

period of exploration, and the period of occupation. The central belt holds a stirring place in the annals of all three. Three great discoverers hold an undying fame in provincial records—Cook, Vancouver, and Mackenzie. The two former are associated with naval discoveries along the coast but in Alexander Mackenzie the central belt has a discoverer of its own. From east to west he travelled across the breadth of the province and kept within this central belt. Entering by way of Peace river he blazed the way for further exploits past the spots where soon were to be erected under his direction such historic posts as Fort St. John, Rocky Mountain House and Fort MacLeod. The Peace, Parsnip, Upper Fraser, Blackwater and Bellakula rivers were his discoveries in 1793, thus establishing a claim to this belt that has never been disputed.

In the period of exploration this belt was one of the earliest districts to become well known. Prominent among explorers are the names of Simon Fraser and David Thompson who at an early date roamed these districts at pleasure and pushed their explorations southwards from bases established here.

As for the period of occupation Central British Columbia holds the lead on mainland and, with the exception of Nootka, on Vancouver island. Fort St. John, Rocky Mountain House, Fort MacLeod, Fort St. James, Fort Fraser, Fort George and Quesnel were thriving centers of trade, with canoe brigades and pack trains going back and forth from one to the other before Astoria, Vancouver or Victoria were dreamed of. Fort Nass and Fort (now Port) Simpson were sea ports of prime importance before an anchor was dropped in Esquimalt or Burrard inlet.

At the time of Confederation the real industrial center of the province was the Cariboo gold district in which the magic city of Barkerville sprang up and for a time became the Mecca of the great far west. The Cariboo, Omineca and Cassiar gold fields led to the occupation of these regions in advance of any of the present more thickly-settled districts of the province, while the fur trade on the northern interior and the fish and seal trade of the coast regions about the mouth of the Skeena and Nass rivers opened up avenues of commerce through its entire breadth.

Before the construction of the Canadian Pacific railway there was a well-established route of travel from east to west far to the north of its location. River steamers plied the Skeena from Port Essington to Hazelton. Pack trains and canoe brigades had networks of routes between the coast and Rocky mountain ranges. From the plateaus they found their way eastward through the Rockies, by the Peace, Yellowhead or Athabaska passes.

The evolution of the province is sometimes divided into three political periods, namely, the unorganized period, the colonial period and the Confederation period. In the latter period only has Central British Columbia fallen behind. Had the Canadian Pacific railway followed the route of the Yellowhead pass and Skeena river, had old Fort Simpson, the seaport of early days, been chosen as capital of the unorganized colonies, what a difference there would have been.

Central British Columbia is not a new country by any means. It is the country of the Pacific slope. Unlike the eastern provinces, where development sprang from the earliest points of discovery and occupation, the development of British Columbia has been in an inverse order. The great central belt of longest historic interest has been pushed into the background through force of circumstances and is now just bursting forth into its own.