

Maligne. It was to the rapids in this stretch that I had sent a picked crew of voyageurs to be in attendance while the boats were passing, and run them down. In all other places, the work to be done consisted merely in carrying baggage and supplies, and hauling boats from one quiet sheet of water to another. The aggregate length of the portages between Shebandowan Lake and Fort Frances is precisely three miles and 76 chains; the two first are the longest namely, Kashaboie and Height of Land portages, and these are respectively three-quarters of a mile and one mile in length. The other portages are very short, only three exceeding a quarter of a mile, and none extending to half a mile. Here then is the labour the voyageurs and soldiers had to encounter in getting to Fort Frances, that is to say—they had to get boats, ammunition, and 60 days' rations, the latter gradually getting less, over three miles and 76 chains of land, and row or sail through some two hundred miles of water, where countless islands rendered the shelter so perfect that the highest winds could not stop them, while the breeze would often fill their sails and relieve them from the toil of the oar. The weight of the boats varied somewhat, those of the clinker construction being from 650 lbs., to 750 lbs., and the carvel from 850 to 950 lbs. With each brigade of six boats were from sixty-five to seventy-five strong men, soldiers and voyageurs, ten men were quite equal to drawing a boat across a portage, but the crews joined together and hauled them across with great ease. The baggage and stores gave the most irksome work to the inexperienced soldiers, but it did not last long at a time, and after the toil involved in getting across a portage, they were soon again afloat and winding their way among labyrinths of islands.

Sometimes mistakes occurred on the lakes, more especially when the sails were hoisted.

The boats in tacking, would leave the usual track and, as new lakes opened up and unknown islands came in view, the guides would get bewildered and scarcely know which way to turn. A case of this kind occurred in the Lac des Mille Lacs, and I mention it to show how easy it is for the best guides to get astray in these island-studded lakes. A half Indian voyageur who had been for many years in the service of the Hudson's Bay Company, and was supposed to know every rock between Lake Superior and the Arctic Seas, came with a brigade of boats to the lake just named. The wind was up, the sails were set at once, and off went the boats dashing at great speed through the water, and leaving island after island behind them. The wind was nearly but not quite fair, and it would be a pity to change them from their track while they were making such speed, almost in the direction they should go. At last they were put about, but the guide looked in vain for some point or island he could recognize. All was new to him. Time and again, the islands bounding the prospect were made for, but only to open up new vistas and lakes more bewildering than the last. This lake is well named Lac des Mille Lacs. It is, however, the only one on the upper part of the route which from its dimensions could admit of the boats going far astray, and in order to guard against the recurrence of such blunders, I stationed some Indians who have their hunting grounds in the neighborhood, at the Height of Land, so that they might be in readiness to act as pilots in this perplexing lake.

Much has been said about the barrenness and forbidding aspect of the Lake region, and no doubt it is in many places somewhat rocky, but not more so than the regions of the Upper Ottawa, or the country intermediate between the Ottawa and the Georgian Bay. Timber, both red and white pine, of fair dimensions, is in unlimited abundance, and in many places, more especially on Rainy Lake, there are indications of valuable minerals.

Arrived at Fort Frances, the Expedition had before it 131 miles of unbroken navigation, ending at Rat Portage. First, Rainy River, winding for 67 miles with a gentle current through forests of the most luxuriant growth, broken here and there by slopes of green sward, where the Indians of former times had practised the art of cultivation, so long forgotten to their descendants, and then the Lake of the Woods, where the course lay for 64 miles farther, through islands which, although the lake is large, afford sheltered channels where the stiffest breeze is hardly felt. There is, however, a traverse of seven miles at the entrance of the lake where boats are sometimes wind bound.