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 Excerpt
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Part II.

THE SASKATCHEWAN.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SASKATCHEWAN BRIGADE.

MONDAY, Aug. 8th, 1808. Dispatched the Lac la Pluie Indians, and at eight o'clock embarked in my small boat, bidding adieu to Panbian river. I took three men with me. My lading consisted merely of my baggage and some dried provisions. I found some Indians opposite Grand Marais; stopped to give them a pipe of tobacco and bid them farewell.

At Rivière aux Marais I stopped at another camp for the same purpose, and then pushed on. Those Indians, with whom I had associated for so many years, appeared really affected at my departure. We camped near Plumb river. *9th.* Before day we were on the water. At Rivière aux Grâties we put ashore for a short time at another camp, and then proceeded. At the Long Reach we found more Indians, to whom I gave some tobacco; they would have loaded us with moose and red deer meat. Camped at Rat river. *10th.* At sunset we arrived at the Forks, where I found a camp of Indians, and Delorme, a freeman [note ¹⁹, p. 193]. *11th.* Hoisted sail, and about two miles below Seine river met a canoe coming up for me with the two men I had sent to Bas de la Rivière. We put ashore, transferred my baggage to the canoe, and started my people in the boat for Panbian river, with a supply of high wine and

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448 AGRICULTURAL COURTES OREILLES.

tobacco. Camped at Dead river, where the Courtes Oreilles and some others were gardening.¹ From them I purchased a small quantity of provisions, which, with what I had already, would enable us to proceed without going to Bas de la Rivère.

The small band of Courtes Oreilles settled here came from Michilimakinac about 16 years ago, when the prospects of great beaver hunts allured them from their native country. At first they dispersed in different quarters of the North West. A band went as far as Lesser Slave Lake and Athabasca river, by the Saskatchewan route; but beaver getting scarce, they abandoned those parts and are now nearly all here, where they pass the summer attending to their corn and potatoes, and in the autumn separate to hunt. These people have no inclination to intermarry with the Saulteurs; they keep to themselves, and dispose of their daughters only among their own tribe. Their manner of living is entirely that of their own nation; they erect bark huts for the summer, others of birch rind for the winter, and also use rush mats [pukkwi, in Tanner]. Their utensils and furniture are neatly constructed, and generally kept clean. They are thus much more civilized and more industrious than the Saulteurs. The first corn and potatoes they planted here was a small quantity which I gave them in the spring of 1805, since which period they have extended their fields, and hope in a few years to make corn a regular article of traffic with us.

A Saulteur I found tented with the Courtes Oreilles came to me very ceremoniously, and having lighted and

¹ "We then went down to Dead River, planted corn, and spent the summer there. Shagwawkoosink, an Ottawwaw, a friend of mine, and an old man, first introduced the cultivation of corn among the Ojibbeways of the Red River country," Tanner, p. 180.

"Mr. Henry had traded ten years at Pembinah; he was succeeded by a Mr. M'Kenzie, who remained but a short time, and after him came Mr. Wells, called by the Indians Gahsemoan, (a sail,) from the roundness and fulness of his person. He built a strong fort on Red River, near the mouth of the Assiniboine," Tanner, p. 181.

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FABULOUS BEAVERS—VERSICOLOROUS BEARS. 449

smoked his pipe, informed me that he had been hunting up a small river a few days ago, and that one evening, while in his canoe, he was surprised by the appearance of a very large animal in the water. At first he took it for a moose, and was about to fire at it ; but on its nearer approach perceived it to be one of the *Kitche Amicks* or large beavers, which he dared not shoot, and allowed to pass near his canoe without molesting. I had already heard many stories among the *Saulteurs* concerning this immense beaver, but put no faith in them ; fear, I presume, magnifies an ordinary beaver into such a monster, or a moose or bear in the dark may be mistaken for one of them, as they are seen only at night, and I am told are very scarce.

Late this evening, while the Indians were still drinking, there arrived a party of young men who had been hunting en canot up Dead river ; they brought some fresh meat, including that of a large black bear and her two cubs, one of which was brown, and the other perfectly black. This is frequently the case. I once saw a black bear, killed early in the spring, whose two cubs were taken alive ; one of them was cinnamon, and the other black. Both were kept at the fort for a long time, and became perfectly tame.

This evening, also, I was present at a dispute between two young men, who were drinking at our fire, and about to draw their knives on each other when I interfered. Their quarrel had started during the hunt, when they were tracing a wounded moose. This affair brought to my mind a circumstance which occurred to myself one day in the autumn of 1799, near the foot of Fort Dauphin mountain, on *Rivière Terre Blanche*, when I went out with my *Saulteur* hunter. We had not gone far from the house before we fell upon the fresh tracks of some red deer, and soon after discovered the herd in a thicket of willows and poplars ; we both fired, and the deer disappeared in different directions. We pursued them, but to no purpose, as the country was unfavorable. We then returned to the spot where we had fired, as the Indian suspected that we had

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wounded some of them. We searched to see if we could find any blood; on my part, I could find tracks, but no blood. The Indian soon called out, and I went to him, but could see no blood, nor any sign that an animal had been wounded. However, he pointed out the track of a large buck among the many others, and told me that from the manner in which this buck had started off, he was certain the animal had been wounded. As the ground was beaten in every direction by animals, it was only after a tedious search that he found where the buck had struck off. But no blood was seen until, passing through a thicket of willows, he observed a drop upon a leaf, and next a little more. He then began to examine more strictly, to find out in what part of the body the animal had been wounded; and judging by the height and other signs, he told me the wound must have been somewhere between the shoulder and neck. We advanced about a mile, but saw nothing of the deer, and no more blood. I was for giving up the chase; but he assured me the wound was mortal, and that if the animal should lie down he could not rise again. We proceeded two miles further, when, coming out upon a small open space, he told me the animal was at no great distance, and very probably in this meadow. We accordingly advanced a few yards, and there we found the deer lying at the last gasp. The wound was exactly as I had been told. The sagacity of the Saulteurs in tracing strong wood animals is astonishing. I have frequently witnessed occurrences of this nature; the bend of a leaf or blade of grass is enough to show the hunter the direction the game has taken. Their ability is of equally great service to war-parties, when they discover the footsteps of their enemies. But to return to my voyage.

Aug. 12th. Having obtained over night all information I could concerning the route on the S. and W. sides of Lake Winipic, we loaded early and went to the entrance of Red river. The wind continued strong from the S. W., causing a heavy swell. We put ashore for an hour, when, the

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LAKE WINNIPEG ENTERED FROM RED RIVER. 451

wind having abated, we embarked and steered N. W. across the bay. None of us had ever passed by this route, as the common track through Lake Winipic runs along the E. side [*i. e.*, from mouth of Winnipeg river northward] as far as Tête du Chien [Dog's Head, at The Narrows], where the lake contracts to a strait hardly a league wide, which canoes cross. At ten o'clock the wind rose from the N., and this annoyed us much in rounding the Presqu'Isle.³ The wind then coming about from the S. E., we hoisted sail and kept on till two o'clock, when there was every appearance of a squall from the S. W. We had some difficulty in landing, as the rain fell in torrents and the wind blew a gale. Here we camped for the night. The land is very low, thickly covered with pine and underbrush, and looks gloomy. The beach is sand and gravel. Raspberries are very abundant.

Aug. 13th. Long before day we were on the water. The weather was cloudy, with a strong S. W. wind. We came on to the entrance of Terre Blanche bay, and attempted to round a long sandy point. We had hard work to regain the shelter of the woods, where we remained until daylight, when, having pushed off with much labor, we rounded the point and entered the bay. The wind blew a gale; however, we coasted along in the reeds and rushes to the entrance of Rivière Terre Blanche.³ Here we put ashore

³ Apparently the peninsula now known as Willow pt., on the W. shore of the lake, in Tp. 19, R. iv, E. of the princ. merid.; cluster of Willow isls. there; boat channel between them and the point; places called Husavik and Gimli in the vicinity.

³ To be distinguished, of course, from the Terre Blanche or White Earth r. mentioned earlier in this work as a tributary of Lake Manitoba. Henry is coasting due N., down the W. shore of Lake Winnipeg. He has passed Drunken r., and also the small places called Arnes and Hnausa; his "long sandy point" is the position of a place now known as Sandy Bar, and here he enters a sort of bay or recess between the mainland on the W. and Big isl., which latter warrants its name in comparison with all the others in this southern section of the lake. Into this bay falls Henry's Terre Blanche r., formerly also White Mud r., now Icelandic or Icelanders' r.; place called Icelandic River on the shore, and back of this the larger settlement of River-town. Big isl. is only separated from the mainland by a narrow strait, of which Henry speaks beyond, hoping to find a passage through it.

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near the old establishment where my people wintered in 1804–05. They made miserable returns, almost perished with hunger, and since that time no Indians have consented to winter here. The miserable country is destitute of large animals; martens only are numerous, and there is no good fishery.

This is the last Saulteur establishment I have made for Red river, and I here bid adieu to the tribes with whom I have passed 16 long winters.⁴ During this time I have experienced every trouble, danger, and inconvenience which attends the management of affairs among that turbulent nation. I have been frequently fired at by them and have had several narrow escapes for my life. But I am happy to say they never pillaged me to the value of a needle. Fifteen of those winters I was strongly opposed by different interests in all my earthly possessions. I sincerely believe that competitive trade among the Saulteurs is the greatest slavery a person of any feeling can undergo. A common dram-shop in a civilized country is a paradise compared to the Indian trade, where two or more different interests are striving to obtain the greater share of the Indians' hunts—particularly among the Saulteurs, who are always ready to take advantage of the situation by disposing of their skins and furs to the highest bidder. No ties, former favors, or services rendered, will induce them to give up their skins for one penny less than they can get elsewhere. Gratitude is a stranger to them; grant them a favor to-day, and to-morrow they will suppose it their due. Love of liquor is their ruling passion, and when intoxicated they will commit any crime to obtain more drink. To this end they frequently pillage a trader and even threaten him with death; and sometimes, when sober, they rob him of both wet and dry goods. It therefore requires a person to be continually on his guard against them and allow them to play no tricks with impunity. At the same time he must study to avoid

⁴ A notable statement, showing that Henry had been in the fur-trade since 1792, or for seven years before the opening of the present journal in 1799.

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GRASSY NARROWS—VARIOUS ISLANDS 453

coming to extremities; for they are all so nearly related that to injure one is a grievance to the whole tribe. But let us now proceed on our voyage to other nations, who may treat us more leniently.

The wind continued high from the S. W. We embarked and proceeded along the lee shore, in hopes of finding, as I had been given to understand, a small passage between the mainland and the large island opposite.⁵ The bay is shallow and overgrown with rushes; wild fowl of all kinds are numerous. We searched in vain for the passage, and were obliged to return to the mouth of the bay and coast along the [Great Black] island, the shores of which are covered with huge flakes of limestone. At three o'clock we came to an opening, but a gale from the N. W. obliged us to put ashore at the entrance of this large strait,⁶ where there was an uncommon number of gulls of different kinds. Here we remained until five o'clock, when the wind abated, and we embarked, though the swell was still high. We made a long traverse from this island to the mainland, where the shore was so steep and rocky that we could find no place to put ashore, and were obliged to push on in the dark. In a short time the wind rose dead ahead from the W., and the swell increased. Our position was decidedly unpleasant;

⁵ The "small passage" which Henry did not find is at the Grassy Narrows between the mainland on the W. and Big or Great Black isl. on the E. Hind's map marks the channel here as 10 chains wide and 6 feet deep in 1858; but it may have been much less in 1808. A little beyond Grassy Narrows is the small Guano isl., close to the mainland; this was named by John Fleming, Sept. 22d, 1858.

⁶ Between Big or Great Black isl. on the W. or left, and Black (also called Grand) isl., which latter is nearly as large, and lies E. of the N. end of the former. Big isl., is believed to be Isle de Fer of Verendrye, later Iron isl., so named from the extensive deposits of iron ore upon it. Punk isl. is next largest; the Deer isls. and Goose (or Little Black) isl. are among the many small ones of this group, S. and E. of Grindstone pt. This point is the end of a very bold projection from the W. shore, its long axis N. E., delimited from the rest of the W. mainland by the broad and deep Washow bay. The place where Henry put ashore was on the E. side of Big isl., very likely at the spot where Hecla is now situated.

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the sea dashed with great violence against the rocks, the night was extremely dark, and the wind seemed to be increasing. Anxious to find any place to land, we crept on as near the shore as the surge would permit, till, having shipped a great quantity of water, we discovered a small cave on a beach of white pebbles, into which we ventured to run our canoe. This was fortunately a good landing-place, as a point of rocks which projected into the lake a few yards broke the fury of the waves before they reached us. Here we unloaded for the night, happy to find so comfortable a berth.⁷

Sunday, Aug. 14th. At daybreak we embarked. The wind continued strong ahead, and though the men labored hard against it, we made slow progress along the shore. About two o'clock we found ourselves astray, completely embayed, and at a loss what course to take. We put ashore for a short time, and then, the wind having veered to the S. E., we embarked, hoisted sail, and steered N. for a high [Grindstone]⁸ point about four leagues off. Having doubled this point, our course lay due W. along a steep rocky shore. At sunset the wind came about E. and blew hard; took in a double reef and sailed on. The guide soon discovered that we were approaching the wished-for Narrows of Tête du Chien, and about 1 p. m. we arrived at Grande Pointe, happy to find ourselves once more on the main route.⁹ We put ashore and camped for the night.

⁷ Henry's snug berth was in what later became known as Boat harbor, a small recess of the shore inside Little Grindstone pt.

⁸ Grindstone pt., a prominent headland, the end of the great peninsula which delimits Washow or Deep bay on the S., is about 8 m. N. by E. from Boat harbor or Little Grindstone bay; Punk isl. on right offing. Henry rounds Grindstone pt., coasts W. some miles, and then makes the traverse across Washow bay.

⁹ The length of the strait which intervenes between the two main divisions of the lake may be 10 or 12 m., about N. N. W. and S. S. E., representing the direct distance between the two most prominent projections from the W. side, now called the Bull's Head and the Dog's Head. The last of these appears to be what Henry calls Grande Pointe, or Tête du Chien, marking the exit from the strait. This exit is the narrowest place—i. e., The Narrows, where a pro-

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THE PASSAGE OF THE NARROWS.

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The land in the bottom of the deep [Washow] bay, into which we went to-day, appeared low and marshy, covered with small pines, willows, and long grass; but the land which projects toward the N. shore gradually rises and becomes rocky, until it forms perpendicular dark gray bluffs, which continue to Tête du Chien, where we again find large piles of limestone.

Aug. 15th. The wind continued to blow hard from the S. E., making a heavy swell in the Narrows. My guide thought it unsafe to proceed, as we had a long traverse to make on leaving this place. As the weather was clear, we spread our baggage to dry, almost every article having been wet since the 13th. During this operation the men gathered raspberries, which grew in profusion. The N. side of the lake appeared to be rocky, the rocks black and gray. The traverse is about a league wide; across it appear some snug inlets and coves with a sandy bottom, which would be of great advantage if one were overtaken by a storm. At eleven o'clock everything was dry, and the wind had abated; we hoisted sail, and came on to the Fort of the Traverse of the Bark Island;¹⁰ but a sudden

jection from the E. comes within 3 m. of the Dog's Head. From here the traverse goes past Snake and Black Bear isls., the group of Moose isls. which occupy the throat of Fisher bay, and Tamarac, Jackhead, and other isls., to the W. shore of the N. division of the lake, about Little Jackhead and Big Jackhead rivers, and so on. Maps differ irreconcilably in naming various points along each side of the Narrows. The latest ones before me agree best with Henry. Fleming's map in Hind's Report, 1858, marks on the W. side in succession: (1) Bull's Head, (2) Little Long bay, (3) Limestone Cave pt., (4) Whiteway's pt.; and on the E. side, beginning opp. the Bull's Head: Loon's straits or Détroit le Duc (lettered "Canoe Route of old N. W. Co."), then a succession of numerous small coves and boat harbors, and finally the Dog's Head, at the narrowest point of exit from the straits, as on other maps, but on the opposite side. McKenzie's map of 1801 again differs from all others I have seen.

¹⁰ So copy, evidently by scribe's error. I incline to read "foot of the traverse of Black Bear island." In any event, this island is one of the many which occupy the traverse across the broad throat of Fisher bay Henry is about to make to the W. mainland: see last note, where several of these islands are named. Henry's Encampment isl. is another of them, perhaps present Snake isl.; but I cannot make positive identification. The Moose isls.

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squall from the N. W. obliged us to put ashore at L'Isle d'Encampement, where we were detained until three o'clock. The wind then came about from the S. E.; we hoisted sail, and took the traverse [of Fisher bay], in which we found a very heavy swell. At sunset we got over to the W. mainland, and kept on with double-reefed sail until nine o'clock, when we camped on a fine sandy beach. We soon had a terrible squall with thunder, lightning, and a heavy shower. My tent was blown down, and we passed a wretched night, wet to the skin.

Aug. 16th. At daybreak we loaded and embarked; wind strong, about W. We crept slowly along the shore, which partially sheltered us. At Rivière à la Tête du Brochet,¹¹ we put ashore for an hour, and then continued until eleven o'clock, when we came to the great Reef of Rocks,¹² a chain of large stones which extends into the lake for more than a mile. We attempted to get around it, but were in danger of being blown out in the lake; we therefore put ashore, and unloaded. The land along here is very low, with a fine sandy beach. The woods in many places stand nearly a mile from the beach, the intervening space being low, with many small lakes, marshes, and stagnant ponds; the waters of the lake seem

of last note are distinguished as Great Moose and Little Moose on Fleming's map; and the one now called Tamarac is there given as Juniper isl. This last is directly off Little Jackhead r. Fisher bay is a very large one; Fisher r. at its head, where there is now an Indian reserve, Tp. 28, R. i, E. of princ. merid.

¹¹ *Brochet* is F. name of the pike, a fish, otherwise called jack; and *tête du brochet* is literally jackhead, another name of the same fish. But in present connection Tête du Brochet appears to signify Pike Head, in the sense of cape or headland, for such is or has been the name of the point near the mouth of the river Henry has reached. This is now known as Jack, Jackfish, or Jackhead r., site of an Indian reserve, and long ago the scene of missionary effort; Fleming marks "Old Missionary Post" in 1858. To reach this place Henry has passed Little Jackfish Head, Little Jack, Little Jackfish, or Little Jackhead r., Cross pt., Spruce pt., and Point Maymagwaysee.

¹² Apparently the place now called Stony pt.; formerly Wicked pt. or the voyageurs' Pointe Maligne; to be distinguished from another of same name beyond.