

TRIP THROUGH NACHES PASS, 1841

MOUNT RAINIER

The portions here reproduced are taken from the edition by Lea and Blanchard, Philadelphia, 1845, Volume IV., pages 418-429 and 468-470.

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I have before stated that Lieutenant Johnson's party was ready for departure on the eighth May [1841] ; that it consisted of Lieutenant Johnson, Messrs. Pickering, Waldron, and Brackenridge, a sergeant of marines, and a servant. I must do justice to the exertions of this officer in getting ready for his journey, which he accomplished in less time than I anticipated, as the delays incident to setting out on a novel expedition, and one believed by most persons to be scarcely practicable in the summer season, are great and tantalizing. In making preparations for such a journey, the Indians were to be bargained with, and, as I have before had occasion to remark, are enough to tire the patience of Job himself. First, the Indian himself is to be sought out ; then the horse is to be tried ; next the price is to be discussed, then the mode of payment, and finally the potlatch : each and all are matters of grave consideration and delay, during which the Indians make a business of watching every circumstance of which they can take advantage. No one can be sure of closing his bargain, until the terms are duly arranged, the pot-latch given, and the horse delivered. After obtaining horses, Lieutenant Johnson had the saddles, alforcas, saddle-cloths, saddle-trees or pack-saddles, etc., with a variety of lashings, to prepare. For many of these we were indebted to the kindness of Captain McNeill and Mr. Anderson⁽¹⁾. Others were made on board the ship, after a pattern lent us. One of the most important persons to obtain was a good guide, and hearing of one who resided at the Cowlitz river, by the name of Pierre Charles⁽¹⁾, he was at once sent for ; but I did not think it worth while to detain the party until his arrival, as he could easily overtake it. Lieutenant Johnson, therefore, was directed to hurry his departure, and to set out, which he did on the 19th May, at noon, and proceeded to the prairie about two miles distant, where the party encamped.

There is little danger on these expeditions of having too few articles: the great difficulty is to avoid having too many. It turned out as I had anticipated. The first night passed in their tent fully satisfied them of this, and taught them to dispense with all other bedding save blankets.

Mr. Anderson rode to the encampment before night, bringing the news of the arrival of Pierre Charles at the fort; whereupon Lieutenant Johnson returned to make an agreement with him and his companion. This was done, although, as is to be supposed, their demands were exorbitant, in consequence of the belief that their services were indispensable.

Pierre Charles's companion was a young man, named Peter Bercier, (a connexion of Plumondon)⁽²⁾ who spoke English, and all the languages of the country.

1. Captain William Henry McNeill and Alexander Caulfield Anderson, Hudson's Bay Company men, then at Nisqually House. Captain McNeill was master of the famous old steamer Beaver. Mr. Anderson was in charge of Nisqually House. Both men were honored by having their names given to islands in Puget Sound.

1 Pierre Charles, French Canadian, had been an employee of the Hudson's Bay Company.

2 Simon Plumondon was an employee of the Hudson's Bay Company, who retired and settled in the Cowlitz Valley.

On the morning of the 20th, they obtained an accession to their horses, and set out on their route towards the mountains. Although the possibility of crossing them was doubted, yet I felt satisfied if exertion and perseverance could effect the object, the officer who had charge of the party would succeed. This day, they made but five miles; after which they encamped, at the recommendation of Pierre Charles, in order that the horses might not be over-fatigued, and be able to get good pasture and water. Here a number of natives visited the camp. Pine trees were in large numbers, many of them upwards of one hundred and thirty feet in height. On the banks of a small stream, near their camp, were found the yellow Ranunculus, a species of Trillium, in thickets, with large leaves and small flowers, Lupines, and some specimens of a cruciferous plant.

On the 21st they made an early start, and in the forenoon crossed the Puyallup, a stream about seventy feet wide ; along which is a fine meadow of some extent, with clumps of alder and willow : the soil was of a black turfy nature. After leaving the meadow-land, they began to ascend along a path that was scarcely visible from being overgrown with Gaultheria, Hazel, Spiraea, Vaccinium, and Cornus.

During the day, they crossed the Stehna. ⁽¹⁾ In the evening, after making sixteen miles, they encamped at the junction of the Puyallup with the Upthascap. ⁽²⁾ Near by was a hut, built of the planks of the Arbor Vitae (Thuja), which was remarkably well made ; and the boards used in its structure, although split, had all the appearance of being sawn : many of them were three feet wide, and about fifteen feet long. The hut was perfectly water-tight. Its only inhabitants were two miserable old Indians and two boys, who were waiting here for the arrival of those employed in the salmon-fishery. The rivers were beginning to swell to an unusual size, owing to the melting of the snows in the mountains ; and in order to cross the streams, it became necessary to cut down large trees, over which the packs were carried, while the horses swam over. These were not the only difficulties they had to encounter : the path was to be cut for miles through thickets of brushwood and fallen timber ; steep precipices were to be ascended, with slippery sides and entangled with roots of every variety of shape and size, in which the horses' legs would become entangled, and before reaching the top be precipitated, loads and all, to the bottom. The horses would at times become jammed with their packs between trees, and were not to be disengaged without great toil, trouble, and damage to their burdens. In some cases, after succeeding in getting nearly to the top of a hill thirty or forty feet high, they would become exhausted and fall over backwards, making two or three somersets, until they reached the bottom, when their loads were again to be arranged.

On the 22nd, their route lay along the banks of the Upthascap, ⁽¹⁾ which is a much wider stream than the Puyallup. A short distance up, they came to a fish-weir, constructed as the one heretofore described, on the Chickeeles, ⁽²⁾ though much smaller.

This part of the country abounds with arbor-vitae trees, some of which were found to be thirty feet in circumference at the height of four feet from the ground, and upwards of one hundred feet high. Notwithstanding the many difficulties encountered, they this day made about twelve miles.

1 Probably the Stone Creek of present usage.

2 Carbon River.

1 Meaning up the Carbon River and its branch called South Prairie Creek.

2 Chehalis River.

On the morning of the 23rd, just as they were about to leave their camp, their men brought in a deer, which was soon skinned and packed away on the horses. This was the first large game they had obtained, having previously got only a few grouse.

They had now reached the Smalocho,⁽³⁾ which runs to the westward, and is sixty-five feet wide: its depth was found to be four and a half feet, which, as it was also rapid, was too great for the horses to ford and carry their loads. The Indians now became serviceable to them. Lieutenant Johnson had engaged several that were met on their way, and they now amounted to thirteen, who appeared for a time lively and contented. This, however, was but a forerunner of discontent, and a refusal to go any farther; but with coaxing and threatening they were induced to proceed.

The road or way, after passing the river, was over a succession of deep valleys and hills, so steep that it was difficult for a horse to get up and over them with a load, and the fall of a horse became a common occurrence. They were all, however, recovered without injury, although one of them fell upwards of one hundred feet; yet in consequence of his fall having been repeatedly broken by the shrubs and trees, he reached the bottom without injury to himself, but with the loss of his load, consisting of their camp utensils, &c., which were swept off by the rapid current of the river.

The route lay, for several days, through forests of spruce, and some of the trees that had fallen measured two hundred and sixty-five feet in length. One of these, at the height of ten feet from the roots, measured thirty-five feet in circumference, and at the end which had been broken off in its fall, it was found to be eighteen inches in diameter, which would make the tree little short of three hundred feet when it was growing. The stems of all these trees were clear of branches to the height of one hundred and fifty feet from the ground, and perfectly straight. In many cases it was impossible to see over the fallen trees, even when on horse-back, and on these, seedlings were growing luxuriantly, forcing their roots through the bark and over the body of the trunk till they reached the ground. Many spruces were seen which had grown in this way; and these, though of considerable size, still retained the form of an arch, showing where the old tree had lain, and under which they occasionally rode. As may be supposed, they could not advance very rapidly over such ground, and Lieutenant Johnson remarks, that although he was frequently desirous of shortening the road, by taking what seemed a more direct course, he invariably found himself obliged to return to the Indian trail.

Daylight of the 24th brought with it its troubles: it was found that the horses had strayed, a disaster that the Indians took quite coolly, hoping it would be the cause of their return. After a diligent search, the horses were found in places where they had sought better food, although it was scanty enough even there.

During the day, the route led along the Smalocho,⁽¹⁾ which runs nearly east and west; and they only left its banks when they were obliged to do so by various impassable barriers. This part of the country is composed of conical hills, which are all thickly clothed with pine trees of gigantic dimensions. They made nine miles this day, without accident; but when they encamped, they

3 White River.

1 White River.

had no food for the horses except fern. The animals, in consequence, seemed much overcome, as did also the Indians, who had travelled the whole day with heavy loads. Lieutenant Johnson, by way of diverting the fatigue of the latter, got up a shooting-match for a knife, the excitement of which had the desired effect.

The trees hereabout were chiefly the cotton-wood, maple, spruce, pine, and elder, and some undergrowth of raspberry, the young shoots of which the natives eat with great relish.

On the 25th, they set out at an early hour, and found the travelling less rough, so that they reached the foot of La Tete ⁽²⁾ before noon, having accomplished eleven miles. Lieutenant Johnson with the sergeant ascended La Tete, obtained the bearings, from its summit, of all the objects around, and made its height by barometer, two thousand seven hundred and ninety-eight feet : its latitude was fixed at 47° 08' 54" N. This mountain was entirely destitute of wood; but, having been burnt over, was found strewn with huge charred trunks, and the whole ground covered with ashes. The inclination of its sides was about fifty degrees.

The country around seemed one continued series of hills, and like La Tete had suffered from the fire. According to the natives, although the wood on the mountains was destroyed many years since, yet it was still observed to be on fire, in some places, about two years ago. Most of the tops of the distant peaks had snow on them. To the east was seen the appearance of two valleys, through which the two branches of the Smalocho ⁽¹⁾ flow.

On descending from La Tete, the river was to be crossed: this was found too deep to be forded, and it consequently became necessary to form a bridge to transport the baggage, by cutting down trees. The current was found to run 6-2 miles per hour. They had been in hopes of reaching the Little Prairie before night, but in consequence of this delay, were forced to encamp before arriving there.

The Indians complained much of the want of food: many of the horses also were exhausted for the same cause, and exhibited their scanty nourishment in their emaciated appearance.

On the 26th, they reached the Little Prairie at an early hour, where, after consultation, it was determined to wait a day to recruit the horses, as this was the only place they could obtain food. It was also desirable to ascertain the practicability of passing the mountain with the horses, and at the same time to carry forward some of the loads, that the horses might have as little as possible to transport. Mr. Waldron and Pierre Charles were therefore sent forward with the Indians, having loads of fifty pounds each, to ascend the mountain, while Lieutenant Johnson remained with the camp to get observations. Dr. Pickering and Mr. Brackenridge accompanied the party of Mr. Waldron to the snow-line. The prairie on which they had encamped was about two and a half acres in extent, and another of the same size was found half a mile farther east.

2 Lieutenant Richard Arnold, in Pacific Railway Reports, Volume XII, Part I, page 191, says: "Near the junction of Whitewater and Green rivers there is a remarkable peak called La Tete, from a large rock on its slope resembling the head and neck of a man. This is an important point, as it forms the gate of the mountains on the west." Modern maps shift the "water" part of the names. They are now White and Greenwater rivers.

1 White and Greenwater rivers.

The 27th was employed by Lieutenant Johnson in determining the positions of this prairie, which proved to be in latitude 47° 05' 51" N., and longitude 120° 13' W. ⁽¹⁾ The variation was 19° 39' easterly. At sunset, messengers arrived from Mr. Waldron, who had reached the summit at noon, and was to proceed down to the snow-line to encamp. The snow was found to be about ten feet deep, and the party crossing sank about ankle-deep, for which reason opinions varied as to the possibility of getting the horses over; but it was determined to make the trial. Lieutenant Johnson, therefore, set out, leaving a supply of food with an old Indian and a horse, both of whom were worn out, and unable to proceed.

By eleven o'clock, they were met by Pierre Charles and the Indians, who gave some slight hopes of accomplishing the task of getting all over. Lieutenant Johnson determined to take only the strongest horses to the edge of the snow. At half-past 5 P.M., they reached the best practicable encampment, being a mile beyond the place where Mr. Waldron had encamped two days before. The snow having melted so rapidly, Lieutenant Johnson, taking all things into consideration, determined, notwithstanding the forebodings of failure held out by the party that had gone before, to make the attempt. It now became necessary to push on with as much haste as possible, on account of the state of their provisions; for what with the loss sustained in fording the river, and in consumption, they were obliged to adopt an allowance.

On the 29th, they departed, at early dawn, in order to take advantage of the firmness of the snow, occasioned by the last night's frost. They ascended rapidly, and passed over the worst of the way, the horses sinking no deeper than their fetlocks. They first passed over a narrow ridge, and then a succession of small cones, until they reached the summit.

Mount Rainier, from the top, bore south-southwest, apparently not more than ten miles distant. A profile of the mountain indicates that it has a terminal crater, as well as some on its flanks. The barometer stood at 24-950 in. : five thousand and ninety-two feet. There was another, to the north-northeast, covered with snow, and one to the west appeared about two hundred feet higher than the place where the observations were taken. This latter had suffered from fire in the same way as La Tete, and showed only a few patches of snow. To the eastward, a range of inferior height, running north and south, was in view, without snow.

On the western ascent of this mountain, the pines were scrubby; but at the summit, which was a plain, about a mile in length by half a mile wide, they were straight and towering, about eighty feet in height, without any limbs or foliage, except at the top. The distance travelled over the top was about five miles. On descending the east side, the snow was much deeper and softer, but the horses managed to get along well, and without accident.

Lieutenant Johnson, in following the party, missed the trail, and lost his way for three or four hours. On discovering the camp of those who had gone before, on the opposite side of a stream, he attempted to cross it on a log, in doing which his foot slipped, and he was precipitated into the water. Although his first thought was to save the chronometer from accident, it was too late, for the watch had stopped; it was not, however, so far injured as not to be set a-going, and it continued to go during the remainder of the journey: the only use I have been able to make of his subsequent observations, was to obtain the relative meridian distances between the points

1 This is an error and should read 121° 25' W. as Naches Pass is known to be 121° 21' and Lieutenant Johnson's "Little Prairie" was a little west of the Pass.

visited, without the absolute longitude. It is needless to say, that I placed little or no dependence on them, in constructing the map.

Although the horses had, with one or two exceptions, reached the eastern side of the mountain, yet they, together with the Indians, were very much exhausted. The time had now come when the Indians, according to agreement, were to be paid off, and they had done much more than they agreed to do, having crossed the mountain twice.

Finding the necessity of retaining all the blankets that had been brought with them, in order to buy horses, Lieutenant Johnson proposed to the Indians to receive an order on Nisqually, in lieu of the immediate delivery of the blankets. This they readily assented to, and also willingly gave up those that had already been paid them, on receiving a similar order, thus showing a spirit of accommodation highly praiseworthy. Only two of them returned to Nisqually, to whom were entrusted the botanical specimens, and the care of the horses left upon the road.

The banks of the small streams on the eastern side of the mountain were bordered with the greatest variety of trees and shrubs, consisting of poplars, buckthorn fifty feet high, dogwood thirty to forty feet high, several species of willow, alder, two species of maple, and occasionally a yew. The undergrowth was composed of Hazel, Vaccinium, Gaultheria, and a prickly species of Aralia. The herbaceous shrubs were Goodyera, Neottia, Viola, Claytonia, Corallorrhiza. The latter, however, were not in flower.

The party on foot, after leaving the Little Prairie about half a mile, crossed the northern branch of the Smaloch⁽¹⁾ which was found much swollen and very rapid. Two trees were cut down to form a bridge. After this, the walking through the forest became smooth and firm, and they passed on at a rapid pace. The Indians, although loaded with ninety pounds of baggage, kept up with the rest. At nightfall they encamped at the margin of the snow.

On lighting their fires, they accidentally set fire to the moss-covered trees, and in a few moments all around them was a blazing mass of flame, which compelled them to change their quarters farther to windward. They had made eighteen miles. But few plants were found, the season being too early for collecting at so high an elevation. The ground was covered with spruce-twigs, which had apparently been broken off by the weight of the snow. The summit was passed through an open space about twenty acres in extent. This glade was surrounded with a dense forest of spruce trees. There was no danger in walking except near the young trees, which had been bent down by the snow, but on passing these they often broke through, and experienced much difficulty in extricating themselves, particularly the poor Indians, with their heavy burdens. The breadth of snow passed over was about eight miles. At three o'clock they reached the Spipen 1 River, where they encamped : this camp was found to be two thousand five hundred and forty-one feet above the level of the sea. The vegetation appeared to our botanical gentlemen farther advanced on the east side than on the west, at the same height; the Pulmonarias and several small annuals were more forward. There were only a few pine trees, and those small, seen on the west side of the ridge; and on the east side, there was a species of larch, the hackmatack of the country. While they remained at this camp, they found a Pyrola, and some new ferns.

1 Greenwater branch of White River.

The country about the Spipen ⁽¹⁾ is mountainous and woody, with a narrow strip of meadow-land along its banks. Mr. Waldron had, on arriving at the camp, sent Lachemere, one of the Indians, down the river to an Indian chief, in order to procure horses. Those that remained after providing for the baggage, were consequently assigned each to two or three individuals to ride and tye on their route.

On the 30th, they proceeded down the Spipen, making a journey of eighteen miles, and passed another branch of the river, the junction of which augmented its size very considerably. Its banks, too, became perpendicular and rocky, with a current flowing between them at the rate of six or seven miles an hour. After the junction, the stream was about one hundred feet broad, and its course was east-southeast.

The vegetation on the east side of the mountains was decidedly more advanced than that to the west, and several very interesting species of plants were met with by the botanists, on the banks of the streams : among them were *Paeonia brownii*, *Cypripedium oregonium*, *Pentstemon*, *Ipomopsis elegans*, and several Composite, and a very handsome flowering shrub, *Purshia tridentata*.

On the 31st, they continued their route over a rough country, in some places almost impassable for a horse from its steepness, and in others so marshy as to require much caution to prevent being mired.

During the morning, they met two Indians, who informed them that the chief of the Yakima tribe was a short distance in advance, waiting to meet them, and that he had several horses. At noon they reached a small prairie on the banks of the river, where old Tidias, the chief, was seen seated in state to receive Lieutenant Johnson ; but this ceremony was unavoidably broken in upon by the necessity of getting the meridian obser- vations. The chief, however, advanced towards him with every mark of friendship, giving the party a hearty welcome. In person he was tall, straight, and thin, a little bald, with long black hair hanging down his back, carefully tied with a worsted rag. He was grave, but dignified and graceful. When they had been seated, and after smoking a couple of pipes in silence, he intimated that he was ready for a talk, which then followed, relative to the rivers and face of the country ; but little information was obtained that could be de- pended upon.

This tribe subsist chiefly upon salmon and the cammass-root: game is very scarce, and the beaver have all disappeared. The cammass-root is pounded and made into a sort of cake, which is not unpleasant, having a sweetish taste, but it is very dry, although some of the party took a fancy to it.

Tidias had with him an old man almost blind, who claimed much respect, and two young men, whose dress of buckskin, profusely ornamented with beads, was much admired by the party. During the talk, the old chief expressed himself delighted to see the white men, and spoke of his own importance, his immense territory, etc., in a style of boasting, to which the Indians are very much addicted. He said that he was desirous of affording all the accommodation he could to the party. But although he had eight or ten fine horses with him, he would not agree to part with

1 Naches River.

them, as they were all his favourites. He was presented with a variety of articles, in return for which he gave the party a few dried salmon.

Towards evening, old Tidias took leave of them, saying that it was not proper for an Indian to encamp in the same place with a white man, and with a promise that he would have horses by ten o'clock the next day ; but he had a game to play by procrastinating, in which he thoroughly succeeded.

In the morning they reached the Indian camp below, but no horses had arrived. It was far, they said, to Tidias's house ; a man could not go thither and return in the same day ; no horses or salmon could be brought ; no one could be permitted to go. Lieutenant Johnson was then told that the road he had to follow was a "hungry" road. At last the Indian was induced by high offers to exchange good horses for a great number of bad ones, and finally consented to part with two more. On quitting him they became thoroughly aware that all the difficulties were owing, not to any indisposition to sell, but were created for the purpose of inducing high prices to be given.

The party now branched off at right angles to their former route, Lieutenant Johnson heartily sick and tired of his friend Tidias and his people. Two more of the Indians here left them. The country they entered, after passing a ridge about six hundred feet high, was quite of a different aspect, forming long sloping hills, covered with a scanty growth of pines. Many dry beds of rivulets were passed, and the soil of the hills produced nothing but a long thin grass. There are, however, some small valleys where the growth of grass is luxuriant, the pines are larger, and the scenery assumed a park-like appearance.

From the summit of one of the hills, a sketch of Mount Rainier, and of the intervening range, was obtained.

On the top of the ridge they fell in with a number of Spipen Indians, who were engaged in digging the cam- mass and other roots. The latter were those of an umbelliferous plant, oblong, tuberous, and in taste resembling a parsnep. The process used to prepare them for bread, is to bake them in a well-heated oven of stones ; when they are taken out they are dried, and then pounded between two stones till the mass becomes as fine as corn meal, when it is kneaded into cakes and dried in the sun. These roots are the principal vegetable food of the Indians throughout Middle Oregon. The women are frequently seen, to the number of twenty or thirty, with baskets suspended from the neck, and a pointed stick in their hand, digging these roots, and so intently engaged in the search for them, as to pay no attention whatever to a passer-by. When these roots are properly dried, they are stored away for the winter's consumption. This day they made only fifteen miles, in a northern direction.

On the 2nd of June, they reached the Yakima, after having crossed a small stream. The Yakima was too deep for the horses to ford with their packs, and they now for the first time used their balsas of India-rubber cloth, which were found to answer the purpose of floating the loads across the stream.

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