

Along the Peace River

HAVING always supposed that Edmonton, Alberta, was the farthest north of agriculture, it was to me rather singular to find, from 100 to 400 miles north of Edmonton, a country of about 125,000,000 acres which very likely is as livable and farmable as the average of Saskatchewan or lower Alberta. The end seems rather hard to foresee; but incidentally the frontier is certainly passing at a tremendous pace not only west but north. We went north, down the noble valley of the Peace River, for 350 miles by steamboat, and at the end of that journey I saw the best wheat and oats I remember to have seen in my life. At Fort Vermilion we were in latitude 58 degrees 30 minutes, and at the Vermilion Chutes, where the tremendous cascades of the Peace River make the only break in navigation for many hundreds of miles, one is some sixty miles still farther toward the wilderness. Yet in this country in late August the flowers were blooming brightly—old-fashioned flowers, marigolds, hollyhocks, sweet peas, all the sorts the folk at home used to raise; and if there were any difference between soil and climate here and that of Western Canada and the Western States, it could not be seen, at least in the summer time. The total hours of sunlight are very long. In ten years no frost has interfered with wheat in that region. The climate at Fort Vermilion is not so severe as at Montreal, and farming can be done on a scale unknown around Quebec. After all, everything is relative.

I confess that I was ignorant also of the size and dignity of the Peace River itself. In places it is nearly half a mile wide, and carries a great volume of water. The valley where we saw it is deep and narrow, and the bluffs back of Peace River Landing are about 800 feet high. At this level, tablelands run back, broken with poplar timber. These are the farming lands proper, the bottom of the valley being practically all occupied by the stony beaches of

the river itself, whose banks for a great part of its course are steep and picturesque.

The Peace River is very swift, and the 350 miles downstream to Fort Vermilion are easily negotiated. Getting back upstream, however, is a different matter, and our entire trip to Vermilion and back took us a little over a week. As a sporting expedition it certainly was a curious experience. We had been told by our host, Hon. James K. Cornwall, M.P.P. for the Peace River District of Alberta, that we were now in one of the greatest game countries of the north, whether for moose or black bears, and we soon were to have proof of this.

In our first afternoon out from the Landing I heard shouts and hurrying on the deck above, and soon the popping of rifles. "What's up?" I asked the captain of the steamer.

"Oh, just a bear," he said. "Lots of them all along here. Engineer killed one yesterday, just above the Landing. Got his hide down below." He hardly turned to see the result of this particular bear chase. The bear was more than a quarter of a mile away, running up the steep, broken country, and no one hit him.

In the summer-time these bears come down to the river to feed on the saskatoons and red willow berries, which are especially abundant on the large islands in the river. When approaching one of these islands it is the custom of the steamboat men to blow the whistle, and then "pot" the bears as they swim out. This doesn't sound a very sporty proposition, but as actually seen it certainly is curiously interesting.

We drew two or three islands blank, although once in a while a short toot on a whistle would call everybody's attention to a bear running off up the distant bluffs. The pilot, J. B. Showan, a halfbreed, is himself a very keen bear hunter, and usually joined in the fusillade which followed the sighting of a distant bear. We ran sixty or seventy miles that evening, and started only ten bears! Mr. Cornwall said