

to strain every nerve to avoid being carried by the force of the current against the rocky cliffs, which were always met with at the sudden bends, and gain the eddy on the opposite side. I often found myself descending a rapid broadside-on, and paddling with all my strength for the side on which the eddy lay. This would be a very unsafe proceeding with the ordinary canoe, but the "Athabasca," as we called our boat, was almost non-capsizable, having a width of four feet and a length of twelve, a form but ill-adapted for speed, but admirably adapted to the work that was expected of it; speed is of very secondary importance in travelling down a river whose current averages from eight to ten miles an hour. On one occasion only was it necessary to land to empty the water out of the boat.

At 7.50 the following morning I was again under way, and at 4 p.m., as I rounded a bend of the river, the ruins of the Rocky Mountain house came in view. This was a few years ago an important trading post of the Hudson Bay Company, but having been deserted it was burnt by the prairie fires; for the country here is thinly wooded, the woodland being interspersed by patches of prairie. The chimneys are now all that remain to attest the existence at one time of this extensive and busy post; and, to judge from their number, each room of the buildings must have been provided with a fireplace, which was the practice in those days in this part of the world, where stoves were all but unknown.

About half a mile below the ruins the Clearwater River enters from the southwest. I landed here, and, having placed my property under the upturned boat, as it was raining, set out to look for a settler's house that, I had been told, was to be found about a mile up the river. I was obliged to guess on which side of the river it was situated, but I guessed aright, and in a few minutes came in sight of it. Even in the distance everything looked ominously quiet about the shanty, and I was quite prepared to find on reaching it that it was deserted. I then returned to my boat with my spirits as much damped by this discovery as my clothes were by the pelting rain, as I had hoped to replenish my stock of provisions, which was beginning to run low. I then reloaded my boat and paddled a couple of miles farther down the river.

Up to this time I had had very little time for reflection, but on this evening, as I sat beside my camp fire, with the oppressive stillness of the air broken occasionally by the distant howl of the coyote, I realized for the first time what it is to be entirely alone in a wilderness, with probably one hundred and fifty miles between myself and the next human being, and thought that if the poet who sighed "for a lodge in some vast wilderness" were only there he would be amply satisfied. Solitude