

DOCUMENTS

DIARY OF WILKES IN THE NORTHWEST

[Continued from Volume XVI., Page 61]

[May, 1841.]

[Added entry.] Latitude observed on shore by circum-meridian lights. 47°. 41'. 15". N. Long. 122°. 41'. 12".

Mt. Baker bore [blank]

" Rainier³² " [blank]³³ [Ms. P. 61.]

11 May

Employed this morning in surveying the Sound just below the Narrows which we finished about 1. o'clock and when the tide served at 3 P.M. I got under weigh with light baffling airs and had difficulty in getting the ships off the shore to which we were very close before we got underweigh but went closer after we weighed however by dint of exertion the boats took us off and we then took a good breeze that brought us to anchor off Nasqually by the help of a strong tide at 8 o'clock when I had the pleasure of an introduction to Capn. McNeill of the Steamer and a partner³⁴ and a Mr. Anderson³⁵ the agent at the Fort of the H.B.Co. they took tea with me and appear desirous of affording us all the assistance in their power at least such was their offer a few days will show the extent of it.

Nothing can be more striking that the beauty of these waters without a shoal or rock or any danger whatever for the whole length of this Internal Navigation the finest in the world accustomed as we are to prize that of our own country.³⁶

I shall now proceed to make many comments to explain the facts of this country but little known, and trust that our endea-

³² See note 30.

³³ Failed to record the bearings.

³⁴ In the published *Narrative*, Volume IV, page 309, Wilkes says: "Captain McNeil is a native of Boston, and was extensively engaged in the Northwest trade. He proved to be a serious competitor with the Hudson Bay Company in their business, and was consequently bought off. He is now a trader in the Company's service, owning stock, and receiving a share of the dividends; to qualify him for which it became necessary for him to become a naturalized British subject." Captain John T. Walbran, in *British Columbia Coast Names*, pages 391-393, gives a similar record but does include the "partnership."

³⁵ Alexander Caulfield Anderson, after years of service with the Hudson's Bay Company as Chief Trader, retired in 1858 and took up his residence near Victoria, B. C.

³⁶ Captain George Vancouver expressed similar enthusiasm for the pristine beauty of Puget Sound. See his *Voyage*, Second Edition, Volume II, pages 117-118.

vors will be successful in accomplishing all that may be deemed advisable in the way of information relative to its capacities for emigrations and settlement. [Continued on opposite page, 60a.]
12. May.

Lt. Alden was this morning transferred to the Porpoise temporarily on being restored to duty.

Orders were given to Mr. Johnstown³⁷ to prepare for an excursion into the Interior. Also to Dr. Pickering, T. W. Waldron of Porpoise, Mr. Brackenridge and the Sergeant.

Lt. Carr Mr. Totten May & Colvos,³⁸ to hold themselves in readiness for surveying duties in the Boat's launch 1st cutter, Ariel & Pilot, also Mr. Sandford & Elliott to join the Porpoise.

Returned the visit of Capn. McNeill and Mr. Anderson the agent of the Fort. It is constructed with Pickets some 20 feet high quadrangular with Bastions at each corner covering less than an acre sufficient however to accommodate the first Establishment but this having become one of their (the H.B.Co.) farms they find it very much contracted, there is indeed as I am informed little or no necessity for a fort or defense now, the Indians few in number some 60 to 100 and perfectly peaceable. the fort is of this shape. [crude drawing of the fort] the bastions thus serve the whole side and the defenders being entirely under cover are enabled to fight against great odds. besides having the bastions the galleries extend all around the pickets I was also shown their garden in which among other things the peas were about 8 inches in height strawberries are in full blossom and will be ripe in a few days. [Ms. P. 61a.]

The gooseberries were in full bloom also but what surprised us most was salad that had gone to seed some 3 feet high & very large, and thrifty.

With Capn. McNeill I visited the Steamer belonging to the Company after looking out for a site for the obsy.³⁹, on the top of the hill. The hill or bluff is about 200 feet above the water, low water mark, immediately under which the ship has one anchor in 12 fathoms the other in 31 although she is not over a cable's length from the shore. This part of Nisqually is about ½ mile back from the base of the hill—opposite to the ship is a fine stream or brook of water affording all the facilities for watering

³⁷ Lieutenant Robert E. Johnson, whose name was correctly given in this day's entry in the published *Narrative*.

³⁸ Passed Midshipman George W. Colvocoressis. The abbreviated form was also used when Colvos Passage was named west of Vashon Island. See Meany's *Origin of Washington Geographic Names*, page 55.

³⁹ Observatory. He had a special personal interest in this branch of the work.

ships, and washing the men's clothes. The Steamer⁴⁰ is about 120 tons, stern mizzen mast and has a double engine of 70 horse power, I was altogether pleased with the arrangement very like the boats in England of her class. I was exceedingly struck with the order of their machinery which at once showed their care of a good & practicable Engineer.

Everyone employed in fitting out boats and other duties appertaining to surveying. [Illegible] & put them in below. [Ms. P. 62.] 13. May.

Brig employed preparing for sea. All hands busily employed preparing boats for surveying. party on shore putting up the observatory.

Capn. McNeil Mr. Anderson & Mr. Wilson⁴¹ attached to the Methodist Mission dined with us also several officers—Recd. from Mr. A. a present of two bullocks he stated that his orders would prevent a constant supply, being limited to that number by the Govr's instructions.

Lt. Johnston endeavoring to purchase horses, no success, less in obtaining guides—fine weather and temperature pleasant. 14th. [May]

Still engaged in outfits—no success in getting horses or guides. Mr. Wilson dined with professors⁴² little or no information about the country is a kind of mechanic lives in a nice log house with a Dr. Richmond & his wife & four fine fat children rosy cheeks quite a novel sight to us. The House is situated on an extensive plain poor gravelly soil—though striking scenery, plain girted by fine woods, and the distant snowy mountains in sight—this night rain. breezes from S. W.

15th. [May]

Morning clear.

Brig sailed⁴³ (for order see letter books), happy to get off, our party:— Bought today 5 horses if so they may be called, Indians difficult to deal with never know when they will sell, require surrender to them before closing a bargain—Landed transit [illegible]⁴⁴ clock put up transit house Boats nearly ready, gave Lt. Johnson notice he must start on Monday by 2 o'clock—also

40 He contents himself with capitalizing the word Steamer without using the name of the famous *Beaver*.

41 W. H. Willson. See Bancroft's *Oregon*, Volume I, pages 155-156, and 188.

42 Meaning the scientists of the Expedition.

43 The Brig *Porpoise* beginning the hydrographic survey from what they called Commencement Bay, the present Tacoma harbor.

44 An abbreviation which may mean siderial.

that the Boats must be ready for departure—by noon same day.
[Ms. P. 62a]

16th May.

Being Sunday nothing was done towards fitting out the parties. a fine pleasant day though cool.

17th May.

Busily employed fitting out the Expeditions⁴⁵ for surveying and the interior the Boats started at 2 P.M. all in good spirits. I have succeeded in getting them off without their grog as I was well satisfied they would enjoy better health.

Got Lt. Johnston off on shore and encamped that he might see his traps and equipment altogether.

Busily employed myself at the observatory in setting up the clock and transit this forenoon [illegible] in this meridian making preparations for my departure for the Columbia River Fort Astoria—the weather fine though cool.

18th May.

Lt. Johnson not off yet fussing fidgeting and delaying our time no crupers, then no packsaddles, then no girths all his time being wasted bargaining for horses. I think his coadjutor Mr. I. W. Waldron would have attended to much better than he did. Still waiting for a guide no end to delay hope to see them off tomorrow, as I do not like the idea of starting before they are all off.

Have been most of the day employed at the observatory taking observations. Fine day & pleasant weather. Intend starting tomorrow morning. Mr. Waldron and Mr. Drayton with me.
[Ms. P. 63.]

19th. [May.]

Left the fort at Nisqually at 10 A.M. Our party consisted of Mr. Waldron Mr. Drayton myself and three servants with a guide(Canadian) and two Indian Boys and together with our baggage horses they amounted to 13 all of them kindly loaned to me by the Company's agent Mr. Anderson in charge of the Fort to whom I feel under many obligations for the trouble he took in fitting us out, if it had not been for his kindness we should have made sorry work of it horses are difficult to be procured the Indians are beyond measure the most provoking fellows to bargain with that I have ever met with, and as your wants or necessities increase, their prices rise in proportion, they are not

⁴⁵ Small-boat expeditions to survey the southern inlets of Puget Sound, the work to be done while he made a journey to the Columbia River.

slow in perceiving your wants, or the dilemma you may be placed in—which they view with becoming sang froid. Mr. Anderson's kindness in the loan of horses placed us beyond these difficulties and I had only to laugh at the perplexities Lt. Johnson was thrown into by the Indians retracting from the bargain he had all but closed with them, requiring more by way of *potlatch* or a gift adding greatly to the price of the horses; the only way to deal with them is to show an utter indifference of manner to obtaining the articles or closing the bargain, they then readily close for fear a competitor may come in and accept. They have little or no confidence in each other and are disposed to rivalry and knock-outs, the chiefs have little or no authority.

Our calvacade was novel and altho the Indians were clothed in worn out European costumes yet their free & easy carriage on horseback with a few ribbons and the cock's feathers stuck in their caps gave them an air of hauteur and self esteem that was not unpleasing [Ms. P. 63a] when viewed from a sufficient distance to hide and render their fittings unseen the management of their horses is truly surprising, and those that a foreigner or pale face would be unable to get off a walk they will mount and proceed with speed without the aid of spur or anything but a small switch. It is amusing to see their manner of whipping a tired nag to full speed when to us it had become all but lifeless. The horses appear to me to have a knowledge of an indian & his cruelties to them. the usual bridle is simply a piece of rope fastened to the under jaw which seems all sufficient for the management of the most refractory horses and so different from the Spanish bit that was ever looked upon as necessary in such cases that one is not a little surprised how they are enabled to overcome them. They practice great cruelty in using their animals & a horse is seldom found that has not a raw back.

The Indians of this country are so much with their horses that one ought in giving their character to separate the two. on his horse he is a man but dismount him, and all his qualities vanish & he becomes the lazy, lounging lout insensible to anything but his own low gambling habits.

In travelling in this country when it becomes necessary to use horses one must lay aside all his feelings relative to means of his conveyance whether on sore backs, jaded horses or those that are lamed and half starved, these will accompany him wherever

he goes my advice to all is to keep away from your horses until they are saddled. [Ms. P. 64.]

Our distance made today was 22 miles mostly in a south direction—at 9 miles passed the Nisqually River by descending a bank of 350 in height almost in some places perpendicular, and we were obliged to walk down it. This led us across a ravine and after having crossed the River 100 yds. wide running a N.N.W. course, with a strong rapid current about 3 feet deep at the ford we again ascended to the prairie level. The Nisqually overflows its banks in the spring and autumn together with all the Rivers which take their rise in the Cascade Mountains—Our route lay through most beautiful park scenery with the prairies here and there breaking through the magnificent pines. Over pr. covered with a carpet of flowers among which was to be found the Lupines camass, sun flowers [blank] & the scarlet [blank]⁴⁶ together with the welcome buttercup of our own fields. about 7 miles of our route lay through the gigantic fine cedar forest and although they are called sapplings, were 6½ feet in diameter and upwards of 200 feet in height. I could not control my astonishment. We encamped at 6 P.M. on a prairie after having crossed the Shutes River which falls into Puget Sound. it is a small stream at this season and will be fordable though when at its height is considered dangerous. Our encamping ground was a beautiful spot and by the large fire we enjoyed our supper exceedingly when alarm was witnessed by us novices in discovering a snake in the tent after it was pitched but this is considered so common an occurrence that I mention it (because I consider it unworthy of notice) as a characteristic of the country our visitor being found only a small garter snake that we paid no attention to the usual visitor being a rattle snake which came but I soon learnt to be on the look out. they are here [Ms. P. 64a] however seldom seen below the mountains the soil there being too wet above the Cascades and at the Dalles they are found in great abundance.

In the morning we found we had been visited by the elk & deer the attraction of the light usually brings them near & oftentimes I am told the hunters are enabled to kill them.
20th May.

We had a good nights rest, and 7 o'clock took our departure exclaiming at the beauty of the Park scenery. It was almost im-

⁴⁶ He left room to fill in these names but failed to do so.

possible to realize our being in a savage & wild country & it but wanted some building country seats to assure us that art not nature had perfected the landscape here. then a beautiful lake was passed with the sward growing luxuriantly to its water edge with deer feeding fearlessly on its margin, with every tint of wild flower growing in profusion.

The soil is shingle and light but would prove good for light and small grain crops, through these Prairies one finds very many *tumuli* some indeed are entirely covered with them, many of the same size, giving them this appearance [drawing] they are conical mounds about 30 feet in diameter & six to 7 in height above the level. being desirous of ascertaining if they contained any relics I visited this called the Grande Prairie with several of my men & had 3 opened but nothing was found in them but at the level of the outward surface a pavement of stones appears in all, they appear to have been formed by the scraping of the surface mould and forming it in heaps or mounds. they are evidently of old formation by a bygone race and no tradition is now extant of them. They are constructed with great regularity & over some [Ms. P. 65] extent of ground some miles whole prairies being occupied by them altho I could get at nothing direct respecting them I was one day told that the medicine man gathered his herbs from them to effect his cures & it struck me that the influence or rather custom of these Medicine Men may be still in vogue though all traditions have been lost, and taking into consideration the influence of the Medicine Men in their tribes it would be a satisfactory explanation to suppose they were used as places where the herbs for the concoction of their cures were grown.

They certainly are not places of burial and not provided by accidental causes they have the marks of savage labour and care and such a labour as a whole Nation had entered into.⁴⁷

At 12 miles we reached the Chickeeles⁴⁸ river the main branch about 200 yds. wide. it empties itself into Grays Harbour on the N.W. coast 30 to 40 miles north of the Columbia River. its course here was S. W. this was just below the junction of two of its branches the Quinous⁴⁹ & [blank] rivers. There we found an

⁴⁷ Geologists have since published many speculations as to the origin of those mounds. The favorite theory is that they resulted from the melting of glacial ice coverings of the area.

⁴⁸ At present spelled Chehalis.

⁴⁹ This name has not persisted. It may have been the Skookum Chuck. Warre and Vavasour in 1845 mentioned in that vicinity the Quinze and Sous rivers. See this *Quarterly*, Volume III, page 151. Wilkes left in his diary a blank space in which he intended to write the name of the next branch.

encampment of about 20 Indians and a more wretched set one scarcely ever laid eyes on—they were preparing for the fishing season, we found the lamprey eel here for the first time it is quite common in the lower rivers—these Indians were dirty squallid & sickly looking living upon a few fish & the Kamass roots a kind of sweet squills that is very abundant on the prairies particularly those that are low subject to overflow by the small creeks—

We remained here to rest our horses & to let them feed on the luxuriant grass for two hours when we again set off & our first feat of horsemanship was to descend a perpendicular bank some 15 or 20 feet high into a small creek 3 feet deep [Ms. P. 65a.] this looked rather alarming but our horses seemed to take it so easy by sliding down on all fours that our fears were soon overcome & we got over safely such novices as we thot were doing a great feat. The soil now changed to a rich unctious clay in a few rods, and the wood became so thick with underbrush it was with both difficulty to horse and rider that we got on. Whilst the former was extricating his legs from the mud holes the latter required all his care and presence of mind to avoid being strangled or torn from his horse this was not all, fallen trees of all sizes, in all directions were to be jumped or hobbled over as best could be done to the exhaustion of our patience and irritation of our tempers. Our kind friends told us the road was good, we found it passable. I trust however my experience may prepare the traveller on this route for meeting with a bad road, If he don't find one he may be thankful that he has escaped an irksome & fatiguing journey. About 12 miles farther we passed over the *Mountain* a hill of about 1500 feet in heighth which was climbed by steps the road having been worn in them by the continual track of the horses, the clay is so slippery that it would be impossible for them to mount this hill without these steps. We encamped at the entrance of the forest having one of the beautiful prairies before us. Our camp was visited by some Indians who after looking at our means of defense & seeing that we had a proper regard for them, sold us some [Ms. P. 66.] fresh salmon & took their departure after bring us a supply of wood for our fire for which we gave them a trifle. We found ourselves truly fatigued as well as our horses and although the night proved rainy we enjoyed our rest exceedingly. In this branch of the Chickees the Quinous salmon are caught in abundance and supply the na-

tives with much of their food. It is navigable for canoes though in places many obstructions exist.

At this encampment Mr. D⁵⁰ found several pieces of cornelian some of a large size of the red colour.

21st [May.]

We left our encampment at 9 o'clock, the weather having cleared off, and the mildness of the day & the freshness of everything around us from the last night's shower added additional beauties to the glowing scenery. Our route lay through alternate prairies & the magnificent forest of tall pines and cedar passing by fords several fine streams of water. The soil excellent the prairies were covered with strawberries inviting one to dismount occasionally. they are our fine field strawberry and certainly in great abundance. There are many plants that excite a feeling of interest in this country as well known friends at home among the number the red honeysuckle which was now in full bloom. After passing an extensive plain called the Kamass of several miles I reached the Company's farm on the Cowlitz occupying an extensive prairie,⁵¹ and covered with luxuriant crops of wheat, and affording a pleasing prospect to the eye with its extensive granaries & shed and the litter of straw showing the product of the last year's crop and the industry of civilisation in the distance on some of the free settlers with their log huts & young orchards attached putting us in mind of our Western [Ms. P. 66a.] States with the exception however of the remains of the conquered forest, here the ground is ready for the plough and nature seems as it were to invite the husbandman to his labour.

(To be continued.)

⁵⁰ One of his companions, Joseph Drayton listed on the muster-roll of the Expedition as Artist.

⁵¹ Usually referred to as Cowlitz Farm Prairie.