

The Yellowhead Pass and the Fur Trade

DAVID SMYTH

This paper examines the history of the Yellowhead Pass in the context of the transmountain transportation and communication networks of the North West and Hudson's Bay companies. Fur trade historians have tended to consider separately the geographic regions divided by the Rocky Mountains, ignoring the important interconnections. Apart from studies of the early years of North West Company exploration through and west of the Rockies, some examination of the switch to the west coast to supply the posts on the Pacific slope, and extracts from journals of the period describing the spectacular scenery and severe hardships encountered while travelling through the mountains, the transmountain links of the fur trade have not been seriously researched. Perhaps because the Yellowhead Pass was not explored until the mid-1820s, after the period of intense rivalry had been resolved and after the fur trade had been solidly established west of the Rockies, it has received especially short shrift.

The principal, though not exclusive, use made by the Hudson's Bay Company of this pass was to transport leather from the Saskatchewan District to New Caledonia. Few historians have covered this area. Ormsby, Morton and Williams do not allude to this subject at all.¹ Rich does not mention the leather brigades in either of his major works.² Innis provides some information about the importance of leather and the supplying of it to New Caledonia, but gets his chronology of the shifts to the different supply routes wrong and provides no explanation for these shifts.³ Cullen devotes only one of sixteen pages of text to New Cale-

¹ Margaret A. Ormsby, *British Columbia: A History* (Vancouver: Macmillan of Canada, 1971); Arthur S. Morton, *A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71*, ed. Lewis G. Thomas (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973); Glyndwr Williams, "The Hudson's Bay Company and the Fur Trade: 1670-1870," *The Beaver*, Outfit 314 (Autumn 1983), pp. 4-86.

² E. E. Rich, *The Fur Trade and the Northwest to 1857* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1967) and *Hudson's Bay Company, 1670-1870* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1960). 3 vols.

³ Harold A. Innis, *The Fur Trade In Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), pp. 303-04.

donia's leather problem and, though the rest of her paper makes a major contribution to the understanding of the outfitting of the district's fur trade operations, she repeats most of Innis' errors and omissions regarding the leather supply.⁴ A recent full-length popular history of the Yellowhead adds little that has not already been published elsewhere, and unfortunately reaffirms many widely held, but totally unfounded, beliefs about the history of the pass.⁵ This paper attempts to fill a gap in previous research by presenting the history of the Yellowhead Pass in terms of its role as a leather supply route in the fur trade from the time of the first exploration of the pass to the time of the abandonment by the Hudson's Bay Company of both this pass and virtually the Company's entire transmountain transportation and communication system in the mid-1850s.

The Yellowhead Pass is one of four passes through the Canadian Rockies used extensively during the fur trade era, the others being the Howse Pass, the Athabasca Pass and the Rocky Mountain Portage. Other routes through the Rocky Mountains were known, and occasionally used by travellers,⁶ but the fur trade companies' principal transportation and communication routes were through these four passes. Trade goods from Grand Portage, then Fort William and York Factory, travelled west over them, as did new recruits bound for New Caledonia and Columbia. Leather and grease, alternately supplied from the Athabasca and Saskatchewan districts, were taken via the Rocky Mountain Portage or the Athabasca or Yellowhead passes. Initially the returns of trade were brought east over the passes, but eventually the west coast not only supplied the Pacific slope with its outfits, except for New Caledonia's leather and grease, but also provided the outlet for its returns. Besides the outfits and returns, the expresses or packets, the companies' inter-district equivalent of mail service, were carried over the four passes. Each spring and fall the expresses, containing copies of account books, correspondence, directives, minutes of council meetings and general news, both from within and outside the western districts of the fur trade, connected the widely separated posts. They not only brought welcome personal correspondence

⁴ Mary Cullen, "Outfitting New Caledonia, 1821-58," *Old Trails and New Directions: Papers of the Third North American Fur Trade Conference*, eds. Carol M. Judd and Arthur J. Ray (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), pp. 241-42.

⁵ J. G. MacGregor, *Overland By the Yellowhead* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Book Service, 1974).

⁶ Irene M. Spry, "Routes Through the Rockies," *The Beaver*, Outfit 294 (Autumn 1963), pp. 26-39. Spry's article is on the passes south of the Yellowhead to the 49th parallel, with emphasis on the exceptional crossings of the fur trade era, rather than on the companies' usual practices.

and news of the outside world but also business communications among the companies' officers which allowed the efficient organization and functioning of the vast enterprises which eventually encompassed virtually all of the Canadian West.

Alexander Mackenzie, the first white man to cross the Rockies and reach the Pacific, did so in 1793 via the Peace River and the Rocky Mountain Portage, which bypasses the Peace River Canyon. The Peace River route became the first fur trade company route through the mountains and was employed as such long after all others were abandoned. The Howse Pass, connecting the North Saskatchewan and Columbia watersheds, was the next pass explored by the North West Company, but was used for only a very short time. Possibly crossed by Canadians as early as 1800,⁷ but definitely by 1806, it was established by David Thompson in 1807 as the gateway to the Columbia. John McDonald of Garth led the last fur trade brigade across it in the fall of 1811.⁸ The Athabasca Pass was the successor to the Howse Pass. This pass, at the headwaters of the Athabasca River, was long known to the North West Company. Thompson crossed it in January 1811, after being prevented by Peigan Indians from leading the Columbia brigade up the North Saskatchewan much beyond Rocky Mountain House and over the established Howse Pass route. The Athabasca Pass quickly became the fur traders' most important link in their transmountain communication and transportation network, and remained so until the discontinuance of that system.

The Yellowhead Pass and the Peace River routes provided the only practicable direct access to New Caledonia from east of the mountains. Sometimes also called Western Caledonia, this district was a vast, undefined area encompassing much of the central and northern interior of present-day British Columbia. In terms of provisions, New Caledonia was the poorest district in the entire fur trade. As an early trader there put it, "New Caledonia being nearly altogether destitute of large animals both the Natives and Traders live entirely upon Fish."⁹ The virtual absence of large game not only forced reliance on the salmon fisheries as the chief source of food but also necessitated the importation of large supplies of

⁷ Claude E. Schaeffer, "Le Blanc and La Gasse, Predecessors of David Thompson in the Columbian Plateau," *Studies in Plains Anthropology and History, Number 3* (Browning, Montana: Museum of the Plains Indian, 1966), pp. 1-13.

⁸ Hudson's Bay Company Archives, Provincial Archives of Manitoba (hereafter cited as HBCA), B.60/a/10, 7 November 1811. Quotation from the HBCA is with the kind permission of the Hudson's Bay Company.

⁹ *Ibid.*, B.188/e/1, John Stuart report of 7 July 1823, fol. 3d.

leather and grease from east of the mountains. New Caledonia was the only district in the companies' domains which had to import all of its leather and grease. Leather, principally dressed moose skins, and to a lesser extent buffalo skins, was used in its various forms in New Caledonia as the principal article of trade with the Indians of the district, and by the fur traders themselves, for shoes, clothes, pack-cords, snowshoes, tents, window parchment and a variety of other purposes as well, including serving as a ritual artefact in certain Indian religious ceremonies.¹⁰ Grease was used in pemmican, candles and soap. The Athabasca and Saskatchewan districts, as noted earlier, alternately supplied New Caledonia with its required leather and grease.

The Yellowhead Pass derived its name from the legendary Tête Jaune. This was the *nom du pays* of Pierre Bostonais, an Iroquois Indian, likely a mixed-blood, who was in the West by 1816, and probably at least as early as 1804.¹¹ He, along with his brother and their families, was murdered west of the Rockies in the upper Peace River region in the fall of 1827. At some point before the fall of 1825, Tête Jaune had made a cache near the limit of navigation of the upper Fraser River, likely of furs to be taken across the mountains via the Yellowhead Pass to Jasper House. The name Tête Jaune Cache has identified the area from that time to the present, and eventually gave its name to the pass.

The Yellowhead was the last of the four passes to be explored. It became the key part of a new route to New Caledonia in the mid-1820s. But despite its low elevation — at 3,711 feet second only to the Monkman Pass in the Canadian Rockies — and its mildly inclined approaches, its record in the fur trade was somewhat chequered. The route over it stretched, without intervening posts, for an estimated distance of more than 450 miles between Jasper House on the Athabasca to Fort George on the Fraser, near the mouth of the Nechako River.¹² The lengthy and uninterrupted isolation imposed on the brigades along the route, the

¹⁰ Mary Cullen, *op. cit.*, p. 241.

¹¹ David Smyth, "Tête Jaune," *Alberta History*, vol. 32, no. 1 (Winter 1984), pp. 1-8. A Tête Jaune, undoubtedly the same man, was in the St. Croix River region of present-day Minnesota during the 1804-05 season. See Charles M. Gates, *Five Fur Traders of the Northwest* (Minneapolis [?]: University of Minnesota Press, 1933), pp. 258, 266 and 274.

¹² HBCA, E.15/13, John Rae to Thomas Fraser, letters of 23 August 1864, fol. 27 and 5 September 1864, fol. 30d. During Rae's telegraph survey of 1864, he estimated the distance from Jasper House to Tête Jaune Cache at 120.5 miles and from Tête Jaune Cache to Fort George at 344 miles, though he knew that the route over the pass for the telegraph line could be straightened and considerably shortened.

unreliable navigability of the Athabasca and Fraser rivers, and the unpredictable weather of the usual mid-autumn journey presented potential problems of communication across the pass and potential dangers in the event of mishap on the upper Fraser, problems and dangers which sometimes were realized and which caused the route to be abandoned on more than one occasion.

The fur traders who actually used this pass in the first half of the nineteenth century never called it, or any other mountain pass, a pass; they called it a portage. Infrequently called the New Caledonia Portage in the letters and journals of the period,¹³ the Yellowhead Pass was almost exclusively referred to as the route or portage via Tête Jaune Cache. On a few occasions in the late 1820s, the officer in charge of New Caledonia referred to the route as "the Leather track,"¹⁴ but this term encompassed the entire distance between Fort George and Jasper House. There is no record of any trader of the period ever calling the pass the Leather Pass, as is now popularly thought to have been the case, though it was frequently called this in the 1860s, 1870s and 1880s. The name "Leather Pass" would appear to have been first used on an 1859 Arrowsmith map of British Columbia, the source of the name likely being the Royal Engineers, who were then conducting surveys in other parts of the colony.¹⁵ After 1860, the pass was also briefly known as the Cowdung Pass, a name deriving from an early appellation for Yellowhead Lake, located just west of the summit of the pass; initially called Buffalo Dung Lake, it soon also became known as Cowdung Lake. It was also referred to at various times as Leatherhead Pass, Jasper and Jasper House Pass, Tête Jaune and Tête Jaune Cache Pass, "Myette" Pass and even the Rocky Mountain Pass. The actual English name "Yellowhead" also appears to have first been used on the above-noted 1859 Arrowsmith map or in the documents sent to the cartographer which formed the basis of this portion of the map.

Prior to the 1821 merger of the Hudson's Bay Company and North

¹³ HBCA, B.94/a/2, 19 October and 24 November 1829, and D.5/4, 31 December 1835, Edmonton House, John Rowand to the Governor, Chief Factors and Chief Traders, fol. 143d.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, B.188/a/10, 13 March 1827, D.4/120, 15 March 1827, Stuart Lake (Fort St. James), William Connolly to the Governor and Council, p. 83, and D.4/122, 27 February 1829, Stuart Lake, Connolly to Simpson, p. 48.

¹⁵ Great Britain. *Imperial Blue Books Relating to Canada Vol. 39, British Columbia, 1848-1889*. "Papers Relative to the Affairs of British Columbia, Part II," facing reverse side of p. 93. The pass is labelled, "Leather Pass or Yellow Hd.P." The map is entitled, "The Provinces of British Columbia, & Vancouver Island; with Portions of the United States & Hudson's Bay Territories."

West Company, New Caledonia was the exclusive preserve of the latter concern. It supplied its complete New Caledonia outfit via the Peace River until 1813, at which time a new route was opened up. Though some men and supplies, including the leather and grease, still entered the district via the Peace River route, after 1813 the principal supply route was by boat from Fort Vancouver up the Columbia to Fort Okanagan and from there by packhorse to Kamloops and Alexandria, the foot of navigation on the upper Fraser River. From Alexandria canoes were used to transport the outfit to the upper posts, including Fort St. James, the district headquarters, located on Stuart Lake which was up the Nechako and Stuart rivers from the Fraser.¹⁶ Immediately after the 1821 merger, the Hudson's Bay Company abandoned this route in favour of the Peace River route and by 1822 the Company had moved the district headquarters to McLeod Lake, at the end of navigation from the east. From there the outfit had to be transported overland and distributed among the remaining posts in the district. McLeod Lake proved to be most inconveniently located as a district depot and the Peace River route to New Caledonia became the most time consuming and costly in the Company's territories.

Many changes in the organization and supply of the fur trade both east and west of the mountains were planned in the 1824-25 season mainly as a result of Governor George Simpson's trip to the Columbia District in the fall of 1824. The principal eastern change was the abandonment of the Beaver River route to the upper Athabasca River and the Columbia District. In order to combine the Columbia, Lesser Slave Lake and Saskatchewan brigades, to decrease costs, and to increase security on the Saskatchewan River, Simpson ordered Chief Factor John Rowand, the officer in charge of the Saskatchewan District, to build a road from Edmonton House to the Athabasca River at Fort Assiniboine. By spring 1825 it was completed.¹⁷

During his westward trip Simpson also took advantage of a recent, seemingly unimportant decision to relocate a minor post. The previous summer Chief Trader Joseph F. LaRocque had been ordered to abandon the wintering post at Smoky River and to re-establish it "more in the heart of the Mountain near the height of Land and where we suppose Frazers River takes its source."¹⁸ The original intention of the planned

¹⁶ Mary Cullen, *op. cit.*, pp. 232-34.

¹⁷ HBCA, B.60/e/8, John Rowand report of 14 May 1825, fols. 4d.-5.

¹⁸ George Simpson, *Fur Trade and Empire*, ed. Frederick Merk (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 30. Virtually the only source of

relocation was to encourage marginal shifts in the hunting and trapping areas of mixed-blood and Indian groups trading at posts on both sides of the Rockies, but Simpson saw the opportunity to have a possible new supply route to New Caledonia explored. After passing the mouth of the Miette River (Simpson called it the "Cow Dung River") and travelling up the Athabasca River and over the Athabasca Pass to Boat Encampment, he encountered a group of free Iroquois. They gave him a quick geography lesson on the area bounded by Jasper House, Boat Encampment and the Fraser River below Tête Jaune Cache. Though Simpson rather misunderstood the information, confusing Moose Lake, on the upper reaches of the Fraser, with Cranberry Lake, the source of the McLennan River, a tributary of the Fraser, he did grasp the significance of the route described to him. Despite the fact that it had not yet been explored, he was so enthusiastic about its potential that he planned to have the Yellowhead route to the Fraser River replace the Peace River route for the transport of the outfits to and returns from New Caledonia.

Brigades had annually travelled past the mouth of the Miette River on their way to and from the Columbia District and the Athabasca Pass since David Thompson had first opened up that route. However, though company traders may have been aware of the Yellowhead Pass early on, there is no evidence that any North West Company or Hudson's Bay Company people ever used it prior to 1824. At Boat Encampment, Simpson took measures to rectify this situation. He sent letters to LaRocque and to William Connolly, the officer in charge of New Caledonia, instructing them to explore the route from the mouth of the Miette to the northern bend of the Fraser River. He was, however, to be disappointed. Upon his return from the Columbia in the spring of 1825, he learned that neither LaRocque nor Connolly had been able to do what had been asked of him. Connolly had probably received Simpson's letter too late to take any action that winter. As for LaRocque, ice in the Athabasca River had delayed his arrival at his destination, necessitating the building of a post on that river near the mouth of the Miette, not far above the existing company post of Jasper House. He had managed to explore the Yellowhead Pass region during the winter of 1824-25, perhaps reaching as far as Yellowhead Lake. In April 1825, Simpson ordered that LaRocque's post be abandoned. He took no immediate steps to have the Yellowhead route explored any further.

information regarding Simpson's plans for the Yellowhead Pass at this time and LaRocque's activities during this season is this Simpson journal of his trip to the Columbia and back. See pp. 30-32, 36-38 and 146-50.

Following his return from the Columbia, Simpson reorganized much of the supply and transport system of the transmountain trade. He recommended that New Caledonia be supplied from the Pacific and that the Nor'wester John Stuart's 1813 route be re-adopted. Simpson also recommended that the Saskatchewan District replace the Athabasca District as the supplier of leather to New Caledonia, though for what reasons is not now known. Fort St. James was to regain its position as district headquarters. These recommendations were all accepted by the Council of the Northern Department which met at York Factory in July 1825.

The Beaver River Route was abandoned in 1825, but the change in the source of the leather supply for New Caledonia and the re-establishment of the old North West Company route for the remainder of its outfit were not to take effect until 1826. Several months would be needed to notify those west of the mountains of these changes and to allow them to take appropriate accommodating steps.

Simpson's intention, stated as late as September 1825, was to have the 1826 New Caledonia leather requisition taken by the Columbia brigade over the Athabasca Pass and down the Columbia River to Fort Okanagan, from which point it would be carried overland to Alexandria.¹⁹ Obviously he could not count on the unexplored Yellowhead Pass route, but he did undertake to have it examined. Chief Trader James McMillan, who had accompanied Simpson on his return from the Columbia, was selected to explore the pass. Apparently his mission was approved by the Council of the Northern Department, but the minutes make no mention of his trip.²⁰ By mid-October, McMillan was at Jasper House, having travelled with the Columbia brigade from Edmonton House via Fort Assiniboine. At Jasper House he hired a guide to lead him across the Yellowhead Pass. Tête Jaune was that guide.²¹ They left Jasper House on 18 October, and by 24 October 1825, after a trip of about 120 miles, reached Tête Jaune Cache. In his report to William Connolly, McMillan specifically mentioned "Tête Jaune's Cache," the first recorded reference

¹⁹ HBCA, D.4/88, 1 September 1825, York Factory, Simpson to Governor and Committee, fol. 79d.

²⁰ John Rowand stated in the Edmonton House post journal that McMillan's mission was explained in the Minutes of Council, but such is not the case. McMillan is listed in the minutes as having charge of Fort Assiniboine in 1825-26, and the only hint of any change of plans is his name being crossed out in one copy of the minutes and being replaced by Henry Fisher's. See HBCA, B.60/a/23, 5 October 1825, and R. Harvey Fleming, ed., *Minutes of Council Northern Department of Rupert Land, 1821-31* (London: the Champlain Society, 1940), pp. 109 and 450.

²¹ David Smyth, *op. cit.*, pp. 5-6.

to this place name.²² McMillan reported favourably on the Yellowhead Pass as a route for the New Caledonia leather. Tête Jaune carried McMillan's report down the Fraser River to Connolly, while McMillan recrossed the pass to the Saskatchewan District.

Connolly accepted McMillan's assessment of the Yellowhead Pass route, but was worried that it would necessitate leaving extra men inland in the summer to bring the leather from Tête Jaune Cache. He proposed the adoption of the Athabasca Pass and Okanagan route, even though this involved an estimated 700 or 800 additional miles²³ and many months' delay. Leather taken via the Athabasca Pass in the autumn would not actually be transported overland from Fort Okanagan to New Caledonia until the inbound journey of the New Caledonia brigade from Fort Vancouver late the following summer.²⁴ In the words of one company officer, this was "taking a short cut by walking round a circle in Place of right across it."²⁵ Not surprisingly, Simpson and the Council of the Northern Department rejected Connolly's plan. The route was to be via the Yellowhead Pass.

In 1826, Simpson's remaining reorganizational changes went into effect. Though some men and returns did leave New Caledonia for York Factory via the Peace River,²⁶ the bulk of the men and returns took the southern route to Fort Vancouver on the Columbia. The Saskatchewan District replaced the Athabasca District as the source of New Caledonia leather, supplying some 500 skins, along with packcords, babiche and sinews, in 1826, and 800 skins, mostly moosehides, in 1827.²⁷ The Columbia, Athabasca River and Lesser Slave Lake brigades, consisting of about fifty men and more than eighty horses, left Edmonton House for Fort Assiniboine in mid-September, over a "road" which one newly engaged company officer noted, "in any other part of the World I really believe would be considered impassible [*sic*]."²⁸ The six-day trip was

²² HBCA, B.188/b/4, 24 October 1825, Rocky Mountain (Tête Jaune Cache), McMillan to Connolly, fols. 9-10.

²³ Public Archives of Canada, MG19, A 21, Hargrave Family Papers, 28 February 1829, Stuart Lake, Connolly to Hargrave, vol. 2, p. 209.

²⁴ HBCA, D.4/88, 1 September 1825, York Factory, Simpson to Governor and Committee, fol. 79d.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, B.188/a/5, 23 November 1825, George Brown's comment in margin.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, D.4/119, 4 May 1826, Stuart Lake, Connolly to Brown, pp. 134-35.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, D.4/6, 5 July 1826, York Factory, Simpson to Connolly, fol. 16d., and B.239/k/1, fols. 88d.-9.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, B.223/a/3, 18 September 1826. Lieutenant Aemilius Simpson, who made this comment, had just entered the Company's service in 1826, after a career in the Royal Navy.

followed by a twelve-day canoe voyage to Jasper House by the Columbia brigade. During this trip and those that followed, its leader was apparently in charge of both his party and the New Caledonia brigade until they separated at the Miette River above Jasper House. Chief Trader Joseph McGillivray, James McDougall and eight new recruits were assisted by Saskatchewan District servants across the Yellowhead Pass with the New Caledonia leather and the express. New Caledonians met the incoming officers and men at Tête Jaune Cache and took them by canoe down the Fraser and then up to Fort St. James, which they reached safely on 3 November 1826. The Saskatchewan men returned from Tête Jaune Cache across the Yellowhead with the horses and New Caledonia correspondence. Despite Connolly's anxiety about this route, and apart from a last-minute substitution for Tête Jaune, who did not appear to guide the New Caledonians to Tête Jaune Cache, this first-time company use of the Yellowhead Pass route was completed without difficulty. However, McGillivray's report of the length and hardships of the overall trip from Jasper House necessitated the Company's dropping its plans to use this route for sending out New Caledonia's semi-invalided retirees.²⁹

Early in 1827, the only pre-planned company winter crossing of the pass took place. A clerk, George McDougall, along with three retiring company servants and an Iroquois guide named *le Gauche*, were sent from Fort St. James with the spring express. That the pass was still relatively unknown was confirmed by Connolly when he requested that the guide be sent back in the fall, as "no other person in this quarter is acquainted with the route from the source of Frasers River to Jaspers house."³⁰ Connolly estimated that it would take twenty-five to thirty days for McDougall to walk to Jasper House from the Stuart Lake post. The party left Fort St. James on 14 March,³¹ and apparently reached Tête Jaune Cache on 1 April, taking another eighteen days to cross the Rockies to Jasper House.³² Delayed by ice in the Athabasca River, Mc-

²⁹ *Ibid.*, B.188/b/5, 8 November 1826, Stuart Lake, Connolly to Chief Factors and Chief Traders of Columbia District, p. 38.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, D.4/120, 15 March 1827, Stuart Lake, Connolly to Governor and Council, p. 86.

³¹ *Ibid.*, B.188/a/10, 14 March 1827.

³² For McDougall's trip dates, see A. G. Morice, *The History of the Northern Interior of British Columbia, Formerly New Caledonia [1660 to 1880]* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1904), p. 155, and Edward Ermatinger, "Edward Ermatinger's York Factory Express Journal, Being a Record of Journeys Made Between Fort Vancouver and Hudson Bay in the Years 1827-1828," *Proceedings and Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada*, Third Series, Vol. VI, Section II (May 1912), p. 82n.

Dougall was overtaken on 6 May by the eastbound Columbia brigade just above Fort Assiniboine. He travelled with the Columbians from then on. The winter crossing of the Yellowhead Pass was evidently viewed as too arduous, for it was never repeated. In 1828 the New Caledonia spring express was sent to Fort Okanagan, and from there it was carried by the Columbia brigade via the Athabasca Pass.³³

George McDougall returned with the Columbia brigade in the fall of 1827. Much of the leather for New Caledonia had already been transported that summer from Edmonton House "through a new road by land" directly to Jasper House.³⁴ This established the standard practice; part of the leather requisition was carried by Saskatchewan servants in the summer at least as far as Jasper House, while the remainder was transported to that post in the fall by the combined Columbia and New Caledonia brigades. The fall brigades followed the usual route, by horse to Fort Assiniboine and then by canoe to Jasper House. As in the previous year, the New Caledonians separated from the Columbians at the mouth of the Miette River. McDougall and eight new recruits, assisted by five Saskatchewan men, then crossed the Yellowhead Pass with the express, twenty-eight packs of leather and forty horses. On 14 October they reached the end of the portage, identified as being a day's journey downstream from Tête Jaune Cache. Thirteen New Caledonians in three canoes met them there. While the Saskatchewan men returned across the pass with the horses, McDougall and party set off down the Fraser, reaching Fort St. James on 1 November.³⁵ The practice of travelling downstream from Tête Jaune Cache before taking to canoes was evidently continued, for in 1863 W. B. Cheadle noted "the original 'Tête Jaune Cache'" and then some distance below it the "real Cache de Tête Jaune."³⁶

If the first two years had gone smoothly for the Company, the next two were to be disastrous. During the summer of 1828, the Saskatchewan leather was taken not just to Jasper House but all the way across the

³³ HBCA, B.188/a/11, 27 February 1828.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, B.60/a/25, 27 May, 18, 28 and 29 June, 9 July and 2 September 1827.

³⁵ The information concerning this fall 1827 crossing was taken from several sources. See Edward Ermatinger, *op. cit.*, pp. 106 and 109, and HBCA, B.94/a/1, 2-23 October 1827, B.188/a/10, 21 September and 1 November 1827, and D.4/121, 25 February 1828, Stuart Lake, Connolly to Governor, Chief Factors and Chief Traders, p. 90.

³⁶ W. B. Cheadle, *Cheadle's Journal of Trip Across Canada, 1862-1863*, eds., A. G. Doughty and Gustave Lanctot (Ottawa: Graphic Publishers, 1931), pp. 177 and 183.

mountains to Tête Jaune Cache. There the leather was left *en cache*, unguarded. When the New Caledonians arrived there in the fall, they found some of the leather missing, likely having been stolen by Indians.³⁷ This was to be the least of their worries. After an extremely dry summer in the Saskatchewan, extensive fires in the early fall not only slowed the progress of the brigades travelling to and beyond Edmonton House but also threatened the health and lives of the men and pack horses. The brigades did not reach Edmonton House until late September, and Fort Assiniboine until 6 October. Their progress was then delayed further by canoes which were in almost constant need of repair throughout the journey up the Athabasca to Jasper House; the last of the canoes did not reach that post until 25 October. The original plan had called for John Edward Harriott to lead the New Caledonian contingent across the Yellowhead Pass with the remaining leather and the express. However, John W. Dease, the officer in charge of the Columbia brigade, decided, upon the advice of Michel Klyne, the postmaster in charge at Jasper House, to take Harriott and party over the Athabasca Pass with him as far as Fort Okanagan. Klyne, Harriott and Dease all believed that the season was so far advanced that there would not likely be anyone waiting at the other side of the pass. While they proceeded across the Athabasca, the New Caledonians returned without the new recruits and with an insufficient supply of leather. The Company, as a result, passed a difficult winter in New Caledonia. Harriott and the new men did not reach Fort St. James until early January 1829.³⁸ Connolly later wrote: "If the Plan they followed had been concerted between them for the purpose of injuring this district they could not have succeeded better."³⁹

Despite the best efforts of Connolly and his men west of the mountains, the 1829 Yellowhead Pass arrangements turned into an even bigger fiasco than those of 1828. In early October, after returning from Fort Vancouver, Connolly sent off the leather party from Fort St. James, with

³⁷ HBCA, B.60/a/26, 20 May and 3 September 1828, and D.4/122, 28 February 1829, Stuart Lake, Connolly to Governor and Council, p. 57.

³⁸ See HBCA, B.60/a/26, early September to 27 November 1828, B.188/a/12, 4 October and 12 November 1828, B.8/a/1, 6 and 7 October and 15 November 1828, D.4/122, 28 February 1829, Stuart Lake, Connolly to Governor and Council, p. 54, and B.188/b/6, 22 October 1828, Rocky Mountain House (Jasper House), Dease to Connolly, pp. 112-114.

³⁹ E. E. Rich, ed., *Part of Dispatch From George Simpson Esq^R Governor of Rupert's Land to the Governor & Committee of the Hudson's Bay Company London March 1, 1829. Continued and Completed March 24 and June 5, 1829.* (Toronto: the Champlain Society, 1947), p. 238.

orders that if they did not meet anyone at the west end of the portage they were immediately to proceed across the mountains to Jasper House. Once again the Columbia brigade was late in getting to Jasper House, its progress having been impeded by ice in the Athabasca River. The last of the party did not reach that post until 1 November. By that time Klyne had sent word to the New Caledonians to wait at the west side of the pass. However, he then apparently advised Francis Heron and Alexander Fisher, the officers in charge of the brigade, that due to the lateness of the season "the navigation towards la Tête jaunes Cache was entirely stopt,"⁴⁰ and Fisher, originally intending to cross the Yellowhead, followed Harriott's route of the previous year. The waiting New Caledonians eventually discovered the changed plans and hastily set off for Fort St. James, not reaching there until 26 November. Once again New Caledonia was left short of men and severely short of leather. Connolly blamed Klyne for the whole debacle, and with more than a little justification. Fisher and the new recruits finally reached Fort St. James in late January 1830.⁴¹

Even before these two disastrous experiences the Company had decided that the Athabasca District would replace the Saskatchewan District as the New Caledonia leather supplier in 1830 and that the Yellowhead Pass route would be abandoned in favour of the Peace River route. Leather which had been left at Jasper House in the 1829-30 season was carried over the Athabasca Pass by the Columbians in the fall of 1830, and then forwarded to New Caledonia. Fort Dunvegan on the upper Peace River became the supply depot where the New Caledonians travelled for their leather. The reason for this change to the Athabasca District is uncertain; apparently Simpson had made the decision in the fall of 1828, while travelling from the Peace River, through New Caledonia on his way to the Columbia District, before the successive Harriott and Fisher mishaps. Certainly by February 1829 Connolly was aware that his leather supply for the 1830-31 outfit would be from the Athabasca District, via Peace River.⁴² In June 1829 the Council of the

⁴⁰ HBCA, D.4/123, 10 November 1829, End of Rocky Mountain Portage (Boat Encampment), Fisher to Governor, Chief Factors and Chief Traders, fol. 27d.

⁴¹ See HBCA, B.94/a/2, 18 October to 24 November 1829, B.188/a/14, 30 September, 1, 4 and 27 October, 26 November 1829 and 24 January 1830, D.4/123, 18 November 1829, Fort Colville, Heron to McLoughlin, fol. 29, D.4/123, 11 January 1830, Edmonton House, Rowand to Governor, Chief Factors and Chief Traders, fols. 55-56, and D.4/123, 4 March 1830, Stuart Lake, Connolly to Governor and Council, p. 146.

⁴² *Ibid.*, D.4/122, 28 February 1829, Stuart Lake, Connolly to Governor and Council, p. 57.

Northern Department confirmed the switch for the next year from the Saskatchewan District and put the amount of leather and grease to be annually supplied from Fort Dunvegan at "the loadings of two Canoes to 50 Pieces in all."⁴³ In February 1829 Connolly had seemed concerned that the new leather route would take more time and prove more difficult than the route via Tête Jaune Cache, but by March 1830, after two straight years of frustration, he was certain that the trip from Fort Dunvegan would "never be attended with such vexatious circumstances as have of late occurred in fetching those supplies."⁴⁴

Neither Governor Simpson nor any other company officer has left a record of the reason for the decision to supply New Caledonia leather from the Athabasca District. Much may have turned on the difficulty that the Saskatchewan District experienced in providing horses in the numbers required for transportation within and through the district. In the autumn of 1826 John Rowand pointed out that "the horses that were employed in the Portages are in a shocking state and some will die in consequence."⁴⁵ A year later Klyne was complaining at Jasper House that, though he needed fifty-four horses to carry the Columbia and New Caledonia outfits over the two mountain portages, he had only thirty.⁴⁶ The very next year Rowand noted that what with wolves, thieves and "the transport business" the district annually lost up to fifty horses or more, and this at a time when they were particularly scarce among all the tribes of the district.⁴⁷ The decision to supply New Caledonia's leather from the Athabasca District did decrease by thirty or forty horses the annual demand on the Saskatchewan to supply transportation for other districts.

For whatever reasons, the Peace River region of the Athabasca District did supply the leather needs of New Caledonia for the next few years. The Yellowhead Pass, in consequence, remained untravelled by the Company, save for occasional trips by company servants from Jasper House to supply Indians and mixed-bloods west of the pass. Before long, however, the Peace River region, and more especially travel to and from it, began to present their own set of problems for the Company. The

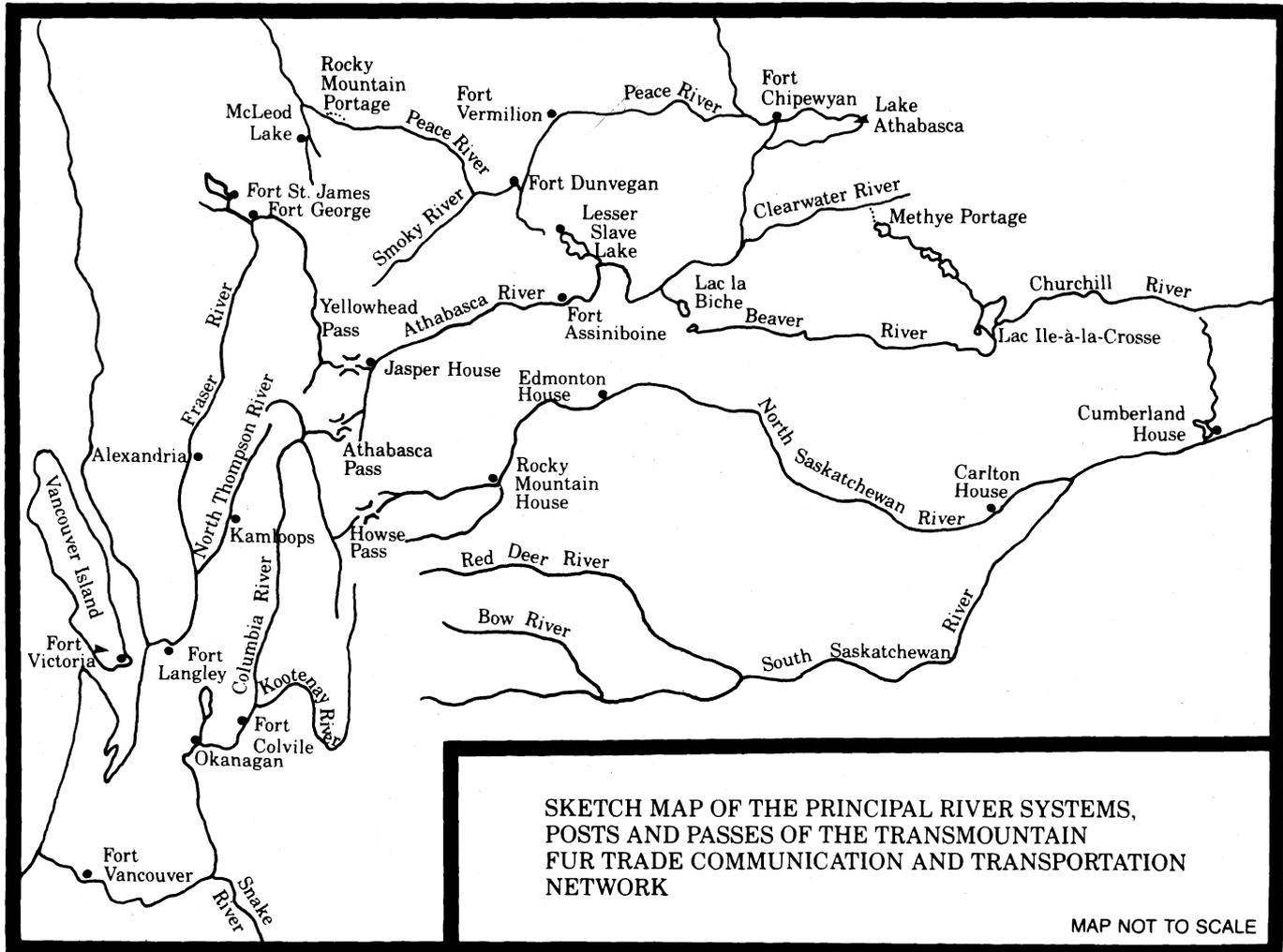
⁴³ *Ibid.*, B.239/k/1, fol. 135, Resolve 9.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, D.4/123, 4 March 1830, Stuart Lake, Connolly to Governor and Council, p. 152.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, B.60/a/24, 27 October 1826.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, B.94/a/1, 1 October 1827.

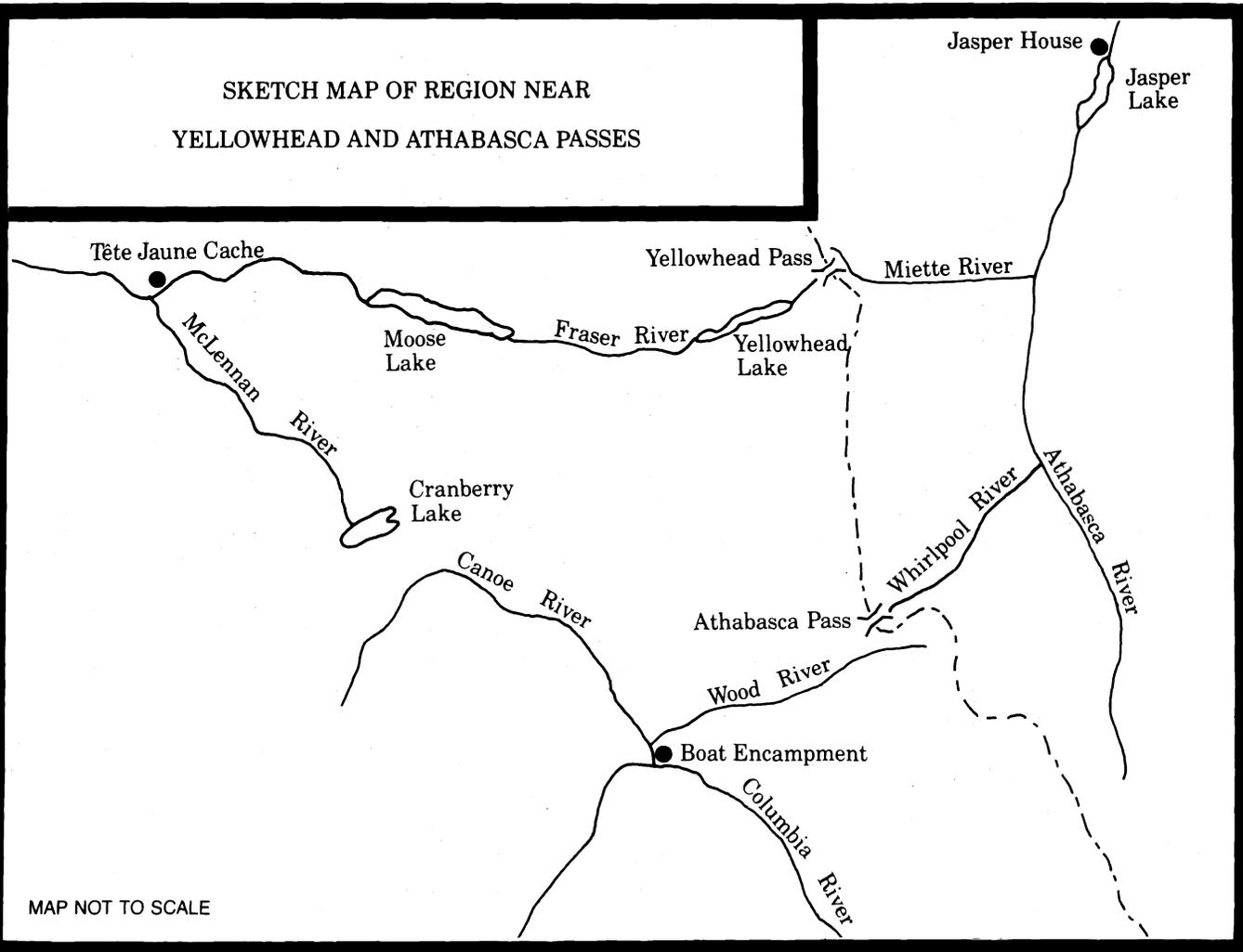
⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, D.4/122, 13 January 1829, Edmonton House, Rowand to Governor, Chief Factors and Chief Traders, fol. 20d.



SKETCH MAP OF THE PRINCIPAL RIVER SYSTEMS,
 POSTS AND PASSES OF THE TRANSMOUNTAIN
 FUR TRADE COMMUNICATION AND TRANSPORTATION
 NETWORK

MAP NOT TO SCALE

SKETCH MAP OF REGION NEAR
YELLOWHEAD AND ATHABASCA PASSES



MAP NOT TO SCALE

journey to the New Caledonia posts from Fort Dunvegan, particularly the crossing of the Rocky Mountain Portage and then the overland journey from McLeod Lake, was a difficult one, and often had to be made in winter conditions. In July 1834 Simpson notified Peter Warren Dease, the officer then in charge of the New Caledonia District, that starting in 1835 the Saskatchewan District would supply the required leather, though he cited the "exhausted condition of Peace River, in large animals"⁴⁸ as the cause and not the difficulty of the route. It was Dease, who had not been appointed to New Caledonia until 1830, who brought up that issue and replied that he looked forward to the return to the route via "Tête Jaune's Cache." He thought that the Yellowhead would be a definite improvement over the Peace River route in supplying the district's leather, "by saving time and being certain of receiving the whole where wanted before the close of the Navigation."⁴⁹

Dease's confidence in the "certain" early arrival of the leather proved to be completely unfounded; in 1835 no leather at all reached the New Caledonia posts, early or late. The leather party from the district, led by A. C. Anderson, was prevented from reaching its destination that fall by early freeze-up on the Fraser. Forced to return east across the Yellowhead, the New Caledonians, the new recruits and the leather did not reach New Caledonia until the following year.⁵⁰ This near tragic occurrence prompted Simpson and the Council of the Northern Department to take action in June 1836. Peter Skene Ogden, who had replaced Dease in the summer of 1835, was advised to take steps always to have a year's stock of leather on hand at the district posts. The Council also decided that after 1836 the Yellowhead Pass would be abandoned in favour of the less direct but more reliable Athabasca Pass and Okanagan route. The reason given for the abandonment of the Yellowhead Pass route was the danger of early freeze-up on the Fraser River, the principal cause of the difficulties which had just occurred. The Council also made one other

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, D.4/20, 3 July 1834, York Factory, Simpson to Dease, fol. 13.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, D.4/127, 14 February 1835, Stuart Lake, Dease to Governor and Council, fol. 54.

⁵⁰ For details of Anderson's 1835-36 difficulties, see Glenbow-Alberta Institute Archives, M17, unpublished A. C. Anderson manuscript, entitled, "History of the N.W. Coast," p. 13-15 and 145-47; John McLean, *John McLean's Notes of a Twenty-Five Year's Service in the Hudson's Bay Territory*, ed. W. S. Wallace (Toronto: the Champlain Society, 1932), pp. 166-70, and HBCA, D.5/4, 31 December 1835, Edmonton House, Rowand to Governor, Chief Factors and Chief Traders, fols. 144d.-5, D.4/22, 24 June 1836, Norway House, Simpson to McIntosh, fol. 25d., D.4/23, 30 June 1837, Norway House, Simpson to Anderson, fol. 52, and D.5/4, 4 January 1837, Edmonton House, Rowand to Governor, Chief Factors and Chief Traders, fol. 224d.

decision concerning the New Caledonia leather supply which may or may not have been a consequence of the 1835 experience. The Council ordered that the Athabasca District begin collecting and storing leather, "as a large quantity will be required in the Course of two of three years hence for New Caledonia."⁵¹ The Company was obviously planning to return to the Athabasca District for its New Caledonia leather.

So bad was the reputation the Yellowhead Pass route had by then earned that Simpson wrote to Ogden in June 1836 informing him that in the absence of a party to take charge of it at Jasper House the leather from the Saskatchewan would be transported that fall via the Athabasca Pass and Fort Okanagan.⁵² There was, however, no difficulty. Ogden's men were at Jasper House in August and transported the leather across the Yellowhead and down the Fraser in plenty of time for distribution among the district posts.⁵³

Time, nonetheless, was running out for the Yellowhead. The Saskatchewan District continued to supply New Caledonia's leather needs, but in each of the next three years the Athabasca Pass was the route used. Then, in 1839, the Council decided that from the 1840 outfit onwards the Athabasca District would become the source for this leather, a decision that all but ended any hope that the Yellowhead route would be re-established. Three factors combined to influence that decision. Access to New Caledonia could be more efficiently achieved via the Peace River route. The recovery of big game animals, principally moose, in the Athabasca District, coupled with the collecting of leather there since 1836, once again put it in a position to meet New Caledonia's needs. Finally, and totally unrelated to either of the above, there was the agreement reached in early 1839 between the Hudson's Bay Company and the Russian-American Company, the Russian-based fur trading rival of the English company on the northwest coast of North America. One of the terms of that agreement stipulated that the Hudson's Bay Company annually supply to the Russian company 2,000 land-otter skins from west of the Rockies and another 3,000 from east of the Rockies. Simpson decided to have the 3,000 otter skins carried to Fort Vancouver via the Athabasca Pass, thus taxing the transport capacity of the Saskatchewan District and the carrying capacity of the Columbia brigade west of the

⁵¹ HBCA, B.239/k/2, fol. 64, Resolve 16, fols. 65d.-6, Resolve 32 and fol. 70d., Resolve 77, and D.4/22, 27 June 1836, Norway House, Simpson to Ogden, fol. 36.

⁵² *Ibid.*, D.4/22, Norway House, 27 June 1836, Simpson to Ogden, fol. 36.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, D.5/4, 4 January 1837, Edmonton House, Rowand to Governor, Chief Factors and Chief Traders, fol. 224.

mountains. This agreement, he thus wrote to Ogden, together with the inconvenience of forwarding the New Caledonia leather from the Saskatchewan "either from Tête Jaune Cache or Okanagan have induced us to determine on providing it in future from Peace River."⁵⁴ The provisions of the agreement regarding otter skins for the Russian-American Company remained in effect until 1849, at which time the Hudson's Bay Company decided that future deliveries of these skins would be made from England.⁵⁵

The Athabasca District annually supplied New Caledonia's leather until 1847, though the Saskatchewan District on occasion indirectly supplied New Caledonia with its grease, sending it via Lesser Slave Lake to be forwarded to Fort Dunvegan and westward.⁵⁶ When the Athabasca ran short of leather in the late 1840s, the Saskatchewan was again called upon to supply New Caledonia's needs.⁵⁷ In 1848, Saskatchewan leather, to augment the supply from Fort Dunvegan, was sent via the Athabasca Pass. In 1849, the Yellowhead route supplied the complete New Caledonia requisition.⁵⁸

From 1850 onwards, Fort Dunvegan assumed its "usual" role of supplier of New Caledonia's leather, but the Company continued to use the Yellowhead Pass. The reasons for the return to the Yellowhead stemmed from two sources, the first and most important being the California gold rush and the second, the "Oregon Dispute." Gold was discovered at John Sutter's mill in January 1848, and by the end of that year word of the find had spread around the world. The following year the rush to the gold fields began, with an estimated 80,000 men reaching the California coast in 1849. Unfortunately for the Hudson's Bay Company, some of these gold-seekers were deserters from its service. By the spring of 1849 the Company was certainly feeling the effects, with fifteen men deserting

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, D.4/25, 13 June 1839, Red River Settlement, Simpson to Ogden, fol. 36d., B.239/k/2, fol. 88, Resolve 11 and fol. 95, Resolve 78, D.5/5, 5 January 1840 [1841], Edmonton House, Rowand to Governor, Chief Factors and Chief Traders, fol. 221, Mary Cullen, *op. cit.*, pp. 241-42, and E. E. Rich, *Hudson's Bay Company, 1670-1870. Vol. III, 1821-1870* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1960), p. 655.

⁵⁵ HBCA, D.4/39, 30 June 1849, Norway House, Simpson to Board of Management, fols. 91-1d.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, D.5/5, 5 January 1840 [1841], Edmonton House, Rowand to Governor, Chief Factors and Chief Traders, fol. 222.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, D.5/20, 20 December 1847, Fort Chipewyan, Ermatinger to Simpson, fol. 677d. and B.239/k/2, fol. 211d., Resolve 12 and fol. 213d., Resolve 33.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, B.188/a/20, 17 November 1849, D.5/26, 27 December 1849, Edmonton House, Rowand to Simpson, fol. 747d. and D.5/27, 25 February 1850, Stuart Lake, Donald Manson to Governor, Chief Factors and Chief Traders, fol. 358.

from Fort Vancouver and more from other west coast posts.⁵⁹ The drain to the gold fields was especially distressing at this time, for the Company was in the midst of expanding and diversifying its coastal operations and was already short of men. During the winter of 1848-49, Simpson, forewarned by his subordinates on the coast, anticipated the potential desertion problem and recruited extra men in both Canada and Great Britain, and did likewise the next year.⁶⁰

The Company sought ways to lessen "the temptation which the late golden discoveries offered."⁶¹ The problem of desertions among its servants in New Caledonia was inadvertently diminished by the 1848 abandonment of the Columbia River supply route to that district.⁶² "The danger of desertion from New Caledonia is lessened by the circumstances of the Fraser's River route having been substituted for the old Columbia River communication; and from Vancouvers Island, Fort Langley and Fort Simpson there is little chance of the people getting away, unless mutiny should break out in the Company's vessels."⁶³ Normally only its own ships stopped at the Company's posts north of the mouth of the Columbia River, whereas the settlements along the lower Columbia were regularly visited by a variety of shipping. The desire of the Russian-American Company to cancel the 1849 delivery of the annual 3,000 otter skin requisition also allowed the Hudson's Bay Company to avert potential desertions among its new Columbia recruits travelling west across the mountains. Simpson reported:

We have the more readily fallen in with the desire of the Russian American Co. on this point, as the risk of desertion among the in-going Columbia recruits this season has rendered it expedient to change the usual route (say, from the Boat Encampment down the Columbia) to a more northerly pass, from the Athabasca portage by Tête Jaune's Cache and New Caledonia; where the people will have less temptation & opportunity to desert, but where, from the insufficiency of our means of transport and the character

⁵⁹ Hartwell Bowsfield, ed., *Fort Victoria Letters, 1846-1851*, intro. by Margaret A. Ormsby (Winnipeg: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1979), p. xlii.

⁶⁰ HBCA, D.4/39, 28 June 1849, Norway House, Simpson to James Hargrave, fol. 76d., 30 June 1849, Norway House, Simpson to Ogden, Douglas and Work, fols. 96d.-7d. and A.12/4, 30 June 1849, Norway House, Simpson to Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee, fols. 525d.-6d.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, D.4/39, 30 June 1849, Norway House, Simpson to Ogden, Douglas and Work, fol. 96d.

⁶² Mary Cullen, *op. cit.*, pp. 242-43.

⁶³ HBCA, A.12/4, 30 June 1849, Simpson to Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee, fols. 524d.-5.

of the navigation, it would be a very difficult matter to convey the other packs.⁶⁴

Without doubt the primary reason for the return to the Yellowhead Pass route was the Company's desire to prevent its new Columbia recruits from deserting to the California gold fields, but problems arising from the "Oregon Dispute" may also have influenced the decision. Though formally settled between the United States and Great Britain on 15 June 1846, with the 49th parallel being accepted as the border west of the summit of the Rockies to the coast, many areas of concern to the Hudson's Bay Company were left unclarified by the Oregon Boundary Treaty. The Company's operations in British territory were secure, but it was uncertain of its prospects in the United States' Oregon Territory. Many of the Company's posts, including Fort Vancouver near the mouth of the Columbia, and a large section of the Columbia River, which was of course the Company's principal route to its posts west of the Rockies, were in American territory. Among the Company's worries was the question of possible American customs duties on its goods, both for the Indian trade and for sale to its servants, brought into or passing through American territory. This question was not finally resolved until mid-1850.⁶⁵ Simpson believed that the less non-essential company activity in Oregon Territory the better. In the fall of 1849 he wrote to the Board of Management, the appointed group of three company officers which, since the 1845 decision of the Council of the Northern Department, had been established to manage all company affairs west of the Rockies.⁶⁶ Simpson suggested that greater use be made of the lower Fraser River in supplying the interior posts. He believed that the Fraser River could supply all the posts in "the New Caledonia, Snake, and Colville districts, Thompson's River, and Walla Walla; leaving only F. Vancouver, Fort George [on the Columbia River], Umpqua, and Willamette, to be supplied by way of Columbia River."⁶⁷ Simpson's intention, to "save the risk of having eventually to pay these exorbitant duties,"⁶⁸ may also have influenced his decision to treat the upper reaches of the Columbia and Fraser rivers much as he was planning to use the lower sections of these rivers.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, fol. 528 and Hartwell Bowsfield, *op. cit.*, p. xlii.

⁶⁵ For discussion of this problem, see HBCA, A.6/28, Hudson's Bay Company Secretary to Simpson: 19 October 1849, pp. 117-18; 16 November 1849, p. 133; 11 January 1850, pp. 163-65; 7 June 1850, p. 261.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, B.239/k/2, fol. 182, Resolve 70.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, D.4/40, 20 October 1849, Lachine, Simpson to Board of Management, fols. 28-8d.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, fol. 28d.

At any rate, in June 1849 Simpson ordered that starting immediately only a small portion of the new recruits for the Columbia would travel via the Athabasca Pass with the express; the larger number would go via "Tête Jaune's Cache." Though it did not yet possess the status of a permanent arrangement, Simpson was certain that this expedient would enjoy it soon.⁶⁹ And so it was. Most of the eighteen incoming men who crossed the Yellowhead Pass into New Caledonia in the fall of 1849 were, as noted earlier, destined for Columbia postings.⁷⁰

In 1850 thirty new recruits were sent across the mountains: twelve via the Athabasca Pass with the Columbia express and eighteen, led by Kenneth Logan, a clerk, via "Tête Jaunes Cache." Logan and "10 Men ('Green Hands')" arrived at Fort St. James in early November with the New Caledonia packet.⁷¹ Presumably the eight others were posted elsewhere in New Caledonia. The majority, if not all, of these eighteen were intended to be forwarded to Victoria, via Fort Langley, near the mouth of the Fraser River.⁷² In 1851 twenty company servants were sent across the Yellowhead Pass for New Caledonia and Columbia, carrying with them some buffalo robes to augment the supply from Fort Dunvegan. This party was led by apprentice clerk William Manson, the son of Donald Manson, the officer in charge of the New Caledonia District.⁷³

The arrangements for 1852 were much like those of the two previous years. Apprentice postmaster Robert Todd was to be in charge of the incoming party bound for New Caledonia over the Yellowhead Pass. However, when Donald Manson returned to Fort St. James from Fort Langley with the fall brigade, he learned that the salmon fishery throughout the district had failed. Realizing that he would have difficulty feeding the people already in the district, he quickly sent men to Jasper House to prevent the new recruits from crossing over the mountains. The incoming men were stopped from crossing the Yellowhead Pass, except for Todd, who returned with the New Caledonians to Fort St. James with the express.⁷⁴

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, D.4/39, 30 June 1849, Norway House, Simpson to Manson, fol. 73d.

⁷⁰ Ten of the new arrivals wintered at Fort St. James, while eight went to Fort George and Alexandria. See HBCA, B.188/a/20, 17 November 1849.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 8 November 1850.

⁷² *Ibid.*, D.4/42, 25 June 1850, Norway House, Simpson to Ogden, Douglas and Work, fols. 5d.-6 and 24 June 1850, Norway House, Simpson to Manson, fols. 17-7d., and B.239/k/2, fol. 243d., Resolve 61.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, B.239/k/3, p. 16, Resolve 64, B.188/a/21, 16 November 1851, D.5/33, 20 February 1852, Stuart Lake, Manson to Governor, Chief Factors and Chief Traders, fol. 224d. and 25 February 1852, Stuart Lake, Manson to Simpson, fol. 239.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, B.188/a/21, 18 September and 9 November 1852, B.239/k/3, p. 40, Resolve

The 1853 crossing went much more smoothly. In June 1852 the Council of the Northern Department had ordered that 140 moose skins be sent to New Caledonia via "Tête Jaunes Cache" in 1853, and the Council added, in June 1853, at Manson's request, twenty-five buffalo skins for the fall 1853 trip.⁷⁵ Sixteen men were sent across the Yellowhead Pass with the leather and the express. No officers accompanied the party, which was met by Robert Todd and escorted down the Fraser by boat. Ice in the river slowed their progress, eventually forcing them to leave the leather *en cache* along the way. Todd and his party finally arrived at Fort St. James on 11 November 1853.⁷⁶

What appeared to be a permanent part of the Company's western system soon revealed its impermanent character once again. The 1853 crossing was the last regular use of the Yellowhead by the Company. The reason for this was the complete reorganization of the Company's operations west of the continental divide. Up to 1853 the districts west of the Rockies had been under the control of the Northern Department of the Company. Due, however, to the limitations of time and distance, the senior officers of these districts did not attend the council meetings, held each year at York Factory, Red River or Norway House in late June or early July. The Council of the Northern Department could not, in consequence, effectively direct the Company's affairs west of the mountains, and the senior officers stationed there were given more independence than their counterparts elsewhere.

In 1852 the Governor and Committee of the Hudson's Bay Company in London decided to establish the operation west of the Rockies as a department separate from and equal to the Northern Department. Developments in interoceanic communication permitted this major organizational change. In 1848 the Pacific Mail Steamship Company was chartered in New York and was granted a contract by the United States Navy Department to carry mail between Panama and the Oregon coast. From this time, mail was sent from London to and across the Isthmus of Panama and was carried by steamer to the Columbia, from there to be taken to Fort Victoria by Hudson's Bay Company vessels. This new service cut

65, and D.5/36, 28 February 1853, Stuart Lake, Manson to Governor and Council, fols. 323-3d.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, B.239/k/3, pp. 27-28, Resolve 13 and p. 61, Resolve 64, and D.5/36, 27 February 1853, Stuart Lake, Manson to Governor and Council, fol. 320.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, B.188/a/21, 11 November 1853, D.4/46, 18 June 1853, Norway House, Simpson to Manson, fols. 54d.-5 and 18 June 1853, Norway House, Simpson to Board of Management, fol. 65.

at least two to three months off the six months or more usually taken by the Company's own, or chartered, ships in making the trip around Cape Horn.⁷⁷ The Columbia Department was to be administratively linked directly with London beginning with the 1853 outfit.

Apart from annually supplying New Caledonia's leather from Fort Dunvegan, all regular communication between the new Columbia Department and the Northern Department was to cease. Even the spring and fall transmountain expresses were to be abandoned; under the new scheme of organization, they were a large and unnecessary expense. As Simpson pointed out to the Board of Management, the new mail service was now much quicker and cheaper. Letters and accounts from the coast could be sent in the mail by the first steamer in April from Oregon and reach Simpson's Lachine headquarters in early May, before he started on his inland trip to Red River. New recruits from Canada and Great Britain would, moreover, no longer be sent west across the mountains; instead of just some, as before this change, all recruits would be sent directly to the Columbia Department in company ships around the Cape. The option was retained to send out retiring servants from west of the Rockies by either the Athabasca Pass or Peace River.⁷⁸ However, there is no record of the Athabasca Pass ever being used for this purpose after that time. Retiring servants who travelled east across the mountains under company auspices undoubtedly did so with the annual leather party to Dunvegan. Not only did the cessation of the transmountain expresses save the Company considerable expense, but it allowed the brigades leaving Edmonton House to get an earlier start in the spring; they no longer had to wait for the Columbians.

In 1853 transmountain travel and communication was carried on much as before. In 1854 the new outfitting arrangements took effect. An express was sent from the Columbia across the Athabasca Pass in the spring, forcing Simpson to make arrangements to transport the Columbian officer, Henry Shuttleworth, back across the pass in the fall. The hastily made plans went astray, resulting in a series of crossings and re-crossings of the Athabasca Pass in late 1854 and early 1855, which eventually saw the express reach Fort Colville in mid-December 1854,

⁷⁷ Hartwell Bowsfield, *op. cit.*, pp. xxxii, xxxix and lxvi. For more information on Hudson's Bay Company and west coast shipping, see Norman R. Hacking and W. Kaye Lamb, *The Princess Story: A Century and a Half of West Coast Shipping* (Vancouver: Mitchell Press Limited, 1974) and Alan Cameron, "Ships of Three Centuries," *The Beaver*, Outfit 301 (Summer 1970), pp. 4-21.

⁷⁸ HBCA, D.4/44, 31 March 1852, Lachine, Simpson to Board of Management, fol. 99, and D.4/48, 28 June 1854, Fort Garry, Simpson to Board of Management, fols. 59d.-60.

while Shuttleworth did not reach that post until the following May.⁷⁹ This was the last regular company express across the mountains.⁸⁰ No new recruits were sent across the mountains in 1854. Just to be on the safe side, Donald Manson did send men from Fort St. James to "Tete Jeane Cache" in the fall of 1854, but the party returned without any "green hands," as Manson had expected.⁸¹ Some of Manson's men probably crossed the Yellowhead Pass to Jasper House during this trip, but this cannot now be confirmed.

After the abandonment of the Company's transmountain brigade and express system, the pass was still periodically traversed by free Iroquois and other Indians and freemen from the Jasper House area to hunt and trap west of the mountains, as they had been doing for years, and by Indians and mixed-bloods residing west of the pass going to trade at Jasper House. In 1859 and the early 1860s, small parties of miners used the Yellowhead to get to the Fraser River and Cariboo gold fields, as did the Overlanders of 1862.⁸² Lord Milton and W. B. Cheadle crossed the pass in 1863. The following year, John Rae, the famed Arctic explorer, led a Hudson's Bay Company expedition across the Yellowhead to survey the route for a transcontinental telegraph. Though the Company planned to construct the telegraph line in 1865, financial negotiations between it and the Government of the Province of Canada broke down and the projected line was never built. A similar fate awaited the later railroad plans for the pass. Selected in 1872 for the Canadian Pacific Railway,

⁷⁹ For details of Shuttleworth's 1854-55 adventure, see HBCA, D.5/39, 12 April 1854, Vancouver, Washington Territory, Ogden and Mactavish to Simpson and Council, fols. 195-5d., D.4/48, 28 June 1854, Fort Garry, Simpson to Board of Management, fols. 59d.-60, B.223/b/41, 3 January 1855, Vancouver, Washington Territory, Mactavish to Simpson, fols. 63d.-4, B.239/c/8, 28 February 1855, Edmonton House, Shuttleworth to Mactavish, fol. 38, B.223/b/41, 23 June 1855, Vancouver, Washington Territory, Mactavish to Simpson, fol. 81, and B.60/a/29a, 7 October and 12 December 1854.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, D.4/48, 28 June 1854, Fort Garry, Simpson to Board of Management, fols. 59d.-60, and D.4/49, 4 December 1854, Lachine, Simpson to William Sinclair, fol. 40. Some transmountain company exchanges, other than the annual Dunvegan leather brigade, may still have occurred on occasion, such as Richard Hardisty's 1858 crossing of the Athabasca Pass in a futile attempt to meet A. G. Dallas. High water prevented Dallas' arrival and Hardisty returned from Boat Encampment without his expected companion. See Irene M. Spry, ed., *The Papers of the Palliser Expedition, 1857-1860* (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1968), p. 379n.

⁸¹ HBCA, B.188/a/21, 28 September and 25 November 1854.

⁸² For references to miners using the Yellowhead Pass, see the Edmonton House post journals in HBCA, from 1859 to 1862, especially B.60/a/30, 19 July 1859, B.60/a/31, 19 October 1860 (this entry notes American miners arriving at the post from the Fraser River via the Yellowhead), and B.60/a/32, numerous references, 21 July to 11 August 1862, to the Overlanders, the debate over their choice of route and their departure for the Yellowhead.

crossed that same year by Sandford Fleming and surveyed by other CPR parties in the 1870s, the Yellowhead remained the officially approved railroad route through the Rockies for almost a decade, until it was rejected for the more southerly route over which the CPR was finally built.

The Yellowhead Pass route was an integral part of a transmountain communication and transportation network which linked the fur trade districts on both sides of the Rockies. Late to be explored and developed, its principal use was in the transporting of leather, and the express, to the New Caledonia District of the Hudson's Bay Company. The Yellowhead provided an alternative to the Peace River route, an alternative which allowed a certain degree of flexibility in company decision-making. More direct than the Athabasca Pass and Okanagan route, the Yellowhead was of special importance at those times when the Athabasca District was unable to supply the leather requirements of New Caledonia. From 1849 to 1853 the Yellowhead Pass route took on another role, when it allowed the Company to prevent potential desertions among its incoming Columbia recruits during the California gold rush by providing an alternative route to that via the Athabasca Pass and the Columbia River.

During its periods of use the Yellowhead Pass route presented serious problems to the Hudson's Bay Company, notably the difficulties in navigation on the upper Athabasca River, the uncertain communication between parties at Jasper House and Tête Jaune Cache, and the danger of early freeze-up on the upper Fraser River. The Yellowhead may have been the most unreliable and risky of the established company fur trade routes, but the whole transmountain network imposed burdens on the Company. The system of transmountain transportation and communication was extremely costly in its use of manpower and other resources, such as canoes, boats, horses and food, was prone to unpredictable difficulties and dangers, and was time-consuming and slow. However, whatever the drawbacks, these mountain crossings were necessary for the direction and operation of the fur trade west of the Rockies, until the introduction of regular mail service to the northwest coast made the transmountain system redundant. In the mid-1850s, the Hudson's Bay Company's operations on the Pacific slope were completely reorganized and linked directly to London. Apart from the annual Peace River leather brigades, the Company's whole system of regular transmountain communication, including the Yellowhead Pass route, was then abandoned.