

CHAPTER XXIX

FINAL REVIEW AND CONCLUSIONS

In exploiting the scenic features of the Columbia River an impression is given to many unfamiliar with it that it abounds with great cañons. That is not true, for not even excepting the passageway through the Cascade Range, where there is much that is interesting and impressive, there is not a single great cañon on the whole length of the Columbia. There are cañons, it is true, but compared with those of the Arkansas, Colorado, Fraser, and other noted rivers, they sink into insignificance.

According to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, a cañon is, "a type of valley with huge, precipitous sides." Webster's definition is, "a deep gorge, ravine, or gulch between high and steep banks"; a gorge is "a defile between mountains"; and a defile is "a narrow pass between hills." The general conception of a cañon is a gloomy gorge bounded, on both sides, by high, practically perpendicular walls. These requirements are measured up to on the Columbia in only a minor degree.

The places where the River is encañoned are: at Redgrave, between Donald and Beavermouth; at the head of Surprise Rapids, where for a short distance the walls are fifty feet high; around the Big Bend to near Revelstoke is popularly known as a cañon, but is more in the nature of a deep, V-

shaped trough with more or less sloping sides heavily forested to the high-water line; the Little Dalles is the first in the United States, a pronounced rugged gorge; then comes Hell Gate; then Nespelem Cañon, which includes Box Cañon; there are many high bluffs below Nespelem Cañon but no enclosing walls until the Walla Walla River is reached; then come the bluffs both above and below John Day River. At the last three places the distance across the gaps from top to top of slopes is from a mile to a mile and one-half. The channel the River has carved through the foothills and mountains of the Cascade Range is known as the "Columbia Gorge," probably as appropriate a name as can be given it, as the troughs through the Grand Dalles and Cascade Rapids are narrow, low-walled, but true gorges in the hard, basalt bedrock of the stream, enclosed by the wider-spaced mountain slopes.

As I glided down the surface of the Columbia below the Umatilla Plains, the impression the valley through the foothills and mountains made upon me was of an open expanse between broken hills and mountain slopes guarded here and there by frequent, frowning outposts of towering, perpendicular cliffs, impressive in appearance but rarely of any great length. This is the thought that came to me as the panorama presented itself to my view—How could even so great a river as the Columbia carve its way through a mighty mountain chain like the Cascades without leaving as an evidence of its handiwork a more continuous walled cañon or gorge? The condition cannot be accounted for by contem-

poraneous upthrust and erosion alone, but must be due to the fact that the sentinel cliffs now standing erect were harder than other places, were subject only to the wearing effect of the water of the Columbia, and not situated so as to be softened by flowing water from the hillsides; while other places, now lying at an angle, were made so by the disintegrating action of side streams, and were carried by water, or gravitated, to their present inclined positions. The diversity of great, bare, frowning cliffs with sloping, timbered ground between in no way detracts from the scenic features of the passage through the Cascade Range but rather adds to them by a break in the monotony and a relief to the eye.

To those who may be disappointed in the magnitude of the cañons of the Columbia, I will say that cañons to satisfy the most exacting are easily accessible on many of its tributary rivers. In British Columbia they will be found on the Kicking Horse, Beaver, and Illecilliwaet; in the United States on the Chelan, John Day, and Deschutes. In the Cascade Mountains many of the smaller streams have their deep clefts and gorges.

A very noticeable feature on the shore line of the Columbia, which makes itself manifest as soon as high water lowers, is the sloping, rock-strewn beach on both sides; and which appears to the navigator like two white ribbons bordering the River's surface. This condition begins at Redgrave Cañon and continues to Celilo Falls; broken only by infrequent sandbars, or encañoned of cliff-lined sections. The Columbia is a fighting river and from the head of

Redgrave Cañon to tidewater at the Lower Cascades, has, almost everywhere, carved for itself a channel in the hard rock of its bed. High, grassy, tree-lined banks, usually found on other large rivers, are almost non-existent on the Columbia, and as a consequence favorable camping-places are few.

What is more marked about the Columbia than anything else is its diversified character. I know of no other river that has such varied attractions, each with its peculiar charm.

Without taking into consideration what man has done to add to the development, life, and animation of the River and its valley, let us glance at what Nature presents that is wonderful and interesting: The mountain-locked, integral lakes smooth as a mirror, or wind-lashed into fury; the rugged, towering, snow-clad mountains with their glacier-filled gulches; the lagoons, sloughs, and lakelets; the great, tributary rivers and valleys; the glacier and snow-fed mountain streams; the high benches and higher plateaus; the terraces, sculptured rocks, frowning cliffs and promontories; the great, bare, rock islands, and others less striking; the marshy flats and tidelands; the sentinel peaks of the Cascade Mountains; the great forested areas, and the fertile and arid lands; the ancient lake beds; the cleft basalt barriers; the rapids with their rock-strewn channels, tossing, roaring breakers, and counter-currents and whirlpools; the tumbling cascades and dalles, and leaping waterfalls; and the broad, majestic, tidal termination of the River as it expires into the embrace of the sea.

It would take volumes to describe more in detail than I have done, everything of interest from the River's feeble birth at Canal Flat to its ship-plowed expanse at its termination. Engrossed as I was in navigating my boat amongst breakers, whirlpools, and maelstroms, contending with wind and weather with no one to relieve me of either strain or labor, my observations were to some extent limited; but as I am a trained observer, I visualized all the salient features as they were passed, and I find that I have been more thorough in detail than the other writers on the Columbia River who have preceded me; and I trust that the readers who have followed me closely will grasp, in a fair measure, the variety and charm that exist on the Columbia.

To produce a more complete description than mine it would be necessary for a trained observer and writer to make a complete rowboat journey, as I did, but assisted throughout by someone to do the navigating, leaving the leader free to make observations, and take notes and photographs. A second trip with its freedom, enjoyment, and even danger, is appealing to me. The trip I made was with scant knowledge of what I was to see and contend with until I met it—although some of the information given me was helpful. As I now know the River in detail and all the problems to be met, a much more satisfactory second trip could be made. While it could not be done with more safety than the first, much time could be saved, formerly spent in sizing up the rapids, and the approach to places of particular interest would be known and prepared for.

Vividly written stories of disasters in rapids, such as collisions with rocks, upsetting of boats, and the swimming or drowning of navigators have a thrilling effect upon the ignorant or non-thinking reader but do not appeal to the sober-minded and experienced. The successful and appreciated whitewaterman is he who escapes disaster and not he who runs into it. However, I claim no particular credit for the successful outcome of my journey down the Columbia other than this: I had a good boat, some ability in the handling of her, some experience with rough water, and, above all, prudence in examining the rapids before running them and in selecting my route through them. I know of a half-dozen rivermen on the Columbia who can, at any time, do as well as I did.

Some of my readers may be interested in knowing more of what I did in the way of fishing and hunting than has been told.

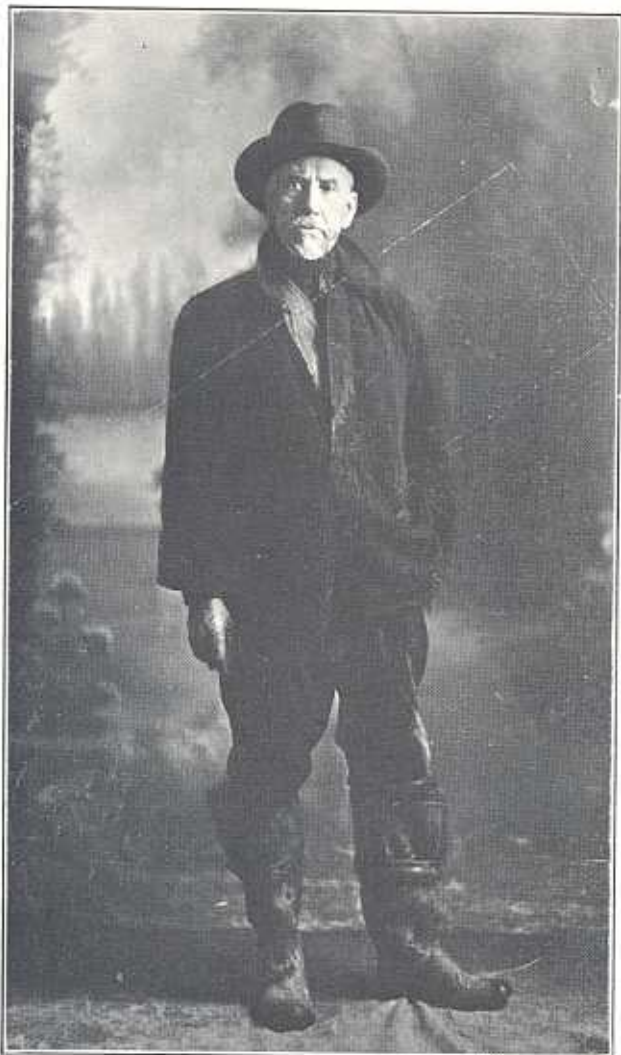
I had so little success fishing at Blackwater Lake, and none at all at Bush and Kinbasket Lakes that I made up my mind that it was an "off" year for fishing (as it proved to be) and made little further effort to catch fish except to trail out, occasionally, a troll line from my boat—but without success, as trolling should be done against the current, and not with it. At St. Leon there was said to be good trout fishing six miles away on Halfway Creek, but the injury I received at St. Leon prevented me from taking advantage of the information. Thereafter I did not happen to encamp in the vicinity of fishing streams. Some I passed not caring to break the

day's run for the uncertain purpose of trying them. At The Dalles City there is a reputed fishing place, in the Columbia, just off a point below the city. I spent several hours in a vain attempt to hook something at the point. After reaching Celilo Falls I confidently expected to spear or shoot salmon—something I had done in the past in Alaska and Western British Columbia—but, as already stated, the salmon run was over and fresh salmon was not fated to be an article of my diet on the trip. The day I was delayed at Lake River, below Vancouver, was partly passed in fishing on Lewis River for dolly-varden (a trout I had caught by the hundreds in Alaska). Using salmon eggs as bait, the only thing I caught was a small pike, almost too bony to eat. This ended my efforts at fishing.

As far as killing game was concerned, I did better, but did no regular hunting. The only wild animals I saw were the little brown bear on the Blackwater trail, a few coyotes, and jackrabbits, none of which I shot. Big game is plentiful along the upper Columbia, especially in British Columbia. There are grizzly, silver-tip, black, and brown bears, mountain goats, caribou and, in places, moose and bighorn, but they are seldom seen near the River and one must know their haunts to get them. There are caribou in the Selkirks five miles from the Ferry and I had planned a hunting trip to their feeding grounds at timber line; but the continuous rains at the Ferry, and consequent wet brush, made traveling in the forest so uncomfortable that the plan was abandoned. Grouse are plentiful in the pine forests,

and of these I got ten in all, but after leaving the Ferry, although I saw several as I traveled, none were within gunshot, and I did not land to hunt them. As the autumn advanced, ducks abounded in the River, and I killed a dozen, shooting them from the boat as they came within range. In some places they were in great flocks, and had I taken the time to hunt them from the shore I could easily have obtained more than I did. Those I got, however, afforded me several appetizing and nourishing stews. Geese also became numerous in the lower River, until the Deschutes River was reached—after that there were none. The geese were more alert than the ducks and would not allow me to get within shooting range with either shotgun or rifle. In the past I had killed geese with a rifle, both sitting and on the wing, but the Columbia River geese were too wary to allow a rowboat to approach nearer than a quarter-mile and although I tried several long range wing shots at them with the carbine, none of the bullets found a mark.

On my arrival at Astoria, the morning paper gave my journey down the Columbia an extended write-up with the glaring headline, "FLOATS DOWN GREAT RIVER." I presume that the author of the head-line thought that because the Columbia has a current, all one has to do to navigate down the stream is to sit lazily in his boat and with occasional use of the oars or paddle the current will *float* the craft to Astoria. Nothing is farther from the truth. While it is a fact that much of the Columbia has a current, very swift in places, yet a great deal of it



—Photo. by Conn

THE VOYAGER EQUIPPED TO DEFEY THE RAIN AND THE
MUD OF THE TIDE FLATS

has barely perceptible movement; there is "back-water" which flows up stream, and there are 153 miles of currentless lakes. Also, the frequent headwinds more than offset the current, and make progress on the lakes slow and strenuous. Except for about nine miles of portaging and lining, the six miles the "Columbia" floated alone from Hunters, and an occasional cessation of rowing to look at a map, shoot a duck, or some other temporary purpose, not even in the swiftest current, or when sailing, did I cease my efforts at the oars. At no time did I float except as stated. Even in the rapids the oars had to be constantly manipulated, either in backing water, or pulling away, quartering, from obstructing rocks and dangerous breakers, or holding the boat true with the waves. The current, of course, adds to the speed with which a boat descends a river, but the length of the Columbia, approximately 1,264 miles, was mainly covered by my own exertions, and my arrival at Astoria was

THE END OF A LONG ROW