

# The Western Edge of the Interior Plateau

(D. A. MacKinnon, Esq.)

## Description of Little Known District from the Point of View of Agricultural Possibilities.

The area to be covered in this article lies between the Grand Trunk Pacific on the North and the Chilcotin country on the South, and is to be east of the eastern foothills of the Coast Range. This portion of British Columbia is not opened up by any railway or trunk wagon roads, and has but few trails. On account of the nature of the country and its geographical position, a person traveling through it has many obstacles to contend with, the base of supplies being far away, the trips are necessarily long and costly, the result being that only a small part of it has been even prospected. The contact between the Coast Range Batholiths and the interior Volcanics and Sedimentaries occurs somewhere in this area. Thus the mineral possibilities of this strip of country is too large a subject and requires too much detail to be dealt with in this article. There is no doubt, however, that some day many large mining camps will be seen in operation in this area.

The country contiguous to the Grand Trunk Railway is fairly well known throughout Canada. The Skeena and Bulkley Valleys have been well advertised and much has been written concerning all their industrial possibilities. There are at present many large farms in the Bulkley Valley in a flourishing condition. The railway has proved a great boon to this district.

South of the Bulkley Valley between the Maurice River and Fraser Lake, we have the Francois and Ootsa Lake Sections. A wagon road running in a southeasterly direction from Houston, a town on the Grand Trunk Railway a few miles east of the Maurice River, crosses the Nadina River close to where it empties into Francois Lake. It continues on to Ootsa Lake, passing through the Upper settlement about sixty miles from Houston and fifteen miles further on reaching the lower settlement. From this point, which is about the centre of the lake on the North Shore, the road runs in a northerly direction back to Francois Lake, which is crossed by means of a ferry, and then on the Burns Lake, where it meets the railroad again. This road, about one hundred and twenty miles long, and for the most part in good condition, is of great value to the settlers. Until the advent of the railroad this locality had a very slow growth on account of the fact that all supplies had to be packed in nearly two hundred miles over the trail from Bella Coola. Since then, however, many new settlers have come in, supplies are very much cheaper and this section is progressing rapidly.

Mixed farming is carried on in this district, but most of the land being at an elevation of between 2,500 feet and 3,000 feet, the summer frosts are too hard for a good agricultural district. It is more suited to cattle raising and has a good future ahead of it in this industry. Sheep would also do very well if it were not for the coyotes, which are very numerous. The long hard winters necessitate from three to four months' feeding. Wild hay grows in abundance, however, and is cut and stacked for winter feed. There are many large open meadows with a thick growth of beaver hay and large patches of prairie land covered with pea vine and rye grass. The vegetation is really remarkable, the general growth of pea vine, rye grass and fire weed being from four to five feet high. A yield of four tons to the acre is not uncommon, but a yield of two and a half tons is about the average. Practically the whole district is good summer range, the pea vine reaching its greatest growth in amongst the trees.

The Owen Lake section is a part of the valley of the Nadina River which flows into the west end of Francois Lake. This section, though not extensive, deserves men-

tion for its very fine stand of wild hay. Low rolling hills and large flat stretches are often entirely free of timber. When the land is timbered, the trees are mostly poplar from three to six inches in diameter. Many claim the average acre in this district can be cleared for twenty-five dollars, and picked areas as low as fifteen dollars per acre.

The luxurious growth of pea vine and rye grass continues, in many places, for a distance of about ten miles west of a line joining the west ends of Francois and Ootsa Lakes. Westward from here to the mountains, however, the growth is practically confined to the meadows. There are occasional very large meadows and many small ones, generally more or less flooded by beaver. This strip of country is dotted with innumerable lakes and is badly broken up by creeks and small hills which rise from 1000 feet to 1,500 feet above the plateau.

A few words on the geography of this section might not be amiss. This is undoubtedly British Columbia's lake country. There are innumerable small lakes and many large ones. Francois and Ootsa are the best known of the larger lakes. They all lie practically east and west, being fed from the Coast range and draining easterly into the Nechako which flows into the Fraser at Prince George. A large river named the Tahtsa flows into Ootsa Lake at the west end. This river flows in an easterly direction and is about fifty miles long. It drains Tahtsa Lake, which is in the heart of the Coast Range. There is a low pass at the head of Tahtsa Lake through to the Coast, a distance of about twenty miles. About four miles from its mouth the Tahtsa River is joined by the Whitesail River which drains Whitesail Lake, another large lake, the head of which is in the coast range. Whitesail and Tahtsa waters are separated by the Tahtsa mountains, a spur of the Coast Range: Eutsuk Lake lies to the South of Whitesail and at one place the two lakes are scarcely a mile apart. Eutsuk Lake drains into Tetachuk Lake, thence by the Tetachuk River into Nechako waters. Eutsuk is probably the largest lake in this district, i.e., has the most water in it. It is not nearly as long as Francois Lake, but it has many large bays and inlets. Eutsuk Lake is eighty-five feet higher than Whitesail Lake and could easily be drained into Whitesail where the two lakes are about a mile apart, thus providing enormous power, if ever required.

The shores of Eutsuk and Whitesail Lakes are thickly timbered with hemlock and balsam. The trees, however, are small, of poor quality and of little economic value. There are occasional meadows in this vicinity, but for the most part the land is barren, being too high and situated too close to the mountains. The scenery, however, is of the best. It is not on so vast a scale as the Windermere country but more beautiful, having the lakes which Windermere lacks. Any person seeking scenery cannot do better than take a canoe trip from Ootsa Lake into Whitesail Lake and then portage the mile across into Eutsuk Lake. He can then go down Eutsuk to Tetachuk Lake and then by the Tetachuk River to the Ootsa River and then back into Ootsa Lake, making a round trip of nearly two hundred miles.

The land mark of the Francois and Ootsa Lake district is Nadina mountain. The bend of the Maurice River where it changes its course from east to north occurs at the foot of this mountain. Nadina is a lone mountain 7,000 feet high. There are no other mountains close to it, and the average elevation of the surrounding country is from 3,000 feet to 3,500 feet. Thus it can be seen a long distance from all directions.

A point worthy of mention is that no salmon ever get into these lakes. The reason is that the fish cannot get past the falls on the Nechako River. If a fish ladder were