

Many years ago, indeed, the Hudson Bay Company had sent an expedition of a hundred men up that river and endeavoured to establish two trading posts; but after a very short trial the attempt was abandoned as too expensive and dangerous, owing to the menacing and often hostile tendencies of the Indian tribes who inhabit that district.

The information we possessed concerning the Rocky Mountains, and the extent to which they truly formed a barrier to the formation of a road across the continent in the most southern latitudes within the British territory, was extremely vague and unsatisfactory. The late Sir George Simpson had, indeed, described the crossing from the Saskatchewan to the source of the Columbia and several parties of emigrants from the Red River Settlement to Oregon, on the Pacific coast, were known to have crossed the Rocky Mountains, under the guidance of the late James Sinclair, by nearly the same route, taking with them not only horses, but also cattle. Nothing was, however, published as to the exact nature of the difficulties encountered by any of these parties, or whether or not these could be easily evaded or removed.

The United States' Government, since 1853, have sent a succession of exploring parties into different parts of the mountain country within their territory, with the immediate object of selecting the best route by which to carry a line of railway to connect the States on the Atlantic with those on the Pacific coast.

The reports and surveys of these expeditions already published fill twelve large quarto volumes, abounding with valuable information of every kind respecting the country, and embellished with views of the scenery.

No one of these surveys, however, offers a favourable prospect for the ultimate construction of a line of railway connecting the Atlantic with the Pacific, principally from the fact that in the central part of the continent there is a region, desert, or semi-desert in character, which can never be expected to become occupied by settlers.

It was, therefore, with considerable interest and anxiety that public attention was turned to our own territories, and the wish to have more exact information concerning their nature and resources induced Her Majesty's Government in 1857 to despatch the Expedition which I had the honour to command.

For my guidance in effecting these objects I received from Her Majesty's Secretary of State for the Colonies the following instructions:—

SIR,

Downing Street, 31st March 1857.

With reference to the letter which, by my direction, was addressed to you on the 28th inst., I have now the honour to communicate to you special instructions for your guidance in the conduct of the Expedition for exploring that portion of British North America which lies between the northern branch of the River Saskatchewan and the frontier of the United States, and between the Red River and the Rocky Mountains.

Having completed all preliminary arrangements necessary for the future safety and success of the Expedition, it is the desire of Her Majesty's Government that you should proceed by the Sault St. Marie, on Lake Superior, to Fort William, and from thence by the Kaministaquoia as far as the Kakabeka falls, and that you should ascertain the precise geographical position of the point at which the White Fish River falls into the Kaministaquoia. From thence it is desired that a party should be detached to explore the country to the westward towards the height of land, and, as far as may be practicable without long delay, to determine the height and direction of the watershed for some distance on either side of the line due west from the White Fish River.

If this preliminary exploration should lead you to think such a measure practicable, it would be desirable that you should detach a small party, lightly equipped, and supplied with provisions for a few days' march, who should pursue a line directly to the westward, meeting the ordinary canoe route either at Cross Lake or Sturgeon Lake.

From the point at which this party shall rejoin the rest of the Expedition you will proceed by the ordinary route to Fort Garry on the Red River.

In regard to the entire region lying between Lake Superior and Lake Winnipeg, it is desirable that in addition to the ordinary observations upon the physical features and geology of the country, the attention of all the members of the Expedition should be directed, to ascertain the relative levels of all the points which can be recorded and laid down with topographical accuracy; as, for instance, the height of the falls and rapids on the streams which lie along the canoe route, and the relative height of the several points in the watershed between the above-mentioned lakes which may be visited by the Expedition. In case, as is probable, the botanical collector should not accompany the separate exploring party, information should, nevertheless, be obtained as to the nature and quantity of timber which may be found on the line of march.

From Fort Garry you will start, as soon as you have organized your party, in a west-