

The Fraser River Centenary.

The newspapers of the civilized world have been recording in generous space the great pageant in Quebec where the ter-centennial of the founding of Canada has been celebrated. With similar enthusiasm our neighbors in British Columbia are preparing to celebrate the centennial of the discovery of Fraser River. The following is taken from the Daily Times, of Victoria, British Columbia, of June 6, 1908:

A hundred years ago last month, Simon Fraser, the intrepid fur-trader and traveler, began his voyage of exploration down the Fraser River from Fort George, a tiny fur-trading post hidden in the heart of the wild region of the Cariboo range of mountains. Fraser, it is curious to note, began his journey under a misapprehension as to the identity of the river he was about to explore. It had been known for some time that a great river emptied itself into the Pacific about the latitude of the Columbia, the mouth of which river was finally discovered by Bruno Heceta in 1775. The estuary of the Fraser was not discovered by Galiano until some seventeen years later. In 1793 Alexander Mackenzie discovered and traversed the upper waters of the Fraser, which he mistook for and reported as the river that poured its waters into the Pacific at the point discovered by Bruno Heceta. It then came about that Fraser, following partly in Mackenzie's footsteps, arrived, via the Peace River country, in the neighbourhood of the upper waters of the Tacouche Tesse, as the Fraser was originally called, in 1805. He explored the district and entered into trade with the local Indians, building several forts, some of which are still used by the fur-traders. Three years later he received orders from the North-West Company, his employers, to explore the Tacouche Tesse to its mouth in the hope of its being navigable, and so saving the expense of overland transport to the western fur country.

The Fraser ranks next in importance to the Columbia among the rivers of the Western coast. It rises near Mount Seikie, in the Rockies, and in its course of 695 miles receives a number of tributaries, of which the Thompson, with its two branches, is the largest. In common with the other British Columbia rivers, the Fraser bends upon itself, flowing northwest from its source and then turning suddenly southward. This is due to the peculiar formation of the Pacific Slope, which consists of gigantic ridges of mountains running approximately north and south. Between the peaks lie long, narrow valleys, through which the great rivers wind until they break away to the sea.

Fraser began his voyage of discovery on May 28, 1808, from Fort George, with nineteen voyageurs, two Indian guides, and Stuart and Quesnel as lieutenants. Some fifteen miles below Fort George they encountered the first of the many awe-inspiring canons through which the river passes. Here one of the canoes was nearly wrecked against the rocky banks. On the following day, the canoes having been lightened, the Cottonwood canon was passed safely, and the party camped at the junction of the Quesnel

with the Fraser, at the spot where the town of Quesnel now stands. During the course of the next day or so Fraser encountered some Indian tribes, who informed him that "the river below was but a succession of falls and cascades, which we would find impossible to pass, not only on account of the difficulties of the channel, but from the extreme ruggedness and the mountainous character of the surrounding country."

By no means disheartened, the explorer procured a guide and pursued his course down stream. He soon found that the Indians had by no means exaggerated the difficulties which the voyage presented; canons, cascades and rapids followed one another in rapid succession, and a score of times a day Fraser and his devoted followers risked their lives in the whirling, rushing waters. Some of the Indians advised Fraser that by making a journey to the eastward beyond the mountains that lined the gorge through which the river flowed he could obtain pleasant traveling to the sea; but he was determined to carry out his mission, and his answer was, as he himself records it, that "Going to the sea by a direct way was not the object of the undertaking; I therefore would not deviate, and continued our route according to my original intention."

Fraser's own description of a canon passed by the expedition near what is now known as Kelly Creek gives a vivid description of the dangers braved and hardships endured: "Here the channel," he says, "contracts to about forty yards, and is enclosed by two precipices of immense height, which, bending toward each other, make it narrower above than below. The water which rolls down this extraordinary passage in tumultuous waves and great velocity has a frightful appearance. However, it being absolutely impossible to carry the canoes by land, all hands without hesitation embarked as it were a corps perdu 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—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. This afternoon the rapids were very bad; two in particular were worse, if possible, than any we had hitherto met with, being a continual series of cascades intercepted with rocks and bounded by precipices and mountains that seemed at times to have no end. I scarcely ever saw anything so dreary and dangerous in any country, and at present, while writing this, whatever way I turn my eyes, mountains upon mountains whose summits are crowned with eternal snow close the gloomy scene."

Shortly after this the exploring party were obliged to continue their journey by land in many cases, but they always hugged the course of the river, and so the indomitable Scotsman was able to carry out the spirit, if not the letter of his instructions. He at length reached Hell Gate, a point in the Big or Black Canon of the Fraser, some twenty miles above Yale, at which an enormous

rock had fallen from the cliffs and all but blocked the path of the waters. Stuart "reported that the navigation was absolutely impracticable," and no way of advance remained but by land. Writing of the difficulties of this portion of the expedition, Fraser says: "We could scarcely make our way even with only our guns. I have been for a long period among the Rocky Mountains, but have never seen anything like this country. It is so wild that I cannot find words to describe our situation at times. We had to pass where no human being should venture; yet in these places there is a regular footpath impressed, or rather indented, upon the very rocks by frequent traveling. 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 had the advantage of their education and experience, were often in imminent danger when obliged to follow their example." By July 1st he had reached tidal water, and found that the tide rose two and one-half feet. At a spot "where the river divides into several channels," which would be a short distance above the City of New Westminster, Fraser began to be much annoyed by Indian tribes, who became very pugnacious. He pushed on, however, until he came in sight of a gulf or bay of the sea called by the Indians "Pas-hil-roe," and landed at a place called "Misquiname," which is now identified as the Musqueam Indian reserve on the north arm of the Fraser. Here, owing to the shortness of his provisions and the hostile attitude of the natives, he was compelled to abandon his purpose of reaching the open sea. It was not until this time that, on making an observation, it dawned upon Fraser that the river he had explored was not the Columbia. Upon this matter his journal says: "The latitude is 49 deg., nearly, while that of the entrance of the Columbia is 46 deg. 20 minutes. The river is therefore not the Columbia; if I had been convinced of this when I left my canoes I would certainly have returned."

Fort George was reached on the return journey on August 6th, so that the descent of the river occupied thirty-five days and the ascent thirty-four days.

Simon Fraser was in his thirty-second year when he led the memorable expedition through all the dangers of this exacting voyage without losing a man. He was born at Bennington, Vermont, but on the outbreak of the Revolution his father joined the Royal standard and served as a captain in Burgoyne's army. The elder Fraser was captured and confined in Albany jail, where he died from the rigorous treatment of his captors. His family then settled in Canada, and Simon, who was the youngest, was sent to Montreal to school. At the age of sixteen he became an articulated clerk of the Northwest Fur Trading Company, and at the time of his exploration in the West had been promoted to the position of a bourgeois, or partner.

The British Columbia government are this year making arrangements to perpetuate his memory by an exhibition of some personal relics of the great explorer.