

HOW WE CROSSED THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS INTO BRITISH COLUMBIA.

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WHEN the discovery of gold in British Columbia raised that colony into considerable importance, the idea of connecting it with Canada, by a road across the continent of America, which should pass through British territory, naturally suggested itself. The Americans had already succeeded in carrying a road and telegraph line across the Rocky Mountains into California, and thus proved the practicability of establishing communication through an immense tract of unsettled country. In 1860, Captain Palliser and Dr. Hector found several passes through the great barrier of the Rocky Mountains, which they represented as presenting no great obstacles to the formation of a road. But these lay far to the south of the great gold-fields of Cariboo, and were in somewhat dangerous proximity to the American frontier. Dr. Hector, indeed, attempted to cross the mountains further north, in order to reach the head waters of the Thompson River, but encountered forests so dense and encumbered, that he judged it impossible to proceed, and turned south to the more open country on the Columbia.

The Leather Pass, lying in about the same latitude as Cariboo, had formerly been used by the Hudson's Bay Company as a portage from the Athabasca River to the Fraser, but had long been abandoned, on account of the many casualties which occurred in the navigation of the latter river.

In the summer of 1862 we left England, determined to reach Cariboo, if possible, by the most direct route, taking the Leather Pass, and exploring the hitherto unknown region of the north branch of the Thompson River. We reached Fort Garry, in the Red River Settlement, on the 12th of

August, and there learned that a large band of emigrants, some 200 in all, and chiefly Canadians, had passed through in the preceding spring, on their way to British Columbia overland. Finding that the season was too far advanced to allow of our crossing the mountains before winter, we travelled on as far as Fort Carlton, on the north branch of the Saskatchewan, and turning almost due north for about seventy miles, built a rough log hut at a beautiful place called La Belle Prairie, and went into winter quarters. We spent our time in hunting and trapping, and served an apprenticeship in hardship and privation most useful to us in our subsequent difficulties. When the thaw set in at the beginning of April, we again started westward, along the North Saskatchewan by Fort Pitt, to Edmonton. This was the last place where we could obtain supplies or assistance until reaching some post in British Columbia, 600 or 700 miles distant; and here we made our final preparations for crossing the mountains. The people of the Fort informed us that the large band of emigrants had crossed by the Leather Pass, and on reaching Tête Jaune's Cache had divided, one portion descending the Fraser on rafts, the other striking south for the Thompson River. Another party of five had followed later in the summer, intending to descend the Fraser in canoes. Nothing was known of the ultimate fate of any of them.*

* During our stay in British Columbia afterwards, we met several of these adventurous pioneers, and learned the story of their travels. The party which descended the Fraser all arrived safely at Fort George, after many narrow escapes, and suffering considerable hardship. Those who followed the Thompson were obliged to abandon all their horses, sixty in number, and several men were drowned in the rapids. The third party of five, who descended the Fraser in canoes, suffered horribly. The canoes were swamped in some rapids; two of the party gained the shore, and the other three a rock in the middle of the stream. These were rescued after two days by their companions, but were so dreadfully frost-bitten and exhausted, that they were unable to proceed. Their comrades erected a rude shelter for them, cut a large supply of firewood, and leaving them their scanty remnant of provisions, set out on foot to obtain assistance at Fort George, which they expected