the building of Kootenay House, and the hostility of the Piegan, that Thompson was finally forced to abandon Howse Pass which lay in Piegan territory and find another route farther north, from the eastern plains to the valley of the Columbia. That is how Athabaska Pass came to be for many years the main thoroughfare of the fur-traders through the Rockies.

CHAPTER III

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[Pg 45]

HOW THOMPSON FOUND THE PASS

It was late in the autumn of 1810 that Thompson, after being foiled by the Piegan in his attempt to get through the mountains by way of Howse Pass, found it necessary to change his plans and seek a route beyond the range of these troublesome Indians.

These Piegan, said the Warden, seem to have been a pretty aggressive lot.

They were. Alexander Henry, who, like Thompson, had traded with them for years, says that the Piegan 'are proud and haughty and studiously avoid the company of their allies (the other tribes of the Blackfeet confederacy), further than is necessary for their own safety.' He says that about twenty years before he wrote the Piegan once a numerous tribe had been reduced by smallpox to one hundred and fifty tents, but were again increasing in numbers. They had always had the reputation of being more brave and virtuous than their neighbours. 'Indeed,' dryly remarks Henry, 'they are obliged to be, surrounded as they are by enemies with whom they are always at war.'

The country which the Piegan called their own, according to Henry, and which they were known to [Pg 46] have inhabited since their first intercourse with traders on the Saskatchewan, lay along the foot of the Rockies, on Bow River, and as far south as the Missouri. The buffalo regulated their movements over this prairie country throughout the year, as they had to keep near the buffalo to obtain food. In summer it was their custom to assemble in large camps of from one hundred to two hundred tents, the better to defend themselves from their enemies. In winter, when there was less danger, they dispersed in small camps of ten or twenty tents, captured the buffalo in pounds, and hunted various animals for the sake of their skins, which they traded at

the posts of the North West Company for guns and ammunition, blankets, axes and other tools, vermilion, and other products of the white man.

Henry says that the ordinary dress of the Piegan was plain leather shoes, leather leggings reaching up to the hip, and a robe over all. This constituted their summer dress, though occasionally they wore an open leather shirt, which reached down to the thigh. Their winter dress differed little from that of summer. Their shoes were then made of buffalo hide dressed in the hair, with sometimes a leather shirt, and a strip of buffalo- or wolf-skin tied around the head. They never wore mittens. The young warriors had a more elegant dress which they put on occasionally, the shirt and leggings being trimmed with human hair and ornamented with a fringe and quill-work. In full dress they always carried a gun^[Pg 47] in their arms, with powder-horn and shot-pouch slung on their backs, as well as their ancient weapons, the bow and arrow.

When they came in to trade, says Henry, young men were sent ahead to inform the traders of their approach and to demand a piece of tobacco for each principal man or head of a family. Six inches of twist tobacco was commonly sent, neatly done up in paper, to which was tied a small piece of vermilion, both tobacco and vermilion being regarded as tokens of friendship. The young men were treated to a glass of liquor, four inches of tobacco, and a small paper of vermilion, with which they immediately returned to their friends. The tobacco would then be delivered, and the men of the party would smoke it while the messengers related the news of the fort, and gave an account of their reception. This ceremony concluded, they moved on toward the fort in a long string.

On the day of their arrival the men assembled at a convenient spot in sight of the fort, where they made a fire and sat about it in dignified ease, smoking their pipes, while the women and children erected their tents near the stockades. That completed, the men arose and moved toward the fort in Indian file, the principal chief taking the lead, the others falling in according to rank or precedence, derived from the number of scalps taken in war.

The trader in charge of the fort was always expected to go out and shake hands with the Indians^[Pg 48] at a short distance from the gates, the farther he went to meet them the greater the compliment. This ceremony over, he walked at their head, and thus conducted them to the Indian hall in the fort. There he desired the principal chief to take the seat of honour, in the most conspicuous place, the others seating themselves according to rank around the room.

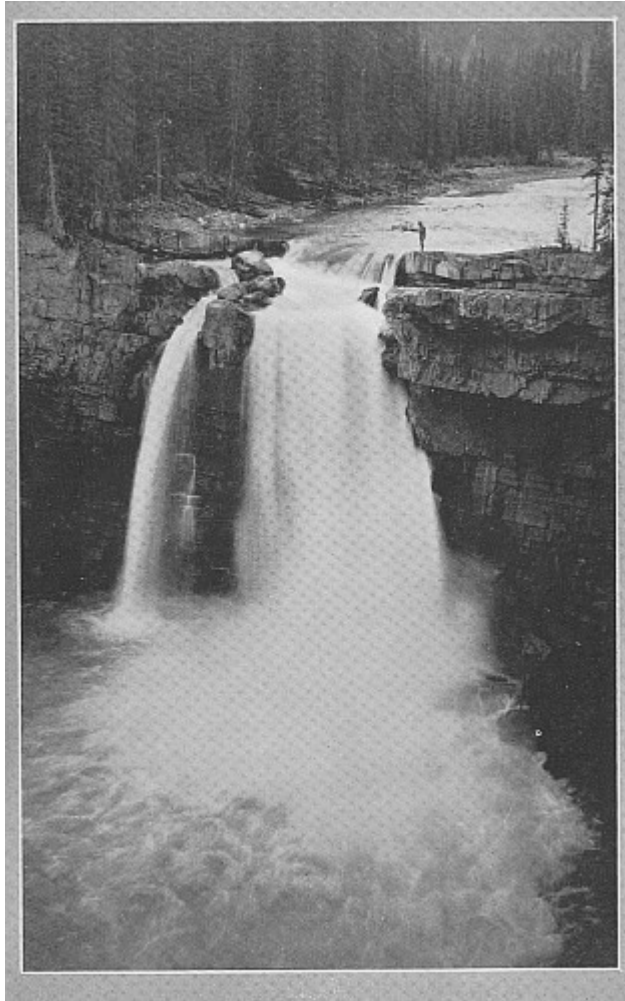
The pipe was then lighted and presented to the chief, who, taking a whiff, would blow it toward the earth while the stem was pointed up, then a second whiff blown up while the stem was pointed down, or perhaps toward the rising or setting sun. The chief would then pass the pipe to the next Indian on his right, and so on, the pipe travelling always with the course of the sun. All having taken a whiff of the trader's pipe, the principal chief would produce his own, which he filled and presented to the trader, who must take a few whiffs before it was sent round the circle. The compliment was considered greater if the chief presented the pipe to the trader to light. If the Indians were numerous, their own pipes were then demanded, filled by the traders, and presented to them, each Indian lighting his pipe according to his own particular notions of ceremony. 'But,' says Henry, 'we must always have people to hand them fire, as their consequential impertinence does not permit them to rise for the purpose.' The more pipes there were in circulation at once the greater the compliment.^[Pg 49]

After the first round each Indian was given half a gill of Indian liquor, beginning always with the principal chief, who was about as ceremonious in taking a drink as he was in smoking. He dipped his finger into the liquor and let a few drops fall on the ground, then a few drops were offered above, but that contented his sense of propriety the rest was disposed of without further delay. What Henry calls Indian liquor was merely alcohol very much diluted with water. Among some of the tribes it was believed that the intoxicating qualities of the liquor were put into it by the white man's magic, and it is recorded of one old chief that, on visiting a fort with some of his sons, he tasted it himself, and, finding it too strong, gravely requested the trader to order some of the spirit to depart before trusting it to the young braves. The trader as gravely carried the liquor into another room and added an equal quantity of water.

Henry says that if the party of Indians visiting the fort had a flag with them, more ceremony must be observed. In this case the flag-bearer walked ahead, though he might not be the principal man, precedence being allowed him out of respect for the flag. The trader would meet them as before, receive the flag, and carry it into the fort. The principal chief, when he came forward to shake hands with the trader, would frequently lead an extra horse by a line. This he would hand over to the trader as a present. Sometimes the horse^[Pg 50] would have a small parcel of furs or skins tied on his back to add to the value of the gift. The chief would then take off the handsomely painted robe that he was wearing and put it on the trader's back. Then he would take off his fox-skin cap, and ceremoniously adjust it on the trader's head, thereby probably transferring other things than the cap, to the trader's acute discomfort.

When the chief was through, others who had presents to bestow would come forward, and cover the trader with their robes and caps, until, if the party was a large one, the unfortunate man might find himself buried under eight or ten heavy robes, with as many fox-skin caps on his head. All this he must endure, and sit with a solemn face until the smoking ceremonies were over, when he was at liberty to send the robes and skins into the warehouse.

Of course the trader was expected to reciprocate these presents probably to double their value. If a flag came with the party, it was returned to the owner on his departure tied up with a few yards of gartering, to which was attached a foot of tobacco. When all the ceremonies had been concluded, the more serious business of trading furs for goods would commence. After this was concluded, the women and children would be sent off, the men remaining behind to smoke with the trader and beg him for further presents. These generally consisted of four or five balls and powder, about four inches of tobacco, and a dram of liquor.



SNAKE INDIAN RIVER FALLS [\[To List\]](#)

[Pg 51] Thanks; said the Warden, that's enough about the Piegan. How about David Thompson?

Well, Thompson had come up the Saskatchewan with a quantity of trading goods for Kootenay House. He had run across Alexander Henry at Terre Blanche House, and had then gone ahead with some Indian hunters to get game for the party, while the canoes made their way slowly upstream. This was in September. About a day's journey above Rocky Mountain House the men were stopped by Black Bear, a Piegan chief, who had followed them upstream, and now warned them to return to the fort. As the Indians far outnumbered the traders, there was nothing for it but to submit, even if it had been wise to come to extremities.

Alexander Henry was at Rocky Mountain House when the traders arrived. He knew that Thompson was waiting for them above at a place known as Kootenay Plain, and was anxious to get them through. The Piegan, having turned the traders back, would not be keeping a very strict watch on the river, but Indians were constantly coming and going at the fort, and the difficulty was to get the party off unperceived. Here is what happened, as Henry tells the story:

'Everything being settled, at three o'clock the canoes were put into the water, and the men's baggage was taken down to the river ready to embark; the goods only remained in the fort, to be taken out at dark. This had scarcely been done[Pg 52] when a long string of horsemen appeared on

the beach below coming upstream. Our plan was thus deranged; my only recourse was to put the baggage on board, and send the four canoes down river, as if I intended to fetch up the remainder of our goods, as I had informed the Indians I should do, but directing the men to pass upstream with the towing-line about midnight.

'So down the stream they went, while the arrivals stood gazing at them from the opposite side, surprised to find my canoes had reached this place so soon for who should the string of horsemen prove but the Hudson's Bay people from Terre Blanche, coming to winter alongside me here. They had scarcely got over before a Sarcee came with some beavers to trade ... and about dusk three Bloods arrived. I sent a man to inform the canoes and tell them not to pass this camp until they were convinced all hands were drunk.... The night was clear and the moon favourable. They passed unperceived, although the H.B. tents were near the river, and they had a number of dogs, but fatigue seemed to have overtaken both men and beasts.

'The canoes had scarcely rounded the point when we heard the singing of the Bloods, who were coming up along shore.... They knocked at the gates and demanded liquor, but I would not allow them to enter. At 1 a.m. I saw the crews lurking at a distance, not daring to approach for fear of being discovered. I was obliged to open the gates and bring the Indians in. I gave them a good dram and put them fast asleep in my tent. No time was to be lost in getting the goods away. I called the men, who were concealed below the bank, hastily loaded them each with two pieces (of trading goods) and sent them off through the woods to their canoes, about a mile above us.'

Henry's frankness is perhaps not very edifying, but what a dramatic picture he draws. There is no art in it. Henry is describing an incident in which he was one of the principal figures in fact, the principal figure, for he pulled the strings. It is a fragment of the western fur trade, raw but tremendously human.

In the morning Alexander Henry's cousin, William Henry, arrived at the fort, and Alexander was astonished to learn that Thompson, instead of being up the river waiting for his men, had been also headed off by the Piegan, and was now down below near Brazeau River. Henry at once sent word to the men, and managed to get them downstream again the same night, without either the H.B. people or the Indians learning the trick he had played upon them.

Now what had Thompson been doing in the meanwhile? Having, with his Indian hunters, reached the rendezvous, they placed the meat of the deer they had killed on a stage, out of reach of predatory animals, and waited for the arrival of the canoes. It was now about the middle of October, and the rest of the party should arrive in two or three days. When ample time had been allowed, and there was still no appearance of the canoes, Thompson became alarmed, and sent William Henry and an Indian down the river to look out for them.

Henry returned and reported that a few miles below they had seen a camp of Piegan on the bank of the river. Circling around it through the bush, they had climbed down the bank to the river's side and found where their companions had landed. They had built a low rampart of stones to defend themselves. Henry proceeded down the river in hopes of overtaking them, and had even been reckless enough to fire a shot to attract their attention, but without result.

Thompson was now confident that the Piegan might attack him at any moment. No time was to be lost, and at break of day they rode for their lives, leaving the meat behind. The country

they had to pass through was open forest, but it was so encumbered with fallen timber that active Indians on foot could easily overtake them. The Piegan, as Thompson ascertained afterward, arrived early at the stage of meat, and immediately started off on his track. They would have overtaken him before nightfall, but fortunately about one in the afternoon snow came down and covered the tracks of the horses, which made it difficult, though not impossible, to follow.[Pg 55]

An hour later, as the Piegan related, they came upon three grizzly bears standing on the track of the fur-traders. They at once jumped to the conclusion that Thompson, who, as already mentioned, had a great reputation among them for magic, had placed the bears there to prevent pursuit, and, bowing to his superior powers, they abandoned the attempt to follow him.

Thompson and his men rode on through the woods as well as they could. They camped at dark, and, as there was no appearance of Indians, made a small fire. Thompson spent the night in anxiety, not knowing whether or not the Piegan had followed him, cut off from the rest of his men, and uncertain how to get in touch with them. He was at a loss what to do to make his way to Howse Pass, where some of his men were waiting, or get back to the river and find the main party. He decided on the latter course, and, setting off at daybreak, found them the second day, about forty miles below the place where the Piegan had intercepted them.

It was here, at a deserted trading-post, that Thompson made the momentous decision that led to the discovery of the Athabaska route. 'After much consultation,' he says, 'we fully perceived we had no further hopes of passing in safety by the defiles of the Saskatchewan River (Howse Pass), and that we must change our route to the defiles of the Athabaska River, which would place us in safety, but would be attended with great[Pg 56] inconvenience, fatigue, suffering, and privation but there was no alternative.'

He therefore sent some of his men up to Howse Pass to bring down the horses that were waiting there, and on the 28th of October started overland, with twenty-four horses, loaded with trading goods and equipment, and twenty-four men, for the Athabaska. Alexander Henry, who had come down from Rocky Mountain House to see him before he left, says he found him encamped on the top of a hill three hundred feet above the river, where tall pines stood so thickly he could not see the tent until within ten yards of it. Thompson, he says, was starving. And this was the man who had sufficient confidence in himself, and sufficient influence over his men, to set out with a large party and no provisions to cross the Rockies by an unknown route in winter! He not only made the attempt, but he succeeded, and got through to the Columbia without the loss of a man.

He was fortunate in having leather tents with him, and also a sufficient supply of dressed leather to keep the men supplied with shoes. It was arranged that the available force should be divided to the best advantage; four to hunt and procure provisions, two to clear a path through the woods, the others taking care of the horses and attending to other necessary duties.

The route lay along a ridge about thirty miles from the mountains, and the party would have made[Pg 57] pretty good progress but for the fact that the country had been burnt over many times and the ground was covered in every direction with fallen timber. As it was, with their utmost exertions they could only make eight miles the first day in six and a half hours, and had to go to bed hungry, as the hunters had so far had no success.

The next day they were more fortunate, the hunters getting two cow buffaloes and a young grizzly bear. They made another six miles, but the horses were heavily loaded, the ground was swampy, and the poor animals were exhausted by the time they made camp. Fortunately the weather remained tolerable.

The last day of the month the men spent three hours clearing a path through the bush, and as a result they made eleven miles. The hunt brought in one fat antelope not much for a party of twenty-four men. Fortunately a couple of men arrived from Rocky Mountain House with letters and provisions. They returned the following day, and Henry notes some time after in his journal: 'Pichette and Pierre arrived from Mr. Thompson's camp. They left him on Pambian (Pembina) River, with all his property, on his way to the Columbia, cutting his road through a wretched, thick, woody country, over mountains and gloomy muskagoes, and nearly starving, animals being very scarce in that quarter.'

So the story goes, day after day, fighting their way north through a difficult country, with scanty^[Pg 58] provisions and sometimes none at all, while winter advanced upon them with rapid strides. On the 29th of November they reached the banks of the Athabaska, and turned up it into the mountains. On December 3rd Thomas, the Iroquois guide, brought them to an island in Brulé Lake where there was an old hunter's hut, small, very dirty, without any windows, and with no grass in the vicinity for the horses. Thompson refused to stop here, and they went on to a place five miles farther, where there was plenty of grass and a good camping-ground.

Here they remained for the next twenty-five days. The guide told Thompson it would be useless to attempt to go on with horses at this late season of the year. Accordingly the next day they began to build log huts to shelter themselves from the cold and protect the trading goods and provisions, while some of the men made sleds and snow-shoes and others were sent out hunting.

On the 29th of December, leaving William Henry behind to look after the horses, Thompson set out on his final dash across the Rockies to the Columbia. He took with him Thomas the Iroquois as guide, and a half-breed hunter, with ten men in charge of the dog-sleds. The way lay up the Athabaska, sometimes on the ice and sometimes along its banks. The last day of the year found them struggling up the river with reduced loads, the dogs finding the going more than they could^[Pg 59] manage. Thompson had a log hoard made to secure the provisions left behind. This, he says in disgust, 'the work of two hours, the men took five to finish, during which time they cooked twice a four-gallon kettleful of meat, which they devoured, although they had had a hearty breakfast.' The worried explorer, anxious to get through the mountains, and conscious that every moment counted, was exasperated at the indolence and gluttony of his men. 'They have the appetites of wolves, and glory in it,' he cries. 'Each man requires eight pounds of meat per day or more. Upon my reproaching some of them with their gluttony, the reply I got was: 'What pleasure have we in life but eating?' Thus ended the year.

On the first day of the new year 1811 they made fairly good progress, and the hunters were fortunate enough to kill two young buffalo and a mountain sheep. They slept in the open on pine-branches, with a few branches stuck in the snow to windward. It was bitterly cold.

The following day they remained in camp splitting and drying the meat to reduce the weight. The dog-sleds were reduced to eight. The next day or two were uneventful. On the 5th, with the thermometer registering 26° below zero, they started up the Whirlpool with eight sleds,

two dogs to each sled. Thompson had brought two or three horses along to relieve the dogs, but abandoned them the following day at a place where he says the last grass[Pg 60] was to be found, and where a herd of buffalo had lately been feeding. He notes that in spite of the bitter cold the horses lived through the winter.

In his journal under this same date there is a curious entry. 'Strange to say,' he says, 'here is a strong belief that the haunt of the mammoth is about this defile. I questioned several; none could positively say they had seen him, but their belief I found firm and not to be shaken. I remarked to them that such an enormous, heavy animal must leave indelible marks of his feet and his feeding. This they all acknowledged, and that they had never seen any marks of him, and therefore could show me none. All I could say did not shake their belief in his existence.'

Two days later he writes: 'Continuing our journey in the afternoon, we came on the track of a large animal, the snow about six inches deep on the ice. I measured it; four large toes each of four inches in length, to each a short claw; the ball of the foot sunk three inches lower than the toes; the hinder part of the foot did not mark well, the length fourteen inches by eight inches in breadth, walking from north to south, and having passed about six hours. We were in no humour to follow him. The men and Indians would have it to be a young mammoth, and I held it to be the track of a large old grizzled bear. Yet the shortness of the nails, the ball of the foot, and its very great size was not that of a bear, otherwise that of a very[Pg 61] large old bear, his claws worn away. This the Indians would not allow.'

Some time later Thompson comes back to this incident, which seems to have intrigued him. Repeating what he had already said, he adds that the track could be seen for a hundred yards or more. 'The hunters, eager as they are to follow and shoot every animal, made no attempt to follow this beast, for what could the balls of our fowling-guns do against such an animal? Report from old times has made the head branches of this river and the mountains in the vicinity the abode of one or more very large animals.

'To this I never appeared to give credence, for these reports appeared to arise from that fondness for the marvellous so common to mankind, but the sight of the track of that large beast staggered me, and I often thought of it, yet never could bring myself to believe such an animal existed, but thought it might be the track of some monster bear.

'On the sixth of October we camped in the passes of the mountains. The hunters there pointed out to me a low mountain apparently close to us, and said that on the top of that eminence there was a lake of several miles, around which was deep moss, with much coarse grass in places, and rushes; that these animals fed there they were sure, from the quantities of moss torn up, with grass and rushes. The hunters all agreed this animal was not carnivorous, but fed on moss and vegetables.[Pg 62]

'Yet they all agree that not one of them had ever seen the animal. I told them that I thought curiosity alone ought to have prompted them to get a sight of one of them. They replied that they were curious enough to see them, but at a distance. The search might bring them so near that they could not get away. I had known these men for years, and could always depend upon their word. They had no interest to deceive themselves or other persons.

'The circumstantial evidence of the existence of this animal is sufficient, but notwithstanding the many months the hunters have traversed this extent of country in all

directions, and this animal having never been seen, there is no direct evidence of its existence. Yet when I think of all I have seen and heard, if put on my oath I could neither assert nor deny its existence, for many hundreds of miles of the Rocky Mountains are yet unknown, and through the defiles by which we pass, distant one hundred and twenty miles from each other, we hasten our march as much as possible.'

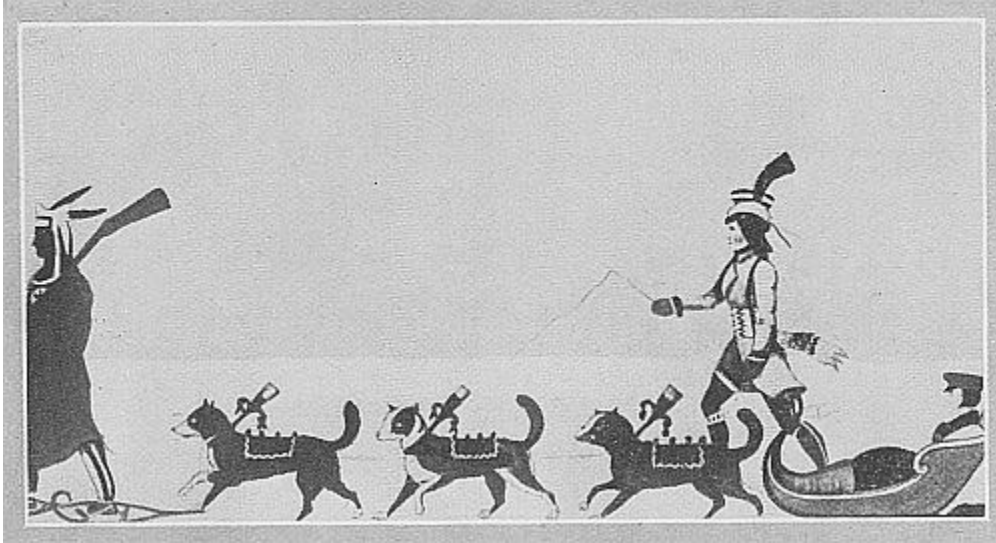
The Warden grunted contemptuously. Quite a fairy tale, he remarked.

Thompson seems to have been a good deal puzzled, I said, and he was not the man to give any particular weight to Indian myths. The thing that evidently impressed him was the size of the tracks in the snow. Assuming that they were those of a grizzly, he must have been a monster. Ernest Thompson Seton, in his *Life Histories of Northern [Pg 63]Mammals*, says that the hind foot of an ordinary adult is about ten inches long from heel to tip of longest claw. Nine inches, he says, would be small, and twelve inches very large. Thompson gives fourteen inches, and apparently very little of this was claw or talon, which seems to have been worn away. Thompson gives the length of the talon in one grizzly as four and three-eighths inches, and in another six and one-quarter, or nearly one-half the length of the foot. On the other hand, the track in the snow would be somewhat larger than the foot that made it. And it should be noted that what are said to be authentic measurements are given, in *Big Game Shooting* (Badminton Library Series), of a grizzly's hind foot of eighteen inches.

Ross Cox, who went through the pass in 1817, heard a similar story from the Indians. 'Some of the Upper Crees,' he says, 'a tribe who inhabit the country in the vicinity of the Athabaska River, have a curious tradition with respect to animals which they state formerly frequented the mountains. They allege that these animals were of frightful magnitude, being from two to three hundred feet in length, and high in proportion; that they formerly lived in the plains, a great distance to the eastward, from which they were gradually driven by the Indians to the Rocky Mountains; that they destroyed all smaller animals; and if their agility was equal to their size, would have also destroyed all the natives. One man has asserted that his grandfather [Pg 64] told him he saw one of those animals in a mountain pass, where he was hunting, and that on hearing its roar, which he compared to loud thunder, the sight almost left his eyes, and his heart became as small as an infant's. Whether such an animal ever existed I shall leave to the curious in natural history; but if the Indian traditions have any foundation in truth, it may have been the mammoth, some of whose remains have been found at various times in the United States.'

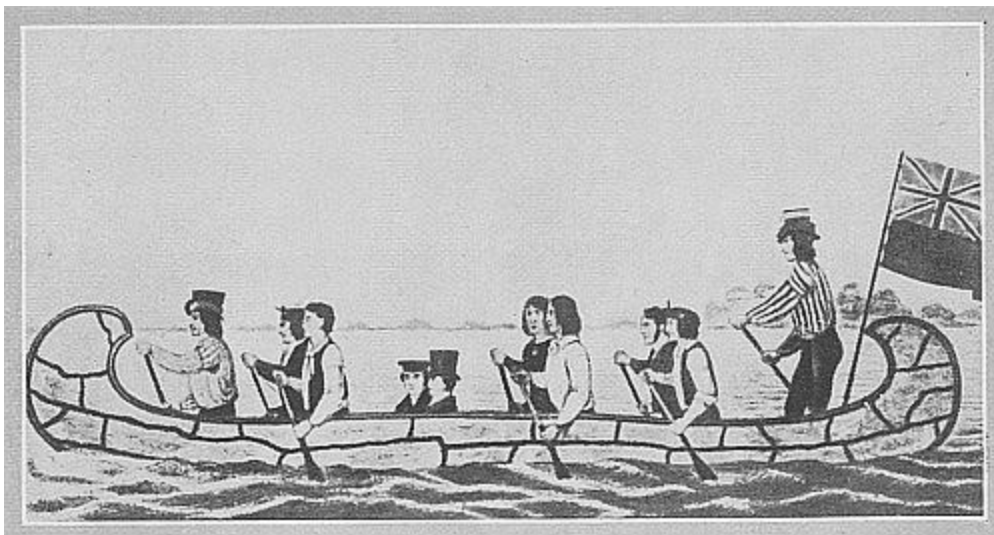
As a matter of fact, Ross Cox need not have gone to the United States for his illustration, as the Red Deer country in Alberta is the happy hunting-ground of those scientists whose quarry is the gigantic prehistoric animal. It is beyond dispute that enormous animals once roamed about this country, but it seems highly improbable that any of them lived so recently that a record of their existence could have survived as an Indian legend.

I've heard the same roar Ross Cox tells about while hunting in the mountains, said the Warden, but I always thought it was an avalanche. It will be much more interesting to recognise it as the complaint of the mammoth. By the way, I suppose the people who named Mastodon Mountain and Mastodon Glacier got the name from Thompson's narrative.



WINTER

TRAVEL IN THE DAYS OF THE FUR TRADE [\[To List\]](#)



SUMMER

TRAVEL IN THE DAYS OF THE FUR TRADE [\[To List\]](#)

Probably, I said. Well, to return to Thompson; the day after he saw the mysterious tracks he was well up toward the pass, for he writes: 'As we [Pg 65] advance we feel the mild weather from the Pacific Ocean.' One of his men this day beat one of the dogs to death, to Thompson's indignation. As he was always ahead of his party, the explorer found it impossible to prevent this kind of wanton cruelty. The man, he says, was what is called a 'flash' man, a showy fellow before the women, but a coward at heart, one who would willingly desert if he had had courage to go back alone.

Thompson does not seem to have conceived a very high opinion of the French-Canadian voyageur, probably because temperamentally they were poles apart. The frivolity and irresponsibility of the voyageur irritated him, while that unconquerable cheerfulness, and even gaiety under adverse circumstances, that redeemed much that might seem weak in his character, made no particular appeal to the phlegmatic explorer. He remembered that his men would stuff

themselves with food when they could get it, with no thought for the morrow, but he forgot that the same men could remain cheerful though starving.

On the 9th of January it snowed all day, which made very heavy work for the dogs. The snow was seven feet deep, and, although the men made a track for them with their snow-shoes, it was still so soft that, as Thompson says, 'the dogs may be said to swim in the road.' The weather was so mild that the snow was dripping from the trees, and everything got wet.[Pg 66]

The next day was a momentous one, for on that day Thompson stood at the summit of Athabaska Pass. Here are his own words: 'A day of snow and southerly gale of wind, the afternoon fine. The view now before us was an ascent of deep snow, in all appearance to the height of land between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. It was to me a most exhilarating sight, but to my uneducated men a dreadful sight. They had no scientific object in view. Their feelings were of the place they were in.

'Our guide Thomas told us that, although we could barely find wood to make a fire, we must now provide wood to pass the following night on the height of the defile we were in, and which we had to follow. My men were the most hardy that could be picked out of a hundred brave, hardy men, but the scene of desolation before us was dreadful, and I knew that a heavy gale of wind, much more a mountain storm, would have buried us beneath it. But thank God the weather was fine. We had to cut wood, such as it was, and each took a little on his sled, yet such was the despondency of the men that when night came we had only wood to make a bottom, and on this wherewith to make a small fire, which soon burnt out, and in this exposed situation we passed the rest of a long night without fire.

'Part of my men had strong feelings of personal insecurity. On our right, about one-third of a mile from us, lay an enormous glacier, the eastern[Pg 67] face of which was quite steep, of about two thousand feet in height, and was of a clean fine green colour, which I much admired. But whatever was the appearance, my opinion was that the whole was not solid ice, but formed on rocks from rills of water frozen in their course. Westward of this steep face we could see the glacier, with its fine green colour and its patches of snow in a gentle slope for about two miles. Eastward of this glacier and near to us was a high steep wall of rock. At the foot of this, with a fine south exposure, had grown a little forest of pines of about five hundred yards in length by one hundred in breadth. By some avalanche they had all been cut clean off as with a scythe. Not one of these trees appeared an inch higher than the others.

'My men were not at their ease, yet when night came they admired the brilliancy of the stars, and, as one of them said, he thought he could almost touch them with his hand. As usual, when the fire was made, I set off to examine the country before us, and found we had now to descend the west side of the mountains. I returned and found part of my men with a pole of twenty feet in length boring the snow to find the bottom. I told them while we had good snow-shoes it was no matter to us whether the snow was ten or one hundred feet deep. On looking into the hole they had bored I was surprised to see the colour of the sides of a beautiful blue. The surface was of a very light[Pg 68] colour, but as it descended the colour became more deep, and at the lowest point was of a blue almost black.

'The altitude of this place above the level of the ocean, by the point of boiling water, is computed to be eleven thousand feet.' This was not apparently Thompson's own estimate, but one he attributes to Sir George Simpson. He added this comment when writing his

autobiography many years after his journey through the pass. It has never been satisfactorily explained how such an unusually careful astronomer came to record an elevation that is almost twice the actual height. In fact, there is evidence that Thompson himself had reached the same conclusion as to the height of the pass, independently of any information he may have obtained from Simpson. In his *Narrative* he says: 'To ascertain the height of the Rocky Mountains above the level of the ocean had long occupied my attention, but without any satisfaction to myself.'

He then goes on to explain how he had twice written east for a mountain barometer, how they had twice been sent out to him in care of John McDonald of Garth, and how they had each come to grief through the carelessness of the latter. He then attempted to estimate the descent of the Columbia from its source to the sea, and found it to be 5,960 feet, which was more than twice the actual figures. With this as a basis, he proceeded to measure the height of some of the mountains about [Pg 69] Lake Windermere. Coming then to the pass, he says: 'At the greatest elevation of the passage across the mountains by the Athabaska River, the point by boiling water gave 11,000 feet, and the peaks of the mountains are full 7,000 feet above this passage, and the general height may be fairly taken at 18,000 feet above the Pacific Ocean.' Here Thompson was astray as to the elevation both of the pass and the mountains. The only explanation one can suggest, to account for such an extraordinary error on the part of a man whose work was characterised by extreme accuracy, is that he must have misread his own figures. It must be remembered that when he wrote his *Narrative* he was a very old man, and was dealing with things that had happened many years before. It is conceivable that in this way he may have made a mistake in transcribing his figures.

To return to his journey through the pass. 'Many reflections,' he continues, 'came on my mind. A new world was in a manner before me, and my object was to be at the Pacific Ocean before the month of August. How were we to find provisions, and how many men would remain with me, for they were dispirited. Amidst various thoughts I fell asleep on my bed of snow.'

Thompson's remark about reaching the Pacific Ocean needs some explanation. He was, as has been said before, an enthusiastic explorer as well as a faithful fur-trader, and the big task he had set [Pg 70] himself was to follow the Columbia down to the sea and survey it as he went. Before he finally left the west he did this and a good deal more. Incidentally, it was his purpose to take possession of the country in the King's name, and possibly one reason why the North West Company was anxious he should do so was because John Jacob Astor had sent out an expedition to establish trading-posts on the Columbia.

Early the following morning they began their descent on the Pacific side of the pass. Thompson noticed immediately the change both in temperature and in forest trees. 'We had not gone half a mile before we came to fine, tall, clean-grown pines of eighteen feet girth.' The descent was so steep that the dogs could not control the sleds, and frequently they would go down the slope in a heap until brought up by some tree, the dogs shooting out on one side of it and the sled on the other. A good deal of time was occupied in disentangling them. Thompson camped that night on top of the snow, it being still too deep to clear away.

The next day, January 11th, they made about nine miles, over tolerably level ground. The supply of pemmican was almost exhausted, and Thomas the Iroquois was sent ahead to hunt. Fortunately he came in to camp with two buck moose. The twelfth was spent in splitting and drying the venison; and on the thirteenth some of the men were sent back to the summit to bring

down certain packages that^[Pg 71] had been left behind. Everything was recovered except a leather bag of balls that a wolverine had carried away.

There is an interesting little story in connection with this bag of balls. In an article in the *Canadian Alpine Journal* for 1921-22, Mr. R. W. Cautley, one of the Inter-provincial Boundary Commissioners, says: 'In August, 1921, one of the writer's party, named Mark Platz, discovered a somewhat scattered cache of 114 deeply corroded musket-balls just north of the summit of (Athabaska) Pass, and one wondered whether the owner had been unable to find the hiding-place again, or had failed to return.' On looking up Thompson's *Narrative*, Mr. Cautley of course realised that these must be the balls carried away by the wolverine in 1811, one hundred and ten years before.

To return to Thompson. The snow was so wet and so deep that the dogs could make very little progress, and it took some days to reach the banks of the Columbia. He continued down its banks for some time, but his men were becoming unruly, disheartened because they found themselves in a country where everything was unfamiliar. Finally, when four of them deserted, he made up his mind to turn back and spend the rest of the winter at the junction with the Columbia of a stream he had named Canoe River, a spot afterwards known as Boat Encampment. He sent two of his men back over the pass with letters to William Henry^[Pg 72] and the partners of the North West Company, and, as he had no paper, he wrote his letters on boards.

In April, having built a canoe of cedar-boards hewn from trees in the surrounding forest, Thompson left Boat Encampment about the middle of April, and ascended the Columbia to one of the trading-posts he had built, and finally made his way to Kettle Falls on the Columbia and down to Astoria.

In July he started up the Columbia, and finally reached Canoe River once more, having completed the survey of the entire river from its source to its mouth. At Canoe River he had hoped to find a party of North West Company men with supplies from the east side of the mountains, but was disappointed. He seems to have expected them to come down from Athabaska Pass by way of Canoe River, or perhaps he means Wood River, which is the actual route from the summit down to the Columbia. At any rate, he started up the river to meet them. Part of the trading goods finally arrived, and Thompson himself started out again over Athabaska Pass to Henry House to hurry the transport of the remainder.

The following year, 1812, having finally decided to retire from the scene of his many years' labours as an explorer and fur-trader, Thompson arrived at Boat Encampment on the 5th of May, with a large shipment of furs. Leaving most of his men to bring on the furs as soon as the snow permitted,^[Pg 73] he himself hurried forward on snow-shoes, or bears' paws as he calls them a round variety of snow-shoes. On May 8th he gained the height of land, 'having with great labour ascended the hills which were under deep snow, mixed with icicles from the droppings of the trees, which made very severe walking.' On the way up he found evidence of beaver travelling over the snow having been surprised by a wolverine.

A cache of meat that had been left for him on the east side of the pass had been destroyed by a grizzly, and they had to march on without food. The mild weather caused heavy avalanches, but he was fortunate enough to escape. The spot where they had camped at the summit of the pass the previous year was now buried under the debris of an avalanche. On the eleventh several

men arrived from Henry House with horses and provisions, and Thompson made his way down to the Athabaska without further trouble.

Here he had a canoe built, and set out for Fort William and Montreal, having first, in his methodical way, left everything in good order at Henry House. 'Having no provisions,' he says, 'and sick of horse meat, sent off the hunters, who brought four sheep, an animal peculiar to these mountains, and by the Americans named big-horn.' And so this indefatigable traveller and pathfinder drops out of our story. He was a man of extraordinary energy, courage, and resourcefulness, the value of whose[Pg 74] achievements as an explorer is only beginning to be appreciated.

Thompson, said the Warden, is a man for whom I have a good deal of respect. I admire a man who sets out to do a thing, and sees it through at whatever cost to himself.

So do I, I said.

CHAPTER IV

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[Pg 75]

GABRIEL FRANCHÈRE AND THE ASTORIANS

During the night the weather, that had seemed rather promising, took a sudden change for the worse, and by daylight it was raining cats and dogs. If there had been any urgency about it, we could have made our way down to Jasper in spite of the rain, but it would have involved a great deal of discomfort. As it was, we had days to spare, as we had made the trip up to the pass in much quicker time than had been anticipated, and there was still plenty of grub. We made up our minds therefore to stay where we were, provided the tent remained weatherproof. The horses had good feed and were not likely to wander.

During a temporary lull in the storm we managed to make a fire and boil water. With plenty of hot tea, it was possible to make a comfortable enough breakfast. Thereafter we lighted our pipes, and the Warden, whose curiosity had been aroused by the Thompson story, wanted to know who had followed him over Athabaska Pass, and left any account of the journey.

About three years after Thompson's trip, I said, or, to be exact, in May, 1814, Gabriel Franchère came over the pass in the opposite[Pg 76] direction. Franchère was a native of Montreal. With several other Canadians, he joined Astor's Pacific Fur Company, and sailed from New York round the Horn to the mouth of the Columbia in 1810. After Astoria had been taken over by the North West Company, he returned to Montreal by the overland route, and afterwards published a very entertaining account of his experiences in French, which was also translated into English by J. V. Huntington. The translator speaks of the Defoe-like simplicity of the original, and he does no more than justice to one of the most readable books in all the literature

of western exploration and the fur trade. As your only alternative is to go out into the rain, you might as well let me tell you something about Franchère's voyage, as an introduction to his trip through Athabaska Pass.

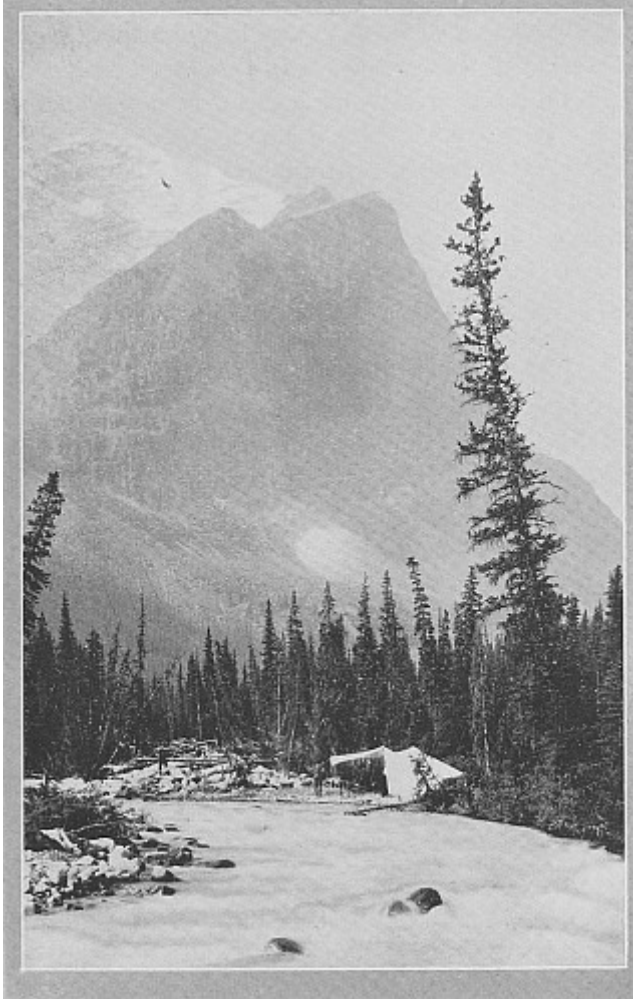
Considering the alternative, retorted the Warden, I don't mind listening, though it does seem a somewhat roundabout way of reaching Athabaska Pass, to come by way of New York and Cape Horn.

The party, I said, left Montreal in a birch-bark canoe, manned by nine voyageurs, with Franchère and two others as passengers. Their route was by way of the Richelieu, Lake Champlain, and the Hudson to New York. At the latter place they created a sensation as the canoe, with its crew of swarthy Canadians, their hats bedecked with coloured ribbons and feathers, shot by the wharves,^[Pg 77] the men keeping time to one of the old *chansons* of their native province.

Franchère, with the others who had joined Astor's Company, sailed from New York on the *Tonquin*. Both he and the other passengers seem to have conceived an unconquerable dislike for the captain of the vessel, one Thorn, an officer of the United States navy, a strict disciplinarian, with rough and overbearing manners, who for his part resented the presence on his ship of so many landsmen, with irritating landsmen's ways, over whom he had no effective control. Particularly he could not hide his contempt for Franchère's ignorance of the ways of the sea, and his habit of eagerly jotting down in his journal particulars of what to the captain were the mere commonplaces of a sailor's life.

The young Canadian was at first rather overwhelmed with his first experience of the sea. 'For the first time in my life,' he says, 'I found myself under way upon the main sea, with nothing to fix my regards and arrest my attention between the abyss of waters and the immensity of the skies.' To this mental discomfort was presently added the acute physical discomfort of sea-sickness. In a few days, however, he began to find many things to interest him, flying fish and dolphins, sharks and turtles. They came in sight of the Cape Verde Islands, but the captain would not touch there as English ships-of-war were cruising in the vicinity^[Pg 78] the commanders of which might think they had a better right than Astor to the services of the British subjects on the *Tonquin*.

The fare on the ship consisted of fourteen ounces of biscuit, a pound and a quarter of salt beef, or one of pork, per day, and half a pint of souchong tea with sugar; rice and beans once a week; cornmeal pudding with molasses the same; and on Sundays a bottle of Teneriffe wine. As there were only six berths in the cabin, besides the captain's and first-mate's state rooms, these were assigned to the senior passengers, and the rest, including Franchère, had to make themselves as comfortable as possible in the steerage. In fair weather they do not seem to have had much to complain of, but when they ran into a gale off the coast of Brazil the seas that swept the deck came down in torrents on their hammocks, through seams that had been opened by the intense heat of the tropics.



THE THRONE, ASTORIA VALLEY [\[To List\]](#)

Incidents of the voyage were the baptism of such members of the crew as had not before crossed the equator, the appearance of those mysterious little white spots in the sky known as the Clouds of Magellan, and an occasional sail on the horizon. Early in December they sighted the Falkland Islands, and, as they were in need of fresh water, the casks were sent ashore. Several of the passengers took advantage of the opportunity to stretch their legs on dry ground. They wandered about the island, chased the foxes, stole eggs from the penguins,^[Pg 79] and hunted for traces of the old French and English establishments. Among other things they found two headboards with inscriptions in English, marking the spot where two men had been buried. As the letters were almost obliterated, they set about carving new ones on fresh pieces of board brought from the ship.

They became so engrossed in this task that they did not notice that all the water-casks had been filled and taken on board. Captain Thorn, exasperated at the delay in returning to the ship, ordered the anchor to be weighed. Two of the passengers had gone to the opposite side of the island to look for game. The roaring of the sea against the rock-bound coast prevented them from hearing the signal gun, and by the time they rejoined their companions the *Tonquin* was already at sea.

'We then lost no time,' says Franchère, 'but pushed off, being eight in number, with our little boat, only twenty feet keel. We rowed with all our might, but gained nothing upon the vessel. We were losing sight of the islands at last, and our case seemed desperate. While we paused, and were debating what course to pursue, as we had no compass, we observed the ship tacking and standing towards us. In fine, after rowing for three hours and a half, in an excited state of feeling not easily described, we succeeded in regaining the vessel.' 'Nothing,' adds Franchère, 'could excuse the act of cruelty and barbarity of which the captain was^[Pg 80] guilty in intending to leave us upon those barren rocks of the Falkland Islands, where we must inevitably have perished.'

Washington Irving in *Astoria* is inclined to defend Captain Thorn, and, although mentioning that he 'spread all sail and put to sea, swearing that he would leave the laggards to shift for themselves,' does not believe that the captain 'really intended to carry his threat into full effect, but rather meant to let the laggards off for a long pull and a hearty fright.' Both he, however, and Alexander Ross, who mentions the same incident in his *Adventures on the Oregon*, agree with Franchère that what actually happened was that Robert Stuart, nephew of one of the men who had gone ashore, seized a brace of pistols and swore he would blow the captain's brains out unless he stopped the ship. Ross was himself one of the party that went ashore.

They weathered the Horn on Christmas Day, and entered the Pacific. The only memorable incident in the voyage north to the mouth of the Columbia was a visit to the Sandwich Islands for water and provisions. They also succeeded in securing the services of a number of Sandwich Islanders to act as boatmen on the Columbia. While they were ashore an old man showed them the spot where Captain Cook had been killed in 1779, and Franchère notes the curious coincidence that the tragedy had happened on the very day of^[Pg 81] their visit thirty-two years before. While they were anchored in the bay of Ohetity, the king, Tamehameha, came out to visit them, with his three wives and his favourite minister. Tamehameha 'was above the middle height, well made, robust and inclined to corpulency, and had a majestic carriage.' His wives 'were of an extraordinary corpulence, and of unmeasured size. They were dressed in the fashion of the country, having nothing but a piece of tapa, or bark-cloth, about two yards long, passed round the hips and falling to the knees.'

Franchère describes the remainder of the voyage to the Columbia, the difficulty in getting over the bar, the selection of a site for a trading-post and the building of Astoria, relations with the famous Indian chief Concomly, the tragic voyage of the *Tonquin* to Nootka and the massacre of Captain Thorn and his crew. One morning they saw a large canoe, flying the British flag, coming down the Columbia. A well-dressed man who appeared to be the commander was the first to leap ashore, and, addressing them without ceremony, said that his name was David Thompson, and that he was one of the partners of the North West Company. He told them of his trip through the mountains, and that in the spring he had built a canoe and descended the Columbia. He kept a regular journal, says Franchère, 'and travelled, I thought, more like a geographer than a fur-trader.'

In May, 1812, the *Beaver* reached Astoria with^[Pg 82] supplies from New York. In the autumn news arrived from the east of the declaration of war. In April, 1813, J. G. McTavish and Joseph Larocque of the North West Company brought news that the *Isaac Todd*, one of the company's vessels, had sailed from England to the Columbia with a cargo of trading goods, and with letters of marque authorising her to seize Astoria. They waited month after month, but the *Isaac Todd* did not make her appearance. Finally the representatives of the North West

Company, whose numbers had in the meantime been considerably augmented, entered into negotiations with Astor's people, as a result of which Astoria was transferred to the company and renamed Fort George.

Not long afterward the sloop-of-war *Raccoon*, with John McDonald of the North West Company on board, reached the Columbia, and her captain, who had anticipated capturing a rich prize, was disgusted to find that the value of the prize had been grossly exaggerated, and that, in any event, he had been anticipated by the North West Company. When he was shown Astoria he cried, 'What! is this the fort which was represented to me as so formidable? Good God! I could batter it down in two hours with a four-pounder!'

As a result of the change of ownership of Astoria, and the state of war that existed between Great Britain and the United States, some of Astor's party, including Franchère, decided to avail^[Pg 83] themselves of the offer of the North West Company to return to the east overland with the annual brigade of canoes. They left Astoria, or Fort George, in April, 1814, in ten canoes, altogether a party of ninety persons. The only striking incident of the journey up the Columbia was the meeting with the wife and children of a hunter named Pierre Dorion. As they were paddling upstream they heard a child's voice crying *Arrêtez, donc! Arrêtez, donc!* They put ashore, and Dorion's wife told them her extraordinary tale. In January her husband and all his companions had been murdered by the Snake Indians. She had managed to elude them with her children, and, without gun, tent, or other provisions than the horse that carried her, had kept them and herself alive through the winter, and had crossed the mountains to the Columbia.

'On May 11,' says Franchère, 'we quitted the Columbia to enter a little stream to which Mr. Thompson had given in 1811 the name of Canoe River.' The stream they actually ascended was Wood River. The main party had previously been divided, some of them going ahead to the Athabaska. The group to which Franchère was attached numbered twenty-four. They found it very heavy work, as they had to travel on foot; the ground was still covered with melting snow, and they were obliged to repeatedly ford the river, with the icy water sometimes up to their necks.

On the morning of the fourteenth they began^[Pg 84] to climb up to the pass, finding it necessary to stop every few moments to take breath, so stiff was the grade. 'After two or three hours of incredible exertions and fatigues,' says Franchère, 'we arrived at the plateau or summit, and followed the footprints of those who had preceded us. This mountain is placed between two others a great deal more elevated, compared with which it is but a hill, and of which, indeed, it is only, as it were, the valley. Our march soon became fatiguing on account of the depth of the snow, which, softened by the rays of the sun, could no longer bear us as in the morning. We were obliged to follow exactly the traces of those who had preceded us, and to plunge our legs up to the knees in the holes they had made, so that it was as if we had put on and taken off at every step a very large pair of boots.

'At last we arrived at a good hard bottom, and a clear space, which our guide said was a little lake frozen over, and here we stopped for the night. This lake, or rather these lakes, for there are two [actually three to-day], are situated in the midst of the valley or cup of the mountains. [The Committee's Punchbowl and its companions.] On either side were immense glaciers or ice-bound rocks, on which the rays of the setting sun reflected the most beautiful prismatic colours. One of these icy peaks was like a fortress of rock. It rose perpendicularly

some fifteen or eighteen hundred feet above the level of the lakes, and had the summit covered with^[Pg 85] ice. Mr. J. Henry, who first discovered the pass, gave this extraordinary rock the name of *M'Gillivray's Rock*, in honour of one of the partners of the North West Company. The lakes themselves are not much over three or four hundred yards in circuit, and not over two hundred yards apart.'

Without any particular adventure or misadventure, they made their way down the Whirlpool, sometimes frozen over, oftener tumbling down over rock and pebbly bottom in a thousand fantastic gambols. After a tiresome march, by an extremely difficult path through the woods, they camped. The following day their guide brought them to the banks of the Athabaska which was pretty good travelling for men on foot, in the middle of May.

I should say it was, said the Warden.

'We all presently arrived,' continues Franchère, 'at an old house which the traders of the North West Company had once constructed, but which had been abandoned for some four or five years. The site of this trading-post is the most charming that can be imagined; suffice to say that it is built on the bank of the beautiful River Athabaska, and is surrounded by green and smiling prairies and superb woodlands.'

That must have been Henry House, commented the Warden.

Yes, and named after the Henry who discovered Athabaska Pass.

Franchère goes on to say: 'We found there^[Pg 86] Mr. Pillet, and one of Mr. J. McDonald's party, who had his leg broken by the kick of a horse.' Pillet was one of Franchère's companions on the *Tonquin* voyage. He was also one of the heroes of an adventure described by Ross Cox. 'Mr. Pillet,' he says, 'fought a duel with Mr. Montour of the North West Company, with pocket pistols, at six paces; both hits; one in the collar of the coat, and the other in the leg of the trousers. Two of their men acted as seconds; and the tailor speedily healed their wounds.' The tailor was Holmes, who some years afterward came to a tragic end. He and six voyageurs had been sent down the Columbia. In attempting to run the Upper Dalles they lost their canoe, with all their blankets and provisions. They had to make their way down the bank of the Columbia through very difficult country, without food or means of procuring it. One after another died, and was eaten by his hunger-crazed companions. Holmes was one of the victims. Only one of the seven lived to tell the horrible tale.

The man who had his leg broken by the kick of a horse is also mentioned in the 'Autobiographical Notes' of John McDonald of Garth, in Masson's *Bourgeois de la Compagnie du Nord-Ouest*. 'One of my men on the east side of the mountains,' he says, 'broke his leg. I had to splinter it the best I could, and left him with one man till he got well to reach Jasper's House.'^[Pg 87]

McDonald was with the party that had gone ahead of Franchère. He describes the journey up Canoe River with a good deal of spirit. 'The river meanders much. We therefore made a straight cut of it, holding by one another by twos and threes, wading sometimes up to our hips in water, dashing in, frozen at one point, and coming out thawed at the opposite point, and frozen again before we dashed in again.' He says the river had a gravelly bottom, and was sure gold abounded in it. 'It took us, I think, fairly full four days' hard work before we got fairly out of the

mountains to Jasper Haws' House, sometimes camping on snow twenty feet deep, so that the fires we made in the evening were fifteen or twenty feet below us next morning. At one encampment we went below and camped at the bottom very comfortably for that night.'

Good for Baron Munchausen! cried the Warden. I thought we'd come to a real old-fashioned traveller's tale sooner or later.

Soon after leaving Henry House, I resumed, Franchère came to a small camp, where a couple of men were waiting with horses for the party. Two of his own men, however, arrived about the same time in a bark canoe they had made, and Franchère, who had bruised his knee against a log, exchanged with one of them, and paddled down to Roche Miette, shooting several brace of duck on the way. Here he was overtaken by the rest of the party. They camped, and the following morning[Pg 88] made their way to Jasper House, or Rocky Mountain House, as Franchère calls it.

The members of the advance-party were waiting for them at Jasper House, which was at that time in charge of François Ducoigne, who had been with Alexander Henry in the Athabaska district in 1803-4, afterwards joined the Hudson's Bay Company. Franchère says that Jasper House had been built by the North West Company as a provision depot for those of their employees who were passing east or west through the mountains. Ducoigne's hunters were at this time absent in quest of game on Smoky River, 'so called by some travellers who saw in the neighbourhood a volcanic mountain belching smoke.' That, at any rate, is Franchère's explanation. It is actually a coal-seam that has been burning for many years. There is a similar case on the lower Mackenzie River.

A few days later three men who had been left behind at Henry House arrived in a little canoe they had made of elk-skins sewed together and stretched like a drum on a frame of poles. The whole party then continued their journey down the Athabaska in canoes. Unfortunately one of them was upset in a rapid and two of the men, Olivier Lapensée and André Bélanger, drowned. The body of the former, who was an Astorian voyageur, was recovered and buried on the banks of the Athabaska. Franchère says he planted a cross over the grave, with an inscription which he[Pg 89] made with the point of his knife. When Alexander Ross travelled the same route in 1825, he found the cross still standing, with the inscription 'Olivier Lapensée, from Lachine, drowned here in May, 1814.'

One word more, before taking leave of Gabriel Franchère. He followed the then recognised route from the Athabaska to the Saskatchewan, and spent a short time at Fort Vermilion, then in charge of a trader named Hallet. 'Mr. Hallet,' says Franchère, 'was a polite, sociable man, loving his ease passably well. Having testified to him our surprise at seeing in one of the buildings a large *cariole*, like those of Canada, he informed us that, having horses, he had had his carriage made in order to enjoy a sleigh-ride; but that the workmen, having forgot to take the measure of the doors of the building before constructing it, it was found when finished much too large for them, and could never be got out of the room where it was; and it was like to remain there a long time, as he was not disposed to demolish the house for the pleasure of using the *cariole*!'

Of the principal fur-traders who accompanied Franchère on this journey, two curiously enough figured five years afterward in the row between the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company at Grand Rapids of the Saskatchewan, but on opposite sides, John Clarke with the former and J. G. McTavish with the latter. McTavish[Pg 90] was captured and sent down

to York Factory. Another who was with Franchère, John Stuart, had been with David Thompson on the Peace River in 1803, and accompanied Simon Fraser in 1808 on his famous journey down the river that bears his name.

And now, said my patient and mildly appreciative audience of one, as he scrambled to his feet, suppose we have lunch such as it is. What will you have cold beans, or cold boiled dinner, or cold soup, or just plain bread and cheese? There's plenty of water to drink.

CHAPTER V

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A COLUMBIAN ADVENTURER

Well, said the Warden, as we finished our unappetising meal, thank heaven we still have plenty of tobacco the only cheering element in a weeping world.

Don't be down-hearted, I said. I am going to introduce you to a rather entertaining Athabaskan pilgrim, Ross Cox. Like Franchère, he had been one of the Astorian adventurers, but remained behind in the Columbia River country for a few years longer. He came through the pass in 1817.

He ascended the Columbia from Fort George with the brigade of that year, a party of eighty-six 'perhaps,' says Cox, 'the largest and most mixed that ever ascended the Columbia.' Not the largest, if Franchère is to be believed, as he mentions ninety in the brigade of 1814, but quite possibly the most mixed. Cox says it contained five Scotchmen, two Englishmen, one Irish, thirty-six Canadians, twenty Iroquois, two Nipissings, one Cree, three half-breeds, nine Sandwich Islanders, a boy apparently of no particular nationality, a servant, two women and two children, also unclassified.

The journey was uneventful until they passed the mouth of the Walla Walla, when a number of [Pg 92] canoes appeared filled with natives. Not expecting any trouble, the men had stowed their muskets away in the bottom of the canoes under the trading goods. The Indians begged a little tobacco from the leading canoes in the brigade, and, when they had let these past, made an attempt to raid the canoes in the rear. Not wishing to come to extremities, the traders tried to ward off the attempt with paddles. This merely enraged the Indians, who immediately attacked with bows and arrows. Those of the traders who had guns returned the fire, and killed or wounded several of the savages. 'The moment they fell a shower of arrows was discharged at us, but owing to the undulating motion of their canoes, as well as ours, we escaped uninjured.' The Indians at once threw themselves in the bottom of their canoes, which drifted rapidly down the current and were soon out of range of the muskets.

The traders lost no time in getting ashore and arming the voyageurs. The situation was alarming. They were in the midst of hostile natives, who would now be determined to avenge the death of their warriors. Even if they managed to hold their own, more men would almost certainly be killed on both sides, and a situation created which would make travel up and down the Columbia almost impossible.

An island out in the river seemed the safest place for the present, and there they spent the night and the following day. They had decided that the wisest plan was to demand a parley with the Indians,^[Pg 93] and offer a certain quantity of goods 'to appease the relations of the deceased.' It blew a gale, and they were unable to leave the island until the second morning. By this time everyone was depressed.

They had had many evidences that the Indians were watching them on every side, to prevent their escape. And, to add to their unhappiness, one of the voyageurs noticed a flight of ravens flying overhead, and exclaimed, 'My friends, it is useless to hope. Our doom is fixed. Tomorrow we shall die.' 'What do you mean?' asked his companions. He pointed to the ravens. 'Their appearance by night,' he replied gloomily, 'in times of danger betokens approaching death. They know our fate, and will hover about us until the arrows of the savages give them a banquet on our blood.' The traders did their best to dissipate the superstitious fears of the voyageurs, but it was more than ever apparent that unless some peaceful settlement could be reached with the natives their chances of escape were exceedingly slim.

They landed on the northern shore, and, leaving a couple of men with each canoe, climbed up the banks, and prepared to show the Indians a bold front if they refused the hand of peace. The flag of truce was raised, and word sent by the interpreter that the white chiefs wished to have a talk with the chiefs of the Indians. In a short time a number of mounted Indians appeared, preceded by about one hundred and fifty warriors on foot, all well armed^[Pg 94] with guns, spears, tomahawks, bows, and well-filled quivers. They stopped about fifty yards from the whites.

Another group now approached from the woods. 'Their hair was cut short as a sign of mourning; their bodies were nearly naked, and besmeared with red paint. This party consisted of the immediate relatives of the deceased; and as they advanced they chanted a death-song,' which was not exactly calculated to raise the spirits of the whites:

'Rest, brothers, rest! You will be avenged. The tears of your widows shall cease to flow when they behold the blood of your murderers; and your young children shall leap and sing with joy on seeing their scalps. Rest, brothers, in peace; we shall have blood.'

The whole body of savages then formed themselves into a crescent, and stood in profound silence, more menacing than noise, waiting for the orders of their chiefs. The leaders of the brigade then advanced unarmed, and two chiefs, with half a dozen of the mourners, met them midway between the two opposing parties. Keith, who was in command of the traders, offered the calumet of peace, which was refused contemptuously. The interpreter was then ordered to tell the Indians that the whites were anxious to remain on friendly terms with them, and to that end offered to compensate the relations of those who had been killed. The chiefs asked what compensation. When they^[Pg 95] learned it consisted of blankets, tobacco, ornaments, etc., they indignantly rejected the offer.

Their spokesman said that no negotiations for peace could be entered into until two white men had been delivered over to them, to be sacrificed according to their law to the spirits of the departed. Keith replied that this was out of the question. He reminded them that they had been the aggressors, and told them that he had only offered compensation because he preferred their friendship to their enmity. However, if they would not accept his terms, nothing remained but to resort to arms. They had better think the matter over, because they had much to lose. The whites were much better armed, and would fight to the death. Also the inevitable result of the conflict would be that the white traders would quit their country for ever.

The Indians returned to their ranks and debated the question among themselves. The older men advised compromise, but their views were fiercely opposed by the relatives of the dead and the younger warriors. Both parties began to prepare for battle. Two or three chiefs alone remained on the neutral ground, reluctant to abandon the effort to secure peace. These finally fell back slowly toward their companions, and both sides sought cover and got their weapons ready.

At this critical moment a dozen mounted warriors dashed into the open space and dismounted. They^[Pg 96] were headed by a young chief of striking appearance, who hastened over to Keith and offered his hand. He then called to the hostile Indians to come to him, and demanded to know the cause of the quarrel. When he had learned the circumstances from both sides, he turned to his own people and lashed them with his contempt.

'I know you all,' he cried, 'and I know that those who are afraid of their bodies in battle are thieves when they are out of it; but the warrior of the strong arm and the great heart will never rob a friend.... The white men are brave and belong to a great nation. Even if you were to kill them all, a greater number would come to revenge their death.... They have offered you compensation. If you refuse to take it, I will join them with my own warriors; and, should one white man fall by the arrow of an Indian, that Indian, if he were my brother, with all his family, shall die.' Then, raising his voice, he cried: 'Let all who love me come forth and smoke the pipe of peace!' A hundred or more immediately came over to his side, the rest sullenly abandoned the attack, and peace was restored.

I have summarised Ross Cox's version of the young chief's harangue, and his own, he says, gives but a faint outline of the original, which lasted for two hours, and soared into wild flights of Indian metaphor, accompanied by impassioned gestures. The admiration of the whites knew no bounds, and^[Pg 97] was perhaps not lessened by the fact that their lives hung upon the issue.

Cox was very much impressed with what he saw of the Kootenay Indians. They are, he says, 'the remnant of a once brave and powerful tribe who, like the Flatheads, were perpetually engaged in war with the Blackfeet for the right of hunting on the buffalo grounds. They are strictly honest in all their dealings, and remarkable for their adherence to truth. Polygamy is unknown among them. The greatest cleanliness and neatness are observable about their persons and lodges. They are rather handsome, above the middle size, and, compared with other tribes, remarkably fair. On the whole, we may say of this interesting people that, in their intercourse with white men, they are rather haughty and reserved; in conversation candid; in trade honest; brave in battle; and devotedly attached to each other and their country.'

A few years ago, I said, I saw something of the Kootenay, and can confirm the judgment of Ross Cox. The Kootenay of the present day are a remarkably superior race of Indians, immeasurably above some of the tribes east of the Rockies, and west of them too. Some

of the Indian faces I saw at the David Thompson celebration at Windermere were strikingly handsome, and full of character and dignity. One must confess that in this respect a comparison with the whites who attended the meeting was rather humiliating.[Pg 98]

Ross Cox's description of the manner of trading agrees pretty much with that of Alexander Ross so far as the smoking ceremonies go. Cox adds that 'when the smoking terminates, each Indian divides his skins into different lots. For one he wants a gun, for another ammunition, for a third a copper kettle, an axe, a blanket, a tomahawk, a knife, ornaments for his wife, etc., according to the quantity of skins he has to barter. The trading business being over, another general smoking-match takes place, after which they retire to their village or encampment. They are shrewd, hard dealers, and not a whit inferior to any native of Yorkshire, Scotland, or Connaught in driving a bargain.'

The trade rivalry between the North West Company and the Pacific Fur Company (Astor's people) in the Columbia country sometimes led to dramatic and more or less amusing episodes. Ross Cox tells of one of these. Two rival traders were operating in the Flathead country, and, as usual, their posts stood side by side. They might be rivals in trade, but, after all, they were two lonely whites in the midst of savages; they needed companionship, and any day they might need mutual protection.



MOUNT EREBUS [\[To List\]](#)

Both happened at this time to be out of that indispensable commodity, tobacco, and at any moment a large party of Flatheads were expected with skins to barter. Nothing could be done without tobacco, as that was the indispensable adjunct^[Pg 99] of all trading operations. Whichever succeeded in getting a supply first would capture the trade. The P.F.C. man sent a frantic appeal to a neighbouring fort to let him have a quantity of tobacco at the earliest possible moment.

The distance between the posts was seventy-two miles, and the tobacco must be delivered that night or the Indians would go over in a body to the N.W.C. trader, with whom they were better acquainted. It was eleven in the forenoon when the letter arrived, and it seemed utterly impossible to save the situation. It happened, however, that Clarke, who received the letter, had a famous horse called Le Bleu, who had beaten all competitors in racing. Ross Cox offered to make the attempt if he would lend him Le Bleu.

He got away at noon on a hard gallop, at first over a well-beaten trail. Late in the evening he came to a thick wood, through which the trail ran for ten miles. In the darkness he lost his way, and got entangled in down-timber and brushwood. Leaving the matter, however, to the sagacity of his horse, they finally won through, emerging from the forest about eight o'clock, to see the lights of their destination twinkling on the river's bank. Two hours later their rivals appeared with a quantity of tobacco, but in the interval the Flatheads had smoked with the P.F.C. people and turned over to them their furs.

Cox also tells of the tragic end of an old voyageur^[Pg 100] who in his day was a famous character in the fur trade, Jacques Hoole. Hoole had been born in France, had served as a soldier in Scotland and made prisoner at Culloden, had been exchanged and subsequently sent to Canada with one of the French regiments. He was present at the Battle of the Plains of Abraham, and was one of the men who carried Montcalm into Quebec after he had received his death-wound.

After the cession of Canada, Hoole left the army, married, and became a farmer. When the revolutionary war broke out, he again responded to the call to arms, this time on the British side, became a sergeant of militia, and for the second time served through a siege of Quebec, the aggressors now being the Americans. He was wounded in the knee, which caused a slight lameness during the rest of his life.

Hoole's good angel seems about this time to have neglected him. The republicans had destroyed his farm, his wife proved faithless, and his children disobedient. In disgust he made up his mind to become a fur-trader, and went west with a party that was about setting out from Montreal. He was too independent to join any of the trading companies, but preferred trapping beaver on his own account, selling the skins at one or other of the forts.

'This extraordinary old man,' says Ross Cox, 'was ninety-two years of age at the time of his death, I saw him the year before, and he then^[Pg 101] possessed much of the lightness and elasticity of youth, with all the volatility of a Frenchman. His only luxury was tobacco, of which he consumed an incredible quantity. From his great age he was called *Père Hoole*. The Canadians treated him with much respect, and their common salutation of *Bon jour, père* was answered by *Merci, merci, mon fils*. He was found one day close to a beaver-dam, scalped and with a bullet through his temples.'

But it is high time we got to Ross Cox's journey over Athabaska Pass. He left Boat Encampment on the morning of May 28th, and made his way up the wide and cheerless valley of Wood River. 'The awful solitude,' he says, 'of this gloomy valley.' Three days later he commenced the ascent of the Grande Côte. 'At its base, were cedar and pine-trees of enormous magnitude, but in proportion as we ascended they decreased in size, and at the summit of the hill their appearance was quite dwarfish.'

Shortly after noon they arrived at the summit, and camped there. 'The country round our encampment presented the wildest and most terrific appearance of desolation that can be well imagined. ... Close by, one gigantic mountain of conical form towered majestically into the clouds far above the others. This is called M'Gillivray's Rock, in honour of the late Wm. M'Gillivray, a principal director of the company. One of our rough-spun,^[Pg 102] unsophisticated Canadians, after gazing upwards for some time in silent wonder, exclaimed with much vehemence, 'I'll take my oath, my dear friends, that God Almighty never made such a place!'

On the 1st of June the party set out about an hour before daybreak in deep snow, to make their way down the Whirlpool. At eleven in the morning they arrived at 'a charming spot of rich meadow ground called by our hunters L'encampement du Fusil.'

The following morning they managed to make some miles before sunrise. 'After passing through a thick wood of small pine, arrived on the banks of the Rocky Mountain river [Whirlpool], at a particular spot called the Traverse du Trou.'

All hands set about preparing a raft. The river was between three hundred and four hundred yards wide, with a gentle current. The raft was carried into a rapid, where it became entangled among the rocks. Finally it was broken up, and they had to construct another. Ross Cox, with several others, embarked on it, taking with them part of the baggage, in an attempt to get it to the other side of the river. 'Poled away with might and main, and had crossed two-thirds of the river when, on the point of entering an eddy, lost bottom with our poles, and were carried instantly into a rapid.'

They brought up against a rock. One of the^[Pg 103] men jumped overboard and managed to gain the shore. Another came out to the raft with a line to secure it until the baggage could be got ashore. Having fastened one end, he and a companion managed to get several heavy bundles on land. This unfortunately lightened the raft so much that it instantly swung round, the line snapped, and before they had time to look about they found themselves again in the rush of the rapid. 'All hands immediately jumped overboard, and seized the raft in the hope of stopping its progress, but the overpowering strength of the current baffled all our puny efforts. We might as well have tried to arrest the flight of an eagle, or stop a cannonball in its career.'

Ross Cox and a couple of others managed to clamber on to the raft once more, but their situation was not enviable. They had neither pole nor paddle, and even if they had could have done nothing much with such a clumsy craft in such a rapid current. They shot down one rapid scatheless, but were almost immediately hurried into another. Again they escaped. 'On emerging from this we were forced with inconceivable rapidity through a succession of cascades and rapids, two miles in extent, in the course of which, owing to our repeatedly striking on the rocks, the timbers began to separate.'

'A brief space of smooth water at length appeared, and we once more indulged a faint hope of escape, when a loud and roaring noise announced[Pg 104] the immediate vicinity of a cataract. The current became swifter. I looked in vain for relief to my two companions. But neither the active mind of my friend M'Gillivray, ever fertile in resources, nor the long experience of the Iroquois, accustomed from his infancy to similar scenes, could suggest any chance of escape.

'The thunders of the cataract now dinned in our ears; the spray from the boiling abyss began to envelop us; and every succeeding moment diminished the slight hopes which had hitherto occasionally shot across our bewildered senses. The frightful rapidity of the current, joined to the apprehension of instant annihilation, banished even the recollection of kindred home, which, for a moment, obtruded itself on my imagination. With hope fled despair, and in silent resignation we awaited our fate.

'But at the moment when it appeared inevitable the sharp eyes of M'Gillivray observed that the raft was caught by a counter-current immediately above the fall. He had a small stick, with which he sounded, and found the depth did not exceed three feet. He instantly jumped overboard, followed by Louis and myself, and with a little exertion we succeeded in dragging the raft into an eddy free from the influence of the great body of water, from whence we easily brought it to shore without the loss of a single article.'

Meanwhile another group had been left on the[Pg 105] opposite side of the river, and, after what they had seen of the fate of the raft, were in no mood to attempt a crossing. They made their way down the banks for about five miles, and camped there very miserably, without food or bedding or even means to make a fire.

The following day the parties were reunited. Nine in the morning brought them to the mouth of the Whirlpool. There, notwithstanding their previous experience, they again built rafts, and were carried down the Athabaska with great rapidity, escaping shipwreck on a big rock in the middle of the stream by almost a hair's breadth. They arrived late in the evening at an uninhabited house called the 'Old Fort,' built, says Cox, 'several years ago as a hunting-lodge for trappers, but subsequently abandoned.' This was, of course, Henry House, at the junction of the Athabaska and the Miette.

At eight on the morning of the fifth they arrived at a hunting-lodge belonging to the North West Company. No person was in it. They had abandoned the rafts, whose principal purpose had been to get them over to the eastern bank of the Athabaska, some time before reaching the mouth of the Miette, and had since been travelling down the valley on horseback. Toward evening they came to Roche Miette, and, climbing laboriously over its face, encamped on the eastern side.

Early on the morning of the sixth they came[Pg 106] opposite Jasper House, or, as Ross Cox calls it, Rocky Mountain House. A canoe was sent over, and ferried them across the river. It is evident that in 1817 Jasper House was still in its original position at the foot of what is now called Brulé Lake, on the left bank. Some time after the union of the two companies the Hudson's Bay Company rebuilt the post on a somewhat more elaborate scale, some miles farther up the river, at the foot of Jasper Lake. The hunting-lodge mentioned by Ross Cox must have been somewhere in this vicinity.

Jasper House, according to Cox, 'was a miserable concern of rough logs, with only three apartments, but scrupulously clean inside. An old clerk, Jasper Hawes, was in charge, and had

under his command two Canadians, two Iroquois, and three hunters.' It will be noted that both Franchère and Cox refer to it as Rocky Mountain House. Alexander Ross, who came through in 1825, was the first to mention it as Jasper House, and it is on his authority that Hawes or Hawse is credited with having built the post. Hawes was in charge in 1817, but Ducoigne had been there two years earlier. It therefore seems improbable that the post could have been built by Hawes.

At half-past one in the afternoon of the seventh Ross Cox took leave of 'the melancholy hermitage of Mr. Jasper Hawes.' He followed the old route down the Athabaska and by way of Methye Portage and Ile à la Crosse Lake to the Churchill and the [Pg 107] Saskatchewan. He gives a spirited account of their arrival at Ile à la Crosse fort. These were days when the long-drawn-out conflict between the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company was at its worst. Each had become a law unto itself, seizing and imprisoning members of the other organisation, destroying their goods, sometimes burning their forts. Occasionally, as in the case of Governor Semple, their conflicts ended in the death of men on one side or the other.

Cox therefore approached the fort warily, not knowing in whose hands it might be at the moment. It was with relief that he saw the flag of the North West Company flying above the bastions. They had disembarked on the opposite side of the lake, to shave themselves and make themselves presentable, and now paddled bravely over to the wharf, singing the '*Chanson à l'Aviron.*'

At Ile à la Crosse Cox was welcomed by that redoubtable Nor'-wester Peter Skene Ogden, of whom he gives a very entertaining account 'humorous, honest, eccentric, law-defying Peter Ogden, the terror of Indians, and the delight of all gay fellows.'

Cox continued his way down to Montreal, and at Rainy Lake bid farewell to M'Gillivray, who was to return to the west. 'We had spent many happy days together on the banks of the distant Columbia. Our studies and amusements were the same. We had suffered in common many privations incident [Pg 108] to that dangerous district; and, whether in a canoe, or on horseback, over a bit of backgammon, or on the midnight watch, there was a community of feeling that peculiarly endeared us to each other.... The pressure of the parting grasp was rendered doubly painful by the reflection that in all human probability we should never meet again.'

Cox had left the fur trade, and was on his way back to the land of his birth, England. And we now may also bid him farewell.

CHAPTER VI

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LAST OF THE NOR'-WESTERS

The morning broke clear, and as we enjoyed the luxury of a hot breakfast we talked over our plans. Last night it had seemed altogether desirable to get back under a civilised roof as soon as possible. This morning, with the sun shining over glorious peaks, civilised roofs had no place in the picture. I still had a day or two to spare, and, as the Warden was free, we decided to ride up to Athabaska Falls. This would really be in the nature of a compromise with civilisation, as our route would be over a very civilised trail, and at the end we would find a newly finished and very comfortable cabin. However, we would be alone in the heart of the eternal hills, and that was a prospect that still had charms.

The tourist, whose name is legion, fortunately prefers for the most part to confine his activities in Jasper Park to little jaunts that will bring him back to luncheon or dinner at the Lodge, and to rough it at night in one of the rustic cottages, equipped with bathroom, electric light, and telephone. Perhaps from his point of view he is entirely right. He certainly escapes many discomforts, and it may be that he misses nothing. At any rate, he leaves the silence unbroken of many a mountain-top and valley,^[Pg 110] spots that sometimes seem too wonderful to be looked upon by human eye.

Highbrow and her companions (Highbrow was not a lady horse, but for some occult reason we always spoke of her) were reluctant to resume their loads, but were finally persuaded. We mounted, turned down the trail, after a time crossed the new bridge over the Whirlpool, and, following the luxurious thoroughfare on the other side, came in the course of a very delightful morning's ride to the spot where the Athabaska hurls itself down into a gloomy, awe-inspiring cavern, writhes there in fury for a moment, and then flings itself down a tortuous gorge. The sullen roar of its passage could be heard while we were still some way down the trail.

Leading our horses carefully over the bridge that spans the gorge immediately below the falls, we mounted again, and rode up the opposite bank for several miles to the new cabin. This trail leads to the southern boundary of the park, and we learned that some of our friends had lately passed, on their way from Banff to Jasper, a wonderful trip through the very heart of the Rockies, but one, unfortunately, that takes more time than most of us have at our disposal.

Turning the horses loose in an excellent natural pasture, we made ourselves comfortable in the cabin, filled the kettle at a spring that bubbles out of the bank, and enjoyed a late but thoroughly satisfactory lunch. We debated whether to build a camp-fire^[Pg 111] or use the cabin stove. It might seem that to tired men the choice would be extremely simple, but the fact was that, while the stove was there, the stove-pipe was still lying on the floor, and, what was worse, there was not enough of it to reach the chimney. However, we decided on the stove, and the Warden, who was a man of resource, managed to improvise an additional length of pipe. It took much longer than a camp-fire, but we had the satisfaction of feeling that human ingenuity and will-power had once more triumphed over the innate stubbornness of inanimate things.

Thereafter we selected a comfortable spot where we could bask in the sun and enjoy the view, and lighted our pipes.

This, I said, seems as good a time as any to inflict upon you some of the experiences of Alexander Ross and Edward Ermatinger, the last of the fur-traders who have left any account of their journeys through Athabaska Pass.

The Warden said nothing, and I continued:

Ross came through in 1825, with Governor Simpson of the Hudson's Bay Company, Chief Factor McMillan, Ross's son, and fifteen voyageurs. The old North West Company was then a thing of the past, having been absorbed by the Hudson's Bay Company four years before. Some of the men who had made the Canadian company famous were now working for the H.B.C., and others, like Thompson, had retired from the fur trade and gone east to spend [Pg 112] the evening of their life in some quiet village on the banks of the St. Lawrence or the Ottawa. Ross himself was on his way to Red River, where he was to make his home in the Settlement that Lord Selkirk had established, and that some years later was to become known as Winnipeg.

Perhaps the most interesting parts of Ross's book, *Fur-Hunters of the Far West*, which contains the account of his journey of 1825, are those relating to the manners and customs of the fur-traders. Here, for instance, is his lively description of the manner in which the partners or bourgeois of the North West Company travelled when they were going light that is, without trading-goods, furs, or other heavy freight:

'The bourgeois is carried on board his canoe upon the back of some sturdy fellow generally appointed for this purpose. He seats himself on a convenient mattress, somewhat low in the centre of his canoe, his gun by his side. No sooner is he at his ease than his pipe is presented by his attendant and he begins smoking, while his silken banner undulates over the stern of his painted vessel. Then the bending paddles are plied, and the fragile craft speeds through the currents with a degree of fleetness not to be surpassed, yell upon yell from the hearty crew proclaiming their prowess and skill.

'A hundred miles performed, night arrives; the hands jump out quickly into the water, and their nabob and his companions are supported to terra [Pg 113] firma. A roaring fire is kindled and supper is served. His honour then retires to his repose. At dawn of day they set out again; the men now and then relax their arms and light their pipes; but no sooner does the headway of the canoe die away than they renew their labours and their chorus, a particular voice being ever selected to lead the song. The guide conducts the march.

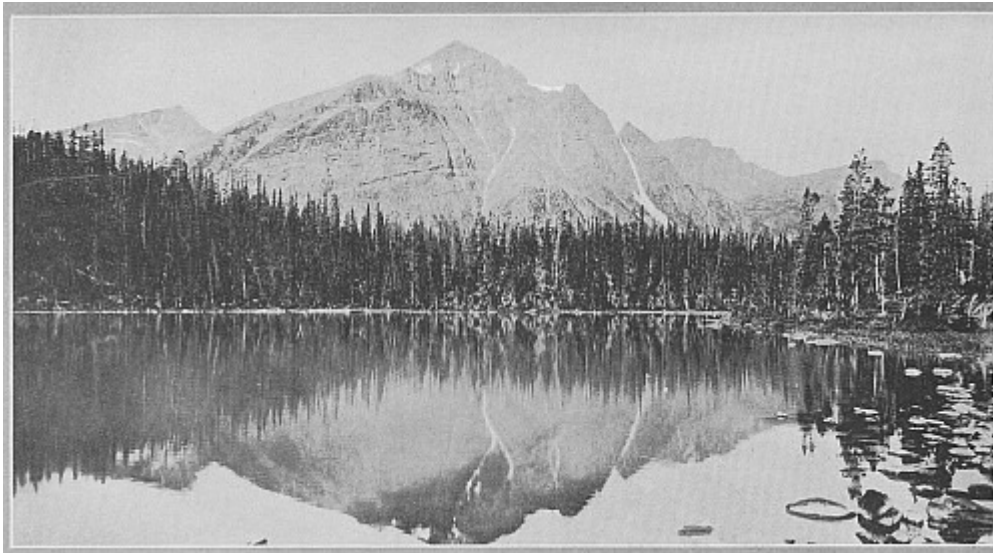
'At the hour of breakfast they put ashore on some green plot. The tea-kettle is boiling, a variegated mat is spread, and a cold collation set out. Twenty minutes later and they start anew. The dinner-hour arrives. They put ashore again. The liquor can accompanies the provision basket; the contents are quickly set forth in simple style; and, after a refreshment of twenty minutes more, off they set again, until the twilight checks their progress.

'When it is practicable to make way in the dark, four hours is the voyageur's allowance of rest; and at times, on boisterous lakes and bold shores, they keep for days and nights together on the water, without intermission and without repose. They sing to keep time to their paddles; they sing to keep off drowsiness, caused by their fatigue; and they sing because the bourgeois likes it.

'Through hardships and dangers, wherever he leads, they are sure to follow with alacrity and cheerfulness over mountains and hills, along valleys and dales, through woods and creeks, across lakes and [Pg 114] rivers. They look not to the right nor to the left; they make no halt in foul or fair weather. Such is their skill that they venture to sail in the midst of waters like oceans, and, with amazing aptitude, they shoot down the most frightful rapids, and generally come off safely.

'When about to arrive at the place of their destination, they dress with neatness, put on their plumes, and a chosen song is raised. They push up against the beach as if they meant to dash the

canoe into splinters, but most adroitly back their paddles at the right moment, whilst the foreman springs on shore and, seizing the prow, arrests the vessel in its course. On this joyful occasion every person advances to the waterside, and great guns are fired to announce the bourgeois's arrival. A general shaking of hands takes place, as it often happens that people have not met for years. Even the bourgeois goes through this mode of salutation with the meanest. There is perhaps no country where the ties of affection are more binding than here. Each addresses his comrades as his brothers, and all address themselves to the bourgeois with reverence, as if he were their father.



LAKE CAVELL

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'From every distant department of the company, a special light canoe is fitted out annually, to report their transactions. The one from the Columbia sets out from the Pacific Ocean the first of April, and, with the regularity and rapidity of a steam-boat, it reaches Fort William, on Lake Superior,^[Pg 115] the first of July; remaining there until the twentieth of that month, when it takes its departure back, and, with an equal degree of precision, arrives at Fort George, at the mouth of the Columbia River, on the twentieth October.

'A light canoe likewise, leaving the Pacific, reaches Montreal in a hundred days, and one from Montreal to the Pacific in the same space of time, thus performing a journey of many thousand miles without delay, stoppage, or scarcely any repose in the short period of little more than six months.'

And here is an entertaining picture of the voyageur painted by himself: 'I have now,' said he, 'been forty-two years in this country. For twenty-four I was a light canoe-man; I required but little sleep, but sometimes got less than required. No portage was too long for me; all portages were alike. My end of the canoe never touched the ground till I saw the end of the portage. Fifty songs a day were nothing to me. I could carry, paddle, walk, and sing with any man I ever saw. During that period I saved the lives of ten bourgeois, and was always the favourite, because when others stopped to carry at a bad step, and lost time, I pushed on over rapids, over cascades, over chutes, all were the same to me. No water, no weather, ever stopped the paddle or the song.

'I have had twelve wives in the country; and was once possessed of fifty horses, and six running dogs, trimmed in the first style. I was then like^[Pg 116] a bourgeois, rich and happy; no bourgeois had better-dressed wives than I, no Indian chief finer horses, no white man better-harnessed or swifter dogs. I beat all Indians at the race, and no white man ever passed me in the chase. I wanted for nothing; and I spent all my earnings in the enjoyment of pleasure. Five hundred pounds, twice told, have passed through my hands; although now I have not a spare shirt to my back nor a penny to buy one. Yet, were I young again, I should glory in commencing the same career again. I would spend another half-century in the same fields of enjoyment. There is no life so happy as a voyageur's life; none so independent; no place where a man enjoys so much variety and freedom as in the Indian country. *Huzza! huzza! pour le pays sauvage!*'

Although the life of a fur-trader was not without its hazards and discomforts, there were, according to Ross, many compensations. The duties were a mixture of mercantile and military. Young clerks of ability were soon put in charge of trading-posts, some involving very considerable responsibility. The clerks 'are first taught to obey, afterwards they learn to command, and at all times much is expected of them. It sometimes happens to be long before they receive the charge of a first-rate establishment, but when the general posture of affairs is propitious to their employers, it is not very often that their laudable desires are disappointed. They at length arrive at the long-wished-for goal^[Pg 117] of partners, and are entitled to a vote in all weighty decisions of the council; they are thenceforth styled Esquires.

'The bourgeois lives in comfort if not luxury. He rambles at his pleasure; enjoys the merry dance, or the pastime of some pleasing game; his morning ride, his fishing-rod, his gun and his dog, or a jaunt of pleasure to the environs in his gay canoe, occupy his time. In short, no desire remains unfulfilled. He is the greatest man in the land.

'The buildings belonging to the Company are both neat and commodious; each class being provided with separate abodes. The apartments are appropriately divided into bedrooms, ante-chambers, and closets. There are also the counting-rooms, the mess-room, the kitchen and pantry, the cellars, and the Indian hall; together with handsome galleries.'

Ross has something to say about women in the fur trade. 'Even in this barbarous country,' he says, 'woman claims and enjoys her due share of attention and regard. Her presence brightens the gloom of the solitary post; her smiles add a new charm to the pleasures of the wilderness. Nor are the ladies deficient in those accomplishments which procure admiration. Although descended from aboriginal mothers, many of the females at the different establishments throughout the Indian countries are as fair as the generality of European ladies, the mixture of blood being so many degrees^[Pg 118] removed from the savage as hardly to leave any trace, while, at the same time, their delicacy of form, their light and nimble movements, and the penetrating expression of the bright, black eye combine to render them objects of no ordinary interest.

'They have also made considerable progress in refinement, and, with their natural acuteness and singular talent for imitation, they soon acquire all the ease and gracefulness of polished life. On holidays the dresses are as gay as in longer settled countries; and on these occasions the gentleman puts on the beaver hat, the ladies make a fine show of silks and satins, and even jewellery is not wanting. It is not surprising, therefore, that the roving North-wester, after so many rural enjoyments, and a residence of twenty years, should feel more real happiness in these scenes than he can hope for in any other country.'

The Warden, who is not much of a ladies' man, listened rather impatiently to these particulars. He couldn't see what the presence of women at the trading-posts had to do with the men's happiness or contentment, nor could he agree that silks and satins, beaver hats and jewellery, had any proper place in such a life. To his mind a man's best companion was his pipe. Has Ross anything to say about tobacco? he asked.

Yes; he tells an Indian legend about its origin. He found it current among the Snake Indians.[Pg 119] 'They were the first smokers of tobacco on the earth, and have been in the habit of using it from one generation to another since the world began. All other Indians learned to smoke and had their tobacco first from them. The white people's tobacco is only good for the whites, and, if they should give the preference to the white people's tobacco and give up smoking their own, it would then cease to grow on their lands, and a deleterious weed would grow up in its place and poison them all.'

Ross says the native tobacco is a good substitute for our own, having the same aromatic flavour and narcotic effect. It is weaker, but he attributes that to the way they manufacture it for use. They dry it, and then rub it between their hands or pound it with stones until it is tolerably fine, in which state it almost resembles green tea in appearance. In smoking it leaves a gummy taste in the mouth.

Well, to get back to his journey, Ross, with Governor Simpson and the others, reached Boat Encampment in April, and started up Wood River. It was most uncomfortable travelling at that time of the year. 'The cold made us advance at a quick pace, to keep ourselves warm. The Governor himself, generally at the head, made the first plunge into the water, and was not the last to get out. His smile encouraged others, and his example checked murmuring.' Ross adds that, although the weather was so cold, they had to be lightly clad, because, as they were constantly fording the river, the[Pg 120] weight of heavier clothes would have been a serious handicap.

'To give a correct idea,' he says, 'of this part of our journey [that is, up Wood River] let the reader picture in his own mind a dark, narrow defile, skirted on one side by a chain of inaccessible mountains, rising to a great height, covered with snow, and slippery with ice from their tops down to the water's edge. And on the other side a beach comparatively low, but studded in an irregular manner with standing and fallen trees, rocks and ice, and full of driftwood; over which the torrent everywhere rushes with such irresistible impetuosity that very few would dare to adventure themselves in the stream. Let him again imagine a rapid river descending from some great height, filling up the whole channel between the rocky precipices on the south and the no less dangerous barrier on the north. And lastly let him suppose that we were obliged to make our way on foot against such a torrent, by crossing and re-crossing it in all its turns and windings from morning till night, up to the middle in water and he will understand that we have not exaggerated the difficulties to be overcome in crossing the Rocky Mountains.'

Finally they arrived at the foot of the big hill, then known as the Grande Côte, which leads up to Athabaska Pass. At nine in the morning they began the ascent, and kept it up till five in the afternoon, toiling up the hill with their heavy loads.[Pg 121] Difficult as it is, Ross says that at certain seasons, when the snow was off the ground, loaded horses managed to ascend and descend by this route.

On the summit of the hill they found the snow eight feet deep. They camped there for the night, each man rolling himself up in his blanket, with his feet to the camp-fire, and his boots and socks on a forked stick to dry. By morning the fire had sunk down, and some of the men, jumping up suddenly, slid down into the fiery gulf, but, unlike McDonald of Garth, they did not stay there. 'Fortunately,' says Ross, 'the melted snow which they carried down with them and the activity of their comrades, who hastily dragged them up, prevented anything more serious than a fright.'

In the morning they advanced 'through a broad, level valley, thickly wooded with dwarf pines, for about six miles, when we reached what is called the great height of land.' In honour of the Committee's Punchbowl, he says, 'His Excellency treated us to a bottle of wine, as we had neither time nor convenience to make a bowl of punch, although a glass of it would have been very acceptable. It is a tribute always paid to this place when a nabob of the fur trade passes by.' This sufficiently explains the peculiar name that has been given to this singular little lake, though there does not appear to be any evidence as to when the name was given or under what circumstances.[Pg 122]

Leaving the Punchbowl, they followed the Whirlpool down to what was then known as the Grand Bateau or Grand Batture the gravel flat between Scott Creek and Ross Cox Creek. 'Not far from this place,' says Ross, 'is a very singular rock, placed on the shoulder of another. This huge and conspicuous rock we named the Giant of the Rocks. The bold and rugged features of the prospect here defy all description.'

They had only advanced a few miles from Grand Bateau when they had the good fortune to meet, at a place Ross calls Campment d'Original, two of the men from Henry House with a band of light horses for their service. The remainder of their journey to the Athabaska they were therefore able to make comfortably on horseback.

At the junction of the Whirlpool, or, as Ross calls it, Punchbowl Creek, with the Athabaska, is a place that was then known as the Hole, 'so called from the depth of water at the edge of the bank, the Athabaska being unfathomable there.'

Having left the valley of the Whirlpool, Ross comments on the character of the pass. 'Of the different passes and portages through these mountains with which I am acquainted, the Athabaska Pass is perhaps the longest as well as the most gloomy and difficult, owing chiefly to the water in the portage valley [Wood River]. The Kootenay Pass, the route by Hell's Gate, or the Valley of Troubles are all less tedious, if taken in the proper season, and[Pg 123] the obstacles they present are more easily overcome than those of the Athabaska. Yet the Athabaska can be travelled from one end to the other on horseback, with the exception of one or two steps in the Grande Côte.'

They arrived at Henry House, or Rocky Mountain House, as Ross calls it, without difficulty. 'Here we found no lordly dwellings, but a neat little group of wood huts suited to the climate of the country.... My old friend Joseph Felix Larocque, an old North-wester, and formerly of Columbia, was in charge, and treated us to a dish of very fine titameg or white fish, the first I had ever seen. The white fish here is considered in point of quality in the same light as the salmon of the Columbia, the finest fish in the country, and many an argument takes place whenever parties east and west of the mountains meet as to which is the best. The Columbians, as a matter of course, argue in favour of the semetleck or salmon, while the adverse party

advocate as strongly the titameg. Delicious as we found the titameg, there was nothing either in the taste or flavour to induce me to alter the opinion I had formed. I gave the preference to the good old salmon as the king of all the piscatory tribes on either side of the mountains.'

They left Henry House in two canoes, and made their way down the Athabaska. Passing through Jasper Lake now Brulé Lake they came to Jasper House, 'still smaller and of less importance than the[Pg 124] first (Henry House), and so called in honour of the first adventurer who established it.' Ross, of course, refers to Jasper Hawse, who, as I said before, is generally credited, though I think improperly, with having built the post about the beginning of the century. No one knows if the curiously punning resemblance between the names of the man and the post was accidental or deliberate. Jasper House was at this time in charge of a man of the name of Klyne, 'a jolly old fellow with a large family.' Attached to the post were only a few indolent freemen. Not an Indian could be seen about the place.

We may take leave of Alexander Ross at Fort Assiniboine, 'a petty post erected on the north bank of the river [Athabaska], and so completely embosomed in the woods that we did not catch a glimpse of it until we were among huts and surrounded by howling dogs and screeching children. At this sylvan retreat there were but three rude houses. Two white men and six half-breeds were all we saw about the place. This mean abode was dignified with the name of fort, and with the presence of a chief factor.' Ross adds, however, that Fort Assiniboine was then being reconstructed by the Hudson's Bay Company on a more elaborate scale.

CHAPTER VII

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A BOTANIST IN THE MOUNTAINS

That, I said, is about all the fur-traders have to tell us about the old Athabaska Trail. There are still, however, several narratives of travellers who came this way through the mountains. One was a botanist, another a missionary, still another an artist. Also some travelled over part of the route, but did not go through Athabaska Pass. The botanist, David Douglas, is remembered principally because his name was given to the Douglas fir. But he was also largely responsible for the Brown and Hooker puzzle.

David Douglas was a native of Scone, near Perth, Scotland. His enthusiasm for plants attracted the attention of Dr. William Jackson Hooker, the eminent botanist, and Douglas acted as his assistant for some time. When the Royal Horticultural Society was looking for a man to send on a botanical expedition to North America, Dr. Hooker at once recommended Douglas. He went first to the United States in 1823. The following year he sailed from England on the Hudson's Bay Company's ship *William and Ann* to the Columbia, to make a further collection of plants on the Pacific side of the continent.[Pg 126]

He was received by Dr. John McLoughlin at Fort Vancouver with characteristic kindness, and threw himself with enthusiasm into a study of the new and interesting flora of the valley of the Columbia. He spent a good deal of his time among the Indians, and seems to have got along very well with them. In fact, he sometimes found their hospitality embarrassing. On one occasion the principal chief of the tribe insisted on providing quarters for the botanist in his own lodge, 'but,' says Douglas, 'by reason of the immense number of fleas and the great inconvenience suffered thereby, I preferred to put up at my own camp on the shore of the river.'

Douglas's journal is perhaps rather dry reading to anyone not interested in botany, but here and there one comes across human touches that are not without their appeal, sometimes to one's sympathy, sometimes to one's sense of humour. Although a man of rather poor physique, his enthusiasm for his work made light of all obstacles, but could not always put the same enthusiasm into his Indian guides. Announcing one morning that he intended to climb to the summit of a mountain on the north side of the river, his guide 'became forthwith sick,' and sent his younger brother as a substitute. The latter showed so little interest in the expedition that Douglas had to present him with all his provisions, except four small biscuits and a little tea and sugar, as a bribe. They slept on the mountain without blankets,^[Pg 127] and the botanist returned the following day faint and weak, but the happy possessor of a number of new plants.

A few days later he had the pleasure of spending an evening with a fellow botanist. 'We sat and talked over our several journeys, unconscious of time, until the sun from behind the majestic hills warned us that a new day had come.'

It is not necessary to say anything more of Douglas's experiences during the two years he spent botanising on the Pacific slope. On March 20, 1827, he started overland with the annual express, with Edward Ermatinger and seven men. Dr. McLoughlin accompanied his guest some distance up the river. Whether or not on this occasion the famous chief factor travelled in state, as he enjoyed doing, Douglas does not say, nor does he make any mention of Mrs. McLoughlin. However, we know from the journal of one of his contemporaries that both Dr. McLoughlin and his wife found pleasure in such harmless amusements. 'McLoughlin,' he says, 'and his suite would sometimes accompany the brigades from Fort Vancouver in regal state, for fifty or a hundred miles, when he would dismiss them with his blessing and return to the fort. He did not often travel, and seldom far, but on these occasions he indulged his men rather than himself in some little variety.

'It pleased Mrs. McLoughlin thus to break the monotony of her fort life. Upon a gaily caparisoned^[Pg 128] steed, with silver trappings and strings of bells on bridle reins and saddle-skirt, sat the lady of Fort Vancouver, herself arrayed in brilliant colours, and wearing a smile which might cause to blush and hang its head the broadest, warmest, and most fragrant sunflower. By her side, also gorgeously attired, rode her lord, king of the Columbia, and every inch a king, attended by a train of trappers, under a chief trader, each upon his best behaviour.'

Douglas mentions that McLoughlin was much concerned over the loss of his gun, which, it appears, was the same one Alexander Mackenzie had carried on both his expeditions, to the Arctic and the Pacific.

At noon on April 27th they had the satisfaction of landing at Boat Encampment. 'How familiar soever,' says Douglas, 'high snowy mountains may have been to us where in such a case we might be expected to lose that just notion of their immense altitude, yet on beholding the

grand dividing ridge of the continent all that we have seen before disappears from the mind and is forgotten, by the height, the sharp and indescribably rugged peaks, the darkness of the rocks, the glacier and eternal snow.'

'The following morning,' says the botanist, 'having the whole of my journals, a tin box of seeds, and a shirt or two tied up in a bundle, we commenced our march across the mountains in an[Pg 129] easterly direction, first entering a low, swampy piece of ground about three miles long, knee-deep in water and covered with rotten ice.'

This day he was forced to put on his 'bear's-paws, or snow-shoes, the snow being from four to seven feet deep. 'Much annoyed throughout the day by their lacing or knotting becoming slack by the wet, and, being little skilled in the use of them, I was falling head over heels, sinking one leg, stumbling with the other, they sometimes turning backside foremost when they became entangled in the thick brushwood. To-day is a scene of some curiosity even to myself, and I can hardly imagine what a stranger would think to see nine men, each with his load on his back, his snow-shoes in his hand, starting on a journey over such an inhospitable country one falling, a second helping him up, a third lagging and far behind, a fourth resting and smoking his pipe, and so on.'

They had the same difficulty as those who had gone before them in getting up Wood River. Six times they forded it on the twenty-ninth. 'The feet cannot with safety be lifted from the bottom, but must be slid along the moment the water gets under the sole, over goes the person. It is necessary in very powerful currents to pass in a body, the one supporting the other, in an oblique direction.... On coming out of the water and trotting along on the hoar frost we found it intensely cold, and all our clothing that was wet immediately[Pg 130] became cased in ice; still withal no inconvenience whatever was sustained.'

On the last day of the month they began their ascent of the Big Hill, or Grande Côte. 'The ravines or gullies unmeasurable, and toward noon becoming soft, sinking, ascending two steps and sometimes sliding back three, the snow-shoes twisting and throwing the weary traveller down (and I speak as I feel) so feeble that lie I must among the snow, like a broken-down waggon-horse entangled in his harnessing, weltering to rescue myself. Obligated to camp at noon, two miles up the hill, all being weary.... Find no fault with the food, glad of anything.... Dreamed last night of being in Regent Street, London! Yet far distant. Progress nine miles.'

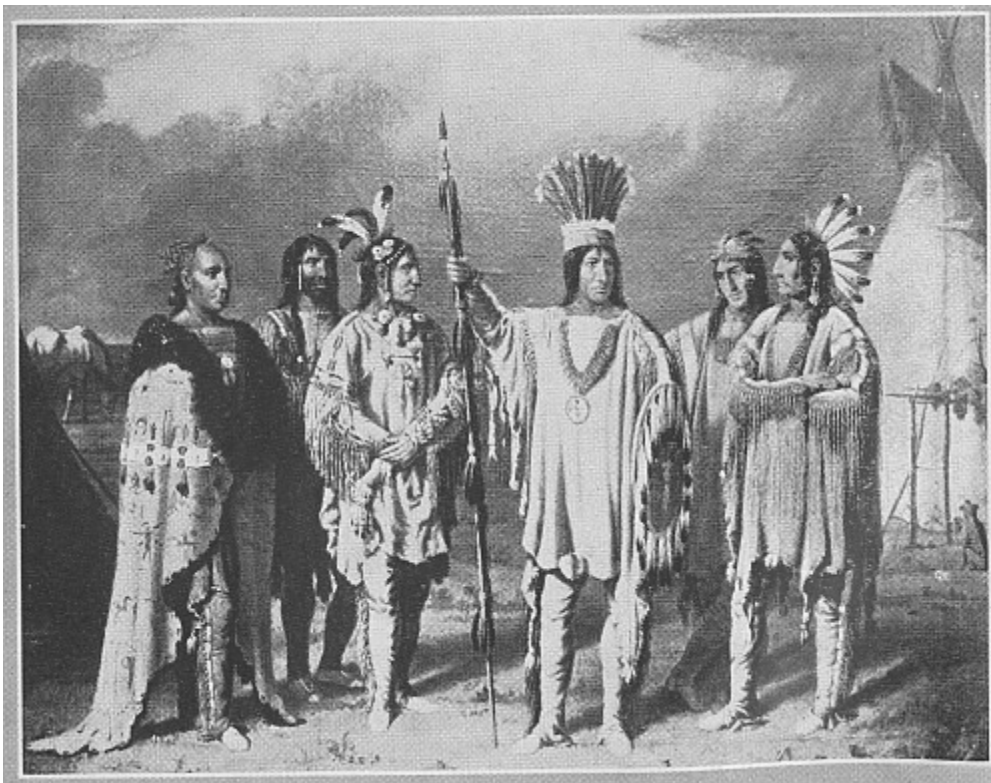
The following morning they reached the summit and camped. 'After breakfast,' says Douglas, 'being well refreshed, I set out with the view of ascending what appeared to be the highest peak on the north or left-hand side [*north* reads *west* in the original detailed journal]. The height from its apparent base exceeds 6,000 feet, 17,000 feet above the level of the sea. After passing over the lower ridge of about 200 feet, by far the most difficult and fatiguing part, on snow-shoes, there was a crust on the snow, over which I walked with the greatest ease. A few mosses and lichens were seen. At the elevation of 4,800 feet vegetation no longer exists not so much as a lichen of any kind to be seen, 1,200 feet of eternal ice.'



BOAT

ENCAMPMENT Paul Kane [\[To List\]](#)

[Pg 131]



BLACKFOOT

CHIEFS Paul Kane [\[To List\]](#)

'The view from the summit is of that cast too awful to afford pleasure nothing as far as the eye can reach in every direction but mountains towering above each other, rugged beyond all

description; the dazzling reflection from the snow, the heavenly arena of the solid glacier, and the rainbow-like tints of its shattered fragments, together with the enormous icicles suspended from the perpendicular rocks; the majestic but terrible avalanche hurtling down from the southerly exposed rocks producing a crash, and groans through the distant valleys, only equalled by an earthquake. Such gives us a sense of the stupendous and wondrous works of the Almighty.

'This peak, the highest yet known in the northern continent of America, I felt a sincere pleasure in naming MOUNT BROWN, in honour of R. Brown, Esq., the illustrious botanist, no less distinguished by the amiable qualities of his refined mind. A little to the south is one nearly of the same height, rising more into a sharp point, which I named MOUNT HOOKER, in honour of my early patron the enlightened and learned Professor of Botany in the University of Glasgow, Dr. Hooker, to whose kindness I, in a great measure, owe my success hitherto in life, and I feel exceedingly glad of an opportunity of recording a simple but sincere token of my kindest regard for him and respect for his profound talents. I was not on this mountain.'

The ascent had taken him five hours, but he [Pg 132] came down again in an hour and a quarter. 'Places where the descent was gradual, I tied my shoes together, making them carry me in turn as a sledge. Sometimes I came down at one spell 500 to 700 feet in the space of one minute and a half.'

The following morning they resumed their journey. Douglas refers to the Committee's Punchbowl. 'This,' he says, 'is considered the half-way house. We were glad the more laborious and arduous part of the journey was done. The little stream Athabaska, over which we conveniently stepped, soon assumed a considerable size, and was dashed over cascades and formed cauldrons of limestone and basalt seven miles below the pass.... The difference of climate and of soil, and the amazing difference of the variety and size of vegetation, are truly astonishing; one would suppose he was in another hemisphere, the change is so sudden and so great.'

As they went on down the Whirlpool they 'passed on the right a very high perpendicular rock with a flat top, and three miles lower down on the same side two higher ones, rising to peaks about a mile apart at the base, with a high background which appears two-thirds glacier, and in the valley or bosom of the three, columns and pillars of ice running out in all the ramifications of the Corinthian order. From the mouth of the valley of this awesome spectacle a passage is seen more like the crater of a volcano than anything else: [Pg 133] stones of several tons weight are carried across the valley by the force of the current during the summer months.'

The 'high perpendicular rock with a flat top' was no doubt Mount Kane, and the two higher peaks three miles lower down on the same side would be Mount Evans and Mount Scott, while the glacier was Scott Glacier.

After leaving the Grand Bateau, Douglas went ahead of his men and managed to get lost. As luck would have it, just as the sun was creeping behind a hill, and he was facing the unpleasant prospect of having to go supperless and blanketless to bed, he saw smoke curling up through the trees about a mile to the eastward. When he got there he found Jacques Cardinal camped with eight horses he had brought up from Henry House for the use of Douglas and his party.

An hour later one of the men came up, and soon after several shots were heard, signals from his party to let him know where they were. He sent the man on horseback to let them know that he had arrived at the Moose Encampment.

Old Cardinal gave Douglas a warm welcome, and roasted for him a shoulder of mountain sheep, which he found very fine. He had a pint copper kettle patched in an ingenious manner, in which he boiled a little of the meat for himself. This kettle and his knife were all his cooking utensils. The voyageur observed to Douglas that he had no spirits^[Pg 134] to offer him. Turning round and pointing to the river, he said, 'This is my barrel, and it is always running.'

Douglas learned from the old man that Dr. Richardson, the Arctic explorer, had arrived at Cumberland House in February, that Captain Franklin had met a ship in the North Sea (the Arctic), and that Thomas Drummond, the botanist of Franklin's expedition, had spent the previous summer in the mountains, and had gone down to Fort Edmonton.

Shortly after daylight the following morning Cardinal went with the horses and brought up Douglas's men. They had breakfast, loaded their packs no doubt with a sigh of thanksgiving on the horses, and continued their journey. Crossing the Athabaska at its junction with the Whirlpool, they arrived at Rocky Mountain House (Henry House) at half-past six in the evening, having made thirty-four miles, according to Douglas's reckoning.

On the morning of the fourth they embarked in two birch-bark canoes and went rapidly down the Athabaska. 'Arrived at Jasper House, three small hovels on the left side of the river, at two o'clock.' Here they remained until the following morning. 'Had some of the much-talked-of white fish for supper, which I found good, although simply boiled in water, eaten without sauce or seasoning, hunger excepted, not so much as salt, afterwards drinking the liquor in which it was boiled.'^[Pg 135]

In the evening Ermatinger found an old violin at Jasper House, and, being something of a performer, played for the voyageurs, while they danced for several hours. 'This,' comments Douglas, 'may serve to show how little they look on hardship when past; only a few days ago and they were as much depressed as they are now elated.'

At daybreak they were off again down the river, shooting one rapid after another. About eleven in the morning they saw the last of the mountains. Camped at sundown, having made ninety-three miles. The next morning they ran into ice, and had to go ashore until it moved downstream. Continuous difficulty with ice forced them to camp early. 'Burnt my blanket and great toe at the fire last night,' Douglas notes in his journal the following morning. The same afternoon they reached Fort Assiniboine, where they were received by Mr. Harriott.

It may be added that, on his way down to York Factory, Douglas met Thomas Drummond at Carlton House, and had an opportunity of examining his 'princely collection' of botanical specimens; found Dr. Richardson at Cumberland House; met Governor Simpson at Norway House; travelled through Lake Winnipeg with Sir John Franklin; and spent a month at the Red River Settlement as the guest of the Governor, Donald McKenzie.

By the way, Douglas left two journals, and in what has been said above I have followed^[Pg 136] sometimes one and sometimes the other. In the more detailed journal there is a note about Drummond that is not without its spice of humour. Douglas had sent a lot of his specimens

ahead in charge of one of the fur-traders the previous year, and had had a good deal of difficulty coming down the Athabaska. Drummond happened to be returning from the mountains at the same time, and accompanied him. Hope my box is safe, says Douglas. I do not relish a botanist coming in contact with another's gleanings. Which, after all, merely shows that a man may become an eminent scientist and remain perfectly human.

Edward Ermatinger also left a journal of this same journey across the mountains, which may be compared with that of Douglas. They started to climb the Grande Côte, he says, through snow four or five feet deep, travelling by short stages, and experiencing a good deal of difficulty in finding and keeping the trail. Camped a mile on the west side of the summit.

The following morning they continued their journey at 3 a.m. in order to make the most of the crust on the surface of the snow. Travelled seventeen miles before breakfast, at 11 a.m. Gave the men a rest 'during the heat of the day.' The snow was rapidly diminishing, and after they had passed the Grand Batture they discarded their snow-shoes. Camped at half-past six, a pretty good day's work. Among other things, it had involved fording the [Pg 137] river six times. Ermatinger sent a man forward to meet the horses that were to be brought up from Henry House. Found them at Campment d'Original. Not a word here or elsewhere about Douglas.

They were off again the next morning at three; reached Campment d'Original at seven, after travelling five miles through very bad woods; loaded the baggage on the horses, and pushed on to the Grand Traverse, where they arrived about noon. Forging the Athabaska, they continued their way to Camp des Vaches, which they reached about three in the afternoon. 'The greater part of the road hither lies through thick woods much encumbered with fallen timber.' Ice and snow thick on the banks of the river. About 6 p.m. they arrived at Henry House; and the following day ran down the river in canoes to Jasper House.

The following October Ermatinger travelled through the pass, on his return journey from York Factory to Fort Vancouver. He reached Jasper House on the first of October, and found there three men from the Columbia with a letter from J. W. Dease dated at Boat Encampment. At this period a good deal of leather was sent west through the mountains, for use at the different trading-posts, that commodity being scarce in New Caledonia. We consequently find Ermatinger loading fifteen packs of leather for transport through the Yellowhead. These packs, with the baggage and provisions, were sent up the river by canoe, while the party [Pg 138] proceeded on horseback. They had altogether fifty-four horses.

The first night they camped at Campment de Cardinale, above the upper lake, or Jasper Lake as it is to-day. The hunters killed two moose near the camp. The next day they reached Henry House, where they split up into two parties, one going up the Miette with the leather, and the other, under Ermatinger, to the Columbia by way of Athabaska Pass. Ermatinger's list of baggage sounds curious: 22 cassettes (a kind of small trunk), 2 cases and basket, 1 portmanteau, 8 bags pemmican, ½ bale portage straps, 2 kegs sugar biscuits, 1 bag flour, ½ moose, beddings, etc. They camped on the banks of the Athabaska, above the Campment des Vaches.

The next day they camped three or four miles above the Campment d'Original, on the Whirlpool, having found the trail much encumbered with fallen timber. On the 7th they sent a man ahead to clear the road, found the ground very swampy, and camped near the height of land. 'View of the mountains very grand.'

Ermatinger also refers briefly to his trip through the pass, going east, in 1828. They set out about the beginning of May, and had a very difficult time, with rain and snow, getting up the Grande Côte. Passed the summit, and pushed down the Whirlpool, over deep snow, to Campment de Fusil, where they had breakfast. Met Cardinal, from Henry House,[Pg 139] at the Grand Batture, with fourteen horses. Camped at Campment d'Original.

The next day they had breakfast at the mouth of the Whirlpool, and reached Henry House at 5 p.m. The men set about repairing the canoes, and they arrived at Jasper House the following evening.

CHAPTER VIII

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[Pg 140]

THE BROWN AND HOOKER PUZZLE

You remember, I said to the Warden, those peaks up at the summit?

Yes, he replied; Brown and Hooker.

That's all very fine, I retorted. There are a number of peaks in the neighbourhood of the Committee's Punchbowl, but which is Brown and which is Hooker?

Why, said the Warden, I thought Brown was the old fellow on the west side of the Punchbowl, and Hooker the one on the east side.

So did a good many of us, but quite a lively little controversy has raged about the question for years, growing originally out of the earlier problem as to the height of these mountains.

Douglas, you will recollect, says that he climbed a mountain on the north side, which he named Mount Brown, and that a little to the south was one nearly of the same height, which he named Mount Hooker. As I said before, there are two Douglas journals for this trip. The one I quoted was a condensed journal, evidently written after his return to England. His original detailed journal, entered up at the time, says that the mountain he ascended was 'on the left hand or west side.' 'North' and[Pg 141] 'south' in the later journal should therefore read 'west' and 'east.' As Douglas's original journal is the final court of appeal so far as he is concerned, it is interesting to know that in it he says nothing about naming either peak, the height 17,000 feet is not given, nor, in fact, is any mountain specifically mentioned except the one he climbed. All that he says of the other peaks is this: 'Nothing, as far as the eye could perceive, but mountains such as I was on, and many higher.' Both names and height were an after-thought.

For years after Douglas's journey two formidable peaks were shown on the maps, on either side of Athabaska Pass Mount Brown, 16,000 feet, and Mount Hooker, 15,700 feet. Even so

very careful a scientist as George M. Dawson, in his *Preliminary Report on the Rocky Mountains*, 1886, says, 'The culminating point of the Rocky Mountains is doubtless to be found about the 52nd parallel of north latitude, or between this and the 53rd parallel, where Mounts Brown and Murchison occur, with reputed altitudes of 16,000 and 13,500 feet respectively, and Mount Hooker, also reported to be very lofty.'

In 1893 Professor A. P. Coleman, of the University of Toronto, made a determined effort to find the two famous peaks, upon the strength of which Canadians had for many years been in the habit of claiming possession of the two highest mountains in the Rockies. The story of his journey is found in[Pg 142] his *Canadian Rockies*, a very entertaining and instructive book.

He reached the Athabaska by a long and difficult trip up through the heart of the Rockies from Morley, near Banff. After some little difficulty he found the mouth of the Whirlpool, and started up the valley. 'We were,' he says, 'surprised to find the old fur-traders' trail so well cut out and with such frequent blazes. It had, no doubt, been freshened up by the early C.P.R. survey parties, though Indians must have used it later.' Coleman managed to wrench his knee in a bad bit of trail, and suffered severely throughout the remainder of the journey. They camped on the flats in front of Scott Glacier.

They were now five days from the Athabaska, and expected to make their next camp at the summit. 'I climbed on my horse, ready for the start, keen to see the giants Brown and Hooker, which should loom up just round the bend of the valley ahead.' It sounds familiar to see Coleman's note 'the bulldogs and buffalo-flies drove the horses frantic,' and later, 'sand-flies and black flies had now joined forces with the other tormentors.'

Early in the afternoon they reached the Committee's Punchbowl. 'Some of the maps make the Punchbowl a lake ten miles long, but here in real life it was only a small pool less than two hundred yards long.' But, 'if this was the Punchbowl, where were the giant mountains Brown and Hooker?[Pg 143] We looked in vain for magnificent summits rising ten thousand feet above the pass, one on each side.' They had reached their destination after six weeks of toil and anxiety, and could not even raise a cheer. 'Mount Brown and Mount Hooker were frauds, and we were disgusted at having been humbugged by them.'

They stayed five days in their camp at the summit. Coleman was too lame to climb, and 'loafed about the camp and fought the pestilent flies that made life a burden.' He had a large population of marmots for neighbours, but saw few of them, although whenever a dead tree was cut down for firewood there was a horrified chorus of whistles. Thunder-storms were frequent, and the grey waters of the Punchbowl suggested nothing convivial. 'Who were the Committee, and why did they need so large a Punchbowl on this desolate mountain pass? Even Highland Scotch fur-traders could hardly have done much carousing on Athabaska Pass.' One can understand Coleman's pessimism, under all the circumstances.

The second day his companions climbed Mount Brown, and reported it an easy ascent. The height was found to be 9,050 feet. The Inter-provincial Boundary Survey has since found it to be 9,156 feet. It was clear that this must be Mount Brown the giant shrunken to a dwarf. The question of Mount Hooker was less certain. Two of the party had also climbed a ridge-like mountain on the opposite side[Pg 144] of the pass M'Gillivray's Rock, or M'Gillivray's Ridge as it appears on the survey maps at the point where Hooker is indicated on Palliser's map; but 'a

much higher, finer peak rises a few miles east of the Punchbowl, with fields of snow and a large glacier, and was estimated at about eleven thousand feet.

'There was no object in waiting longer on Athabaska Pass, and we turned our steps down Whirlpool River on the way home, quite unelated, though we had been completely successful on our third attempt to reach Mounts Brown and Hooker. What had gone wrong with these two mighty peaks that they should suddenly shrink seven thousand feet in altitude? And how could anyone, even a botanist like Douglas, make so monumental a blunder?

'We asked ourselves all sorts of questions, and got no answers that satisfied us, as we made our way down the valley to the Athabaska. That two commonplace mountains, lower by two thousand or three thousand feet than some of their neighbours to the south-east, should masquerade for generations as the highest points in North America seems absurd; and it is not surprising that Dr. Collie, ten years later, should wonder if we had not reached the wrong pass, and should make a new search for these high mountains.'

Three years later, or in 1896, Walter D. Wilcox, like Coleman, an enthusiastic climber in the Canadian Rockies, made an attempt to solve the Brown and [Pg 145] Hooker puzzle. The particulars are found in his *Rockies of Canada*. He tried a new route by way of the Bow River, the Little and North Forks of the Saskatchewan, and a problematical pass to the Whirlpool. R. L. Barrett accompanied him, and that veteran packer and fine companion Fred Stephens helped to look after the outfit.

Bush fires and other obstacles made the journey a difficult and trying one, though there were many compensations. 'The sound of mountain streams falling in cascades, the picturesque train of horses, each animal cautiously picking a safe passage along the rocky highway; the splendid trees around us, our great height, and the tremendous grandeur of the mountain scenery, all helped to make our surroundings most enjoyable.'

Finally, after a good deal of search, they found a practicable pass between the Saskatchewan and the Athabaska, and came down to the flat, gravel beds of the Sun Wapta River, which they followed for six days, and at last got a distant view of the Athabaska. Finally they reached the lake which Coleman had named Fortress Lake, on the British Columbia side of the range. They were now at no great distance from Athabaska Pass, and hunted eagerly for evidence of the two mighty peaks. Climbing a near-by mountain, Wilcox saw about ten miles to the south-west 'what appeared to be by far the highest and finest peak that I had seen on the entire journey. It was a wedge-shaped peak [Pg 146] rising from a very long and precipitous wall of rock, which seemed to be over ten thousand feet high.' This he thought must be Mount Hooker.

They built a raft and floated down Fortress Lake to the other end; and, descending Wood River, got a magnificent view of the supposed Mount Hooker, but all their observations only confirmed the view that its altitude was not much over ten thousand feet. A rapidly diminishing food supply forced them to turn back, leaving the Brown and Hooker problem just about where it had been before.

In 1897 J. Norman Collie, while climbing Mount Freshfield, saw far to the north-west, perhaps thirty miles, a magnificent snow-covered mountain, its western face a precipice. 'From the way it towered above its neighbours it seemed to be excessively high. Although the great peak Mount Forbes from this point also overtopped all the surrounding peaks by many hundreds

of feet, yet this other giant far away to the north-west was of much greater interest, for there were only two peaks of that size, and so far north, marked on the maps. These were Brown and Hooker, reputed to be 16,000 and 15,700 feet high.'

See how hard it is to kill an idea that has taken root! At any rate, the glimpse he got of this mysterious peak, and the possibility that it might prove to be one or other of the elusive giants, was potent enough to bring Professor Collie out again to the Rockies the following year. With him came [Pg 147] Hugh E. M. Stutfield, another veteran traveller and mountain-climber. Their experiences in the Rockies are told in *Climbs and Explorations in the Canadian Rockies*.

At the outset they were faced with this situation. They, of course, knew the results of Coleman's journey. If they accepted without question his negative conclusions, it was idle to waste any more time hunting for Brown and Hooker. On the other hand, there was the very high mountain seen by Collie from Freshfield. To assume that this was either Brown or Hooker entailed one of two suppositions: 'either that Professor Coleman had been mistaken as to the mountain climbed by the members of his party; or else that the botanist Douglas, who named the peaks, and David Thompson, who estimated their heights at 16,000 and 15,700 feet, had traversed a different Athabaska Pass from the one that now bears the name, and which Professor Coleman undoubtedly visited.

'The first alternative seemed impossible; the second was the less improbable of the two, as it was difficult to understand how Douglas and Thompson, scientists both of them, could have made such glaring errors as to the altitude of these mountains. That peaks which had appeared in every map of Canada for the past sixty years as the loftiest in the Dominion, and which most Canadians still believed in as in their Bibles that these peaks were not, after all, so high as thousands of others in the main range, [Pg 148] seemed almost incredible.... It may be mentioned that some travellers from Edmonton, who visited the Athabaska Pass in the spring of 1898, asserted that they had seen Mount Brown and Mount Hooker standing there in their old pride of place, and they scouted the idea of their being frauds. Altogether there seemed enough doubt about the matter to make further investigation desirable.'

A misconception that strikes one here and the same idea appears to have been more or less in the minds of both Coleman and Wilcox is that Douglas and Thompson had made glaring errors as to the altitude of Brown and Hooker. Is that a necessary assumption? Douglas says of the peak he named Brown, 'the height from its base may be 5,500 feet.' The glaring error was not in the altitude of the mountain, but in the altitude of the pass, which in his condensed journal Douglas gives as between 10,000 and 11,000 feet. The actual elevation of the summit is 5,737 feet. Thompson made the same mistake in overestimating the height of the pass above sea-level.



CAMP AT

AMETHYST LAKE, TONQUIN VALLEY [\[To List\]](#)

The route of Collie and Stutfield was from Laggan to the upper Saskatchewan, by way of Pipestone and Siffleur Creeks. Collie climbed Mount Athabaska, and got from the summit what he thought was new light on the Brown and Hooker conundrum. A little to the north of a peak which they named Mount Bruce, and directly to the westward of Athabaska, rose what appeared to be^[Pg 149] the highest summit in that region of the Rocky Mountains. 'Chisel-shaped at the head, covered with glaciers and snow, it also stood alone, and I at once recognised the great peak I was in search of; moreover, a short distance to the north-east of this mountain another, almost as high, also flat-topped, but ringed around with sheer precipices, reared its head into the sky above all its fellows. At once I concluded that these might be the two lost mountains, Brown and Hooker.' Subsequent investigation proved that one of these peaks was Mount Columbia, and the other a new peak they named Mount Alberta. By the way, Professor Collie, with more charity for the renowned botanist than has been shown by some other people, named a new peak Mount Douglas.

After his return to England Professor Collie made a further study of Douglas's journey, and convinced himself that Professor Coleman had solved the problem, at least so far as the identity of Mount Brown was concerned, and the non-existence of any peaks of the altitudes suggested by Douglas. 'These two fabulous Titans, therefore, which for nearly seventy years have been masquerading as the monarchs of the Canadian Rockies, must now be finally deposed.'

In the summer of 1913 Geoffrey E. Howard and A. L. Mumm made an expedition up the Whirlpool to the Punchbowl. Fred Stephens, who had looked after the outfits for both Wilcox and^[Pg 150] Collie, was also on this expedition. The travellers picked up at Jasper any information they could as to the route, but this was somewhat meagre. 'Old Swift himself, that prince of pioneers, who has lived hereabouts for seventeen years, had much to tell us at second hand of those colossal giants, Brown and Hooker, at the headwaters of the Whirlpool; and indeed to information of every variety there was no end.' The net result was to leave them thoroughly bewildered, wondering if Coleman had only dreamed that he had been at Athabaska Pass, or had

been bewitched when he was there. In any event, they would also have a look at the Committee's Punchbowl and the more or less impressive peaks that surrounded it.

Someone had said that the trail up the Whirlpool could best be described as a boulevard. Unfortunately it did not live up to its expectations. Time and again they had to cut their way through a welter of tangled timber. However, the weather on the whole might have been worse, and they had comfortable camps. 'Soon we were gathered round the fire in the teepee, and where in the world can one feel such a sense of cosiness, comfort, and well-being, find such good company, hear such fascinating yarns, or smell such delicious odours of cooking or of fragrant pine-smoke as in a teepee in the Rockies on a still night when the fire draws well and the river makes music outside?'

The trip up to the summit was uneventful. At [Pg 151] one place among muskegs they were greatly interested to find remains of corduroy, which convinced them that they were more or less following the old prospector's trail of the Canadian Pacific surveys, along which stores were brought over from British Columbia. Climbing one of the hills, they saw, or thought they saw, a gigantic peak appearing and vanishing behind the clouds. 'I will confess,' says Howard, 'that for a few dizzy hours I harboured a fantastic idea that perhaps Douglas had been right in his estimate of the size of the mountains hereabouts. Still, I knew in my heart that it must be a fantasy, for Coleman is not a man given to making mistakes.'

Another climb, with the clouds flying high, revealed a wonderful panorama of peaks and snowfields, Ross Cox, Scott, Evans, and Kane, with the fine peak that has since been named Mount Hooker, and the several icefields and glaciers that lie between. 'It was a thrilling moment, as we realised that in all probability no human eye had ever rested on many of these glorious peaks.'

On the trail they found an interesting blaze, with the following initials and date:

J.M.
W.C.
H.A.T.
H.S.
Oct. 20
'53.

[Pg 152] This was a relic of one of the annual brigades of the Hudson's Bay Company, in the time of Sir George Simpson, and each of the initials but one was afterwards identified. 'J.M.' was James Murray, 'W.C.' was William Calder, and 'H.A.T.' was Henry A. Tuzo, gold medallist of McGill University, who went overland in 1853, became a physician at the coast, and was father of Mrs. J. A. Wilson of Ottawa, the well-known mountain-climber after whom Mount Tuzo was named.

About this time Mr. Howard found it necessary to turn back, and Mr. Mumm completed the journey to the summit. He got up to the snout of the Scott Glacier, but a change of weather forced him to retreat. The following day he camped beside the Punchbowl.

'Then,' says Mumm, 'came one of my red-letter days. As all the world knows, Mt. Brown, whatever it may have been in the past, is now only 9,000 feet high, but, as a viewpoint, it would

be hard to say too much in its praise. There was not a cloud in the sky, and the atmosphere, as often happens when a solitary fine day occurs in the middle of broken weather, was almost uncannily clear. We spent fully three and a half hours on the summit, trying to absorb the details of a very wonderful panorama.... Immediately north of us was a peak almost the same height as Mt. Brown.'

Descending the valley two days later, Mr. Mumm had a good view of Mount Brown and the adjoining[Pg 153] peak last mentioned. 'It would be hard to find,' says Mumm, 'another pair of mountains rising side by side which resemble each other so closely. They are as like as Tweedledum and Tweedledee, and the resemblance suggested to me a solution which has not, I think, been put forward before of the hitherto unanswered question, where is Mt. Hooker? Why should not these mountains be Mount Brown and Mount Hooker? It has always been taken for granted that they must be on opposite sides of the pass, but there is not a word to warrant this assumption in Douglas's narrative. The only statement he makes that has any topographical significance is the following: 'A little to the southward (of his Mount Brown) is one nearly the same height, rising into a sharper point; this I named Mount Hooker.'

'It is difficult to put an intelligible interpretation on these words except on one hypothesis, namely that Douglas went up the northern peak and called it Mount Brown, and that Dr. Coleman's Mount Brown is Douglas's Mount Hooker.... If Douglas was not something of a mountaineer in fact, a good deal more of a mountaineer than was common in his time I very much doubt if he would have found his way to the top of Dr. Coleman's Mount Brown alone.'

Now here, surely, is something more complicated than a cross-word puzzle. First we had Douglas's Mount Brown, then we had Coleman's Mount Brown;[Pg 154] and now, I submit, we have Mumm's Mount Brown; for if Mumm argues that the peak Coleman's party climbed was not the peak Douglas climbed, why should not you or I argue with as much reasonableness that the peak Mumm climbed was neither? As a matter of fact, there is nothing in Coleman's narrative to suggest what particular mountain his friends climbed, but he does make the quite positive statement 'That the right mountain was climbed is certain, since there is no other even as high within ten miles on the north-west side of the pass.'

In the 1918 volume of the *Canadian Alpine Journal*, Mr. E. W. D. Holway attempted the difficult task of throwing 'New Light on Mounts Brown and Hooker.' Mr. Holway, so that all the evidence may be before his readers, quotes first an article in the *Companion to the Botanical Magazine* of 1836, purporting to give extracts from Douglas's journal, then the journal itself in its summarised form, and finally the detailed journal, all descriptive of the ascent of Mount Brown. He then gives the following extract from Greenhow's *Memoir*, 1840:

'The highest points in the Rocky Mountains and probably in North America, if not in the whole western continent, are those about the 52nd degree of latitude near the northernmost sources of the Columbia River. Mr. Thompson, the astronomer of the Hudson's Bay Trading [Pg 155]Company, has measured several of these peaks, of which one, called Mt. Brown, is estimated by him at sixteen thousand feet, and another, Mt. Hooker, at fifteen thousand seven hundred feet. It has been stated that the same gentleman has recently found other points farther north which he considers to be more than 10,000 feet higher than either of those mentioned.'

And finally he offers this significant quotation from the journals of David Thompson, under date March 10th, 1809. 'At the greatest elevation of the passage across the mountains by the

Athabaska River the point by boiling water gave 11,000 feet, and the peaks are full 7,000 feet above this passage; and the general height may be fairly taken at 18,000 feet above the Pacific Ocean.'

The earliest map, according to Mr. Holway, giving Mount Brown and Mount Hooker, with the elevations of 16,000 and 15,700 feet, is that issued in October, 1829, with the first part of Hooker's *Flora Boreali-Americana*. Douglas, it appears, superintended the preparation of this map.

To these interesting particulars brought together by Mr. Holway, Mr. James White adds a Supplementary Note. He seizes upon the fact that the critical point in the whole controversy is the over-estimate of the elevation of Athabaska Pass. He quotes from Thompson's original notes of January 10th, 1811, the day he crossed Athabaska Pass,[Pg 156] to show that they contain no reference to the elevation of the pass, and says, 'It is evident that Thompson added the elevation in 1849, when writing his *Narrative* for publication. Taken in conjunction with the bracketed note, we have almost a demonstration that Thompson obtained the estimated altitude of 11,000 feet from Simpson.' He thinks it probable that Douglas also got his figures from Simpson at Norway House on his return journey, though 'there is a possibility that it was generally accepted as correct by the officers of the Hudson's Bay Company and North West Company.'

'The surprising feature above Douglas's statement,' he adds, 'is that, as a trained botanist, he must have been informed respecting the tree limit in other parts of the world. Yet he says that the timber-line is 2,750 feet above Athabaska Pass. Therefore he accepts the result, namely, that in latitude 52° 27' the tree limit is 13,750 feet above the sea! In the light of experience elsewhere, how could Douglas accept without question this extraordinary conclusion?'

Mr. White suggests that too much reliance need not be placed upon Greenhow's *Memoir*. As the passage quoted from that work is inaccurate in several particulars, there is reason to believe that the main statement, that the information was drawn from Thompson, is also inaccurate. Mr. White is of the opinion that Greenhow got his facts from Douglas's *Memoir*. [Pg 157]

Finally, Mr. Arthur O. Wheeler struggles with the problem, in an article in the 1921-22 volume of the *Canadian Alpine Journal*. He is not concerned about Mount Brown, apparently accepting the peak climbed by Coleman's party as the same named by Douglas, but devotes himself to the identification of Mount Hooker. His conclusion is that the high peak a few miles east of the Punchbowl, referred to by Coleman, is Douglas's Mount Hooker. The Inter-provincial Boundary Survey surveyed the pass in 1920, and the Topographical Division of the survey subsequently made a report to the Geographic Board of Canada on the positions and altitudes of Mounts Brown and Hooker. The Board accepted the view that the high peak referred to above was Mount Hooker.

In a synopsis of this report, Mr. Wheeler says: 'On a bearing 18° north of east lies a peak, rising into a sharp point, which is distant approximately six miles from the summit of Mt. Brown and which has an altitude of 10,782 feet, or 1,626 feet more than that of Mt. Brown. It seems most likely that this is the mountain Douglas refers to as Hooker. From the vicinity of Fortress Lake this mountain peak stands up in a sharp white cone. It is not conceivable that the long, evenly crested ridge rising directly above the Punchbowl from Athabaska Pass summit has anything to do with the question. It was therefore recommended to the Geographic Board that

the 10,782-foot peak about six miles easterly[Pg 158] from Mt. Brown be confirmed as Mt. Hooker, which has been done.'

I suppose it argues a great deal of stupidity, but I find it difficult to appreciate the force of the evidence upon which this particular peak was recognised as the one named Hooker by Douglas. Why does it 'seem most likely that this is the mountain Douglas refers to as Hooker'? And what has the vicinity of Fortress Lake got to do with the question? Douglas was nowhere near Fortress Lake. Also why is it 'not conceivable that the long, evenly crested ridge rising directly above the Punchbowl from Athabaska Pass summit has anything to do with the question' ?

You can search me, said the Warden. Which is the long, evenly crested ridge? It doesn't sound familiar.

It is our old friend M'Gillivray's Rock. From where you saw it beside the Punchbowl, it doesn't look remotely like a long, evenly crested ridge. We've had a good deal about Brown and Hooker, but I feel stimulated by Mr. Wheeler's rather positive statements to add my mite to the general confusion.

Suppose we get back to Douglas's original journal. 'After breakfast,' he says, 'being, as I conceive, on the highest part of the route, I became desirous of ascending one of the peaks, and accordingly I set out alone on snow-shoes to that on the left hand or west side.' Douglas at that moment stood somewhere about where we were camped[Pg 159] beside the Punchbowl. From where he stood the two dominating peaks were, the one he was about to climb, Mount Brown, and the peak that towered immediately above him on the other side, known to the fur-traders, but probably not to him, as M'Gillivray's Rock.

He does not say definitely in his original journal that he reached the summit of Mount Brown, but we may assume that he did. From there he saw 'nothing, as far as the eye could perceive, but mountains such as I was on, and many higher.' In this journal he says nothing about any other particular mountain; but in his summary journal, prepared after his return to England, he says, 'a little to the south is one nearly of the same height, rising more into a sharp point, which I named Mount Hooker.' As a matter of fact M'Gillivray's Rock is just 376 feet lower than the summit of Mount Brown. As I noted before, Douglas's *north* in the summary reads *west* in the original, and we are justified in changing his *south* in the summary to *east*. M'Gillivray's Rock is 'a little to the east,' and it is also 'nearly of the same height.' He had seen many higher mountains from the top of Mount Brown, but the one he named Mount Hooker was 'nearly of the same height.'

I think we may assume that Douglas wrote up his journal, not on the summit of Mount Brown, but in his camp near the Punchbowl. From that camp, may I repeat, he would be dominated by two quite definite peaks, the one he had climbed and the immense rock that towered above him to[Pg 160] the right. That mountain, which Mr. Wheeler brushes aside so contemptuously, had made quite a different impression on other travellers who had camped beside the Punchbowl. Franchère described it as an icy peak like a fortress of rock, that rose perpendicularly above the lake. Ross Cox speaks of it as a gigantic mountain of a conical form that towered majestically into the clouds far above the others. These men had travelled through a region of magnificent scenery, but were nevertheless impressed with the majestic appearance of M'Gillivray's Rock. The very fact that this alone of all the mountains about the pass had been

named by the fur-traders, is sufficient evidence of the effect it had upon them. Is it so unlikely that Douglas would also have felt the influence, in that particular environment, of this dominating mountain?

One other point. Douglas says of the mountain he named Hooker, 'I was not on this mountain.' He might be expected to say this of M'Gillivray's Rock. Is it conceivable that he would have said it of a peak so situated that he would not have dreamed of climbing it?

With all due deference to Mr. Wheeler and the Inter-provincial Boundary Survey and the Geographic Board, I venture to believe that the two mountains David Douglas had in mind when he named Brown and Hooker were the two peaks of almost equal size that stand nearest to the Committee's Punchbowl on either side. [Pg 161]

And I second the motion, said the Warden.

What do you say to lunch?

By all means, he replied. After that excessively dry and involved argument about Brown and Hooker, I think we both need some nourishment.

We wandered back to the cabin, cooked as good a meal as our limited choice would now warrant, saw that the horses were behaving themselves, and then, with our trusty pipes, walked up the trail for a mile or two to see a mountain goat-track the Warden had been told about.

I thought it might be a little difficult to find, but when we came to it was astonished to find it much more deeply marked than the long-travelled park trail we were on. The goat-trail came down from the mountains, crossed our own at right angles, and ran down to an immense salt-lick on the banks of the Athabaska. There must have been several acres of the river-bank that mountain goats, mountain sheep, and other animals had frequented for countless generations. Their deeply indented trails ran in every direction, and one could pick handfuls of wool from the bushes that grew along their tracks.

As one had a wonderful view across the valley of the Athabaska to a range that sprang up into splendidly jagged peaks, and there was a chance unfortunately not realised of seeing some of the goats, we decided to spend the afternoon here, and, until more interesting events should happen, I went on with my tale.

CHAPTER IX

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IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF DE SMET

On the west side of Jasper Lake is a big peak named Roche De Smet, and the range of which it forms a part bears the same name. The man after whom these mountains are named was not only a very self-sacrificing and devoted missionary, but he was also a notable traveller, and had the gift of describing what he had seen with artless and delightful simplicity, and sometimes with a good deal of gentle humour. He wrote long letters to his Superior, and these were some years ago gathered together and published in book form.

De Smet's missionary labours were carried out on both sides of the mountains, and at one time or another he had been over several of the passes. In 1846 he came east through one of the passes near the International Boundary, travelled north through the country of the Blackfeet, and by way of Fort Assiniboine reached the Athabaska, returning to the Columbia by Athabaska Pass.

His letters are full of interesting anecdotes, his own amusing misadventures as a traveller, character sketches of fur-traders, Indian legends, and incidents in the life of the various tribes with which he came^[Pg 163] into contact. Passing a beaver-lodge, he is reminded of a Flathead legend. 'The Flatheads,' he says, 'affirm that the porcupine and beaver are brothers, and relate that anciently they abode together, but that, having frequently been discovered by their enemies through the indolence, idleness, and extreme aversion of the porcupines for the water, the beavers met in council and unanimously agreed upon a separation. The latter availed themselves of a fine day and invited their spiny brethren to accompany them in a long ramble among the cypress and juniper of the forest. The indolent and heedless porcupines, having copiously regaled themselves with the savoury buds of the one and the tender rind of the other, extended their weary limbs upon the verdant moss and were soon lost in profound sleep. This was the anticipated moment for the wily beavers to bid a final adieu to their porcupine relatives.'

De Smet has a good deal to say about that very interesting confederacy the Blackfeet, whom it had long been his ambition to convert to Christianity. Sometimes he ran across singular characters among them. On one occasion he was addressing a gathering of Blackfeet through an interpreter, as he had not yet acquired their language. The Blackfeet sat on the side of a hill, the chiefs on the ridge, and the common crowd below. When he had ended, one of the chiefs came down to shake hands with him, saluting him in very good English, but^[Pg 164] with an intonation that seemed curiously familiar. 'These people,' said the chief, 'are deeply interested in what you have to tell them, but your interpreter has not put it before them in the right way.' 'But you, sir, where did you learn English?' asked De Smet. 'In Ireland, faith,' replied the Blackfoot chief.

On another occasion, when he was resting in the lodge of a Blackfoot chief, a chief of the Nez Percé tribe entered accompanied by three Blackfeet, a warrior, an interpreter, and a young man about twenty years of age. It appeared that this youth, when not more than a year old, had lost both his parents. His mother, a captive among the Blackfeet, died in the first years of her captivity. His father, whose country was far distant from the Blackfeet, was altogether lost to him. The poor orphan became the adopted son of a Blackfoot woman, who brought him up as one of her own offspring.

The adopted son grew up as a Blackfoot, familiar only with the manners and customs of his new friends, knowing no relations but those about him. On this day the woman whom he believed to be his own mother had declared to him that she was not. She told him what had

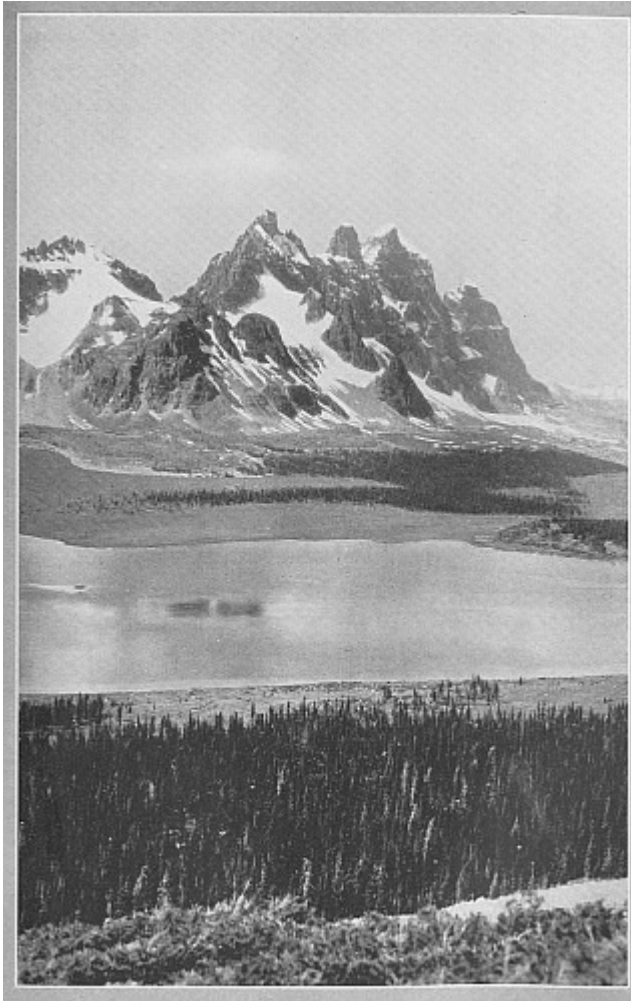
become of his mother. As she followed him into the lodge, he said, 'And who is my father?' 'There,' replied the woman, pointing to the Nez Percé chief.

The father sprang up in amazement, but his [Pg 165] doubts were soon removed as he hastily stripped the young man's garments from his back and discovered the mark of a burn that he had received when he was still an infant.

De Smet was impressed with the burst of feeling drawn from these usually undemonstrative Indians at the unexpected meeting. The chief had no grown children, and urged his son to return with him to his native country, offering him at the same time one of the best and most beautiful of his horses. De Smet added his entreaties.

The son, torn between his duty to his father and love for his adopted mother, hesitated. There were also the companions and friends of his youth, some of whom were absent. How could he leave them all, to go off to an unfamiliar land and an unfamiliar people? Yet these were his own people. Finally he said, 'Give me time to see a little more of her who has watched over me for so many years and whom I have always looked upon as my mother, and permit me also to bid farewell to my companions and friends. After that I shall follow my father.'

De Smet travelled north through much the same country that Thompson had found so inhospitable thirty-six years earlier. And, although he made his journey at a different season, he found it almost equally inhospitable. He was not much of a horseman, and, with his thoughts on other things than the trail, sometimes got into trouble. Here is his entertaining account of one encounter with [Pg 166] an unfriendly branch. 'The path,' he says, 'conducted us through a thick forest of cypress; I am told this is the last *Deo Gratias!* These belts of tall firs are very numerous, and form great obstacles and barriers to land communications between the east and west of the mountains. I have a little word of advice to give all who wish to visit these latitudes. At the entrance of each thick forest one should render himself as slender, as short, and as contracted as possible, imitating the different evolutions of all encounters of an intoxicated cavalier, but with skill and presence of mind. I mean to say, he should know how to balance himself cling to the saddle in every form, to avoid the numerous branches that intercept his passage, ever ready to tear him into pieces, and flay his face and hands.'



**RAMPARTS OF AMETHYST LAKE,
TONQUIN VALLEY [\[To List\]](#)**

'Notwithstanding these precautions, it is rare to escape without paying tribute in some manner to the ungracious forest. I one day found myself in a singular and critical position. In attempting to pass under a tree that inclined across the path, I perceived a small branch in the form of a hook, which threatened me. The first impulse was to extend myself upon the neck of my horse. Unavailing precaution! It caught me by the collar of my surtout, the horse still continuing his pace. Behold me suspended in the air struggling like a fish at the end of a hook. Several respectable pieces of my coat floated, in all probability, a long time in the forest, as an undeniable proof of my having paid^[Pg 167] toll in passing through it. A crushed and torn hat, an eye black and blue, two deep scratches on the cheek would in a civilised country have given me the appearance rather of a bully issuing from the Black Forest than of a missionary.'

In due course he arrived at Fort Assiniboine, built in a meadow near the banks of the Athabaska. 'In the spring,' says De Smet, 'the river can be descended in three days from Jasper to Assiniboine, a distance of more than three hundred miles.' Travelling with dog-sleds up the river, they were nine days in making the trip. He refers to Lake Jasper, evidently meaning what is today known as Brulé Lake, and describes Jasper House as being on the second lake 'twenty miles higher,' the second lake being what we know now as Jasper Lake. 'The rivers Violin and Medicine on the southern side, and the Assiniboine on the northern, must be crossed, and to

reach the height of land at the Committee's Punchbowl we cross the rivers Maligne, Gens du Colets, Miette, and Trou, which we ascended to its source.' The Violin is, of course, the present Fiddle Creek, and the Medicine probably Rocky River. The Assiniboine is perhaps Snaring River; the Gens du Colets may be the upper waters of the Athabaska above the junction with the Miette, and the Trou is obviously the Whirlpool.

On the shore of Lake Jasper De Smet met an old Iroquois called Louis Kwaragwanté, or Walking Sun, accompanied by his family, thirty-six in number.[Pg 168] This reminds me I do not quite know why of a story that De Smet tells somewhere of an enterprising woman of the South Seas who had had nine husbands, and had eaten three of them in times of famine.

De Smet in his narrative tells how Roche De Smet got its name. The Indians at Jasper House, it appears, had determined to honour the missionary in this way. 'Each one discharged his musket in the direction of the highest mountain, a large rock jutting out in the form of a sugar-loaf, and, with three loud hurrahs, gave it my name.'

Colin Fraser was at that time in charge of Jasper House. This is the same Colin Fraser who travelled across the continent with Governor Simpson in 1828. Archibald McDonald, in his narrative of that journey, says of him, 'This decent young man is lately from the Highlands, and on this voyage accompanies the Governor in the double capacity of piper and assistant servant.' Colin seems to have lost no opportunity of playing his beloved bagpipes. 'We got Colin Fraser,' says McDonald, 'to give us a few of his favourite strathspeys on the bagpipes, that went off very well to the ear of a Highlander, but as yet makes but a poor accordance with either the pole or the paddle.'

When they were approaching Norway House, McDonald writes, 'As we wafted along under easy sail, the Highland bagpipes in the Governor's canoe was echoed by the bugle in mine. Our entry was[Pg 169] certainly more imposing than anything hitherto seen in this part of the Indian country. Immediately on landing, His Excellency was preceded by the piper from the water to the fort.' When they got farther west, we are told that the bagpipes and the Highland piper in full dress excited among the natives 'emotions of admiration and wonder,' but it must have been mortifying to a degree to Fraser to find that the Indians west of the mountains, while pleased with the pipes, found the Governor's musical snuff-box wildly exciting.

By the way, Malcolm McLeod, who edits McDonald's *Journal*, has a few words to say of Athabaska Pass. In his day it was known to the men of the Hudson's Bay Company as Rocky Mountain Portage, or Columbia Pass, or Boat Encampment Pass. He says he travelled through it again and again in early life, and once with thirty feet of snow after mid-April in the pass. It was considered impassable even in July on account of the snow. He says he went through in early November. He quotes his father's journal of 1826, 'Arrived at the Rocky Mountains on the 27th April. The snow was so deep that we were obliged to cut our leather trousers to make snow-shoes of.'

On the 25th of April De Smet bade farewell to his kind friend Colin Fraser and his children, 'who had treated me with every mark of attention and kindness.' A few days later he entered the valley of the Fourche du Trou, or the Whirlpool. On the[Pg 170] 1st of May he reached the Grand Batture, 'which has all the appearance of a lake just drained of its waters.'

'Here,' says De Smet, 'we pitched our tent to await the arrival of the Columbia brigade, who always pass by this route on the way to Canada and York Factory.' Not far from their camp they found an object of surprise and admiration, 'an immense mountain of pure ice, fifteen hundred feet high, enclosed between two enormous rocks. So great is the transparency of this beautiful ice that we can easily distinguish objects in it to the depth of more than six feet. One would say by its appearance that in some sudden and extraordinary swell of the river immense icebergs had been forced between these rocks, and had there piled themselves on one another so as to form this magnificent glacier. What gives some colour of probability to this conjecture is that on the other side of the glacier there is a large lake of considerable elevation. From the base of this gigantic iceberg the River du Trou takes its rise.'

Toward evening on the 6th of May they discovered, at a distance of about three miles, two men approaching on snow-shoes. They proved to be the advance-guard of the annual brigade bound from Fort Vancouver to York Factory.

The following morning De Smet and his men were off early, and after a march of eight miles fell in with the main body of the brigade. The leader was Francis Ermatinger, one of the most capable[Pg 171] and adventurous of the traders of the Hudson's Bay Company, and an old friend of the missionary. With him were two British army officers, Captain Warre and Captain Vavasour, who had been sent out by the British Government the previous year in connection with the Oregon question, and were now returning home by way of York Factory. De Smet had entertained them in 1845 at Kalispel Lake.

Captain Warre describes the meeting in his *Sketches in North America and the Oregon Country*. 'We had,' he says, 'scarcely walked ten miles when the joyful sound of human voices assured us of more immediate relief, and we soon encountered a party of men who had been sent to meet us with provisions, accompanied by Le Père de Smit, a Jesuit priest from Belgium, and chief of the Roman Catholic missionaries in the Columbia district, who was on his return to that part of Oregon.'

After a brief halt and exchange of news, the two parties resumed their march, the brigade toward the Athabaska, the missionary up to the height of land. Up to this point De Smet had found the journey not uncomfortable. Now, however, they were running into heavy snow, and it was impossible to proceed except on snow-shoes. 'For myself,' says the missionary, 'I had to try the snow-shoes for the first time in my life. By means of them I had to ascend those frightful ramparts, the barriers of snow, which separate the Atlantic world from the Pacific Ocean.'^[Pg 172]

They had now, according to his computation, seventy miles to travel to reach Boat Encampment, and this they proposed to accomplish in two and a half days. 'The most worthy and excellent Messrs. Rowand and Harriote (John Rowand and John E. Harriott, both chief factors in the service of the Hudson's Bay Company), whose kindness at the Rocky Mountain House and Fort Augustus I shall ever acknowledge, were of opinion that it was absolutely impossible for me to accomplish the journey, on account of my corpulency, and they wished to dissuade me from attempting it.

'However, I thought I could remedy the inconvenience of my surplus weight by a vigorous fast of thirty days, which I cheerfully underwent. I found myself much lighter indeed, and started off, somewhat encouraged, over snow sixteen feet deep. We went in single file, alternately ascending and descending, sometimes across plains piled up with avalanches, sometimes over

lakes and rapids buried deeply under the snow, now on the side of a deep mountain, then across a forest of cypress-trees, of which we could only see the tops. I cannot tell you the number of my summersets. I continually found myself embarrassed by my snow-shoes, or entangled in some branch of a tree. When falling, I spread my arms before me, as one naturally would do, to break the violence of the fall, and upon deep snow the danger is not great, though I was often half buried, when I required the assistance of my^[Pg 173] companions, which was always tendered with great kindness and good-humour.'

After a strenuous day's travel, they made preparations to camp. Pine-trees were cut down and stripped of their branches, and on these they made their beds, whilst a fire was lighted on a floor of green logs. 'To sleep thus,' says De Smet, 'under the beautiful canopy of the starry heavens, in the midst of lofty and steep mountains, among sweet, murmuring rills and roaring torrents, may appear strange to you, and to all lovers of rooms, rendered comfortable by stoves and feathers; but you may think differently after having come and breathed the pure air of the mountains, where in return coughs and colds are unknown. Come and make the trial, and you will say that it is easy to forget the fatigues of a long march and find contentment, and joy even, upon the spread branches of pines, on which, after the Indian fashion, we extended ourselves and slept, wrapped up in buffalo robes.'

The following morning they left this camp, which had been at the summit of the pass, and commenced the descent to the Columbia. It took them five hours to get down to the comparatively level ground at the foot of the Grande Côte. It had turned mild during the night, the snow was very wet, and they climbed down in wet clothes, sad and disconsolate.

'We saw,' says De Smet, 'maypoles all along^[Pg 174] the old encampments of the Portage. Each traveller who passes there for the first time selects his own. A young Canadian, with much kindness, dedicated one to me which was at least one hundred and twenty feet in height, and which reared its lofty head above all the neighbouring trees. He stripped it of all its branches, only leaving at the top a little crown; at the bottom my name and the date of the transit were written.' These were what were known as 'lob-sticks,' an illustration of which will be found in Southesk's book.

Finally they left the valley of what De Smet calls the Great Portage River (Wood River) and made their way through heavy timber, which brought them to an extensive marsh, through which they had to plod up to the knees in mud and water. A little later they were encouraged by the sight of a beautiful and verdant plain, where 'four reindeer were seen carousing, bouncing, and jumping in the midst of plenty.' On the 10th of May, towards noon, they arrived at Boat Encampment. 'Those who have passed the Rocky Mountains at fifty-three degrees of north latitude, during the great melting of the snows, know whether or not we merit the title of good travellers. It required all my strength to accomplish it, and I confess that I would not dare undertake it again.'

De Smet, by the way, tells a story that seems to be related to an incident told by Paul Kane, of an Indian massacre near Jasper House. De^[Pg 175] Smet says that he learned the particulars from a family of Porteurs from New Caledonia, whom he met at the mouth of the Miette. It is a tale of extraordinary privation and hardihood, that sounds curiously like one told by Ross Cox and Alexander Ross of the wife of Pierre Dorion, in the Snake Indian country.

According to De Smet, the father, mother, and brother of a young girl of fifteen were massacred in the woods by a party of Assiniboines. The girl, with her two younger sisters, managed to escape. They wandered about the country for two years, without meeting any human being, without knife or hatchet, making fire by the primitive Indian method, living on roots and wild fruits and an occasional porcupine. In winter they found shelter in the abandoned den of a bear.

The younger girls wandered away at the end of the first year, and were never afterwards heard of. The elder was ultimately found by a voyageur, who looked after her, provided her with clothing, and sent her back to her tribe.

De Smet also tells a story about Jean Baptiste, one of the men employed under Colin Fraser at Jasper House. It is best given in De Smet's own words. The Calvinistic minister was probably Robert Rundle, the well-known Protestant missionary.

'Jean Baptiste was converted. It appears he had done a little thieving in his time, and when[Pg 176] he was converted the Black-Robe enjoined him to restore two dollars he had stolen from the Calvinistic minister of the neighbourhood. Jean Baptiste accordingly presented himself before the minister, and the following dialogue ensued:

'The Minister: Well, what do you want?

'Baptiste: Me one time rob you. Black-Robe tell me give that money back.

'Minister: What money is that?

'Baptiste: Two dollars. Me bad Indian rob you; now me good Indian got water on forehead. Me heap child Great Spirit. Here is your money.

'Minister: All right; don't steal any more. Good-bye, Jean Baptiste.

'Baptiste: Ah! Good-bye no good; me want something else.

'Minister: What do you want?

'Baptiste: Me want receipt.

'Minister: A receipt! What do you want a receipt for? Did Black-Robe tell you to ask for one?

'Baptiste: Black-Robe say nothing. Jean Baptiste want a receipt.

'Minister: But why do you want a receipt? You stole the money and you have given it back that's all there is about it.

'Baptiste: That not all about it. Listen. You old, me young; you die first, after while me die. Understand?[Pg 177]

'Minister: No, I don't. What do you mean?

'Baptiste: Listen. Me mean heap. Me go heaven after a while. Me knock on gate. Great Chief Saint Peter come and open. He say, 'Hello, Jean Baptiste! What do you want?' Me say,

'Want to come in Great Spirit Lodge.' Peter say, 'How about your sins, Jean Baptiste?' Me say, 'Black-Robe forgive sins all right.' He say, 'How about the two dollars you stole from minister? You say you gave them back? You show me receipt.' Now, then, poor Jean Baptiste, poor old Indian, got no receipt, and he have to run all over hell to find you. '

CHAPTER X

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[Pg 178]

WANDERINGS OF A CANADIAN ARTIST

After the missionary comes the artist. Paul Kane was actually an Irishman by birth, but to all intents and purposes he was a native of Toronto. He was brought there as a very young child; it was there he spent the impressionable years of boyhood; and it was there that he made his first efforts as a painter; there also in later years he completed from sketches most of his famous paintings of Indian life and western scenes.

He spent several years studying art in Europe, and on his return to Canada conceived the idea that became his life's work. With the assistance of Sir George Simpson, he travelled through the far West, and for three years lived with Indians and fur-traders on both sides of the Rocky Mountains, studying the ways of the fur trade and the manners and customs of the natives. The results of this study he embodied in several hundred sketches. Most of his finished paintings are now in the Royal Museum of Archæology in Toronto. A few are in the Public Archives and the Speaker's Chambers of the House of Commons at Ottawa. Others are scattered in private collections.

In 1846 he started West on his memorable expedition, the narrative of which he published in [Pg 179] 1859 under the title, *Wanderings of an Artist among the Indians of North America*. The book is illustrated with a number of his own paintings and drawings. It is from this narrative that the following particulars are taken of his journey from Edmonton through Athabaska Pass to the Columbia.

He left Fort Edmonton on the 6th of October with a party of fur-traders, twenty in all. They had sixty-five horses to carry the baggage and provisions. One of the party was Colin Fraser, who was now in charge of Jasper House, and was returning there from a visit to Edmonton. He had, says Kane, been at Jasper for eleven years. He apparently told the artist about his trip across the continent with Governor Simpson eighteen years before, and of the effect his bagpipes had had upon the natives. One of them had been so strongly impressed with the idea that one who played such an extraordinary instrument in such an extraordinary way must be more than human, that he had begged Fraser to intercede for him with his relative, the Great Spirit. The piper had assured the Indian that his influence in that quarter was quite negligible.

Four days brought them to Fort Assiniboine on the Athabaska. The post had apparently not improved since Alexander Ross had visited it twenty-odd years before. 'This establishment,' says Kane, 'although honoured with the name of a fort, is a mere post used for taking care of horses, a common man or horse-keeper being in charge of it.'^[Pg 180]

The artist found much to interest him, by the way, in studying and contrasting the manners and customs of the various tribes with whom he came in contact. He never lost an opportunity of making sketches of Indians and Indian scenes, chiefs, medicine men, warriors, squaws and children, their horses and villages, their characteristic costumes, their ceremonial dances, methods of warfare and buffalo-hunting. Sometimes the Indians were flattered that he should wish to paint their portraits; oftener they objected from superstitious or other reasons, and had to be coaxed or bribed into a more reasonable mood.

Kane also found much to repay his attention in the wild life of the country through which he was travelling. He never tired of studying the ways of that extraordinary little animal the beaver, and the amazing results of its industry. 'I measured a tree,' he says, 'lying on the ground, which had been cut down by the beaver; it was seven feet in circumference.'

On their way up the Athabaska they found three bears, an old one and two cubs, that Colin Fraser had killed some days before and left in a cache. On the 1st of November they entered Jasper's Lake (now Brulé Lake), and the following day Kane writes in his diary: 'We are now close upon the mountains, and it is scarcely possible to conceive the intense force with which the wind howled through a gap formed by the perpendicular rock called Miette's Rock, fifteen hundred feet high, on the one side and a lofty mountain on the other (Roche Ronde). The^[Pg 181] former derives its appellation from a French voyageur, who climbed its summit and sat smoking his pipe with his legs hanging over the fearful abyss.' Someone else who tells the same story says that it was done on a wager.

Two of the men were sent on to Jasper House to procure horses, as it was found that further progress in the boat they had procured at Assiniboine was impossible, both on account of the shallowness of the water and the violence of the wind. The fort was distant about fourteen or fifteen miles. That night it blew a hurricane. The boat was blown out of the water, and was found lying fifteen feet up the bank, although its weight was so great that the strength of nine men could not move it back to the river. They camped among high pines 'waving in the wind like a field of grain.' Their roots 'formed a network near the surface, which was in constant motion, and rocked us to sleep as we lay around our camp-fires.'

They arrived at Jasper House cold, wet, and famished, but were soon cheered by a blazing fire and five or six pounds of mountain sheep. The fort consisted of 'only three miserable log huts. The dwelling-house is composed of two rooms, of about fourteen or fifteen feet square each. One of them is used by all comers and goes Indians, voyageurs, and traders, men, women, and children, being huddled together indiscriminately, the other room being devoted to the exclusive occupation of^[Pg 182] Colin and his family, consisting of a Cree squaw and nine interesting half-breed children.' Kane made a sketch of the post, which appears in his book.

The Indians in the neighbourhood of Jasper House numbered only about fifteen or twenty. They were, according to Kane, of the Shoo-Schawp (Shuswap) tribe, and their chief, of whom he made a sketch, was called Capote Blanc by the voyageurs. His real home was a long distance to the north-east (Kane must have meant to say south-west), but 'he had been treacherously

entrapped whilst travelling with thirty-seven of his people, by a hostile tribe, which met him and invited him to sit down and smoke the pipe of peace. They unsuspectingly laid down their arms, but before they had time to smoke their treacherous hosts seized their arms and murdered them all except eleven, who managed to escape, and fled to Jasper House, where they remained, never daring to return to their own country through the hostile tribe. Capote Blanc was a very simple, kind-hearted old man, with whom I became very friendly.'



MOUNT EDITH

CAVELL [\[To List\]](#)

A day or two later they started up the valley of the Athabaska with thirteen loaded horses, but, as there was no likelihood that they would be able to take the horses over the pass, Kane had an Indian make him a pair of snow-shoes. On the sixth they encamped at La Row's Prairie to pasture their horses. The following day they travelled hard and made some distance, although the route [Pg 183] lay 'sometimes over almost inaccessible crags, and at others through gloomy and tangled forest.' As they ascended the snow increased in depth, and they began to feel the effects of the increased cold and rarefaction of the atmosphere.

On the eighth Kane noticed two mountain goats looking down from a lofty and precipitous ledge of rock, not exceeding, to all appearances, a few inches in width. As the snow was now very deep, and there was fear that the party that was waiting for them at Boat Encampment might give up hopes of meeting them and return down the Columbia, leaving them in an exceedingly awkward and tragic predicament, they sent two of the men forward at top speed.

They camped on the ninth at the Grand Bateur, and the following day found it necessary to send the horses back, as they stuck fast in the snow. The day was spent in making snow-shoes. Two experienced men were sent ahead to beat a track, and Kane made his first essay on snow-shoes, suffering both discomfort and discomfiture. One of the party, Mrs. Lane, wife of a fur-trader, who had been accustomed to snow-shoes from her childhood at Red River, proved to be one of the best pedestrians.

They camped early, making a regular winter encampment, which was only done when the snow was too deep to reach the ground. 'Some of the old voyageurs amused themselves by telling the new hands or *mangeurs du lard* that the Indians in those parts were giants from thirty to forty feet high,[Pg 184] and that accounted for the trees being cut off at such an unusual height.'

Kane gives a minute description of a winter camp in the mountains. First the snow was beaten down by walking around on snow-shoes. Five or six logs of green timber were then laid down close together, so as to form a platform. The fire of dry wood was then kindled on it, and pine branches spread on either side, on which the party, wrapped in their blankets, laid themselves down with their feet toward the fire. That incident of someone falling into the hole made by the burning coals seems to have been a familiar one on the Athabaska trail. Kane says an Iroquois, who had placed himself too near the fire, rolled down a depth of six or seven feet, the snow having melted under him while he slept. 'His cries awoke me, and, after a hearty laugh at his fiery entombment, we succeeded in dragging him out.' It is not mentioned if the Iroquois joined in the laugh. Possibly not.

On the twelfth they reached the summit, walked across the frozen surface of the Punchbowl, and the following morning began the descent of the Grande Côte. It had taken them seven days to come up from Jasper House. In one day they had made their way down the Pacific side to nearly the same level. The descent was a work of great difficulty on snow-shoes, particularly for those carrying loads; their feet frequently slipped from under them, and the loads rolled down the hill. They[Pg 185] forded the icy waters of Wood River thirty-seven times, and reached Boat Encampment about five in the afternoon of the fifteenth.

Kane found that the men sent to meet them at Boat Encampment had been waiting for thirty-nine days, and had made all their preparations to return down the river the following day, had not the messengers arrived in the nick of time.

The worst part of the journey was now over, and Kane remarks, 'Few who read this journal, surrounded by the comforts of civilised life, will be able to imagine the heartfelt satisfaction with which we exchanged the wearisome snow-shoes for the comfortable boats, and the painful anxiety of half-satisfied appetites for a well-stocked larder.'

His trip down the Columbia to Fort Vancouver need not be described here. He remained at the fort for some time, enjoying the hospitality of its officers and the company of educated men. Among the many interesting native types that he added to his gallery of portraits was Casanov, chief of the Flatheads, a man of advanced age and striking personality. He had maintained his great influence over his tribe chiefly by means of the superstitious dread in which they held him. For many years he had kept a hired assassin to remove any obnoxious individual against whom he entertained personal enmity. He had married a daughter of Concomly, who had previously been the wife of McDougall of the North West Company. Kane says that on[Pg 186] the first marriage Concomly had shown his liberality by 'carpeting her path from the canoe to the fort with sea-otter skins.' Such a dowry a few years later would have been worth a king's ransom.

Kane's narrative is full of interesting particulars of Indian customs, among others their way of making fire. 'The fire,' he says, 'is obtained by means of a small, flat piece of dry cedar, in which a small hollow is cut, with a channel for the ignited charcoal to run over; this piece the Indian sits on to hold it steady, while he rapidly twirls a round stick of the same wood between the palms of his hands, with the point pressed into the hollow of the flat piece. In a very short

time sparks begin to fall through the channel upon finely frayed cedar-bark placed underneath, which they soon ignite. There is a great deal of knack in doing this, but those who are used to it will light a fire in a very short time.'

Kane travelled about the country, up the Columbia and its tributaries, and even as far afield as Vancouver Island and the adjacent mainland, visiting the different tribes, studying their ways, and drawing pictures of them and their home-life. He tells this story of a fur-trader who had been in charge of Fort Walla Walla on the Columbia:

'His clerk had a quarrel and fight with the son of a chief, whom he beat. The Indian thereupon collected a large party of the tribe, and rushed with them into the yard of the fort, and attempted to seize the offender for the purpose of taking his[Pg 187] life. Mr. Mackenzie kept them off for some time, but, finding he could do so no longer, he ordered one of the men to bring him out a keg of powder, the head of which he knocked in, and, taking a flint and steel from his pocket, he stood over it as if about to ignite it, telling the Indians that if they did not immediately depart he would show them how a white chief could die and destroy his enemies. The Indians took the alarm, and fled through the gates, which he immediately barred against them, secretly sending the clerk the next day to another post out of their reach.' Curiously enough, during the days of New France, Saint-Pierre, who was in charge of Fort La Reine on the Assiniboine, adopted the same expedient to get rid of a troublesome band of Indians.

One of the tribes Paul Kane visited had a peculiar breed of small dogs with long hair. These dogs were bred for clothing purposes. The hair was cut off with a knife, and mixed with goose-down and a little white earth to cure the feathers. This was then beaten together with sticks, and twisted into threads by rubbing it down the thigh with the palm of the hand, in the same way that a shoemaker forms his wax-end, after which it underwent a second twisting on a distaff to increase its firmness. The threads were then woven into blankets by a very simple loom of their own contrivance. A single thread was wound over rollers at the top and bottom of a square frame, so as to form a continuous woof[Pg 188] through which an alternate thread was carried by the hand, and pressed closely together by a sort of wooden comb. By turning the rollers every part of the woof was brought within reach of the weaver. In this way a bag was formed, open at each end, which, being cut, made a square blanket.

In one of his excursions Kane was struck with the singular ugliness of an Indian chief whom he met. He very reluctantly consented to his portrait being drawn, and enquired very earnestly if it would not involve the risk of his dying. After Kane had finished the sketch, and given him a piece of tobacco as recompense, he held it up for some moments, and said it was a small recompense for risking his life. He also followed Kane for several days, begging him to destroy the picture, until at last, to get rid of him, the artist made a rough copy which he tore up in his presence, pretending that it was the original.

Another interesting practice that Paul Kane describes is what was known in the days of the fur trade as the Indian Post. 'The gentlemen in charge of the various posts,' he says, 'have frequent occasion to send letters, sometimes for a considerable distance, when it is either inconvenient or impossible for them to fit out a canoe with their own men to carry it. In such cases the letter is given to an Indian, who carries it as far as suits his convenience and safety. He then sells the letter to another, who carries it until he finds an opportunity of selling it to advantage; it is thus passed on and sold until it[Pg 189] arrives at its destination, gradually

increasing in value according to the distance, and the last possessor receiving the reward for its safe delivery. In this manner letters are frequently sent with perfect security, and with much greater rapidity than could be done otherwise.'

On the 1st of July, 1847, Kane started East again with the brigade. On the way up the Columbia he heard of the horrible fate of Dr. Whitman and his family, murdered by hostile Indians because they blamed him for an epidemic of measles that was sweeping like a pestilence through their tribe.

Toward the end of October they reached Boat Encampment, and on the 2nd of November began the ascent of the Grande Côte, finding the snow deeper at every step. One of the horses fell down a steep slope with a heavy load on its back, and escaped without either hurting himself or losing his load.

They arrived at the summit as the sun was sinking below the horizon, and, as there was no feed for the horses, pushed on down the Whirlpool. It was intensely cold. Kane's long beard became a solid mass of ice. Long after dark they reached the Campment de Fusil. The next day they passed the Grand Batture, and found the snow decreasing in depth. They succeeded in reaching the Campment de Regnalle (evidently should read Campment d'Original) by nightfall.

On the fourth they started long before daylight, and made good progress until noon, when they came [Pg 190] to a wild tract of country which appeared to have been visited years before by some terrible hurricane, which had uprooted the whole forest for miles around, not leaving a tree standing. The younger growth were now pushing their heads up through the fallen timber of the ancient forest. Reached the Grand Traverse after dark.

The following day they arrived at the mouth of the Whirlpool, found the Athabaska in flood, and had much difficulty in getting across. The water almost covered the backs of the horses. They passed La Rouge's Prairie, and Kane camped on the same spot where he had slept exactly a year previously to the very day.

Continuing their way on the sixth, it became so cold that they could no longer sit their horses, but were obliged to dismount and drive them on before. Finally they reached Jasper House, more dead than alive, but soon forgot their troubles over a delicious piece of mountain sheep. A great number of these animals had been driven down into the valleys by the intensity of the cold, which had set in early this year and with unusual intensity. Kane counted as many as five large herds of mountain sheep grazing in different directions at one time.

On the 29th November he reached Fort Assiniboine, having travelled three hundred and fifty miles in fifteen days. The post was plentifully supplied with white-fish. He remained there two days, and then continued his way to Edmonton and the East.

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HECTOR ON THE ATHABASKA

Dr. Hector, afterwards Sir James Hector, did a lot of travelling in and about the Rockies, and many of the peaks and valleys, snowfields, glaciers, and waterfalls between Banff and Jasper were seen by him long before they were revealed to our modern mountain-climbers. He assisted Captain Palliser in the very important explorations carried out in the years 1857 to 1860 under instructions from the British Government, and the records of which are contained in that monumental document the *Palliser Report*, published in 1859 and 1863. A magnificent peak overlooking the Bow River, and a lake not far from the source of that river, commemorate Hector's name. While many of his valuable achievements as an explorer have been forgotten except by a few scientists and historical students, he is still remembered as the man who gave Kicking Horse Pass its singular name.

On January 12, 1859, Dr. Hector left Fort Edmonton to carry out a plan he had conceived some time before of making his way up the Athabaska and the Whirlpool to Athabaska Pass. He sent his reports and letters for England east by the Hudson's Bay Company's winter express, and started for[Pg 192] Jasper House with three companions. Each had a dog-train heavily laden with pemmican and other provisions and equipment.

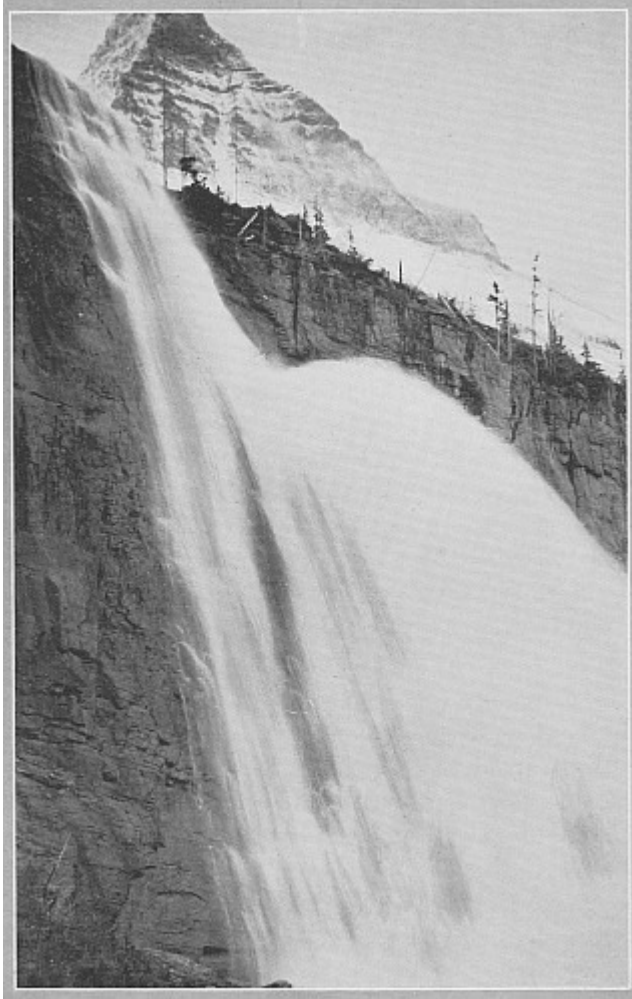
Hector tells the following circumstances, to illustrate what a good train of dogs can do, provided they have a hardy and expert driver. 'Mr. Christie (at that time in charge of Fort Edmonton) found in arriving at the horse-guard that he had forgotten a letter he wished me to take to Jasper House. He at once sent back his clerk, Mr. Sinclair, to the fort with his dogs, although that gentleman had just driven them twenty-five miles to this place. Sinclair got to the fort about midnight, and sent back a man with the same dogs, who arrived with the letter for us before we were up in the morning, the dogs having thus run seventy-five miles in a good deal under the twenty-four hours. M. Lacombe, the Roman Catholic priest, has been frequently driven from the mission at Lac St. Ann's to the fort in his dog *cariole*, a distance of fifty miles, after which his man Alexis, one of the best runners in the country, has loaded the sled with four hundred pounds of meat, and returned to the mission before next morning.'

I remember meeting the veteran missionary, Père Lacombe, a good many years ago. We were fellow-guests on the private car of Sir Donald Smith, afterward Lord Strathcona, and it was extremely entertaining to listen to the reminiscences and the play of wit of these two remarkable men, whose[Pg 193] lives had been so closely identified with the history of the North-west. Father Lacombe died a few years ago, at something over ninety years of age, having given his long life to most devoted and self-sacrificing work among the western Indians.

On the morning of the thirtieth Hector and his party came within sight of the mountains. As they were preparing to camp they observed smoke rising out of the woods, and, climbing the bank, found a party of Iroquois half-breeds. Bringing their dogs up the bank, they camped beside them. The half-breeds were badly off for provisions, and were living altogether on the little hares that they trapped in the woods, and which happened to be very scarce this year. They had originally been trappers in the service of the North West Company, and on the union of that organisation with the Hudson's Bay Company they turned freemen, trading the furs they obtained at Jasper House.

The last day of January Hector writes in his journal, 'Got a splendid view of the mountains. ... Miette's Rock is a bold object resembling the Devil's Head north of Bow River.... It was quite dark when we reached the base of Miette's Rock, where a spur of the mountain from the south compelled us again to seek the river.... We took the most shallow place we could find, where the river was very rapid, and, without taking the harness off the dogs, unfastened them from the sleds, and, pitching them into the water, pelted them^[Pg 194] with pieces of ice, so that they swam for the other side of the river. We then got off the edge of the ice ourselves, found the water took us above the waist, and, getting the sleds, loads and all, on our shoulders, waded through the rapid and so reached the left bank. The wind was bitterly cold, and we stiffened into a mass of ice.'

They arrived at Jasper House about ten in the evening. Hector says the post had been abandoned for some years, but was this winter again occupied, and placed under the charge of Mr. Moberly, who received them very kindly. This was, of course, the second Jasper House, built by the Hudson's Bay Company at the foot of Jasper Lake. They had passed the site of the old fort 'just without the mountains at the Lac a Brulé,' and noted that vegetables and barley grew well there. Of the new fort Hector says, 'Jasper House is beautifully situated on an open plain, about six miles in extent, within the first range of the mountains. As the valley makes a bend above and below, it appears to be completely encircled by mountains. The little group of buildings which form the fort have been constructed, in keeping with their picturesque situation, after the Swiss style, with overhanging roofs and trellised porticoes. The dwelling-house and two stores form three sides of a square, and these, with a little detached hut, form the whole of this remote establishment.'



EMPEROR FALLS [\[To List\]](#)

Hector mentions Roche Jacques, Roche de[[Pg 195](#)] Smet, and Roche Ronde, and says 'these names were given long ago at a time when a great number travelled by this route across the mountains. As late as 1853 there was communication at two seasons by this post with the Columbia district. In March, when the snow had acquired a crust, the express with letters and accounts started from Edmonton by the route I have just followed, and continued on to the Boat Encampment, to which place, by the time they had arrived, owing to the earlier spring on the west side of the mountains, the brigade of boats had ascended from Vancouver. The mail from the western department was then exchanged, and taken back to Edmonton, and thence to Norway House, along with the Jasper House furs.

'The second time of communication was in the autumn, after the Saskatchewan brigade returned to Edmonton in the beginning of September, upon which the officers and men bound for the western department, taking with them the subsidy of otter-skins that the company annually paid the Russian Government for the rent of the North-west coast, crossed the portage to Fort Assiniboine, then ascended the Athabaska in boats to Jasper House, with pack-horses reached the Boat Encampment, and then descended the Columbia to Vancouver, where they arrived generally about the 1st of November. The journey from York Factory on Hudson's Bay to the Pacific coast by this route generally occupied three and a half months, and[[Pg 196](#)] involved

an amount of hardship and toil that cannot be appreciated by those who have not seen boat-travelling in these territories.'

The big-horn, says Hector, was very plentiful in the neighbourhood of Jasper House, and formed the principal food of the people there. There were two or three Iroquois hunters attached to the post, and they were sent off every morning before daybreak. The hunters generally used dogs, which were beautifully trained to turn the sheep as they rushed up the mountains to reach the most inaccessible precipices. In the forenoon it was always possible, with a good glass, to see many bands of mountain sheep on the mountains, and Hector once watched with great interest in this manner the progress of a hunt on the slopes of Roche de Smet, or, as he somewhat inappropriately calls it, Roche de Smelt.

In addition to mountain sheep, Moberly also fed his people on wild-cat, or Canadian lynx, which were 'about the size of a small greyhound,' and excellent eating when fat.

There was at that time a rule at Jasper House that no freemen were to hunt within thirty miles of the post. A number of mouths had to be fed throughout the winter, and the supply of game was strictly limited. It was an anxious task to provide for the little community. In order to save the game around the fort until the winter, Moberly had left it for two months and had camped about twenty[Pg 197] miles up the valley at a place where there were plenty of big-horn. Some years before the practice had been to send parties out for several months on hunting expeditions to accumulate provisions for the winter. During these hunts as many as thirty or forty moose and several hundred big-horn would be killed. In addition a large quantity of white-fish and trout were obtained from the mountain lakes.

The morning of February 10th they started up the Athabaska with dog teams. Hector mentions Colin's Range on the east side of the river, and Snaring River on the west. The latter, he says, was named after a tribe of Indians that once lived there, dwelling in holes in the ground, and living on animals which they captured with snares of green-hide.

On the eleventh they came to the junction of the Miette and the Athabaska, where there had once been a trading-post, and followed the main stream to the south. They passed the Campment du Roches, where they found many signs of former travellers, and, among others, the name of Hector's friend Hardisty, of the Hudson's Bay Company, written on a blaze the previous summer on his return from Boat Encampment, where he had been sent to meet Chief Factor A. J. Dallas. Dallas, according to Dr. George Bryce, had shown great nerve and judgment this same year in British Columbia in a serious brush with the United States authorities.[Pg 198] Three years later he became Governor of Rupert's Land.

Hector camped at the Prairie des Vaches. The following day his Indian guide, who had injured his foot while hunting, told him, much to Hector's disappointment, that he would not be able to guide him up to the Committee's Punchbowl. At noon they came to the mouth of the Whirlpool, and Hector climbed a mountain and had a fine view up its valley. 'I easily recognised,' he remarks, 'Mount Brown and Mount Hooker. They seemed distant 30 miles to the S. by N.' He appears to have been more fortunate than a good many later travellers.

Hector continued his way up the Athabaska, and then returned the way he had come to Jasper House and Fort Edmonton.

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MILTON AND CHEADLE

That, I said, is the last of the journeys of which I have any record over the old Athabaska Trail between Jasper House and Boat Encampment. There are still a couple of narratives of expeditions over a portion of the route that is to say, up the Athabaska as far as its junction with the Miette. From that point they turned up the latter stream to Yellowhead Pass. As it happens, they are both interesting stories, and I think I shall take the risk of boring you with them, if you do not stop me.

The Warden looked non-committal, but did not make any hostile demonstration, so I went on.

The first of these later trips was that of Milton and Cheadle, whose story is told in their *North-West Passage by Land*, published in 1865. Their expedition was undertaken 'with the design of discovering the most direct route through British territory to the gold regions of Cariboo, and exploring the unknown country on the western flank of the Rocky Mountains, in the neighbourhood of the sources of the north branch of the Thompson River.' One suspects, after reading their book, that the compelling reason was the desire to see a bit of the world that was at that time tolerably remote from civilisation.[Pg 200]

They arrived at Fort Edmonton on the 14th of May, 1863, where they were welcomed by Chief Trader W. L. Hardisty. Fort Edmonton 'boasts of a windmill, a blacksmith's forge, and a carpenter's shop. The boats required for the annual voyage to York Factory are built and mended here; carts, sleighs, and harness made, and all appliances required for the company's traffic between the different posts.' There were about thirty families living in the fort, engaged in the service of the company, and a large body of hunters were constantly employed in supplying the establishment with meat.

At Lake St. Albans, about nine miles north of Edmonton, a colony of half-breed freemen had formed a small settlement. This was then the home of Père Lacombe. Five grizzly bears had attacked a band of horses near the mission and chased two men on horseback. A grand hunt had been arranged, and Milton and Cheadle were invited. They rode over the following morning, and found the missionary standing in front of his house. He was 'an exceedingly intelligent man, and his society was very agreeable.' He spoke English very fluently, and his knowledge of the Cree language was acknowledged by the half-breeds to be superior to their own. He gave them a capital dinner, and showed them round the settlement. They saw several very respectable farms, with rich wheat-fields, large bands of horses, and herds of fat cattle. Père Lacombe had brought out ploughs at his own expense, and [Pg 201] other farming implements, and was then completing a grist-mill to be worked by horse-power. He had built a chapel and established schools. 'Altogether this little settlement was the most flourishing community we had seen since leaving Red River.' The bear-hunt proved a disappointment, as the bears had apparently decamped.

At Fort Edmonton Milton and Cheadle met a trader named Pembrun, who had just arrived to take charge of the brigade of boats that was to take the season's furs to Norway House. Also Macaulay, then in charge of Jasper House, who had come to fetch winter supplies. Pembrun had crossed the mountains several times in years gone by, by Athabaska Pass, and on one occasion in winter.

Pembrun related several stories of these journeys, and amongst them one 'which bears a strong resemblance to a well-known adventure of the celebrated Baron Munchausen, but which will be readily believed by those acquainted with the locality in which it occurred.' At his first camp in the mountains 'he set to work to shovel away the snow with a snow-shoe, after the usual manner of making camp in the winter, but, having got down to his own depth without coming to the bottom, he sounded with a long pole, when, not finding the ground, he desisted, and built a platform of green logs, upon which the fire and beds were laid. Passing the same place afterwards in the summer, he recognised his old resting-place by the tall stumps^[Pg 202] of the trees cut off twenty or thirty feet above the ground.'

It was while at Fort Edmonton that Milton and Cheadle met the renowned Mr. O'B., who plays such an important part in their story. He was 'a gentleman of considerable classical attainments, on his way to British Columbia, whither, however, he progressed but slowly, having left Red River twelve months before.' He was of middle height and wiry make, about forty or fifty years of age. 'His face was long and its features large, and a retreating mouth, almost destitute of teeth, gave a greater prominence to his rather elongated nose.

'He was dressed in a long coat of alpaca, of ecclesiastical cut, and wore a black wide-awake, which ill accorded with the week's stubble on his chin, fustian trousers, and high-lows tied with string. He carried an enormous stick, and altogether his appearance showed a curious mixture of the clerical with the rustic. His speech was rich with the brogue of his native isle, and his discourse ornamented with numerous quotations from the ancient classics.'

Mr. O'B. introduced himself, and requested permission to join Milton and Cheadle's party on their way through the mountains. The latter were reluctant to add such an unpromising recruit, and their guide, who had seen something of the character of Mr. O'B., strenuously objected. However, they finally agreed to take him, overwhelmed by his^[Pg 203] importunity. It was not long before they realised to their sorrow that the guide had been right.

On the 3rd of June the party left Edmonton for the Athabaska. They stopped at a settlement called Lake St. Ann's. Our old friend Colin Fraser was the H.B.C. officer at the place. They spent the evening with him, and were entertained over their pipes with his reminiscences of the old days when the wood-buffalo were found in plenty as far as Peace River, and game so abundant that starvation was unknown. He told them he had been thirty-eight years in the country, and that cariboo and big-horn were so numerous when he first went to Jasper House that a green hand and a boy had supplied the post with ample provisions throughout the winter. He had not seen Fort Garry for thirty years, and for fifteen had not been farther than Edmonton, yet he was happy and contented.

When they left St. Ann's the trail led them immediately into dense forest, where the ground was boggy and rotten, and thickly covered with fallen timber. The horses sank in up to their girths, and every few yards were obliged to jump over some obstruction in their path. Mr. O'B. was now 'deeply impressed with the difficulties he encountered, and declared that, although he

had visited many countries, he had never known what travelling meant before. His assistance was limited to good advice, for he was afraid to approach a horse, and when his help was required to load the animals he^[Pg 204] was invariably missing. We generally ferreted him out, and found him hidden in the bushes, quietly smoking his pipe, and diligently studying the last remnant of his library, the only book he took with him, Paley's *Evidences of Christianity*.'

On the 11th of June they crossed the Pembina, and stopped to examine a magnificent coal-seam on its banks. Remembering tales they had heard at Edmonton, they also amused themselves for a time prospecting the sand of the river for gold.

For the next few days they travelled through country that was largely muskeg, and tried both their own tempers and the endurance of the horses. 'No one but a Hudson's Bay voyageur would dream of taking horses into such a region.' Mr. O'B. 'employed his time in increasing the enmity which the men had conceived for him by his dislike for work, and his imperative manner when demanding their services. He did not attempt to assist in packing his own horse, but required the help of the men to roll up his blanket, or stow away his pemmican.

'Obstinately persisting, in spite of all remonstrances, in marching last of the single file in which we travelled, he frequently lagged behind; when he found that the party ahead were out of sight, which was the case every few yards, from the closeness of the trees, terror took possession of him, and he sat down, without attempting to seek the path, making the woods ring again with his cries for help.^[Pg 205]

'The first time this occurred we stopped the train in some alarm, and Baptiste hurried back to see what could have happened, when, to his disgust, he simply found Mr. O'B. seated on a fallen tree, bawling with all his might. After this neither of the men would go back for him, and the duty devolved upon us. Mr. O'B. was a man of most marvellous timidity. His fears rendered his life a burden to him. But of all the things he dreaded and their name was legion his particular horror was a grizzly bear. On this point he was a complete monomaniac. He had never yet seen a grizzly bear, but he was in the daily expectation of meeting one of these terrible animals, and a sanguinary and untimely end at the same time. As he walked through the forest the rustle of every leaf and the creaking of the trunks seemed, to his anxious mind, to herald the approach of his dreaded enemy.

'The Assiniboine, taking advantage of his weakness, cured him for a time of his carelessness in losing sight of the party by lying in wait hid amongst the trees close to the track, and, as Mr. O'B. passed by, set up a most horrible growling, which caused him to take to his heels incontinently, and for several days he kept near protection. As we sat round the camp-fire one evening a rustling in the bushes attracted our attention, and we were startled for a moment by the sight of a dark, shaggy object moving along, which, in the dim, fitful firelight, looked very like a bear. Mr. O'B. rushed up to us^[Pg 206] in abject terror, when the animal, passing into clearer view, disclosed a foot clothed in a moccasin, and we recognised the boy, enveloped in a buffalo robe, and creeping on all fours, to practise on the fears of *Le Vieux*.'

Not long after that the Assiniboine guide had a genuine adventure with a grizzly. He had gone out in search of beaver, shot one in the river, but failed to get it. 'Wandering on for some time without meeting with anything more, he turned back just before dusk and retraced his steps. When he arrived within a few hundred yards of the camp he heard a rustling in some underwood

near by, and, thinking the horses had strayed there, turned aside into the cover to drive them back.

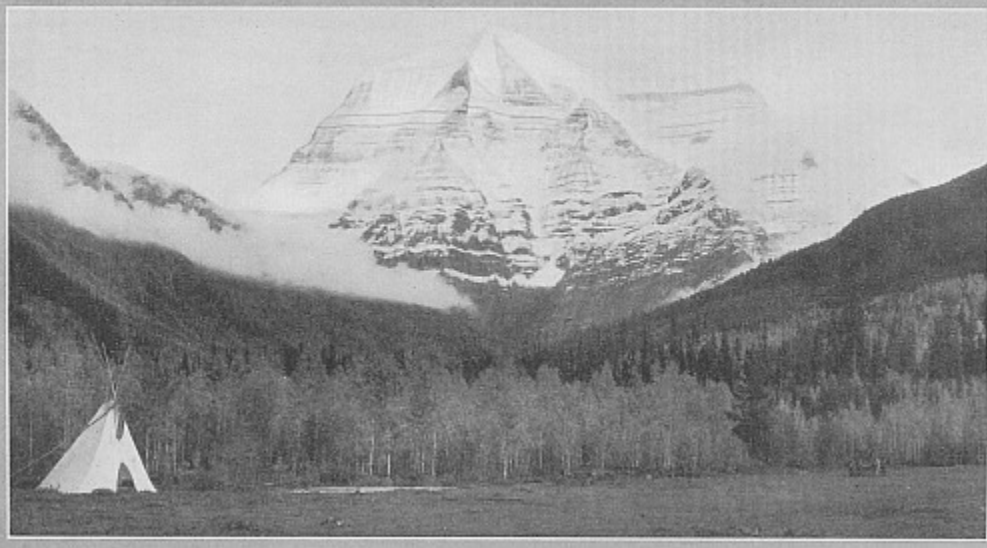
'Instead of seeing the horses he expected, he found himself face to face with an enormous grizzly bear, which was engaged in tearing open a rotten trunk in search of insects. On the appearance of the Assiniboine, the animal desisted from its employment, and advanced towards him with a terrible growling and lips upcurled, displaying her great teeth and enormous mouth. The first bear was now joined by two others of rather smaller size, who came running up, attracted by the growling.

'The Assiniboine, an old and practised hunter, stood his ground firmly, and as the old bear came within two or three yards suddenly threw up his arms. This, a usual device in hunting the grizzly bear, caused the animal to stop for a moment and [Pg 207] sit up on her hind legs, giving an opportunity for a steady shot. The Assiniboine took a deliberate aim, and pulled the trigger, but, to his dismay, the snapping of the cap only followed. He pulled the second trigger, and that missed fire also.

'Strange to say, the bear did not attack him, and, as he continued to show a firm and immovable front, retired with the others, and all three stood watching him. At every attempt he made to move one or other rushed toward him, growling fiercely. This continued for some time, but at length they resumed their occupation of breaking up the rotten logs, and he stole off unperceived.

'He was not, however, content to leave them undisturbed after his narrow escape. When well out of sight he stopped, poured fresh powder into the nipples of his gun, and re-capped it. He then crept cautiously round so as to approach them from another quarter. He found them still in the same place, occupied as before. Crouching behind a natural barrier of fallen trees, he took a fair deliberate shot at the old bear. Again both barrels missed fire, and the three, aroused by the snapping of the caps, looked round, and, quickly perceiving him, rushed up, growling and showing their teeth, but stopped as they came to the barrier of trees, which they fortunately made no attempt to pass. The same scene previously described was now reenacted, the animals resenting any sign which the man showed of retiring, but refraining from actual [Pg 208] attack. At last they all suddenly set off at speed, and after a time the Assiniboine reached the camp without further molestation.'

A few days later they came to the banks of the McLeod, another tributary of the Athabaska, and camped for the night. Forded the stream in the morning, and added a dish of delicious trout to the usual breakfast. The guide, who had been discontented for some time, deserted the party during the night. Milton and Cheadle were left with thirteen horses to pack and drive through the thick woods, the one-handed Assiniboine, with his wife and boy, being their only assistants, 'Mr. O'B. representing a minus quantity.' They had before them six or seven hundred miles of very difficult country, and not one of the party had ever before set foot in the region. They pluckily decided to go forward.



THE MONARCH
OF THE ROCKIES MOUNT ROBSON [\[To List\]](#)

While they were following a branch of the McLeod, Cheadle and the Indian boy again tried their luck at fishing. 'A number of trout were lying in the shade of a large, overhanging alder, and we disposed ourselves along the trunk, in order to drop the tempting fly before the noses of the fish. Cheadle, in his eagerness to accomplish this, fell head first into the water with a tremendous splash, and the boy, in his amusement at his companion's misfortune, slipped also and splashed in after him. Finding that the fish immediately returned to the protecting shade, in spite of their fright, and were [Pg 209] even then too sleepy to take the bait, we set the boy to manage the fly, whilst we stirred up the fish judiciously with a long pole. They were then sufficiently roused from their lethargic state to notice the bait, and a good dish of them was secured. Not one had been taken before this device was adopted.'

Is that, asked the Warden, supposed to be a humorous anecdote, or merely a common fish story?

That, I replied, is part of an authentic narrative, and is presumed to be as authentic as the rest of the story, including Mr. O'B. Here, by the way, is another incident in which that valiant gentleman took a characteristically impressive part. They had stopped for the noon meal in the middle of a thick forest of young pines. The trees grew so closely together that they had to cut a clear space for the horses and the camp-fire. The 'bulldogs' were very numerous and attentive, so they built a large fire for the benefit of the horses, and a smaller one for themselves.

Suddenly a louder crackling and roaring of the other fire attracted their attention, and they were horrified to see that some of the trees surrounding the clearing were on fire. The horses, in their eagerness to keep in the thick of the smoke, had kicked some of the blazing logs among the closely set pines. Cheadle, seizing an axe, rushed to the spot and felled tree after tree, to isolate those already on fire from the rest, while Milton carried [Pg 210] water in a bucket from a neighbouring pool and poured it on the smouldering moss.

'We were by this time nearly surrounded by blazing trees, and the flames flared and leaped up from branch to branch, and from tree to tree, in the most appalling manner, as they greedily

licked up, with a crackle and splutter, the congenial resin of the trunks, or devoured with a flash and a fizz the inflammable leaves of the flat, wide-spreading branches.

'The horses became frightened and unmanageable; some of them burst through the thick timber around, in spite of the flames, and one, severely burnt about the legs, threw himself down and rolled in his agony in the very hottest of the fire. We dropped axe and bucket, hauled at him by the head and tail in vain, and at last, in desperation, beat him savagely about the head, when he sprang up and bolted away.

'But the delay caused by this incident had nearly been fatal. The fire had rapidly gained head, the air became hot, and the smoke almost stifling, the flames raged fiercely with terrific roar, and for a moment we hesitated whether we should not abandon all and make for the river. But we took courage, snatched up hatchet and pail once more, and as each tree fell and patches of moss were extinguished we began to hope.

'While we were thus busily engaged in our frantic exertions it occurred to us that our friend^[Pg 211] Mr. O'B. had hitherto given us no assistance, and, looking round, descried him still seated where we had left him, feebly tugging at a boot which he appeared to have great difficulty in pulling on. We shouted to him, for God's sake, to come and help us, or we should all be burnt to death. He replied, in a doubtful, uncertain manner, that he was coming directly, when he had got his boots on. Roused at length by our fierce objurgations, and struck by the suggestion that he would burn as easily with his boots off as when properly shod, he ran up, trembling and bewildered, bringing a tardy and ineffectual assistance in the shape of half-pints of water in his little tin mug! Gradually, however, we succeeded in cutting off the fire, which still raged fiercely away from us, recovered our horses, and found that even the one which had caused us such anxiety was not seriously injured, although singed all over, and much burnt about the legs.' The Assiniboine was absent at the time looking for the trail, and the woman and boy had gone down to the river to wash some clothes.

The next day they reached the Athabaska. The river was at the height of the summer flood, its waters turbid, deep, and rapid. They learned from the Indians that it was called Mistahay Shakow Seepee, or the Great River of the Woods, to distinguish it from the Saskatchewan, the Mistahay Paskow Seepee, or Great River of the Plains. They followed up the bank, and presently got their^[Pg 212] first view of the Rocky Mountains. Guarding one side of the gateway through which they were to pass, they could see that singular rock Roche Miette, 'somewhat like the half of a sponge-cake cut vertically.' Continuing their way up the river-valley, they travelled through thick timber, marshes, and boggy ground, pleasantly varied occasionally by beautiful park-like oases of an acre or two in extent.

That evening they camped on a tiny prairie, rich with vetches in full bloom. Although it was the 26th of June, frost set in keenly during the night, and water left standing was frozen. Mr. O'B., who persisted in wearing boots in preference to moccasins, found them frozen so hard that they were compelled to delay the start until they could be thawed out. The next day at noon they reached a very picturesque little lake, circular in shape, and shut in on every side by lofty mountains, with rugged, precipitous sides. A solitary loon, resting alone on the surface of the lake, sent forth its melancholy wail, and added to the wildness of the place.

The following day at noon they came to the foot of Roche Miette. They saw many fresh tracks of mountain sheep or big-horn, the *mouton gris* of the voyageurs, *mouton blanc* being the

mountain goat. Cheadle and the Assiniboine went hunting, while the rest followed the steep trail over the spur of the mountain that came down to the water's edge. 'On every side a succession of peaks towered^[Pg 213] up, of strange fantastic shape. To the west the Priest's Rock (Roche de Smet), a pyramid of ice, shone brightly above a dark, pine-clad hill.'

On the farther bank of the river, between the two lakes, they could see, like a mere speck in the valley below, the little wooden building of Jasper House. They arrived opposite the fort on the 29th, and found it uninhabited. It was surrounded by a low palisade, and stood in a perfect garden of wild flowers, making a wonderful picture against the background of dark green pines.

Cheadle tells the story of their big-horn hunt. They 'clambered up the crags close to the Roche à Myette, following the tracks of the *mouton gris*. Along narrow ledges of a precipice of limestone rock, up to a giddy height, the hunters struggled on, breathless and their legs aching with the exertion of climbing such as they had long been strangers to, without catching sight of a big-horn.

When they had ascended seven hundred or eight hundred feet, they espied a mountain goat feeding quietly, along with a kid by its side, a few hundred yards in advance. Making a long detour, and going higher yet, to get above the animal, they crawled cautiously along to the point where they had last seen the goat, and, peering over the edge of a rock, saw its face looking upwards, about twenty yards below. The rest of the body was hidden by a projecting stone, and Cheadle fired at the forehead.^[Pg 214]

The animal tumbled over, but got up again bewildered, making no attempt to escape. The Assiniboine now got a sight of the shoulders and fired, when the animal scrambled away, with difficulty, a short distance. They quickly followed, and found it almost dead. Having no more ball, the Assiniboine killed the kid with a charge of shot. On going up to the game, it appeared that the first shot had merely struck the frontal bone, close to the root of the horn, which it tore off without further damage; but the shock had so stunned the beast that it was unable to move away.

The hunters pushed the goat and kid over the precipice, and scrambled down after it. Looking up at the precipice from below, it seemed as if not even a goat could find footing, and Cheadle wondered he had ever dared to venture there.

The following day, and still keeping close to the river, they reached 'a beautiful little prairie, surrounded by fine hills green almost to their summits, and overtopped by lofty, snow-clad peaks.... The prairie was richly carpeted with flowers, and a rugged excrescence upon it marked the site of the old Rocky Mountain Fort, Henry's House. The track, leaving the valley of the Athabaska at this point, turned toward the north-west, and entered a narrow rocky ravine, the valley of the River Myette.'

They camped that night on the banks of a small stream, which the Iroquois told them was named Pipestone River. The fifth day after leaving Jasper^[Pg 215] House they were surprised to come upon a stream flowing to the westward. They had unconsciously crossed the continental divide. The morning of the 14th of July brought them to the Grand Fork of the Fraser, 'the original Tête Jaune Cache, so called from being the spot chosen by an Iroquois trapper, known by the sobriquet of the Tête Jaune, or Yellow Head, to hide the furs he had obtained on the western side.'

Here is a fine bit of description of one of the most magnificent views in the mountains, with which we may appropriately enough take leave of Viscount Milton and Dr. Cheadle:

'The situation is grand and striking beyond description. At the bottom of a narrow, rocky gorge, whose sides were clothed with dark pines, or, higher still, with light green shrubs, the boiling, impetuous Fraser dashed along. On every side the snowy heads of mighty hills crowded round, whilst, immediately behind us, a giant among giants, and immeasurably supreme, rose Robson's Peak. This magnificent mountain is of conical form, glacier-clothed, and rugged. When we first caught sight of it a shroud of mist partially enveloped the summit, but this presently rolled away, and we saw its upper portion dimmed by a necklace of light, feathery clouds, beyond which its pointed apex of ice, glittering in the morning sun, shot up far into the blue heaven above.... It was a glorious sight, and one which the Shuswaps of The Cache assured us^[Pg 216] had rarely been seen by human eyes, the summit being generally hidden by clouds.'

It's a pity, said the Warden, that Robson's not in Jasper Park. The park boundaries end at the continental divide, and Robson, of course, lies over on the British Columbia side. Add Robson and the wonderful peaks that lie about it to Jasper and you'll have about the finest national park in the world.

That will come in time, I said, like a good many other things. To change the subject, did you ever hear of the Earl of Southesk?

Not that I know of. Who was he, and what has he to do with the Athabaska Trail and the Rockies?

Well, not much to do with the Athabaska Trail, but a good deal to do with the Rockies. His only connection with the Athabaska is that he travelled along some of its tributaries, but he got pretty well up into the heart of the mountains, and wrote a very entertaining book about his experiences, *Saskatchewan and the Rocky Mountains*.

He followed pretty much the same route as Hector and Milton and Cheadle from Fort Edmonton as far as the McLeod, but then, instead of continuing on to the Athabaska and Jasper House, he turned up the McLeod and the Embarras to a point between the upper waters of the Athabaska and the Brazeau, climbed a mountain which he named Southesk's Cairn, and then worked south through the mountains^[Pg 217] to the Bow River and Old Bow Fort, and back by the Red Deer and Battle Rivers to Edmonton. This was in 1859, a few years before the journey of Milton and Cheadle.

He suffered a good deal crossing the prairies in July, and we find him jotting down his bitter reflections in his diary. 'I hate the very sight of these popular prairies, because they swarm with mosquitoes, which always abound in long grass. My joy is a vast sandy plain, broken with bluffs, and carpeted with short, crisp, yellow-brown turf. There game abounds, and the abominable fly scarcely dares to show his proboscis. Well may the Evil One be called Baalzebub the god of flies!'

Southesk felt the peculiar charm of desert places, far from the haunts of man, a charm that a good many of us feel for a time, though most of us are not self-sufficient enough to be content to lead a hermit existence indefinitely. We like to get back to our fellows. 'Never,' he says, 'have I known the cry of any wild animal that had not something pleasing in its cadences, when heard in

a solitary desert place, where the din of man's life is far away, where nothing reveals itself to the eye or ear but is touched with the adorable melancholy of loneliness.'

I glanced at the Warden, who prefers his lonely cabin to all the joys of civilization, and he nodded appreciatively.

Southesk spent some time at Fort Edmonton, enjoying the characteristic hospitality of the officers^[Pg 218] of the Hudson's Bay Company, and with eyes and ears alert to many things that were new to him in the life of the far West. He had a horse called Lane, whom nobody seemed able to manage but a French half-breed, George Kline. 'It was a study to watch this man's tactics (when it became necessary to catch Lane), how he walked round and round the wary old animal, bent half double and making the most extraordinary movements, till at length Lane grew so puzzled that he forgot to run away, while the active Frenchman slipped nearer and nearer, then suddenly threw a line over the horse's head, and secured him in an instant.'

They travelled from Edmonton to St. Ann, and not far from that place were met by Mr. Moberly, who was making his way from Jasper House, where he had until lately been officer in charge.

These successive journals supply one with material for a fragmentary history of that interesting old post on the Athabaska; at least we have a fairly complete list of the men of the North West Company and the Hudson's Bay Company who had charge of either the old post or the new from its original foundation.

At St. Ann Southesk had the pleasure of dining with Pères Lacombe and Le Frain, and found them 'agreeable men and perfect gentlemen.' He adds that 'everything at the mission house is wonderfully neat and flourishing; it is a true oasis in the desert. The cows fat and fine, the horses the same, the dogs,^[Pg 219] the very cats, the same. A well-arranged and well-kept garden, gay with many flowers, some of them the commonest flowers of the woods and plains, brought to perfection by care and labour. The house beautifully clean; the meals served up as in a gentleman's dining-room. Excellent preserves of service-berries and wild raspberries everything made use of and turned to account.'

Crossing the Pembina and ascending the McLeod, Southesk found himself at last well up in the mountains, and gloried in the unfamiliar scenes. He had all an artist's appreciation of novel effects. 'Just before I had been struck with admiration at the sombre loveliness caused by the streaming of the sun's rays through a great stretch of burnt pine forest. All the tall trees were standing up like jet-black masts, and the glorious light gleamed like silver on the quivering surface of the river, gilded the sable stems wherever it touched them, and played in dancing spots over the long grass, and on the low undergrowth of poplars destined in course of years to fill the place of the for ever blighted wood.'

When he got his first glimpse of the main range, he could only gaze at its far-off, mysterious splendour speechless. 'The Rocky Mountain range stretched along the horizon far as the eye could reach.... Too remote to display any smaller modulations, they rose flat against the blue sky, themselves all steeped in a soft mellow grey from summit to base.... With feelings almost too deep for utterance, I turned^[Pg 220] to Antoine, hoping to find in him some sympathetic response. His eyes gleamed and sparkled as they met mine; with a pleasant smile, he pointed

first to the nearer hills, then to the grand range that stretched far beyond: '*Monsieur Milord*,' said he with impressive earnestness, '*il n'y a pas des moutons ici; mais la bas ah!*'

Southesk was kind to his horses, and took keen interest in their individual characteristics. What he says of one of them called Jasper must sound familiar to every man who has ridden mountain trails. 'Jasper was an admirable horse for this work. He cared nothing for muskegs, however deep and bad; even when sinking in a swamp he would take the opportunity to snatch a bite of grass if his nose got near enough to the surface. Greediness was one of his faults. Sometimes, while drawing himself over a log, he would stop half-way, and begin eating a tempting mouthful that happened to lie handy. He was very gentle and quiet; I never knew him fidgety, except once, when a wasp stung him.'

That fellow Jasper must have been an ancestor of your horse, remarked the Warden, with a grin.

Without doubt, I replied, remembering many exasperating moments on the trail.

Southesk on his climbs came to know the whistling marmots; 'siffleurs whistling with their clear, bell-like, melancholy notes *quisquis-su* the Crees call them.' He found a certain amusement in experimenting with novel foods. 'For the first[Pg 221] time I had the pleasure of eating that most delicious meat, siffleur, which tastes like very delicate mutton, with the fat of a sucking-pig.' And elsewhere he says, 'Had beaver-tail for supper like pork fat sandwiched between layers of Finnan haddock.'

He's welcome to his beaver-tail, said the Warden.

Here, again, is a picture of one of their camps in the mountains. 'We made an enormous fire of logs. Nothing could exceed the beauty of the pine and firs as displayed by the light of our flaming pyramid. Even the grass showed a strange ruddiness mingled with its quiet green, and the eyes of the horses, wandering on the banks above us, shone like little stars rising and setting amidst deepest shades.'

I think we may leave him, as he turns south from the Cairn, on his way to the Bow. 'Changes of temperature are very sudden in these elevated valleys. At noon we were hiding from the burning sun ... in the evening trembling in the icy wind ... but there are no mosquitoes, so welcome cold, heat, wind, rain, fog, anything, if only these tormentors are cut off!'

CHAPTER XIII

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[Pg 222]

OCEAN TO OCEAN

About time," remarked the Warden, "that we made tracks for home. I'm getting hungry.

So am I.

Got any more Athabaskan pilgrims in your bag?" he asked, as we walked back to the cabin.

One more," I replied, "the Fleming expedition of 1872, the story of which is told by George Munro Grant in *Ocean to Ocean*. This journey was made in connection with the settlement of the route of the Canadian Pacific Railway through the Rockies, and as a result of it Fleming was confirmed in his view that the Yellowhead Pass was the most practicable route. For political reasons, and very much against Fleming's wishes, the Dominion Government finally selected the Kicking Horse route. Fleming's judgment has since been confirmed by the building of two transcontinental railways through the pass he had selected for the Canadian Pacific; with grades far more economical than the best the Canadian Pacific can ever hope to obtain by way of the Kicking Horse. However, that's neither here nor there. All that we are interested in is Grant's story of the journey of 1872. I'll tell you something about it after supper. [Pg 223]

We got ourselves something to eat in the cabin, and afterwards found comfortable spots to lie on, while I went on with the story of the 1872 trip.

The party," I said, "consisted, in addition to Fleming and Grant, of the famous botanist John Macoun, Dr. Arthur Moren of Halifax, Fleming's son, and Charles Horetzky, an old H.B.C. man, who acted as photographer. Macoun and Horetzky, however, left the others at Fort Edmonton and went up to the Peace River country. The others were bound for the Athabaska. We may pick them up at Edmonton.

They arrived there August 27th. Hardisty, who was still stationed there, gave them a warm welcome. No time was lost, and they got off the following day, driving to St. Ann's and picking up their outfit there. Grant was introduced to the white-fish of the lake, which he found tasted like the famous shad of the Bay of Fundy, without the number and intricacy of the latter's bones. 'It is an infinite toil to eat shad, but with white-fish a man may abandon himself to the simple pleasure of eating.'

The pack-animals got their loads, and they were off for the mountains. Speed being an object, they dispensed with tent, extra clothing, tinned meats, books, and, in fact, everything that was not absolutely necessary, and thus brought the horses' loads down to about a hundred and thirty pounds. At St. Ann's they took leave of the last Hudson's[Pg 224] Bay Company's officer they were to meet until they were well into British Columbia, and Grant seizes the occasion to express their appreciation of the company's unfailing hospitality. A hospitality, as he says, that was extended to all who claimed it, to the hungry Indian and the unfortunate miner, as well as to those who bore letters of recommendation. 'It was on such a scale as befitted a great English corporation, the old monarchs, and still the greatest power in the country.'

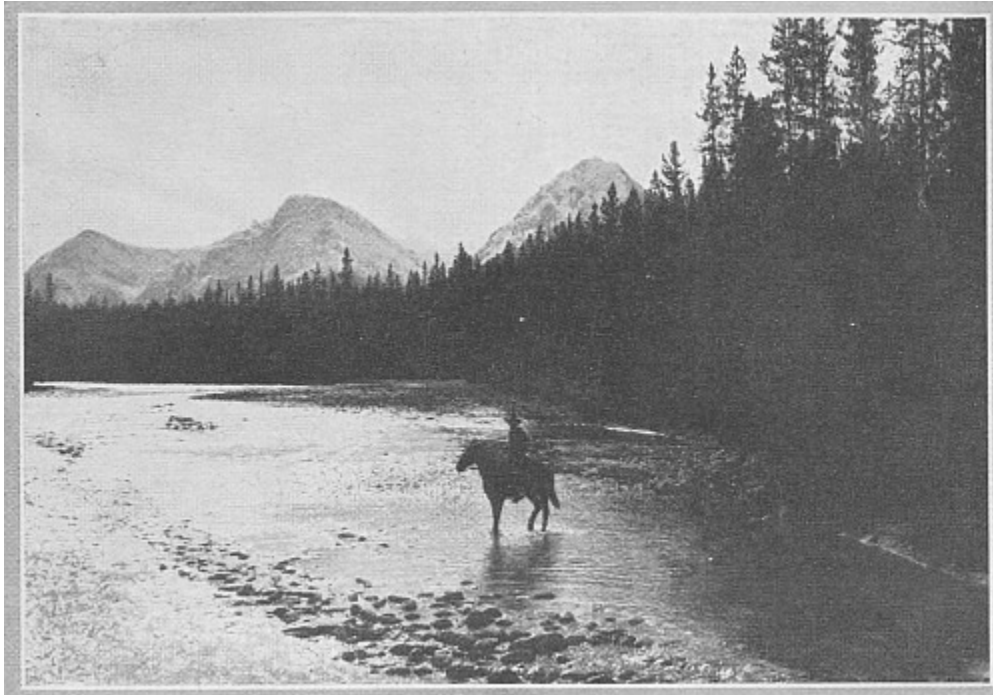
They passed the remains of several *sweating-booths*, and Grant explains the method. 'They are,' he says, 'the great Indian natural luxury, and are to be found all along the road, or wherever Indians live even for a week. There was scarcely a day this month that we did not pass the rude, slight frames. At first we mistook them for small tents. They are made in a few minutes of willow wands or branches, bent so as to form a circular enclosure, with room for one or two

inside. The buffalo robe is spread over the framework so as to exclude the air as much as possible, and whoever wants a Russian bath crawls into the round, dark hole.

'A friend outside then heats some large stones to the highest point attainable, and passes them and a bucket of water in. Those inside pour the water on the stones, steam is generated, and on they go pouring water and enjoying the delight of a vapour bath, till they are almost insensible.'^[Pg 225] Grant adds that Dr. Hector thought the practice an excellent one, as regards cleanliness, health, and pleasure. His own view was that the Indians carried it to an extreme that utterly enervated them. However that may be, it is certain that the practice was common to a great many widely scattered tribes of Indians, and that it, like many other things that appear to have been derived from the whites, existed long before white men had come in contact with the natives.

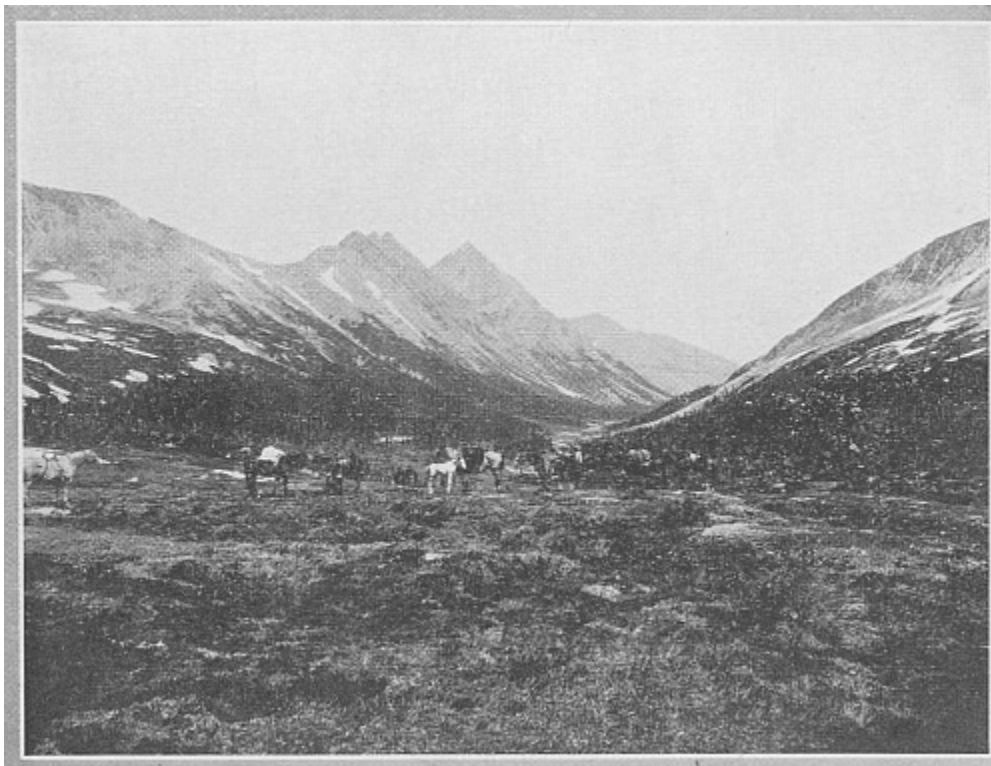
They ran, like their predecessors over this route, into some pretty heavy country before they reached the Athabaska 'Crashing through windfalls or steering amid thick woods round them, leading our horses across yielding morasses or stumbling over roots, and into holes, with all our freshness we scarcely made two miles an hour, and that with an expenditure of wind and limb that would soon have exhausted horse and man.' The Pembina and the McLeod were crossed in due course. On the banks of the latter they found an almost obliterated record left on a spruce-tree by the party of prospective gold-diggers who had gone through this way to the Cariboo country shortly before Milton and Cheadle. All that remained of the inscription was the date, 'August 10th, 1862,' one or two names, the suggestive words 'for Cariboo,' and the equally illuminating remark 'a hard road to travel.'

They tried a short cut on the McLeod, and found, as one usually does, that the established trail^[Pg 226] is best the longest way round is the shortest way home. In struggling across the creeks 'the difference between the Lowland Scot and the Frenchman came out amusingly. Brown continued imperturbable no matter how the horses went. Beaupré, the mildest-mannered man living when things went smoothly, could not stand the sight of a horse floundering in the mud. Down into the gully he would rush to lift him out by the tail. Of course, he got spattered and perhaps kicked for his pains. This made him worse, and he had to let out his excitement on the horse. Gripping the tail with his left hand, as the brute struggled up the opposite hill, swaying him from side to side as if he had been tied to it, he whipped with his right, *sacré*-ing furiously till he reached the top. Then, feeling that he had done his part, he would let go and subside again into his mildest manners.'



WHIRLPOOL [\[To List\]](#)

ON THE



GOING INTO THE TONQUIN VALLEY [\[To List\]](#)

PACK TRAIN

Grant pays a strong tribute to the merits of pemmican. 'It is good and palatable uncooked and cooked, though most prefer it in the *richaud* form. It has numerous other recommendations

for campaign diet. It keeps sound for twenty or thirty years, is wholesome and strengthening, portable, and needs no medicine to correct a tri-daily use of it. Two pounds weight, with bread and tea, we found enough for the dinner of eight hungry men. A bag weighing a hundred pounds is only the size of an ordinary pillow, two feet long, one and a half wide, and six inches thick. Such a bag would supply^[Pg 227] three good meals to a hundred and thirty men.'

The doctor one evening tried his hand at a plum-pudding. The principal ingredient was pemmican. To this was added flour and water, baking soda, sugar, and salt. A flavouring extract was still needed, and the doctor searched his medicine chest hoping to find ginger. In default of that he suggested chlorodyne, but that was vetoed, on the ground that if they ate the pudding they would probably need the chlorodyne later. The pudding was put in the sugar-bag, and popped into the pot. There it remained for two hours, but was then found to be merely boiled pemmican, to the doctor's chagrin. Fleming suggested more boiling, and the additional half-hour worked like a charm. It was a real pudding at last, and, with a little brandy and sugar as sauce, was highly appreciated.

September 9th they had their first glimpse of the Athabaska, and reached its banks soon after. While making camp that evening one of the men struck something metallic that blunted the edge of his axe. Feeling with his hand, he drew out from near the root of a young spruce-tree an ancient sword-bayonet, the brazen hilt and steel blade in excellent preservation, but the leather scabbard half eaten as if by the teeth of some animal. 'It seemed strange in this vast and silent forest wilderness thus to come upon a relic that told, probably, of the old days when the two rival fur companies armed their agents to the teeth, and when bloody contests often^[Pg 228] took place between them.' The bayonet was presented to Fleming as a relic of the Athabaska, and I remember seeing it hanging up in his hall in Ottawa many years ago.

The next day they had their first sight of the mountains. 'There was no ambiguity about these being mountains, nor about where they commenced. The line was defined, and the scarp as clear, as if they had been hewn and chiselled for a fortification. The summits on one side of the Athabaska were serrated, looking sharp as the teeth of a saw; on the other, the Roche à Myette, immediately behind the first line, reared a great solid, unbroken cube, two thousand feet high, a forehead bare, twenty times higher than Ben An's; and, before and beyond it, away to the south and west, extended ranges with bold summits and sides scooped deep, and corries far down, where formerly the wood-buffalo and the elk, and now the moose, big-horn, and bear find shelter. There was nothing fantastic about their forms. Everything was imposing. And these, too, were ours, an inheritance as precious, if not as plentiful in corn and milk, as the vast, rich plains they guarded. For mountains elevate the mind, and give an inspiration of courage and dignity to the hardy races who own them, and who breathe their atmosphere.'

The morning of September 11th they crossed Fiddle River. The trail had run for a time among wooded hills. 'Suddenly it opened out on a lakelet,^[Pg 229] and right in front a semi-circle of five glorious mountains appeared, Roche à Perdrix on our left, Roche à Myette beyond, Roche Ronde in front, a mountain above Lac à Brulé on our right (Boule Roche).' He also mentions a high, wooded hill on the left near Roche à Perdrix. Three of them were so near and towered up so bold that their full forms, even to the long shadows on them, were reflected clearly in the lakelet, next to the rushes and spruce of its own shores. 'Here is scene for a grand picture equal to Hill's much admired painting of the Yo Semite Valley.'

The road now dropped rapidly from the summit of a wooded hill that they had reached to the valley of the Athabaska. 'As it wound from point to point among the tall, dark green spruces, and over rose-bushes and vetches, the soft blue of the mountains gleamed through everywhere, and when the woods parted the mighty column of Roche à Perdrix towered a mile above our heads, scuds of clouds kissing its snowy summit, and each plication and angle of the different strata up its giant sides boldly and clearly revealed. We were entering the magnificent Jasper portals of the Rocky Mountains by a quiet path winding between groves of trees and rich lawns like an English gentleman's park.'

They stopped again beside the Fiddle to drink a health to the Queen out of its clear ice-cold waters, and halted for dinner in a grove on the other side, thoroughly excited and awed by the grand forms^[Pg 230] that had begirt their path for the last three hours. They felt that they could now sympathise with the daft enthusiast who returned home after years of absence, and, when asked what he had as an equivalent for so much lost time, answered only, 'I have seen the Rocky Mountains.'

They were now inside the range, in a valley that was ever opening and revealing new mountain forms. 'Roche Ronde was to our right, its stratification as distinct as the leaves of a half-opened book. The mass of the rock was limestone, and what at a distance had been only peculiarly bold and rugged outlines were now seen to be the different angles and contortions of the strata. And such contortions! One high mass twisting up the sides in serpentine folds, as if it had been so much pie-crust; another bent in great waving lines like petrified billows.

'The colouring too was all that artist could desire. Not only the dark green of the spruce in the corries, which turned into black when far up; but autumn tints of red and gold as high as vegetation had climbed on the hillsides; and above that streaks and patches of yellow, green, rusty red, and black relieving the grey masses of limestone; while up the valley every shade of blue came out according as the hills were near or far away, and summits hoary with snow bounded the horizon.'

Grant describes Roche De Smet (or Roche Suette as he calls it) as 'a vast mass like a quadrilateral rampart, with only two sides of the square^[Pg 231] visible, the sides furrowed deep, but the line of the summit unbroken.' But to him the most wonderful object was Roche Miette, right above them on their left. 'That imposing, sphinx-like head, with the swelling Elizabethan ruff of sandstone and shales all around the neck, save on one side where a corrugated mass of parti-coloured strata twisted like a coil of serpents from far down nearly half way up the head, haunted us for days. Mighty must have been the forces that upreared and shaped such a monument. Vertical strata were piled on horizontal, and horizontal again on the vertical, as if nature had determined to build a tower that would reach to the skies.'

The following day they rode on to Jasper House, arriving exactly fifteen days after leaving Edmonton. This included two Sundays, when they did not travel. Jasper House in 1872 was all but abandoned by the Hudson's Bay Company. There remained two log houses, the largest propped up before and behind with rough shores, 'as if to prevent it being blown away into the river or back into the mountain gorges.' The houses were untenanted, locked and shuttered. Twice a year an agent came up from Edmonton to trade with the Indians of the surrounding country and carry back the furs. The modest glory of Jasper House had departed!

This, as Grant remarks, is one of the best possible places for seeing to advantage the mountains up and down the valley. 'A score of miles to the[Pg 232] south Pyramid Rock gracefully uplifts its snowy face and shuts in the valley, the space between being filled by the mountains of Rocky River and the great shoulders of Roche Jacques.... There is a wonderful combination of beauty about these mountains. Great masses of boldly defined rock are united to all the beauty that variety of form, colour, and vegetation give. A noble river, with many tributaries, each defining a distinct range, and a beautiful lake ten miles long, embosomed three thousand three hundred feet above the sea, among mountains twice as high, offer innumerable scenes seldom to be found within the same compass for the artist to depict and for every traveller to delight in.'

The trail led them along the borders of Jasper Lake, every mile revealing new features of the landscape to excite their admiration. Toward the west end of Jasper a lakelet, separated from the main lake by two narrow, pine-clad ridges, 'presented in its dark-green waters, that reflected the forest, a striking contrast to the light, sunny grey of the larger lake reflecting the sky.' Beyond the lake they rode up a valley 'closed at the head by a great mountain, so white with snow that it looked like a sheet suspended from the heavens.' This peak is now called Mount Edith Cavell. It was then known to the voyageurs as *La montagne de la grande traverse*, as it stood at the parting of the ways, where one road led up to Athabaska Pass and the other to Yellowhead Pass.[Pg 233]

Grant gives a different derivation, to that mentioned before, of the name of Snaring River. It was so called, he says, because this was a famous place in the olden time for trappers. It was made memorable to this party because of the danger they experienced in crossing it. The water was high, and the bed was full of large, round boulders, such as we met with fording the north branch of the Whirlpool. Beaupré 'took some pemmican in his pocket as a precaution, in case all hands but himself were lost.' Notwithstanding the omen, they all managed to struggle across, though the water was up to the horses' shoulders and they stumbled repeatedly.

They had just unpacked the horses for the noon meal, when a Shuswap Indian rode up, with a note for Fleming from one of the Canadian Pacific survey engineers, Walter Moberly, who had been ordered to meet him at Jasper House, but had been delayed. Valad spoke to the Indian in Cree, and Beaupré in French, but he was from the Pacific side, and only shook his head. Then Brown addressed him in the Chinook jargon, and he answered at once. Asked if his party had enough food, he replied, '*Oh! hy-iu, muck â muck! Hy-iu iktahs!*' (Lots of grub! Lots of good things!)

They camped that night somewhere below the mouth of the Maligne, and the next morning rode on to the point where the Miette joins the Athabaska, opposite the site of Henry House. They found the going excellent, 'passing for four or five miles over[Pg 234] beautiful little prairies, which had not yet been touched by the frost, and on which grew the bunchgrass that horses prefer to any other feed and for the next two or three miles through small and middling-sized pines, so well apart from one another that it was easy to ride in any direction.... The highest mountains that we had yet seen showed this morning away to the south in the direction of the Athabaska Pass and the Committee's Punchbowl. Our road led westward up the Myette, and, as the Athabaska here sweeps away to the south, under the name of Whirlpool River, the turn shut out from view for the rest of our journey both the valley and the mountains of the Whirlpool.'

As they were about to turn up the Miette they were overtaken by Moberly, who had ridden on in advance of his men. He had taken a different trail at Snaring River, and so had missed Fleming's party, but, running into the track of their horses later, had sent back the Indian to make enquiries. Moberly had organised large provision trains on the British Columbia side, and had brought them up on pack-horses to Boat Encampment. From there they were to be taken over Athabaska Pass to the Athabaska Valley, to afford autumn and winter supplies to the survey-parties.

There is an incident in Milton and Cheadle, the finding of the headless body of an Indian under circumstances that made it difficult to account for the tragedy. This headless Indian story, and the [Pg 235] almost incredible Mr. O'B., had led a good many readers of Milton and Cheadle's book to discredit the whole narrative as a bit of fiction. Grant says, however, that not only did they find both stories verified, or rather the story of the headless Indian and the reality of Mr. O'B., but the accounts of the country and the tale of their own difficulties were as truthfully and simply given as it was possible for men who travelled in a strange country to make them. Grant heard enough at Fort Edmonton about Mr. O'B. to prove that his characteristics were not exaggerated.

Just a few words about Moberly. Some years ago he wrote a pamphlet on the *Early History of the Canadian Pacific Railway*. It is largely controversial, but it contains also some particulars of the expedition referred to by Grant. Moberly followed a different route from that usually adopted from the Columbia. 'We ascended,' he says, 'and crossed over the high mountain spur that rises to a great elevation between the waters of the Columbia and those of the Wood or Portage River, and made in as direct a line as possible for the Athabaska Pass, between Mounts Brown and Hooker. This line of travel we took in order to avoid the long way by the valley of the Columbia to the Boat Encampment, and thence by the old trail of the North-West Fur Company of Montreal by the valley of the Wood River to the foot of Mount Brown.' [Pg 236]

Moberly found this a very difficult and uncomfortable route, but finally made his way to the summit by way of the Grande Côte. 'Found the trail of the old fur-traders going up the steep mountain, and then we camped and cooked a porcupine which we found at this place.' The next morning he climbed up to the summit, and shot two fine caribou beside the Committee's Punchbowl. As his moccasins had been worn out by the climb, he camped there and made new ones out of the green-hide, and dried and smoked some of the meat for provisions. Then he left the old Athabaska route, and, travelling along the easterly side of Mount Brown, crossed a high ridge (Canoe Pass), and, following a well-beaten caribou trail, camped beside a small spring 'that is the true source of the Fraser River.' Moberly eventually made his way by this route that does not seem to have been followed before or since to Yellowhead Lake, where he found one of the survey-parties encamped.

Moberly also has something to say about this expedition in his official report on the Canadian Pacific surveys of that year. 'I reached the Yellowhead Pass,' he says, 'on September 6th. This mountain trip was rather arduous, as we were obliged to cross the summits of five distinct ranges varying from six to eight thousand feet in height. My object in taking this course was to travel by the Athabaska Pass to Henry House, and thence westward by the Caledonian and Fraser valleys.' [Pg 237]

'I arrived at the Athabaska Pass, at the foot of Mount Hooker, in nine and a half days. On ascending to the height of land, a wide, grassy depression at a height of six thousand five hundred feet above sea-level connects the valley of the Whirlpool and probably the Canoe Rivers. I went down and explored the right bank of the Athabaska and Jasper Lake to the lower end of the rocky point that projects from the Roche à Miette, about two miles below Jasper Lake.'

Moberly's associate, Hall, was at the same time surveying the route through Athabaska Pass, and reported very severe weather at the Committee's Punchbowl. The cold, snow, and want of feed had so weakened the horses that they could be kept no longer at the height of land, and were moved down to Prairie des Vaches. It will not surprise anyone who has been there to learn that Hall reported the valley of the Whirlpool as utterly unfit for settlement.

A story is told in connection with the Canadian Pacific Railway surveys in the valley of the Athabaska that is not without a spice of humour, though the victims must have found it supremely uncomfortable. It appears that a party of surveyors were working near what is now Pochontas. They got very wet crossing the river, it was late in the season, and they were reduced pretty much to what they had on. It was important that their clothes should be dried as quickly as possible. A^[Pg 238] happy thought came to one of them. Lumps of coal were lying near the shore. Some of these were gathered, a fire made in the tent, and the wet clothing hung over it to dry, while the shivering men ran up and down to keep themselves warm. The inevitable, of course, happened. The coal-fire, confined within the tent, set fire to the canvas, and in a moment tent and clothing went up in smoke. The unfortunate surveyors had to quickly improvise clothing of sorts from a quantity of old sacking they were lucky enough to have with them.

CHAPTER XIV

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JASPER PARK

In the morning we packed, and taking leave of the cabin and its delightful surroundings, returned down the trail to Jasper. There I took leave of my friend the Warden, with very sincere regret on my part, and I hope on his. I had found him a rare companion on the trail and in the camp, ready to talk or listen, equally ready to smoke in understanding silence. He was one of that type of Englishmen that has made England the greatest colonising nation the world has known men who are temperamentally restless and unhappy in cities, who must for ever be seeking some untravelled country or unfrequented road. These men are the world's pioneers, scouts of civilisation. They have much in common with Daniel Boone and the frontiersmen, Chapdelaine and his fellows of the north country. The essential difference is that they are often, like the Warden, men of broad education, men of more spacious horizons, who, themselves shunning civilisation, nevertheless unconsciously prepare the way for civilisation. The Warden

would, of course, reject as absurd the idea that he had been in any sense a factor in the building up of the British Commonwealth, in his varied service as a soldier in [Pg 240] South Africa, as a civil official on the West Coast, as a prospector in the interior of the Guianas, as an adventurer in the oil-fields of Mexico and the goldfields of Alaska, and as one of the guardians of a national park in the heart of the Rockies; but it is none the less true. And it is a fortunate circumstance for the British Commonwealth that, more than any other country, it breeds men of this type to carry the traditions of their race into every remote corner of the world.

This Jasper Park, of which my friend is one of the wardens, is a region of many wonders. I had the opportunity in 1913 of seeing one or two corners of it, at a time when it was still practically in its natural state, and particularly the wonderful district around Maligne Lake, and that equally splendid area just outside the present park boundaries in the neighbourhood of Mount Robson. Since then a great deal of excellent work has been done, in the building of roads and trails and bridges, the development of a system of fire protection, and the conservation of wild life. As hotels were bound to come, for the use of thousands of people who are not happy except under a roof, it is at least fortunate that those in authority had the good taste to build on the shores of Lake Beauvert an inn and a group of cottages that do not clash with their wild and extraordinarily picturesque setting.

The old Athabaska trail ran through the very heart of what is to-day Jasper Park, as did also that [Pg 241] later trail that led up the Miette to Yellowhead Pass and down into New Caledonia. Four thousand four hundred miles of mountain and valley, glittering peak and pine-clad slope, snowfield and glacier and waterfall, waving forest and verdant plain, emerald lake and roaring torrent, alpine meadow and sombre gorge these are some of the elements of Jasper Park, one of the splendid national playgrounds that Canada has set apart for the use of the public. As Sir Conan Doyle says in his *Memories and Adventures*, 'When Canada has filled up and carried a large population, she will bless the foresight of the administrators who took possession of broad tracts of the most picturesque land and put them for ever out of the power of the speculative dealer.'

One enters the park from the east not far from the lower end of Brulé Lake, where old Jasper House once stood. Near the other end of the lake Fiddle River falls into the Athabaska from the south. Trails lead to the three deep gorges of Fiddle River, as well as to the hot springs on Sulphur Creek, one of its tributaries. The springs have been used for many years because of their medicinal value, but are now rather off the main track, as tourists for the most part make Jasper their headquarters. They are supposed to have been discovered by Indians many generations ago, and in the days of the fur trade a series of circular pools was built of boulders and sulphur rock. The upper pool is extremely hot, but the temperature becomes [Pg 242] more moderate in the second, and the lower pool is quite comfortable. In fact, when I was there in 1913 we spent a good deal of our time in the lower pool. As a matter of fact, there was nothing much else to do.

About half a mile from Pocahontas, on the railway through the park, is a singular and picturesque little waterfall known as the Punchbowl. The rock has been worn into the form of a huge bowl or goblet, and into this the water of Mountain Creek falls in a filmy ribbon. On the west side of the river trails lead to Boule Roche and Ogre Gorge, to Roche à Bosche and Roche Ronde, up Moosehorn Creek, Ronde Creek, Coronach Creek, and Snake Indian River. By following Snake Indian River to Twin Tree Lake, and ascending the Smoky River to its source in Adolphus Lake, one finds oneself on the continental watershed, in the midst of a group of

gigantic peaks of which Robson is the unquestioned king. Here are Whitehorn and Resplendent, Gendarme, Mumm, and Lynx, while a little farther north rise Calumet and Pamm, and a score more of giants of the Rockies.



WOMENFOLK

OF THE KOOTENAY [\[To List\]](#)

Starting again from Pocahontas, on the east side of the Athabaska, one may climb Roche à Perdrix or Roche Miette, or follow the trail up Rocky River, under the towering cliffs of Miette to the three-hundred-foot gorge. By way of the Rocky River trail one may reach Jacques Lake, where trout are so plentiful and so ravenous for bait that the wildest [Pg 243] of fishermen's yarns become sober realities. From Jacques Lake one may continue on to Medicine Lake, and either return down the Maligne to Maligne Gorge and the Athabaska a few miles below Jasper, or continue on to Maligne Lake, which for sheer loveliness has hardly a peer in the Rockies or elsewhere.

But by all odds the most wonderful trip that the visitor to Jasper Park can take is to the Tonquin Valley. One might exhaust his supply of superlatives without giving any adequate idea of the magnificence of the country that surrounds the Tonquin. The trail leads up Whistlers Creek to Amethyst Lake, near the south end of the valley. Imagine a vast mirror in whose richly coloured depths are reflected green meadows and hillsides clothed in green forest, dazzlingly white glaciers and snowfields, and the vast precipices of the Ramparts frowning darkly and menacingly from above. From the Tonquin Valley one gazes with awe upon a bewildering circle of gigantic peaks, Dungeon and Redoubt and Fraser, Erebus and Eremite and Thunderbolt, Postern, Bastion, Turret, Geikie, and a dozen more, while farther to the west lie Barbican, Portcullis and Fitzwilliam, and on the other side, toward the Athabaska, that most stately and beautiful peak, Edith Cavell. A good trail leads to Cavell Lake at the foot of the mountain, and the Glacier of the Ghost, and before long this will be transformed into a motor road which may or may not be a matter for congratulation. [Pg 244]

Jasper Park, considering its youth it was set apart by Order in Council in 1907 is remarkably well supplied with trails, and these are being rapidly extended year by year. One of

the larger projects that has been under consideration is the building of a practicable trail down through the heart of the mountains from Jasper to Banff. This would be a fairly expensive piece of work, but does not present any very serious difficulties, and would afford an extraordinarily interesting route. As a matter of fact, experienced mountaineers have been making the trip for several years, without encountering any unusual difficulties. Trails already extend from Jasper both up the Athabaska and the Sunwapta and by way of Maligne Lake, to the Brazeau River, which forms the boundary of Jasper Park. These trails would have to be improved, and extended through the intervening forest reserve to Rocky Mountain Park. It is even one of the possibilities of the future that a motor highway will be built from Banff and Louise north to Jasper.

One of the attractions of any national park is, of course, the presence within its boundaries of wild animal life. Nothing is more extraordinary to the visitor than the way in which wild animals learn that these parks are sanctuaries where they are safe from the gun of the hunter. For years the tameness of the bears in the Yellowstone, and of the big-horn and mountain goats at Banff, have astonished those who had not previously visited^[Pg 245] these parks. The same thing is happening in Jasper.

Writing in 1914, Sir Conan Doyle said, "The park is not as full of wild creatures as it will be after a few years of preservation. The Indians who lived in this part rounded up everything that they could before moving to their reservation. But even now the bear lumbers through the brushwood, the eagle soars above the lake, the timber-wolf still skulks in the night, and the deer graze in the valleys. Above, near the snow-line, the wild goat is not uncommon, while at a lower altitude are found the mountain sheep. On the last day of our visit the rare cinnamon bear exposed his yellow coat upon a clearing within a few hundred yards of the village (Jasper). I saw his clumsy, good-humoured head looking at me from over a dead trunk, and I thanked the kindly Canadian law which has given him a place of sanctuary. What a bloodthirsty baboon man must appear to the lower animals! If any superhuman demon treated us exactly as we treat the pheasants, we should begin to reconsider our views as to what is sport."

Since Sir Conan Doyle wrote, wild animals of many varieties have multiplied in the park or have emigrated to it from less protected regions. With the exception of the grizzly, who occasionally proves troublesome, these animals are perfectly harmless, and their increasing tameness makes it possible to study them at close range, which under other^[Pg 246] conditions would be out of the question. No doubt in time the list of animals will be increased by bringing in some of the superabundant buffalo from Wainwright. The narratives of early travellers prove that a hundred years ago buffalo made their home in what is now Jasper Park, and grazed in the meadows along the Athabaska.

Speaking of wild animals, J. Alden Loring, of the United States Biological Survey, who visited what is now Jasper Park in 1895 and 1896, has many interesting things to say about the animals he found there, and among others he upsets the popular idea as to the extreme shyness and wariness of mountain sheep. In studying their habits, he found that they frequented the higher craggy mountains with grassy slopes, descending to salt-licks during the summer. They were stupidly tame, did not really scent an enemy, and on being approached retreated in a leisurely manner and with reluctance.

It was difficult, very difficult, to tear oneself away from Jasper Park and the Old Athabaska Trail, and I felt as I climbed aboard the train like echoing the words of Sir Conan Doyle, in those verses that he calls so happily *The Athabaska Trail* :[Pg 247]

My life is gliding downwards: it speeds swifter to the day
When it shoots the last dark canyon to the plains of far away.
But while its stream is running through the years that are to be,
The mighty voice of Canada will ever call to me.
I shall hear the roar of rivers where the rapids foam and tear,
I shall smell the virgin upland with its balsam-laden air,
And shall dream that I am riding down the winding, woody vale
With the packer and the pack-horse on the Athabaska trail.

I have passed the warden cities at the eastern water-gate,
Where the hero and the martyr laid the corner-stone of State,
The habitant, *coureur-des-bois*, and hardy voyageur
Where lives a breed more strong at need to venture or endure?
I have seen the gorge of Erie, where the roaring waters run,
I have crossed the Inland Ocean, lying golden in the sun,
But the last and best and sweetest is the ride by hill and dale
With the packer and the pack-horse on the Athabaska trail.

I'll dream again of fields of grain that stretch from sky to sky,
And little prairie hamlets where the cars go roaring by,
Wooden hamlets as I see them noble cities yet to be,
To girdle stately Canada with gems from sea to sea;
Mother of a mighty manhood, land of glamour and of hope,
From the eastward, sea-swept Islands to the sunny Western slope,
Evermore my heart is with you, evermore till life shall fail,
I'll be out with pack and packer on the Athabaska trail.

POSTSCRIPT

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Since my return to the east I have had word of two of my companions on the Athabaska Trail the Warden and the uncertain-sexed Highbrow. The Warden writes from the Valley of the Whirlpool, toward the end of November, a very valley of desolation to anæmic sons of the town at that season of the year, but he apparently is happy and contented, needing no companionship amid those mighty solitudes where the mastodon surely ought to roam. Out on the trail, or at home in his snug cabin with his pipe and a book or two, the Warden is sufficient unto himself.

He writes not of himself, however, but of another companion of the trail. You remember, he says, the little Roman-nosed bay pony of such a determined disposition used to be Highbrow, but I have re-christened her Margot well, she eventually won the battle, according to her lights. She broke her head-stall, in the Tonquin Valley, and beat it back to Jasper. Tried, evidently, to take the bunch with her, but the other horses refused for once to follow, though they were loose at the time. She arrived in Jasper all right, but just in time to be sent out on a three weeks' jaunt along the northern boundary of the park with a heavy pack. And [Pg 249] that seems to have soured her disposition permanently. Poor little Margot Highbrow! He or she is

learning by sad experience that wilfulness does not always pay, but, on the contrary, sometimes seems to possess the disconcerting characteristics of a boomerang.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

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[Pg 250]

Without attempting to offer an exhaustive list of printed material relating to the Athabaska Pass and the Athabaska route, the following may be of interest to those who care to go more deeply into the subject:

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TRANSCRIBER'S NOTE

Accented words and hyphenated words have been standardized. Obvious printer's errors have been silently corrected. All other inconsistencies have been left as in the original except where noted below.

Page 121 Typo corrected from MacDonald of Garth to McDonald of Garth .

POSTSCRIPT changed to POSTSCRIPT

Index: Selkirk 133 There is no reference to Selkirk on page 133, however have left as in the original.[Pg 255]

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