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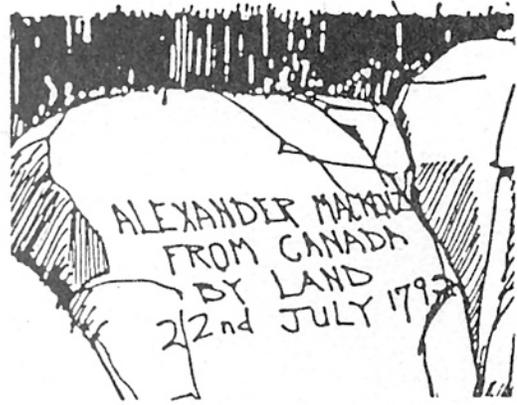
# NEWSLETTER

ALEXANDER MACKENZIE  
VOYAGEUR ROUTE ASSOCIATION

<http://www.amvr.org/>

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## THIS ISSUE

This Newsletter is a mixed cache with several items from the eastern portion of the AMVR in the Great Lakes area. It includes an interesting canoe story and Bookmark No. 2.

Kent Sedgwick, Editor

## THE LARIVIERE CANOE

This is an authentic birchbark canoe built by Felix Lariviere about 1906. Its construction was in the mode of original native and fur trade canoes without nails or machined wood. As well as traditional paddles, it was powered by oars to troll for fish.

The picture is taken on the French River (part of the Mackenzie Voyageur Route) about 48 km from the city of North Bay in northern Ontario. In the background is a summer cottage called *Pennuscan* (PENNSylvania, USA and CANada).



Felix Lariviere was the caretaker of the cottage, an occupation passed on to his oldest son, Billy, and his sons. Felix is the forward rower in the picture. Billy learned some canoe-building skills from his father and also constructed authentic bark canoes until the 1920s.

This picture and information is provided by John Gregg of York, Maine, a strong supporter of our Association. John bought *Pennuscan* in 1961. Billy built two bark canoes (14 ft. and 12 ft.) for John Gregg in 1955 and 1963 respectively, but with some modern, machined wood, plywood decks and nails. John points out that bark canoes built with modern materials are also authentic now because native and white constructors have built this way since the 1920s. John still has those two canoes as well as six others of varied construction.

NOTE: John Gregg retains rights to using the picture.

# THE RAINY RIVER PORTION OF THE ALEXANDER MACKENZIE VOYAGEUR ROUTE

submitted by Jim Smithers, Vice -President of AMVRA  
resident of Thunder Bay, Ontario on Lake Superior

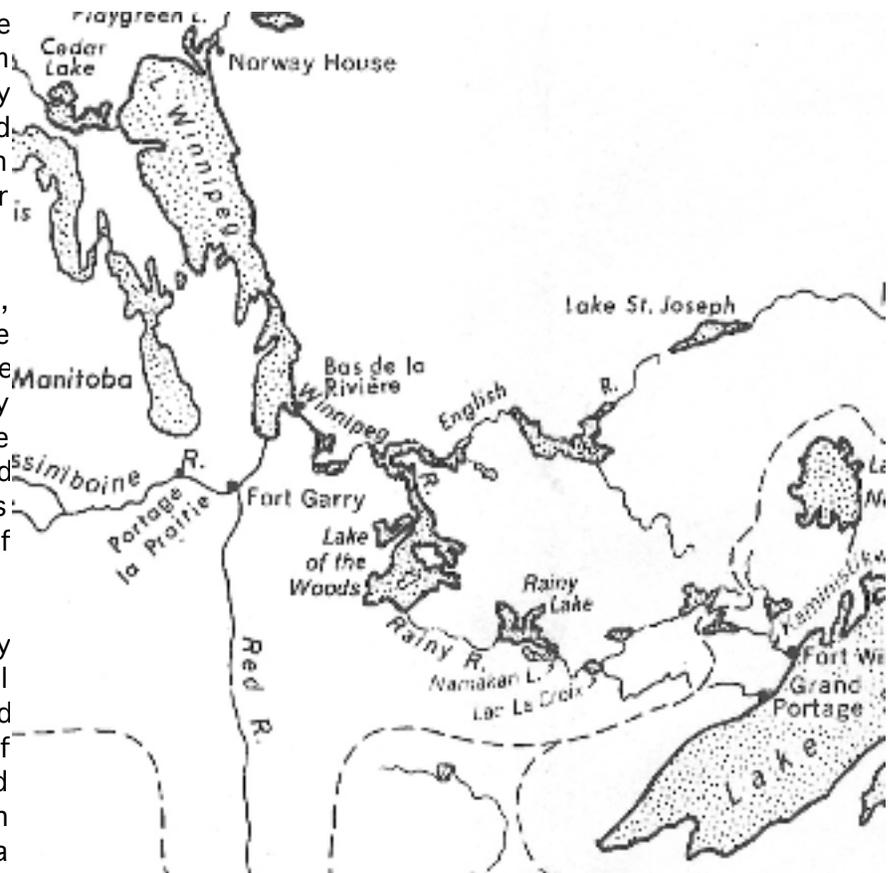
Alexander Mackenzie passed through the Rainy River portion of the AMVR many times as he travelled to and from Fort Chipewyan. In his Journals, he noted that:

"This is one of the finest rivers in the North-West... Its banks are covered with a rich soil, particularly to the North, which, in many parts, are clothed with fine open groves of oak, with the maple, the pine, and the cedar... Its waters abound in fish, particularly the sturgeon, which the natives both spear and take with nets."

During the period when the Northwest Company dominated the fur trade through its inland trading post at Fort William, the upper portion of the Rainy River acted as a transfer point for goods coming from distant locations in the Athabasca region. Special Fort William brigades took trade goods west to Rainy River, thus shortening the trip and enabling the western brigades to return to their home forts in a single summer season.

The river has had numerous Indian, French, and English names based on the vast clouds of mist generated by the thundering falls just below the Rainy River outlet of Rainy Lake. Today, the power of the falls is harnessed and provides power to two huge paper mills on the Canadian and American sides of the river.

To the east of the Rainy Lake-Rainy River-Lake of the Woods water-travel corridor, the rocky Canadian Shield dominates the landscape with a mix of rock outcrops, lakes, swamps and mixed boreal forests. To the west, the Canadian Prairie landscape dominates. This is a land of productive farms producing grains, hay, and cattle. When crossing the Rainy Lake Causeway, one leaves one distinct ecosystem and enters another.



Map excerpted from that valuable guide to the AMVR,  
"Fur Trade Canoe Routes of Canada/Then and Now"  
by Eric Morse

This coming-together of environments undoubtedly enabled Aboriginal societies to flourish as the area is rich in fish, game, berries, and wild rice. Archeologists have identified some 3000 years of Aboriginal settlement, and there was a lot of trade between the local natives and tribal communities both North and South of the region. For example, the Sioux travelled North to trade corn for rice and furs. The Rainy River

Laurel Aboriginal Society was quite prosperous, and extensive burial mounds are found on both sides of the river. Some have been developed as research interpretive and tourism sites. It's a pleasant 160 km canoe trip through a mellow rural landscape down the Rainy River. There are a few small towns for a pop-stop, and while campsites may be next to a few curious cows, it's a nice ride in a steady current down a prairie-like river. It's a bit muddy, so bring water. The vast delta where the river enters Lake of the Woods offers endless bird-watching opportunities during the migration seasons.

One of my favourite Rainy River historical moments involves Frederick von Graffenreid. "Fred" was an officer in a group of Swiss mercenaries during the occupation of Fort William by Lord Selkirk. By Christmas, boredom had set in, so Fred and a few of the boys decided to snowshoe to the Fort at Rainy River to visit his friend Odet. Needless to say, it was A LOT harder than they

expected, and they barely made it alive. They became so hungry that they ate the seeds they were taking to the Fort for a new garden. And when they arrived, they found that Odet had gone farther West to visit another friend. Oh, well!

A short distance down the Rainy River from the outlet of Rainy Lake, the Big Fort River enters from the South. This was an important water route to and from the upper Mississippi River, and it was used for both trade and warlike purposes. It was not used by the European fur-traders, as a better Mississippi River connection out of Lake Superior was available via the St. Louis River near the present-day city of Duluth, Minnesota.

The twin cities of Fort Frances and International Falls each have about 8000 residents, and while the two paper mills dominate their economies, both have profitable



At the top is the Ochagach map drawn on birchbark and used by LaVerendrye in 1731. Nat'l Archives of Canada C-069747

farming and tourism enterprises. In the past, there were numerous mining operations on the Canadian side of the border - especially in the Atikokan area. The bridge connecting the two towns is privately owned (and currently for sale), so it costs a few bucks to trans-border shop. Fort Frances is named after Frances Simpson, the young wife of Governor George Simpson of HBC fame. She visited the town in 1830 on her way West to the Red River settlement. Modern siding had made both of these "older" towns quite smart looking.

The first European to visit the Rainy River area was Jacques De Noyon in 1688. He spent the winter between the small rapids at the outlet of the lake and the huge cataract a short distance downstream. Various independent traders visited the area over the years, but it was not until 1731 that a permanent fort was built and occupied on a regular basis. La Verendrye reached the mouth of the Pigeon River in the summer of 1731 shortly after acquiring the OCHAGACH map of the water route west of Lake Superior from this famous Cree traveller. He sent his nephew La Jameraye to establish a fort (Fort St. Pierre) during the winter, and he arrived in the spring of 1732 on his way west to Lake Winnipeg. The loss of their traditional Hudsons Bay trading posts to the British in the 1714 Treaty of Utrecht forced the Montreal merchants to seek an inland water route to the fur riches of the west. As well, the myth of the Western Sea was still alive, and the hopes of a fast and easy route to the Orient westward from Lachine (The China), Quebec was a powerful motivator for early explorers and traders.

After the take-over of the NWC by the HBC in 1821, the Rainy River area gradually declined in fur trade importance, and over the years, logging, mining, pulp and paper, farming and eventually tourism became important aspects of the local economies. As part of the unique Canadian/American Boundary Waters Corridor, various border problems crop up from time to time. Most issues are effectively dealt with through negotiation and the International Joint Commission on trans-border water matters. A recent decision by North Dakota to drain water for irrigation out of Lake of the Woods based on a unilateral we-need-it basis has Canadian alarm bells

ringing loudly. On the other hand, American resort operators don't like the Canadian policy on requiring remote-access permits to fish in the Canadian side of the lakes and rivers.

The Rainy River region has a long history of being a mingling-place for the numerous Aboriginal groups that populated the area. Today, many First Nation groups inhabit both sides of the river, with Bingo Night providing a modern-day mingling-moment. Alexander Mackenzie noted the following some 200 years ago: "This is the residence of the first chief... He is by distinction called Nectam, which implies personal pre-eminence. Here also the elders meet in council to treat of peace or war." Hey, not much has changed, has it?

## **MACKENZIE VOYAGEUR ROUTE MAP**

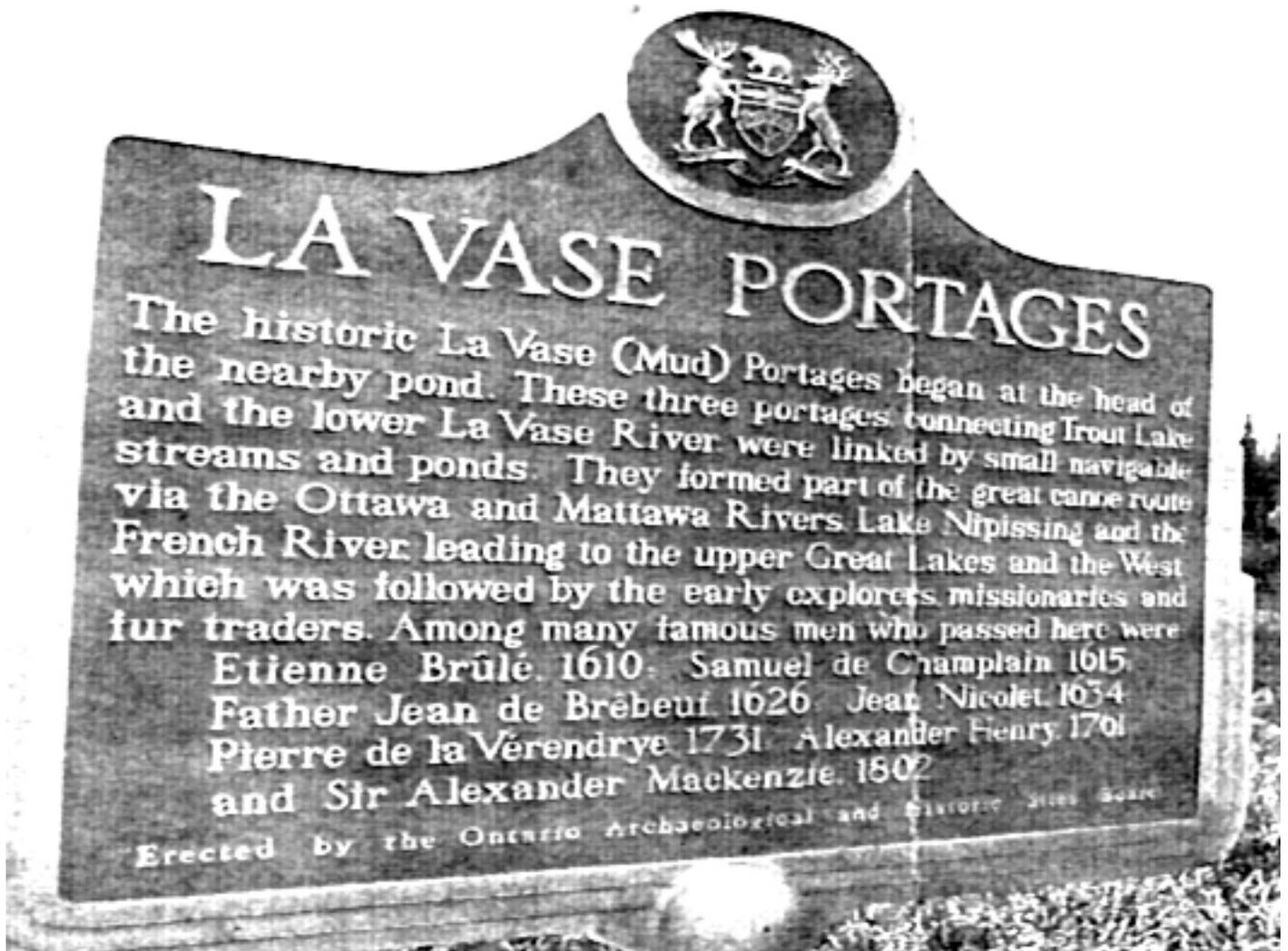
To follow the AMVR in the Great Lakes area, you need our map (2004) of "Canada Sea to Sea on the Alexander Mackenzie Voyageur Route", now including the Northwest Territories and Mackenzie River. It's available from Sandhill Book Marketing in Kelowna (1-800-667-3848). Suggested price \$5.95.

We were pleased to receive an order from Parks Canada for copies of the map. They are for distribution at the eastern end of the voyageur route at The Fur Trade at Lachine National Historic Site (website below).

[http://www.pc.gc.ca/lhn-nhs/qc/lachine/index\\_e.asp](http://www.pc.gc.ca/lhn-nhs/qc/lachine/index_e.asp)

## ANOTHER ENDANGERMENT STORY

In the last issue, I filled a fair bit of space with text and photos of the impact of ATVs on the Mackenzie walking trail portion of the AMVR in British Columbia. Now I have another issue to bring to our membership. It was drawn to my attention by John Gregg (Lariviere canoe article), our member in Maine with a cottage on the French River, part of the AMVR in Ontario.

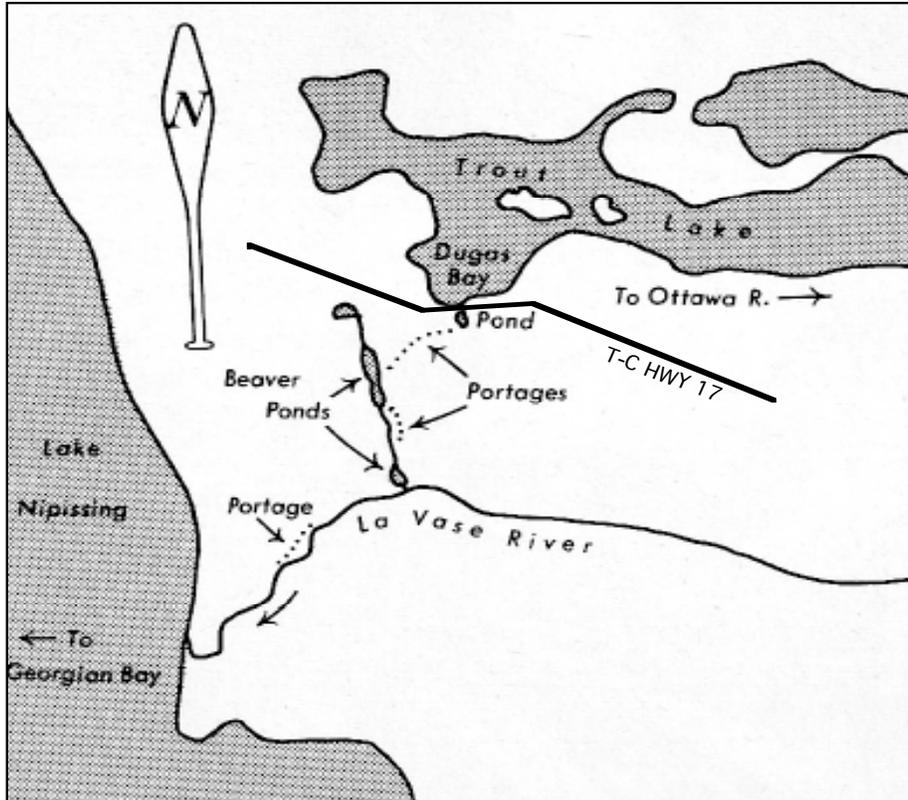


Historic plaque at Trans-Canada Highway

Within the municipal limits of the City of North Bay, Ontario are La Vase Portages. A 1500 m portage connects Trout Lake with a series of beaver ponds leading to La Vase (mud) River. These portages cross the divide between the drainage basin of the Ottawa River and Great Lakes, a crucial section of the AMVR. The 11-km La Vase Portages, one of Canada's most important portages, was added to the designated section of the Mattawa, a Canadian Heritage River, in 2002. A group in North Bay, the "Restore the Link Committee", raised funds to purchase private property along the historic route, put up interpretive signs, and researched the location of this historic route.



In 1999, a developer first made application to the Ministry of Natural Resources for a 40 ha/100 ac parcel of Crown land south of the Trans-Canada Highway adjacent to the portage route. He proposed to quarry granite rock (the Canadian Shield underlies the portage) to crush for aggregate. Numerous stakeholders have sought input to the application and North Bay council must approve a rezoning for the intended use. In addition to consideration of the appropriateness of a quarry beside a historical route and in a conservation area wetland, the issue of the width of a buffer (60-200m) between the quarry and the route is a specific detail being debated.



Map modified from  
"Fur Trade Canoe Routes of Canada/Then and Now"  
by Eric Morse

I find it rather amazing that there would be any debate at all. Surely in this instance the heritage and environmental values far outweigh the merits of the quarry proposal. It's not as though there is a shortage of granite rock in the Canadian Shield elsewhere along the Trans-Canada Highway. I've asked North Bay planning staff to advise me of the final outcome of the application.

Kent Sedgwick



Information mainly from North Bay Nugget newspaper, 8 Nov. 2005

## BOOKMARK No. 2

by Kent Sedgwick

This is another in an occasional series in the AMVR Association Newsletter describing *Mackenzie-ana*, primarily Mackenzie biographies. The subjects of the Bookmarks are included in the author's collection of works on Mackenzie and the fur trade.

“Mackenzie and His Voyageurs:  
By Canoe to the Arctic and the Pacific  
1789-93”  
by Arthur P. Woollacott

This Bookmark is a retelling of Mackenzie's two important voyages of exploration with no real original information. Arthur Philip Woollacott (1875-1958) was born in Victoria, British Columbia and a few family papers are on deposit at the Provincial Archives. He enlisted in the Irish Fusiliers of Canada in 1916 for the Canadian Overseas Expeditionary Force. Why he became interested in Mackenzie is not apparent but his enlistment paper states his occupation as “Cruiser and Teacher”. If “cruiser” meant a forestry occupation, perhaps he worked in the interior of British Columbia through which Mackenzie had passed. He did seem somewhat interested in exploration, publishing a paper in 1935: “Castaway Japanese Junks Discovering America”.

His book “Mackenzie and His Voyageurs” was published in 1927. Woollacott believed “...discoveries cannot be seen in proper perspective except against a background of history.” Consequently, the author included “...references to his[Mackenzie's] private life, his business activities, and the events of the time, to give perspective to his work as an explorer.” It is a book of 237 pages with 32 photographs, one simple map of Canada with Mackenzie's routes, a modest bibliography of secondary materials and an index. Strangely, none of the photos are Woollacott's; he relied greatly on the photos of the Geological Survey of Canada, many of which are only peripheral to Mackenzie.

The first 29 pages provide a context to Mackenzie's voyages including the French, then British advance westward across North America and the arrival of Mackenzie at Fort Chipewyan. Woollacott uses the

next 60 pages to describe the arctic voyage in 1789. For the arctic voyage, he relied on Mackenzie's published journal to retell the story but with few quotes from the journal. The next chapter (11 pages) summarizes Spanish and Russian voyages to the west coast of North America which provided the knowledge the author says Mackenzie must have acquired in London during his sojourn there in the winter of 1791-2. Then a 15-page chapter covers his wintering at Fort Fork on the Peace River in 1792-3.

Woollacott provides 77 pages describing Mackenzie's Pacific voyage in 1793. Woollacott states he followed Mackenzie's route from Peace River, Alberta to Alexandria on the Fraser River by canoe. Yet, like the Arctic voyage, the author relies on retelling the story from Mackenzie's journal without offering his own observations (or photographs) of the route. For the overland trail section from the Fraser to the coast mountains, he used geologist George Dawson's reports from 1876. He also used Bishop's report of 1925 (Newsletter 57) for the Bella Coola to the Rock, saltwater portion of Mackenzie's journal.

The final chapter of 14 pages argues that “Canada owes a great deal to the fur companies.” He basically lists the follow-up explorations of traders after Mackenzie (Finlay, Fraser, etc.); stating that: “To the combined efforts of all of the above is due, then, the fact that Canada west of the Rockies is today British.”

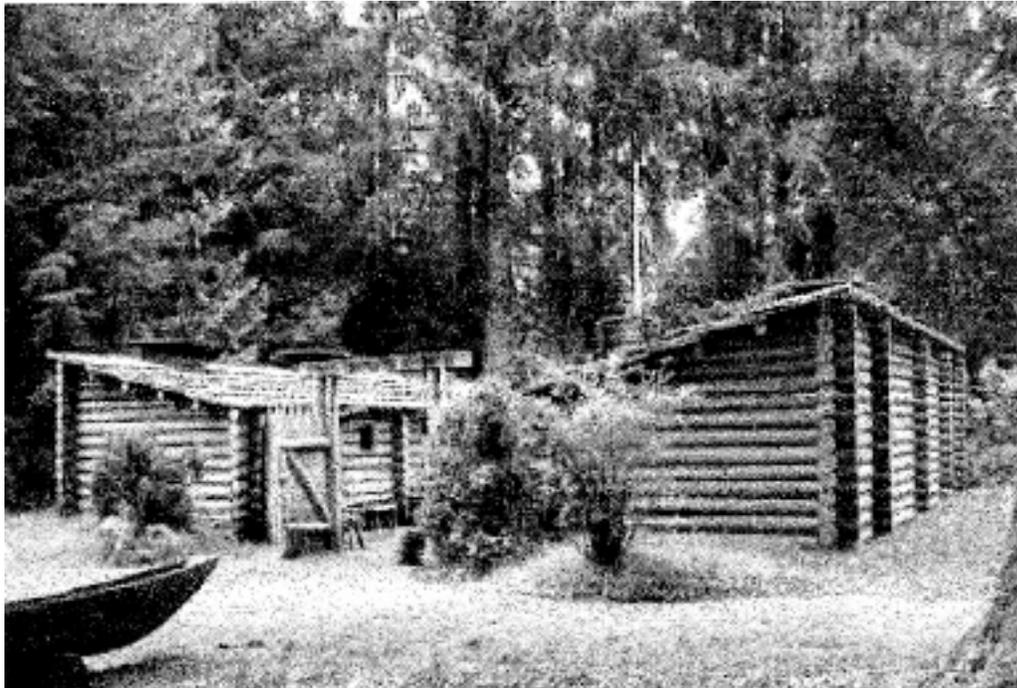
This book is not a work of originality of interpretation but is a retelling of Mackenzie's journal in the author's words. The most interesting part consists of four appendices concerning Dawson's report on the overland trail, a surveyor's report of Mackenzie's crossing point of the continental divide, a summary of “Indian tribes”, and a reproduction of the Nootka Convention between Spain and Britain.

Used copies of “Mackenzie and His Voyageurs” are easy to find, with a wide price range of \$14-\$150. The latter seems to be a lot for a not-rare book with little originality. <http://www.abebooks.com/>

## FORT CLATSOP DESTROYED

In Newsletter 56, I commented on the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial project which had its western culmination at Fort Clatsop near Astoria in Oregon. L&C began construction of the fort as a winter headquarters on 10 December 1805 and moved in on December 24. L&C left the fort to return to St Louis on 23 March 1806. The original fort rotted away but in 1955 volunteers built a replica from Clark's sketches.

Unfortunately, the replica fort burned down on 7 November 2005, just before the bicentennial commemorations. The superintendent of Lewis and Clark National Historic Park says the fort will be rebuilt but certainly not in time for the bicentennial.



## SIMON FRASER BICENTENNIAL

In the last Newsletter, I lamented the lack of recognition given to the bicentennial of Simon Fraser's crossing of the Rocky Mountains for the North West Co. He directed the founding of a post at McLeod Lake, which has endured as the first permanent European settlement in British Columbia.

But I lamented too soon. In early January 2006, Stephen Hume had a 60,000 word, week-long series in the Vancouver Sun newspaper on Simon Fraser. Subtitled "The Birth of Modern British Columbia", Hume created the very recognition I was seeking for Fraser by providing biographical and human interest background to his exploits and by following his route along the AMVR to British Columbia.

I e-mailed Hume a note of congratulations on behalf of AMVRA and encouraged him to do another series on the David Thompson bicentennial which begins next year. More on Thompson in the next Newsletter.

You can still read this outstanding series at: <http://www.canada.com/vancouver/sun/fraser/index.html>

## WINTER VOYAGEUR TRAVEL: THE PACKATEERS

by Jim Smithers

During the fur-trade era, it took quite some time for messages, goods, and people to travel to and from isolated trading posts in Western Canada to the company offices and manufacturing plants in England. The order for a particular style of blanket or a new metal trap would be take about a year to travel to Europe as it was hand-carried by canoe and sailing boat . At least another year would elapse as the goods were manufactured and transported by the same arduous method back to the source of the order.

Since there was great competition between the NWCo., the HBCo., and numerous independent traders, the "edge" in trade was often gained by having the the most desirable trade item FIRST. Modern-day day department stores face the same competitive problem, and they work incessantly at having the best and fastest inventory control systems. Wal Mart, for example, has the largest, private-satellite, communications and inventory control system in the world.

Since most of Canada is dominated by snow and ice for about half the year, canoe travel was generally restricted to about 5 months. While heavy and bulky trade goods couldn't be easily transported long distances over ice and snow, people (and messages) could. So, there was an extensive network of snowshoe routes connecting trading posts and scattered Native and European settlements. Much of the travel was local, as it was common for people to travel to the "next" fort in the dead of winter to visit a friend since boredom caused by enforced isolation and idleness was a constant problem. This practice was in keeping with Native traditions, as winter was often an idle season, and shoeshoe travel is generally quite pleasant - no rain, BUGS, or wet feet.

Since the speedy travel of orders for trade goods were so important in this highly competitive marketplace, there was a special group of "voyageurs" called Packateers. These hardy travellers carried messages of various kinds between forts, and to and from company headquarters in North America. In general, the system was like the better-known pony express mail system. There was an interconnected "chain", and the each Packateer carried messages along a well-defined route through a specific region. The routes were closely related to the existing canoe routes and

attendant Native trade, trapping, and persona travel routes. They took shortcuts to the local canoe route when it was easier/faster, and in some cases, locals were hired to pack trails in the early season and after heavy snow falls. While travel in unpacked deep snow is SLOW and EXHAUSTING, 6 to 7 km an hour and 50 to 80 km days are not too difficult on packed trails. (This is almost identical to canoe travel speeds.)

In some ways, this system parallels both the current snowmobile trail network which connects much of Canada for winter recreational purposes, and the extensive winter road network which enables heavy and non-perishable goods to reach isolated Northern communities and mines cheaply by truck.

This winter travel system was very important in getting trade orders to Montreal in time to be on the first sailing ship departing for England after navigation opened on the St. Lawrence River in May. Messages taken by canoe from the West wouldn't make it to a ship until the fall, and if manufacturing was involved, this might delay the final delivery by a year.

As well as this winter message and people travel system, it was often common for the canoe brigades to not make it all the way back to the remote fort before freeze-up. The trade good would then be stashed, and after a few good snows, they would be hauled by snowshoe and sled to their final destination. This was NOT considered much fun!

Alexander Mackenzie also travelled during the winter for both business and pleasure (boredom), and one winter he travelled from Fort Chipewyan to the fort at Ile a la Crosse to visit a friend. He too suffered winter boredom. (Living in a wood hut and eating fish every day at 40 below would bore anyone.)

Lastly, since I used to like taking long heritage-type trips, I still think about re-enacting two momentous snowshoe trips. During the period when Lord Selkirk and the HBCo. were at "war" with the NWCo., Prichard carried an "impending- conflict" message from Montreal to Winnipeg via the James Bay route at exactly the same time that Lagamodiere carried a similar message from Winnipeg to Montreal via the Red River, Northern Minnesota and Great Lakes Route. Now that's a LOT of snowshoeing!

# PEACE RIVER MUSEUM EXPANSION PROJECT

by Adele Rhymys, AMVRA President

Newsletter 57 noted an expansion at the Peace River Museum to create archive space. This Phase IV is well under construction. This new wing will house the Archives and have a Reading Room so the public can have access to the fine collection of photos and print materials. The area will all be air conditioned, with a new furnace that will also upgrade the air in the original museum section. We have extended the Fort façade on the exterior, so our Fur Trade theme is further developed. The whole complex is now very attractive for tourism purposes, and is large enough to handle class groups, and coach tours. Curator Dallas Wood is developing the master plan for displays in the new Canoe Shed, to fulfill our dream of the Mackenzie Interpretive Centre. Within the Town of Peace River, the Museum has become a striking landmark with its lookout towers as a focal point at the south end of Main Street.

## WRITERS WANTED

Although I have not yet run out of material for the Newsletter, I am opening up the pages to anyone who would like to contribute a short, current notice or a longer (max. 1000 words) article about Mackenzie, the fur trade or locations along the AMVRA.

Please email the text and photos to:

Kent Sedgwick, Editor

kent\_sedgwick@shaw.ca.

## TRAIL GUIDE

AMVRA has reprinted (without an update) the 2nd edition, 1987 guide to the Alexander Mackenzie Heritage Trail from the Fraser River (km 0) to the end of the foot trail (km 347) on Hwy. 20 in the Bella Coola valley at Burnt Bridge Creek. Guides are available in bookstores in British Columbia and from Sandhill Book Marketing in Kelowna (1-800-667-3848). Cost is approx. \$23.

## AMVRA - ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The AGM for 2006 will be held in Peace River, Alberta on March 23. Please contact President Adele Rhymys for details. 780-332-2554

## AMVRA MEMBERSHIP

Individual - \$10 per year

Business, Institution - \$25 per year

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