

ATHABASKA TO THE BAY.

Edmonton to Fort McMurray.

During the summer of 1918 it was my privilege to undertake an extended canoe trip through these portions of the hinterlands of the prairie provinces so little known to the general public. The northern part of Alberta has been well advertised and brought more or less to the fore through the medium of the famous Peace River District which occupies the greater part of this area. The remote parts of the other prairie provinces, however, have not been so fortunate in this respect. To me was assigned the duty of securing a first hand, up-to-date report of the present condition of this vast territory in connection with my work with the Natural Resources Intelligence Branch. After spending a month along the frontier or limit of agricultural settlement, I found myself in Edmonton about the middle of June preparing to penetrate the more distant areas.

It might be remarked here that by the term Northern Saskatchewan is generally meant the area lying north of the main Saskatchewan river, roughly about 125,000 square miles in extent; and by Northern Manitoba the additional area of 178,000 square miles granted to this province in 1912. The total area generally designated by the terms "Northern Saskatchewan" and "Northern Manitoba" is thus approximately 300,000 square miles. It is, therefore, evident that no exploration of any extent could be expected from a two months' expedition by a limited party.

This district, however, is not new. For over 250 years it has been known to the fur traders, both English and French, and the earliest discoveries and explorations were made in an inverse direction from that travelled by me, that is, they were made from east to west, while I travelled from west to east. One can sit in his library and make a comprehensive study of these regions from the many reports and stories published pertaining to their early romance. The district has also been fairly well covered by geological and other official parties whose maps and reports give a general history of the geological and physical features of the country and of its varied resources. Without having seen with one's own eyes, however, it is impossible for any person, no matter with what zeal he may pursue such fields of literary enlightenment, to obtain a proper conception of this wonder world or to catch the true spirit of its greatness.

It was thus to round out and put the finishing touches to my studies that I undertook to tread the mazy paths of wilderness, to meet the native Indian who still roams these districts in primitive style, and to emulate the fur traders of old as they conducted their brigades of canoes laden with a wealth of pelts from the Arctic divide to tidewater at Hudson Bay, there to meet the trading vessels from England. By such an experience only can be acquired that true grasp of the greatness of the district which enables one to assimilate and dovetail together in proper proportions, and with due credit, the many tales and reports, true or otherwise, which he meets in the pages of his library.

After due deliberation as to the best ways and means of procedure I decided upon the following course:—

To proceed from Edmonton to Fort McMurray by train, and from Fort McMurray easterly by canoe, taking with me throughout one white man as cook and assistant-companion-in-general, and relays of two native guides from post to post as required. The days of through trips are over. No more do the canoes of the French Canadian fur brigade set out from Montreal on their long and