

The Hudson's Bay Company abandoned this route to the Mackenzie about the time of the Riel Rebellion in 1885.



THE HUDSON'S BAY COMPANY'S PORTAGE LA LOCHE POST.

The winter supply of feed for the cattle on Portage la Loche in its palmy days was grown at La Loche Post and at Buffalo Lake at the mouth of La Loche River (hence called Bull's House), but now there is no necessity for raising grain or fodder. In 1897, some people endeavoured to go this way to the Yukon, and the Hudson's Bay Company re-opened this once famous portage. The view from the top of the Portage looking west, of which a cut is given earlier in this report, has been enthusiastically described by many travellers. The valley of the Clearwater River would, in my opinion, be a magnificent cattle range, and should be a farming country. There are large open prairies, and the grass is splendid. Vetch and pea-vine grow everywhere. I was greatly impressed with the Clearwater Valley, it is quite similar to the North Saskatchewan Valley. The soil is a good loam with a sandy clay subsoil. I had ample opportunity to observe it carefully as the whole place in the vicinity of the Portage is pitted with prospect holes. The loam would be about a foot deep on an average. Sir Alexander Mackenzie in his "Voyages from Montreal through the Continent of North America to the Frozen and Pacific Oceans in 1780 and 1793," says of the Clearwater Valley:—

"The Valley is about three miles in breadth and is confined by two lofty ridges of equal height, displaying a most beautiful admixture of wood and lawn, and stretching on until the blue mist obscures the prospect. Some parts of the inclining heights are covered with stately forests, relieved by promontories of the finest verdure, where the elk and buffaloes find pasture. These are contrasted by spots where fire has destroyed the woods and left a dreary void behind it. . . ."

From conversation with the natives, the priest and the Hudson's Bay Company's manager, I feel sure that the climate here would be quite favourable to wheat raising. I am informed by the residents that this section is not affected by early frosts and the gardens which I saw certainly bear out their statements. John A. Groat, the Hudson's Bay Company's manager at Portage la Loche post informs me that he has heard from Indians that the Valley of the Pembina River is still a better country as the prairies are larger. This valley lies to the south west of the Clearwater, which the Pembina is a tributary. In the matter of collecting information here as in other sections I met the same difficulty that though I was told that crops had been grown successfully I could not ascertain particulars as to the extent of the crop or the yield per acre. In fact, no detailed information could be obtained.