

ATHABASCA AND TRIBUTARIES.

THE country immediately to the north and northwest of Edmonton is almost unknown, save along the few trails extending from here toward the mountains. Those large rivers, taking their rise in the foothills and first range of mountains, are the most southerly branches of the great Mackenzie River. Leaving Edmonton for Jasper House, the first river of this system passed is the Pembina, a stream about eight chains wide, carrying a large volume of water in the spring and rainy season, but not subject to rushes of high water from the mountains, as it does not head far enough in the mountains to feel the effects of the melting snow and glaciers. The banks are high and timbered with a fair growth of poplar, balsam of Gilead, and in some places, of spruce. The river winds its tortuous course in a general northeastern direction. Coal in quantities is found on its banks, and some seams are known to have been burning for years. The watershed which divides the waters flowing to the north from those which flow to the Saskatchewan is, in some places, very narrow, the Indians say only a day's travel; in other words about fifteen or twenty miles. Large quantities of timber are to be found in the valleys at the head of this stream.

The McLeod River is the next stream of importance beyond the Pembina. It also flows between high lands clothed with poplar and some spruce, and is very winding in its course. Its head well into the first range, and is subject to sudden and great floods during the hot weather of the summer, but dwindles to a small body of water in the fall, with a wide stretch of gravelly beach on either side. In high water this stream will have a width of about six chains. Its current is very rapid, rendering it totally unfit for steamboat navigation. In the lower forty miles of the river is a succession of falls and basins. They are about a mile apart, over archy rapids from two to three feet in height. In the autumn the basins are very deep, with no perceptible current, while on the rapids there is hardly enough water to float a canoe. In the summer, with a high stage of water, the rapids are hid, and the steady fall of two or three feet to the mile gives a current of tremendous velocity. Gold in quantities sufficient to pay for working, if access could be had with provisions, is to be found, and will in time be worked, no doubt. The country along the river has, at one time, been very heavily timbered, but fires have done their work there as well as further south, and any timber which still exists will be found to be surrounded by a network of muskegs and creeks. Coal is also to be found, but is not likely to become of any economic value for some generations. Sandstone is the only rock seen in this place, while the drift is of the kind usually found in the bars of some of our western rivers.

The Athabasca, called by the Indians the "big river," takes its head far in the mountains, its western and southern branches rising close to the Fraser and

Columbia rivers, respectively, and flows east to the junction of the McLeod. The Jasper Pass, through which the Government route of the Canadian Pacific Railroad was located, is the head of the river. The Indians of the Jasper country are descendants of the Iroquois, of Quebec, and still speak that language, as well as Cree, which they have learned from their neighbors. Leather from the east side of the mountains, years ago was taken by boat to Jasper, then transferred by horses to the boat encampment on the Columbia River, and taken thence to the coast for sale to the Indians of British Columbia. The banks of the Athabasca are high and are covered with brule and second-growth poplar, spruce and pitch pine, the result of the ravages of fire willfully or carelessly set out years ago, when no value was set on the primeval forests. Coal is to be seen, but not in such quantities as on the Pembina or Saskatchewan. Gold can also be found from the head of the river to the Landing, but whether in paying quantities remains to be demonstrated.

The river is about twelve chains wide at the mouth of the McLeod, with a strong current, and could, undoubtedly, be navigated by steamer as far as the Ghost Rapids, some distance above that point. The awful current lasts to Old Fort Assiniboine, where the river takes a bend to the north, and becomes wider, with more bars. Nothing now remains to mark the site of Fort Assiniboine, save the heaps caused by the fallen chimneys and half-filled cellars. It was situated on a prairie of about two hundred acres, on the north side of the river, and about forty feet above it. It was the connecting link between Edmonton and Lesser Slave Lake, and a pack trail extending to the north and a cart trail to the south. The goods were forwarded by water *via* the Athabasca and Little Slave River and Lake, to the Hudson's Bay Post, on the west end of the lake. The Upper Athabasca has very little flat land along it, the high banks, in many places, rising straight from the river. A number of fine streams come in from the north, some of them rising in close proximity to the Smoky River; notably the Baptiste, Big Hawk, Burnt, Halfbreed and Little Slave rivers. These are from two to five chains wide and drain a large extent of country. They are high in the spring, but as they do not rise in the mountains they add little to the volume of water that pours down the Athabasca during June, July and August. After leaving the mouth of Little Slave River the Athabasca bends to the south with a somewhat swifter current than for the previous eighty miles, till the Landing is reached, thence after its somewhat erratic course it seems to make up its mind and strikes away northward to join its waters with those of the great Mackenzie.

Much good land, though timbered, can be found in the regions traversed by these rivers, and much that is bad, covered with a small and stunted growth of poplar, spruce and pitch pine. Much of it by thorough burning could be made good grazing land. The snow-fall is not extensive, and good water is plentiful. But, altogether, it is not a country that will be sought by settlers until the vast prairies both to the south, on the Saskatchewan, and to the north, on the Peace River, have been settled.

—*Edmonton Bulletin.*