

# RESOURCES OF CANADA'S FERTILE NORTHLAND

In the minds of many Canadians the idea is inherent that the vast country lying to the north of the Saskatchewan watershed and west of Hudson's bay is unfitted for agriculture, and that its value to the Dominion lies in its annual production of furs, already exploited, its vast timber forests, known but not yet brought into service, and its mineral wealth, as yet unknown and almost absolutely unexplored.

For some time past it has been realized by numbers of far-sighted people that after a few more years' inflow of immigration at the present rate, Canada's future expansion as an agricultural, lumbering, mining and industrial country will depend upon the exploitation of the natural resources of this far north land, together with the northern portions of Quebec, the districts of Keewatin and Ungava, on the coast of Hudson's bay, the immense Mackenzie and Peace River districts, and the Yukon territory.

The trend of settlement in Canada, and also in the United States, has been westward, following the construction of the railways. The land in the railway belts (the more southern part of western Canada) is being rapidly filled up, as the older railway lines throw out their branches northward, and as the present construction of the new National Transcontinental railway proceeds. Attention is therefore, already being drawn to that portion of Canada, hitherto supposed to be not only inaccessible but comparatively barren, which lies still further north.

**EXTENSIVE AVAILABLE LAND.**  
R. E. Young, of the department of the interior, in 1905, prepared a statement showing that the enormous influx of immigrants and settlers would in a reasonable time exhaust the available lands for free homesteads in the present settled portions of the western provinces, and calling attention to the practically unexplored hinterland of Canada.

Mr. Young also had a map of the northern portion of Canada prepared which contained all available information from any source regarding the possibilities and resources of the country. As a result of Mr. Young's investigation the matter was taken up by the House and a select committee of the Senate was appointed to inquire into the resources and value of that part of the Dominion lying north of the Saskatchewan watershed, and the Rocky mountains and west of the provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan, and the Keewatin and Ungava were also brought within the scope of the investigation.

In February, 1907, the committee commenced its work, and by March 30, 1907, when it completed its labors, the evidence collected formed a valuable collection of information on points hitherto practically unknown.

Captain E. J. Chambers, of the senate, edited and condensed into narrative form the evidence given before the committee, and the Hon. Mr. Oliver decided to issue it for public information as a publication of the department of the interior. The book is now available.

and copies will be sent free on application to the department.  
Three large maps of the country under investigation accompany the volume and these contain a wealth of detail not hitherto found in any previously published maps. There are also charts showing the average possible hours of sunshine during summer in these districts, the isothermal lines, isobars, and the summer temperatures.

The area dealt with in this volume is of stupendous extent. The area of the portions of Alberta and Saskatchewan lying north of the Saskatchewan watershed may be set down at 230,000 square miles. Ungava has a total of 354,065 square miles; Keewatin 470,416; Mackenzie 262,182; total 1,657,559 square miles. This is by more than 300,000 square miles twice the combined area of the four original provinces of confederation namely, Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. It is exactly 274,672 square miles greater than the combined area of the seven older provinces and of those portions of the two new provinces of Saskatchewan and Alberta which lie south of the Saskatchewan watershed.

The evidence given by Mr. Brelin is fully as favorable from an agricultural standpoint as that given by Mr. Conroy. His judgment is that from the mountains to Peace point, a distance of seven or eight hundred miles and for an average of seventy-five miles back on each side of the Peace river, there is a tract of land fully equal to the soil on any similar length of the Saskatchewan. A great deal of it is clean prairie especially on the north side, the balance being covered with scrub and small timber.

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country. The feed is excellent. The Prairie river country is the finest piece of the northwest that Mr. Conroy has seen. Most of it is level and open with nice bluffs of timber mixed, with some spruce and poplar.

Between the Little Smoky river and the Lesser Slave lake the country is open. Along the banks of the Smoky river, there is a long distance of open country north of Dunvegan, all along the river, it is fit for agriculture on both sides, and for a long distance back.

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## Enormous Tract of Country Hitherto Regarded as Inaccessible and Comparatively Barren, Lying to the North of the Saskatchewan Watershed are Unspeakably Rich in Timber and Minerals, While There are Thousands of Miles of Agricultural Land Fit for Settlement—Valuable Information Collected by R. E. Young for the Country.

more valuable, according to thorough authentic and well substantiated evidence, than was at one time supposed, and is capable of sustaining a very large and prosperous population. The settlements in this distant region, while insignificant in number and extent as compared with its vast area, are important as demonstrating practically and unquestionably the great possibilities of this territory as an agricultural and industrial country, and as emphasizing the importance of exploring and surveying such areas as are likely to first attract the stream of settlement which is bound to set in before long.

**GOOD AGRICULTURAL LAND.**  
According to one witness, who has had exceptional opportunities for familiarizing himself with the country and its resources, there is a good deal of agricultural land fit for settlement, and it is unselfish, as there is settled in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta today.

W. F. Brelin, member of the Alberta legislative assembly, who resides at Lesser Slave Lake, after a careful computation estimates the area of agricultural lands available in the unorganized territory of Mackenzie and northern Alberta at not less than one hundred million acres.

Owing to the attention which has been drawn to the Peace river country of late by reason of the almost immediate construction of the Grand Trunk Pacific railway through it, the evidence of those witnesses who deal with this portion of the country is perhaps of the most vital public interest at the present time. It is of interest to the department of the interior, and to the Indian department, Mr. Conroy, who has been travelling through the country for eight or nine years gave some of the most interesting details. From the southwest, the Peace river flows into the valley of the Swan Hills, a beautiful country, open. The finest grass in the world grows there, blue top, some of it six or seven feet high. The basin all around the lake is fine agricultural land. The blue grass grows on the highland, not in droughty spots, but on the lowland, and the forested area. Probably four tons to the acre would be an average crop.

There is a good deal of open country all around the south side of Lesser Slave lake. About 40 miles north there is some 20 miles of rolling prairie country. Probably four tons to the acre would be an average crop.

As to the soil, many supposed that the Peace river valley, as a valley, was a low lying section of the mountains, and that the river, it is spoken of as "The Valley" by many people, and they think that it extends to the mountains on to the Arctic ocean.

The river bottom proper only consists of points or flats in the valley of the bed of the river, which "bottom" is practically about two miles in width, whereas the Great Peace valley proper, which is properly called the Peace river valley, is in reality a broad tract of country. When you once get on to the height of land, this so-called "valley" covers 300 miles in width, and extends from the Rocky Mountains on to Lake Athabasca, into which the Peace river drains.

The banks are very high where the Peace river leaves the mountains, and the banks of the river to get up what is spoken of as the height of land. At Fort St. John the banks are about 1,000 feet in height, and it would be quite a problem for the farmer living up on the height of land to get water from the river. When you reach the Peace river crossing, which at present is the terminus of the road or trail from Edmonton, the usual route to the north, the banks are 800 feet in height, and where the road winds down the bank to get to the bottom of the Peace river, it is about one mile long, that length being necessary for the suitable grade to get down to the bottom of the river.

From the Peace river crossing as the river swings to the north and east, the banks gradually become lower, and when Wolverine Point, about 200 miles to the northeast of the Peace river crossing is reached, the banks are about 200 feet in height. From thence to Fort Vermilion the banks become lower, and at Fort Vermilion you find the banks from 100 to 150 feet in height.

You will find the same conditions in the upper part of the river as in the lower. It makes great bends, and on alternate sides of the river you will find wide flats, where there is probably the richest soil there is in that northern country, made up of alluvial deposits, all black soil. There are places on the lower parts of these points which get flooded, perhaps once in seven or eight years. Nearly all the points, however, are above the high water mark, and when these flats are cultivated, the soil yields the heaviest of crops. On these flats cultivation of the soil was first undertaken in that part of the country, and it was supposed by many that they comprised the only part of the Peace river or northern country from Edmonton to the north that was suitable for cultivation. For many years experiments were carried on the flats. People supposed that when they undertook the cultivation of grain on the height of land they would get into the muskeg, and swamp that adjoined the river in many places, and grain could not be raised, but this has been proved to be a fallacy. The sample of grain which had produced, was largely taken from the height of land or table land near Fort Vermilion.

The table land is sometimes called "bench land" and this bench land is a very wide. There are places in it, as at the south of Fort Vermilion, and at the south of Lesser Slave lake, where 100 miles of this land on each side of the river, but there is said to be very good land behind. Below Fort Smith there is a deposit of alluvial soil similar to that of the prairie, and this extends as far as the Rocky mountains below Fort Simpson and even along the valley beyond.

Mr. Smith was at Fort Providence on July 15, 1906. Fort Providence is near Slave Lake on the Mackenzie river, in latitude 61.25. This is 317 miles by travelled route from Athabasca Landing, but as Mr. Stewart could calculate it, it is about 550 miles further north than Edmonton. He saw there on July 15, wheat in the milk, potatoes in flower, pea fruit for use, tomatoes, turnips, rhubarb, beets, cabbage, onions, and other garden vegetables.

Small fruits in profusion. The tomatoes were not fully formed and witness did not think they ripened. They grew there under glass. The strawberries ripened at any time. In fact they had ripe strawberries before that, and raspberries, currants, gooseberries and saskatoons. The wheat that Mr.

Stewart saw there was just in the milk. He inquired when it was sown and was told May 20. It seemed incredible, until it was remembered that there is scarcely any darkness during summer there. There was about 20 hours' sun each day, and the heat was greater for several days than anything Mr. Stewart had ever experienced in Ottawa. Along the lower

white spruce. The poplars as we go north seem to increase in size and height, and as we approach Lesser Slave Lake and between this lake and the crossing of the Peace river. Below the junction of the Smoky they grow very clean and straight trees, not over a foot or fourteen inches, but reaching a height of 17 or 18 feet, making excellent building timber as well as fencing and fuel. In some parts there are stretches of good spruce well adapted for lumbering purposes. There has also far been but little destruction from fire in this quarter. The land is mostly level, soil excellent, and if the summer frosts do not prevent it, the country will begin soon to settle up and there will be an ample supply of timber for local use, if not for export to the adjoining prairie regions.

**ALL KINDS OF TIMBER.**  
"I never saw as fine poplar as I saw there. A considerable number of poplars were over a foot, but a foot would be a fair average. I have seen poplar in all parts of the prairie country, but never saw any growing up as straight."

Mr. Stewart explained that spruce for commercial purposes grows to the Arctic sea. He was astonished to find that the limit of tree growth extended as far north as it does. He thought it extended probably ten degrees further north in this district than in Labrador. The different kinds of trees that we have in the Mackenzie basin include white spruce, black spruce, the larch or tamarack, which is as far north as the spruce, the jack pine and the balsam. Mr. Stewart did not see any balsam in the Arctic circle; aspen, white poplar, balsam of Gilead and birch are all found down as far as Fort Macpherson. The natives make their canoes out of birch bark and the junctions of the Peace and Slave rivers, probably 14 inches in diameter. Below Fort Good Hope the timber is smaller. Some of it has been made into flooring, and lumber is made from the timber there. There is a large supply of spruce suitable for pulp.

**NORTH OF THE SASKATCHEWAN.**  
Quite a considerable amount of attention in the report is devoted to the country north of the Saskatchewan watershed, and several witnesses gave important information regarding its possibilities. Mr. Archdeacon McKay, who probably knows the country better than any other white man, and who has his headquarters near Lac la Ronge, 150 miles north of Prince Albert, has grown wheat

at Athabasca and at Fort Chipewyan, Mr. Stewart and his fellow travellers had over 100 in the shade for several days. There was a thermometer on the steamer in the shade. It continued all night. That Arctic heat was something quite unexpected. The hot wave extended down the Arctic sea that year as Mr. Stewart ascertained from Indians who had come from Rempel House, near the Arctic boundary to meet the steamer the Wrigley.

Fort Good Hope, in latitude 66.16 is 970 miles farther north than Edmonton, yet Mr. Stewart saw cabbage, onions and other garden vegetables growing in the gardens there. Beyond this he did not see any until he got to Fort York. When he got beyond Fort Good Hope the frost is so near the surface of the ground that it is not surprising, therefore, the first year. At Fort Macpherson, and in that neighborhood where the portage is in a vegetable garden every year. A very valuable point established by the tables at Fort Good Hope looked as good as any others. The soil there was very rich. As far as the soil is concerned, the country is a fine one; banks twenty feet high, and thirty feet high, and a good deal of light soil. After leaving Lake Athabasca there is rock along the

from the river, is suitable for settlement. **GREAT YIELD OF WHEAT.**  
Mr. Lawrence has farmed at Vermilion for over twenty years, and has never had a failure in wheat in that time. "There is no such," he has raised as high as 65 bushels of wheat to the acre. That was his biggest yield, and was accomplished without the aid of fertilizer. All the witnesses are agreed as to the great quantity of timber to be found in the Peace river country and adjacent territory. The spruce is large and fit for saw logs, some being three feet across the stump. All the rivers have beds of timber. The banks except where the first have been destroyed, and most of it is spruce and black bark poplar, the latter growing quite large, as much as three to four feet through the stump, at times.

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years was six weeks each winter. All the river before you come to the mountains. It has its wants and its muskeg, and its low patches of land, that you will find in almost any country where you have a large growth of scrub timber, but the larger part of this land as the witness had found by traveling over the country away

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years was six weeks each winter. All the river before you come to the mountains. It has its wants and its muskeg, and its low patches of land, that you will find in almost any country where you have a large growth of scrub timber, but the larger part of this land as the witness had found by traveling over the country away

Stewart saw there was just in the milk. He inquired when it was sown and was told May 20. It seemed incredible, until it was remembered that there is scarcely any darkness during summer there. There was about 20 hours' sun each day, and the heat was greater for several days than anything Mr. Stewart had ever experienced in Ottawa. Along the lower

white spruce. The poplars as we go north seem to increase in size and height, and as we approach Lesser Slave Lake and between this lake and the crossing of the Peace river. Below the junction of the Smoky they grow very clean and straight trees, not over a foot or fourteen inches, but reaching a height of 17 or 18 feet, making excellent building timber as well as fencing and fuel. In some parts there are stretches of good spruce well adapted for lumbering purposes. There has also far been but little destruction from fire in this quarter. The land is mostly level, soil excellent, and if the summer frosts do not prevent it, the country will begin soon to settle up and there will be an ample supply of timber for local use, if not for export to the adjoining prairie regions.

**ALL KINDS OF TIMBER.**  
"I never saw as fine poplar as I saw there. A considerable number of poplars were over a foot, but a foot would be a fair average. I have seen poplar in all parts of the prairie country, but never saw any growing up as straight."

Mr. Stewart explained that spruce for commercial purposes grows to the Arctic sea. He was astonished to find that the limit of tree growth extended as far north as it does. He thought