

REPORT ON THE RED RIVER EXPEDITION OF 1870.

BY S. J. DAWSON, CIVIL ENGINEER.

Early in the winter last year of (1869-70,) I received instructions from the Government to provide vessels of a class adapted to the navigation of the waters in the unfrequented region intervening between Lake Superior and the Red River Settlement. A military force had to be sent through on the opening of the navigation, and it was a matter of vital importance that these vessels should be of a character to meet the exigencies of such a service.

The route for a distance of two hundred miles, had never been traversed by any vessel larger or stronger than a bark canoe, and the chief officers of the Hudson's Bay Company, who were supposed to be well acquainted with the country, had declared it to be impracticable to their boats.

Among those who gave expression to this opinion was the late Sir George Simpson, Governor of the Company, than whom no one could pretend to greater experience in navigating the inland waters of British North America.

That distinguished gentleman, in a written communication to the Government, which was subsequently published, had expressed his belief that the route was practicable only to bark canoes, and that these (as every one acquainted with such vessels must concede) were not adapted to the conveyance of a military force.

So general was this opinion as to the character of the route, by Lake Superior, and so firmly fixed had it become, that the Imperial Government on two occasions sent troops by way of Hudson's Bay to Fort Garry, once in 1846, when a wing of the 6th foot was led up from that icy sea by Colonel Crofton; and again in 1857, when several companies of the Canadian Rifles were sent out.

Having traversed the route by Lake Superior frequently, I was in a position to explain to the Government that the reports as to its impracticability were exaggerated, that it had been for many years the highway of the North-west Company of Canada, and that, after the mountainous country on the borders of Lake Superior was passed, there would be no difficulty whatever in sending forward a force of considerable numbers, by means of boats.

The suggestions which I had the honor to submit, in this regard, having been approved, the services of the principal boat-builders throughout the Provinces of Ontario and Quebec were speedily called into requisition. Early in January the first contracts were given out and the work of boat-building went on without interruption until the opening of navigation.

At the same time a number of flat scows were ordered and built for use in shallow rapids, and every article of outfit that could possibly be required, whether in the way of rigging for the boats, tools for repairing them or outfit for the voyageurs, was provided in ample quantity.

I was furthermore directed (in January, 1870,) to increase the force on the Thunder Bay Road, in as far as the season and the nature of the locality would permit, so as to have the larger bridges completed and other necessary preparations made, before the opening of navigation. In order the better to ensure these instructions being carried out, an active and experienced officer, Mr. Lindsay Russell, was despatched by way of Superior City, from which place he had to walk two hundred miles on snow shoes to

Thunder Bay. A copy of his instructions is annexed, and I may here remark that he executed them with energy and skill.

It was at this time apprehended that the insurgents at Red River might endeavour to tamper with the Saulteux Indians, a tribe which occupies the country about Fort Frances and the Lake of the Woods in formidable numbers, and in order to establish and keep up friendly relations with these Indians, by direction of the Government, I sent instructions to a trusty agent at Fort William, to proceed to Fort Frances where he had long resided, and enter into communication with the chiefs and leading men of the tribe. A copy of these instructions is hereunto annexed.

Before the navigation opened, it became necessary to secure the services of a number of skilled voyageurs to manage and navigate the boats, and agents were accordingly despatched to the various localities throughout the country where the desired class of men was to be found.

Furthermore, in hiring men for the Public Works, in view of the probability of the necessity arising of their being required as voyageurs, such only were engaged as had some experience in navigating the inland waters of the country, or in driving logs in rapid rivers. The total number of men thus engaged, either as workmen or voyageurs, was eight hundred, and it was kept at that number throughout the season.

Having been in communication with the military authorities, at various times, during the month of April, I was most careful to inform them as to the condition of the Thunder Bay Road, and the character of the country generally, through which the Expedition would have to pass. They were furnished with maps showing the length, respectively, of the portages and navigable sections; and in order that there might be no misapprehension as to the state of the road, I submitted to them a memorandum of which the following is a copy:

"MEMORANDUM.

"Ottawa, 25th April, 1870.

"When the work of road making was brought to a close last fall, a section of 25 miles, reckoning from Thunder Bay, was practicable to waggons, with only one interruption at the Kaministiquia, which was then unbridged, continuing on the line an additional section of ten miles was cut out in such a way as to be practicable to oxen with sleds or carts.

"The two large rivers—Kaministiquia and Matawin—which cross the line, were bridged last winter, and bridges were also built over the more considerable of the smaller streams, so that, practically, the work of bridging may be considered as completed.

"It may be added that portage roads were laid out and opened, in as far as such work could be done in winter, between Shebandowan Lake and Lac des Mille Lacs.

"At the same time instructions were sent to the officer in charge, to set all the available force to work on the road as soon as the snow should have so far cleared off, as to admit of operations thereon being resumed, so that about eighty men are by this time engaged on the unfinished section of the line.

"An additional force of 120 men will be sent to their aid by the first steamer, and a week later, a further number of about fifty will go up.

"OPENING AND IMPROVEMENT OF THE PORTAGES.

"The voyageurs who go up in charge of the first shipment of boats should, im-

mediately on their arrival at Thunder Bay, be sent to open and improve the Portages between Shebandowan Lake and Rainy Lake, and for this purpose they can be supplied with canoes at Fort William, and out fit from the Government stores at the works.

"THE WAGGON SERVICE.

"Stables will be required at Thunder Bay, at the half-way Station, and at Shebandowan Lake, together with tents or huts for the accommodation of the teamsters. Intermediate between the half-way station and Thunder Bay, on the one side, and between the first named place and Shebandowan Lake, on the other, there should be camps as resting places where the horses could be fed. These camps would only require one or two men to be stationed at each, to take care of the hay and oats, and have victuals in readiness for the teamsters as they passed.

"Both at Thunder Bay and the half way station of the Kanimistiquia, it would be necessary to have a blacksmith with shoeing apparatus and a supply of horse shoes.

"The waggon service would require in all:

Teamsters .....	73
Men at Camps .....	4
Overseers .....	3
Blacksmiths .....	2
Clerk or time keeper .....	1
	83

"BOATS AND SUPPLIES OVER THUNDER BAY ROAD.

"Operations in this regard may be at once commenced by organizing the waggon service and sending boats, provisions, oats, hay, &c., forward to the Matawin Crossing, 25 miles from Thunder Bay. And at this point a small space should be cleared to guard against fire, and a few huts erected to serve as storehouses.

"THE BOAT SERVICE.

"In providing for this, three voyageurs should be sufficient for each boat, that is, with the aid of the soldiers in rowing and in transporting articles over the Portages.

"With this arrangement it would be necessary, that, in running rapids, the crews of two boats should be put in one, running first one, and then the other. The voyageurs may not be all equal, expert, and, perhaps, four to each boat might, in some cases be necessary.

"It is reasonable to believe, however, that after a little practice, many of the soldiers will become almost as skillful in the management of a boat as the voyageurs, and they will have had an opportunity of gaining experience before any of the difficult sections are reached.

"In case of necessity, additional force can be supplied, to some extent, from among the men on the works, most of whom have had more or less experience as boatmen. Each brigade of boats would require an overseer voyageur, for the maintenance of discipline among the crews, calling them to time in the morning, &c.

"There should also be a clerk or two attached to the force, to keep the time and accounts of the voyageurs.

"When the greater part of the boats, and a considerable portion of the supplies, have reached Shebandowan Lake, oxen and horses should be placed on the Kashaboiwe, Height of Land, Baril, Brulé, and French Portages, as follows:

"On Kashaboiwe Portage, 1 span of horses, 2 yoke of oxen,

Height of Land, 1 span of horses, 2 yoke of oxen.