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978-1-108-07937-2 - New Light on the Early History of the Greater Northwest: The Manuscript Journals of Alexander Henry and of David Thompson, 1799–1814: Volumes 1

Edited by Elliott Coues

Excerpt

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HENRY'S JOURNAL.

Part 1.

THE RED RIVER.

CHAPTER I.

MY FIRST VENTURE, 1799–1800.

AUTUMN, 1799. While building at Rivière Terre Blanche [White Mud river¹], near the foot of Fort Dauphin [Riding] mountain, my Russia sheeting tent was pitched in a low place on the lower branch of the little river, sheltered from the wind, among some tall elms and oaks. I was accustomed to sit up late, with a candle burning in my tent, for some time after the fires had been put out. Some of my people, who had occasion to sleep away from home, assured me that from their camp, which was about 12 miles E. of us, they could distinctly perceive this light, which they

¹ Henry's Journal opens thus abruptly, without a word of his journey to the place. But we learn from other sources that he came from Montreal, by the usual route—the portion of which from Lake Superior westward will be particularly noted beyond. His present temporary position is not determinable with greater precision than the text affords; it is in the Macdonald district of the Province of Manitoba, some 35–40 m. W. N. W. of Portage la Prairie. The stream named traverses the district eastward to fall into the S. W. angle of Lake Manitoba, between places called Totogon and Lakeland; the two principal places upon it are Neepawa and Gladstone; some of its lower branches are Pine, Squirrel, and Rat crs.

Other geographical notes on points raised by incidental mention in this fragmentary chapter are best deferred to some more appropriate connection; all such will be found beyond.

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observed to be extinguished about midnight, when I used to go to bed. Several Indians assured me of the same circumstances. I could only account for this by supposing the reflection of the candle-light among the tops of the trees to have caused this unusual illumination to be conveyed to such a distance, as it was impossible, from the low situation of my station, that my fire could have been seen through the woods among which I was tented.

In the fall of 1799 I performed a short journey alone on horseback from my winter-quarters to Portage la Prairie, one of our establishments on the Assiniboine. The distance was not more than 12 or 15 leagues. I left my house early in the morning, on an excellent horse. My route lay directly across an open plain for 15 or 20 miles. About the middle of the traverse I was suddenly seized with a violent colic; the pain was so great that I could not keep my saddle. I therefore dismounted, hopped my horse, and threw myself on the grass, where I lay in agony for two hours, expecting every moment would be the last; until, quite exhausted, I fell asleep. But I was soon awakened by the howling of a number of wolves that surrounded me. The pain had entirely left me, but I was so weak as to be scarcely able to mount my horse. I proceeded at a slow walk, as my entrails could not bear the rough motion of a trot. In this manner I escaped from the wolves, which had probably viewed me as their prey.

In 1799, at my winter-quarters on the Terre Blanche, animals were so scarce as to oblige me to hire my hunters upon extravagant terms: For every moose [*Alces machlis*], six skins;² for every red deer,³ five skins; to be paid for in

² That is, the value of six beaver skins, taken out in trade: see Pike, ed. 1895, p. 283, for the *plus* as a standard of value in the fur-trade.

³ Henry so designates the American elk or wapiti, *la biche* of the French, *Cervus canadensis* of naturalists, which in this country represents the red deer of Europe, *C. elaphus*, and would naturally be taken by him for the same animal. The relationship of the two is very close indeed, and "red deer" is less of a misnomer than "elk," which is the Scandinavian name of *Alces machlis*, an animal closely related to our moose, if not the same. Henry's phrase "red

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A LITTLE TEMPERANCE TRACT.

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whatever article of dry goods they might think proper to take, at the low price of four skins for a fathom of common blue strouds or a blanket of $2\frac{1}{2}$ points, and other goods in proportion; silver-work at their choice in any quantity and very cheap. Besides this dear bargain I gave my two men, their wives, and all their children, each a full clothing of the best goods in my store; with a 9-gallon keg of Saulteur liquor⁴ to each man. I also furnished them with guns, knives, ammunition, tobacco, other articles necessary for a hunter, and an allowance of two gallons of liquor for every 10 animals they might kill. Even upon these hard terms I was obliged to consider it a great favor they did me. Animals were so scarce that we suffered much from hunger. On Dec. 19th, 20th, and 21st we ate nothing till the evening of the last day, when I received a

deer" is contrasted with his use of "fallow deer," for the common deer of North America, *Cariacus virginianus*; but the true fallow deer is *Dama platyceros*, a European species.

⁴Alcohol or "high wine," diluted to suit an Ojibway Indian's stomach, as regarded from a commercial rather than digestive standpoint. Indians already debauched would not stand so much water as fresh tribes could be induced to exchange beaver skins for, and hence a difference in recognized degrees of dilution in different cases. On the Red and Assiniboine rivers, about 1800, it was no uncommon thing for an Indian to give five or six prime beavers for a quart of "Saulteur liquor"—a gill or two of alcohol, the rest water. For example, Tanner's Narr., ed. James, 1830, p. 70, tells how liberally Netnokwa, an influential old lady among the Ojibways, conducted her drinking-bouts: "In the course of a single day, she sold 120 beaver-skins, with a large quantity of buffalo robes, dressed and smoked skins, and other articles, for rum. It was her habit, whenever she drank, to make drunk all the Indians about her, at least as far as her means would extend. Of all our large load of peltries, the product of so many days of toil, of so many long and difficult journeys, one blanket and three kegs of rum only remained, besides the poor and almost worn out cloathing on our bodies." Keating's Long's Exped. II. 1824, p. 67, states that one Desmarais (probably Henry's man, of whom we shall hear more) bought of an Indian about 120 beaver skins for two 3-point blankets, eight quarts of rum, and a pocket looking-glass; these goods, rated at \$30, probably did not cost \$15; and the skins were sold in Montreal for upward of \$400.

Henry or his copyist spells *Saulteur* in five or six ways, which I shall reduce to the form above given: see Pike, ed. 1895, p. 30, where the origin of the name is noted.

4 ADVANCE OF SPRING IN MANITOBA.

moose’s head, which was boiled and divided among 17 persons. This winter, 1799–1800, we considered one of the most extraordinary known for many years. Early in November we had an extremely heavy fall of snow ; but the rest of the season was open and mild.

Feb. 19th, 1800. I left my house for Rivière Qu’Appelle [or Calling river]. The snow was then melted in many places on the plains. During my journey, which occupied 16 days, we saw only two bulls [*Bison americanus*] between Montagne à la Bois [Bosse] and Rivière Qu’Appelle. “Hunger!” was the general cry at our establishments along the Assiniboine.

Early in March the snow was entirely gone ; we were obliged to abandon our dog-sleigh at Rivière la Souris [Mouse river], and put our goods upon horses. *7th.* I saw a few vultures [turkey-buzzards, *Cathartes aura*] and cormorants [*Phalacrocorax dilophus*] at Rivière du Milieu. *13th.* A flock of swans [*Olor americanus* or *O. buccinator*] at my winter-quarters. *16th.* Ducks and other spring birds. *20th.* We made sugar of the bastard maple [ash-leaved maple, *Negundo aceroides*]. *24th.* The meadows on fire. *27th.* Mosquitoes began to plague us.

April 11th. The Terre Blanche having been clear of ice for some time, I embarked in my canoe for Portage la Prairie. Weather excessively hot. Wild pigeons [*Ectopistes migratorius*] passing N. in great abundance. In a few days we experienced a dreadful snowstorm, which continued with great violence for three days, when there were three feet of snow upon the ground ; but it did not remain long.

This campaign my house expenses for 17 persons were, . . .	1500	skins
I gave out in debts in the fall, to the Saulteur Indians, 982 . . .	“	
Received in the course of the season,	618	“
Loss,	364	“
<hr/>		
Total cost,	1864	skins

Notwithstanding this heavy expense and loss, amounting to 1864 skins, mostly prime goods, and although I was

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PROFIT OF THE FIRST CAMPAIGN.

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strongly opposed by a neighbor, of the T Association from Montreal, I had a clear profit of upward of £700, Halifax currency, on the outfit of loading 1½ canoes, containing 40 pieces of goods.

This campaign was my first *coup d'essai* in the Northwest.

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CHAPTER II.

THE RED RIVER BRIGADE OF 1800.

THE route from Grand Portage to Lake Winnipeg is too well known to require description. I shall, therefore, only keep memoranda of the successive obstructions to our daily progress.¹

Saturday, July 19th, 1800, 3 p. m. Our baggage and other necessities having been carried over the portage, which is about nine miles, our men fully equipped for the year, and their accounts settled, I set off for Fort Charlotte, where I arrived at 5 p. m. The portage was very bad in some places, being knee-deep in mud and clay, and so slippery as to make walking tedious.²

¹ On the regular Rainy River route, from Lake Superior to Lake Winnipeg. Starting from the place still known as Grand Portage, it went overland 9 m. to Fort Charlotte, on Pigeon r., up this river, down Rainy r. to Lake of the Woods, through this lake to Winnipeg r., and down the latter to Lake Winnipeg. From Pigeon r. to Lake of the Woods the route is identical with the present international boundary between the United States and Canada, separating the State of Minnesota from the Province of Ontario. The text is a bare itinerary, with little incident or description, but it is interesting in giving the names of places in the vernacular of the voyageurs at the beginning of this century. We shall be able to follow Henry closely, and I will take occasion to collate the accounts of various other early travelers—notably of David Thompson, of whose unpublished manuscripts I possess copious notes. He generally uses the English equivalents of Henry's French names, enabling us to compare the two sets of terms with each other and with modern designations. The best early account of the route is in Sir A. McKenzie's classic, orig. ed. 4to, London, 1801, pp. xlviii–lxii.

² Grand Portage, of the French and English, was primarily the designation of the long carrying-place over which baggage was taken on men's shoulders from a point on Lake Superior to a point on Pigeon r., 9 m. distant; but it speedily became the name of the place on the lake whence the start was made, and also the title of various establishments there. The situation is about 47° 58' N., 89° 39' W., by U. S. charts, on Grand Portage bay (too shallow for

THE START FROM GRAND PORTAGE. 7

Sunday, July 20th. The canoes having been given out to the men, to gum and prepare, I found everything ready for our departure ; and early this morning gave out to all their respective loading, which consisted of 28 packages per canoe, assorted for the Saulteur trade on Red river, namely :

Merchandise, 90 pounds each,	5 bales
Canal tobacco,	1 bale
Kettles,	1 bale
Guns,	1 case
Iron works,	1 case
New twist tobacco,	2 rolls
Leaden balls,	2 bags
Leaden shot,	1 bag
Flour,	1 bag
Sugar,	1 keg
Gunpowder,	2 kegs
High wine, 9 gallons each,	10 kegs
<hr/>	
Total,	28 pieces

vessels to land, and separated by Hat point from Wauswaugoning bay), in which is the small Grand Portage isl. The most conspicuous object in the vicinity is the hill now called Mt. Josephine, 703 ft. high (Thompson made it 741 ft. 11 ins.). The N. W. establishment there, before and after 1800, was a stockaded post, 24 X 30 rods, on the edge of the bay and under the hill ; it was long a famous rendezvous of the Northmen, who were assembled sometimes to the number of more than a thousand. It was abandoned in 1803, headquarters being then removed to Kaministiquia (Fort William). In 1785 the old fort was in charge of Mr. Croutier, with Mr. Givins of Montreal as clerk. In the spring of that year Gregory, McLeod & Co. started a rival post in charge of Pierre Lanniau or L'Anneau, with Roderick McKenzie as clerk, and 18 voyageurs. The X. Y. Co. post was built in 1797, about 200 rods from that of the N. W. Co., across a small stream which makes into the bay. The elder Henry says that, when he arrived at Grand Portage, June 28th, 1775, he “ found the traders in a state of extreme hostility, each pursuing his interests in such a manner as might most injure his neighbour,” p. 239. Fort Charlotte was the N. W. Co. post at the other end of the portage, on Pigeon r. The labor of land-carriage was great ; McKenzie says, p. xliv., that each voyageur was required to carry eight of the ordinary packages or pieces ; but if more were to be transported, the man was allowed a Spanish dollar for each one. “ I have known some of them,” he adds, to “ set off with two packages of 90 pounds each, and return with two others of the same weight, in the course of six hours, being a distance of 18 miles.”

Pigeon r., also called Dove r., derives these names from the F. phrase Rivière

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8 PIGEON RIVER—PARTRIDGE PORTAGE, ETC.

Equipage for the voyage: Provisions for four men to Red river, 4 bags corn, $1\frac{1}{2}$ bushels in each; $\frac{1}{2}$ keg grease; 4 packages, of about 90 pounds each, private property belonging to the men, consisting of clothing, tobacco, etc., for themselves and families for the year; so that when all hands were embarked, the canoes sunk to the gunnel.

At ten o'clock the brigade were all off, and at three o'clock I followed. The water was very low. In a short time we came to Partridge portage,³ of about 600 paces over. The road was very slippery and muddy. Having got our baggage over, we embarked and proceeded to the Prairie, where our people were camped. All were merry over their favorite regale, which is always given on their departure, and generally enjoyed at this spot, where we have a delightful meadow to pitch our tents, and plenty of elbow-room for the men's antics.

July 21st. The canoes were early on the water with half a load, which was conveyed to Grosse Roche.⁴ There we found the water so low that we were obliged to carry all our baggage and canoes over for about 1,000 paces, through a path made bad by a number of pines which had lately been blown down. We then, by means of half-loads, pro-

aux Tourtres, or the River of Turtles, *sc.*, turtle-doves, probably referring to the passenger-pigeon, *Ectopistes migratorius*. The phrase also appears as des Tourtres, Au Tourt, etc. A name current earlier was Rivière aux Groseilles, as if Currant or Gooseberry r.; but this is also found as Groseilliers r., in all the variation of spelling of that personal name, which was borne by the celebrated companion of Radisson in the 17th century. The stream is a comparatively small one, which flows eastward into Lake Superior at 48° N., after a turbulent course of rapids and falls. It arises in the Height of Land which separates the waters of the Great Lakes from those of Hudson's bay, being there connected with certain sources of Rainy r. Pigeon r. is joined toward its mouth by Arrow r., on the N., from Arrow l.

³ Portage du Perdrix of the F., a place where Pigeon r. falls over a precipice whose often alleged height of 100 ft. is exaggerated. This first interruption of navigation is about $1\frac{1}{2}$ m. above Fort Charlotte; the portage is good, on the left, 380 yards, S. 60° W. It is about $2\frac{1}{2}$ m. hence to the usual first camping-ground, at la Prairie or the Meadow.

⁴ Otherwise Big Rock or Great Stone portage, $1\frac{1}{2}$ m. from the last, on the right, 485 yards, N. 40° W.

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CARIBOU TO THE CHERRY PORTAGES.

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ceeded to Caribou ⁵ portage, over which our baggage was carried about 700 paces, while the canoes were towed up among the rocks. We then proceeded to Outarde portage ⁶ with half a load, and put up for the night, having sent the canoes back for the rest of their lading.

July 22d. It was late before the canoes arrived. Our baggage was soon over, although this portage is about 3,000 paces. We then embarked on Outarde lake, and came to Orignal portage of 1,000 paces, after which we embarked on Orignal ⁷ lake. I left my loaded canoes at this place and proceeded to Grand Portage des Cerises, ⁸ about 1,000 paces. Thence to Petit Vaseux portage, about 400 paces, and thence to the last Vaseux [or Little Cherry] por-

⁵ Or Deer portage, as it was also called, the caribou being the woodland reindeer, *Rangifer caribou*. This carrying-place is $\frac{1}{3}$ m. from the last, on the left, 540 yards. The name has sometimes been rendered Carrebœuf.

⁶ Portage aux Outardes of the F., literally Bustard portage, but equivalent to Goose portage, as *outarde* is the name by which the voyageurs knew the Canada goose, *Bernicla canadensis*. It is now sometimes called Fowl portage. The place is 3 m. from the last, on the right, 1,748 yards. It conducts into Lac aux Outardes, or Goose l., as Henry presently says. His statement of its length is exaggerated, unless his paces were short; another authority says 2,400 paces. Thompson speaks in this connection of a certain Goose rock, "about 20 high." Goose l. used to be called 6 m. long; it is not far from 4 m., including a constriction which divides it into two lakes, to be found on some modern maps as North Fowl and South Fowl lakes; the width is a mile or two; the direction, nearly N.

⁷ Or Moose portage and lake, as it was then and is still also called: for the name *orignal*, see Pike, ed. 1895, p. 87. McKenzie gives this as Elk portage. The length of the carrying-place is about as said; the lake is some 4 m. long, by $1\frac{1}{2}$ wide, extending in an E. and W. direction. A portage, off the route we take, conducts N. to Arrow r. from Moose l.

⁸ Long Cherry or Great Cherry portage, the first and most difficult of the three which intervene between Moose l. and Mountain l., about $2\frac{1}{4}$ m. from Moose portage; it is 762 yards long, N. 60° W., on the right of the stream. This conducts into a little lake, 400 yards long, and then comes Petit Vaseux, or Little Muddy portage, also called Second Cherry portage, 250 to 300 yards long, according to state of the water, on the right. Another reach of about $\frac{1}{2}$ m. brings us to what Henry calls the last Vaseux portage, also known as Third Cherry, Little Cherry, and Lesser Cherry portage, 250 yards long, about S. 60° W. The Mountain l. thus reached is some 6 m. or more long, by about 2 m. in greatest width, lying nearly E. and W.

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tage, about 500 paces, over which we embarked on Mountain lake. Through this we proceeded with a fine breeze aft, and in a few hours reached Petit Portage Neuf,⁹ over which we carried about 600 paces, when we came to a small [Watab] lake. Having passed this, we came to the Petit Détroit, a narrow place where a canoe can scarcely pass. Here, in forcing our passage, we broke a hole in the bottom of one canoe, which obliged us to unload and repair; after which we proceeded to Grand Portage Neuf, where we put up for the night, my people being much fatigued.

July 23d. The men were early at work on the portage, which is about 3,000 paces long; at ten o'clock all was over. Here I found many canoes, some finishing the portage, others embarking; all was bustle and confusion. We pitched our tent for the night, to await the brigade, which arrived this evening. They all made merry upon some small kegs of wine generally given them on their engagement at Grand Portage, one or two gallons to each man.

July 24th. Loaded and embarked at daybreak, crossed Rosa¹⁰ lake to Petite Pêche, where there were some canoes

⁹ Little New portage, which succeeds Mountain l., was so named from the circumstance that what was an old route in those days followed a different track from the one we are on. It is now called Watab portage. It is 480 yds. long, in direction N. 70° W., and is stony and uneven, with some high banks. The lake into which it conducts is Watab l., a mile or two long, first westerly, and then turning southward. This is called Rove l. on the G. L. O. map of Minnesota of 1894, and also on another map before me. Petit Détroit, or Little strait, is a place where the passage narrows to a few feet, and is so shoal that a canoe had sometimes to be discharged, or even carried. Thence it is only about a mile to Great New portage, or New Grand portage, which is some 1,400 yards long, and thus occupies most of the interval between Watab l. and the next one, Rose l. For this reason it has been sometimes called Rose portage.

¹⁰ "Rosa" l. may be intended for Roseau (or Reed) l., but is now commonly known as Rose l. This supposition is strengthened by the fact that an alternative name is Mud l., and a muddy lake is one in which reeds are likely to grow. The G. L. O. map of 1894 letters "Rose or Mud." Rose l. affords the closest connection with Arrow l., on the N. The course in Rose l. is 2 m. W. to what Henry calls Petite Pêche—a term whose significance in this connection escapes me. Thence it is but a short reach of 3 m. to Martin or Marten