

BRITISH
NORTH AMERICA.

In the Report (Appendix, No. 3) there is a third route suggested for examination and trial, viz., by one of the lower branches of the Green River and the Squattock Lakes.

Whether successful or not it is liable to the objection of approaching the frontier of the United States.

There remains to be noticed the exploration for a line of railway from Whitehaven, on the eastern coast of Nova Scotia, towards Pictou and Bay Verte.

This was rendered necessary in consequence of the suggestion made by Captain Owen, R.N., to make Whitehaven the Atlantic terminus of the railway.

The details of this exploration are given in the accompanying Report, Appendix No. 4, and exploratory sheets, Nos. 20, 21, 22, and 24.

Engineering difficulties and expensive cuttings occur on this route.

From the commencement in the harbour of Whitehaven, the line must pass along a barren and rocky coast for upwards of 30 miles to Country Harbour, before it can turn off towards the interior. And it cannot do this and get clear of the sea-shore without the necessity of making a tunnel of about a mile in length through a ridge of whinstone.

Again, at the falls of the St. Mary River there will be required a tunnel of a quarter of a mile, and a viaduct across a valley of about 500 feet in length.

The summit level occurs between Lake Eden and Beaver Lake, and is 400 feet above the sea.

At Grant's Bridge, on the East River, for nearly three miles in length, there would necessarily be several expensive cuttings through rocks of sandstone and limestone.

The length of this line from Whitehaven to Bay Verte is estimated at 181 miles. From Halifax to the same point is 124; leaving a difference of 57 miles.

If the direct route No. 3 could be established, it would add 17 miles to the trunk line.

But as it is not to be supposed that Halifax, the capital and great commercial city of the province, would in such a case allow itself to be excluded from the benefits of the proposed railway, then it would involve, in addition to this 17 miles of trunk railway, a branch line of probably 90 miles.

Or if the Eastern Bay Chaleurs line through New Brunswick be added on to it, as in route No. 5, then it will involve no less than 57 miles extra of trunk line, and the same necessity for the branch line of 90 miles mentioned.

To compensate for such disadvantages, it must be shown that Whitehaven has the most paramount claims to be selected as the Atlantic terminus, in preference to Halifax.

The harbour of Whitehaven is 120 miles nearer to England by sea than Halifax; equivalent to, in ocean navigation by the steamers, 10 hours.

This, it is readily conceded, is a very great advantage; and were there no drawbacks or other considerations in the way, it would be quite sufficient to give that port the preference.

It is a well-known fact, however, that there is a time and season in the year when the Cunard steamers cannot keep their direct course to Halifax even, but are compelled by fields of ice to keep to the southward, and sometimes pass to the south of Sable Island.

During this time, which occurs in the spring of the year, and may last for two or three months, there would be some risk in their making direct for the more northern port of Whitehaven. And if for these three months the steamers were obliged to make Halifax their port, then for that time the Whitehaven line would be useless.

In respect to the advantages which it is said to possess, of remaining open all the year round, it is not quite clear that it does so.

From inquiries made on the spot in the summer of 1847, Captain Henderson learned that the preceding winter the harbour had been frozen over entirely, five to six inches thick,* and that it was sometimes blockaded up and much incommoded by ice.

Subsequently, however, and during this winter, when the objects of the inquiries made there in the summer became known, and the advantage of the railway spoken of, a statement accompanied with affidavits was forwarded, with a view to counteract the effect of the information given to Captain Henderson and the parties exploring there.

They are given in the Appendix No. 5 to this Report.

They tend to show that though the immediate entrance to the harbour may be, and generally is clear, yet that large quantities of floating ice find their way through the Gut of Canso, and by Cape Breton, which pass off in a southerly direction, crossing the direct path of steamers and vessels from Europe.

The coasting vessels keeping in shore are not so liable to be molested by it.

The harbour is admitted to be a fine sheet of water, but it does not and cannot vie with Halifax, either in appearance or capacity.

Referring to Lieutenant Shortland's Report, Appendix No. 5, who made a survey of it in obedience to the directions of Captain Owen, R.N., it appears that it is not free from the objection which is made against the port of Halifax, and is its only drawback, viz., the prevalence of fogs.

Lieutenant Shortland says, "that in foggy weather the harbour (Whitehaven) is difficult to approach, especially to a stranger, as the soundings in shore are very irregular, and I have not been able to learn any good indications of its vicinity to be gathered from the lead, so as to render its approach by that means certain; and Torbay, its immediate neighbour to the westward, is a dangerous place to get into.

"From the fishermen and small coasters I understand the currents round the point are

* Vide Appendix No. 5.