

Report of the Minister of Lands, 1914

The Clearwater Valley

By R.H. Lee

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Surveyor General, Victoria, B.C.

Sir, -- The Clearwater River empties into the North Thompson River at mile 70 of the Canadian Northern Railway, that is about seventy miles north of the city of Kamloops. At this point the North Thompson River flows almost due west, and the Clearwater comes in from the north. The Clearwater River, while not nearly so wide as the North Thompson, has about the same volume of flow, is a very turbulent stream, and its channel is strewn with large boulders and rocks. The possibility of power-development from this river and its tributaries is almost beyond comprehension.

For the first twenty miles above the junction with the North Thompson River -- that is, up to where the Mahood River flows in to it -- the Clearwater pursues a fairly straight course, through a rugged canyon, and is not navigable even for canoes or small boats. This canyon is bounded on the west by steep rocky mountains, and on the east by a bench 800 to 900 feet above the river, and is from one-half to nine miles in width. This bench extends from near the North Thompson River about twenty-five miles almost due north, and has an average elevation of about 2,500 feet above sea-level.

For the past three years the Government land surveys have been confined to this bench, and it is here that the good agricultural land is situated, now open for pre-emption. The first eight miles of the bench, up to what is known as the Trappers Cabin, one mile above Bear Creek, has been taken up. In the next three miles the bench is narrow, being only about half a mile in width, and is very rough and broken. For the next four or five miles the bench is known as the Herman Flat, is about two miles in width, and contains some 4,000 acres of good agricultural land, which has been divided into lots of 160 acres each for pre-emption. The soil is a good clay loam, timbered with small fir and pine, and is well watered by Camp Creek on the south and Beaver Creek on the north, besides numerous springs and small brooks which have their origin in the mountain-side to the east of the bench.

From the south end of Green Mountains, some sixteen miles from the North Thompson River, and on the east side of the Clearwater northward for about four miles the bench is very broken and rocky, so much so that it was considered inadvisable to survey the 4,000 or so acres that it contains. On the west side of Green Mountain, however, is a block of approximately 3,000 acres of first-class land not yet surveyed.

BENCH NINE-MILES WIDE

At the north end of Green Mountain, about twenty miles from the North Thompson River, the bench spreads out to a width of about nine miles from the main mountain-range on the east of the valley to the Clearwater River, which forms the west boundary. It was upon this portion of the bench that the past season's work was done. About 12,000 acres were divided into sections of 160 acres for pre-emption.

This portion of the bench lies at an elevation of about 2,800 feet above sea-level, which may be considered by some to be too great an altitude for agricultural purposes. My observations, however, lead me to the conclusion that in the mountainous districts of southern British Columbia the growth and maturing of vegetables, fruit, grain, and hay do not depend so much on the altitude as on the climatic conditions of the locality. As an illustration, I would cite Rose Hill, an extensive territory situated on the top of the mountains just south of Kamloops. The country there lies at an elevation of 2,500 to 3,000 feet above sea-level, and is fully exposed to the bleak northern winds, yet one driving through that section of the country in midsummer, when he sees the splendid growth of grains and crops in general, would almost imagine that he was travelling through one of the most fertile districts in the Province. What is true of the Rose Hill District will, I believe, in the very near future, prove true of the Clearwater Valley, especially that part of it north and west of Green Mountain, and to a greater degree, for the Clearwater Valley has the following several distinct advantages: A rainfall of about 20 inches; a multitude of streams and springs, large and small; and the shelter of the almost completely encircling mountain-ranges, the Raft River Range on the east and the Mahood Range on the west.

SURFACE IS VERY UNIFORM

The surface of the bench land is very uniform, reducing to a minimum the difficulties of any irrigation project, should irrigation prove necessary. The soil is a deep clay loam. It is rocky in places, probably due to glacial deposits, as the rock is almost wholly surface rock, except the bluffs around the mouth of the Myrtle River and along portions of the Clearwater.

The bench is covered with a dense growth of alder, cottonwood, hazel, willow, and spruce bush. There are also sections of young fir and pine, though the most of this was killed by a fire which swept the valley some years ago. Sufficient, however, has escaped the fire to supply the needs of settlers for many years to come. The land, in my opinion, is by no means difficult to clear, for practically all of the large timber is dead and easily burned. The surrounding mountains and hills, as well as parts of the bench, are covered with a dense growth of young timber and small bush, which renders them useless as pasture land.

MANY OPEN WILD MEADOWS

The number of open wild meadows scattered over the bench is amazing; their areas vary from 5 to 75 acres, and they are for the most part free from bush and covered with a luxuriant growth of wild hay. The majority of them are quite dry and the remainder can be drained with very little difficulty. Their soil is a rich black loam and vegetable mould from 4 to 5 feet in depth.

A MIXED-FARMING COUNTRY

I cannot recommend this as a stock-raising country, as the range required for this purpose is lacking; for mixed farming, however, I believe it to be unsurpassed by any section of country in the interior of British Columbia.

Needless to say, disappointment is in store for any one expecting to find a quarter-section of cleared or meadow land, seeded with timothy, and with a modern farm-house ready to step into; but a man who is willing to work and is looking for a 160-acre lot upon which to settle and to make a home would do well to investigate this valley, for the soil is first-class and the climate unexcelled by any immediate district.

CLIMATE

This is the third season that I have spent on survey in this district, and I have not the slightest hesitation in saying that the climate is first-class, far surpassing that of the North Thompson Valley. During the late spring of the present year there were two frosts, but they were not at all heavy enough to do any damage. The North Thompson Valley, however, which lies at an altitude of 1,200 to 1,500 feet lower, experienced very severe frosts during the same period of time.

The summer days were warm, bright, and sunny, and the nights were pleasantly cool. Doubtless the close proximity of several large lakes -- Mahood, Clearwater, and Myrtle -- and the sheltered position have a very strong tendency to equalize the temperature of day and night.

The valley is enclosed by a high range of mountains on the east, north, and west, and the prevailing winds which are southerly or south-westerly are generally warm.

The summer season is a long one and the fall weather is delightful. When my party left, about the middle of October, we were enjoying bright, warm, and sunny days, but at the lower altitude of the North Thompson Valley we encountered distinctly colder and more disagreeable weather.

During the past season, from the middle of May to the middle of October, there were fifty-six rainy or showery days, divided as follows: May, 5 days; June, 11 days; July, 12 days; August, 12 days; September, 11 days; October, 5 days.

This should make irrigation unnecessary; but if at any time it be considered necessary or advantageous, there is close at hand and abundance of water for all purposes.

PRECIPITATION, GROUND-WATER, AND RIVERS

The snowfall during an average winter, as far as I can determine from observations and reports of trappers and others, does not usually exceed 2 feet.

The bench is very liberally watered by numerous creeks, large and small, which rise in the hills to the east, or from springs scattered over the bench. In addition to these, the bench is cut and bounded by three rivers -- the Clearwater, Little Clearwater, and the Myrtle.

The Clearwater River, a swift turbulent stream, 200 to 500 feet wide, forms in the west boundary of the bench, and furnishes, with its bold rocky canyons and precipitous bluffs hundreds of feet in height, some of the most magnificent scenery to be found anywhere in the interior of the Province.

The Myrtle River, 200 to 500 feet in width, runs diagonally across the bench about three mile north of Green Mountain and empties into the Clearwater at a point about twenty-two miles north of the junction of the latter river and the North Thompson. This river, which carries the overflow of Myrtle Lake, a large body of water about twenty miles north-east of Green Mountain, is a very swiftly flowing stream, especially for the last five miles of its course, which includes a series of the most magnificent falls to be seen anywhere in British Columbia.

The Little Clearwater River rises in the mountains to the north-east of Green Mountain and some distance south of Myrtle Lake. It is from 50 to 70 feet wide and has quite a volume of flow, though it is not so swift as the Clearwater or Myrtle Rivers.

WATER-POWER

The possibilities for power-development in the valley are enormous and can be estimated only after a careful hydrographic survey. The Clearwater River has been mentioned before as a very swift river, and the possibilities for its development are very great. In the twenty to thirty miles of its course it has a fall of about 500 to 600 feet. Bear Creek, some eight miles north of the North Thompson River, is a stream 30 to 40 feet wide, with a fall of 800 feet to the miles. Beaver Creek, about fifteen miles from the North Thompson River, is 40 to 50 feet in width and has a fall in the last three-quarters of a mile of 750 feet. The Little Clearwater crossing the bench on the east of Green Mountain, has a width of 50 to 75 feet and a very heavy fall. The Myrtle River is prominent as a source of power far above all the others as far as I have traced them. It is from 200 to 500 feet wide and for most of its course flows very swiftly.

THE HELMCKEN FALLS

Some of the largest and most magnificent falls to be found anywhere in British Columbia are to be seen on this river. The Helmcken Fall, situated about one mile above the junction of the Myrtle and Clearwater Rivers, has a perpendicular fall of 450 feet, and from the basin into which the main falls drop are a series of smaller falls and rapids. These falls present a very beautiful sight when the sun is in the west, for then a large rainbow spans the canyon from wall to wall. The spray rising from these falls can be seen for miles.

About two miles and a half above the Helmcken Falls are the Dawson Falls, a series of four falls with rapids between. The upper of these falls has a perpendicular drop of 50 feet and a width of 800 feet at the crest. The other falls of the series vary from 15 to 25 feet in height. All of these with the rapids between can be seen from several points, and form a very imposing spectacle, besides being capable of producing when harnessed an enormous quantity of power.

GAME

Black bear, marten, and beaver are plentiful, as well as grouse, ducks, and geese. Very few deer were seen, as they keep to the mountains in the summer and were beginning to frequent the lowland pastures just before we left. Trappers also report that caribou are to be found a few miles north of the scene of the past season's work.

MINING

The Clearwater River heads upon the eastern border of the famous Cariboo Gold-mining District, and this section may without any hesitation be considered well within the gold-bearing district. On account, heretofore, of the difficulty of access it has not been very well prospected. Now, however, with the main line of the Canadian Northern Railway within twenty or thirty miles, and a Government wagon-road, as the connecting link, in process of building, the prospector can gain entrance to this section with very little trouble, and the report of rich finds in the near future would not greatly surprise me.

TIMBER

There are large timber limits located on the Myrtle and Clearwater Rivers a few miles north of the surveyed section, the opening-up and operating of which will provide a market near at hand for all kinds of farm produce, besides affording employment during the winter season to any of the settlers that might desire it.

MEANS OF ACCESS

Any person intending to locate and settle in the Clearwater Valley, would start from Kamloops, situated at the junction of the North and South Thompson Rivers, and upon the main line of two transcontinental railways, the Canadian Pacific and the Canadian Northern. All necessary supplies can be obtained in Kamloops, which is the nearest outfitting centre, as well as the Land Recording Office, and leaving Kamloops the settler would proceed by the Canadian Northern Railway up to Camp 71, a station situated one mile above the mouth of the Clearwater River.

Leaving the railway at this point, he would cross the North Thompson River on the free Government ferry and travel by wagon-road to Larkey's cabin, five miles up the Clearwater Valley. From this point a Government trail continues up the east side of the Clearwater Valley, through a bench previously described, for a distance by trail of thirty to forty miles to the north end of Green Mountain. During 1914 the work of replacing this trail by a wagon-road will be pushed ahead as far as Green Mountain, and perhaps beyond Myrtle River. From Larkey's cabin northward the road will be almost a level one up to and beyond the Myrtle River.

From Camp 71 to the Myrtle River the distance by wagon-road will be about twenty-five miles, but by the present trail it is forty, owing to the necessity of placing our survey camps in the most convenient places for our work, and building the trail to the camps instead of following a shorter and more direct northerly direction.

Camp 71 (Marshall's crossing), on the main line of the Canadian Northern Railway, is the nearest post-office at present. The construction of the wagon-road to connect with the Canadian Northern Railway

will bring this locality in close touch with the markets of the towns along the North Thompson Valley, and with the cities of the east and west.

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