

It is difficult to over-estimate the value of the waterways of the Mackenzie basin, not only to the region itself but to Canada as a whole. They constitute an asset of the first importance in the development of the natural resources of the region. Not only have they been the channels of trade and exploration in the past, but they will continue to be in the future the means by which further exploration, settlement and development will be carried out. In the early history of the region the waterways formed the routes by which the explorers traversed the country, and while, at the present time, most of the main streams have been explored, yet there are vast areas between these main streams, aggregating 240,000 square miles in extent, that are still unknown and the smaller streams and watercourses constitute the easiest and only natural means by which these areas are to be explored. To-day, with hardly any exceptions, the settlements of the region are situated on the waterways, and for a long time to come these waterways will determine the location of the centres of population in the region. No doubt, in the future, mining camps may be opened up in the interstream areas and agricultural communities formed in sections where the land is suitable, as is now being done in the south-western portion of the region, but in the early stages of development and growth of either of these two classes of communities, the watercourses must be used before other routes of travel are opened up.

Railways will eventually be built into the region from the south, and this period is now beginning for the extreme southern fringe of the Mackenzie basin, but unless there is some extraordinary mineral development in the northern part of the basin, the limit northward, to which the future railways will extend, will be determined by the limit at which successful farming operations can be carried on, for, except in certain exceptional cases, the products of agriculture furnish the bulk of the traffic for the railway lines.

Until these railways are built, however, water transportation must be practically the only means by which the traffic of the region is handled, and, indeed, the building of railway lines will by no means do away with the navigation of the lakes and rivers, when there is such a magnificent system of waterways, because of the difference in the cost of the one method of transportation over the other.

Of course, on account of the climate, it is not possible to navigate the lakes and rivers of the region for a longer period than four to five months of the year. On the other hand, how-