124

Judge F.W. Howay
from
W.N.S.

Simon Fraser, Explorer and Fur Trader

By Walter N. Sage

Reprinted from the
PROCEEDINGS of the PACIFIC COAST BRANCH of the
AMERICAN HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION, 1929

THE LIBRARY

THE UNIVERSITY OF
BRITISH COLUMBIA

SIMON FRASER, EXPLORER AND FUR TRADER

Simon Fraser came of Highland Catholic stock. His grandfather was William Fraser of Culbochie or Kilbochie and his grandmother was Margaret Macdonald of Glengarry. His father, Simon Fraser, second son of William and Margaret Fraser, came to America with his wife in 1773 and two years later took up land in Vermont. There young Simon, the explorer, was born in 1776.

Through the kindness of Adjutant General G. A. Fraser of the North Dakota National Guard, a direct descendant of Simon Fraser, it is possible to clear up much of the obscurity which has enveloped the facts of the explorer's early life. General Fraser most kindly furnished the author with the following extract taken from the manuscript diary of Simon Fraser which is in his possession.

"My father and mother came out from Scotland in the year 1773 in the vessel called the Pearl, in which vessel so many of the Highland families came to America, the same year, viz.: McDonnell of Leck, Culochie, Apacallader & Growling. My father purchased land in Vermont state in the year 1775 —about this year the Revolutionary War broke out—in 1777 my father joined the British cause, under General Burgoyne and received a commission upon the recommendation of Major General Simon Fraser, and soon after was made a prisoner at the battle of Bennington under Colonel Baum & was confined to Albany jail where he was very cruelly used along with many other British officers, and from there he was sent on board the 'Sophas' a small vessel to Rhode Island, where he died of ill treatment after an imprisonment of 13 months and 10 days. After the Peace of 1783 the whole family came into Canada, with William Fraser, her brother who came down from Canada after the Reduction and brought the family to Coteau du Lacs & from there with Angus, her brother the Family came to Upper Canada and William remained at Coteau du Lacs."

The above extract is very illuminating. Simon Fraser's father and mother came to America in the same year as the

"Scottish Armada" landed at Pictou Harbour, Nova Scotia.[1] Simon Fraser Sr. took up land in Vermont, probably near Bennington,[2] in 1775, the year of the outbreak of the war of the American Revolution. When his young son, Simon, was about a year old, Simon Fraser Sr. joined the Loyalist forces and obtained a commission under General John Burgoyne. Apparently it was a captain's commission because in the troops under Colonel Baum at Bennington there is listed a "Captain Fraser's light company" amounting to fifty men. The following reference to Colonel Baum's detachment occurs in the Burgoyne despatches:[3]

"His Excy. Lt. Genl. Burgoyne sent out a Detachment under Command of Colonel Baum, who was to have the following troops with him viz.:

Brunswick Dragoons	150
Capt. Fraser's light company	50
Peter's Provincial Corps	150
Provincial and Canadian Volunteers	56
Indians	100
	506

Governor Skeen was also sent with the Detachment from whose suppose(d) knowledge of the Country, and Influence amongst the Inhabitants much was expected."

There is no need to retell the story of the Battle of Bennington. "Governor Skeen" was utterly incompetent and led Colonel Baum and his troops into a trap. The following passage from Burgoyne's despatch of August 20, 1777, gives the British general's version of what happened. It should be noted that Burgoyne does not here mention Skeen (or Skene, the name is spelled variously) by name, but there is no mistaking his identity.

"It appears that Lieutenant-Colonel Baum, not having been able to complete his march undiscovered, was joined at a place called Sancoix Mill, about four miles short of Bennington, by many people professing themselves to be Loyal-

1. The "Scottish Armada" was really the ship "Hector" which in 1773 brought two hundred Highlanders to Pictou County, Nova Scotia. From Simon Fraser's statement quoted above, it is evident that the "Pearl" also brought many Highlanders to America.

2. Howay and Schofield, *British Columbia* (Vancouver 1914), I. 240.

3. Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa, Q Series, Vol. 14, p. 298.

ists. A provincial gentleman of confidence who had been sent with the detachment as knowing the country and character of the inhabitants, was so incautious as to leave at liberty such as took the oath of allegiance.

"His credulity and their profligacy caused the first misfortune. Colonel Baum was induced to proceed without sufficient knowledge of the ground. His design was betrayed; the men who had taken the oaths were the first to fire upon him: he was attacked on all sides. He showed great personal courage, but was overpowered by numbers."

This statement by Burgoyne does not do justice to the prowess of John Stark and his New Hampshire levies. Stark attacked Baum on August 16, 1777, and after what the American commander described as the hottest action of his life—he had fought at the Plains of Abraham and at Bunker Hill—the New Englanders carried the British breastwork and "took two pieces of brass cannon with a number of prisoners."[4] It is to be inferred from Simon Fraser's diary that his father was among the prisoners taken, although Sir Charles Lucas definitely says that "some of the British contingent with their commander, Captain Frazer escaped."[5]

After the war Mrs. Fraser and her family were brought to Coteau du Lacs in Canada by her brother William.[6] William remained at Coteau du Lacs but his brother Angus took Simon Fraser's mother and family on to the new Loyalist settlements which were springing up along the St. Lawrence. From the Lunenburg Land Book it is evident that Angus Fraser took up land in Cornwall Township. He obtained 100 acres and Lieutenant William Fraser received 300 acres in the "fourth concession" of that township.[7] The location of these lots was near the village of St. Andrews (West), about eight miles north, north-west of the town of Cornwall, On-

4. Stark's statement as quoted in Hudleston, *Gentleman Johnny Burgoyne*, (New York, 1927 reprint) 170.

5. Lucas, *A History of Canada, 1763-1812*, (Oxford, 1909) 171.

6. Coteau du Lacs, or Coteau du Lac, is in Soulanges County, Quebec. Soulanges is one of the two counties of the Province of Quebec which lie south of the Ottawa River, in the angle formed by the junction of the St. Lawrence and the Ottawa.

7. Lands under certificate of Location, Districts of Mecklenburg and Lunenburg, 1790. (MS in Public Archives of Canada) The entry runs as follows: "Lieut. Wm. Fraser, Angus Fraser, Lots 20 and 21. Wm. Fraser 300 acres; Angus Fraser 100 acres —1-2 lot 21, 4th Concession on North side of Middle Branch of the Rivière aux Raisins."

tario.[8] There Simon Fraser received his early education, although he seems also to have gone to school in Montreal.

At the age of sixteen in 1792 Simon Fraser joined the service of the North West Company. According to Howay and Scholefield it was the influence of his uncle John Fraser who was a judge in Lower Canada, which procured for young Simon a place among the North West Company clerks.[9]

Little is known about the early career of Simon Fraser in the fur trade. Matters are further complicated by the fact that there seem at this time to have been two Simon Frasers in the service of the North West Company. There are papers in the Library of St. Sulpice, Montreal, which evidently refer to the other Simon Fraser who seems to have been older than our Simon. Among the Highland clans certain christian names were commonly given, Alexander among the MacKenzie's, Norman among the McLeod's and Simon among the Fraser's. The existence of two Simon Frasers in the service, although not finally proved, seems now to be very probable.[10] In the references which follow it is practically impossible to separate the two Simon Frasers. William McGillivray in his journal of 1793 may be referring to the other Simon Fraser.

---

8. There are two villages named St. Andrews, in fairly close proximity. The one mentioned here is St. Andrews (West) in the Province of Ontario: the other St. Andrews (East) is on the south bank of the Ottawa River between Ottawa and Montreal in the Province of Quebec. Howay and Scholefield, op. cit., I, 249 claim that Mrs. Fraser "at that time in very straightened circumstances moved to Canada, eventually settling at St. Andrews near the Ottawa." St. Andrews (West) is much nearer the St. Lawrence than the Ottawa. The division of Canada into the provinces of Upper and Lower Canada (Ontario and Quebec) did not take place until 1791, six or seven years after Mrs. Fraser's arrival in Canada.

9. In a despatch dated, Quebec, Oct. 15, 1779, Sir Guy Carleton refers to the dismissal of certain Judges including a Judge Fraser. (Q Series, Vol. 14, p. 267). "Mr. Fraser's case is very different, more advanced in Life, with a Family to support, having thrown himself out of a different Profession, has administered Justice in the Province from the Conquest, and was a Judge of the Common Pleas at Montreal from the first Establishment of Civil Courts, without Reproach, I believe, from any honest man, and good Subject, either as a Gentleman or a Magistrate: now turned out. He must be reduced to no small Distress, and purposes going Home on this account." If this Judge Fraser was Simon's uncle it is evident that he was reinstated since Simon did not enter the North West Company's service until 1792.

10. Mr. J. N. Wallace in his book, *The Wintering Partners on Peace River from the Earliest Records to the Union in 1821, with a Summary of the Dunvegan Journal, 1806*, (Ottawa 1929) p. 66, contends that either it cannot be said that Simon Fraser, the explorer, joined the North West Company at the age of sixteen, or that there must have been two individuals of that name, both of considerable standing in the fur trade. In his review (*Canadian Historical Review*, X, 266) Father Morice adds the following comment: "The reviewer greets that remark with all the greater satisfaction as he was himself, while preparing his *History of the Northern Interior of British Columbia*, confronted by the same difficulties which now prompt such a bold assertion on the part of Mr. Wallace. The fact is that it is hard to reconcile the importance of the role played by S. Fraser with the extreme youth that must have been his, if all that is ascribed to him is predicted of the same individual who was born in 1776 and died in 1862." Judge F. W. Howay is my informant regarding the papers in the Library of St. Sulpice, Montreal.

During the winter of 1792-93 Simon Fraser was at Reindeer Lake (Lac des Cariboux) in the Churchill or English River district. We get the following information about him from the journal of William McGillivray (entry for February 24, 1793).

"Mr. Alexander Fraser and Beaudril arrived from Lac la Ronge with the Coyonew's son for their Guide. Mr. Simon Fraser's Letter is dated the 3d Jan—he had then seen but few of his Indians, so could form no Judgment of the Returns. There are however a great number of Chipewayans (tho' not so many as was supposed) and if they work any ways well—the 3 Canoes will be pretty heavy—Lac des Caribou is not better than usual in the fishing way but with a Fall fishery and some they daily take they make shift to live—Mr. Fraser had not yet heard from Rat River. I'm apprehensive that place will turn out but poorly this year as a good many of the Indians are at Lac la Ronge—of this last place I have great hopes—Versailles sends me word there will be nothing remaining for the summer. Of Course I may expect at least 50 packs."

On March 1, 1793 William McGillivray wrote to Simon Fraser asking him "to send a canoe if possible in the Spring early to the Detroit of the English Lake—to build some Hut there to receive the Provisions from F(ort) des Prairies where Mr. Shaw is to send them—and bring out his remaining Goods to Fort des Traites—as some of them will be wanted for Lac la Ronge."[11] This order, issued by McGillivray to Fraser, resulted in the building of the first fort of the North West Company at Cumberland House.[12]

Simon Fraser arrived from Fort des Traites on June 5, 1793, with thirty packs of goods from Lac des Cariboux. His total yield for the season was seventy-nine packs and eight kegs of castoreum. Fraser sent off a canoe to build the hut on English Lake. This little establishment, McGillivray joyously adds, "will somewhat curb the English People at Cumberland House, at any rate it will prevent them getting any provisions from our Indians to the Northward which used to be of much use to them."

11. Journal of William McGillivray. (Masson Papers, Canadian Archives.)
12. Professor Morton, of the University of Saskatchewan, is my informant.

McGillivray set out for Grand Portage and on June 14 arrived at The Pas. Simon Fraser seems to have been accompanying him. At The Pas McGillivray found Shaw waiting—he had been there fourteen days—and after distributing three bags of pemmican apiece to the heavily laden canoes McGillivray and his party left them behind and started out for the depot in two light canoes.

Our next reference to Simon Fraser is in 1795 when he wintered at Lac la Ronge.[13] In 1797 he was agent at Grand Portage.[14] Two years later, in 1799 Fraser is listed as a clerk in the Athabaska Department.[15] Three years later in 1802 at the early age of twenty-six Simon Fraser was admitted to the rank of partner or *bourgeois* in the North West Company. He had worked hard during his ten years as clerk, but fur traders were not usually so fortunate in obtaining such recognition while still under thirty. In 1804 Fraser was at Fort Liard in the Athabaska Department. Simon McTavish, "le Marquis," died in July of that year and his decease led to the reunion of the X Y Company with the Nor-Westers. On November 5, 1804, an agreement was signed between the former rivals who then designated themselves as the Old and the New North West Companies. Simon Fraser was not present on this occasion and his signature was affixed by his attorneys.

The reunion of the companies led to a farther advance westward. The Rocky Mountains had been crossed by Alexander MacKenzie in 1793 on his famous journey to the Pacific Coast. James Finlay in 1797 ascended Peace River and found the branch which now bears his name. He also examined the Parsnip or southern branch of the Peace but did not find Pack River or McLeod's Lake. But no attempt was made to extend the fur trade beyond the Rockies. Posts were built on Peace River to the east of the mountains. Now when the competition of the X Ys was removed the Nor-Westers were free to tap the fur resources of what Simon Fraser was to name New Caledonia.

---

13. Davidson, G. C., *The North West Company*, p. 113 note 124.

14. *Ibid.* One would suggest that our Simon Fraser was rather young to be agent for the North West Company at the depot. Very probably it was the other Simon Fraser.

15. Masson, *Les Bourgeois de la Compagnie du Nord Ouest.* (Quebec, 1889) I, 61. His wages are given as 1200 livres, Grand Portage currency, or £100.

It is often stated that the expedition of Lewis and Clark, sent out by President Jefferson in 1804, was responsible for the resolve of the Nor-Westers that Simon Fraser should cross the Rockies in 1805. This is on the whole unlikely.[16] Lewis and Clark came to the Columbia by the Snake River and their wintering place at Fort Clatsop was hundreds of miles to the south of New Caledonia. To be sure the general confusion which then existed as to the course of the Columbia River and the identification of the upper waters of the Fraser —or as it was called Tacoutche Tesse—with the Columbia might have influenced the Nor-Westers to send Fraser across the mountains, but it is clear from Fraser's journal of 1806 that he was attempting to open up new avenues for the fur trade.

In the spring of 1805 James McDougall crossed the mountains, ascended the Parsnip and found his way to McLeod Lake. Then he pushed on farther and came to Carrier Lake, fifteen miles east of Stuart Lake. He was now in the land of the Carrier Indians and had almost reached the heart of New Caledonia.

Obedient to orders Fraser in August, 1805, left Fort William and proceeded to Peace River. There at Rocky Mountain Portage Fraser constructed a post usually termed Rocky Mountain House.[17] Leaving two clerks and twelve servants at the new post Fraser pushed on up the Peace to the Parsnip and then by Pack River to McLeod Lake. There he founded another fort which we know now as Fort McLeod but which for years was called McLeod's Lake. The lake was named by Fraser in honour of his friend Archibald Norman McLeod of the North West Company. It has been claimed by Hubert Howe Bancroft in his *History of the North West Coast* that Fort McLeod was built by James McDougall, probably at the orders of Fraser or John Stuart who accompanied

16. This is Judge F. W. Howay's opinion. *Cf. British Columbia, The Making of a Province*, (Toronto, 1928) 58.

17. This was not the first Rocky Mountain House or Rocky Mountain Fort on Peace River. There was a post named Rocky Mountain Fort on that river during the winter of 1799-1800. The journal of that post is to be found among the Masson Papers in the Canadian Archives. Fraser's fort was also called Rocky Mountain Portage. According to Dean R. W. Brock of the University of British Columbia the proper name of the portage is Portage of the Mountain of the Rocks. It is to the east of the mountains.

Fraser.[18] The point is, however, not very important, and as Father Morice states most definitely[19] that Fraser founded the post it is well not to waste time in further discussion.

Fraser left three men at McLeod's Lake under command of La Malice a French Canadian who unfortunately turned out to be utterly untrustworthy. Then Fraser returned to the east of the mountains and on December 20, 1805, accompanied by James McDougall started off from Rocky Mountain House to Dunvegan, the most important post on Peace River. He left John Stuart behind with orders "to get a chimney built in his bedroom, likewise to get wood sawed for a table and cupboard."[20] Fraser and McDougall arrived back from Dunvegan on January 18, 1806.

On January 28, 1806 Fraser sent McDougall to McLeod Lake with supplies for La Malice who was thought to be still in charge of the post. McDougall and his men arrived to find the post deserted. La Malice later turned up at Rocky Mountain House with the excuse that his men were so lazy that he could get no work out of them at all.

Pushing on from McLeod Lake, McDougall reached Stuart Lake at the site of the present Fort St. James. He was the first white man to view that beautiful sheet of water. Carving an inscription on one of the trees he claimed the territory in the name of the North West Company. Meeting one of the Stuart Lake Indians he presented him with some red cloth, thus hoping to secure his goodwill when the white men arrived in larger numbers later.

Fraser was now planning an expedition to take possession of the fur trading territory to the west of the mountains. On April 27, 1806 Archibald McGillivray arrived from the east to relieve Fraser at Rocky Mountain House and on May 20 the expedition started under the command of Simon Fraser and John Stuart.[21] It was a hard journey and Fraser,

---

18. H. H. Bancroft, *History of the North West Coast*, (San Francisco, 1884) Vol. II, 88-9, note 3.

19. Rev. A. G. Morice, *op. cit.*, p. 54

20. *Journal of John Stuart at the Rocky Mountains*, (MS. in the Archives of British Columbia, Victoria, B. C.) entry for December 20, 1805. Transcripts of this journal are in the Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa, and the Bancroft Library, University of California. There is a photostat copy in the University of British Columbia Library. H. H. Bancroft, *op. cit.* quotes freely from this journal.

21. The details of this journey are fully given in Fraser's 1806 Journal. Transcript in the Bancroft Library. This journal has been published in the 1929 Report of the Public Archives of Canada.

as Sir Alexander MacKenzie before him, went up to the sources of the Parsnip and reached the Fraser by way of the Bad River instead of finding the easier route by Crooked River and over Giscome Portage. After many adventures the explorers reached Stuart Lake on July 26, 1806. Father Morice has drawn a graphic word-picture of the arrival of the white men based upon the traditional account of the Stuart Lake Indians, who were of course members of the Carrier tribe. The natives received Fraser and Stuart hospitality and trading began at once.

A post was founded on Stuart Lake and another a little later on Fraser Lake. The North West Company had secured a foothold in New Caledonia. It was at this time that Simon Fraser bestowed on that beautiful region of mountains, lakes and rivers the name of New Caledonia. Highland Scot as he was, he had never forgotten his mother's tale of the "land of brown heath and shaggy wood" and being struck by the similarity of the scenery of the two regions he gave to this new fur trading empire west of the Rockies the poetical name which it was to bear until 1858. The boundaries of New Caledonia were never very definite. It was shut in between the Rockies on the east and the coast Range on the west but to the north and south there were no natural geographical lines.

In the autumn of 1807 reinforcements arrived and Fraser founded still another post—Fort George, near Prince George, B. C.—at the confluence of the Fraser and the Nechako. This post was intended in part to be a base for the next great venture, the descent of the Great River which MacKenzie had termed "Tacoutche Tesse" and which was then thought to be a northern branch of the Columbia.

At the end of May 1808 Simon Fraser left Fort George with a party of twenty-four in four canoes to explore the river.[22] John Stuart and Jules Maurice Quesnel were his

22. The original manuscript of Simon Fraser's 1808 journal is in the Toronto Reference Library. It is entitled "Journal of a voyage from the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific Ocean. Performed in the year 1808—" and consists of fifty-five folio pages, carefully numbered. The manuscript, which was originally written in a clear and neat hand has been revised for publication by a second hand, probably that of Roderick MacKenzie of Terrehonne, cousin of Sir Alexander MacKenzie and historian of the North West Company. Some notes have been added by Senator L. R. Masson who in 1889 published the journal in the first volume of his *Les Bourgeois de la Compagnie du Nord-Ouest*, (pp. 155-221). Masson has made some slight changes in the text, has omitted certain passages and has occasionally corrected Fraser's errors in French, but

lieutenants; the canoes were manned by nineteen hardy voyageurs and two Indians. The first day they shot the Fort George Canyon without mishap and the day after they encountered the Cottonwood Canyon where they lightened the canoes and ran them down the rapids. The natives warned them to send word ahead that they were coming, else they might meet with opposition, but if the Indians heard of their approach they would treat them kindly. But the dangers ahead were too great and the white men had better give up their attempt to reach the sea.

Fraser stoutly refused to give up his enterprise and pressed on. It was heavy going. The river was in flood; in some places the level was raised twenty feet and the canoes encountered waves eight feet high. How the frail craft ever weathered the rapids was a mystery. At one place Fraser and his men on shore rescued their companions who had managed by good luck to escape from a whirlpool when their canoe landed against a projecting rock. Cutting steps in a steep bank with their daggers Fraser and his party managed to get a line down to the front of the canoe. Some of the canoemen climbed up the rope and hauled up the canoe; others supported it upon their arms. Their lives, Fraser tells us, hung by a thread as the breaking of the rope or a single false step might have hurled them all into Eternity.

On Friday June 9 the travellers encountered the terrible *rapide couvert* one of the worst canyons on the upper Fraser. It was a thrilling experience. Fraser thus described it:[28]

---

in the main he has published the text as he found it in its amended form. The citations given on the next pages are from Masson's text.

In the Bancroft Collection (Series C. No. 17) there is a fragmentary journal covering the period May 30 to June 16, 1808. It is much fuller than the Toronto MS. and is also rougher in style. In its form it is similar to Fraser's Letters from the Rocky Mountains (Bancroft Collection, Series C. No. 19). It lacks entirely the fine writing of the Toronto MS., even in its unrevised form. Descriptions of the course are given in abbreviations which recall the mathematical shorthand employed by David Thompson, but the narrative of these twelve days is more detailed than in the longer MS. Bancroft used this transcript in writing his description of Fraser's journey down the river (cf. *North West Coast* V. II, 113-119, and especially note 1 on pp. 118-119) and it left him in doubt as to whether Fraser ever reached the mouth of the river or not. It is evident that Bancroft did not have access to the Toronto MS. which states clearly (p. 24) that Fraser had reached the sea. "At last we came in sight of a guink or bay of the sea: this the Indians called *Pas-hil-roe*. It runs in a S.W. and N.E. direction. In this bay are several high and rocky islands whose summits were covered with snow. On the right shore we noticed a village called by the Natives Misquinme: we directed our course towards it."

My thanks are due to Dr. George H. Locke, Chief Librarian of the Toronto Public Library who most kindly allowed me to use Fraser's journal of 1808 to have a photostatic reproduction made of it.

28. Masson, *Bourgeois*, Vol. I., p. 170-171. Fraser's MS. journal, p. 12. Fraser originally wrote "escape from perdition." This was corrected to "destruction." Masson added the word "total."

"Here the channel contracts to about forty yards and is enclosed by two precipices of immense height which, bending towards each other, make it narrower above than below. The water which rolls down this extraordinary passage in tumultuous waves and with great velocity had a frightful appearance. However, it being absolutely impossible to carry the canoes by land, all hands without hesitation embarked as it were *à corps perdu*[24] upon the mercy of this awful tide. Once engaged, the die was cast, our great difficulty consisted in keeping the canoes within the medium or *fil d'eau*,[25] that is, clear of the precipice on one side and from the gulfs formed by the waves on the other. 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 gazing at each other in silent congratulation at our narrow escape from total destruction."

Such risks were foolhardy and the next day the canoes were left behind and the explorers set out on foot. On June 15 they came to Lillooet[26] where they found a fortified Indian village, one hundred feet long, twenty-four feet wide, surrounded by a palisade eighteen feet high. Fraser on this occasion had to shake hands with more than a hundred Indians. At Lytton on June 9 there were over twelve hundred Indians assembled and Fraser had to shake hands with them all and in addition listen to long harangues of which he could understand but little. The friendly Lillooets provided Fraser and his companions with canoes and the travellers started once more for the sea. At Lytton, or Camchin as the natives called it, Fraser and his party crossed a large river which Fraser named the Thompson in honor of the great astronomer David Thompson whom he thought was "established upon the source of it."[27]

Soon they reached the fearsome Big Canyon and abandoning the canoes made their way along the cliffs by means

24. *à corps perdu*—headlong, desperately.
25. *fil d'eau*—literally, thread of water, i.e., centre of current.
26. I have attempted to give the modern names of these villages as being more intelligible than Fraser's guesses at the Indian names.
27. Fraser was mistaken. David Thompson never saw the Thompson River.

of Indian trails. It was the most terrific country which Fraser had yet encountered. Of it he writes:[28]

"It is so wild that I cannot find words to describe our situation at times. We have to pass where no human being should venture; yet in those places there is a regular foot-path impressed or rather indented upon the very rocks by frequent travelling. Besides this, steps which are formed like a ladder or the shrouds of a ship, by poles hanging to one another and crossed at certain distances with twigs, the whole suspended from the top to the foot of immense precipices and fastened at both extremities to stones and trees, furnish a safe and convenient passage to the Natives; but we, who had not the advantage of their education and experience, were often in imminent danger when obliged to follow their example."

At Spuzzum on June 27 Fraser was entertained most hospitably with "fresh salmon, boiled, green and dried berries, oil and onions." The natives along this part of the river made blankets from the wool of mountain goats and also from dog's hair. Some of the dogs had been recently shorn.

Fraser's difficulties with the river were now nearly over but his troubles with the Indians only beginning. He got to smooth water when he passed Yale but near the site of New Westminster he met the warlike Cowichans who were none too friendly. He was much interested in an Indian community house, six hundred and forty feet long, sixty feet broad and eighteen feet high. The entrance was through an opening in one of the front posts or pillars.

On July 2 the bold explorer reached Musqueam at the mouth of the north arm of Fraser River. In front of him lay the Strait of Georgia and he could see the distant islands which guarded the way to the open ocean. If he could only cross to them and reach the Pacific! But it was not to be. He landed at the Indian village and spent an hour examining it, being especially interested in what he thought was a native fort. It was in reality an enormous community house, fifteen hundred feet long and ninety feet wide. When he returned to his canoes he found that they had been left high and dry by

28. Masson, op. cit. I, 190-191. Fraser MS, p. 29. It had been hard going ever since June 21 when one of the canoes was wrecked and a voyageur Dulaire narrowly escaped drowning. On June 26 they abandoned the canoes. The ladder paths were on Jacob's Ladder Bluff, five or six miles below Boston Bar on the right bank of the river.

the ebbing tide. The Musqueam Indians saw their opportunity and came on "howling like so many wolves and brandishing their war-clubs." By heroic exertions the white men launched their canoes in the nick of time and headed up stream. Fraser managed to take a hurried observation and found that the latitude was as near as he could judge it 49°. The mouth of the Columbia is 46°20'. He notes this in his journal and adds rather bitterly. "The river therefore is not the Columbia! If I had been convinced of this when I left my canoes, I would certainly have returned."[29]

The journey up the river though dangerous was safely accomplished. The coast Indians pursued Fraser for some distance but he managed to escape. Some of the men threatened to desert, but Fraser made each of the party swear an oath that he would sooner perish than forsake in distress any of the crew during the voyage. Fortunately the season of high water was nearly over and on the upper reaches of the river the dangers were not so great. The friendly Indians whom they had met on the way down assisted them and at length Fraser and his bold companions reached Fort George on August 6, 1808.[30]

As a feat of heroism and exploration Fraser's journey ranks high. He had gone down the Great River to its mouth and had returned without the loss of one man. But he had not found the Columbia. The navigation of the river was too dangerous and most of the country traversed was not rich in furs. The coast Indians were definitely hostile. So it was that the Nor-Westers made no attempts to found forts on the lower Fraser.

Simon Fraser did not remain long at Fort George. He crossed the mountains and was at Fort Chipewyan on Lake Athabaska in September. Daniel Williams Harmon who met Fraser at Fort Chipewyan gives us the following information in his journal for September 21, 1808.[31]

---

29. Masson, op. cit. I, 203. Fraser MS. p. 33, runs thus: "This River, therefore, is not the Columbia—If I had been convinced of this truth when I left my canoes, I would certainly have returned from thence."

30. For the sake of brevity this portion of Fraser's journey has been dismissed in a paragraph. Full details may be found in Masson, pp. 203-221, or Fraser's MS. pp. 39-53.

31. Harmon, Daniel W., *A Journal of Voyages and Travels in the Interior of North America.* (N. Y. reprint, 1922) 140. It is noteworthy that the number of Fraser's party given by Harmon does not correspond with the usual figure quoted above.

"Mr. Simon Frazer has just returned from the Pacific Ocean. This last spring, accompanied by two other gentlemen, twelve Canadians, and two of the natives, he set out from New Caledonia, on the west side of the Rocky Mountain, on this tour. Mr. Frazer states, that his party met with some ill treatment from the Indians who live along the sea coast, but that they were hospitably received by those who reside farther up the country. The Indians in that quarter, he says, are less scattered than those who live on this side of the Rocky Mountain, and reside, not in tents, but in houses or huts, constructed of wood. He also reports, that the country through which they passed, is far from being well stocked with beavers, or any other kind of animals; and that the natives subsist principally upon fish."

Fraser returned to Rocky Mountain House and wintered there. In May, 1809, he set out for Rainy Lake and on May 16 stopped at Dunvegan where he met Harmon, who duly recorded the event in his journal. That year he was placed in charge of the Athabaska Department. Two years later, in 1811, we hear of him at Red River and then in 1813 in the MacKenzie River Department. But we do not know his movements accurately during these years.

After the affair of Seven Oaks, 1816, Simon Fraser and nine others including Dr. John McLoughlin, Hugh McGillis, Sir Alexander MacKenzie and John McDonald of Garth, were placed on trial at York, now Toronto, on October 30, 1818, in connection with the murder of Governor Semple. No case could be found against them and all were acquitted.

We do not know the date of the retirement of Simon Fraser from the fur trade, but it certainly was before 1821 since his name does not appear among the chief factors and chief traders commissioned by the new Hudson's Bay Company at the time of the union of the two companies.[32] He returned to Canada and married a daughter of Captain Allen McDonnell of Matilda, Upper Canada.[33] According to the late Mr. John Chisholm of Cornwall, Ontario, who had given much study to the later years of Simon Fraser and who dis-

32. A reference to S. Fraser at Lac La Cloche in the English River or Churchill country in November, 1820, is to be found in Davidson, op. cit., Appendix O., 302. This may be our Simon Fraser, but is possibly another person of that name.

33. Masson, op. cit. Esquisse, 103.

tinctly remembered Simon Fraser's youngest daughter, Harriet Fraser, the explorer bought land in Cornwall Township, County of Stormont.[34] He lived for a time in comfortable circumstances but he made an unprofitable investment in a sawmill and his latter days were spent in poverty. He died at St. Andrews, Ontario, on April 19, 1862, aged 86 years and was buried at Ste. Anne de Bellevue, Quebec.

Such was Simon Fraser, a brave, devoted, intrepid explorer and fur trader. He opened up a vast region west of the Rocky Mountains and founded trading posts for the North West Company which greatly strengthened the British hold in Old Oregon. His name has now been given to the great river whose course he traced to the sea. His fame is secure upon the North West Coast.

University of British Columbia. WALTER N. SAGE.

34. According to Mr. Chisholm, Fraser bought two or three properties on the fifth and sixth concessions of Cornwall Township near Harrison's Corners.

HF
5819.1
E79
S2
c.1.

McBride Printing Co., Los Angeles