

CHAPTER II

INVESTIGATIONS, PREPARATIONS, AND ARRIVAL AT THE COLUMBIA RIVER'S SOURCE

Having definitely determined to undertake the navigation of the Columbia River from its extreme headwaters to its union with the Pacific Ocean, and having sufficient confidence in myself, from past experience, to venture the undertaking alone, the next thing was to ascertain, for a certainty, if the River was navigable for its full length, and if not, how much was, and to find out if a canoe or rowboat was a sufficiently staunch water-craft to battle the many rapids that I knew would have to be contended with.

I confess to considerable ignorance in regard to the Columbia. In 1890-1892, while employed as an engineer on the construction of the Great Northern Railway, I was on the Kootenay River, in Montana, forty-five miles below the Canadian line, and knew that stream joined the Columbia somewhere to the west, but that the source of the greater river was so near I was not aware. I knew about the Pend d'Oreille River, the Spokane, Snake, and Walla Walla, all tributaries of the Columbia. I had heard a great deal about the Great Bend country; and read an account of the Lewis and Clark expedition; knew of the founding of Astoria by John Jacob Astor; had crossed the River several times at Vancouver, Washington; and, of course, had heard of the Dalles, and that there were many rapids and

water-falls, just where I did not know. I also knew that its source was in Canada, but had the impression that its identity began at the mouth of the Canoe River and that that stream was its real source. As my inquiries were pursued I found that most people were more ignorant than I was. Some persons told me it headed in Idaho, others insisted that its starting place was in Montana. I also found that those who were acquainted with its lower section knew little, or nothing, about the upper part, while those familiar with the upper end were likewise ignorant about the lower one.

To gain enlightenment I studied what maps were available embracing the whole River. These were so illy defined that they did not disabuse my mind of the belief that the real Columbia began at Canoe River. I obtained the United States Geological sheets covering as much of the Columbia as had been surveyed and platted; but these did not include sections at the River's mouth, at the Dalles, and about 200 miles from the Canadian line, southward. The maps were clear in regard to streams and topography, but many rapids were missing and those shown were only indicated by their position and approximate length, with no intimation of their character.

I wrote many letters to various sources, seeking enlightenment. Most of the replies were discouraging. I give extracts from two of them:

"Navigation of the Columbia River below Donald is impossible. That part to Revelstoke is known as the Big Bend; where the river changes from a northerly to a southerly direction, there is a difference of level of

about 1,000 feet and is taken up by a number of rapids and low falls and complicated by large rocks; free navigation for small boats, except for the experienced man who knows the waters, does not commence in B. C. at all. I only know one old river captain of the present day who knows the waters thoroughly and he never makes it by the Columbia but runs up the Columbia from Golden and down the Kootenay, thence via Kootenay Lake with various portages to the Columbia River; and thence down that stream. Except for stretches of about 100 miles there are no navigable streams in B. C., as this country is practically a land of mountains with rivers winding and falling through numerous cañons."

Another writer says, in part:

"If you desire to go beyond Golden and around the Big Bend and so on to Astoria you would want something heavier than a Peterborough canoe, or something of its class, and a guide as well."

These letters were not very cheering, and besides did not give me such definite facts in regard to the various rapids in British Columbia as I was seeking, and where I knew the most dangerous ones were. However, a communication soon came from the Commission of Conservation of The Dominion of Canada, together with a bulky, illustrated volume on water conservation, accompanied by a good map of British Columbia. These gave me much of value, showing me that the Columbia, instead of starting at the mouth of Canoe River, did so at a place near the head of Columbia Lake 232 miles to the southward. They also told me something about the rapids on the west side of the Big Bend—that they were dangerous but had been frequently navigated.

Still I had no reliable facts about the rapids on the east side of the Big Bend until the following letter was received:

"Starting from Golden the river is navigable for a canoe or batteau, past Donald to Kitchen Rapids, which are short and can be lined down. Then it is all right again for quite a distance, past Bush River, then Surprise Rapids, which can be lined down except in June and July, when you will have to portage. Then a short distance to Kinbasket Lake. From the north end of Kinbasket Lake to Wood River, there are quite a few rapids, which can all be lined down. This last portion between the lake and Wood River takes on an average two days, by running the rapids three hours.

"If you require any other information I can give you, you are welcome to it.

Yours truly,

W. WENMAN."

Wood River joins the Columbia at the mouth of Canoe River—the head of the Big Bend, and Mr. Wenman's letter was the kind of information I wanted; and together with the other facts gleaned convinced me that the Columbia had been navigated for its full length, and settled all doubts—for I knew that what others had done I could do.

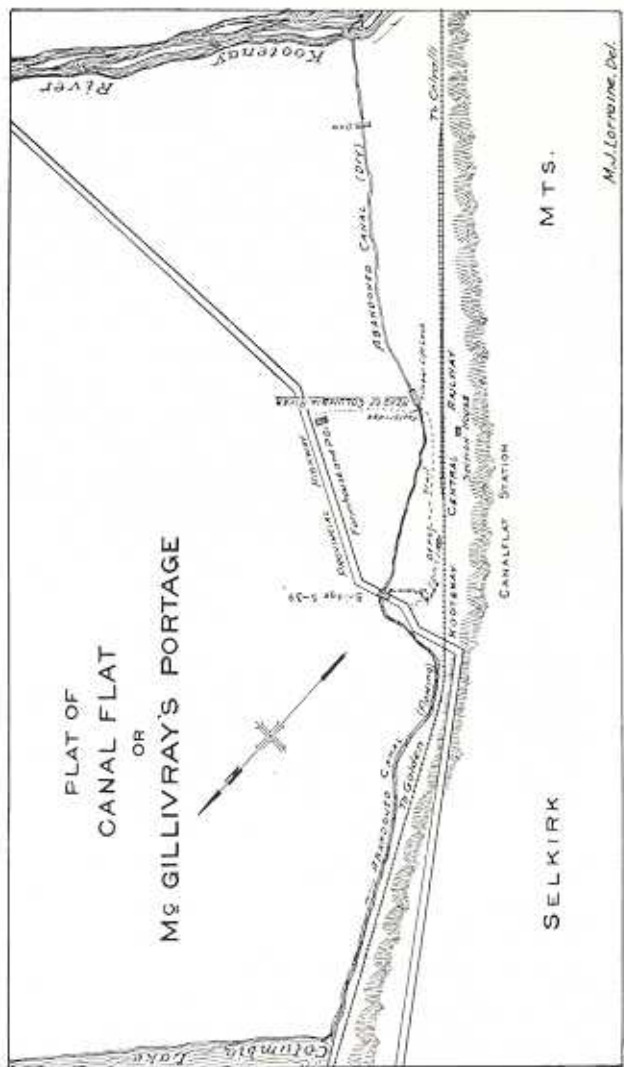
The question of the navigability of the Columbia having been settled the next thing necessary was to get an outfit together for the proposed trip. I had my little Alaska tent 7'x7' square with 3-foot walls. It was of light canvas with paraffined top to keep out rain, and weighed 11 pounds. My old Alaska sleeping bag was still usable and with the tarpaulin to protect it from moisture and dirt weighed 11 pounds. For tools for boat-building, I collected a

small cross-cut saw, hammer, wood chisel, screw-driver, small, adjustable square, and a spokeshave. On account of weight a plane was omitted, as I trusted to be able to borrow, or rent one when needed—and, anyway, in a pinch a spokeshave is a good substitute for a plane. My folding Corona typewriter, 3A Kodak, rubber boots, heavily hob-nailed laced boots, tennis shoes to wear when running rapids, rough outer clothing and a change of underwear packed in a serviceable hogskin bound telescope made a part of the outfit. In addition were fishing tackle (without poles), a 12-gauge shotgun, a 45-calibre Springfield carbine, and ammunition for both guns. The whole outfit, exclusive of guns and ammunition weighed less than 100 pounds.

On the afternoon of May 23, 1921, I left Los Angeles, and boarding the steamer Yale, at Wilmington, arrived at San Francisco the next morning. There was a seaman's strike on and I was compelled to continue my journey by rail, by way of Portland, Oregon, to Spokane. Here I stayed overnight and transferring to the Spokane International Railway crossed the Canadian line at Kingsgate and reached Cranbrook, British Columbia. Cranbrook is on the Crow's Nest Pass line of the Canadian Pacific Railway, while my destination, Canal Flat station, is on the Kootenay Central Railway, 91.7 miles farther north. The Kootenay Central trains operate over both lines from Cranbrook to Golden on the main line of the Canadian Pacific, leaving the Crow's Nest Pass line at Colvalli 27.7 miles east of Cranbrook; but as they are what are called two-a-week trains I would be compelled to lay over

at Cranbrook three days for the next train. Having this time on my hands it seemed a wise thing to do to make my purchases of lumber and supplies at Cranbrook and pay freight charges to Canal Flat. I scoured the town over for suitable lumber with which to construct a boat of the type I had decided to use but could find none; but learned, incidentally, that there was a large sawmill, planer, and good general store at the village of Wardner 21.9 miles nearer my destination. The Crow's Nest Pass trains run daily, and remaining but one night at Cranbrook I proceeded to Wardner, arriving there on the afternoon of May 27, and immediately put in an order for lumber, provisions, nails, paint, rowlocks for the boat, and all necessary cooking and eating utensils and tools, together with a double-bitted axe, everything to be ready to be shipped north on the Kootenay Central on the morning of May 30. The order was filled and shipped on time and my outfit and I reached Canal Flat at 6 o'clock P. M., May 30.

Canal Flat station, located on the flat at the foot of the Selkirk Range, consists of a sidetrack, an old box-car used as a depot, and another old box-car used as a section-house. The only other building is Hardwick Grainger's ranch house—which is also the post office—about a quarter mile east of the station. Both the box-cars are demounted from their running gear; and the one used as a depot faces on a graveled walk and is east of the railroad track. The depot is divided into two sections by a partition. In the larger section is an old heating stove, and a counter stretches across its south end. In the



north, and smaller end, is a rude board bunk without a mattress. Other furnishings, there are none. I decided to make the depot a habitation, using the bunk as a bed and making its boards as soft as possible by spreading all my spare clothing and tent over them and under my sleeping-bag. When traveling by water I usually take with me a light sheet-iron stove, but as there were none to be had at Wardner, and until one could be obtained somewhere below on the Columbia River I would be compelled to cook my meals over a camp fire. The stove in the depot was useless for cooking purposes, so starting a fire outside, and using the most readily prepared catables among my supplies I was getting supper ready when a tramp appeared—plainly a decent workingman. I shared the supper with him, after which—as he had no blankets—he went to the section-house where he thought he could find a place to sleep. I saw him no more. After he had gone I started a mixing of sour-dough, made my bed and crawled into my sleeping-bag well satisfied with my trip thus far.