

ON TRAIL FOR GRANDE PRAIRIE

The Land of Chinooks, Marvelous Scenery and Fertility Beyond the Steel

WHERE is Grande Prairie? That is the question being asked by a large number of people; but how to get there interests a few who live in Edmonton or thereabouts. Grande Prairie is part of the so-called last great west in the Peace River country—this is not a real estate advertisement, for as yet there are no real estate agents in Grande Prairie, though heaven knows how soon they will arrive when the homesteading begins to become general and homesteaders of this year become the speculators of next, pushing their own frontier farther and farther afield from the railway.

This is part of the untraveled land; a land so fertile that according to some who have been there raising casual crops, there is nothing better in the valley of the Saskatchewan or the Bow or the Red. There have been as many stories about the Peace River valley as about the Garden of Eden. But the consensus of really valuable experimental opinion seems to be that there are three great valleys in the Peace River country capable of great crops and a large and prosperous population of producers. At any rate, the railways are heading out that way from Edmonton; at the present time three transcontinentals and two or three other subsidiary lines, all tracking to tap the fertile reaches of the Peace en route to the mountains and the sea.

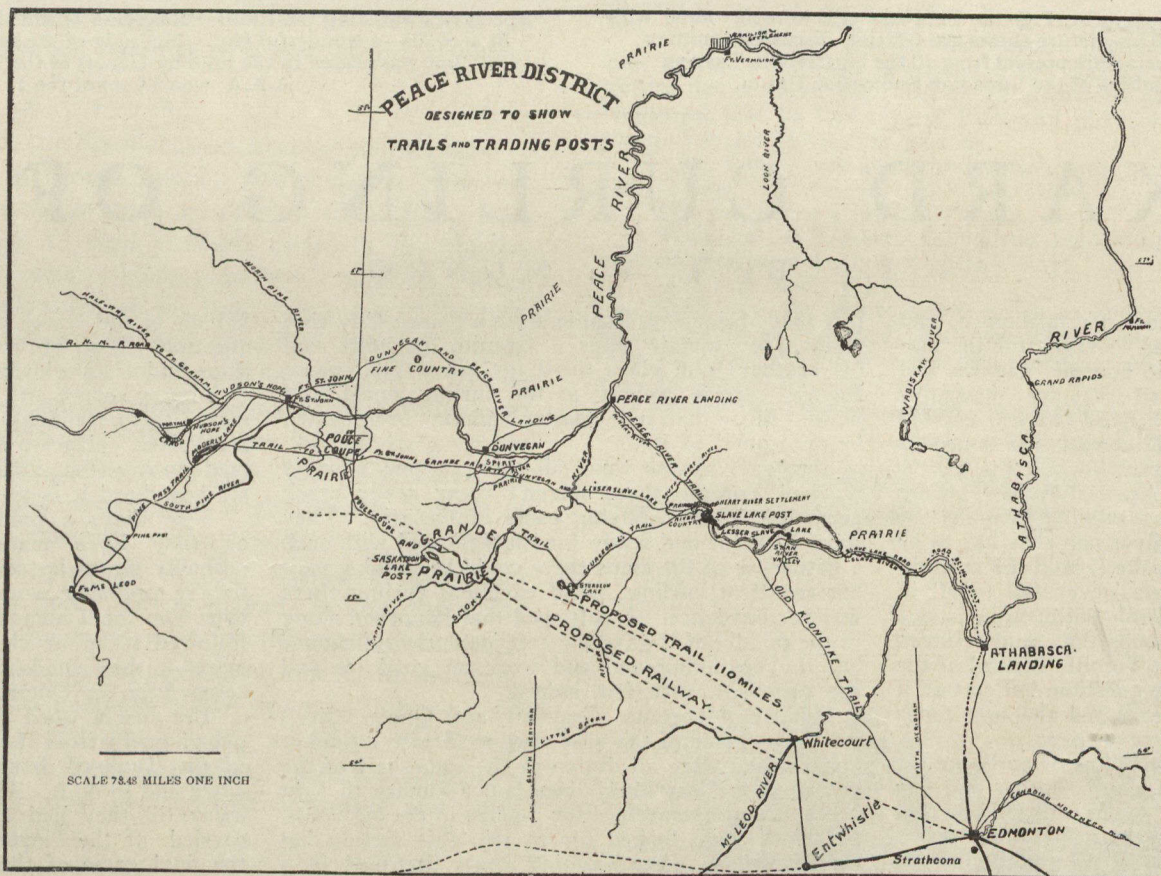
But long before the railways began to yearn for that country the prospector had been in. Of course everybody has heard about the Lawrence Bros. of Vermilion and Allie Brick, the flour-bags and the grist-mill. It is well known that though the Grande Prairie is far to the northwest of Edmonton its climate is even more moderate, being tempered more seductively by the stray chinooks that straggle in there from the coast through the Rockies. Parties have been going in for years from Edmonton. Three years ago outfits drove in via Athabasca Landing, which is a round-about route but had the main-travelled road a good deal of the way. Two years ago one A. M. Bezanson drove up in a sleigh with a caboose, taking his wife; and he settled in Grande Prairie ahead of the railway. He had already written a book about the Peace River trail because he had put in a couple of years mooching round over it, wanting to know and wanting the rest of the world to know about it also. He had nothing but praise for the country. Years ago the Klondike overlayers saw the fertile valleys of the Peace, the first body of white men except fur traders to behold it. They built their boats at Peace River Landing and began their water voyage through a charming and a pastoral land that reached away illimitably from the river. But their main interest was in getting through the country to where the gold was—and they took more than a year to do it. Nowadays in Edmonton they are outfitting and arguing and have been holding public meetings to discuss ways and means of getting to the Grande Prairie and no farther; hundreds of men who desire nothing better than to get there ahead of the railway, to homestead and to drive stakes and to be the pioneers in a new land of promise and production.

The extension of the railways has set most of these people speculating. Two roads have pushed well out in that direction south of Athabasca Landing, the old travelled route, but still heading towards the head-waters of the Athabasca and the Smoky and the Findlay and the Parsnip and the Peace, which rise in the mountains and run up to the northern sea through the Mackenzie. Entwistle, on the Grand Trunk Pacific, is the Pisgah from which some of these people have been seeing the promised land. The people who propose to trek in to Grande Prairie held a meeting in Edmonton not long ago—

as was noted in the columns of the CANADIAN COURIER last week. They mapped out a route. It was an interesting convention; present some old-timers who had driven stakes in Edmonton when it was a hundred times harder to get at by cart than Grande Prairie is now by train and trail. John McDougall, veteran fur trader and merchant prince and land king, was chairman of the meeting. He recalled the old days, as could Hon. Frank Oliver had he been there. The journalist was present; the scribe ready to chronicle the annals of the new Jerusalem—to wit, Mr. F. D. Piche, editor of the proposed *Peace River Pilot*—blessedly auspicious name! He intends to set up his case of type and his hand-press at Entwistle and from there, the end of civilisation, record the short and simple annals of the new colony. The lawyer was there. Mr. Ray proposes to open a law office at Grande Prairie. He knows very well that even in a modern Garden of Eden there will be disputes and titles to record and claims to file.

The Way of the Trail.

Well, the idea of the moving colony is to entrain as far as Entwistle and from there to go on runners fifty-five miles to Whitecourt, which is at the confluence of the McLeod and the Athabasca—



Map of the Land from Edmonton to Grande Prairie; showing one actual and one proposed Railway, and the Trail from Entwistle on the G.T.P.

this over a main travelled trail; thence blazing a new trail 140 miles to Grande Prairie. Of course there were dissensions and there are difficulties. The high price of food is a drawback; also the fact that the new trail made at the settlers' own expense would be useful only in winter when frozen. Peter Gunn, who is the M.P.P. in the Alberta Legislature for the land lying round Entwistle, says they can all get in there and have a fairly good time provided they are willing to use the axe.

Meanwhile other settlers who went in last year by the longer route have come out to civilisation and have told how they got in. It was last April when the party headed by Mr. J. E. Gundin, now of Beaver Lodge, Grande Prairie, thirty-one people and seventeen yoke of oxen and fourteen waggons of supplies headed away from Edmonton for the partially unknown. Recently Mr. Gundin came out and brought back with him, not bunches of grapes on poles as the spies did from the land of Eschol to the camp of Moses, but a good lively fact-story of how they got in and out again, coupled with the best of advice and a few adventures. His party was known as the "bull party" owing to the number of oxen. Here is the story of the times they had:

"February the fifteenth," said he, "is the latest any party should start for the Peace River country over the old trail. The chinooks of the north make the roads bare and the rivers break up two weeks earlier than here. We left Edmonton on the twen-

tieth and got over the Athabasca on the 28th. A few days later the river broke up. Our waggons were freighted with from thirty to thirty-five hundred pounds and the north shore of Lesser Slave Lake we found to be utterly impassable for our loaded waggons. We were stuck. We tried to pack around but gave up the idea and determined to wait until the ice went out of the lake, to ship our goods by boat. We got the oxen around the north shore all right and shipped our goods across the lake. June was free from rain and we continued our tour reaching Beaver Lodge by way of Peace River Crossing and Dunvegan on the 12th of July. After looking over the country we moved on to our locations on July 28th, two weeks before the land was surveyed by Mr. McFarlane, when we took out declarations on scrip.

"We found black surface soil from four to eight inches in depth, and a subsoil of chocolate clay from four to six inches in thickness. The soil is very uniform in Grande Prairie and the country rolling. Some of our party have found springs. The water appears to run in veins rather than a sheet of water.

"From our location we can see Nose Mountain forty miles away to the west, and about 125 miles distant we can see some twenty snow-clad peaks.

There is plenty of timber for building purposes—spruce and poplar. The gardens which we saw were excellent in every way. Everything from tomatoes to potatoes ripened in the open. Since reaching Grande Prairie our party has enjoyed the best of health. One family, the Millers, had illness among four children almost constantly in Ontario. They have had no sickness whatever up there. The farmers in Grande Prairie much prefer oxen to horses because of the great cost of oats. Oxen grow fat on the prairie grass. The settlers are without exception well satisfied with the country and are very sanguine of the future."

The Stage Setting on the Athabasca.

Even old-timers who have been in the employ of the Hudson's Bay Co. for half a century sometimes mention the wonderful beauty of the scenery in the Peace River valley. A well-known ex-Factor now living in Edmonton spoke recently of

a trip he once made with a Beaver Indian down along the lower waters of the Smoky. It was in the fall of the year; the time of hoar frost. They camped by dusk at the confluence of the Smoky and the Athabasca; the stolid Cree never saying a word. At sunrise they got up. At the tepee flap they stood gazing on a splendid, indescribable picture; the bluffs and headlands of two silent, silver rivers garbed in a most astonishing fabric of dazzling white that sparkled and coruscated like a web of star-dust upon millions of little poplars and galleries of far-rising hills. For nowhere else in America at least can be seen such hoar frost as in that land to the north of Edmonton. For a moment the Beaver was speechless. Then a sort of sunrise went over his face. He raised his hand.

"Beautiful!" he said; which was the first time the Factor had ever heard the Indian give vent to a word of admiration.

The air in that country has been highly praised by those who live there. People in Edmonton, which is near the highlands of the Saskatchewan believe that the air there is about as crisp and exhilarating as can be found in Canada. However, when it comes to real air values it seems to be largely a matter of comparison. Some years ago a lanky bronchobuster from Dunvegan, which is the edge of the last-horse country, was down in Edmonton part of the winter. He shivered and snuffled and grouched about the damp wind—which to the easterner seem-