CHAPTER X

From Moberly to Waitabit Creek

I made another trip to Golden, and bidding good-bye to the Colwells, intelligent and kindly people originally from the New England States, on the morning of June 29 I was again on my journey down stream. The River by this time was very high, overflowing its banks, and in many places extended from mountain side to mountain side, a distance of more than a half-mile. The current was very swift, but safe, and all I had to do was to keep in the middle of the stream. In about two miles I passed the mouth of the noted Blaeberry River, where Thompson first reached the Columbia. There is a large grassy flat at the mouth and Thompson must have had a good place at which to build his canoes.

Below the Blaeberry I had an experience that impressed me as having in it more of the element of danger than anything else I encountered thereafter. I had just passed Donald station, on the Canadian Pacific Railway, when I heard a sound like someone chopping, and looked around to locate the chopper. I could see no one. I was rowing down stream, bow first, and the sound kept getting closer, and suddenly was right behind me. Turning hurriedly I saw a quarter-inch steel rope stretched across from shore to shore and just ahead. The sag of the rope curved it down until it just dipped into

Columbia River near Donald, B. C.

the water. The current would catch the rope, drag it down stream, then release it, and it would fly back upstream to repeat the process. It was the flip-flop, flip-flop of this rope that I had heard and thought was someone chopping. The rope was so small that it could not be seen at any considerable distance and when I first became aware of it, it was but fifteen feet away, so close that I was helpless to do anything. It so happened that the rope gave a flop and started to drag with the current just as I reached it and I passed over safely although it scraped against the bottom of the boat. If the River had been a foot lower the rope would have caught the boat's bow about half way up and doubtless turned her over instantly.

The rope is used by some farmer as a means of ferrying across the River. I made a complaint about it to the Fire Warden of the district and he promised to see that the trouble was remedied by raising it higher above the water, so a skiff could pass under it.

A mile below Donald I reached the first crossing of the Columbia River by the Canadian Pacific Railway. Here on the right hand side a long, level point, about 50 feet high extends into the River, and opposite is a low, flat point, just above high water. Although the River is fully three-fourths of a mile wide near Donald, at the crossing it all passes through a space of 300 feet. The railway bridge is of steel, has three spans and a total length of 400 feet. The whole River passes through the middle span. At this narrow place the current is swift, but without whirlpools, and I had no difficulty

in gliding under the bridge. A half-mile below the railway crossing, on the right, is Waitabit Creek, a large glacial stream entering the River about three miles above the head of Redgrave Cañon—the first actually dangerous place I will encounter. As I approached its mouth I noticed a nude man standing on the shore. He had been taking a bath and proved to be K. C. (Casey) Knudson, the very Dane whose canoe had upset under the railway bridge. He had a tent camp in the timber about one hundred yards from the shore. I pitched my tent near him but closer to the river. It was a good camp ground, well above high water, with ample fuel and good water.

Before leaving home I had planned what I conceived to be the best method of proceeding down the Columbia. The plan was this: Building a boat; then going leisurely down the upper river while it was comparatively low to near the head of the first rapids; then, while the flood was at its highest "kill time" until possibly the middle of August, when shorter and cooler days would result in the lowering of the river plane; then, to steadily continue on my way until Astoria was reached, and before the autumnal rains set in. This schedule was followed fairly well, except that at times, while waiting in camp, I would become restless, and if the river receded a little would "inch along" a little way down stream, with the result that I was below both Surprise and Kinbasket Rapids by the middle of August.

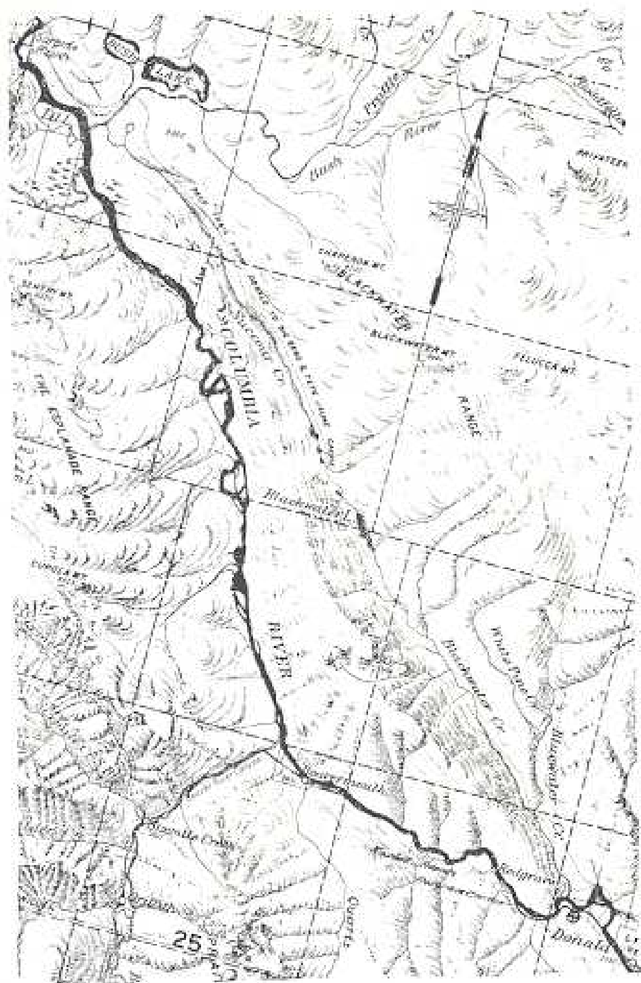
Waitabit Creek seemed a favorable place for me to "wait-a-bit," and it probably derived its name

Camp at Waitabit Creek

from the fact that those who christened it had waited there the same as I proposed to do.

The following day it rained all day, but on July 1, for the purpose of reconnoitering what was before me, I walked across the River, over the Canadian Pacific bridge, and then down the railroad track. About a mile below the crossing the railway curves abruptly to the left, and standing there on the road-bed (where the cross is placed on the accompanying map), a peculiar condition presented itself to my view. Looking to the northwest I could see a broad, heavily forested valley, almost directly in line with the Columbia to the southward. Below me, almost at my feet, was the River apparently come to an abrupt ending. But on the opposite side of it, shimmering through the trees, and not far distant, water could be seen. The uninformed observer, neither familiar with the River's course nor having studied maps, would be convinced that the water seen represented the Columbia's continuation. He would be mistaken. The valley is the valley of Blackwater Creek, and the water is the mouth of Bluewater Creek, into which the Blackwater flows. Their course is exactly opposite to that of the Columbia.

From where I was standing the Columbia, turning sharply to the left, has cut through the mountains forming its first cañon, and then turning to the right comes back in line with Blackwater valley at the mouth of Succour Creek, a little stream that heads close to the source of Blackwater, and forms a practical continuation of the latter creek's valley, but draining in the opposite direction. The moun-



THE COLUMBIA RIVER FROM DONALD TO SURPRISE RAPIDS

tain between the trough of the Columbia and Blackwater and Bluewater Creeks is an isolated one, and evidently once united the Selkirks to the Rockies and is now a part of the latter.

Professor Dawson, an eminent Canadian geologist, has this to say about the upper Columbia River: "What is called the Columbia River originally flowed south into Kootenay River from a point thirty miles north of Golden. Some convulsion of nature lowered the elevation here and changed the river's course."

I am not entirely in accord with Professor Dawson. I agree with the statement that the upper Columbia was a tributary of the Kootenay, but my theory is that Blackwater Creek was the head of that tributary, and that a lake existed from the then mouth of Blackwater and occupied the valley all the way southward to Canal Flat, where it discharged into the Kootenay. The difference in elevation between Canal Flat and the head of Redgrave Cañon is but 150 feet, and the lake could easily have been of that depth. Eventually the water at the north end of the lake found a weak place in the mountain side on the west and gradually eroded an outlet which became the present channel of the Columbia and the stream reversed its course. The Kootenay River then silted in Canal Flat. This would make Beaver River the original head of the Columbia River.

Leaving the place where I had made my observations and reached my conclusions about the ancient character of the upper Columbia, and how Redgrave Cañon had been formed, I followed the rail-

road curve to the left and was soon within the confines of the cañon, an eroded gorge through the neck that once united the two mountain ranges. The cañon is about three-fourths of a mile long, narrows up, at water level to not more than 200 feet in places, and is quite crooked. The current is very swift, swinging back and forth from rocky point to rocky point. There are no rapids, but many eddies and whirlpools, and one dangerous maelstrom at the lower end.

Before going further, as there will be numerous eddies, whirlpools, and maelstroms to contend with, before Astoria is reached, I will explain to the uninformed reader what they are.

An eddy is generally found near the shore where some obstruction causes the current to reverse itself and run up stream, and is usually spoken of by rivermen as "backwater." Sometimes they are quietly circling currents. They are not dangerous but are an aid to navigators ascending a stream. A whirlpool is a mass of deep, swirling water, often in the middle of the channel, and with great gripping power in its current. They are not necessarily dangerous, but are good things to avoid, as once within their clutches vigorous rowing or paddling is necessary to escape from them. According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, "water tends to flow in vortices due to conflicting currents, when pronounced called whirlpools"; and, "a maelstrom is a destructive, sucking whirlpool."

At the maelstrom Redgrave Cañon narrows to about a hundred feet in width. A projecting cliff juts out on the left and immediately opposite to it

is a low rocky point with a tail of scattered rocks extending into the water. The current here becomes very swift, with a foaming crest, and runs directly towards the maelstrom—which is just below the cliff on the left—but is deflected, possibly by the back action of the swirling mass, and turns to the right between the maelstrom and an innocent eddy, that is formed just below the low rocky point on the right. Down stream from the narrows the River broadens out, the current is quite swift but is free from obstructions and agitated water. I afterwards learned that the maelstrom in Redgrave Cañon is 70 feet deep at time of high water, and has been known to engulf large trees and draw them down out of sight. It was violently agitated when I saw it and had a great depressed vortex.

I carefully examined the whole length of the cañon, and photographed it from a cliff just below the narrows. Particular attention was paid to the vagaries of the current, and location of points of danger. The only serious place seemed to be at the narrows, and danger of getting into the maelstrom, for if a boat would get into that she would be drawn out of sight, instantly. The river was very high and after coming to a decision that it would be wise to wait for lower water I returned to camp on the Waitabit.

Mr. Knudson had broken camp and departed, but before leaving told me there was good fishing in Blackwater Lake, about twenty miles to the north, and that the old Tete Jaune trail was in a passable condition, and there would be no trouble in finding

the place. Going there seemed a good way to pass the time, and besides it meant some sport.

Making up a small pack of provisions and cooking utensils, and with a small axe in one hand and my carbine in the other, but with no bedding, I struck out up the trail, and by nightfall reached the lake, a clear body of water nestled between steep mountain slopes. On the way up I was confronted by a small black bear, about two years old, which came blundering down the brush-encumbered trail. Neither one of us saw the other until about thirty feet apart, when we both abruptly stopped. The bear stood still an instant, eyeing me, and then turned off the trail into the timber, giving me the right-of-way. I could have easily killed it with my 45-calibre carbine, but had no object in doing so, and it departed unharmed. My success in fishing was poor. Two mountain trout was the extent of my catch, and after remaining overnight I returned to camp somewhat disappointed.

It was on the trip to Blackwater Lake that I first became intimately acquainted with the Columbia River Valley mosquito. They had not bothered me much heretofore, but now, of all the persistent, ferocious, and devilish pests that I ever encountered they are the worst. I had fought mosquitoes in the Mississippi Valley; in the swamps of Kansas; in the Rocky Mountains, where they breed just below the melting snow banks near timber line; and in Alaska and western British Columbia, and had always been able to stand their onslaughts—but not these. Placing both axe and gun in one hand, with the other

I fought as best I could, with no appreciable success, and had to submit to the inevitable. They come at their victim in clouds, and no sooner alight than their little drills begin puncturing the skin. Every puncture means a sting, and every sting leaves a white welt. My forehead, neck, and wrists became a mass of sores, which it was almost impossible to refrain from scratching. In most places where I have been if one is walking rapidly along a trail mosquitoes do not bother greatly, but on the Blackwater trail speed availed nothing—they could not be left behind. They seem to know when one is in trouble. The Tete Jaune trail is little used and is much obstructed with windfalls—trees that have blown down and often cross the trail in tiers of two and three in a place. Before reaching a windfall you have been followed by, say, a hundred mosquitoes, but as soon as you begin to climb over the obstruction, with both feet and both hands occupied, then their numbers increase tenfold, and by the time the obstacle is crossed you become almost frantic. I was compelled to admit myself defeated by the Columbia River Valley mosquito, and constructed a net to wear over my head and neck thereafter; and then found that I was not singular in doing so as everyone else resorted to the same protection.

I had other experiences with the mosquitoes, but the use of a net made them more bearable, and they were able to get only an occasional bite. After the middle of August they began to get scarce, and by the first of September ceased to bother.

Others have had experiences with these mosqui-

toes similar to mine. Below I give an extract from Stutfield and Collie's *Climbs and Explorations in the Canadian Rockies:*

> "The weather was very hot and sultry, and that evening a swarm of the most voracious mosquitoes we ever encountered drove us nearly crazy. The men said they had occasionally seen them more numerous on the prairie but never in their lives had they known them anything like so vicious or venomous. They lost no time in buzzing or fooling around, but went straight to business with their beaks until our hands and faces were a mass of bites. Nets, lotions, and "smudge" were of no avail; all we could do was to sit still and grin and bear it as well as we could and the night was one of unending torment."

There is but one good thing I can say about the mosquitoes of the North, and that is, that there appear to be no malarial carriers, or *Anopheles*, among them, for malaria is unknown in British Columbia. The name *Anopheles* is taken from the Greek and means useless, hurtful. This is their description: "A genus of mosquitoes which are the secondary hosts of malarial parasites, and whose bite is the usual, if not the only, means of infecting human beings with malaria."

It is claimed that the female mosquito is the only one that sucks blood, for it will not be fecund without it for food. The male mosquito feeds on the juice of decaying wood, as the female must do if no blood can be found. If there are as many males as females, how many uncountable millions of these pests must this earth support? Also, by what means or instinct do they so quickly, and from a distance, locate the food so necessary for the perpetuation of their

species? I have landed on a dry sandbar, in western British Columbia, with no stagnant water anywhere near—no water except that of the flowing river—and not a mosquito would be present, at first, but in half an hour they arrived from somewhere by the hundreds and every one busily engaged in seeking my blood.

After my return from Blackwater Lake the weather became cooler and the River lowered about a foot and a half, and on July 5 I again walked across the Canadian Pacific bridge and down the railroad track to the lower end of Redgrave Cañon. At the west end of the bridge the Columbia River Lumber Co. had a camp and a spur track was being put in for their use. Here I again met Brede, who was working on the track gang; and I also had dinner in the lumber company's mess house.

On arriving at the narrows of the cañon it was evident that the River was considerably lower than at the time of my previous inspection, and conditions now seemed quite favorable for me to chance the first one of the real dangers that will thereafter be constantly encountered.

To prepare for the rapids, I had secured a piece of heavy canvas cut in triangular shape conforming to an end of the COLUMBIA. On one of its longer sides was placed a row of brass eyelets, or "grommets," the opposite side was folded over, to prevent tearing, and tacked to the outside of the gunwale of the boat. The grommets were then hooked over the head of nails driven in the gunwale opposite to the side tacked. The canvas reached

from the stern six feet forward toward the bow, covering everything in that part of the boat. As I always placed the tent and sleeping bag in the stern, and as the latter was made up in a round bundle it arched the canvas upward sloping it like a roof. This arrangement was designed not only to keep the tent and bedding dry, but as I always run rapids stern first, to avoid straining my neck looking over a shoulder, and also to have the pathway ahead constantly in view so as to pull, quartering, away from obstructions, or bad water, any waves that would splash over the stern would immediately run back into the river and little would have a chance to get into the boat. Nowhere on my trip did much water come aboard except where a wave struck the boat fairly in the middle, and that was seldom.

I had planned every foot of the progress through Redgrave Cañon. The plan was this: to keep the middle of the channel until the narrows were approached, and then to barely touch the stream of frothing water that trailed away from the low, rock point on the right, and would give me fifty feet of clearance from the maelstrom on the left; and then slipping between the maelstrom and the eddy on the right glide into safe water immediately below them both. I knew that if I would get into the maelstrom it would mean "curtains" for me.

When I first met Knudson, in describing me, and not knowing my name, he had dubbed me the "Columbia Man," the appellation being derived from the name of my boat; and by that name I became somewhat generally known along the River.

Perfect strangers would stop, wave their hands, and call out, "Hello, Columbia." The rivermen were much interested in my undertaking and kept track of its progress as it was featured in the newspapers published in the various towns when I reached them.