

SECOND JOURNEY TO THE SHORES
OF
THE POLAR SEA.

CHAPTER I.

Join the Boats in the Methye River—Cross the Long Portage—Arrival at Fort Chipewyan
—Departure from thence with the whole party for Mackenzie River—Arrangements at
Fort Norman—Descent to the Sea—Return to the Winter Quarters at Great Bear Lake.

THE boats of the Expedition had advanced from Hudson's Bay into the interior, twelve hundred miles, before they were joined by the officers; whilst the latter, from taking a more circuitous route by New York and Canada, as shewn in the introductory chapter, travelled two thousand and eight hundred miles, to reach the same point.

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This junction took place early in the morning of the 29th of June, 1825, in the Methye River, latitude 56° 10' N., longitude 108° 55' W., which is almost at the head of the waters that flow from the north into Hudson's Bay.

June 29.

In no part of the journey was the presence of the officers more requisite to animate and encourage the crews, because the river itself, beside being obstructed by three impassable rapids, is usually so shallow, through its whole course of forty miles, as scarcely to admit of a flat-bottomed bateau floating with half its

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cargo, much less our boats, which drew, when loaded, from eighteen to twenty inches. This river and its impediments being surmounted, the Methye Portage, ten miles and three quarters long, was at no great distance, which is always held up to the inexperienced voyager as the most laborious part of the journey. But whatever apprehensions the men might have entertained on this subject, seemed to vanish on our landing amongst them; and Dr. Richardson and myself were received by all with cheerful, delighted countenances, and by none more warmly than by our excellent friend and former interpreter Augustus the Esquimaux, and Ooligbuck, whom he had brought from Churchill, as his companion. A breakfast was quickly prepared by Mr. Fraser, a clerk of the Hudson's-Bay Company, under whose charge the boats had been, since their departure from Cumberland House; and I then inspected the boats and stores, which I was rejoiced to find were in good order. We had brought letters from the relatives of several of the party, and another hour was allowed to read them.

At ten A.M. we began to ascend the stream, but very soon found that it was necessary for the whole party to walk in the water, and drag the boats through the mud. Nor could we long advance even by this mode, but were compelled either to carry some of the cargo along the shore, where walking was at all practicable, or else to take half the lading in a boat to a part where the river was deeper, and then return for the remainder. From thus travelling the distance twice over, it was the fifth day before we reached the lake from whence its waters flow.

Thursday,
June 30.

On the evening of the 30th of June, we witnessed one of those violent but momentary gusts of wind which occur not unfrequently in the spring and autumn, and which prove so destructive to the forests in this country. It was preceded by calm and very sultry weather, with loud thunder and vivid lightning. In an instant

the tents were overthrown, and even very large trees were bent by its force into a horizontal position ; indeed, for a few seconds, the scene around us appeared one of almost entire devastation. When the violence of the squall was past, we had great reason to be pleased at its occurrence, for the strong steady breeze and heavy rain that succeeded, carried away the myriads of musquitoes by which we had been tormented the whole day.

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Having crossed the Methye Lake, we arrived at the portage of that name. Here it was necessary to make an equal division of the cargoes, and to devise means for the conveyance of the boats. The packages amounted to one hundred and sixteen, weighing from seventy to ninety pounds each, exclusive of the three boats and the men's personal luggage ; and there were nineteen men of the boats' crews, two Canadians, and two boys, to carry these burdens. At first the packages were equally distributed among this party ; but several of the men, who had been reduced by their previous exertions, became lame : among these were the Esquimaux, and we were, therefore, compelled to make other arrangements, and ultimately to employ the crew of my canoe, though the great fatigue they had suffered in our rapid journey from Penetanguishene, made me desirous of sparing them for the present.

Monday,
July 4.

The boats were the heaviest and most difficult articles to transport. One of the small boats was carried on the shoulders of eight men, of whom Mr. Fraser undertook to be one, as an example to the rest. Another of the same size was dragged by other eight men ; and the largest was conveyed on a truck made for the purpose on the spot, to which service the lame were attached.

Each day's journey, and also the intermediate stages, were determined by the places where water could be procured, and our mode of travelling was as follows :—Rising at three A.M., the

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men carried a part of their burden to the first stage, and continued to go backwards and forwards till the whole was deposited. They then slept for a few hours, and in the cool of the evening the boats were brought up. By these means every thing was ready at the western end of the portage early on Monday, the 11th of July. The slight injuries which the boats had received, principally from exposure to the sun, were soon repaired; they were put into the water to tighten, and the whole party were allowed to rest.

Monday,
11th.

With reference to the Methye Portage I may remark, that, except the steep hill at its western extremity, the road is good and tolerably level, and it appeared to us that much fatigue and suffering might have been spared by using trucks. Accordingly two were made by our carpenters at Fort Chipewyan, in 1827, for the return of the Expedition, and they answered extremely well. I mention this circumstance, in the hope that some such expedient will be adopted by the Traders for the relief of their voyagers, who have twice in every year to pass over this ridge of hills.

The annexed accurate drawing, taken by Lieutenant Back, from the highest part of this Portage, gives a beautiful delineation of one of the most picturesque scenes in the northern parts of America.

Tuesday,
12th.

Being now in a fair way to reach the Athabasca Lake, Dr. Richardson and I embarked, on the 12th, in the canoe, to proceed to Fort Chipewyan, for the purpose of preparing the gentleman in charge for the reception of the party.

By noon we got over the four Portages on Clear-Water river, and descended, with some trouble, the series of rapids that follow them. Once below these, the passage to the lake is generally considered as free from fatigue; but we did not find it so, for, owing to the shallowness of the water, the men had to get out

and drag the canoe in several places. The difference between the depth of water now and in other years at the same period, was attributed to the snow having fallen in the preceding autumn before the frost was sufficiently intense to harden the ground, and, consequently, much of the moisture had penetrated the earth, which, under other circumstances, would have remained in a frozen state, for the supply of the river at the spring thaw.

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In the course of the night we were under some alarm for one of our men, who having incautiously lain down to sleep under a wet sail, while the rain was pouring heavily, was seized with a cramp in the stomach, and violent pain in the head. Having been brought into the tent and covered with blankets, he became better before morning, but not sufficiently strong to allow of our setting off at the usual hour. We entered the Elk, or Athabasca River, at three P.M., on the 13th, and were carried swiftly down by its current to the Hudson-Bay Company's post named Berens House, where we stayed the night. Here we received a supply of dried meat.

Wednesday,
13th.

We safely arrived in the Athabasca Lake on the 15th, by the channel of the "Riviere des Eaux remuées;" but in the subsequent traverse between Bustard Island and Fort Chipewyan the canoe was in danger of foundering in a sudden gale. Two large waves broke with full force into it, and obliged us to bear away and steer for the nearest shore; but the men having soon rested, and being now sheltered by islands, we pushed on to Fort Chipewyan. Our arrival there caused great surprise to its inmates, when they learned that we had come from England to that advanced post so early in the season, being only two days later than the time at which Dr. Richardson and Mr. Hood had arrived in 1819, though they had passed the winter at Cumberland House.

Friday,
15th.

The stores at Fort Chipewyan being well furnished with warm

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clothing, and other articles, which we required for the use of the men and Indians at winter-quarters, I availed myself of the permission which the chief factor of this department, Mr. James Keith, had given me to complete our stock of cloth, blankets, nets, and twine, to a quantity sufficient for two years' consumption. A supply of twine was indispensable, because, by a letter from Mr. Dease, I had learned that the meshes of the nets made in England, of the size generally required for fishing throughout this country, were too large for the smaller fish that frequent that part of Bear Lake where our house was to be constructed. Mr. Campbell, the clerk in charge, cheerfully gave me the benefit of his experience in making out lists of such things as we were likely to want, and in assorting and packing them.

Monday,
18th.

The boats rejoined on the 18th, and the crews were allowed the following day to recruit themselves. A party of Indians came very opportunely with fresh meat, which is always an agreeable change to the voyager, who has generally to live on dried provision. The Indians, as well as the women and children of the fort, spent the greater part of the day by the side of our boats, admiring their whole equipment, but more especially the gay figures painted on them. Many of these were different from any animals or representations they had seen, and, judging from the bursts of laughter, some curious remarks were made on them.

Wednesday,
20th.

It being necessary that I should await the arrival of Lieutenant Back's canoes, Dr. Richardson undertook to proceed with the boats towards Slave Lake. Their lading was now increased by the bales already mentioned, as well as by several bags of pemmican, which Mr. Keith had stored up for our use. The crews, however, were reduced by the discharge of three Englishmen, at their own desire, who thought themselves unequal to the fatigue of the service.

I had the happiness, on the 23rd, of welcoming my friends, Lieutenant Back and Mr. Kendall, on their arrival with three canoes. Their journey from Fort William had been expeditious, notwithstanding the detention of eighteen days, by bad weather, on the road. A serious misfortune had happened at the very outset of the journey, through the unskilfulness of one of the bowmen, in allowing his canoe to turn round and get before the current, while attempting to ascend the Barrier Rapid, by which it was driven against a stone with such force, as to be upset and broken. The stores were fortunately saved, though completely drenched; but many of the delicate atmospheric instruments were broken. Mr. Kendall was despatched to Fort William for another canoe while the things were drying.

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Saturday,
23rd.

On a subsequent occasion, in the Winnipeg River, the same man placed his canoe in such a situation, as to endanger its being hurried down a steep fall, and had it not been for the coolness of a man, named Lavallé, who jumped into the water and held the canoe, while the rest of its crew arranged themselves so as to drag it into a place of safety, every life must have been sacrificed. The success, indeed the safety, of this kind of river navigation, among currents and rapids, depend on the skill of the bowman; and after these proofs of his incapacity, Lieutenant Back very properly engaged a substitute at the first fort to which he came.

At another time, in the Sturgeon-weir River, the canoe in which Mr. Kendall was embarked, having been accidentally driven before the current, she was only saved from destruction by his own powerful exertion and activity.

These short details will convey an idea of the anxiety and trouble these officers experienced in their journey to Chipewyan.

The party and the stores having now passed the more difficult

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part of the road, I discharged as many of the Canadians as could be spared, and furnished them with a canoe to take them home. Some went to Montreal; and they were the first persons who had ever gone from that place to Chipewyan, and returned in the same season.

Monday,
25th.

The greater part of the 25th was employed in obtaining astronomical observations, the results of which, we were delighted to find, placed Fort Chipewyan within a few seconds of longitude of the position in which it had been laid down on the former Expedition. Our present azimuth compasses showed an increase in variation, since 1820, of $2^{\circ} 16' E$. The dip was observed $81^{\circ} 26' 47''$.

Fort Chipewyan was this summer visited, for the first time, by a large flight of swallows, resembling the house-martins of England. They came in a body on the 25th of June, and immediately began to construct their earthy nests under the ledge of the south-front of the house. Some barn or forked-tail swallows also arrived on the 15th of June, and took possession of the store-houses and garrets, as they had in former years done. Some of the young of the last-mentioned birds were sporting on the tops of the houses as early as the 17th of July.

At sunset we embarked in four canoes, one having been procured here. The descent to Slave Lake occupied four days, and was unattended with any circumstance deserving mention, except that two of the canoes were broken in consequence of the guide mistaking the proper channel in a rapid; fortunately, these bark vessels are soon repaired, and we had only to regret the delay the accident occasioned.

We halted at the Salt River to take in salt, as we found, by a note left here, Dr. Richardson had done. The geese were moulting at this time, and unable to fly; they afforded us much sport in their chace, and an excellent supper every night.

A body of Indians were waiting near the entrance of the lake to welcome our arrival; they were so numerous, that we were forced to omit our general custom of giving a small present to each native, and thus incurred the charge of stinginess, which the loud vociferations they raised on our setting sail, were probably meant to convey.

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At six, on the evening of the 29th, we reached Fort Resolution, the only establishment now at Slave Lake, and we felt happy in being once more under the roof of our hospitable friend, Mr. Robert M'Vicar, to whom I am much indebted for the excellent order in which he had brought up our supplies from Canada in the preceding year. Dr. Richardson, after a halt of two days, had gone forward with the boats.

Friday,
29th.

All the portages on the road to Bear Lake being now passed, the Canadians made a request, that we would allow them to commemorate the event by a dance. It met with a ready compliance; and though they had been paddling for thirty-six out of the thirty-nine preceding hours, they kept up their favourite amusement until daylight, to the music of bagpipes, relieved occasionally by the Jews' harp.

We rejoiced to find at this post our worthy old Copper-Indian friends, Keskarrah and Humpy, the brother of Akaitcho, who had been waiting two months for the express purpose of seeing us. These excellent men showed that their gratification equalled ours, by repeatedly seizing our hands and pressing them against their hearts, and exclaiming, "How much we regret that we cannot tell what we feel for you here!" Akaitcho had left the fort about two months on a hunting excursion, hoping to return, with plenty of provision for our use, by the middle of August, which was as early as he thought we should arrive. Keskarrah confirmed the melancholy report we had

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heard in the more southern districts, that most of the hunters who had been in our service at Fort Enterprise, had been treacherously murdered, with many others of the tribe, by the Dog-ribs, with which nation we also learned the Copper-Indians had been at war, since the year of our departure from them, till the last spring. The peace had been effected through the mediation of Messrs. Dease and M'Vicar, and we were gratified to find that Akaitcho and his tribe had been principally induced to make this reconciliation, by a desire that no impediment might be placed in the way of our present expedition. "We have too much esteem," said Akaitcho, "for our father, and for the service in which he is about to be again engaged, to impede its success by our wars, and, therefore, they shall cease;" and on being asked by Mr. Dease whether he and some of his young men would go to hunt for the party at our winter quarters, he replied, "Our hearts will be with them, but we will not go to those parts where the bones of our murdered brethren lie, for fear our bad passions should be aroused at the sight of their graves, and that we should be tempted to renew the war by the recollection of the manner of their death. Let the Dog-ribs who live in the neighbourhood of Bear Lake furnish them with meat, though they are our enemies." Such sentiments would do honour to any state of civilization, and show that the most refined feelings may animate the most untutored people. Happily we were now so circumstanced as to be able to reward the friendship of these good men by allotting from our stores a liberal present to the principal persons. On the delivery of the articles to Keskarrah and Humpy, I desired them to communicate to Akaitcho, and the whole tribe, the necessity of their strictly adhering to the terms of peace, and assured them that I should not fail to urge the same obligations on the Dog-ribs. A silver royal medal, such as is given to the Indian chiefs in Upper Canada, was likewise