

THE COLUMBIA UNVEILED

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

On my 67th birthday, while employed as an engineer on the survey of the proposed Pacoima Dam, near the City of Los Angeles, California, the idea came to me to make a trip down the waters of the Columbia River from its source in the mountains to its termination in the sea. Where the thought emanated from I am unable to definitely determine. Possibly from something someone may have said about the Columbia; possibly something I had read; or more likely because one of the engineers in the party owned a ranch on that river to which he occasionally talked of retiring when through with engineering. This, no doubt, together with past experience in navigating other streams, sub-consciously, made an impression on my mind which brought on a desire to "tackle" the Columbia; and the desire finally resolved itself into a determination. Our engineering work was near completion, and the camp soon to be broken up—the end was in sight, and I was getting uneasy to again make a trip "in the open." My wandering life as an engineer had developed in me a *wanderlust* that, at times, demanded to be satisfied, and what more interesting than a trip down the mighty Columbia from its headwaters?

I had always been interested in the Columbia River, due mainly to the fact that one of my ancestors, Samuel Brown, was one of the six Boston merchants who outfitted the expedition that discovered the mouth of the River.

I had had much experience with life out-of-doors. As an engineer I had roughed it on the plains of Nebraska, Kansas and Colorado; in the mountains of Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, Arizona, and California; and on the table-lands of New Mexico and Mexico. When a youth on the survey of the southern boundary line of Wyoming Territory I had carried a chain 368 miles directly west across the Rocky Mountains. I was born and raised on a stream down which it was but four miles to the Mississippi River; had always owned, or had the use of a rowboat which I learned to handle as soon as big enough to use the oars; and spent much time hunting, fishing, and camping on that great stream. When still a young man, together with a friend, each of us in our own double-ended, clinker-built skiff, descended the Mississippi, starting from Galena, Illinois, and finishing our journey at Osceola, Arkansas, a thousand miles down river. We began our journey in the fall, keeping just ahead of the ice, and hunted, fished, and trapped all the way, selling our furs at St. Louis, Missouri, and game at the different towns as we passed. In the spring, disposing of one boat, we placed the other on board a steamer and went with it up-river to St. Louis. The down-river boats did not run above St. Louis, and the "Diamond Jo Line," stern wheelers, were the only ones operating north of that city, and as the

ice was still running strong they were not yet on their run. Not wishing to wait we launched our skiff below the Eads bridge and started towards home, expecting that a steamboat would overhaul us in a few days and we would board her. In this we were mistaken. Taking advantage of the eddies we averaged thirty miles a day, up stream; and the next day after arriving home learned that the first Diamond Jo boat had just reached Dubuque, Iowa, sixteen miles from Galena. We had beaten her by one day. We were seven months on the trip having a varied experience, encountering many serious wind-storms, and getting caught in ice jams that formed overnight.

After the above experience I spent many years between the Mississippi River and the Pacific Ocean, locating and constructing railway lines, roughing it, living in a camp most of the time—doing pioneer work. In 1903, while engaged in making a location survey on the North Fork, Feather River, California, for the Western Pacific Railway, I had my first experience in boat-building, constructing a rough skiff for carrying my party of engineers across the river, to and from their work.

In 1914, I went to Alaska and British Columbia with a partner on a mining venture on the Unuk River and there learned how to carry a load on my back with pack-strap and pack-board. I carried a sixty-pound pack and a nine-pound Winchester rifle for 160 miles over mountains, across streams and windfalls, and through almost impenetrable blue-berry bushes and devil-clubs, sleeping where night



WITH PACK AND RIFLE ON AN ALASKA TRAIL

overtook me, with no other shelter but the foliage of a spruce or hemlock tree.

In 1915, I was again on the Unuk River—this time with two partners. We constructed a rowboat at Ketchikan, Alaska, and in her rowed seventy miles across salt water to the mouth of the Unuk. The Unuk River has a current of about seven miles an hour and we ascended it by lining up stream. Twenty-four miles above the river's mouth is an impassable cañon. Here we made a portage carrying our outfit five miles around the cañon; then we whip-sawed lumber from spruce trees, felled in the forest, and built two twenty-five foot boats—a party of three other men having joined us in the meantime. In these heavy, green boats we continued up the Unuk to a point fifty miles above its mouth, and from there returned, in the same boats, to the head of the cañon. Here three members of the party decided to run the cañon with one boat, believing it passable down stream if it was not up. The plan was to run the second boat through if the first trip was successful. It proved a serious undertaking—they reached the lower end of the cañon, barely escaping with their lives. Their boat filled with water in a great breaker and only a timely sand bar, on which they were able to make a landing enabled them to beach her before she sank. Their bedding and provisions were saturated with water, and much of the latter had to be dumped overboard. They reported no amount of money would induce them to make a second trip—the place was worse than White Horse Rapids on the Yukon. Leaving the second boat at the head of the cañon, her load was

carried across to the foot, where the original boats had been left, we re-loaded and rowed back to Ketchikan, my party using the boat constructed in the forest and leaving our original boat behind. On this trip we carried tents with us and made comfortable camps each night.

I returned to the Unuk River in 1916, taking a man named Wells along with me from San Francisco. On this trip I purchased lumber at Ketchikan and had it conveyed, in a gasoline launch, to the mouth of the Unuk where I constructed, alone (Wells knew nothing of boat building), a 19-foot, double-ended rowboat. My companion proved to be afraid of the river but said nothing until the boat was finished, when he refused to trust himself to the swift current. I had paid his way from California, and in disgust at his defection I started up the river alone. As the Unuk River current is too swift to row against, the only way to ascend it is by lining a boat first along one shore and then along the other, occasionally wading where the water is shallow. I fought my way successfully upstream for twenty miles, to where there is a cañon two miles long, with no rapids but a current too strong for one man to contend with, and the walls on both sides perpendicular. The wall on one side had occasional breaks, but 400 feet of rope was needed to line by the longest cliffs—I had but 100 feet. I spent seven days trying to get through this cañon, but was balked after conquering it for a mile and was compelled to return, ninety miles, to Ketchikan where I engaged a helper and purchased the 400 feet of rope needed for the cañon. With my new companion my destina-



ASCENDING THE UNKUR RIVER ALONE, AND TAKING OWN PICTURE.

tion was reached, fifty miles above the mouth of the Unuk.

In 1919 I went to the Unuk River for the last time. I engaged the services of a man at Ketchikan and we went, by motor boat, to Bell Island a hot-spring resort twenty-four miles below the mouth of the Unuk. Here I had left my boat after coming down the river in 1916. I found that during my absence the boat had become badly damaged. Anticipating this I had brought lumber with me, and with this practically rebuilt the boat, and then gave her, throughout, a fresh coat of paint. The two of us then rowed across salt water to the mouth of the Unuk, lined up it, and using the boat left at the head of the impassable cañon in 1915 reached my objective point. After arriving at the place my helper expressed a desire to return to get work in a fish cannery—as the salmon run was just starting. This was feasible for in 1915 we had left a boat at the mouth of the impassable cañon and it was still in good condition, and by walking back fifteen miles through the timber he could get to it. He left me and reached Bell Island in safety, while I remained alone for two months on the upper Unuk River. The Unuk River heads in British Columbia, but flowing westward crosses the International Boundary and empties into United States waters at Behm Canal. It is considered one of the most dangerous streams of the North because of its swift current and the many "sweepers" that line its banks, and which will swamp a boat instantly if carried into them. Only experienced rivermen navigate it, either up or down.

In view of the foregoing experiences I felt fully qualified and able, both as a riverman and boat builder, to undertake the trip down the Columbia River, and decided to make it, and do it alone, as that would add something to my credit, if successful; and, besides, some of my partners, heretofore, had not made good but failed me at critical times. I knew I could rely on myself. The dire predictions of possible disaster did not affect me.