

Report of the Annual Meeting Rapports annuels de la Société historique du Canada

Report of the Annual Meeting

Across the Prairies Two Centuries Ago

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Volume 33, numéro 1, 1954

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/300359ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/300359ar>

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Éditeur(s)

The Canadian Historical Association/La Société historique du Canada

ISSN

0317-0594 (imprimé)

1712-9095 (numérique)

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Citer cet article

Wilson, C. (1954). Across the Prairies Two Centuries Ago. *Report of the Annual Meeting / Rapports annuels de la Société historique du Canada*, 33(1), 28–35.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/300359ar>

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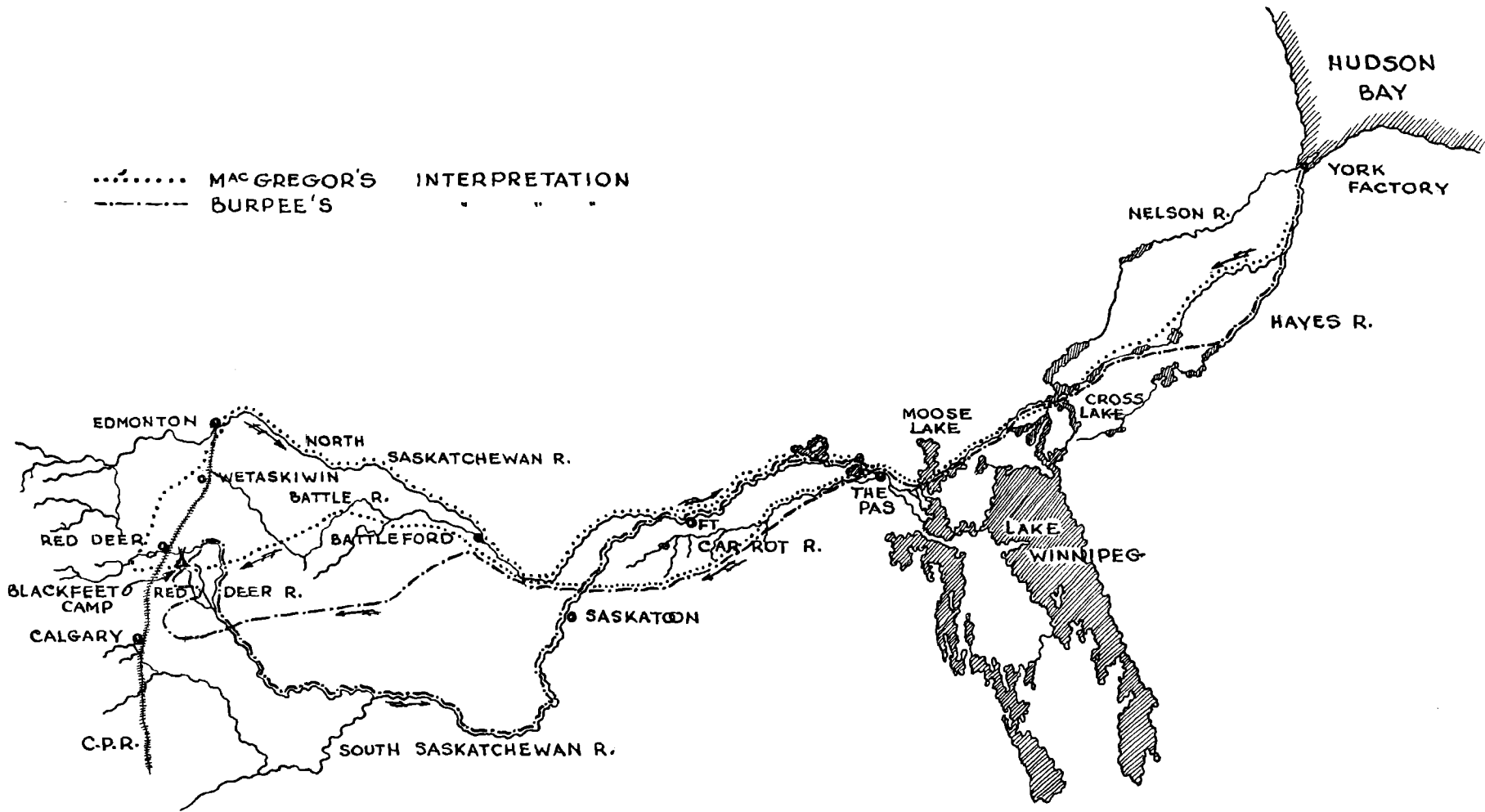
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..... MAC GREGOR'S INTERPRETATION
- - - - - BURPEE'S



ACROSS THE PRAIRIES TWO CENTURIES AGO

By CLIFFORD WILSON
Hudson's Bay Company

TWO HUNDRED years ago this month, Anthony Henday of the Hudson's Bay Company set out from York Factory to cross the prairies into the country of the Blackfoot Indians. His journey proved to be a remarkable one, of some 2000 miles, during which he became the first white man to penetrate the plains beyond the forks of the Saskatchewan, and the first to see the Rocky Mountains.

So far, two serious attempts have been made to trace that journey. The first was made by Lawrence J. Burpee, when in 1907 he read a paper to the Royal Society of Canada that was published in 1908. The second was made by Arthur S. Morton, and the condensed results of his research are to be found in his *History of the Canadian West to 1870-71*.

This paper constitutes the third such attempt. In preparing it, I have enjoyed certain advantages not available to Dr. Burpee or Prof. Morton. One was the use of aerial maps of the whole area through which Henday passed. Another was the field research on Henday's route from Saskatoon west, recently carried out by James G. MacGregor, president of the Historical Society of Alberta. And a third, available to Morton but not to Burpee, was access to two other versions of Henday's journal, not yet printed, which, with the published version, are to be found in the Archives of the Hudson's Bay Company.

Henday's own journal has been lost. The three versions of it that have survived have all been heavily edited — as is evident from the fact that they constantly disagree with each other. The version I shall call A is the familiar published one, to which reference has already been made. It was copied by Miller Christy in 1895 from the latest of the three in the Company's Archives, and deposited in the Public Archives of Canada. The original of it is contained in a volume, *Observations on Hudson's Bay*, written by Andrew Graham and dated about 1790.

Version B is apparently the official one, a fair copy sent by the chief at York Fort, James Isham, to London, for the information of the Governor and Committee, and for that reason toned down somewhat so that it would be fit to be read by them.

Version C is contained in an earlier copy of Graham's *Observations* dated about 1767-9, and is also in Graham's handwriting.

I have suggested that the two unpublished versions were of considerable help in tracing Henday's route. But actually they have confused the issue, and without Mr. MacGregor's careful field observations, this paper would be able to add very little that is new to the subject. In trying to follow a route taken by an inexperienced and unscientific explorer, 200 years ago, through completely unknown country, and set down in three widely differing versions, one needs a knowledge of the country through which he passed. And in this respect I should be totally unfitted for the task in hand, were it not for

Mr. MacGregor's detailed notes with which he has generously supplied me.

The eastern part of the journey, between York Factory and Saskatoon, will be touched upon only lightly, partly through ignorance of the country, and partly because, the more one tries to follow Henday along the tortuous rivers and over the primitive portages, the more one becomes mired in uncertainty.

It was on June 26th, 1754, that Henday set out with a party of Cree Indians for the Far West. The natives he travelled with were trading Indians — that is, Indians who were middlemen, like the Ottawas — who bought furs from the prairie tribes and sold them to the white men on the coast of Hudson Bay.

The copy of Isham's instructions to Henday preserved in the Company's archives reads in part: "Having procured a trusty home Indian Connawapa by Name, for your Companion, you are to proceed with him to the Keischachewon, Missinne pee, Earchithinue, Esinepoet, or any other Country Indians, that we have not as yet any traffick with; and that you may converse with them, making them presents, perswading them to be at peace, and not to Warr . . . but to hunt and gett goods, and bring them to the fort

"You having a compass, hand Line paper &c, &c, along with you, therefore be Very Exact in Keeping a Journal of your travels and observations Daily, . . . mind to Remark Down Every thing that occurs to your View Daily."

These Archithinues were evidently members of the Blackfoot Confederacy. Of the others mentioned, the Keischachewon were obviously those who lived along the banks of the Saskatchewan, the Missinne pee were the Indians of the Churchill River, and the Esinepoet were of course the Assiniboine.

Six days after he had left York Fort Henday wrote to Isham from "Desolation Fall". Dr. Burpee gave it as his opinion that Henday was on the Hayes River when he wrote, but when he did his research in 1907 the mapping of that part of the country was still very imperfect, while the distances, and especially the directions, that Henday gives in his journal are often impossible to reconcile with modern air maps.

But two features Henday describes show that he did not follow the later, well-known route from York Factory to the West by way of Oxford Lake and Lake Winnipeg. First, on June 29th, he passed four large falls in one day. On the Steel River (now named Fox River) there are four waterfalls within a day's travel. This is true of no other river in this area. Attick Lake is the second feature. From the last fall, where he appears to have camped on June 29th, to the entrance of Attick Lake (spelt on modern maps Utik) the canoeist travels in a southwesterly direction. Henday took a week to travel this distance, which he sets down as 153 miles, travelling the first 80 miles northwest and the last 73 west and south. This is far from agreeing with either the distances or the directions of the Fox and Bigstone Rivers, but there is no other way by which he could reasonably have travelled to reach his destination.

From Attick Lake he appears to have travelled via Cross Lake, then Minago River and Moose Lake to the Saskatchewan. While he

was on his way from Moose Lake to the Saskatchewan, Henday wrote another letter to Isham dated July 9th — obviously a mistake for 19th — of which the following is an extract:

. . . We are got near 300 Miles up this Country, and the Indians last Night inform'd Me that we should see a French Factory in 3 Days more, and that We must go by it, before We can go their Country I dont very well like it, having nothing to Satisfy Them on what account I am going up the Country and Very possibly they may suspect Me to be a Spy, but I will Face them with a good Countenance let it be how it will, for as I am gone that Farr, if it please God, Will see the Farthest end of all Their Country, as I can if the French do not stop Me, as I don't doubt but they will be very Inquisitive about it I shall say nothing at all to them (if they cannot talk English) and then I will give them a civil Lye . . . I wish your Honrs. Health, and if the French should shoot me, I have nothing to lay to Your Honrs. Charge.

On July 22nd, they came to the first French post. His meeting with its inmates, who threatened to detain him, is described in the published version of his journal. A more frank description, however, is found in Version B which Morton gives in his *History of the West*, p. 245.

Henday smoothed his way out of the post of Basquia by sending the Frenchmen two feet of tobacco, and continued westward without further interruption. On August 13th, he wrote: "We are now entered Muscuty plains, and shall soon see plenty of Buffalo, and the Archithinue Indians hunting them on horseback." That word "Muscuty" raises another problem. Here it obviously means the true prairie. In the same version of the journal — that is, Version A — he writes on October 29th: "Left Muscuty plains, which I have been in since the 13th Aug." And in version C he says much the same thing, adding: "The Indians calls the Archithinue Country by another name, which is *Arsinee Watchee* (i.e. dry Country)." But in Version B he writes on that day that he took his departure not from the Muscuty Plains but from *Arsinie Watchee*.

Now as any student of the Cree language knows, *assini* means stone or rock, and *watchee* a hill or mountain, while *Assinee Watchee* is definitely the Rocky Mountains — not "dry country" at all. The entries for December 24th only add to the confusion. Version A, says: "On a rising ground I had an extensive view of the Muscuty country which will be the last this trip inland." Version B says: "I had a fine prospect of Muscuty or *Arsinee Warchee* country . . . this will be the last time I shall see that delightful country this trip inland." While Version C says: "I had a fine view of *Arsinee Watchee* att a farr distance, it being the last sight that I shall ever have of it this year."

Version B, in other words, suggests that Muscuty and *Arsinee Watchee* are synonymous — in other words, that the plains and the Rockies are the same thing. Version C is the only one that makes sense to modern readers.

This comparison shows the difficulties of reconciling the three versions of Henday's journal as they apply to certain given days. But even greater confusion results when the researcher tries to reconcile distances and directions. These distances are not only vague: they also

appear to have been altered by the copyists, possibly in the light of later knowledge. The Governor and Committee put it concisely when, on May 12th, 1756, they wrote to Isham: "We apprehend Henday is not very expert in making Drafts with Accuracy or keeping a just Reckoning of distance other than by guess which may prove erroneous." Perhaps that is why, in the two unpublished versions, the distances travelled are often shown *double* those of the published version, and the lines of march are also changed from time to time.

Mr. MacGregor, who, as I mentioned a few minutes ago, has travelled the route he believes Henday to have taken, from Saskatoon westwards, has carefully studied the published version and also the changes made to it by versions B and C. His findings differ sharply from those of Burpee, and in many respects from those of Morton, and the historian who is concerned with Henday's actual route will find them well worth studying in detail. Here, unfortunately, we can only show them on the accompanying map in comparison with those of Burpee.

The three people who have studied Henday's route across the plains all agree that on his outward journey he crossed the South Saskatchewan river at a point just north of the present city of Saskatoon. All three authorities are also pretty well in agreement on his route as far as a point south of the present Battleford. But from that locality Burpee has him turn sharply southwest, while Morton and MacGregor believe he continued northwest and west "along the southern edge of the wooded valley of the Battle River". After that, Burpee's identification of his route differs sharply from those of the two others.

On September 20th they came to a camp of Assiniboines, from whom Henday bought a horse, not to ride, but to carry his provisions and baggage. Before they crossed the Battle River again, while they were in camp on October 1st, they met the first group of Blackfeet they had come so far to find — seven tents of them, on horseback, and armed with bows and arrows, and bone spears and darts.

Henday's party crossed the Red Deer river, according to Mr. MacGregor, near Foxall Lake on October 11th, and two days later seven more Blackfeet rode up, to tell them that they would come to the great camp on the following day.

The camp consisted of about 200 tents pitched in two rows. At one end was the teepee of the head chief, large enough to contain fifty people. The chief received them, seated on a clean (not "clear" as the Burpee version has it) buffalo skin, and attended by 20 elders. The bearded Henday was probably the first white man that the chief had seen, and for this reason, no doubt, the great man asked him to sit down at his right hand. First, several "grand pipes" were passed round, without a word being spoken. Then boiled buffalo meat was circulated in grass baskets, and the Englishman was presented with a dozen tongues.

Next day, October 15th, Henday was again invited to the chief's teepee.

"By an interpreter," he wrote, "I told him what I was sent for, & desired of him to allow some of his young men to go down to the Fort with me,

where they would be kindly received, and get guns &c. But he answered, it was far off, & they could not live without Buffalo flesh; and that they could not leave their horses &c: and many other obstacles, though all might be got over if they were acquainted with a Canoe, and could eat Fish, which they never do. The Chief further said that they never wanted food, as they followed the Buffalo and killed them with the Bows and Arrows; and he was informed the Natives that frequented the Settlements, were oftentimes starved on their journey. Such remarks," added Henday, "I thought exceeding true."

That, then, was virtually an end to the matter. He left some trade goods with the chief, and later went buffalo hunting with some of the young men. But it was plain to him that the Blackfeet had no intention of making that long, hard journey to the sea and back that he himself had only *half* completed after *16 weeks'* travel.

From the camp which he locates about 18 miles southeast of the city of Red Deer, Mr. MacGregor believes that Henday travelled west, passing what is now the Calgary-Edmonton line of the C.P.R. at about Innisfail, and going on to within a few miles of the Clearwater river, at which point he turned north and northeast.

Somewhere about here he must have had his first sight of the Rocky Mountains — and yet he does not even mention them. Of course the Indians would have told him about them. No white man ever discovered anything above ground in this country that had not already been seen by the natives. But one would have thought that a sight as magnificent as the snowy Rockies on a clear fall day would at least have inspired some comment from the first white man to see them. It is quite possible, of course, that his original journal, which was lost, contained some remarks on the scenery, and that Isham or some other wretched editor deleted them, as being too frivolous to be read by the august Governor and Committee in London. The fact remains that only once, on December 24th, does Henday refer to the mountains. Even then we are not absolutely certain that it is the Rockies he is talking about.

Henday's Crees were now back in their own hunting grounds, and during the months of November and December 1754 and January 1755 they wandered around in the country west of the present Innisfail and Red Deer, hunting for the wherewithal to sustain life and make it pleasant. They had arranged a rendezvous with other Indians not far from what is now Edmonton, and about mid-January they began to move towards it in a leisurely fashion.

On the evening of February 27th, they camped at Archithinue Lake, which Henday describes as "one mile broad and a good day's journey in length". Mr. MacGregor finds this lake easy to identify as "a long, narrow depression occupied by a chain of lakes starting with Saunders Lake and running through Ord Lake and one or two other lakes south of that, and ending in Coal Lake. There is no alternative to this."

Dr. Burpee, however, had an alternative. Henday's description, he says, clearly identifies this long, narrow body of water as Devil's Pine or Ghostpine Lake, some 80 miles due south, where Mr. MacGregor contends the great Blackfoot camp was situated. But Ghostpine Lake is only *four* miles long—which is hardly a good day's journey.

Proceeding in a northeasterly direction, Henday's party appears to have bypassed the site of modern Edmonton, some five miles east of the present city limits, crossed to the far side of the North Saskatchewan, and continued along the valley to camp on the night of March 5th slightly downstream from the mouth of the Sturgeon or Tea river. "This area along the North Saskatchewan," writes Mr. MacGregor, "has been a favorite camping place for hundreds of generations of primitive people. It is doubtful if there is any place in Alberta where it is easier to find such a great quantity and variety of primitive artifacts."

"There is no doubt in my mind," he continues, "that Henday and his Indians were now camping near the mouth of the Sturgeon This was the rendezvous of which the Northwest Company and the Hudson's Bay Company had heard so much when, fifty years later, they established Forts Augustus and Edmonton at that spot."

From March 5th to April 28th the party stayed in that one camp, going out to hunt by day, and making canoes for the voyage to York Factory. Mr. MacGregor is definitely of the opinion that Henday went home by way of the North Saskatchewan, and so is Prof. Morton. Dr. Burpee on the other hand believed that he didn't go north of Lacombe, and paddled home by way of the Red Deer and South Saskatchewan.

As they went down the river, bands of Indians joined them for the trip to York Factory, or to trade their furs to the Indians who were making the whole journey. Henday again did his best to persuade the "Archithinues" to come down to the Bay, but they refused. He was disgusted that his own Indians, who had promised Isham they would try and persuade the Blackfeet to come, never opened their mouths on the subject when the time came. "I have great reason to believe," wrote Henday in his diary, "that they are a stoppage; for if they [that is, the Blackfeet] could be brought down to trade, the others [the Crees] would be obliged to trap their own furs; which at present two-thirds of them do not."

By the time they came to the last band of Blackfeet, where he met the chief of the first great camp, his party numbered 60 canoes. Two days later they came to the first French fort, an outpost of Basquia, where the men from Montreal proceeded to get Henday's Indians drunk on brandy and then traded from them about a thousand of their prime winter furs.

Five days later they came down to Basquia, where the process was repeated. Henday was convinced that if they only had Brazil tobacco they would cut off the English trade entirely. By the time he and his party got away, four days after arrival, about all they had to take to York Fort were the heavy skins that the French would not take on the long grind to Montreal.

With seventy canoes the Englishman at last set out for home, secure from further molestation. On the first three days he paddled 130 miles in a general northeasterly direction, and found himself in Christinaux or Monoko Lake. The distance between Monoko and Deer Lake, according to his previous year's record, was only 38 miles.

But this time he travelled 150 miles, *plus four days* paddling in lakes large and small, in deep rivers and shallow rocky streams, before reaching Deer Lake.

The reason for this long detour is hard to determine. With 70 loaded canoes, why should he and his Indian friends go wandering all over the countryside for ten days instead of going straight on to York Factory? For eight of the ten days they kept on the move. About the only reason for such apparently unnecessary travel I can think of is that Henday was looking for a place to put an inland post — a project very dear to the heart of his chief, James Isham. But it is hard to imagine seventy — or even twenty — canoes full of Indians and furs following him around while he looked for one.

Going home by the same route he had used to reach Attick Lake the year before, he finally arrived at York Factory on June 23rd, having been absent a full year all except three days.

Today Henday's first western trip is recognized, to use the words of Morton, as "one of the most astonishing journeys in the astonishing history of the fur trade of the Northwest".

DISCUSSION

F. G. Roe discussed the problems of ascertaining distance from early accounts. He said that England was still under the influence of the medieval concept of miles at Henday's time, which was about $\frac{1}{2}$ the modern mile. We must make allowance for this in determining Henday's route. He pointed out the effect of heavy rainfall and droughts upon lakes and sloughs in various areas. This complicated identification of lakes by size. *R. G. Glover* said that Henday speaks of the Indians making canoes. How far south in Alberta was the white birch available? He suggested that Henday did not determine the route; that Henday's Indians would determine the route and he had to go with them. This added to the difficulties in ascertaining Henday's route. *F. G. Roe* said that white birch grew on the Red Deer River but not further south. *R. G. H. Cormack* said that white birch could be found occasionally among the poplars south of Red Deer town at present. He said that there were quite large birch trees north of Edmonton and in the vicinity of Lesser Slave Lake.