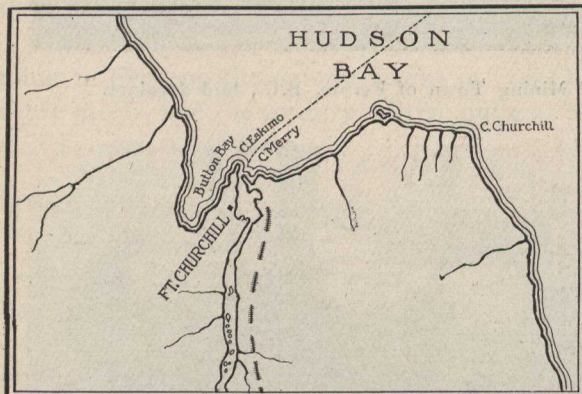


# THE HUDSON BAY ROUTE

THE STORY OF A DREAM AND ITS POSSIBLE REALISATION

ONE of the most important decisions reached by the Dominion Government in 1908 relates to the building of a railway from Lake Winnipeg to Hudson Bay. For thirty years such a railway has been a dream of the westerner. More than one charter has been granted, and more than one railway has been commenced. The Governments of Great Britain and Manitoba have all taken a considerable interest in the project and numerous investigations have been made.

There have been two chief points in the controversy which has been going on for a generation. The first was the possibility of building a railway



Map showing nature of the almost land-locked Harbour at Fort Churchill.

the possibility of Hudson Bay navigation. In 1894 there was formed in Great Britain a company known as the "Hudson Bay and Pacific Railway and New Steamship Route" for the purpose of exploiting this possible line of travel. The promoters of this company published a rather interesting pamphlet which contained most of the information which was available at that time, and any person interested in the subject will find in it some entertaining reading.

During the fourteen years that have elapsed since that time there has been more or less investigation, and much has been written and spoken as to the possibility of the route. The floating ice bogey has nearly disappeared. The Dominion Government has sent two or three expeditions to the north, and several engineers have made investigations both as to the inland districts and the coast lines. During the past winter a select committee of the Dominion Senate has given further attention to the subject and has collected all the evidence available. Their report is a voluminous and extensive document. A large portion of the material has been published in a pamphlet entitled "Canada's Fertile Northland," published under the authority of the Honourable Frank Oliver, Minister of the Interior. While this evidence relates to the whole of northern Canada, some of it bears directly upon the possibility of a Hudson Bay railway, the resources of the country through which it will run and the line of policy which will be pursued by the Government in further development of this northern district. Among the recommendations of this committee is the following:

"(2) That the construction of a railway connecting existing railways with Fort Churchill on the Hudson Bay, would open up a large tract of land, well fitted for settlement, as well as afford an additional outlet for the products of the West, and where settlements are now being made."

Section C of this report deals especially with the navigability of Hudson Bay and Hudson Strait and contains evidence from Mr. A. P. Low, Mr. J. B. Tyrrell, Dr. Robt. Bell and Commander Wakeham. Mr. Low states that between the end of July and the end of September, when he was there, the Strait was not quite clear of floating ice, but that there was not sufficient ice during this period to harm an ordinary vessel. From the end of September snow squalls are frequent and when the temperature gets low there is considerable fog. He seems convinced, however, that navigation is possible up to November 15th. The presence of floating ice would depend very much upon the direction of the prevailing winds. Iron tramp steamers should find little difficulty during this period. After November 15th, especially prepared steamers could navigate the Bay and Strait for a considerable period in favourable years. During at least two months of the year there was no trouble from ice at all, and the Hudson Bay route was then even a clearer one than the St. Lawrence.

Mr. Tyrrell, who has been in Churchill twice in the months of October and November, confirms Mr. Low's opinion as to the possibility of navigation and is almost more convinced as to its practicability.

However, the harbour of Fort Churchill closes about November 1st and if Fort Churchill is the only good harbour on the western coast of Hudson Bay, then of course navigation will be practically useless after that harbour is closed.

Dr. Robt. Bell explains that he has been through Hudson Strait nine times. June 22nd was the earliest date on which he entered the Strait. All his trips were made between June 22nd and October 10th. No difficulty was ever experienced. Hudson Strait is 500 miles in length and averages 100 miles in width and there are many possible harbours on each of the shores. With proper lighting and reliable charts, navigation of the Strait should be easy. He never saw but one fog in the Strait and no blinding snow-storms. He saw no reason why ships should not pass through the Strait at any time during the winter; neither the Bay nor the Strait is frozen up any more than the Atlantic Ocean. Between Churchill River and Nelson River the land consists of a hard clay surface. Farther inland it is partly muskeg. There would be no difficulty in building a railway through this district except on the muskeg land near Churchill.

Commander Wakeham details his experiences with the sailing vessel, *Diana*, which he took into Hudson Bay in 1897. They had some trouble with pack ice in the latter part of May, but if he were taking the trip again he would know how to avoid it. They made several trips in and out of the Strait and never had any further delay from ice. On September 7th they experienced their first snow storm. On October 24th he was at Cape Wolstenholme and met no ice. In their last attempt to get into the Bay on October 29th, they were stopped by heavy winds and snow storms. He made four round trips altogether, two of them into Hudson Bay and one of them as far as Churchill. He is convinced that when the Strait is properly surveyed and lighted navigation will be safe, but thinks it will end about November 1st.

## CONCLUSION.

As to the navigability of Hudson Bay and Strait all authorities agree that it is possible until November 1st.  
(Continued on page 13)

to Hudson Bay, and the second was the possibility of carrying goods from Hudson Bay to Liverpool via Hudson Strait. The opening up of the Northwest and the discovery that wheat could be grown several hundred miles farther north than any one anticipated, combined with the gradual accumulating knowledge that the northern part of Canada contained considerable mineral wealth, has convinced people that the building of such a railway is possible and advisable. The question of navigation remains a disputed point. It is quite true that Hudson Bay never freezes and it is just possible that Hudson Strait is seldom or never entirely frozen over. Nevertheless, this argument is not conclusive, for the simple reason that all these northern waters are made dubious by reason of the large fields of floating ice which continually present themselves. The rotation of the earth from west to east causes the ice fields and icebergs coming down from the north to float in through Hudson Strait.

In 1888 a select committee of the House of Commons inquired into the question of navigation of Hudson Bay and submitted a report. This stated that Hudson Bay is a vast sheet of water measuring 1,300 miles in length with an average width of about 600 miles. The average depth was placed at 70 fathoms and it was stated that there were no rocks nor dangerous reefs to impede navigation. The temperature of the water of Hudson Bay in summer is some 14 degrees higher than that of the water of Lake Superior. The report on Hudson Strait stated that it is 45 miles wide between Resolution Island and Button Island on the north coast of Labrador with a rapid current and a tide rising from 30 to 40 feet. "Were it not for the presence of the Polar ice which comes down from the Arctic seas by way of Fox's Strait during the months of April, May, June and July, Hudson's Strait would be exceptionally safe, owing to the uniform great depth of water and the entire absence of reefs or dangerous islands."

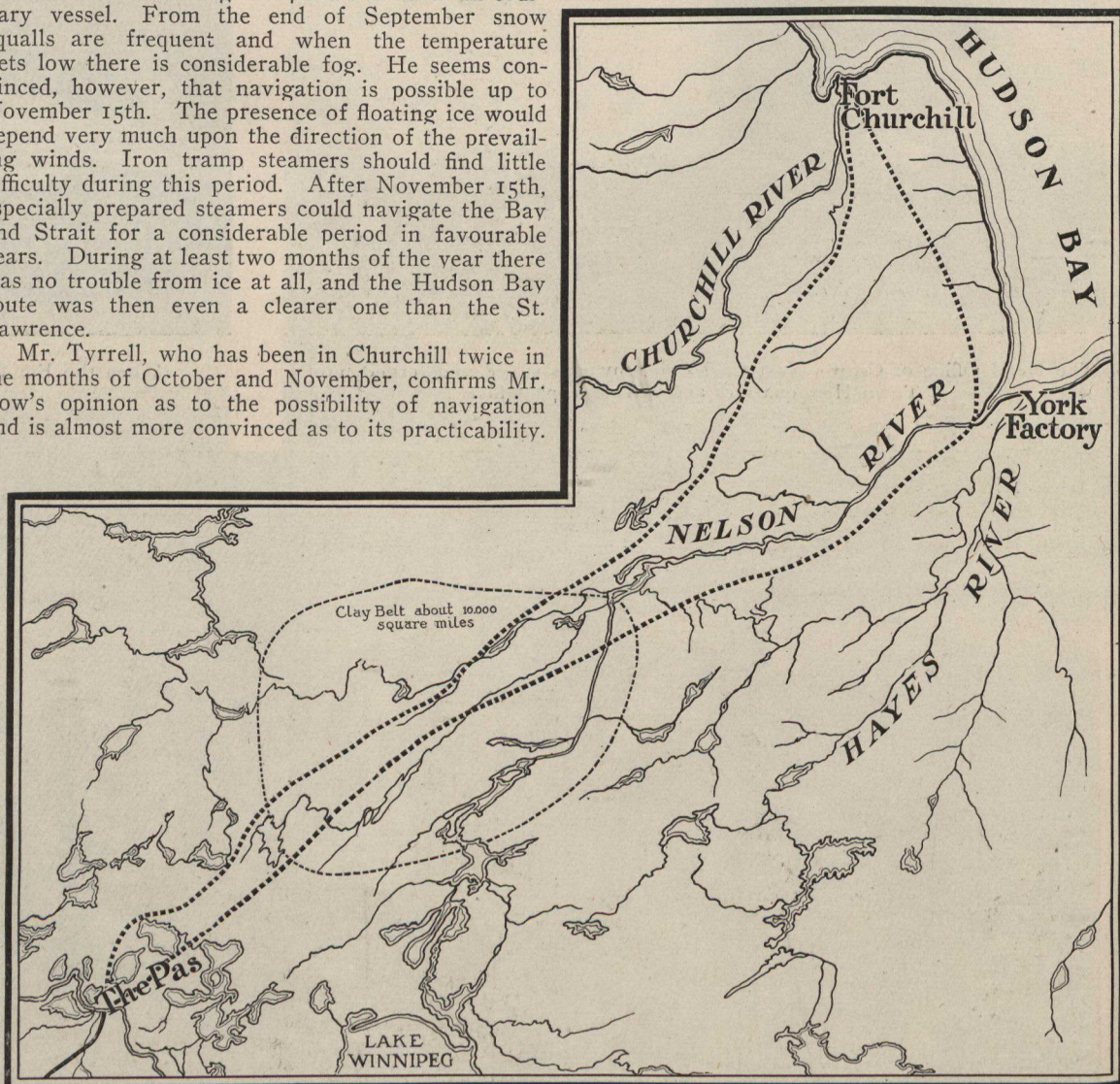
The committee compiled a comparative table of distances as follows:

	Miles.
Liverpool to Fort Churchill .....	2,926
Fort Churchill to Calgary .....	1,000
Calgary to Vancouver via C. P. R. ..	642
	4,568
Liverpool to Montreal .....	2,990
Montreal to Vancouver via C. P. R. ..	2,906
	5,896

Difference in favour of Hudson Bay 1,328

The committee further stated that navigation was possible during nearly three months in the year and that with further seafaring knowledge they could probably be prolonged some weeks. Presumably this would cover the months of July, August and September.

In 1884-85-86 the Dominion Government sent an expedition to test the navigability of the Strait and Bay. In 1888 the Provincial Legislature of Manitoba appointed a select committee which dealt with



The proposed Hudson Bay Railway will have a choice of routes, to be determined by the Engineers' reports and the possibility of a Harbour at the Mouth of the Nelson. York Factory is at the Mouth of the Hayes River, but there is no good Harbour there. From The Pas, present terminus of C.N.R. to the Mouth of the Nelson is 450 miles; from there to Churchill is 100 miles.