

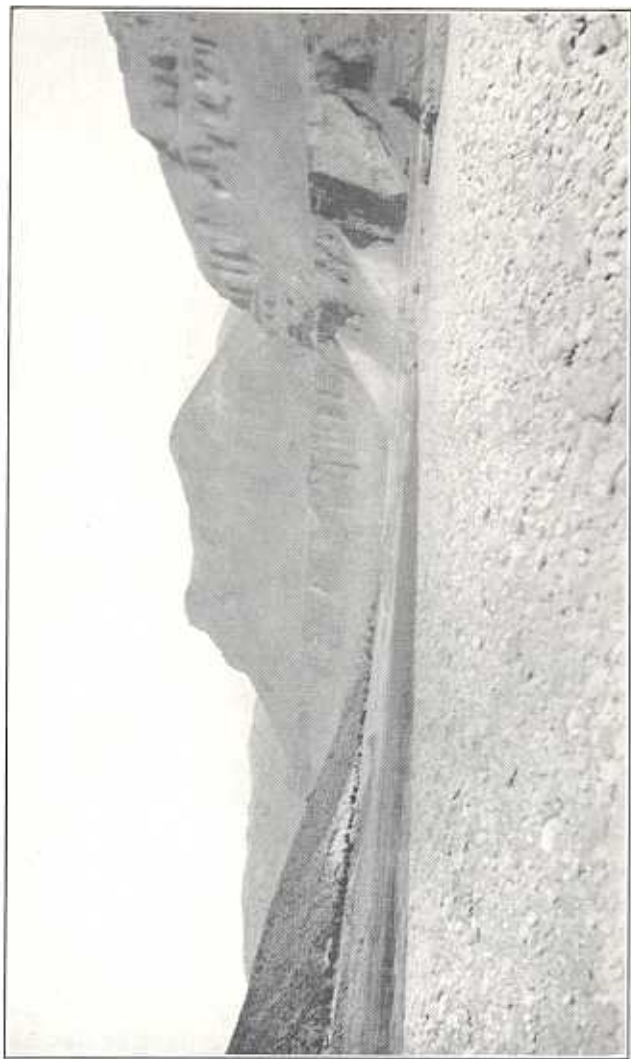
CANTILEVER BRIDGE AT WENATCHEE, LOOKING UPSTREAM

CHAPTER XXI

FROM WENATCHEE TO PASCO

As Wenatchee was the largest town so far reached on my trip, although the business section was well back from the beach, I decided to look it over. I found it a clean, well-built, modern city, with a population of 7,000 people. It is on the main line of the Great Northern Railway, on a level plain, on the west side of the Columbia, and almost in the geographical center of the State of Washington. A cantilever highway bridge spans the River just below the town. Three miles above is the mouth of Wenatchee River, which drains a fertile valley to the northwest. Wenatchee is in the heart of a rich agricultural district; various crops are raised, but apples are the main reliance, and it is claimed that the small area of 30,000 acres tributary to Wenatchee constitutes the most important single apple-growing district in the world, and is the foundation for its proud claim of being "The World's Apple Capital."

I spent about two hours at Wenatchee and then passed under the bridge and in five miles came to a rough stretch of water known as Rocky Island Rapids. The breakers were high and numerous, but avoiding the worst of them, I shot through with nothing more serious happening than the picking up of a little spray which ran off the canvas at the stern and did not reach my person.

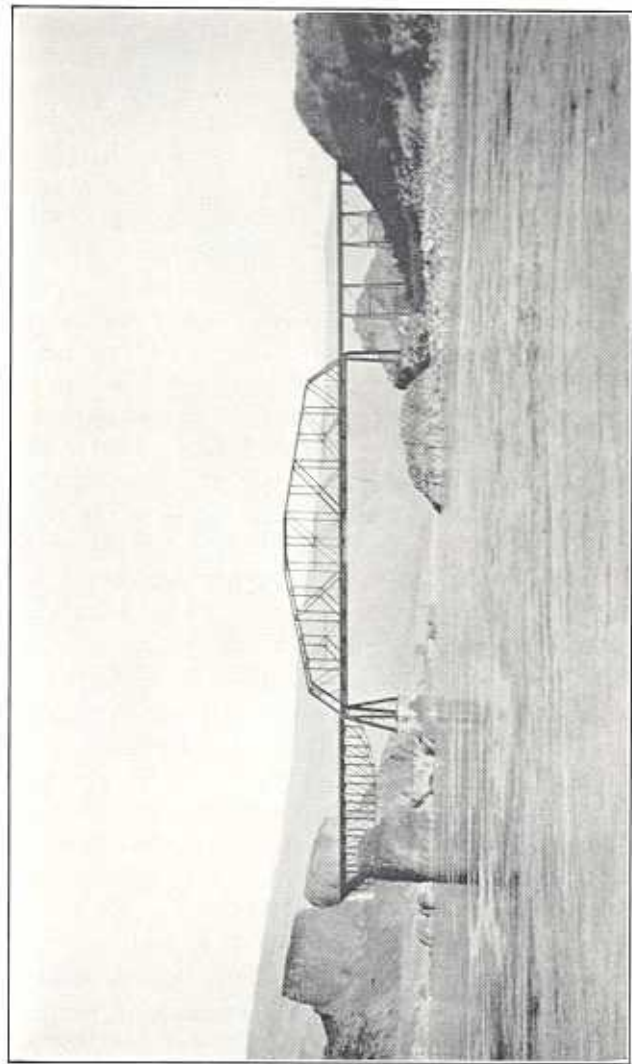


BEGINNING OF BASALT BLUFFS BELOW WESATCHEE

Three and a half miles farther along I reached the crossing of the main line of the Great Northern Railway. At a very contracted place in the River, natural rock abutments were found on both shores and a three-span bridge, 874 feet long now unites the rocky walls. The middle span has a length of 416 feet and the whole volume of the Columbia, a quarter mile wide above, passes through the middle span. I approached the bridge with the feeling that whirlpools were bound to be formed in the narrow neck, and perhaps there was a problem ahead of me to be solved. In this I was mistaken—there was hardly a ripple to disturb the tranquillity of the surface of the River. It was hard for me to realize that the mighty Columbia, after flowing 800 miles, and being augmented by the flow from other almost equally great streams could pass through the gap at the Great Northern crossing without at least the semblance of a whirlpool.

After crossing the Columbia the Great Northern Railway encounters the steep slope of a high plateau and follows, southward, along the left-hand shore of the River about fifteen miles before it finds a way to turn eastward. Two miles below the railway crossing I reached Rock Island station, and found a place to camp just under the high railway embankment above the station.

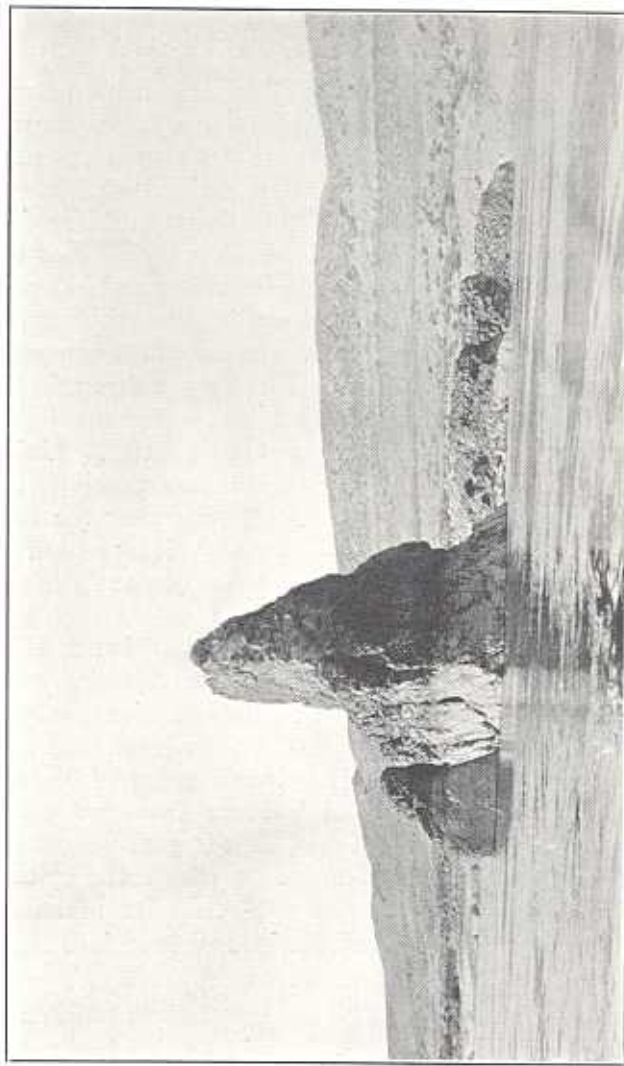
Left Rock Island station October 8, and in a mile and a quarter reached Rock Island Rapids, a dangerous section of the River demanding inspection before running. I landed well above their head on the right-hand shore, where there is a low bench



GREAT NORTHERN BRIDGE AT MALAGA

which merges into another 150 feet high at the head of the rapids. Climbing this higher bench an unobstructed view of the whole situation was before me. Rock Island Rapids are about three-fourths of a mile long. There are two channels, divided by a great, bare mass of basalt a half mile long and fifty feet high. The right hand channel skirts the base of the high bench on which I stood; its upper end has only a swift current, but its lower end is filled with numerous protruding rocks and although the breakers were not as tempestuous as some I had come through, the protruding rocks cause such a crooked channel that weaving a way among them was doubtful. Lining along the base of the high bench was possible, but my high elevation enabled me to see over the rock island to the left-hand channel, and as it looked much the safer of the two I decided to go across river and examine it.

Along the left shore there is a narrow bench of no great height, which the Great Northern Railway follows, and above that the mountains rise abruptly 2,000 feet. Like the right-hand channel, the left-hand one, at its head, is tranquil except for slow-moving harmless eddies; but the entrance would not be attractive to the timid, as it is guarded, on the left, by a considerable point on which are several isolated, jagged, upstanding rocks fifty feet in height. It is at its lower end, where it is divided into three branches, that the left-hand channel presents a problem to the navigator. The one on the left terminates in a dangerous cascade; the middle one looks runnable, if it can be followed, but as part of its current



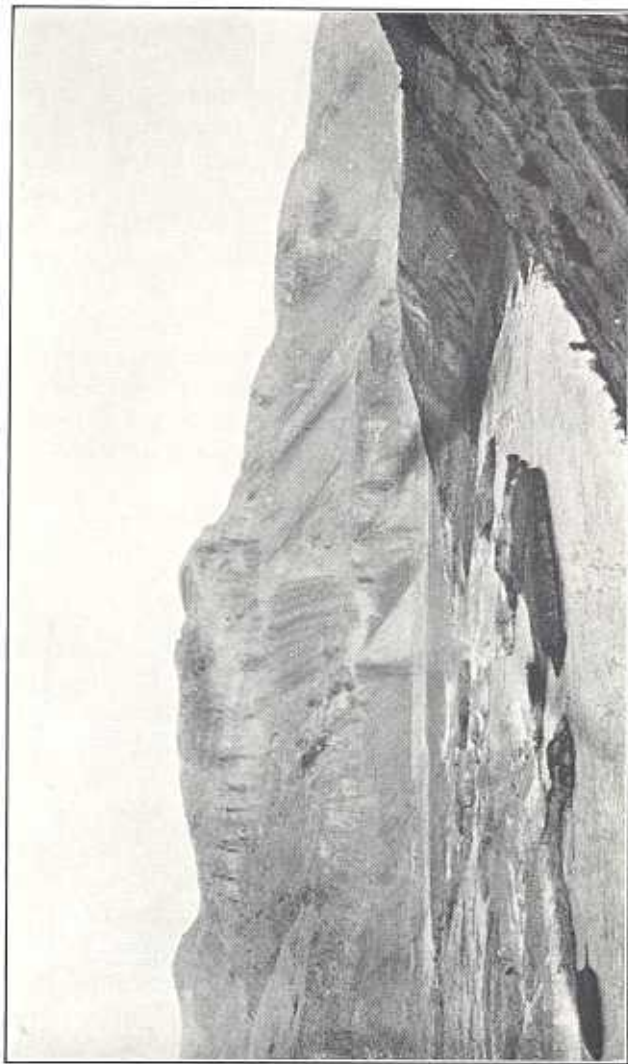
—Photos, by *Expte*

HEAD OF EAST CHANNEL, ROCK ISLAND RAPIDS.

draws strongly towards the cascade, there is no certainty that an oarsman can overcome its influence and keep to the right of the foaming mass. The branch on the right is the safest of the three. There was nothing in it more alarming than a large rock at its head, well spaced from the island shore, and some medium-sized breakers below in a straight channel. Going back to the head of the left-hand channel I decided to run it all, without lining or portaging. Rounding the point at the entrance and hugging close to the island, the obstructing rock was soon reached and passed on the right, the breakers were entered and proving no way serious were run through with little effort.

Two miles below Rock Island Rapids was a small riffle, and three miles farther Cabinet Rapids, where I was due to receive a surprise.

Everyone I had talked with about Cabinet Rapids assured me that I had nothing to fear there, so I did not take the trouble to examine them before running other than to stand up in my boat and "size them up" as the current carried me towards them. The River contracts there and a swift current with a narrow, agitated crest starts at the left-hand shore and runs diagonally across to a perpendicular cliff with a concave, lateral face which rises directly out of the water on the right, and striking it with great force is sharply deflected to the left along the curved face and shooting past the point in which it terminates, expends itself in the body of the River. Just below the head of the crested current was a submerged rock with the water foaming over it and a

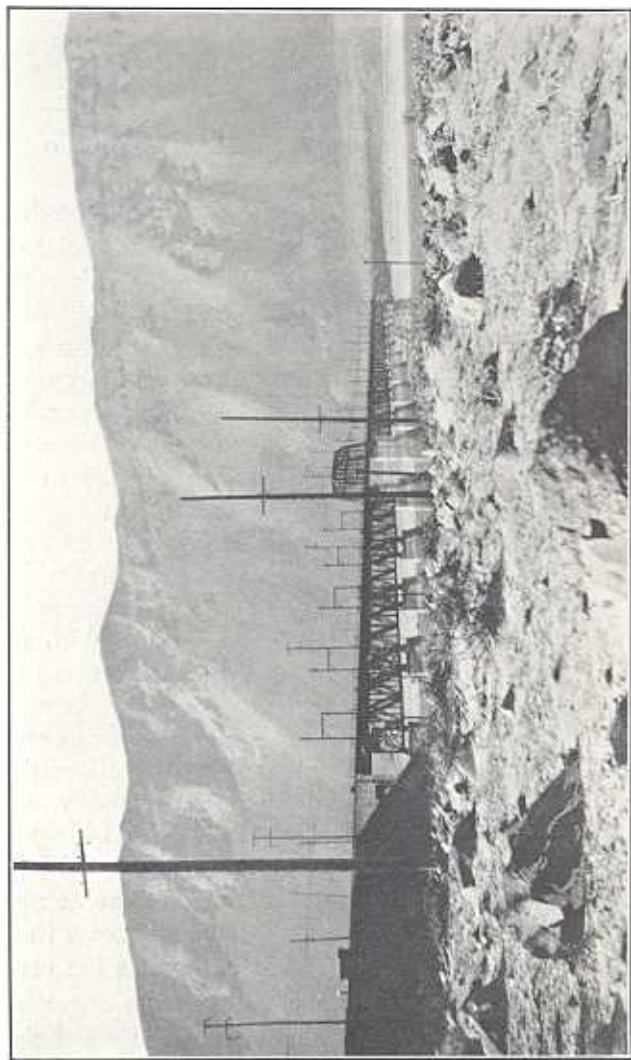


—Photo, by Forde

LOOKING DOWN WEST CHANNEL, ROCK ISLAND RAPIDS

large "souse-hole" below—something like the one I so narrowly missed at Grand Rapids, but smaller. Below this rock, and souse-hole, was an apparently safe eddy skirting the current on the left. To the right of the current, and above where it reached the face of the cliff was a considerable whirlpool.

In the little time in which I had to formulate a plan, what I decided to do was this: to back into the crested current, below the rock, pull quickly to the left into the eddy, reverse the boat, and row towards the left-hand shore where there was little commotion. But the plan did not work! No sooner had I got through the current and into the eddy than the COLUMBIA began to travel rapidly upstream towards the souse-hole. This would not do and my instant decision was to get back into the current, trusting that I could pull out of it before reaching the cliff. It must be understood that I was shooting Cabinet Rapids in my customary fashion with the boat's stern down stream. As the current was now above me, all I had to do was to row bow forward into it. As has been stated the current was narrow and that caused what happened; for the effort that I put into the oars, to escape from the eddy, carried me clear across the current into the whirlpool on the right. Instantly the COLUMBIA turned half-way around. I had long since learned that as soon as a boat starts to turn in a whirlpool the best thing to do is not to try and check her but aid in the revolution, and at the same time endeavor to force her a little down stream and away from the swirl that turns her. The COLUMBIA repeated the half-way

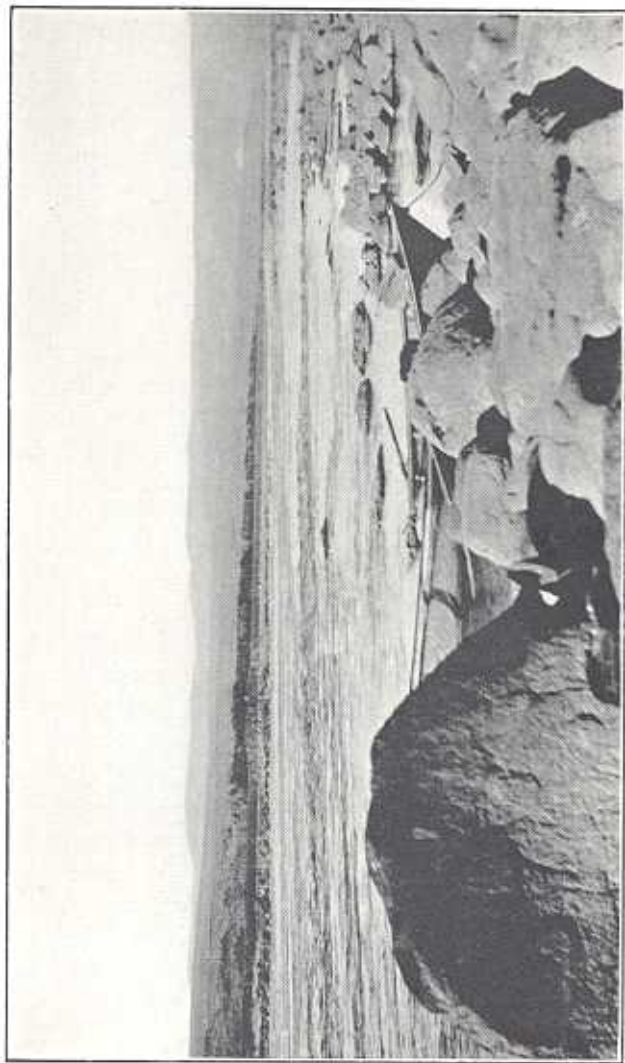


CHICAGO, MILWAUKEE & ST. PAUL BRIDGE AT BEVERLY

turn three times before I could get her out of the whirlpool and once more in the current, which she reached bow forward, and immediately flashed past the face of the cliff and the projecting point, but so close that I had to draw the left-hand oar inboard to prevent it being splintered against the shore.

After passing the point I was in safe water, and nothing serious had happened. I had struck nothing, taken aboard no water, and, as the rapids are short, had merely spent a lively three minutes. When I reached Pasco, a few days later, I learned that two men who had tried to run Cabinet Rapids in a rowboat had been dashed against the cliff and one of them was drowned. Captain W. P. Gray, a retired riverman, told me that at one time, in attempting to take a steamer through the place she had smashed into the cliff and lost eight feet of her bow. I did not go far after leaving Cabinet Rapids but found a place to camp in the sand among the sage brush on the right-hand shore.

On the following day, except for two small rapids, Gaulquil and Island, easily navigated, there was no rough water and I reached a camp ground just above Beverly where the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railway crosses the Columbia after coming from the East down Crab Creek. This crossing-place is in marked contrast to the short and favorable one of the Great Northern. Here the River is over a quarter-mile wide, its shores are flat and thickly covered with basalt boulders. I counted seventeen spans in the C., M. & St. P. bridge, and am not sure that I got them all. The main street

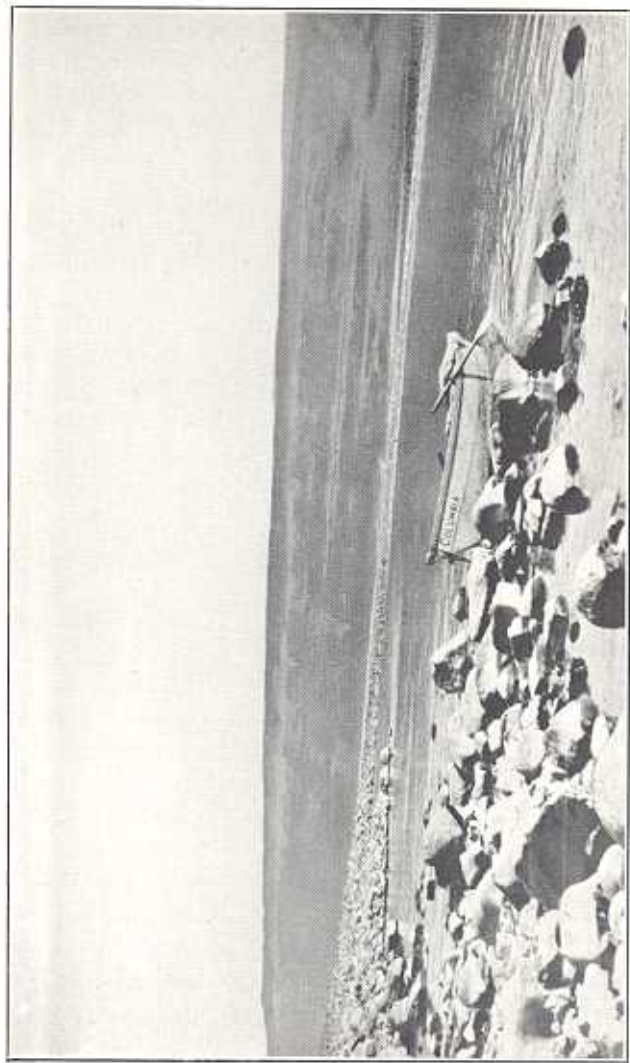


GAUQUEL RAPIDS

of Beverly is a half-mile east of the River. It is a small, dreary place, with streets and sidewalks covered with wind-driven sand. On the front porch of the most pretentious residence the housewife was doing the week's washing.

A mile and a half below Beverly are the Saddle Mountains, 1,800 feet high, which the Columbia cuts at right angles. The River is here but 800 feet wide, but while it laves the steep slopes on the left, on the right they are a mile away. Two miles suffices to get through this intervening ridge, and two miles more brought me to the head of Priest Rapids.

Priest Rapids are, next to Kinbasket Rapids, the longest combination of rough water on the Columbia River. There are seven separate rapids in a distance of eleven miles; but between the third and fourth there are five miles of untroubled water. These rapids are unlike any other on the Columbia, for while the rest are formed by either a contraction of the channel or a division of it into two or more by rock islands, and the channels are obstructed by good-sized masses of rock, either submerged or exposed, the River at the head of Priest Rapids immediately widens. Where above it has a width of 1,000 feet, it quickly doubles, then becomes 3,000 feet wide, only to narrow again to a quarter-mile at the foot of the last rapid. The expansion causes shallow water almost everywhere and the bottom is frequently seen as one glides along the surface and gives the feeling that his boat may at any time run aground. The rough water is caused by low reefs and points of small, basalt boulders. At the

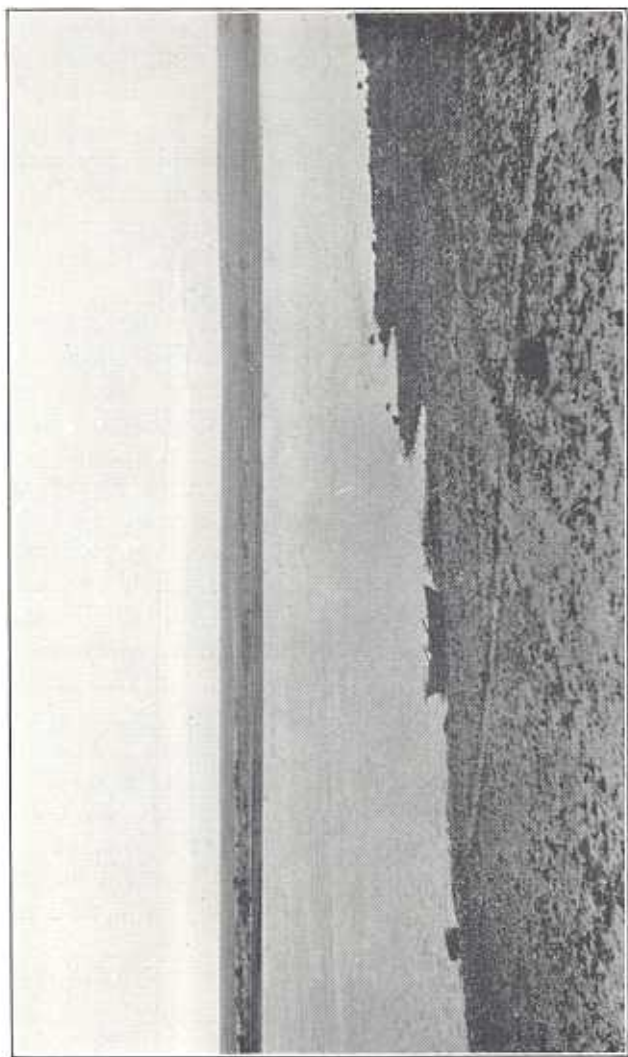


BAY AT HEAD OF PRIEST RAPIDS, LOOKING WEST

head of the fourth rapid, a part of the River is diverted along the right shore for two miles to a small power station.

The first six sections of Priest Rapids are sufficiently formidable in appearance to make the prudent navigator land at the head of each, examine its peculiarities, and select the route he is to follow. As there are no high banks on which to stand and get a general view, this necessitates walking down and back almost the full length of each section, and takes some time, making slow progress. It was on October 10, that I reached the head of Priest Rapids. The first section was easy. The second section was rather rough, requiring careful consideration of the way to be followed and also the way the boat was to be handled. I experienced no difficulty either in that or the milder third section, and was then in the five miles where there is no whitewater. Half way down this I came to an old sheep camp on the right shore, just off the mouth of Sourdough Cañon, and not far from the track of the Hanford branch of the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railway, and where there was a corral and a stack of coarse prairie hay that made a good bed. As there was no other camp ground for miles below, at the foot of the rapids, and I could not reach it before nightfall, I made an early halt and rigged up a comfortable resting place.

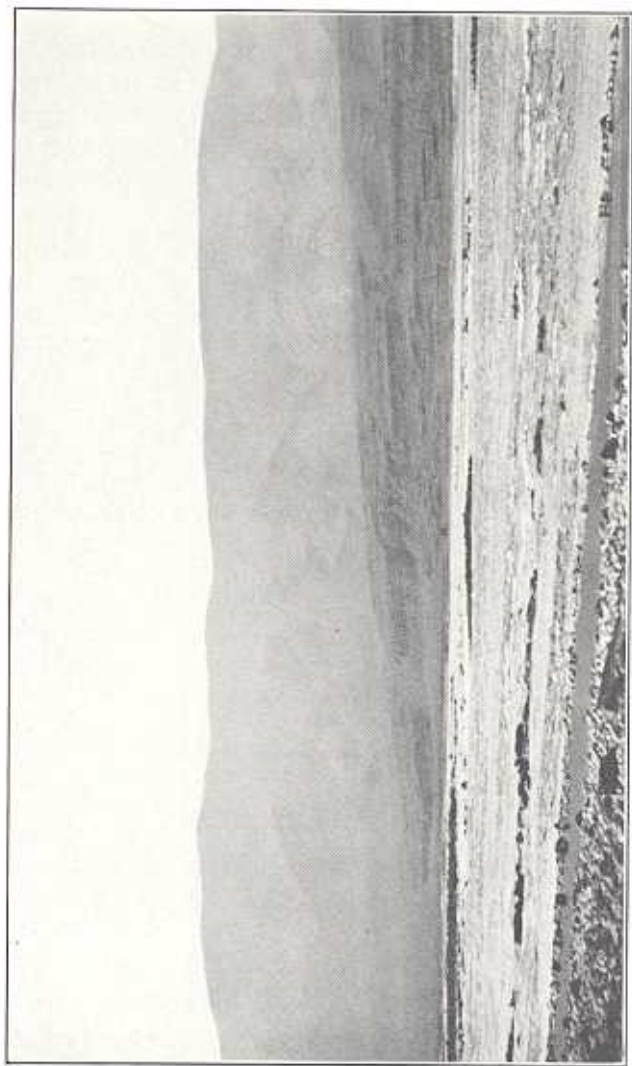
October 11 I reached and examined the 4th, 5th and 6th sections of Priest Rapids, the latter the only one having dangerous breakers. It is about as rough a rapid as I care to tackle, but after de-



THE LEVEL PLAIN OF OLD LAKE LEWIS

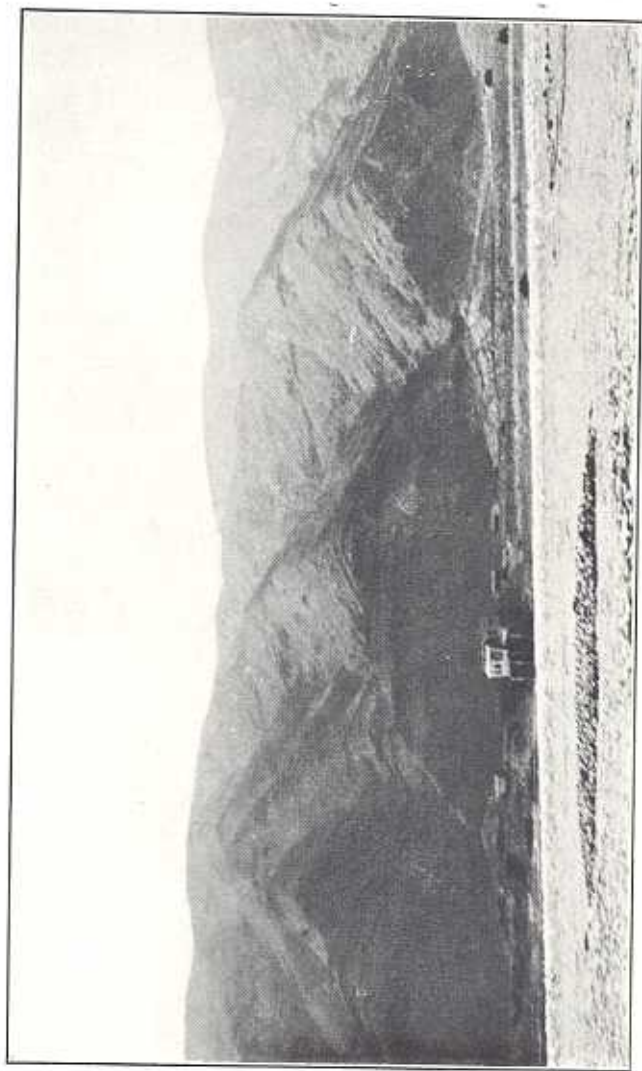
cing that it could be run with safety, if done rightly, I slipped through its greatest waves with nothing more serious happening than the picking up of a little spray on the canvas at the stern of the boat. The seventh section was nothing more than a light riffle.

Fourteen miles below the foot of Priest Rapids I reached a negligible rapid called Coyote. Just above it on the right shore is a large pumping plant that raises water into the Hanford Ditch which irrigates twenty thousand acres of fertile land. About twenty miles downriver is the town of Hanford, the terminus of a branch from the main line of the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railway to the north. Shortly after passing Priest Rapids, the Columbia River becomes a half mile wide, then increases to three-fourths of a mile, and flows, untroubled, for sixty-five miles to Pasco. I had nothing more strenuous to do than to keep my boat in the swiftest part of the current and in a short time came to the White Bluffs, just below Wahluke on the left, where the River, which has been flowing to the northeast, turns sharply to the southeast. These bluffs are about ten miles long and between 400 and 500 feet high, are of lacustrine formation, of sandy marl. The River flows at the base of their steep slopes. Opposite their lower end, on the right-hand shore, begins the most intensively cultivated and charming section along the whole length of the Columbia River. For sixteen miles, to the town of Kennewick, is a level plain, nowhere more than fifty feet above the Columbia, covered with a continuity



SECTION 6 OF PRIEST RAPIDS

of farms of ripening grain, fruit orchards with the trees just beginning to turn yellow, and green patches of alfalfa. Back from the River, on the higher spots, are the farmhouses and barns surrounded by groves of sheltering trees. Seven miles above Kennewick I passed the mouth of Yakima River, which enters the Columbia from the northwest; and opposite Kennewick reached Pasco on the evening of October 13, and found a place to camp in a little frame shed in a small grove not far above the city pumping station.



THE POWER STATION AT PRIEST RAPIDS