

The next morning, after having celebrated holy mass in a cabin which my people made for the purpose with poles covered with branches of fir, and after we had breakfasted and adjusted our packs, we continued our voyage, always ascending along the river Nepisiguit, as far as the rapid called commonly the Fall of the seals [*Le Saut aux loups marins*] which marks the separation of the two ways which lead to Miramichi, the one shorter but more difficult through the burnt woods, and the other longer but easier by the river.¹ The great desire I had to go immediately to our [Indians of] Port Croix, to commence there the mission, made me resolve so much the more easily to take the route by the burnt woods, which the Sieur Henaut and the Indian also had traversed a short time before; and thus of one accord we left the river which nevertheless would have spared us much trouble and fatigue had we followed it, as experience made us amply know later.

That you may know what the burnt woods are, I will tell you that the heavens were one day all on fire, full of tempest and thunder which rumbled and made itself heard in all parts; the thunderbolt fell in a time when the dryness was extraordinary, and burnt not merely all the woods and forests between Miramichi and Nepisiguit, but also burnt and consumed more than two hundred and fifty leagues of country, in such a manner that we could see only trunks of trees very high and very black, which showed in their frightful barrenness the marks of a conflagration widespread and altogether surprising.² This great extent of country is always covered with snow in winter. One sees only the young shoots and the little bushes which appear rather as islands distant one from another from two to three leagues, than like the woods, or forests of Canada: in a word, this fire was so furious and violent, that the flames darted and embraced, so to speak, from one bank of the river to the other; whence it comes that the moose and beaver have [re-] appeared only long after this sorrowful accident. That which gives much trouble to the voyagers who traverse these burnt woods is that they cannot find places to camp under shelter from the wind, nor wood to warm one's self. It was, however, in these sad solitudes, and in these deserts, more awful a thousand times than those of stony Arabia, that we lost our way, because we were willing to follow the tracks of some Indians who were hunting beaver: for, wishing to examine the routes and turnings of the Indians and of these animals, we took a false route, and departed from that which without doubt was the most

¹The identity of the Seal Fall is unknown. The distance the author gives above Bathurst, i. e. over four or five leagues, is rather too great for Pabineau Falls, though otherwise this would be very probably the Seal Fall. It is much the largest fall below the Grand Falls. The route to Miramichi turns up Gordon Brook below Grand Falls (see the map) whence there is an easy portage to the Miramichi. Just above Gordon Brook is the Chain of Rocks, a bad rapid, which possibly may have been the Seal Rapid.

²This fire must have exceeded the great Miramichi fire of 1825.