

RECONNAISSANCE OF THE NORTH WEST PROVINCES AND INDIAN TERRITORIES OF THE DOMINION OF CANADA.

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The Assiniboine River is navigable for good sized boats all the way from Fort Garry to Fort Ellice, and I believe much further. In spring no great difficulty would probably be experienced in navigating the river with a stern wheel steamer of light draught the whole way from Fort Garry to Fort Ellice.

Between Fort Ellice and Fort Carlton, on the North Saskatchewan, lies a great extent of country—more than three hundred miles. Throughout a considerable portion of the road followed alkali lakes are prevalent, and for several days I found no good water.

Upon the whole I do not consider the country between Fort Ellice and the Touchwood Hills, which are about midway between Fort Ellice and Carlton, and the country beyond the Touchwood Hills for two or three day's journey towards the North West, so well adapted for settlement as the Province of Manitoba, and the country between it and Fort Ellice.

From that part of the country, however where the "Bound Hill" (a conspicuous object about two day's journey south of Fort Carlton), is situated, to North Saskatchewan River, and from thence for several hundreds of miles westward to the Rocky Mountains, the value and fertility of the country for agricultural and stock raising purposes has certainly not been exaggerated in the accounts of any travellers.

The North Saskatchewan at Fort Carlton is about four hundred yards in breadth, with a current of between two and three miles; and it nowhere exceeds that breadth upwards to the Rocky Mountains. Although there are numerous sand bars, it is navigable for large sized boats, and I believe for stern-wheel steamers of light draught from within twelve miles of Lake Winnipeg nearly to the base of the Rocky Mountains. When the river is low, steamboats probably would not be able to pass at Coal Rapids below Carlton. At the proper season of the year for navigation, however, it is only necessary to make one or two portages the whole way from Fort Garry, on the Red River, to the Rocky Mountain House.

The land lying between the north and south branches of the Saskatchewan River near Carlton, and for many miles to the east and west, is particularly well adapted for settlement, and the whole country along the north bank of the North Saskatchewan, extending for hundreds of miles to the westward, is very fertile and admirably adapted for settlement. There are two half breed settlements at no great distance from Fort Carlton—one at St. Laure, (French half breed) on the South Saskatchewan, about 30 miles south west from Fort Carlton; the other, an English half breed settlement (Prince Albert) 50 miles east from Fort Carlton, on the North Saskatchewan. The population of St. Laure, last year, was 68 men 58 women and 198 children, possessing 577 horses, that of Prince Albert, 35 men, 57 women, 81 children, and 181 Indians. The population of these two settlements is probably much increased since this census was made, and it is believed that a considerable number of the half breed population in Manitoba will leave that Province next summer and move to these settlements.

The country to the south of the North Saskatchewan, leading towards what are called the Great Plains, I understand is by no means

so fertile or so well suited for agriculture; and there is there, I believe, a scarcity of both fuel and water.

Some doubts may exist as to the possibility of raising as large wheat crops along the valley of the North Saskatchewan, from the occasional occurrence of summer frost can be raised in the Province of Manitoba, but I believe that for stock farming, vegetables and the hardier grains, such as oats, barley, &c., the fertile belt of British North America can hardly be surpassed.

With regard to the temperature of the climate, on very few occasions was there any interruption to its mildness in the past summer during the months of June, July, August, September and October. On the night of the 17th August, when travelling between Fort Ellice and the Touchwood Hills, I experienced a slight frost, but not sufficient, so far as I could judge, to materially injure wheat crops. Again on the night of the 10th September, when about two day's journey from the Rocky Mountain House, I experienced another similar frost—these were the only occasions during the past season that I experienced any frosts or cold, until reaching the foot of the Rocky Mountains on the 21st September near the Porcupine Hills, being then at an altitude of between 3,000 and 4,000 feet above the sea level—and at the time of the Equinox, I was stopped for several days by a snow storm, which not unfrequently occurs in the mountains, but rarely so early on the plains. This snow disappeared from the plains in a few days, almost as rapidly as it came, and with the above exceptions, from the time of quitting the Lake of the Woods, one hundred miles east of Fort Garry, until reaching the Pacific Coast, a period of three months, the climate was delightful—it was frequently quite unnecessary to pitch a tent when camping for the night; for many nights I slept out in the open air, or lay underneath the cart.

It takes twenty days to go with large sized row boats, carrying cargo from Carlton to Fort Edmonton, but a light draught steamer would accomplish the distance in a short time.

Gold is to be found in the sand bars of the Saskatchewan the whole way from Fort Edmonton to Carlton, and almost throughout its entire length.

I was informed that at Carlton a man can earn from two to three dollars daily, during the proper season by washing the sand of the river, and at Fort Edmonton from five to six dollars daily for seven or eight months in the year.

At Fort Ellice on during the past summer there were only five or six men engaged mining, from one of whom I obtained some good specimens of the Saskatchewan gold, which is considered equal in quality to that obtained in the mines of British Columbia.

The few miners who have as yet penetrated into the Saskatchewan country state that gold is to be found in nearly all the streams which flow into the Saskatchewan River, and they are of opinion that quite as rich deposits exist on the eastern as on the western side of the Rocky Mountains.

The Hudson's Bay Company's Forts along the lines of the North Saskatchewan at Carlton, Pitt, Victoria and Edmonton consist of wooden houses surrounded by stockades; these stockades are about twenty feet high with small bastions at the angle to afford flanking defence—although probably sufficient to afford protection from Indians, they are of slight strength.

At Forts Carlton, Pitt, and Victoria, accommodation for companies of soldiers, 50

strong, could be found in these Hudson's Bay Company's Fort, in addition to the present occupants, and at Fort Edmonton for about 125 soldiers.

These Forts are conveniently enough situated for purposes of trade, but in a military point of view are badly placed, being in nearly every instance commanded from the rear by higher ground.

The Rocky Mountain House, however, is built on a good military site, and could easily be put in a defensible condition.

The scenery about the Touchwood Hills, as well as in any other sections of the country lying between Fort Garry and Edmonton is extremely picturesque and park like. At the time of the year I passed through, the wild flowers were in full bloom; the prairie covered with beautiful plants and countless roses, both red and white, presented a gorgeous appearance; not unfrequently when camping for the night the traveller literally makes his bed upon roses.

Fort Carlton and its vicinity is a desirable spot for settlement, but the whole country along the north bank of the Saskatchewan to Edmonton is at least equally so, offering in many places superior advantages from the greater quantity and better quality of the timber.

From Edmonton to the Rocky Mountain House, specially in the neighbourhood of the Battle River and Wolf Plain, the country is still richer and better wooded.

At Fort Victoria, where a small settlement has arisen, and at Fort Edmonton I saw several fields of excellent wheat being harvested.

I have no doubt whatever that when the valley of the North Saskatchewan is opened up and settled, it will be found to be very productive.

That beautiful country lying in the territory of the Blackfoot Indians, extending for about 300 miles along the Eastern base of the Rocky Mountains towards the International Boundary line, with a varying breadth of from 60 to 80 miles, is in respect of fertility, of surpassing richness—in regard to scenery, magnificent.

The effect produced upon the mind of the traveller who journeys day after day through these vast and beautiful solitudes is of an elevating character, the recollection of the scenes visited remains deeply impressed upon the memory.

The average temperature during the Winter months along the base of the Rocky Mountains in this section of the country, is higher by 15° than that of the Western portion of the Province of Ontario; all over the Saskatchewan country, horses and cattle winter out.

All travellers and old residents in the West, testify to the healthiness of the climate—in indeed in the pure air of the prairie, sickness is almost unknown.

Scattered through the whole of the Saskatchewan country, are numerous lakes, generally of no great size; they are favourite haunts of great numbers of wild duck, and geese.

Some of the lakes between Forts Carlton and Edmonton, such as Egg Lake, Jack fish and Saddle Lake are, however, of considerable size, and contain immense quantities of White fish.

Wild pigeons, and prairie hens abound everywhere.

In the Touchwood Hills and along the Eastern base of the Rocky Mountains, several kind of deer and bears are very numerous.