

Prophecy of the Swan: The Upper Peace River Fur Trade of 1794-1823, by David V. Burley, J. Scott Hamilton, and Knut Fladmark. 234 pp. Vancouver: UBC Press 1996. Maps., illus. \$65 cloth.

Delayed Frontier: The Peace River Country to 1909, by David W. Leonard. Calgary: Detselig 1995. 256 pp. Illus. \$29.95.

The combination of these two books provides a much needed explanation as to why British Columbian scholars have all but ignored the Peace River country and its history. It is certainly not for a lack of evidence, human drama, or relevance. Rather, *Prophecy of the Swan* and *Delayed Frontier* demonstrate that the forces that opened up the Peace provided only fleeting contact with the people, places, and perspectives on the other side of the Rocky Mountains. Simply stated, the links to the land-based fur trade of the Hudson Bay territory and to the homesteaders arriving from northwestern Alberta were more significant and deeply felt in the Peace than were the westward connections to New Caledonia and British Columbia. Until recently, British Columbian scholars have reciprocated by choosing to believe that everything that mattered in the province was west of the Rocky Mountains.

Admittedly, difficulties exist when dealing with the Peace country. Documentary evidence is scattered through the Hudson's Bay Company archives, the Provincial Archives of Alberta, and the British Columbia Archives and Records Service, amongst many locations. Other sources are in even more challenging environs.

Prophecy of the Swan is the work of three archaeologists who have placed the findings and conclusions from their digs along the Peace River into the historical context of the fur trade during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Overtly interdisciplinary in its focus, this book verifies Fort St John's claim to being the oldest non-Native settlement in British Columbia and documents the aggressive competitiveness of the fur trade in the years preceding the 1821 amalgamation of the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company.

The greatest accomplishment of this book is its ability to fill in some of the gaps that exist in the documentary record. The digs "unearthed" previously unknown post locations, clarified the nature of the trade in the region, and provided convincing indications that by 1822-23 the Peace had effectively been trapped out. A second contribution is the inclusion of journals providing a daily record from two of the posts along the Peace River. Detailing the nature of work and life at an Interior post, these journals are potential gold mines for anyone interested in the fur trade. Finally, in depicting the painstaking effort involved in archaeological work, the authors provide important insight into the methods of a discipline that can offer historians a great deal of useful and previously inaccessible data.

Delayed Frontier not only covers some of the same historical ground but brings the story of the Peace region forward to 1909. David Leonard of the Provincial Archives of Alberta incorporates a generous collection of photographs, maps, diaries, and letters in his reconstruction of the opening of the region from the pre-fur trade era to the era of the early twentieth-century homesteaders. Organized thematically, Leonard's book explores the treaty processes, Aboriginal peoples and cultures, missionary work, the fur trade, agriculture, and the so-called settlement frontier. Culled from fourteen separate archives across Canada, Leonard's extensive research documents the lengthy ties stretching from the Peace Country across the Canadian Prairies and beyond. In so doing, he makes it abundantly clear that to understand the Peace and its history, one must view it as an extension of the Prairies and, thus, as an anomaly within British Columbian scholarship.

Leonard's greatest success is his ability to populate the history of the Peace, both on the Albertan and British Columbian sides, with human beings. While the region is well supplied with "characters," such as Twelve-Foot Davis, the real essence of the history are the Aboriginal peoples who called the region home and the travellers, Klondikers, and homesteaders who discovered the Peace on their way to somewhere else. Some of the newcomers stayed while others pressed on to return later or never again. The accounts they left, or the observations they inspired in others, often serve to provide near poetic reflection on why the Peace, in concert with the symbolism of its name, was so alluring to so many.

Although these books succeed on different levels, both raise some minor concerns. The wedding between archaeology and history in *Prophecy of the Swan* is, at times, a bit bumpy. For example, the authors acknowledge that the archaeological digs recover the relics that reflect the non-Native side of the Peace River trade, but we are still some distance from a full appreciation of the Aboriginal view of the newcomers to the Peace. There is evidence of a fairly uncritical acceptance of the entirety of fur-trade literature; Peter Newman is used in concert with Arthur Ray without any indication that the latter is much more authoritative than is the former. For his part, Leonard tends to fall down on organizational grounds. His thematic approach is sometimes repetitive and baldly unchronological. Although the themes hang together, one often has the sense of continually passing over familiar ground. Leonard is also too fond of undigested and lengthy quotations, which create the impression that the work is a compilation of compelling primary sources.

Beyond these specific concerns, *Prophecy of the Swan* and *Delayed Frontier* are both rather conservative when it comes to asking questions. The authors were evidently content to record what happened and then offer some fairly unadventurous conclusions. Neither author was prepared to ask or answer the question as to why scholars should be interested in or even care about

the history of the Peace. What can we learn that is special or particular about the Peace from either its archaeology or its later human history? Undoubtedly, there are hints here but certainly no consistent effort to theorize or to ask this question. While the two books provide a valuable service in detailing the outlines of the history and some of the resources to be plumbed, a great deal remains to be pursued.

These two books deserve the attention of British Columbian scholars because, collectively, they put to rest a number of misconceptions and simple falsehoods that continually resurface in the telling of our history. Indeed, it could be argued that they put the scholarly community on notice that it is no longer acceptable to overlook the late eighteenth-century roots of non-Native settlement in the Peace, just as it is no longer acceptable to claim there were no treaties in British Columbia. They also deserve attention for what they did not aspire to, for this indicates how we must, as individuals and as a community of scholars, writers, and readers of British Columbian history, continue to press forward and ask penetrating questions rather than merely being satisfied with recording what allegedly occurred.

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Chilkoot Trail: Heritage Route to the Klondike, by David Neufeld and Frank Norris. Ottawa: Parks Canada, Department of Canadian Heritage, and Whitehorse: Lost Moose, 1996. 182 pp. Illus., Maps. \$24.95 paper.

Gold Rush: Reliving the Klondike Adventure in Canada's North, by Ian and Sally Wilson. West Vancouver: Gordon Soules, 1996. 246 pp. Illus. \$16.95 paper.

In 1992 I hiked the Chilkoot Trail with a group of teenagers. To prepare myself for this hike I spent many hours in the gym getting my body in shape and many more hours in the library searching for information about the trail and its history. While there was plenty to read about the gold rush, there was very little information available about the trail itself — and a singular lack of photographs (other than glossy pictures of the scenery). The best information I could find was a brochure and map for the use of hikers distributed in Skagway by the United States National Parks Service.

Chilkoot Trail is the book I looked for in 1992! It is a collaborative effort between David Neufeld, a Parks Canada historian and ranger, and Frank Norris, a ranger and historian at Alaska's Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park. Both men have spent many years as park rangers, regularly hiking the trail. Neufeld and Norris begin with a detailed account of the land itself. They describe the trail, which is fifty kilometres long and rises approximately 1,080 metres over this distance. The authors give a clear