

## **North Thompson River, by Joseph Hunter in S. Fleming: Report on Surveys on the Canadian Pacific Railway up to January, 1877 . Appendix D. pp. 101-104.**

REPORT ON EXPLORATION FROM THE CLEARWATER TO THE NORTH THOMPSON, via BLUE RIVER PASS,  
BY JOSEPH HUNTER

Kamloops, B.C., 9<sup>th</sup> June, 1874.

SIR, - I have the honor to inform you that, as directed by Mr. Fleming's telegram to me of 28<sup>th</sup> April last, to "explore the Clearwater through to North Thompson," I left Kamloops on 2<sup>nd</sup> May, taking with me Charles Williams, Andrew Anderson, C.E. Fortier, besides "Jim" and "Dick," Indians, six weeks' provisions, thirteen mules, and two horses.

I reached the crossing on the North Thompson, six miles below the mouth of Clearwater, on the 5<sup>th</sup>, and the same day, crossed animals and supplies. I decided on taking Mahood's trail from here to Canim or Mahood Lake, thence north-east to the line of last autumn's exploration, following that line to Clearwater. I took this route from having received unfavorable information in regard to the nature of the trail up Clearwater, and the difficulty of crossing the stream from Mahood Lake at a high stage of water.

We were engaged most of the 7<sup>th</sup> in finding Mahood's trail, and in repairing it along the soft ground near the crossing. We started on the morning of the 8<sup>th</sup>, and found the trail very much out of repair. Most of the bridges were either afloat or entirely washed away. Our progress was consequently slower than I expected, and it was not until the evening of the 9<sup>th</sup> that we came in sight of Canim Lake. Next morning, instead of following the trail onward to the soft ground in the valley, I struck east, on good firm ground to Canim River, which I reached half way between Canim and Mahood Lakes. Next day, I followed the river down (on the trail cut by Mahood's party, 1872) to Mahood Lake, with the intention of crossing not far from the head of the lake. I found it impossible to either swim the mules or cross the supplies, the river being too swift and rough. I therefore had a raft constructed, capable of taking seven animals at one load, and, by this means, crossed the head of the lake. We had everything across at dusk on the 12<sup>th</sup>. Once across this lake, I began to suspect, from the appearance of the mountains along the south side, that the exploration of last autumn had not been carried so far eastward as was supposed, and that some other stream must have been mistaken for Clearwater. A certain unmistakable double peak bore from the last camp, (No. 12) eastward of Jarvis's exploration a little east of south. This peak I recognized at once.

Acting, therefore, upon the above supposition, instead of striking N.E. as I had intended, I resolved to follow up a large stream emptying into Mahood Lake about a mile from its head, and evidently running in a S.E. direction. At noon of the third day, 15<sup>th</sup>, we arrived at Camp No. 12, (Jarvis's exploration,) having travelled about twelve miles in a bearing of north 25° west. This mistake could not possibly have been made by anyone who had been along the Mahood Lake Valley, as the mountains on that lake once seen can be easily recognized afterwards.

At Camp 12, (Jarvis's,) I had to stay for a day and a-half, on account of the serious and almost fatal illness of Dick, the Indian.

On the 17<sup>th</sup> we left Camp 12, the barometer indicating 32.80. That day we travelled up the valley of the east branch of River Deception, six miles to my Camp No. 1, 3,500 feet. At three miles we crossed an Indian trail, which Jim informs me leads to Clearwater Lake, and at four miles crossed another well cut out trail, leading also to the head waters of the Clearwater.

From Camp No. 1 to No. 3, about due east, total distance 19 miles, the valley rises gradually to 3,800 feet. The centre in some places is wet and swampy, and generally covered with scrubby black pine, but the hill sides sustain a full growth of the finest timber, Douglas pine, spruce and cedar being the varieties most common.

I had to send the pack train back from Camp No. 3 on account of the absence of feed and the rough nature of the valley, which from here to the summit is covered with volcanic rocks, somewhat similar to the formation near the summit on the Howe Sound Route. In this instance, the surface is not quite so rough and irregular, the rocks are smaller in size, and the volcanic action seems to have been more intense. Dick had another severe attack of illness, and I had to send him back by the train. After leaving a small cache of provisions to fall back upon in case of necessity, I with one white man and an Indian, all well loaded, went ahead. The same day, (20<sup>th</sup>), the Indian deserted us and went back. C. E. Fortier and I took as much of his load as we could, and that day made Camp No. 4; altitude, 4,100; total distance from river Deception, 25 miles. The centre of the valley here is higher than at the sides by about 100 feet and opposite here also a not unfavourable looking valley comes in from the north-east, which at 10 miles up seems to turn well to the eastward, towards Clearwater. Down this valley runs the main stream, and it is just possible that a pretty low pass might be found from the head of this stream to strike Clearwater higher up than where we crossed.

On the 21<sup>st</sup> we had travelled about two miles when we came to the end of the volcanic formation, and noticed the water running eastward. The descent into the valley of Clearwater from this point was rapid. Following down a pretty large stream we came, in five miles, to where it turns southward, and probably falls into the stream from Mahood Lake, not far from its east end.

From the western slope of the Clearwater Valley, a good idea can be formed of the country below and also of the opposite side.

Along the centre of the valley runs a low mountain or back-bone, separating the stream down which we had been travelling from the Clearwater, and terminating about two miles south of our line of travel. On the opposite side, and about due east, the high range of mountains running north and south, in which Raft and Mad Rivers have their sources, seems to terminate or break abruptly, and at its northern limit there seems to be a pass eastward, not lower than 4,500 or 5,000 feet. Bearing North 60° east a favourable looking pass is seen, which seems to suddenly turn westward, and is the only practicable looking pass which could be seen, and is the one which I resolved on taking towards the North Thompson.

We reached camp No. 5—3,250, in nine miles from Camp No. 4 on summit—having descended in that distance 850 feet.

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> we reached Clearwater, in four miles; altitude, 2,500 feet; total distance from River Deception, 38 miles. The travelling today was of the most tedious and difficult description—by a succession of beaches, over piles of fallen timber, across cedar swamps and through tangled thickets of ash, hazel and willow. Clearwater is here a swift shallow stream, 400 feet wide, running a little east of south with high benches on each side.

The result so far is:--

From Camp 12, Jarvis exploration, on River Deception, altitude 3,280 feet eastward to summit, altitude 4,000 feet—27 miles, rise 720 feet.

From summit, at 4,000 feet, to Clearwater, altitude 2,500 feet—13 miles—fall 1,500. The general course being nearly due east, and the ground, so far, being generally hard and firm.

On Saturday, the 23<sup>rd</sup>, we made a raft and attempted to cross the Clearwater, but failed, and it was not till the evening of the 24<sup>th</sup>, after drifting down stream for a considerable distance, that we succeeded in reaching the eastern bank. On 25<sup>th</sup>, travelled north 60° east, in order to strike the valley before alluded to, as seen from the west, but, after travelling six miles, discovered it was only a ravine running into the mountain, and at 3,400 feet, eight miles, had got on the west side of the valley of a stream running south 70° west, and falling into Clearwater, I should judge, about three miles north of the valley of Mahood Lake. The divide from the ravine before spoken of into the valley of the stream which, for convenience, call Murtle River, is not over 3,400 feet, nor between Murtle River and Clearwater, to the south, does any part seem of greater altitude. Camp 8, eight miles from Clearwater, on a course of north 60° east, altitude 3,400 feet.

We kept along the valley of Murtle River up stream, on a course north 80° east, to Camp 9, by a small lake, a mile long by half a mile wide, 15 miles from Clearwater. Altitude 3,700 feet. I could hear the river to the east, and in the evening started towards it, but darkness coming on, I was compelled to return to camp. The valley here is about a mile wide, and the mountains on each side neither high nor rough.

From Camp No. 9 we travelled north 70° east, over almost level ground. In three miles we struck the river at a point where, after tumbling through a canyon for half a mile, it falls 35 feet perpendicularly.

From the head of the canyon to Camp 10, 21/2 miles, total from Clearwater 21 miles—altitude 3,700 feet—the river is from 175 to 200 feet wide. At Camp 10, where it has become a lake, one-fourth of a mile wide, we crossed on a raft, and travelling down a fine wide valley, due east, for five miles, reached a lake at 3,700 feet, the same altitude as Camp 10. I soon discovered that we had crossed an arm of this (Murtle Lake) early in the morning.

Murtle Lake, undoubtedly one of the finest sheets of water in British Columbia, is ten miles in length, north and south, by seven miles in width. It is enclosed on the east by low green hills; on the north the mountains are both high and rugged. On the south, the most important in case a line of railway should come this way, the mountains are steep but not rough, and generally keep well away from the lake, leaving a margin of hard, firm, level ground along the shore. The atmosphere here is thin and transparent; the water of the lake is fresh, clear and deep. Two small streams enter the lake from the east, but the main feeders come from the mountains to the north.

Having crossed by a raft on the 20<sup>th</sup>, we took the valley of the stream further to the south, but soon found it turning south-east, and returned to Camp 12. Here we noticed recent signs of horses, but we searched in vain for any trail to this neighborhood. An old wigwam, a cache, a fishing spear and several paddles were found, showing that Indians must frequently visit here.

On the 31<sup>st</sup> we took stock of our supplies, and discovered that we had just enough left to take us back to our cache, providing no delay took place in re-crossing the Clearwater. With reluctance, I resolved to begin our return next day. As a last attempt, however, I climbed the mountain to an altitude of 5,000 feet, went eastward along the ridge for about eight miles, and there, from a tall tree, could see, about forty miles east, a high range of mountains stretching north and south, which it was impossible for the small stream running in the valley below to drain. I therefore concluded that there must be a divide not far up the valley, and that the high mountains must be on the east side of North Thompson. Could we get there in four days we would be safe, for then we would not be more than a few days travel from a small cache of supplies which left on my first trip up the North Thompson, not far from the mouth of Devil's Canyon; besides, we might meet our pack train, which, in case of spare time, I had ordered up river to meet us. I resolved to make the attempt.

Early on the morning of the 31<sup>st</sup> we left Camp 12 on Murtle Lake and, travelling north 80° east, up a favorable valley for five miles, reached the divide at 3,800 feet; total from the Clearwater 38 miles. Five miles farther on we camped at 3,650 feet. Up to this point (Camp No. 13) there are no great obstacles in the way, at least from Murtle Lake. From Camp 13, however, the mountains begin to close in, and the stream to fall rapidly through a canyon, as much in some places as 75 feet in 200 yards. For five miles this canyon continues, the mountain rising from its edges almost perpendicularly. At five miles from Camp 13 the canyon suddenly widens out into a fine level valley. At the same point, a stream, much larger than that down which we came, comes in from the north-west. Here I first recognized the valley of Blue River, and the stream last referred to as that which I had explored on a former occasion. At seven miles, Camp No. 14, altitude 2,700 feet, we had thus descended, in seven miles, 950 feet. On 2<sup>nd</sup> June, following the river north 75° east, through the flat alluded to in a former report, we crossed the line of the V Division, near peg 1,037, bench mark 423.31, my barometer indicating 2,400, and camped on the North Thompson a quarter mile below the mouth of Blue River, having travelled that day ten miles. Next day at dark we reached the cache of supplies, and on June 4<sup>th</sup> met our pack train and the M division forty miles above Clearwater, Mr. Jarvis having started up that river on 31<sup>st</sup> May. My men, whom he met at the crossing of the Thompson, gave him all the information they could.

From Clearwater to North Thompson we have: -

Clearwater, altitude 2,500 feet; to Camp 14, altitude 2,700 feet, easterly 12 miles; fall, 1,100 feet.

Camp 14, altitude 2,700 feet; to mouth of Blue River, altitude 2,400 feet, 10 miles north-east, fall, 300 feet. Total distance from Clearwater to North Thompson 60 miles.

The weather during the whole trip was very variable, the altitudes are consequently not to be too much relied upon.

After seeing the pack train safely across the Thompson, on the 7<sup>th</sup> instant, I took to a raft by which I reached Kamloops on the evening of the 8<sup>th</sup>, when I received your letter 27<sup>th</sup> May, to which I paid immediate attention.

It is not my purpose to offer any opinion or make any suggestions as to the possibility of constructing a railway on or near this line of exploration, my object being to furnish you with information sufficient to enable your better judgment to decide that point. I would only remark that if this route shall be deemed impracticable, and a line still desired between the Fraser River on the North and the Mahood Lake Valley to join the North Thompson and the Cariboo Waggon Road, it must be sought for to the north of the line just explored, as I am well satisfied no practicable route exists to the south that is not already known.

I am,

Your obedient servant,

JOS. HUNTER.

To MARCUS SMITH, Esq.,

Deputy Engineer in Chief, B.C.