

63 VICTORIA, A. 1900

such numbers as in the one adjoining the Nisutlin river. The mountain goat inhabits the mountains and frequents the wildest and most inaccessible sections. The ptarmigan was the only bird we saw in these altitudes. The waters of the Nisutlin river and Teslin lake abound in fish, but to take full advantage of this one must be provided with a fishing net.

EXPLORATION OF BIG SALMON RIVER.

The region drained by Big Salmon river and its numerous tributaries may be divided into two sections, each one having distinctive features of its own. A line drawn in the direction of the valley of the south branch, and produced across that of Big Salmon river in a northerly direction, would fairly indicate where the change in the topography of the country occurs. To the east of this line are massive mountains crowned with high, rugged and fantastically shaped peaks, frequently difficult of access, as we found to our cost on several occasions. The slopes of these mountains are generally devoid of vegetation and are furrowed by deep gorges and ravines leading to valleys, of which there are several, both north and south of the river. The snow, which never entirely disappears from their summits, acts under the rays of the sun as a feeder to the numerous tributaries of the Big Salmon river. The mountains north of the river attain their greatest elevation in a range which has diverted the general course of the river between the first and second bends. Farther west they, however, change to more regular outlines and lose the forbidding aspect which they had. The same remark applies to the range south of the river, and though their denuded and rocky frontal still continues to flank the valley for several miles below the second bend, they eventually disappear and are replaced by low and timbered hills, which bound the eastern side of the valley of the south branch, while those on the north side of the Big Salmon river slope down to the level of extensive plains which spread westerly, and beyond which can be seen the crest of some low hills sparsely timbered on top and with grassy slopes facing both the Big Salmon river and the plains.

Beyond the south branch, these hills and ridges are in groups on both sides of the valley and without any well defined direction. In some places they approach the river but only for short distances, and when they recede from the stream they leave between it and the foot hills, flat bottom lands covered with thick brush, which are apparently flooded during high water. Such is the character of the country until the south branch of Big Salmon river is reached.

From this point the river flows through a terraced country; both banks are formed by high and steep escarpments of gravel mixed with fine yellow sand. These escarpments, whose crests are at first less than half a mile apart, gradually recede from each other. The width of the valley is thus constantly increasing the farther down we go and by the time its confluence with the Lewes is reached its terraces have merged into those along the latter river. These terraces were at one time timbered with poplar and pine, as indicated by the numerous pieces of decayed timber lying on the ground.

On my arrival at Cary portage, after completing the exploration of the Nisutlin river, I set to work to determine its position by an observation for latitude. I then surveyed the trail across the portage from the right bank of the Nisutlin to the southern extremity of Quiet lake and found it to be nearly four miles long. The path at first follows for some distance the southern side of a small stream, which at the time was dry, the beavers having effectively cut off the water by throwing a dam across its bed, then by a gentle ascent it leads to a terrace which holds a lake, three quarters of a mile long and two hundred and sixty feet above the level of the river. The distance between the right bank of the river and the eastern end of the lake is one and a half miles. Half a mile beyond this lake is a second lake, less than half a mile across, and then a pond which is just north of the path and close to the foot of high cliffs. We had now reached the highest point on the trail, three hundred and seventy feet above the valley of the Nisutlin. From this point the ground slopes a distance of one and a third miles towards the southern end of Quiet lake, where the portage ends. With the exception of a short stretch between the river and the first lake, where the soil is dry and firm, the trail passes over damp ground, thickly covered with moss and some trailing willows with