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### The End of Alexander Mackenzie's Trip to the Pacific

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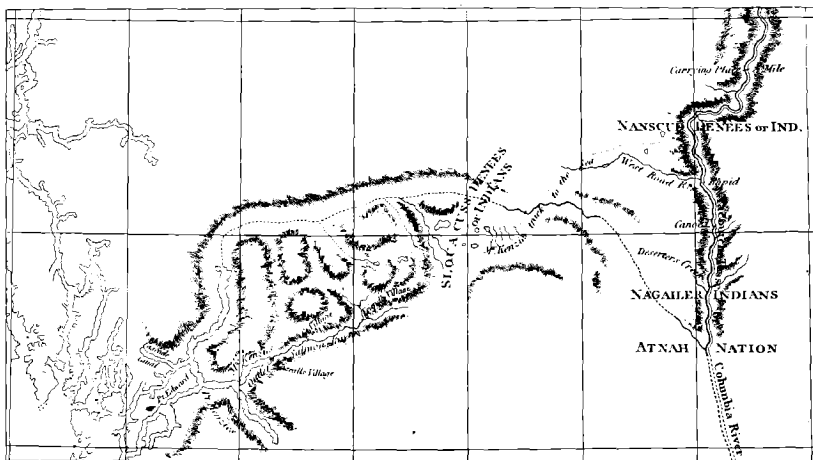
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THE END OF ALEXANDER MACKENZIE'S TRIP TO THE PACIFIC

BY

HARLAN I. SMITH

Sir Alexander Mackenzie, the first white man to reach the Pacific coast of Canada over land, came down from the high plateau between the Fraser river and the Pacific ocean and reached the Bella Coola river at a Bellacoola Indian village called Nùtléig, which he shows on his map published in 1801 as Friendly Village (fig. 1) (Lantern Slide). I visited the site of this place in 1920 and again in 1922. It is on the north side of Bella Coola river immediately above, that is to the east of, the mouth of Kahylktst river. This is about 31 miles from the sea by the present-day wagon road. It is something less than a mile down the Kahylktst river from the bridge on this wagon road, locally known as Burnt Bridge. The maps show the post office of Firvale, a mile or so down the road from this place, but this consists of only two or three frontier farms.



Map of portion of Mackenzie's route to the sea.

The site of the old Bellacoola village appears to have been covered by sediments from the rivers, or to have been pretty well washed away, probably the latter. There are, however, slight signs that this place had been inhabited by Indians recently. In fact the Bellacoola Indians of this valley, who are now concentrated on their reserve at the mouth of the river, are still represented near this

old village for a week or so each season by a few individuals who go there to pick berries. On this old site are also the remains of one of the very earliest white men's cabins of the whole region.

The present day wagon road extends from the sea to Stūih at the junction of the Atnarko and Talchako rivers, that is 42 miles from the salt water or about 11 miles above this old site. From Stūih and from various places along the wagon road, there are trails leading up on to the high plateau. Indians come over these trails and down the Bella Coola valley to the town of Bella Coola once or twice a year to secure their winter's supplies. It is not uncommon for them to come as far as 150 and 200 miles, and it is said that before the Grand Trunk Pacific was put through that they came here for supplies from as far as the Peace River country. This is the best travelled route for horses from the interior to the Pacific coast of Canada. There is no wagon road from the interior of Canada to its western coast. The one or two other trails which reach the Pacific coast of Canada are abandoned, or very little travelled, badly grown up, and are not used because they do not lead to a source of supplies.

It will be remembered that Mackenzie continued down the river, stopping at a village on the north side, which he describes and shows on his map as Gt. Village. I visited the site of this village in 1922. It is known to the Indians as Nūsk-Elst, and is on the upper or eastern side of the mouth of Tsatleanootz river. The humpback salmon ascend this river in great numbers. The site is about three miles below the Canoe Crossing bridge, or approximately two miles below Canoe Crossing. It is nearly in line with the highest peak of the mountains through which the Bella Coola river here breaks from the rather dry interior to the sea coast. Floods have eroded the débris from parts of this old village which appears in places to reach a depth of three or four feet. There were still living in 1923 Bellacoola Indians who talked of the days when this village was abandoned, although they may not have been present themselves.

The village, indicated by Mackenzie on his map as Rascalls village, on the south side of Bella Coola river near its mouth, is still inhabited, and part of the site is included in the Indian reservation. Part of it is on private property. It is about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles south of the present Bella Coola townsite. Here it was that Mackenzie finally reached the sea and embarked for a short canoe trip down the inlets.

About two miles south of the townsite, where the flat bottomlands of the valley reach the base of the very steep mountains, a small stream comes out of the mountains from the south, and here is a waterfall of considerable charm. On the west side of this fall,

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bathed by its spray at certain times, is a shelf in the rock wall of the canyon (figs. 2 and 3). This is three or four feet wide by something over twenty feet long. On the back of it, and on its floor, are petroglyphs bruised into the rocks by the Bella Coola Indians of long ago. Plaster of Paris moulds of these petroglyphs have been made and deposited in the National Museum of Canada. This was a secret meeting place for a certain organization of the Indians. It is of such romantic interest and there are such weird stories about it, that, taken together with its natural beauty, and the petroglyphs, it would seem to be well worth setting aside as an historic landmark of interest to tourists.

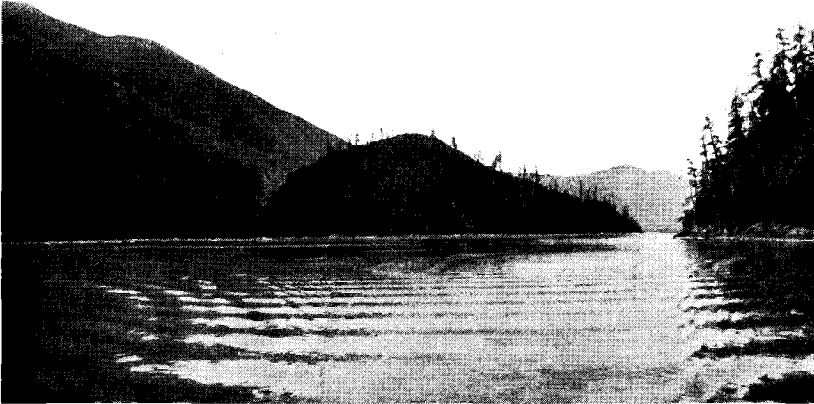
Three miles above here, in the Bella Coola valley, another stream enters the river from the south. Where this stream comes out of the mountains and strikes the bottomland is a canyon at least seventy feet deep. This point is about one mile south of the Bella Coola river and the present wagon road. Here on the western side of this canyon are a number of outcrops bearing an extensive series of petroglyphs bruised into the rocks by the Bella Coola Indians of long ago. Plaster of Paris moulds of some of these have also been made for the museum. These petroglyphs, also, are in a place which in its present condition is of great natural beauty. The pictures are said to have been made by a family while secretly singing its sacred songs. This site is also well worth preservation as a national historic monument.

It is easy enough to give directions so that people may visit such sites. In fact, the above locations are sufficiently accurate for anyone wishing to visit these petroglyphs, but in this new country it is more difficult to give their legal location, and this would probably require the services of a surveyor.

From the mouth of the Bella Coola, Mackenzie and his party travelled by canoe down North Bentinck arm, and as they passed the entrance to South Bentinck arm they saw to the south in this arm the little island (fig. 4) known to the Indians as Kinkilst and marked as King island on one of the maps, but which must be distinguished from the large King island which lies to the west of Labourchere channel.

I have proposed that a strip of country, approximately seventy miles long east and west by some twenty miles wide north and south, be set aside as a great out-of-doors museum for the conservation and sanctuary of wild life, both animal and plant, for the preservation of Indian petroglyphs and other historic sites—all this to be a national monument to Sir Alexander Mackenzie, the first white man to reach the Pacific coast of Canada overland. This area lies immediately to the south of the Bella Coola valley, and is as yet unsurveyed, its

title still being in the Crown. This being the case, it would be unnecessary to go to any expense to have the park established. The area has in it many glaciers and innumerable waterfalls. Practically all of it is high land, which will never be of use for agricultural purposes. With the possible exception of the eastern part, it lies in an area which the geologists indicate is not likely to be valuable for its minerals, and much of it is above timber line. Like a great monument, in some places over 10,000 feet high, it overlooks the spot where the first white man to cross Canada reached the sea, and it in turn with its lofty peaks was seen by him as he came down the valley and embarked on the waters of the Pacific.



Kinkilt island, the Pacific coast island mentioned by Mackenzie.

Continuing on from the mouth of South Bentinck arm, Mackenzie turned through Labouchere channel and westward to a point near Elcho harbour. This is perhaps fifteen miles up Dean channel eastward from Cousins inlet, the location of the present town of Ocean Falls, which is the chief stopping place of the boats between Vancouver and Prince Rupert. In other words, where Mackenzie ended his westward journey and turned back towards his home land is only fifteen miles from Ocean Falls where some seven or eight passenger steamers land per week, so that this whole region is now accessible to historians and tourists.

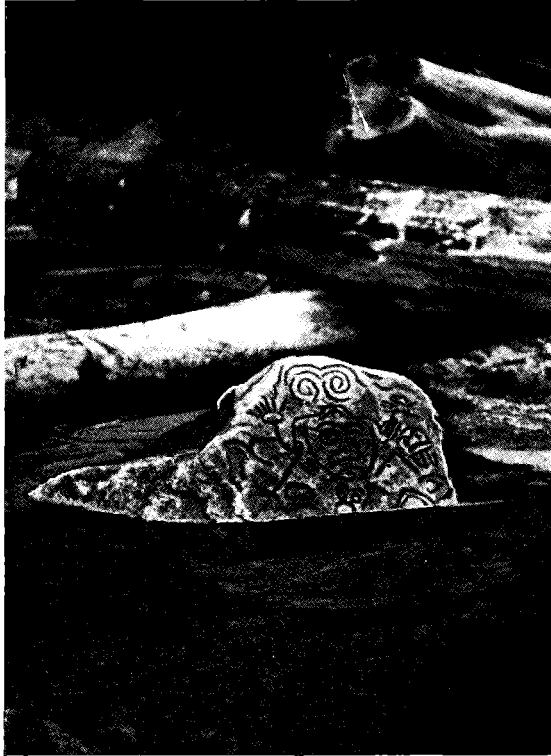
On the eastern side of the entrance of Elcho harbour is a little rock promontory. Here I found refuse of an ancient village pretty well covering the entire promontory, and, without making use of suitable tools, discovered that this refuse reached the depth of at least 18 inches. I was told by the Bellacoola Indians that this promontory

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had been fortified with a high strong wall of logs. The natural steepness of its shores would largely protect it without such a wall. The Bellacoola Indians told me that there had been about four houses within this enclosure and that its entrance leading from the land was closed at night. They also said that on the land were a few other houses.



Petrolyph at Elcho Harbour, B.C.

In a small bay between this rocky promontory and the eastern shore of Elcho harbour is a beach where the people could have pulled up their canoes, and on this beach are two rocks bearing petroglyphs. These rocks are washed by the high tide. The Indians say there are burial caves in the cliff back from the promontory. This promontory is a noticeable feature to the observant tourist who may be passing on Dean channel to or from Ocean Falls, because since the Indians have lived here no heavy timber has grown on the old village site, and so it is grown up with nettles and other vegetation which shows

at a great distance as a much lighter green than that of the evergreen forest.

The Indians say that this fortified point and its accompanying mainland habitations were the home of Bella Bella Indians, a people entirely different in language from the Bellacoolas. It is my present belief that it was the people of this Bella Bella settlement that are referred to by Mackenzie and that his party dreaded to meet at the time when they started on their homeward journey. This land also being of little or no value, the fort and petroglyphs might well be preserved as a national monument.

A short distance to the west along the north side of Dean channel are two places where the Indians have painted with red upon the cliffs rising from the sea, but no one has yet been able to discover the painting which Mackenzie states he put upon the rocks. This painting may have weathered away, or as the Indians say it may have been destroyed by forest fire.

The Bellacoola Indians still tell of Mackenzie's trip through the valley as their first sight of white men. A few of their statements may be from information absorbed by their later generations from discussions with white men. But much of what they say is surely from the pure Indian viewpoint, and in general corresponds with Mackenzie's account.

If my suggestion to establish Mackenzie park is carried out, visitors to the region will soon find there are many delightful and interesting side trips which may be taken from the vicinity of the park to such places as the historic sites above mentioned and to many beautiful natural features. They may in fact well spend many months in the Bella Coola valley viewing the beauties of the park without ever going up into it, and they will find in the eastern portion of the area at least that the usual objection to the rainy weather of the Pacific coast cannot be entertained. In fact the entire park area is dry during the summer months. It is free from violent storms and mosquitoes.

When the profits to Canada from the money spent by foreign tourists in visiting this area are sufficient, the roadway up the Bella Coola valley might be improved throughout its length and continued about fifty miles to connect it with the automobile road to the east and thus make this area accessible from the Caribou Road, and eventually from the Pacific states and the east. This road up the Bella Coola valley, which might appropriately be called Mackenzie highway, follows practically the route of the great explorer. In fact the width of the valley would not allow it to depart more than a mile or so from his route down the valley. Motor boats and Norwegian fishing boats make the great explorer's sea route easily accessible to visitors.