



The Midnight Sun.

In the early days of the Hudson's Bay Co., "the hundred miles" between Edmonton and the Athabasca River to the north was known as the long portage. The trail is still in use, as it was in those days, being the connecting link between the two great interior waterways—the Saskatchewan River and the Athabasca River—whose waters finally find their way into the Arctic Ocean.

This trail is not the best at any time, and when we travelled over it two years ago, on our way into the Arctic, it was decidedly bad.

As there is no Pullman accommodation to Athabasca Landing, we were permitted to occupy the hurricane deck of a freight wagon, a luxury indulged in when the conditions of the trail would allow, which, however, was not often. At other times, we found walking (the only means of transportation) good, but in due time reached the Landing, and a few days later found ourselves afloat on the Athabasca River, among a miscellaneous collection of bags, boxes, bales and barrels—in fact, everything that goes to make up a fur-trader's outfit—bound for the Far North.

For those who have never seen a trader's outfit, a description of the one with which we journeyed for the first seven hundred miles of our trip may be interesting. The scows numbered four, and were all after the same pattern, being about fifty feet long, twelve feet wide, and four feet deep. Each boat's crew consisted of seven Indians, one of whom acted as guide or steersman, and handled the ponderous "sweep"; one as bowsman, and the five others as oarsmen, whose duty it also was to pack the goods across the portages. Each scow carried about 180 pieces, each piece representing 100 pounds on an average. All the goods for the north are put up in hundred-pound lots, or as near that quantity as possible, so that they may be the more easily "packed" on the portages.

The first thing in the boat was a tier or two of bags of flour, extending from bow to stern. Then came sides of bacon, sacks of rice, caddies of tobacco, bags of shot and bags of balls, boxes of rifles, boxes of raisins, crates of hardware, pails of candies, stoves, medicine chests, kegs of powder, bales of twine for net-making, blankets, ready-made clothing, dress goods, tea, etc., all piled in without much order; the only care exercised in their placing being to see that the boat rides level.

So on we drifted, only stopping when night overtook us. Then the boats were "snubbed" to a tree, and each man took his blanket, and having selected a spot most suited to his fancy as a resting place, went to sleep. The Indians always lit a fire, and "hi-hi-ed" around it for considerable time, after which they rolled in their blankets and went to sleep with their feet to the fire.

Preparing the "grub" for the crew of 24 Indians was no sinecure. A stove, with a length or two of pipe, was set up on a raised platform in one end of the boat for the accommodation of the cook. Here he held despotic sway, and woe betide the Indian who came to touch that stove. In all sorts of weather the process of making bannock had to proceed. We saw the cook in a pelting rain standing on a side of bacon with a "slicker" coat and a sou'wester on, busy mixing up the flour for his bannock. Bacon, beans, bannock and tea made up the usual bill of fare. There was no trouble in serving dinner. Everybody helped himself out of the identical dishes in which the things were cooked.

The boats were all tied together, and when "Meat sue" was called there followed a lively scramble by the crew over bales and boxes, as if the very existence of each depended on his getting there first. I have seen hungry people eat, but these Indians beat all previous records. Dippers of beans, great chunks of bannock and bacon, and cups of tea strong enough to float a wedge, disappeared apparently without an effort. For the first few days I thought they would never get filled up, but gradually they became satisfied.

A hundred and twenty miles from the Landing we passed through the Pelican rapids, and saw the place where the Government had sunk a shaft in the hope of striking oil, but struck gas instead, which was escaping in great quantities, with such force that one could hear it for almost a mile. It was on fire then, and I believe is still burning, with a flame jumping 25 or 30 feet into the air.

A hundred and forty-five miles further brought us to Grand Rapids, the most dangerous rapid on the Athabasca River, and the first of a series of almost continuous rapids for 87 miles. Everything had to be taken out of the scows and "packed," about half a mile, over the island. The boats then run empty down the channel to the right. At left side is the main channel, through which it is utterly impossible for a scow to go in safety. The package of the goods across this portage was really the first work I saw the Indians do, and the loads they carried were truly astonishing. They have a strap about eight feet long, which they use for packing purposes. The two ends of the strap are tied to the articles to be transported. It is then raised well up onto his shoulders, with the broad center part of the strap resting across the upper part of his forehead. They carried loads all the way from 100 to 200 pounds, and on the shorter portages much more than that. For example, I saw one of them packing an ordinary No. 8 cook stove, and another—small, skinny individual—walking off with a barrel of sugar.

The "run" through the rest of the rapids was most exciting and delightful; sometimes rushing along at fifteen miles an hour, sweeping around bends, shooting little falls, riding over heavy swells, where everything creaked and rattled as the scow plunged and tossed in the heavy waves.

Just before the last two rapids were "run," I saw one of the finest sights of my whole trip. As we drifted around one of the many bends, two moose were sighted almost a mile away. Instantly everybody was alert. The only two rifles in the boat were made ready, and amid a deathly silence, save for the swish of the "sweep," we were guided nearer to shore, and still nearer to the unsuspecting moose. We drifted on and on, every minute bringing us nearer and still nearer, while one of them, all unconscious of our proximity, walked leisurely around the shore, cropping the tufts of grass. As we drifted nearer, the other appeared walking slowly up the cut bank onto a small projection, and stood there looking at its companion by the water's edge. They were then both broadside to us, facing each other, and about 100 yards away, when crack went the rifles. We expected to see the death struggle of one or both, or else a fine exhibition of moose speed, but for the moment we saw neither. They simply turned their heads and looked at us. That was the last touch to the magnificent picture. How our eyes drank in the sight—the two mon-

archs of the forest standing as if carved in marble; the towering banks clothed in green luxuriance to the very summit; the gravelly beach; the rushing river; the sun glowing in mellow radiance on the great clouds of foliage, undisturbed by the slightest breath;—all these together made a scene rarely surpassed in the great picture galleries of nature!

We would have drawn the curtain on the scene just there, but the events which followed impressed us so deeply we could not. Before the animals were half skinned, two of the Indians were eating a kidney apiece. The way the carcasses were cut up and mauled around was shocking. We concluded that if we were to relish any of the moose we had better be moving, and move we did; but not before we saw another Indian trying to get a considerable piece of the paunch into the hip-pocket of his blue overalls. We camped early that night, for the Indian has a weakness for moose meat, and while any remains he feels it his duty to continue eating. Notwithstanding that a lot had been boiled, and more fried for supper, they kept the fires burning all night, and roasted and ate moose and beat their tom-toms until nearly daybreak. Next morning, "Sunday," a few came for breakfast, two or three for dinner, but none for supper. Monday morning, when we were ready to go, there was no moose left, except the hide and a small piece our cook "cached"; even the bones were cracked and the marrow extracted.

We soon reached old Fort McMurry, 350 miles from Edmonton, after successfully passing all the rapids on the Athabasca, and the boat hands, except one, were all paid off. The H. B. Co.'s steamer, "Graham," comes up as far as this point, and down as far as Smith's Landing, where the rapids on Slave River begin. There is every indication of immense tar deposits at old Fort McMurry; the odor of tar is quite noticeable as one drifts down the river. The mud of the cut bank is quite dark, and smells strongly of tar, and will burn with a little coaxing.

The next 200 miles to Fort Chippewyan, we drifted leisurely down. Interesting as it is, space will not permit a further description of our journey down the Athabasca, where all the bends or points are so much alike that you cannot tell one from the other, and all so beautiful, despite their unvarying sameness, that you can look at them day after day without tiring, and feel that "a thing of beauty is a joy forever." After leaving the Athabasca River, the west end of the Athabasca Lake had to be crossed for a distance of about twelve miles, before reaching Fort Chippewyan, from which, with the assistance of a small steamer belonging to a fur trader of that place, we went up Slave River to the mouth of the Peace.

This part of Slave River, from Chippewyan to where the Peace flows into it, is somewhat erratic in its movements. One time you may find it flowing into the lake, as we did, and the next flowing the other way. Its movements are controlled by the height of the water in the lake. Once at the mouth of the Peace River, we made a quick "run" down the Slave as far as Smith Landing. Here we were confronted by twenty-five miles of very heavy rapids, and a crew of Chippewyan Indians had to be engaged as guides and packers. The H. B. Co. and some of the free traders have oxen and carts to convey the goods overland to Fort Smith, a distance of sixteen miles, instead of the laborious work of going by the river, by which way there are four distinct portages to be made in the twenty-five miles, at each of which every bag and box had to be "packed," and the boats hauled overland.

The Smith Rapids, as they are called, are simply magnificent, but the main part of the river, about two miles wide, is altogether too dangerous for boats to go down. They are, therefore, run through the numerous small channels on the east side of the main stream. The "run" to the point where we had to make the first portage was very exciting. Some places there was no more than room for the boats. The overhanging boughs almost touched our heads as we raced along, switching around bends and jumping little waterfalls. The guides were all a "qui vive," keeping their boats in the right course and avoiding the rocks that threaten to block up the channel entirely. It took us just six days to make the twenty-five miles. I found myself then at Fort Smith, from whence the H. B. Co.'s steamer, "Rigley," runs into the Arctic Ocean, making a round trip of twenty-six hundred miles once in every year, taking a supply of goods and bringing back furs.

A few miles from Smith the salt supplied for the whole north is obtained. It is of a fine coarse quality, so plentiful that it can be shovelled up by the bagful. Not far also from Smith roam a small herd of the once plentiful buffalo.

Heretofore, I have said nothing about the dogs, but it was not for lack of dogs. At every post, and with every Indian, you will find them. They are the people's horses. In the winter, when they are used principally, they are fed little or nothing, and in the summer scarcely enough to keep their