

*A JOURNAL of VOYAGES
and TRAVELS in the INTER-
IOR of NORTH AMERICA*

Between the 47th and 58th Degrees of N. Lat.,
extending from Montreal nearly to the
Pacific, a Distance of about
5,000 Miles

*INCLUDING AN ACCOUNT OF THE PRINCIPAL
OCCURRENCES DURING A RESIDENCE
OF NINETEEN YEARS IN DIF-
FERENT PARTS OF
THE COUNTRY*

BY

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A PARTNER IN THE NORTHWEST COMPANY

WITH INTRODUCTION AND MAP

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Tuesday, 29. LA CHINE. Yesterday, I left Montreal, for this place, in company with several other Clerks; and am on my way to the interior, or Indian countries, there to remain, if my life should be spared, for seven years, at least. For this space of time I am under an engagement to serve as a clerk to the North West Company, otherwise denominated McTavish, Frobisher & Co. The goods intended for the interior or upper countries, are here put on board of canoes. These canoes which are constructed of the bark of the birch tree, will carry a burden of three and an half or four tons each; and are severally manned by eight or nine Canadians, who are said to manage them with greater dexterity, than any other people.

Wednesday, 30. POINT CLAIRE. Rainy evening. For the first time in my life, I am to pass the night in a tent. In the former part of the day, I was employed in marking bales of goods, which are to be sent to the Grand Portage or General Rendezvous. About 12

o'clock, I embarked on board of one of the canoes, destined for the above mentioned place. The whole squadron, which consists of thirty canoes, is divided into three brigades. One or two Guides or Pilots are attached to each brigade. Their business is, to point out the best course up and down the streams and through the lakes, and to take charge of the canoes and property on board. They attend to the repairs of the canoes, which are frequently broken, and have the same command over the men, attached to their respective brigades, as the commander of a vessel has, over the men on board. The Voyagers, as the men are called, have many of the customs of sailors; and among them the following. By all those on board, who have never passed certain places, they expect to be treated with something to drink; and should a person refuse to comply with their requisitions, he would be sure of being plunged into the water, which they profanely call, baptizing him. To avoid such a disaster, I gave the people of my canoe a few bottles of spirits and porter, by drinking which, they became very merry, and exhibited the reverse of their appearance a few days since, when, with heavy hearts and weeping eyes, they parted from their relations. Shortly after we had pitched our tents, an Irish gentleman, whose house was near the margin of the water, politely invited me to take tea with him.

Friday, May 2. Chute au Blondeau. We have a strong head wind. But, since yesterday morning, we have come nearly sixty miles, and have passed two Rapids. At these places, most of the property was taken out of the canoes, and carried across the Portages, on the backs of the people. The young men, who have never been in the Indian countries, now began to regret that they had enlisted into this service, which requires them, as they say, to carry burdens like horses, when, by remaining in their own country, they might have laboured like men.

Sunday, 4. The wind has been so high, during the whole of the day, that we could not go upon the water. I have therefore passed the time in reading, and in the society of a fellow-clerk.

Monday, 5. We are now about one hundred and twenty miles from Montreal. This afternoon, our people killed a deer, with their setting poles, as he was crossing the river.

Tuesday, 6. The Three Kettles. In the former part of the day, we passed a beautiful water-fall, where the Riviere au Rideau, or Curtain River, falls into this, which is the Ottawa River. The former is ten or twelve rods wide, and the water falls perpendicularly, about forty feet, presenting at a little distance, an appearance at once pleasing and grand. We are now about one hundred and fifty miles from Montreal; the land on each side of the river is very level, and the soil

appears to be good. William McGilvray, Esq. passed us this evening, in a light canoe, bound like ourselves, to the Grand Portage.

Thursday, 8. Au Chat. We now, for the first time, see Indian huts or tents.

Friday, 9. We arrived this morning, at this place, where the North West Company have a small establishment; and I have passed the afternoon, in shooting pigeons.

Saturday, 10. Grand Calumet. This Portage is nearly two miles long; and over it, the people carry both the canoes and their loading. Here stands a house, built by those who came here to traffick with the Indians; but which has been abandoned for several years, as the Indians, who formerly hunted in this vicinity, are now gone farther north, where Beaver, &c. are found in greater plenty. Behind this house, I found a small bark canoe, in which I embarked alone, for the purpose of shooting ducks. Having proceeded some distance from the shore, the canoe upset, and I fell, with my gun, into the water. Having my great coat on, it was with no small difficulty that I reached the shore; and I was happy to escape, with the loss of only my gun.

Sunday, 11. We are encamped on an Island opposite to Fort Coulonge. Soon after we arrived here, the person who has the establishment in charge, came to invite a fellow-clerk, who travels in the same canoe with me, and myself, to sup with him, to

which I readily agreed; but my companion chose to remain with the canoes. I was treated with all the politeness of which a Canadian is master, which is not a little; for in this, as well as in many other respects, the Canadians resemble their ancestors, the French.

Monday, 12. We are encamped on a large sand bank. I have had a little conversation with my fellow-traveller, respecting his conduct the last evening, while I was absent. When I departed for the Fort, I gave him the keys of our travelling box and basket, that he might have the means of making a supper; and on my return, I was not a little surprised at finding not only him, but several of the common labourers, much intoxicated. I reprimanded Mr. P. with considerable severity, to-day, and told him, that if I should ever again find him in the like shameful condition, I should be under the disagreeable necessity of informing our employers of his conduct, as soon as we should reach Head-quarters. He promised that he would not again be guilty of such conduct; but I should place more reliance on his promise, had not his mother been a *squaw*. There seems to be in the blood of an Indian, a kind of predisposition to intemperance.— We barter with the natives, receiving sugar for biscuit, of which, as well as of pork, beef and spirits, they appear to be uncommonly fond.

Tuesday, 13. We are encamped on a rocky bank, where it is impossible to find a smooth place, sufficiently large to pitch a tent; we are therefore obliged to make our bed between two large rocks, and sleep in the open air. On the north side of the river are mountains, which appear almost destitute of timber, of any kind.

Wednesday, 14. We shall again sleep where we did last night, as the people have been employed, during the whole of the day, in repairing the canoes, which had become leaky.

Thursday, 15. Roche Capitaine Portage. This Portage is so named from a large rock, that rises to a considerable height above the water, in the middle of the rapid. During the day, we have come up several difficult ones, where many persons have been drowned, either in coming up or going down. For every such unfortunate person, whether his corpse is found or not, a cross is erected by his companions, agreeably to a custom of the Roman Catholics; and at this place, I see no less than fourteen. This is a melancholy sight. It leads me to reflect on the folly and temerity of man, which cause him to press on in the path, that has conducted so many of his fellow creatures, prematurely to the grave. Thus in hope of gaining a little money, which can minister but imperfectly to our comfort, and that, during a short season, we expose ourselves to death.

Friday, 16. Came up a rapid where, a

few years since, two canoes, in going down, were broken, and several men were drowned; therefore, we see more crosses erected.

Saturday, 17. Roderick McKenzie, Esq. agent for the North West Company, passed us, who, with those that accompany him, is on his way to the Grand Portage.

Sunday, 18. The Lazy Portage. This day we left the Ottawa River on our right hand, and came up a small river, that falls into it. About noon, we passed a cave, in the side of a high hill. This cave, I am told, is spacious; but we were in too great haste, to permit my examining it. This I was the more inclined to do, as I am told that the natives relate many remarkable stories respecting it; and among others, that a large animal remains in it, which they call a Man-eater, and which devours all those, who have the presumption to approach the entrance, of his solitary dwelling.

Monday, 19. The Pines. Came up several bad rapids; but have been so fortunate, thus far, as to meet with no disaster. The banks on each side of the river, for a considerable distance, are a perfect natural wall, formed of smooth stones; and are about one hundred feet high.

Tuesday, 20. La Vase, or Miry-place. During the whole of this day, we have been crossing ponds, and small lakes.

Wednesday, 21. After coming over a number of short portages, and crossing several

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Wednesday, 21. After coming over a number of short portages, and crossing several

ponds, and descending a small river, at the source of which is a height of land, we have at length arrived at a place, called the Meadows, which constitutes the north end of Lake Nipisangué, or, as it is commonly written, Nippising. Here we find several Indians, who appear to be in poor circumstances. We, however, obtain from them a little sugar, and a few wooden dishes and spoons, for which we give them provisions.

Thursday, 22. Sailed a part of the day, on the above mentioned lake; but, towards noon, the wind was so high, that we were obliged to encamp on a small island, which is almost destitute of wood.

Friday, 23. The Lost Child. This place took its name from the following circumstance. Several years since, the natives, being encamped here, lost a child, for whom they made diligent search, but in vain. They imagined, however, that they heard his lamentations in the bowels of the earth; whereupon they commenced digging, but to no purpose; the reason of which they conceived to be, that the Devil, or Bad Spirit, as he is called by the Indians, was continually carrying him from one place to another, in the earth. Many large holes have actually been dug in the earth, as our people have shown me.

In the morning we left Lake Nipisangué, and have ever since been descending the French River, which is a considerable stream.

In the latter part of the day, we passed a narrow place in the French River, to which, a number of years since, many of the most abandoned and savage Natives were accustomed to resort every spring, and where they built a kind of Fort, or stone wall, which is still to be seen. Behind this, these villains secreted themselves; and, when the voyagers were passing by, discharged volleys of shot into their canoes, and of course, as the distance was small, killed many of them. They would then rush from their hiding place, and fall upon and butcher the remainder, and go off with the plunder, which they had thus seized, into a distant part of the country. But the better sort of their countrymen, would not join them in such barbarous and unprovoked hostilities. At length the good Indians, who were well disposed towards the white people from Canada, pronounced these murderers a nuisance to society, and made war upon them, until the greater part of them were destroyed. The few that survived, retired into a distant part of the country, and nothing has since been heard, respecting them. The friendly Indians, for their exertions in extirpating their unworthy relations, were handsomely rewarded by the North West Company.

The Canadian Voyagers, when they leave one stream to go up or down another, have a custom of pulling off their hats, and making the sign of the cross, upon which one in

each canoe, or at least, in each brigade, repeats a short prayer. The same ceremonies are observed by them, whenever they pass a place, where any one has been interred, and a cross has been erected. Those, therefore, who are in the habit of voyaging this way, are obliged to say their prayers more frequently perhaps, than when at home; for at almost every rapid which we have passed, since we left Montreal, we have seen a number of crosses erected; and at one, I counted no less than thirty! It is truly melancholy, and discouraging, seriously to reflect on the great number of my fellow creatures, who have been brought to an untimely end, by voyaging this way, as I know not but I shall myself, also, be doomed to the same watery grave. With such dismal spectacles, however, almost continually before our eyes, we press forward, with all the ardour and rashness of youth, in the same dangerous path, stimulated by the hopes of gratifying the eye, and of securing a little gold.

Saturday, 24. Lake Huron. We find on the shore of this lake, low Cranberries, in great abundance.

Sunday, 25. The wind has been so high, that it has prevented us from sailing, the greater part of the day. We are encamped on an island, of which there are many in this lake. On one of them, it is reported, that the Natives killed a snake, which measured thirty-six feet in length. The length and

size of this astonishing serpent, they have engraved on a large smooth rock, which we saw, as we passed by. But we have often seen other engravings, on the rocks, along the rivers and lakes, of many different kinds of animals, some of which, I am told, are not now to be found, in this part of the world, and probably never existed.

Wednesday, 28. Island of St. Joseph. To this place the British troops came and built a fortification, when the Americans took possession of Michilimackinack. There are stationed here one Captain, one Lieutenant, one Ensign, and thirty nine privates. The fort is built on a beautiful rise of ground, which is joined to the main island by a narrow neck of land. As it is not long since a settlement was made here, they have only four dwelling houses and two stores, on the other parts of the peninsula; and the inhabitants appear like exiles. The North West Company have a house and store here. In the latter, they construct canoes, for sending into the interior, and down to Montreal. Vessels, of about sixty tons burden, come here from Detroit and Mackana and Soult St. Maries. The whole island is computed to be about twenty miles in circumference; the soil is good; it is distant, nearly nine hundred miles from Montreal, and forty-five from Mackana, and is in Lat. 47° North. Spirits are sold here for six dollars a gallon; and other things, in the same proportion.

Thursday, 29. Duncan McGilvray, Esq. one of the agents for the North West Company, arrived in the morning, at St. Josephs, from Mackana; and soon after, we embarked on board of our canoes, to come to this small Island. As the weather is calm, my fellow-traveller and I intend sleeping in our canoe; but the labourers will pass the night on shore.

Friday 30. Sault St. Maries. Here the North West Company have another establishment on the north side of the Rapid; and on the opposite shore, there are a few Americans, Scotch and Canadians, who carry on a small traffic with the Natives, and also till the ground a little. The soil about Lake Huron, which we have just passed, appears to be good, and the face of the country is low and level.—Here the North West Company have built locks, in order to take up loaded canoes, that they may not be under the necessity of carrying them by land, to the head of the Rapid; for the current is too strong to be stemmed by any craft. The Company are likewise building a saw mill, at the foot of the Rapid, to furnish boards, &c. for the Grand Portage, &c. Here is the outlet of Lake Superiour, by which its waters pass into Lake Huron. On each of these lakes, the North West Company have a vessel. One goes to the Grand Portage, and the other to Detroit, &c.

Saturday, 31. We shall sleep where we

did the last night. Several of us have visited the people, who live on the other side of the rapid, where we saw a dance of the Natives, who are Sauteux or Chippeways.

Sunday, June 1. Point au Pin, or Pine Point, in Lake Superiour. We here find the vessel that sails from this to the Grand Portage. I went on board, and the Captain informed me, that she would carry about ninety five tons, and that she makes four or five trips every season. I left the Soult St. Maries, in company with three hundred men, who are in thirty five canoes.

Monday, 2. Point aux Arable, or Maple Point. We now form four Brigades, in which there are six clerks.

Tuesday, 3. A high wind during the whole day. In the morning, we attempted to sail, but soon found we could not, without shipping a great deal of water; we therefore soon landed again, and are encamped, within one hundred rods of the place where we tarried the last night.

Wednesday, 4. As it has rained and snowed all day, accompanied by a high wind, we have not been able to leave our encampment of the last night. Mons. St. Germain, who has the charge of a small Fort, belonging to the North West Company, not far from this, visited us, and brought with him a few necessaries.

Thursday, 5. Although the swells in the Lake are very high, we have made good

progress, during the whole day. We are encamped near a large rock, on which the Natives, as they pass this way, leave an arrow or two, or some other article of little value to appease the Devil, or Muchamunatoo, as they call him, and prevent him from doing them harm.

Sunday, 8. In the course of the day, we have passed several islands, which, as well as the main land, appear to be covered with little else besides moss, with here and there a shrubby spruce.

Monday, 9. In the morning we passed another Fort, belonging to the North West Company.

Tuesday, 10. We are obliged to anchor our canoes by a small island, instead of unloading them, as is customary every night, for the whole country is on fire; but whether by accident or design, I am unable to learn. Our people, who pass this way every summer, say that, almost every year, fire runs over this part of the country, which is, of course, nearly destitute of animals, of any kind.

Thursday, 12. Sugar Point. Our people say we have sailed ninety miles during the day.

Friday, 13. GRAND PORTAGE, where we arrived late this evening. This place lies in the 48th degree of north latitude; and is said to be nine hundred miles from the Soult St. Maries, and eighteen hundred from Mon-

son. This, as I am told, is about the time when they generally arrive; and some of them are already here. The people who come from Montreal with the goods, go no farther than this, excepting a few who take those articles to the Rainy Lake, which are intended for Athabasca, as that place lies at too great a distance from this, to permit people who reside there to come to this place and return, before the winter commences. Those who bring the goods from Montreal, on their return, take down the furs, &c. from the north.

Excellent fish, I am informed, are taken here. White fish are sometimes speared, which will weigh twenty-two pounds. The water in the lake is uncommonly clear.

Sunday, 15. The people here pass the Sabbath, much in the same manner as they do, the other days of the week. The labouring people have been employed, during the day, in making and pressing packs of furs, to be sent to Canada. This appears, not as it should be, to me, who have been taught to abstain from labour on the sabbath, and to consider that it should be employed in a religious manner. The people, however, who have been long in this savage country, have no scruples of conscience on this subject.

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every day, for some time past, people have been flocking in from the Interiour, with the returns of the season.

Saturday, 28. The last night, a squaw, in a state of intoxication, stabbed her husband, who soon after expired. This afternoon, I went to their tent, where I saw a number of Indians, of both sexes, drinking and crying over the corpse, to which they would frequently offer rum, and try to pour it down his throat, supposing him to be as fond of rum when dead, as he was when alive. The Natives of this place are Chippeways.

Friday, July 4. In the day time, the Natives were permitted to dance in the fort, and the Company made them a present of thirty six gallons of shrub. In the evening, the gentlemen of the place dressed, and we had a famous ball, in the dining room. For musick, we had the bag-pipe, the violin and the flute, which added much to the interest of the occasion. At the ball, there was a number of the ladies of this country; and I was surprised to find that they could conduct with so much propriety, and dance so well.

Sunday, 13. Yesterday, several gentlemen, on their way to their winter quarters, accompanied me to Charlotte, at the other end of this Portage, which is nine miles over. My business was to send off a number of canoes, bound for Fort des Prairies. The country

between this and Fort Charlotte, is tolerably level; and the soil appears to be pretty good.

Tuesday, 15. This morning a number of gentlemen, as well as myself, left the Grand Portage, to proceed to winter quarters. I am to accompany John McDonald, Esq. to Fort des Prairies. We left Fort Charlotte, about 3 o'clock P. M. on board of two canoes, each of which will carry about two tons, and is pushed on by six Canadians. This is a small river; and we have passed several places, where the men were obliged to carry the ladings, a short distance, and in some places, to transport the canoes also.

Wednesday, 16. The Long Cherry Portage. In the former part of the day, we crossed small lakes and ponds, connected by several portages, and then came over the height of land. Since passing this, we have descended a small river, which, I am informed, after running through several lakes, at length discharges itself into Hudson's Bay, in latitude 51° north. At the mouth of this river, the Hudson Bay Company have a fort, which is called Albany Factory.

Friday, 18. Great Pines. We have this day crossed the Flinty Lake, so named from the stones, found on its shore. For some time past, I have had a fit of the ague and fever, every day. It commenced when I was crossing the large Lakes; and, I am told, that it is seldom that a person is attacked with it, in the region where I now am.