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The Rich Nechaco Valley And Its Possibilities



FORT FRASER

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Extracts from

"THE NEW GARDEN OF
CANADA."

E. A. Talbot, Author.

The extracts selected refer to incidents, localities, etc., in the Rich Nechaco Valley, of which Fort Fraser is the centre.



Since the publication of this book the Station question has been settled, and Fort Fraser lots are now sold with a guarantee that the Railroad Station will be located where indicated on the original plans.

RIVER STEAMERS SODA CREEK TO FORT FRASER AND TETE JAUNE CACHE TO FORT FRASER

After establishing shallow-draft boats on the Fraser between Soda Creek and Fort George, other voyages of discovery were undertaken up the various other rivers. The smallest and shallowest-draft vessel was employed for this exploration work, and it succeeded in making its way up the Fraser as far as Tete Jaune Cache, ascended the Nechaco to Fort Fraser, a matter of 120 miles, and also the Stuart River to Fort St. James on Stuart Lake, 139 miles. These investigations conclusively proved that there are about 1000 miles of navigable waters available to shallow-draft steamers in the interior of British Columbia which can be exploited profitably.

FRUIT CULTURE

Is profitable. So far as the Nechaco Valley is concerned, I can emphatically say that it possesses great possibilities. Cherries and apples appear to do excellently, as do also gooseberries, currants and general ground fruits.

VEGETABLE GARDENING

This settler had taken over a quarter of a section—160 acres. Yet from his own account he could not quarrel with his

luck. The previous year he had raised two acres of potatoes, and the crop had netted him £200. This year he was reckoning on as large, if not a larger financial return from the same source, since prices, due to greater demand, were higher. The astonishing point was that he had not tilled the soil. This was just a thick deposit of decayed vegetable matter and alluvium, for in the distant past his farm was at the bottom of a large lake, occupying the whole of the depression known as the Nechaco Valley. This light, nourishing topsoil was so soft that one could plunge one's arm up to the armpit without meeting the subsoil. All that was necessary was to make the drills, push the tubers in with the fingers, bank up, and then let them grow.

A little farther on we came upon another settlement where about the same acreage was under cultivation. In this case the crops were of a more varied character, coinciding very closely with an English kitchen garden or mixed farm. There were patches of turnips, carrots, parsnips, lettuces, cabbages, etc. The white turnips had grown to an immense size, those we pulled up ranging up to 10 inches in circumference, beautifully solid from rind to core, and as palatable as any English-

grown root of this species. The carrots were long, measuring about 18 inches from crown to tip, well formed, free from woodiness or fibre, sound, and of excellent color. The parsnips seemed to be equally good, though those were early days to judge this root; still, they measured about three inches across the crown. The beets also were doing well. The lettuces were large and succulent and though not possessing the crispness of the English variety, were yet of excellent flavor. The cabbages were large, the hearts well turned in, and of good shape. The new settler in these parts has certainly one advantage over his British confrere. He is not pestered with worms, caterpillars, and other plagues which wreak such havoc in the field or garden, while the lightness and richness of the soil conduce to remarkable yield with a minimum of effort, after clearing is accomplished.

THE NECHACO RIVER

Under normal conditions, this river, owing to its crystal clearness, has a hue of deep prussian blue.

WILD GRASSES

If the luxuriance of the wild vegetation offers any criterion, then farming in this territory presents incalculably attract-

ive possibilities. The natural grasses grow to a tropical height and density. Sugar cane grass at seven feet high, red top at six feet, brome grass five and one-half feet, and timothy topping five feet, were quite common. The vetches also are prolific, being found in such dense masses as greatly to impede rapid progress. The growth is strangely diversified.

SOIL AND RAINFALL

The Nechaco Valley proper is in reality an old lake bed. The soil is a thick deposit of silt, in some places running to 40 feet in depth, with a clayey subsoil. The silt is freely impregnated with thoroughly decomposed vegetable substance. The rainfall is just sufficient to stimulate growth to perfection, the temperature is equable, and the climate is about the same as that prevailing in Central Europe, which is only natural, seeing that the latitude is about the same as that of the south of England.

FODDER FOR STOCK

There appears to be no need for the pioneer to have any anxiety as to food for his stock during winter in view of these bounteous wild supplies, effort being confined merely to the cutting and gathering of the succulent, tall, well-developed grasses.

POSSIBILITY OF GROWING GRAIN

The Canadian says that where "four inches of grass will grow, wheat will grow, and where wheat can be raised any produce will thrive." In face of this enunciation, the Nechaco Valley, with its wild hay topping five feet, should be a land of plenty.

ALFALFA PROFITABLE

Another pioneer has seeded his holding to alfalfa. His industry was most handsomely rewarded, for he had cropped four times in the year. This was a new development which testified in a striking manner to the amazing fertility of the soil and the congeniality of the climate, while it had sent the value of that pioneer's land to high-water mark, it being easily worth £20 or \$100.00 an acre.

THE NECHACO LAKES AND STREAMS—A SPORTSMAN'S PARADISE

TACHIC LAKE

While the pack-train was loading up for resumption of the journey early the next morning, we spied a dugout spinning over the lake towards us, and the agitation of the water showed that the oarsman was having some fine sport. When he pulled

in he held up a prize and yelled: "Say, frien's, what d'yar think o' this? Bully, ain't it, eh?" displaying a fine, sleek, rainbow-colored, glittering mass of scales. A silver salmon trout, he called it, and it was a beauty, turning the scales at three pounds. "I come out ev'ry mornin' before breakfast an' hook one o' these," he went on. "Why, that lake's full o' them. Say, come an' have a throw." Presently we saw a vicious tug and an instant later there was a bright flash in the air as the fish made a leap of about ten feet. The fighting and plunging went on for about ten minutes, then the dugout came in with a sharp shoot with another quivering specimen lying in the bottom. When weighed it tipped the beam at three and a half pounds, and they were two as fine specimens of the trout family as one could desire to land. Our American visitor said they were "fair devils" when hooked, and would often jump clean over the canoe, while their rushes made the pike's movements a mere tortoise crawl in comparison. Lett confessed that his catch had given him a lively five minutes, accustomed though he was to all classes of fish found in Canadian river waters.

Our affable American informed us that he had taken over a section—a square mile

—on the shore of this lake, and that his son had bought a like area of land just near us. “I came up hyar last year, and I war so impressed with th’ country that I’m goin’ to make it my home. I guess this is just about God’s country, right enough! My wheat farms are down in Dakota, but I’ll clear out down thar, because I can’t tear myself away from this spot. Is the land good? Well, I should smile! You would not catch me clearin’ the forest if it warn’t. How about winter? Well, last winter I worked about in my shirt sleeves. It is not near so cold as it is down Dakota way. We didn’t have two feet of snow.”

FORT FRASER TOWNSITE AND ADJACENT ARABLE LANDS

It was about noon on Sunday when we came to a straight cut through the poplars, down which ran the telegraph wire to the river’s banks. The descent was for more than a mile, and so easy as to be almost imperceptible. At the bottom of the dip the trail gave a short wind and we were on the river at the ferry, which we took across the Nechaco to Fort Fraser.

The Nechaco at this point makes one of those sudden, big, sweeping bends, for which British Columbia rivers are famous,

source of the waterway being on the slopes of the distant, rugged Cascades, fringing the Pacific Coast, and draining in all an immense tract of country, of which about 640,000 acres are arable.

Lake Stuart offers great attractions for agriculture. I met one or two pioneers who had been cruising through this territory and who had made Fort Fraser on their return journey south. Their reports were glowing, and they were emphatic in their opinion that it is impossible to exaggerate the agrarian potentialities of the Lake Stuart country.

This latter country, extending from Fort Fraser to the eastern side of Stuart Lake, is richly wooded, poplar (cottonwood) predominating, but this growth is denser than that which prevails in the Nechaco Valley, the large, open flats of which are so attractive to the settler. Still, around Stuart Lake and Stuart River, to the confluence of the latter with the Upper Nechaco, there are nearly 350,000 acres of excellent farming land, the possibilities of which, after clearing, are reflected by the varied and prime produce which the industrious factor of Fort St. James successfully raises year after year, comprising the usual range of vegetables and bush fruits.