

NEWSLETTER

ALEXANDER MACKENZIE VOYAGEUR ROUTE ASSOCIATION

EDITOR'S NOTE

This newsletter focusses on the terminus of the Nuxalk-Carrier Grease Trail (Alexander Mackenzie Heritage Trail) to balance the last issue which was concerned with the start of the trail at Km 0. Also included is a thought-provoking article about "Communications", past and present.

TRAIL DEDICATION

The terminus of the Alexander Mackenzie Heritage Trail (Nuxalk-Carrier Grease Trail) is at Km 347 in the Bella Coola valley where Burnt Bridge Creek flows under Highway 20, the road to Bella Coola from Williams Lake. Burnt Bridge is a roadside picnic site on the creek just inside the western boundary of Tweedsmuir Park. Several hundred metres down the creek, where it flows into the Bella Coola River, is the site of the Friendly Village named in Mackenzie's journal. Also at Burnt Bridge picnic site is a boulder with plaque commemorating the official opening of the trail. And therein lies a tale.

In 1925, Harlan Smith, an archeologist with the Geological Survey of Canada, called for the creation of "Mackenzie Park" in *Science* magazine. It took a while but the B.C. government created a huge park reserve in 1936, extending 200 km north to south, between Highway 16 and Highway 20, on the eastern slopes of the Coast Mountains. However, the proposed park was named Tweedsmuir after the governor-general of the time, Lord Tweedsmuir. His term of office was 1935-1940. Tweedsmuir's birth name was John Buchan and he had a significant writing career as well as one in politics and the military. His wife, writing as Susan Buchan, also had a literary career and the couple instituted the Governor-Generals' Literary Awards in 1936.

In 1937, Tweedsmuir, his wife and third son Alastair (b. 1918) commenced a tour of the proposed park from Burns Lake on the Canadian National Railway because the present Highway 16 was not constructed. The intent was to



Lord and Lady Tweedsmuir at Ootsa Lake at the north end of the park, about to board a float plane

traverse the park to the Bella Coola valley, travelling by horse, boat and float plane. However, inclement weather caused the schedule to fall behind and the party eventually flew over the park to Bella Coola. They were welcomed by hereditary chief Sam King, the great-grandson of the chief who welcomed Mackenzie in 1793. The welcome included an eagle down blessing and naming Tweedsmuir "Eckwenica - The man above whose position enables him to assist those below."

The party then drove some 70 km up the gravel highway through the Bella Cool valley to Burnt Bridge where the governor-general visited

the site of Friendly Village where Mackenzie was welcomed. They returned to Prince Rupert by ship to reach the railway on the return journey to Ottawa. Lady Tweedsmuir even authored an article in *National Geographic* (April 1938) about the trip.

Tweedsmuir Park was officially created in 1938. Today, its area of 9800 square kilometres is administratively divided into north and south parts, recognizing the access from Highway 16 and Highway 20 respectively.

The 50th anniversary celebration of the park in 1988 was also the occasion when the Alexander Mackenzie Heritage Trail (Nuxalk-

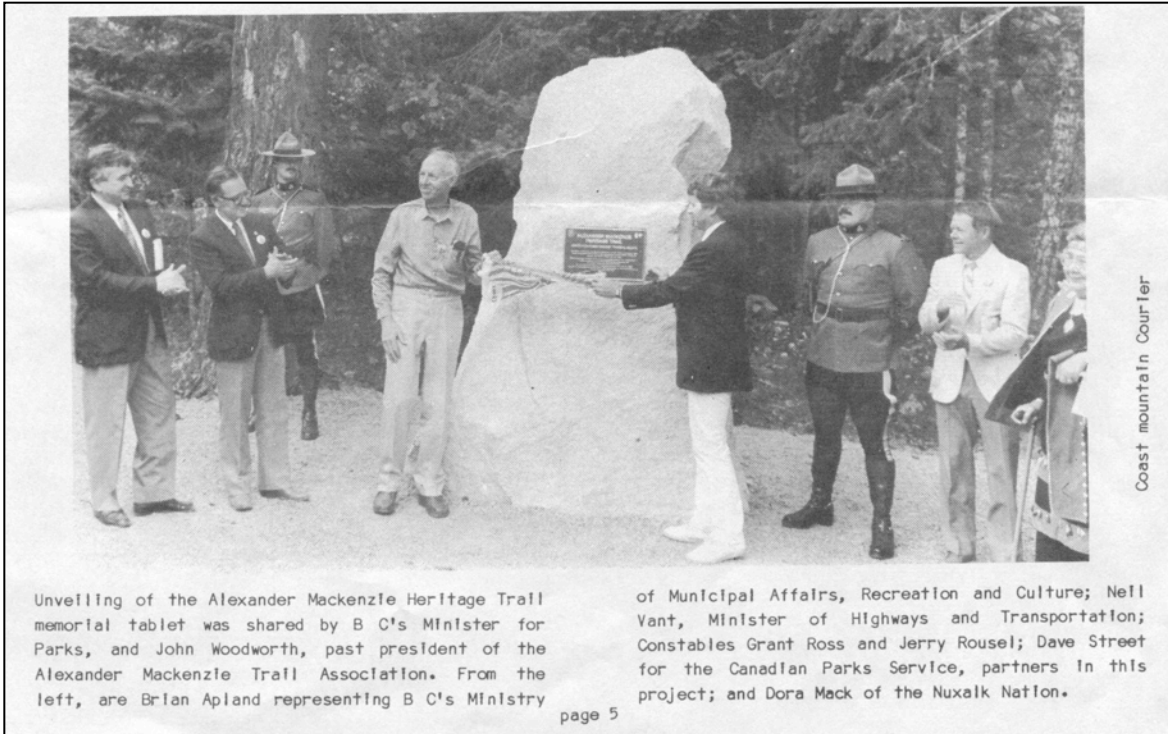


Lord Tweedsmuir and Dr. Terry Huberts, new Minister of Parks for B.C., cut the Tweedsmuir Park 50th Anniversary cake at the public picnic.

Coast Mountain Courier

Carrier Grease Trail) was officially designated. The celebration was marked by the attendance of the second Lord Tweedsmuir. A plaque provided by BC Parks was unveiled to officially designate the trail. A humorous skit reenacted the arrival of Mackenzie at Friendly Village.

Players included local actors, archeological students, Mackenzie Trail Association members and members of the Nuxalk First Nation. Photos are from Newsletter No. 14.



The infamous skit about Mackenzie's arrival at Friendly Village. Standing left to right are head voyageur Joseph Landry, Alex Mackenzie and second-in-command Alexander Mackay. The latter is played by your editor.

MACKENZIE'S ROUTE AT BURNT BRIDGE

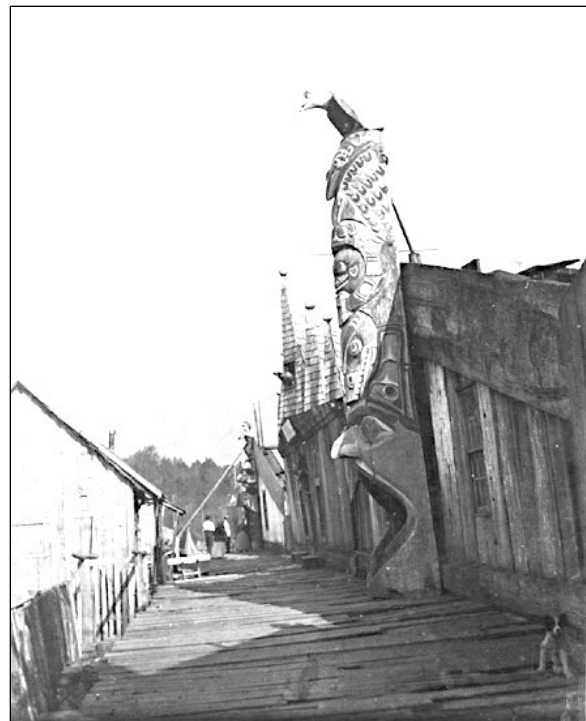
The defined Mackenzie Heritage Trail from Km 331 to the end at Km 347 does not follow Mackenzie's actual route. As explained in the trail guide, *In the Steps of Alexander Mackenzie*, before the native families travelling with him left in another direction, they "pointed out to me the pass in the mountains, bearing south by east by compass." Mackenzie followed that direction over a snow-filled mountain pass and down a cliff-face he called "the precipice," probably along a track east of Burnt Bridge Creek. They started on July 17 "before the sun rose" and did not arrive in Friendly Village in the valley until "It was now dark." It was so difficult that when the Mackenzie Trail was established for hikers, an old trail from the early 1900s, locally known as Burnt Bridge Grease Trail, was used west of Burnt Bridge Creek.

However, to provide a sense of Mackenzie's actual route, BC Parks and AMVRA have provided a 2-hour loop trail (with a locally available brochure) from Burnt Bridge picnic site up the east side of the creek to the foot of the precipice and then west over the creek on a bridge to an easy return to the picnic site on an old logging road and the last bit of the Mackenzie Heritage Trail.

From Burnt Bridge, you can follow Mackenzie's route by driving Highway 20 through the scenic Bella Coola valley. The highway parallels the Bella Coola River, down which native canoemen took Mackenzie. He praised their skill, saying his own voyageurs were inferior in canoemanship.

MACKENZIE IN BELLA COOLA

The Nuxalk village at the site of present-day Bella Coola was known as Qomq'-ts. On July 19th, Mackenzie said it consisted of "six very large houses, erected on pallisades [sic- meaning pilings], rising twenty-five feet from the ground...From these houses I could perceive the termination of the [Bella Coola] river, and its discharge



Qomq'-ts in 1894

into a narrow arm [North Bentinck Arm] of the sea." This is a remarkably subdued statement, considering it was the termination of the transcontinental crossing from Montreal.

The town of Bella Coola today (population about 1000) is the location of the Bella Coola Valley museum, housed in a log building, c.1892. It has some interesting



artifacts and displays about Mackenzie.

A short distance to the west along the highway is a provincial plaque for Mackenzie mounted on a roadside boulder. This is not the same plaque as on the famous rock 65 km down the channel.



From Qomq'-ts, Mackenzie then canoed to the famous Rock where he took his final latitude-longitude readings. His latitude calculation was about 1.8 km south of the rock and about 40 km west. He then painted his famous "brief memorial" with "vermillion in melted grease" on the rock face. The inscription as written in his journal is:

Alexander Mackenzie, from Canada, by land, the twenty-second of July, one thousand seven hundred and ninety-three.

Whether he really wrote all these words out in full, complete with commas, is problematical. The last

time the original inscription was seen and reported as "partly decipherable" was by a fur trader in 1836.

In 1926, the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada constructed a concrete monument



The monument on the Rock accessible only by boat or float plane.

with a plaque on the rock. A version of Mackenzie's inscription was chiselled into the rock and painted red. Wendy Kingsley, Manager of the Bella Coola Valley Museum,



A rubbing from the Rock inscription

explains to visitors that Mackenzie's original inscription had long since disappeared, so the HSMB of Canada, in its wisdom, chiselled into the same rock an abbreviation of the original inscription. She likes to point out differences between the inscription recorded in the journal and the current BSMB rock inscription, especially the change in spelling of Mackenzie's name. The museum also has the plaque from 1926 which was replaced for the 1993 Mackenzie bicentennial.

MISCELLANEOUS

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

Check some changes in the website, with more to come, including back Newsletters

AGM in Peace River, Alberta is scheduled for Tuesday March 30, 2010 in the evening. Contact President Adele Boucher-Rymhs at 780-332-2554 or adelrymhs@abnorth.com

COMMUNICATIONS THEN AND NOW - 1789 TO 2009

submitted by Dr. Jim Smithers
leader of the 1989-1993
Mackenzie Bicentennial Expeditions

If Alexander Mackenzie decided that he wanted blue blankets rather than the usually-popular red ones delivered to his remote trading post at Fort Chipewyan, a labourious and time-consuming process ensued. A hand-written order would be sent on the first express canoe heading for Fort Frances (Lac la Pluie) where it would be transferred to a special brigade destined for the Great Rendezvous at Fort William. Here, it would be bundled with other orders and carried by canoe to Lachine. Once again, it would be compiled with a myriad of other requests and placed aboard a ship sailing to England. Upon arrival in the fall of the year it was formulated, it would then be conveyed by horse carriage to the appropriate woolen mill.

If all went well, the requested blue blankets MIGHT make it to Fort Chipewyan by the fall of the following year. Of course, a whole host of interruptions often short-circuited this carefully-orchestrated flow of information and goods, and it might be two- or three-years before the requested blankets actually arrived.

Today, Mackenzie could use a number of systems/devices including Priority Post, numerous courier companies, phone, fax, email, Twitter, and Skype to forward his request directly to the woolen factory in England. This might take a few days, but more often just a few seconds. (However, since the famous Star Trek transporter isn't operational yet, the blankets would take a few days to arrive by air express.)

There are a whole host of computer-based communications systems available today. Since we have sons living abroad (one in Hawaii and the other in Japan), we recently became Skype users. Skype is a free downloadable software package on the internet (via Google) that enables one to engage in real-time voice and video contact with people around the world. My wife and I now sit before the web cam (perched either on the computer or built-in) in our home office and chat with our sons who live far-far away.

As we chatted this past evening, the Skype user notation on the screen indicated that more than fourteen-million people were on Skype at that particular moment. To date, there are three-hundred seventy (370) million Skype users worldwide. (Our next step is to get all five of our children on a conference call at the same time.)

If Mackenzie had Skype, he could just click on the appropriate contact registrant and instantly both a Skype tune and an icon would be displayed on the contact's computer. Once they clicked on the green phone icon on their monitor, direct communication would take place. Ever fast, eh??? BUT – make sure you're properly dressed! ! ! !

Mackenzie was a prolific letter writer with Roderick Mackenzie being a favourite recipient. (The last ninety-pages of Lamb's epic book on Mackenzie are devoted to his voluminous correspondence with a variety of friends, NWCo (Northwest Company) Partners, and government officials.) While posted in many remote locations, Mackenzie maintained a considerable library (for the times), and he often too-off on long trips to visit friends in nearby forts during the slack winter season. In First to Cross the Continent, Barry Gough notes that Fort Chipewyan was often referred to as the "Athens of the North".

Today, developing and maintaining a library is much less work than during Mackenzie's time. I'm about to buy a Kindle II Reader, which is marketed by Amazon. It costs \$360.00 U.S., holds 1500 books, and according to the reviews, the fourteen (14) shades of grey/black of the screen makes for easy reading. Because it's wireless, a book can be downloaded anywhere in sixty (60) seconds for \$9.99 U.S. It's about the size of a thin standard-sized book, and there are more than 250,000 books available in the Amazon inventory. Major newspapers cost a few dollars a month.

Thirty-nine members of the Mackenzie Expeditions now keep in touch as members of the Expeditions' Facebook site maintained by Shawn Patterson. I belong, and it is NEAT to see former "lean-mean paddling machines" with more girth and less hair – along with the usual middle-class collection of children, dogs, gardens, mortgages, and Volvo sedans - the BMW roadster is long gone!

If Mackenzie had the customary collection of modern-day communication devices at Fort Chipewyan, here's what he MIGHT (??) be doing on a daily basis:

- buying/selling muskets on eBay.
- finding the best route to a new trading area on Google Earth.
- sending a text message Roderick Mackenzie.
- Googling the latest British Ministry of Trade policies.
- downloading a Tom Casey novel on e-Book.
- posting his opinion on the new HBCo policy on tobacco sales on his personal blog.

- updating his tune collection on his iPod.
- talking on the cell phone to the voyageur sent to retrieve the trade goods which were cashed in the bush because of an early freeze-up the past fall.
- updating his Blackberry to receive streaming videos of the latest movies.
- sending a Twitter message to Rick Sanchez at CNN regarding the latest stock market scandal.
- updating his Facebook site. (He might prefer My Space.)
- taking pictures with his digital camera of a group of native trappers who arrived at the Fort the day before. Since this was the first contact with people who lived on the western slope of the Camsell Mountain Range, the pictures would be immediately e-mailed to the Anthropology Museum in London, England.
- fax a message to his book publisher.
- check the weather in Orkneys on Radio BBC.
- scrub the spam from his email account.
- watch a movie on his portable DVD player.
- view the latest popular "soap" on TV - "The Perils of Peter Pond!"
- update his racing-car skills on his new xBox.
- WRITE A LETTER TO HIS MOTHER - she refuses to use any of the "new-fangled" stuff.

Here's another new one - Google just announced a new service called Google Tracker - it lets you monitor the location of anyone carrying a mobile communications device on your home/office computer. (This would be a handy way to keep track of the lusty voyageurs who liked to linger too long with the equally-lusty ladies in the nearby settlement - as well as where your son is parking your car on his Saturday night date.)

During Mackenzie's time, it was common for well-funded exploration expeditions to have an artist as a member of the travelling party in order to have a visual record of new peoples, places, plants, and animals. Some of the best-known Canadian paintings were made by Frances Hopkins and Paul Kane during the "Voyageur" period of Canadian history. Mackenzie didn't have an artist on his voyages, but he included detailed written descriptions of new peoples and places in his daily journal.

This last item REALLY tics me off - while the modern-day Mackenzie Expeditions took place only 20 years ago, they were well-before digital cameras. So, we spent endless time, effort, and money putting together all the "stuff" necessary for a film-based pictorial record. The most irritating aspect was keeping everything dry. By comparison, a good digital camera is

about the size of a package of cigarettes, it's easy to use, holds dozens of pictures, and it fits quite nicely in a zip-lock bag inside a shirt pocket.

This past Christmas, my wife gave me a portable Garmin GPS which has a clip and a sticky cup to fit on the dash of my car – or the handle bars of my motorcycle. It's about the size of a pocket novel. Since it is a satellite model, it gives both visual map and voice directions anywhere in North America. Mackenzie relied on information from Peter Pond and other traders in planning his voyages west. He also garnered day-to-day navigational advice from local inhabitants which he encountered along the way. Once-in-a-while, he resorted to "abducting" a knowledgeable-local for a short section of the route forward.

Twenty years ago, we relied on a huge collection of water-proofed maps and charts, a good compass, Mackenzie's journals, and lots of local advice regarding the route ahead. We carried an early edition of the modern GPS system, but since it was both cumbersome and complex, it was seldom used.

One of the most necessary, but time-consuming aspects of a trader's life two-hundred years ago, was keeping track of everything. Each ninety-pound pack of goods was labelled and recorded in a very organized and detailed fashion. Mackenzie's first job was as a clerk in the Counting House of "Mr. Gregory" in Montreal . He would have died for a modern-day, bar code and scanner system linked to an overhead satellite. When the Wal-Mart clerk scans your purchase at the check-out counter, the largest satellite communications system in the world conveys the sale information instantaneously to Wal-Mart headquarters in Bentonville, Arkansas as well as the production facility in China.

A current communication item of interest concerns President Obama's insistence on continuing to use his personal Blackberry. The National Security compromise involved modifying his 'special' Blackberry; the black key is for family and a few friends, while the red key is encrypted and is for limited official use.

I bet that there are currently a zillion, nerdy teen-agers skulking in dark basement rooms working flat out on being the first to break the code. Hey, since the winters were long, dark, cold, and boring at Fort Chipewyan 200 years ago, perhaps Mackenzie would now be more famous as a hacker than an explorer??????