

THE STORY OF DISCOVERY OF THE FRASER RIVER

Following is the full text of the paper on "The Discovery of the Fraser River and its Significance to Oregon Pioneers," read yesterday afternoon before the Oregon Historical society at its tenth annual meeting, by the president, Frederick V. Holman:

The dedication of a monument to Simon Fraser at New Westminster, B. C., on September 23, 1862, in honor of his exploration of the Fraser river, in 1806, recalls a most daring achievement. It is an historic event of great interest and importance in the history of British Columbia and of the original Oregon country. The Fraser and the Columbia are the only rivers which break through that great range of mountains which starts near the Gulf of California, and is known in that region as the Sierra Nevada, and continues through Oregon and Washington, as the Cascade mountains. This range of mountains is finally appears in northern British Columbia.

In historical importance this exploration by Simon Fraser should be considered as one of the four notable events in connection with these two great rivers. These events chronologically are as follows:

First, the discovery by Captain Robert Gray, May 11, 1792, of the Columbia river.

Second, the discovery by Sir Alexander Mackenzie, June 17, 1793, of the Tacoutche Tesse, which is now known as the Fraser river.

Third, the exploration by Clark and Lewis, in 1804 and 1805, to the south of the Columbia river.

Fourth, the exploration by Simon Fraser, in the summer of 1806, of the Fraser river to its mouth.

It is the discovery and exploration of the Fraser river which shall speak particularly in this address. As the mouth of the Columbia river was theoretically discovered by Captain Bruno Hecla of the Spanish navy, August 15, 1776, who named it Rio de San Roque, so the mouth of the Fraser river was theoretically discovered by Lieutenant Don Francisco Elias, of the Spanish navy, in 1791, who named it Rios de Florida. In honor of the prime minister of Spain. Neither of these discoverers entered either of these rivers. But the course of each of these rivers was shown on Spanish maps afterward published.

The mouth of the Fraser river is practically identical with the several exits running through what is apparently a sand island, as viewed from the Gulf of Georgia.

Failure of Vancouver.

It is surprising that Captain George Vancouver did not find the Fraser river. He was an experienced explorer and had been a midshipman in Captain Cook's last voyage, in the years 1776 to 1780, inclusive. But it is no more surprising that Vancouver's failure to find the Columbia river.

In 1781 Alexander Mackenzie, afterwards knighted for his discoveries, discovered the Mackenzie river. He went down that river to where it flowed into the Arctic ocean. In 1781 he went to London and returned to Canada in the spring of 1782. Very soon after he started with an expedition to cross the continent to the Pacific ocean. He arrived at Astoria in the fall of 1791. He entered the lake of the Hills, October 10, 1792. Into this lake flow the waters of Peace river. With his party he ascended Peace river until November 1, 1792, when they came to a place to which Mackenzie had sent ahead two men to begin the preparation of winter quarters. On Mackenzie's map it is called Fort Fork. Its latitude is 54 degrees 9 minutes; its longitude 117 degrees, 35 minutes, and 15 seconds, as ascertained by observations made by Mackenzie. Here Mackenzie and his party passed the winter.

May 9, 1793, they started again on their journey, ascending Peace river. May 21 they came to the junction of the Finlay and Parsnip rivers, the latter Peace river. The party ascended Parsnip river to its head waters. After making a short stay at the head of the river, they descended to the mouth of the river, which they descended until the latter river entered the great river, which Mackenzie called the Tacoutche Tesse (Tesse meaning river), being a name given it by a tribe of Indians. This is the Fraser river. The discovery of this great river occurred June 17, 1793.

Mackenzie descended this river until he was deterred by the hostile attitude of the Indians and the physical difficulties of following the river, and by information given by the Indians of the dangerous character of the river. He then ascended the river a distance equal to about one degree of latitude in that region. Here he left the Tacoutche and went overland, westward, until he came to an arm of the Pacific ocean now called Bentinok Inlet, at about latitude fifty-two degrees and longitude one hundred and thirty degrees. On his return trip he arrived at Fort Chippewawan, August 24, 1793, where his journal ends.

It is sometimes said in a loose way by writers that Mackenzie discovered the Tacoutche was a part of the Columbia river. This was not the case when he discovered the Tacoutche. He did not then know that the Columbia river had been discovered, nor did he learn of it until after his return from his discovery of the Tacoutche.

Mackenzie kept a journal. In it he speaks of the Tacoutche as "the great river," and he also wrote in his journal:

"The more I heard of the river (Tacoutche) the more I was convinced it was not empty itself into the ocean to the north of what is called the River of the West, so that with its windings, the distance from its mouth to the Straits of Anian, which were now heightened by the discontent of my people I could not but be alarmed at a vessel attempting to get to the discharge of such a rapid river, emphatically when I reflected on the tedious and dangerous return up it, even if I should meet with no obstruction from the natives."

Fabled Oregon, or River of West.

In referring to the River of the West, Mackenzie undoubtedly had in mind the fabled river described by Jonathan Carver in his travels. In 1778 Jonathan Carver published, in London, the first edition of his book, describing travels in the interior of North America. Carver was a great traveler, and also a great writer, and a great fabricator of fiction. In the introduction or preface of his book, Carver said:

"The account I give of the Naudowessies, and the situation of the four great rivers that take their rise within a few leagues of each other, nearly about the center of this continent, viz: The River Bourbon, which empties itself into Hudson's bay, the Waters of Saint Lawrence; the Mississippi and the River Oregon, or the River of the West, that falls into the Pacific ocean at the Straits of Anian."

In the book itself Carver wrote of these rivers, and showed on a map, bound in the book, that part of the River of the West which empties into the Pacific ocean, a short distance below latitude forty-five, the Straits of Juan de Fuca, and the lower course of the Straits of Anian, running from the Straits of Juan de Fuca at about latitude forty-eight to a short distance east of where the River of the West was supposed to flow into the Pacific ocean. Somewhat as though Puget sound extended south to the Columbia river. The substantial accuracy of this showing the present straits of Juan de Fuca, a part of Puget sound, and the mouth of the Columbia is remarkable considering that at the time this book was published none of these waters were known.

At the time Mackenzie discovered the Tacoutche, he knew from his voyage down the Mackenzie river to its mouth at the Arctic ocean, that the fabled Straits of Anian, and those of De Fonte did not exist. But he supposed that Oregon or River of the West might exist.

Mackenzie's knowledge of Columbia. The Columbia river was discovered by Captain Robert Gray May 11, 1792, on his journey to the Pacific ocean. The

discovery of the Columbia river was not known to Mackenzie probably until the return of Vancouver to England in 1795, although Mackenzie may have heard of it after his return, in the fall of 1793 to Montreal, from his expedition, for Captain Gray returned to Boston by the way of the Cape of Good Hope in 1793 or 1794. Mackenzie went to England in 1798 and there supervised the publication of his journal. It was published in 1801.

Captain George Vancouver returned to London in September, 1795, and his voyage was published in London in 1801. In his book, Vancouver gave a detailed statement of the discovery of the Columbia river, the latitude and longitude of its mouth, and of the exploration of the Columbia by Lieutenant Broughton from its mouth to Point Vancouver, in October, 1792, a distance of about 100 miles.

Mackenzie's main journal of his expedition was published as written by him, except of course to editorial supervision. But in the latter part of this volume is a summary, possibly written by his cousin Rodrick Mackenzie, who is said to have revised the manuscript of Alexander Mackenzie. In this summary the course of the river is shown as the Columbia river and a map is bound in the volume showing between dotted lines the Columbia river as being a continuation of the course of the river as far south as latitude 51, but no further south. Vancouver's Voyage is the undoubted source of Mackenzie's knowledge of the Columbia river, as set forth in the summary to Mackenzie's journal, and in said map.

The course of the Columbia river for more than the 100 miles from its source as explored by Lieutenant Broughton, was not known until the Lewis and Clark expedition in 1804-1806, and then only from the junction of the Snake with the Columbia river. North of the Snake river the course of the Columbia river was not known until 1811.

The first white man who discovered and explored the sources of the Columbia river was David Thompson, one of the partners of the Northwest company. He was also the first white man to descend the Columbia river to its confluence with the Snake river. In 1811 Thompson, in a light canoe, manned by eight Indians and an interpreter, went down the Columbia river, arriving at Astoria July 16, 1811. This was a short time after the founding of Astoria. The Tonquin, the ship which brought the Astor expedition, entered the Columbia river March 24, 1811. April 12 the expedition landed and camped at Astoria to make that place its permanent home.

First Settlement on Fraser.

The first permanent settlement on the Tacoutche or Fraser river was made under the leadership of Simon Fraser on behalf of the Northwest company. This was the first permanent occupation of the continent west of the Rocky mountains, north of latitude 42 degrees and south of latitude 54 degrees, 40 minutes, and being what was subsequently known as the Oregon country. It was in 1806 that Simon Fraser and his party arrived in the country. He shall not go into details concerning his occupation of this part of the country except to say that for a long distance, to the north and south, he established several trading posts or forts. For this address relates to the discovery and exploration of the Fraser river and not to settlements in the country.

Was Difficult Task.

There could have been no doubt in Fraser's mind that his exploration would be a difficult and dangerous undertaking. Mackenzie had turned back because he had found the river so dangerous to navigate, and along the river below he knew were so treacherous and warlike character. Fraser had no guide. He made very careful preparations for his journey. The expedition consisted of 21 men besides himself, in four canoes. The exact day that the expedition started is in doubt, but it is not material. It probably left Fort George on the Tacoutche, which I shall hereinafter call the Fraser, on May 28, 1806. At the outset one of his canoes was almost wrecked at Port George canyon. The next two days were most dangerous navigation.

May 30 the expedition arrived at the lowest point on the river reached by Mackenzie, where the latter turned back. But Fraser did not hesitate. In his journal he says that for two miles there was a strong rapid with high and steep banks which contracted the channel in many places to 40 or 50 yards and that "this immense body of water, passing through this narrow space, in a turbulent manner, forming numerous gulls and cascades, and making a tremendous noise, had an awful and forbidding appearance."

As the passage by land appeared even worse, Fraser resolved to try to have one canoe run the rapid with a light load and manned by his best five men, but the attempt was unsuccessful, the canoe was dashed against a rock, but its crew fortunately saved themselves by climbing up the rock. The rescue of these five men was a perilous act, endangering the lives of all who took part in it. Fraser says in his journal:

"The bank was extremely high and steep, and we had to plunge our daggers at intervals into the ground to check our speed, as otherwise we were exposed to slide into the river. We cut steps in the declivity, fastened a line to the front of the canoe, with which some of the men ascended in order to haul it up, while the others supported it upon their arms. In this manner our descent was most precarious; our lives hung, as it were, upon a thread, as the failure of the line or a false step of one of the men might have hurled the whole of us into eternity."

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July 3 the expedition came to a place where the channel contracted to a width of about 40 yards, enclosed by two precipices of immense height, bending over toward each other. The water passing through rolling in tumultuous waves and with great velocity, had a frightful appearance. It was impossible to carry the canoes overland. The whole party without hesitation and with most desperate daring embarked in their canoes. In his journal Fraser says:

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And Simon Fraser's exploring expedition was a great work, not only in its accomplishment, but in its effects. It is proper that this river should always bear his name, in exploring a known river he discovered it. While the Fraser river is navigable only a short distance above its mouth, it makes a water grade possible through almost impassable mountains. The great wagon road and the Canadian Pacific railway utilize this grade.

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Simon Fraser was a near relative of the noted Baron Simon Fraser Lovat, a Scotchman known as Lord Lovat. Lord Lovat was a Jacobite intriguer, who took part in the Scottish rebellion of 1745, which ended in the battle of Culloden. He was executed in 1747. His family is one of the oldest in the Scottish Highlands. Simon Fraser, the explorer of Fraser river, was born in 1746, on his father's farm near Bennington, Vermont. His father, also named Simon Fraser, emigrated from Scotland in 1773. In the American Revolutionary war his father was a British loyalist or Tory, one of the so-called United Empire loyalists. He became a captain in the British army. He was captured in the war and died in prison.

Young Simon Fraser was taken by his mother to St. Andrews, Ontario, which was his home during his youth, although he attended school at Montreal in 1792, when he was 16 years old, he joined the Northwest company. His promotion was rapid. In 1802 he became a bourgeois or partner of that company. That he arrived at this position when he was only 28 years old is a proof of his ability and of how he was considered by his company. This is also shown from his being sent to and being placed in command, in the field of operation in New Caledonia.

Exploration of the Fraser.

In the fall of 1807 Simon Fraser received instructions from the Northwest company to explore the Tacoutche to its mouth. It was then believed that this river was a part of the great Columbia river. This belief was strengthened by the fact that for a long distance, to the point Mackenzie ceased to descend the Tacoutche, his course was almost due south, and the mouth of the Columbia was only about one degree of longitude west of this part of the Tacoutche.

There were political reasons for this exploration because the expedition of Lewis and Clark in 1804-1806, was a military expedition of the United States to descend the Columbia river to its confluence with the Snake river, to ascertain if furs could be shipped by sea and supplies brought up the river. It was well to spy out the land.

Fraser knew that the mouth of the Columbia was about eight degrees of northern latitude, a distance of one hundred miles, from which he was to start. He knew it was a difficult and dangerous undertaking, and he knew only the fact that for a long distance, to the point Mackenzie ceased to descend the Tacoutche, his course was almost due south, and the mouth of the Columbia was only about one degree of longitude west of this part of the Tacoutche.

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July 2 Fraser and his party arrived at one of the mouths of the Fraser, probably what is called the "North Arm." Although some writers have endeavored to belittle Fraser's achievement and have asserted that he did not reach the mouth of the river, it is now completely established that he did reach the mouth of the river. In his journal he gives its latitude as "49 degrees nearly." He adds, in his journal: "The river is therefore, not the Columbia. If I had been convinced of this when I left my canoes I would certainly have returned." The latitude of the mouth of the Columbia river, as published by Vancouver in his voyage, is 46 degrees and 18 minutes.

Dr. George Bryce truly says in his book: "The remarkable history of the Hudson Bay company," referring to the latter entry in Fraser's journal. "How difficult it is to distinguish small from great actions! Here was a man making fame for all time, and the idea of the greatness of his work had not dawned upon him."

He then voyaged by the river several days under great perils, at times portaging his goods and canoes over mountains and across canyons and ravines. Sometimes they went over rapids and through canyons, which it is said never before nor since was attempted.

July 3 the expedition came to a place where the channel contracted to a width of about 40 yards, enclosed by two precipices of immense height, bending over toward each other. The water passing through rolling in tumultuous waves and with great velocity, had a frightful appearance. It was impossible to carry the canoes overland. The whole party without hesitation and with most desperate daring embarked in their canoes. In his journal Fraser says:

"Thus skimming along, as fast as lightning, the crews, cool and determined, followed each other in awful silence, and when we arrived at the end we stood sitting at each other in silent congratulation at our narrow escape from total destruction."

Here the Indians made a map and informed Fraser that it was absolutely impossible to proceed further by water, but he continued for the day. On June 10 he became convinced that at least not in any way detract from his freshet being on, he could not continue by water. So he left his canoes and cached a part of his supplies. The whole party then proceeded on foot, carrying heavy packs, occasionally traveling by water in canoes hired from the Indians.

Office Open All Day Today—Sunday

Discount Ceases On Swinton Lots Monday, Dec. 21st At 7 P. M.

Thursday we announced to the public that we would discontinue the giving of ten per cent discount on SWINTON lots; that they would be sold at regular prices, beginning Tuesday, until Christmas, and would be ADVANCED TEN PER CENT December 26.

The response to this advertisement was instantaneous and magnificent. This response showed plainly that the PUBLIC KNOWS that LOTS in SWINTON are a MOST DESIRABLE INVESTMENT.

Are you one of those who bought on Thursday or Friday or Saturday? If not, remember that you've only TWO DAYS to get in on the ground floor.

Remember also that it is almost absolutely certain that EVERY LOT will be sold by tomorrow night. Procrastination is a thief of time, and also of opportunities. "Putting things off" may result in many regrets for you—may result in your SEEING SOMEONE