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THE VOYAGE OF THE "JUPITER"—THE BEAR RIVER AND GREAT BEAR LAKE

SELDOM in my life have I heard a sound so unwelcome as the foreboding scream of the whistle that jarred me out of the first beginning of a heavy sleep. We had arrived at Fort Norman; it was 2.30 A.M., that hour when one's courage is at the lowest ebb. The Hudson Bay Co. with their kindly help could do no more for us; the time had come for us to shoulder our own responsibilities, and to bid our kind hosts and pleasant travelling companions farewell.

The steamer stopped at Fort Norman for only a few hours, our stuff was dumped out on the beach, the canoes landed, the *Jupiter* cast loose, and the *Mackenzie River* stood out in the stream again and was soon lost to sight on her long voyage still farther north.

We were on an exposed shore, the first job was to get the *Jupiter* in a fit state to put our stuff aboard. Since leaving Fort Resolution she had been the home of a team of dogs and was in a condition indescribably filthy; it took several hours' hard work scrubbing, swabbing, and baling to get her reasonably clean and then we loaded all our stuff on board. It was afternoon before we finished; we had been toiling all day in a hot sun, not even taking time for lunch; tormented by flies, and almost overpowered by the smell of our new home. For though I said reasonably clean, that was merely to the eye; the smell didn't evaporate for hours. The last twenty-four hours had been a succession of bad smells. At last we got everything

loaded and tracked the *Jupiter* to a sheltered spot about half a mile up the Bear River; only then were we at liberty to make an acquaintance with Fort Norman.

The post is the usual small village of log shacks; a small store run by



The Beach at Fort Norman

the Hudson Bay Co. and another by the Northern Trading Co. There is a Roman Catholic Church and Mission, also a small Protestant Church. The latter was out of commission and shut up when we were there. The post is beautifully situated on a point between the Bear and Mackenzie rivers, and the outlook is very fine. In front is the great Mackenzie River, and far beyond it the distant Rocky Mountains; to the north is the lofty Bear Rock with its variegated colours.

We made the acquaintance of Mr. Leon Gaudet, the Hudson Bay

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Co.'s factor, and of Hornby and Melville, two Englishmen who had been several years on Great Bear Lake hunting and attempting to trade with the few Indians who live in that desolate country. They had spent the last winter near old Fort Confidence in Dease Bay, where they had built a



Main Street, Fort Norman

small house. Melville was on his way out to civilisation again, Hornby had decided to spend another year in the country. The preceding summer they had met the Eskimos from Coronation Gulf, the last remaining primitive people on the continent quite untouched by civilisation and still living in their primitive way. These Eskimos, who have lately been made famous by a sensational title, come inland in the summer from Coronation Gulf and the lands farther north to hunt caribou and get wood for sleighs, etc. Hornby and Melville had met them on the edge of the Barrens to

the northeast of Great Bear Lake. The Roman Catholic Mission had decided to send one of their fathers to get in touch with these Eskimos and attempt their conversion. Father Rouvier, O.M.I., had been well chosen for this hazardous undertaking; and Hornby, who wanted to do



Mackenzie River and the Bear Rock from Fort Norman

some fur trading with them, had arranged to accompany him on his journey.

We learned also that Mr. J. Hodgson, a retired Hudson Bay Co.'s factor and his family, had also spent the preceding winter on Dease River, trapping and hunting caribou. They were to leave Dease River as soon as the ice in the lake broke up, returning in a York boat left there by Hornby and Melville, and we thought it possible that we might meet them on their way home.

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Our first concern was to get together an Indian crew to track our boat up the Bear River. Most of the Bear Lake Indians were at the post and would soon be going up the river again to their hunting grounds on the lake. By the aid of the Hudson Bay interpreter we negotiated with these



The Bear Rock from our Camp

people, but could not induce them to undertake the job. Besides a large number of birch canoes they had a small York boat that they had obtained from the Hudson Bay Co., and their own outfit probably required all hands. Even the offer of our York boat as soon as we got our stuff across the lake did not tempt them, “for that” they said “cannot be divided among us, only one man can own it.” Another specific objection was the pants we wore; innocent Duxbak pants, but they saw an unfortunate likeness to the uniform canvas pants worn by the R. N. W. M. P., and they didn’t want

any of them in their country. For several days we treated, entreated, and negotiated with these people and under the disadvantage of having to carry it on through an interpreter, but there was nothing doing. Meantime we had a fairly comfortable camp at the place where we had taken



The *Jupiter* at Fort Norman

the *Jupiter*. The water of the Bear River is brilliantly clear and was then at a temperature not far from the freezing point. Hornby and Melville were camped on the point between us and the post, a place that became familiar enough to ourselves more than a year later.

It was an irksome and exceedingly trying time; we were impatient to start on our voyage, but it looked for a while as though the *Jupiter* would get no farther than her present anchorage. We even began preparations for making the journey by canoe, when by the exertion of consider-

able trouble and personal influence, and the offer of high wages, Mr. Gaudet succeeded in getting together a crew of local Indians for us.

Six men were all he could get; including ourselves this made a short-handed crew to track a York boat up that swift river, but our load was



Lion and the Doctor

fortunately not a heavy one for the size of the boat; we had 3 1/2 tons of stuff all told, and the *Jupiter* drew about eighteen inches of water. Four or five inches of this was keel, and a confounded nuisance that keel was to us before we got to Bear Lake, and very little use after, except perhaps that it afforded extra strength to our ship on one occasion when it was badly needed.

Saturday, July 8th, was the day fixed for our start. We decided to leave the *Procyon*, one of our canoes, at Fort Norman, as it might be neces-

sary for us to leave the country by way of the Porcupine and Yukon Rivers. We saw her safely bestowed in the care of the Hudson Bay Co., said good-bye to our friends at the post, and returned to our ship to await the crew. By 3 P.M. they showed up in a big birch canoe that they brought to return



Our Indian Crew

to Fort Norman in when we got to Bear Lake. Their names, or at least the names by which we knew them, were Lixie Trindle, Clement, Samuel, David Wright, Horatio, and François. Lixie Trindle was the only one who knew a little English. He was the captain of the outfit till we got to Bear Lake, and although he had not been given a particularly good reputation we found him a reliable and a hard worker. Samuel was the humourist of the party; he had a broad heavy face with a singularly fatuous expression. We never knew what his jokes were about, probably they were at

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our own expense. François was a small well-built man, very strong, very quiet, and a hard worker so long as he had an example. He had his wife, a little girl, and one dog with him, and he wanted to cross Great Bear Lake, with us, and to work for us a couple of months, which was convenient



We Make a Start

enough. His wife could talk a little French and was afterwards the only medium by which we could communicate with the Indians. The rest of the Indians were quiet, hard-working men, and though we were short handed we certainly made up for it in the quality of our crew. The opinion we had formed of the Northern Indians, generally, was certainly improved by our small personal experience with these men. But they were no doubt better than the average Indians; moreover the character of the work, a short severe effort with the end in plain view a few days ahead suited

them better than a long trial with its end indefinite, and requiring persistence and steadiness of purpose.

The first thing our crew did was to start a fire, put on the kettle, and settle down to a good square meal and a smoke. Then the grand start was



Banks of the Bear River

made at last; we shoved across the river to the north shore and were soon under way in harness.

Lixie took the big steering sweep; this was his job all the way up the river. At this part of it four men on the tracking line were enough, and we took “spells” on the boat. Lion and I were among the idlers at first and the Doctor was on the line.

It was a dull cloudy day but pleasant enough sitting in the boat watching the shore slip past and feeling that we had got fairly started on our

voyage. The great rise of water and the breaking up of the ice in spring keep the banks clear of trees. For the first forty miles the shores of the river are generally pleasant grass-covered slopes, at that season profuse in all kinds of flowers; roses, violets, fireweed, wild onions, and all in bloom at



Bear River — The Franklin Mountains

the same time. Behind and above was the unbroken spruce forest, much denser and the trees much taller than I expected to find them here. Altogether it is a most beautiful river with its brilliantly clear water, its charming banks, and the fine views of mountains in the background; Bear Rock was then behind us to the west, and the Franklin Mountains to the east ahead of us.

The river is very swift and generally shallow; except near the mouth where the river bottom is limestone, and at the head of the rapids, we saw no rocks in place; it is all gravel, or gravel and boulders.