RETURN

Of a communication addressed by His Excellency the Governor-General of Canada to the Hon. Richard McBride, with reference to His Excellency's visit to the Province of British Columbia in the year 1908.

RICHARD McBRIDE,
Premier.

Premier's Office,
February 8th, 1909.

Ottawa, October 18th, 1908.

Dear Mr. McBride,—

I have just returned to Ottawa from my trip to the West, and my first letter must be one of thanks to you for the gift from your beautiful Province of one of the most delightful holidays I have ever enjoyed, since I first began to enjoy holidays, nearly fifty years ago.

My first week in British Columbia was spent in visiting various fruit farms at Grand Forks, Keremeos, Penticton, Summerland, Kelowna, Coldstream, the valley between Penticton and the boundary, and the Kootenays.

Thanks to the kind arrangements made for me by the C. P. R., who were good enough to place their very comfortable steamers at my disposal, and to the N. W. M. P. horses, which I brought with me, I was able to cover much ground in little time, and in the most enjoyable manner.

Wherever I went I found the same enthusiasm and confidence in the future of the fruit industry. With the necessary irrigation, transportation and labour secured, every yard of that country to which water can be led will be under orchard. If your fruit industry is properly pushed and cared for, your fruit valleys will soon show a larger number of happy, prosperous, wealth-producing, beautiful homes to the square mile than will be found in ten times a larger area in any other part of Canada.

I have travelled much, but I have never seen any district offering in a greater degree a combination of splendid climate, beautiful scenery, rich land and convenient situation.

Your orchard at Penticton was pointed out to me. The view from it on the lovely evening on which I visited it was so peaceful and beautiful that I much envy you the happiness in store for you when you can spare time to live there.

After a week's contemplation of the happy future awaiting your orchard country, I decided to follow the advice of Mr. Oliver, of Proctor, a genuine lover of the mountains, and to try the trail from Kootenay Lake to the Columbia River. He informed me that he had tramped over nearly every valley in southern British Columbia, and that the valleys traversed by this trail were, in his opinion, the most beautiful and interesting of all.

We left Argenta on the morning of October 4th, the trail passing along the edge of a deep and precipitous canyon of great beauty, through a fine cedar forest. We remained for the night in a camp which had been prepared for us, four miles short of the summit. The views from this well timbered and sheltered camp, on a flat in the lap of the mountains, surrounded by snow-covered peaks, were so beautiful that I much regretted I had not time to remain there and explore.

The trail from Argenta to this camp, about 28 miles, was good; some of the bridges, however, require attention, and one long stretch of corduroy contains many rotten planks. I was fortunate in passing my horses over it without either breaking their legs or getting bogged. A trifling expenditure would remedy these defects.

From the summit easterly, down Toby Creek, there are a number of fallen trees across the trail. My nephew, Rex Benson—a boy of 19 and Captain of last year's Eton Cricket XI.—and Mr. Harold Lowther—brother of the Speaker of the British House of Commons—went on ahead with the one axe we had in our outfit, and chopped about 25 trees, which lay across the trail, but the number of trees requiring the axe were more than we could chop, so we unpacked the horses and sent them back, and shouldering our blankets and such food as we required, tramped on; Messrs. Lowther, Benson, Oliver and myself.

If the trail had been opened by the Government this spring, as I had been informed, it was my intention to ride along the trail to the end of the waggon road up Toby Creek, and to have driven thence to Windermere. We were, however, obliged to walk, and this necessitated our camping at Davis Cabin, about half-way between the summit and the head of the waggon road. Again, I found the surroundings of this camp so beautiful that I regretted I could not remain there for days, instead of hours.

Next morning we proceeded on our tramp down the trail till the head of the waggon road was reached at 12.45. Here we found a comfortable but tenantless camp, in which we made ourselves at home, helping ourselves freely to a good meal out of inviting and unprotected stores. Mr. Oliver, accompanied by my nephew, who did not appear to be inconvenienced by the confinement of a pair of long boots so tight that he had not been able to take them off since we left Argenta, then proceeded down the road, hoping to find a "rig" to take the place of the conveyance for which we had telegraphed, but which had not arrived, Mr. Lowther and I resting meanwhile in the comfortable camp which Providence had so kindly provided for us. Soon after their departure the owner of the camp, Mr. Barbour, a packer, with a Canadian of French descent, Caspar L———, arrived, with a pack-train of 17 horses, carrying ore. So far from resenting the occupation of his camp by strangers, he appeared to be genuinely pleased. When I apologised to him for having made ourselves at home in his absence, and for having helped ourselves freely to his food, he replied with a broad smile that we were most welcome; that such was the way of the country; and that he would do the same by us when he struck our camp in our absence.

Mr. Lowther, who is an experienced Montana ranchman, having helped him to unpack and attend to his horses, Mr. Barbour, after providing us with another excellent meal of Toby trout, caught and cooked by the French Canadian, drove us to his ranch, 12 miles down the road, where we were most hospitably entertained by Mrs. Barbour, and where we were met by the "rig" which Mr. Oliver had sent up from Athelmere, and which took us to Windermere, where we found, on our arrival at midnight, excellent accommodation waiting for us at a comfortable hotel. Here I was met by Mr. Hyde Baker in his motor, who drove us to Cranbrook, stopping one night *en route* at Wasa. The road from Windermere to Cranbrook goes through a most beautiful and interesting country the whole way. We made out the distance to be from Argenta to Windermere 70 miles, and from Windermere to Cranbrook 90 miles; total, 160 miles.

I have dictated the above in full detail to you as I understand the newspapers have had sensational reports in big headlines of perils encountered by me in your snowy mountains. There is no truth whatsoever in these statements. I and the other members of my party enjoyed every minute of our walk. We often stopped to admire the beauty of the snowy summits. That was the only hindrance offered by the snow to our progress. The road, the whole way from Argenta to Windermere, was a continuous and delightful surprise to me. I am convinced that if this route were made accessible to tourists, and the steps taken to advertise its attractions, you would bring to this part of your Province a steadily increasing stream of visitors and settlers. I am already considering whether it may not be possible for me to bring Lady Grey and my daughters to a camp at Toby Creek next year. There is nothing that I should enjoy more than to remain there three weeks or a month.

If the Ottawa Parliament prorogues sufficiently early, I hope to visit the Yukon next summer, and I should like to be able on my return to spend a month from, say, September 15th, in a camp on a spot I have selected in Toby Creek Valley. This would not be possible unless the trails are kept open; the expenditure of a few hundred dollars would be sufficient for this purpose.

If I am able to realise this plan I shall hope to receive you as a guest in my camp during my stay. I believe you would agree with me that the scenery between the summit and Windermere is as attractive as can be found in any part of the Rockies. The two magnificent glaciers, seen at a close distance, from the summit of the Argenta-Windermere trail, present, with the beautiful valley of Toby Creek, stretching away into the purple distance of the Rockies, one of the most beautiful views that I have ever seen.

The cedar forests through which the trail passes, from Argenta to the summit, are in themselves well worth seeing, and I sincerely hope it may be possible for your Government to save them from destruction.

I also think that steps should be taken to preserve the forests on both sides of Toby Creek, and would like to suggest for your consideration the desirability of sending your forestry expert to report as to the advisability of establishing a forest reserve from Argenta to the junction of Spring and Toby Creeks, and north and south about 20 miles.

I have been to the Yellowstone Park and do not hesitate to say that the area to which I have referred is more varied and attractive.

During my trip the early October colouring of the upper trees, between the glittering white of a recent snow-flurry on the tops, and the dark forests of the deep valleys below, the singular clearness of the atmosphere, and the reflections of the blue sky and of the mountains in the pools and the lakes, formed a series of pictures which, from an artist's point of view, left nothing to be desired. I was informed by Mr. Oliver, who has tramped through these valleys at all times of the year, that the colouring, though varying each week, is equally beautiful during every week of the year the trail is open. If this is so, and I can readily believe it, you have here an opportunity which seldom falls to the lot of any Government.

I understand my party is the first pleasure party which has made use of the Argenta-Windermere trail. I am confident that if this trail is made known and accessible to tourists, it will be made use of each year by an increasing number of people in search of rest, health, beauty and recreation, viz.: artists, sportsmen, botanists, geologists, forest lovers and mountaineers. To secure this, the first necessity would appear to be the taking of the necessary steps to prevent the trees from being cut or burned. It would also be desirable to prohibit the killing of all birds and any but dangerous, destructive animals, such as mountain lions and silver-tips; so that this area might combine the purposes of a Game Preserve as well as of a National Park. It would be an additional attraction if bear and herds of deer could be seen along the park-like bottoms and on the hillsides, and if the bird life could also be increased. At my camp at Davis Cabin I saw two birds of as pretty a plumage as I have ever seen in any part of the world, and of the existence of which I was formerly unaware. I believe they are camp scavengers, and the friends and companions of solitary prospectors. These and all other birds, the rarity of which is the one disappointment of your beautiful B. C. forests, should be carefully preserved.

I sincerely hope you may be able to make this area into a National Park. A log chalet, four miles on each side of the summit, for cooking and dining, surrounded by a number of single and two-bed huts and tepees, where parties could keep their privacy while getting their meals at the central chalet, could be built at trifling cost, and these arrangements repeated at intervals on the Toby Creek slope. Mr. Oliver believes they could be made even profitable from the start.

Now I know how difficult it is for Prime Ministers, however powerful, to obtain appropriations for a new purpose, but I am so convinced that the establishment of a National Park in this district would be of benefit to the world in general and to British Columbia in particular, that I am anxious to help you in any way I can to get this done. I think that perhaps the best way in which I can help you is if I settle now to make a camp there next year, and I am accordingly instructing Mr. Oliver to make ready for me, by September 1st next, a camp on a spot I have selected, at a cost not to exceed $500; provided, of course, that the trails are opened and that your Government will secure me the exclusive right for the summer to the occupation of about 50 acres.

I will ask you to regard this action as my contribution towards the establishment of a National Park. From this and other camps on Toby Creek fresh expeditions could be made every day for a long period. I am informed that there is within a day's journey from this camp an immense glacial ice-fall, from which huge blocks of ice, during the summer months, go thundering down over great precipices at frequent intervals all day. There are other glaciers, innumerable unscaled but scaleable peaks, wonderful canyons, hot springs, etc., which can be visited from these camps.

I hesitate to add to the length of this letter, but in view of the recent disastrous losses your Province has sustained through forest fires, I would like to ask whether you do not think that it would be to the public advantage to make the area to which I have referred interesting to tourists, not only from a scenic point of view, but also as an object lesson in forestry?

I am under the impression that if the forests on the trail from Argenta to Windermere were administered on up-to-date, scientific and profit-making principles, you would make more than enough to pay for the maintenance of your road, the salaries of yonr rangers, and the

interest on the sum you might receive on their sale. But perhaps this timber is already sold? I do not know whether your laws enable you to expropriate timber limits to make a National Park, but if not, do you not think it would be desirable to enact such legislation as would give the Executive the necessary power?

Barbour, the packer, informed me that the company owning the timber limits on the Windermere side of the summit does not contemplate any lumbering along Toby Creek next year. What the position on the Argenta side is I do not know; but if, as I suspect, the Province has sold the timber limits, I would ask could not steps be taken to prevent any lumbering along the line of trail until you have the time to look into the desirability of securing these forests from destruction? It would be ten thousand pities if the axes were this winter to destroy one of the most attractive portions of the trail.

I am sorry to say that at the lower end of the Toby Creek waggon road the timber of a whole mountain side has been destroyed, with the result that there is a huge blot upon an otherwise lovely landscape. This was the work, 20 years ago, of a prospector named Morrison, who fired the hill, from top to bottom, in his anger and disappointment at not finding any paying minerals. The fire overtook him, and he was only saved from the fate he deserved by lying two days in the creek. I am told that he afterwards boasted in public that he had "burned the whole damned country to hell."

Fortunately, the change of sentiment on matters relating to forests is such that no one would make such a boast now with impunity.

If you should find it possible to adopt the suggestion I have made, the contrast between the "Morrison blaze" and the scientifically managed forests adjoining would be a valuable object lesson.

May I further suggest that you should ask the officials whom you may entrust with the duty of reporting to you on the matters referred to in my letter, to put themselves into communication with S. E. Oliver, of Proctor, B. C., who is, I believe, in the position to supply you with all the information you may require.

It is estimated that the tide of tourist travel in Switzerland leaves behind in its wake annually the huge sum of $200,000,000. It is in the power of your people to divert a large portion of this enriching tide from Switzerland to British Columbia.

(Signed) GREY.

VICTORIA B. C.:
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