

DAVID THOMPSON'S JOURNEYS IN THE SPOKANE COUNTRY

The shortest route by railroad at the present time between Portland, Oregon, and Spokane, Washington, is by the cut-off of the Union Pacific system, which was completed from the Snake River northward about the year 1914. This cut-off crosses Snake River at the mouth of the Palouse River. It is interesting to note that in August, 1811, a little more than one hundred years previous, David Thompson, when on his return journey from Astoria to Spokane House, made use of and left a record of nearly this same line of travel between the Snake and Spokane Rivers, deviating from it because his objective point was lower down the Spokane River.

In the last issue of this Quarterly Mr. Thompson was described as arriving at Spokane House on June 14, 1811. From there he proceeded overland to Kettle Falls on the Columbia River (of which journey his record will be given later), built a canoe there, and voyaged down the River to Astoria, being the first white man to travel that part of the River between Kettle Falls and the mouth of the Yakima River. From that point to the Ocean members of the Lewis and Clark party had preceded him. Returning up the River that summer, Mr. Thompson did not follow the longer route around the "big bend" of the Columbia, but on the morning of August 6 turned up Snake River, and in the afternoon of Thursday, August 8, 1811, landed at the established Indian crossing of the Snake River, namely, at the mouth of the Palouse River. His record of arrival reads: "At the end of course put ashore at the mouth of a small brook and camped, as this is the road to my first Post in the Spokane lands. Here is a village of 50 men; they danced until they were fairly tired and the Chiefs had bawled themselves hoarse. They forced a present of 8 horses on me, and a war garment."

The following summer (1812) John Clarke of the Pacific Fur Company led his party over this same trail, for an account of which see "Adventures on the Columbia River" by Ross Cox. It is also interesting to note that Captain John Mullan in laying out the military road from Fort Walla Walla to Fort Benton used this same Indian crossing at Snake River.

The trail used by David Thompson, therefore, became in later years in part the "Mullan Road," and in greater part the "Colville Road," which was used so heavily and so long in the commercial and

agricultural development of the Colville, Spokane and Big Bend districts of the state of Washington from Walla Walla northward. Mullan and in Vol. 12 of Pacific Railway Reports by Governor Isaac I. Stevens will make this route more clear to the reader.

While at the Indian camp on the Columbia on August 6, Mr. Thompson had dispatched an Indian to Jaco Finlay at Spokane House with instructions that provisions and horses be sent to meet him. But time was pressing and he proceeded to buy horses and started with a hired guide, traveling by night at first. His journal entries of August 9-13, inclusive, are as follows:

[1811]

Aug. 9th

Friday. A fine day, Wind a Gale South. Obsd. for Longde., Time, & Ltde. This Aug. 8, Astronom Day. $118^{\circ} 44'$ W. Latde $46^{\circ} 36'$ N. It was late before the Horses could be collected & I left one they could not find. They said the Chiefs below knew how to talk but not how to act, they declared they did not wish for any return for the present of horses, but that they knew the nature of a Present. I gave each of them Notes for the Horses, to be paid when the Canoes arrive. At 5 P. M. set off & held on up the Brook cutting off the great Pt. till $11\frac{1}{2}$ P. M. when we camped. Co. N. 5 E. $1\frac{1}{2}$ m., Brook at 1 m., crossed end of Co. went up the Banks, Co. N. 20 E. 14 m., last 1 m. along the Brook. The land very rocky & full of rocky hills cut perpend. wherever the rocks show themselves, & exactly the same kind of rocks as along the Columbia, with much fragments in splinters &c. very bad for the Horses & the Soil a sandy fine impalpable Powder which suffocated us with dust & no water to drink to where we camped.

Aug. 10.

Saturday. A fine, cloudy, blowy Day. At $7\frac{1}{4}$ a.m. set off & held on at N. 10 E. 5 m. then crossed a shoal Brook of 6 yds. wide from the East, held on Co. $+2\frac{1}{2}$ m. & baited at $11\frac{1}{2}$ a.m. At 1 p.m. set off & held on say North $2\frac{1}{4}$ m. a Brook came in from the N. Ed. held on up the left Brook & put up at 6 P.M., say Co. North 8 m. The appearance of the country is much the same, tho' somewhat less rude, & there is often a few Aspines, Alders with a very rare Fir along the Brook, much wild Cherry & 3 sorts of currants, one sweet & red, the others yellow acid, red light acid.

Aug. 11

Sunday. A very fine Day, mostly cloudy. At $7\frac{1}{4}$ a.m. set off Co. up the Brook N. 10 E. $2\frac{1}{2}$ m. when we crossed a Rill from the Nwd., we

kept on along a Rill of water in the Spring, now dry North $9\frac{1}{2}$ m. to a little water among some Poplars & Willows, it is a long time since we saw any here, we baited from $\frac{1}{2}$ p.m. to 2.20 p.m. We then went off North 1 m., N. 20 W. $1\frac{1}{2}$ m. to a kind of lead wet Ground, hereabout are Willow Bushes & Woods before us, held on Co. N. 15 E. $6\frac{1}{2}$ m. for the last 2 M. we had a kind of Brook or Ravine on our left, camped at a Pond at $6\frac{1}{2}$ P. M. Killed a Duck our Provisions being fairly done & fasting all day, not seeing the People who were to have met us with Provisions & Horses we were obliged to kill a Mare for food, as our Guide told us we had yet 3 days Journey to go. The Country till 10 a. m. like the past, very rocky & barren, since which it has much mended, & only stony where on wet low Ground, the rest is tolerably well for Grass & the soil appears good, tho parched up for want of Rain, which rarely, or never falls during the Summer Months. At the Camp the Firs are thinly scattered along the kind of Ravine, all the rest is all wide Plain without a Tree, a few Chevrueil Tracks & Dung.

Aug. 12th

Monday. A fine day. At 6.20 a.m. set off, held on along a line of Woods on our (abt. North 1 m. to a Pond of some size, then N. 50 E. 4 m., N. 30 E. 5 m. & stopped at $11\frac{1}{2}$ a. m. to bait the Horses among a few Ponds & good grassy land with thin woods. At 1 p. m. set off & camped at a Rill at $6\frac{3}{4}$ p. m., say Co. N. 30 E. 1 m., N. 10. E. 7 m. across a large Plain, without water, to the Woods of a Brook, we descended the banks, which are high & crossed it abt. N. 10 No. 1 m., then along the Brook of 6 yds \propto N. 10 W. 1 m., here it sank in the ground & we went North $1\frac{1}{2}$ m. & camped at a Rill to which we were guided by a Spokane we met, from whom we got a little dried Salmon.

Aug. 13th.

Tuesday. A very fine day, at $5\frac{1}{2}$ a.m. set off & at $6\frac{1}{2}$ a.m. arrived at the House. Thank God for his Mercy to us on this Journey, found all safe, but Jaco was with the Horses, sent to meet me, late in the evening he arrived. Our Co. was abt. N. W. 3 m., we came faster but our road was always down hill.

Stated in narrative form David Thompson was camped on Friday, August 9, 1811, with a band of Indians of the Sahaptin family (Nez Perces) at the mouth of the Palouse River in Whitman County, Washington. He told these Indians that it was the purpose of the North-West Company to establish a trading post near them, and

purchased horses from them by the use of demand notes upon the Company; this being the first record of commercial paper issued in the Inland Empire. Late that afternoon he set off up the Palouse River (which he called a brook) for a mile or two and then up the steep ridge on the east of the River to the prairie or wheat lands of to-day and across the bend of the River to a late encampment near the present town of Hooper. The railroad and the wagon road at present follow around the bend of the River to the west and north instead of across.

The following day he proceeded across the eastern end of Adams County, north to the present line of the S., P. & S. Ry. and then northeast to Rock Creek about where the Mullan Road used to cross it, and thence up that Creek; his camp seems to have been near the source of the Creek and about five or six miles southeast of Sprague, Lincoln County.

On Sunday, the 11th, he continued northward across Lincoln County into Spokane County and camped for the night somewhere near the line of the Northern Pacific Railway between Cheney and Sprague; and on the following day turned more to the northeast into the vicinity of Medical Lake and on to Deep Creek where that stream sinks on Section 3 of Township 25 north, of Range 41 E. W. M., and then a few miles further to Coulee Creek for the night. The regular trail or road to the lower crossing (Le Prez) of the Spokane River to Colville passed to the west of Medical Lake several miles, but Mr. Thompson kept to the northeast toward Spokane House. The following morning, Tuesday, he found himself within five or six miles from his destination. His clerk, Jaco Finlay, in going to meet him, had evidently followed the trail from Spokane House to the mouth of Latah Creek below the Falls of the Spokane and thence up that Creek southward, and had missed him entirely. T. C. ELLIOTT.