

Acknowledgements

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Historical Readings

This document contains a selection of historical resources. The purpose of these passages is to provide teachers with some authentic historical resource material to review for background information or to provide to students at an advanced level to fuel their interest in historical text.

The Ministry of Education has been granted permission to use the documents contained in this booklet. The materials include excerpts from:

Activity 2 - Captain Vancouver's Voyage to the Northwest Coast of BC

- *The Secret Voyage of Sir Francis Drake*, by Samuel Bawlf, Douglas & McIntyre Ltd, 2003.

Activity 3 - The Rush to Furs

- *British Columbia Chronicle, 1778-1846: Adventurers by Sea and Land*, by G.P.V. Akrigg and Helen B. Akrigg, Discovery Press, 1975.

Activity 6 - Getting to the Goldfields

- *British Columbia Chronicle, 1846-1871: Gold and Colonists*, by G.P.V. Akrigg and Helen B. Akrigg, Discovery Press, 1977.

Activity 2 - Captain Vancouver’s Voyage to the Northwest Coast of BC

The descriptions in this set of historical readings are designed to give a sense of the life on board a ship during the Age of Sail which lasted until the invention of the steamship in the early 19th century.

The crowded conditions, the diet of the sailors, the tasks they had to perform, and the difficulties of navigation of the ship will assist students in visualizing life in another place and another time.

Ship Description

On July 9, 1577, Francis Drake wrote to the government, claiming the royal bounty for construction of his new bark: “The same Frances hath of late caused to be erected made and builded at his own expenses proper cost and charge one ship or vessel called the Pelican of Plymouth of the burden of one hundred and fifty tonnes”. Little more than 100 feet in length overall and perhaps 21 feet in beam, the *Pelican* was not a large ship by the standard of the day, especially considering the task she would be expected to perform. To the casual observer, she was a typical merchantman, a three-masted bark of the French type.

However, from the outset her design had been conceived to suit Drake's purposes: Her hold was large enough to carry four prefabricated pinnaces as well as supplies and provisions, and her sturdy oak-timbered hull was specially double-planked to endure the stresses of the long voyage. Fully laden, she drew only thirteen feet of water, enabling her to operate in shallow coastal waters. Her mainmast rose to a height of about ninety feet, and she had double canvas sails, including special top gallants to make the most of a light wind and enhance her sailing speed.

Appearances aside, the *Pelican* was also much better armed than any merchantman. Above her hold, her gundeck, having about five feet of headroom, carried fourteen cannons mounted to fire from seven gunports on each side of the ship. The cannons were slender, long-range demi-culverins, each weighing about 3,400 pounds and capable of hurling a 9 1/2-pound ball at an enemy well before it could come close enough to reply with its own guns. In addition, there were four more of these mounted above deck to fire from her bow and stern, together with several smaller, breech-loading guns known as falconets. Altogether, the weight of the *Pelican's* ordinance alone was more than thirty tons. She also carried a variety of incendiary devices that could be launched at the sails and rigging of an adversary to set them afire; and her armory contained ample numbers of arquebuses, crossbows, pikes, longbows, shields, helmets, corselets, swords, and pistols to equip her crew for a fight at sea or on land.

To accompany the *Pelican*, the queen provided the new eighty-ton bark *Elizabeth* with eleven guns instead of the *Swallow* as originally proposed. Rounding out Drake's squadron were the thirty-ton *Marigold*, the provision ship *Swan* and the pinnace *Benedict*.

Provisioning

When Drake returned to Plymouth, the provisioning of his ships was virtually completed. He had left James Stydye, one of the captains who had served with him in Ireland, in charge of lading the vessels. Aboard the *Pelican* it had been a tight fit. In addition to the pieces and equipage of the four prefabricated pinnaces, there were carpenters’ stores for their assembly and for the repair of the *Pelican* herself, including extra spars, timbers, and planks; kegs of tar, pitch, and rosin; and spare anchors, canvas, and cordage as well as a portable blacksmith’s forge accompanied by quantities of iron bars and plate and a supply of charcoal. Also, for construction of fortifications and other works on land, there were a large number of axes, machetes, picks, and spades. All these items had to be fitted into the *Pelican*’s hold along with three tons of gunpowder and shot, sufficient water storage in casks to sustain the ship’s company for sixty days, and as much food as could be carried.

For victuals Stydye had acquired the usual staples: biscuit, meal, pickled or dried beef, pork, and codfish; cheese, butter, rice, dried peas, raisin, salt, vinegar, sweet oil, mustard, and honey, and numerous casks of wine and beer. Meals were cooked over a fire lit in an iron firebox, for which purpose quantities of firewood also had to be carried.

Then came the racks of arms and armor and a long list of miscellanea, including lanterns, candles, buckets, fishnets, twine, hooks, needles and cloth, shoes, bedding, plates, bowls, and tankards. For trade with the native peoples he encountered, Drake’s partners had supplied a variety of manufactured goods, probably including woolen cloth, copper kettles, basins and cups, knives, bracelets, looking glasses, and colored ribbons and beads. And the queen had given Drake an assortment of luxury items to be presented as gifts to the foreign potentates whom he met. These he kept in his cabin, which had fitted out with finely crafted furnishings and decorations in order that “the civility and magnificence of his native country might, amongst all nations whithersoever he should come, be the more admired.”

Navigation

In coastal waters a navigator relied on a simple magnetic compass to maintain his course, and the lead and line to sound for water depth. Together with the logbook, or “rutter”, in which he recorded compass bearings, soundings, and other details for ready reference, these had long been the basic tools for navigating Europe's coasts, where a pilot could also rely on ancient lore and his knowledge of the principal landmarks. But the advent of the ocean voyages, in which a ship sailed beyond sight of land for extended periods, had necessitated the development of the first instruments and techniques that enabled a navigator to estimate his position and progress without reference to familiar landmarks.

To ascertain his position in latitude – the distance north or south from the equator – a navigator used either a cross-staff or an astrolabe to measure the height of the midday sun. With the three-foot-long cross-staff, he held the butt to his cheek and sighted along it, moving the sliding crosspiece until its lower end touched the horizon and its upper end covered the disk of the sun, and then he read the corresponding elevation, marked in degrees where the crosspiece intersected the shaft. Alternatively, the astrolabe was a metal ring six to eight inches in diameter suspended from a thumb ring and had a movable dial along which one sighted until it was aligned with the sun, and then read its elevation from the scale of degrees marked around the circumference of the ring.

While the practical means of determining one's latitude had been developed, however, there was no corresponding means of determining longitude – one's position east or west of a known point – from a ship at sea.

Careening

The work of careening the ships became the focus of daily activity. Cannons, equipment, and provisions were lifted out of each ship, and sails, cordage, and rigging were removed for repair. Then came the labor of removing the ship’s ballast – the tons of stone or gravel laid in the bottom of the hull to lower her center of gravity in the water, so as to prevent her capsizing when lightly loaded.

When each ship was lightened, it was moved toward shore on the high tide until she became grounded, sideways to the beach, when the tide fell. Then lines were tied to her mast-tops and pulled shoreward, rolling the ship on her hull until her seaward side was exposed down to the keel at low tide.

With the ship tethered in this position, a team of men set to scraping off the barnacles and other sea growths that had attached themselves to her hull and slowed her sailing speed. They drilled and plugged wormholes and raked out the seams between the planks, wedging and hammering fresh caulking into them. The hull was coated with a mixture of hot tar and brimstone carried in buckets from fires set up on the beach. When one side of the hull was finished, the ship was repositioned for work on the other.

On shore another team labored to repair sails and rigging, and the blacksmith set up his forge to replace broken fastenings. Aboard ship, a party bailed out the bilges and did their best to kill the rats that scuttered between their feet. John Hawkins had recommended careening as often as possible, believing that the filth and vermin that accumulated in the bilges were the chief cause of shipboard epidemics.

When these tasks were completed, the ship was floated off again and trimmed with new ballast. Some of the men set about rerigging her while others lifted her guns and equipment aboard. All her cannons were stowed deep in the hold for the next leg of the voyage.

While the work continued, the company slept ashore in tents. The nights were long and cold. It snowed several times, and the air and ground sent a constant, damp chill into their bodies. Port St. Julian was at nearly the same southern latitude as England was to the north and Edward Cliffe considered the weather to be comparable, although “in the depth of winter, or rather colder.”

In fact the winters at higher latitudes in both the Northern and Southern Hemispheres at this time frequently were colder than the oldest person could remember, because the middle of the century had marked the onset of one of the coldest periods in what modern scientists have called the Little Ice Age. Around 1300, after 300 years of weather slightly warmer than the mid-twentieth century, global climate began to cool, and the glacial remnants of the last Great Ice Age had begun to grow once more.

Activity 3 - The Rush for Furs

The life of a fur trader was a hard and lonely one that focussed on the annual brigade to take furs to tidewater at Fort Vancouver and returning with supplies and trade goods for another season.

The diet of the traders and a description of life on the trail bring this period of our history to life.

The Communication

The vital link which joined the HBC's Pacific forts with the Company's eastern headquarters was "The Communication". This was the term applied to the chain of waterways and portages which linked Fort Vancouver on the Columbia River with York Factory on Hudson Bay. Along the route stood a whole series of forts – Fort Colvile, Jasper House, Fort Assiniboine, Fort Edmonton, Fort Pitt, Carlton House, Norway House and Oxford House. Along the Communication travelled the two annual expresses. The first was the eastbound spring express which set out with the accountant from Fort Vancouver bearing his accounts and those of the other posts for the past year, along with McLoughlin's despatches to Governor Simpson. Travelling with the express canoes were any officers going on furlough, retiring, or taking up new assignments east of the mountains. With them also went engagés who had served the term of their contracts and had decided not to re-enlist. Sometimes the latter would accompanied by their [country wives and children], en route to a new home in the Red River Colony. At Norway House the express would split up, some went no further, others pushed on to York Factory to catch a ship for England, and still others headed towards the Ottawa valley and Montreal. A few months later the fall express carried the accountant back to Fort Vancouver, his records approved and audited. With him travelled various officers newly appointed to western forts, and parties of engagés similarly sent out to Dr. McLoughlin's domain. The fall express also brought despatches, newspapers and mail. Its arrival at Fort Vancouver was one of the major events of the year.

New Caledonia Brigade Trail

Another principal event was the arrival of the brigades from the Interior. Almost as soon as the ice was out of the lakes and rivers, the canoes began putting out from McLeod Lake, Fort Kilmaurs (Babine Lake), and the rest of the New Caladonia posts, with their rich burdens of baled furs (the furs from a single post were worth £10,000 in a good year). Joining together like rivulets into a stream, they constituted the New Caledonia brigade. Southward the canoes travelled, down the Fraser River, until they reached Fort Alexandria. Here several hundred horses were waiting. The bales were taken out of the canoes and loaded on the horses, each with a ninety-pound bale on either side. Then began the long overland journey to Fort Kamloops (otherwise known as Thompson River Post or, very seldom, Fort Shuswap). The Kamloops contingent having joined the brigade, it headed along the shore of the South Thompson River, turned south at Monte Creek, crossed the height of land beyond and descended into the Okanagan valley. Here the brigade trail led south, close by the shores of Lake Okanagan and the Okanagan River. Finally Fort Okanagan was reached. Here a junction would be made with the Fort Colvile brigade which brought with it all the furs the year had yielded Fort Walla Walla (also known as Fort Nez Percé), Fort Colvile, Flathead House, Kootenay House and other outposts. Horses were now left behind as the brigade started down the Columbia in the “Columbia River boats”, sturdy, clinker-built craft each capable of carrying forty-five of the heavy bales of furs. Some days later there was a great exchanging of huzzahs and firing off of salutes as the brigade, striking a faster pace, came around the bend and up to the wharf at Fort Vancouver.

A month or so earlier the supply ship, or ships, had arrived from England. Their cargoes of trade goods were stored in the warehouse. Each post’s “outfit” was made up in ninety-pound “pieces” in readiness for the coming year, and each piece was plainly marked. The mark indicating that the parcel belonged to the Thompson River (Kamloops) outfit for 1863 was

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Ashore came the brigade’s cargo of furs, and into the emptied boats went the trade goods that would be their return cargo. No time was wasted on the turnaround – after all, four months were needed for the round trip from Fort St. James to Fort Vancouver. The brigade which arrived at Fort Vancouver on 11 June 1830 departed on June 29th. The furs received from the brigades were loaded into the Company’s now empty supply ships and were soon enroute to the London market.

Fur Trade Description

Starvation has caused the Death of a number of our Alexandria Indians since the Fall... McGillivray's table of the year's consumption of food gives a fair idea of the diet at one of the New Caledonia forts:

8573	Dried Salmon	3	Horses
430	Large Fresh ditto	9	Dogs
1024	Small Fresh ditto	56	Kegs of Potatoes
154	Rabbits	100	Suckers
283	Berry Cakes	135	Pemmicans
3	Beavers		

The good father has left us a vivid picture of the discomforts as he travelled the dusty trails of the Okanagan, the enormously long packtrain constantly churning up the fine dust:

There is a feverish atmosphere, an oppressive sun, a choking dust, a hill to climb, a ravine to cross. The first days, especially, one experiences general discomfort and numerous inconveniences through the irksome position when on horseback, having on the crupper one's church plate, bed, household equipment, and even kitchens. Good luck indeed if some untoward wind does not force us to breathe a thick dust which prevents us from seeing two rods ahead of us. A low buzz of conversation is heard with a monotony only broken when passing through a creek or a river. Then we draw closer together, horses hesitate, men shout, get angry, jostle each other, tumble; and often wrecks [spills] follow, exciting general hilarity and reviving conversations for the rest of the day.¹⁷

Camp was made early each afternoon. The supplies for the forts were unloaded from the horses and stacked in orderly piles, and the horses themselves were turned loose to pasture. In the morning, hours were spent rounding up the horses, which could have wandered off for miles. More hours went into saddling the horses and carefully reloading the supplies – a bungled job could leave a horse with raw sores which would render him useless. Preparations as extensive as these meant that the brigade was not on the trail again until mid-morning and Father Demers discovered that the brigade was lucky to achieve four hours of travel each day. But these four hours were uninterrupted – the inconvenience of halting the long caravan was so great that it was a standing rule that once on the trail the packtrain did not halt until it ended its day's journey.

¹⁷ *Famed Quebec Mission*, p. 153

Activity 6 - Getting to the Goldfields

Success in the gold rush depended on getting to Victoria and the gold fields quickly to stake a claim.

The numerous stories of individuals who struggled to get there and were not successful are often lost to history. The difficulties encountered by everyday individuals in their attempt to find gold make interesting reading.

Victoria

Ship followed ship with more Californians bent on “making a pile” on the Fraser. As “Fraser fever” swept California, farmers abandoned their crops in the fields, miners left prosperous claims, business after business closed its doors, and houses which had sold for \$500 were offered for \$100. Every available ship, no matter how unseaworthy, put out from San Francisco and headed north, its decks black with passengers jammed aboard without any consideration for safety or sanitation. During the first half of June seven sailing ships and four steamers left San Francisco with fortune-hunters heading to the Fraser. One of the small steamers carried 1000 passengers, and another 1200. On July 8th two California steamers, the *Orizaba* and the *Cortez*, arrived more or less simultaneously at Victoria and landed 2800 passengers.

Once ashore, the miners wanted to get to the Fraser River as soon as possible. Unfortunately for these early arrivals, there were no ships to take them up the Fraser, apart from the occasional HBC boat going to Fort Langley. Some parties of miners bought Indian canoes, dangerously unstable for inexperienced whites. But there were not enough dugouts for thousands of men and so, in the spring of this year, the tent-town around Victoria rang with the sound of hammers as the migrants built their own boats to take them across the Strait of Georgia and up the Fraser. Most of these were awkward little craft, “coffin-shaped” according to one description. Too often that epithet was prophetic. Nobody will ever know how many men drowned when these little boats came to grief in sudden storms. As they threaded their way through Active Pass, and camped overnight at Miners Bay on Mayne Island, many had only the dimmest idea of where they would find the mouth of the Fraser. ...

One joyful discovery awaited these first-comers when they travelled up the Fraser River beyond Fort Hope. They did not, after all, have to make the appallingly difficult journey to the river’s confluence with the Thompson before they got into the gold area. Gold was waiting for them up and down the length of the Fraser Canyon in gravel bars which sometimes reached out into the river but more often lay parallel with the shore. The first to be discovered was Hill’s Bar, south of Yale. One of Hill’s partners has left an account of this momentous discovery:

...we camped for lunch on a bar about ten miles from Hope to cook lunch, and while doing so one of our party noticed particles of gold in the moss that was growing on the rocks. He got a pan and washed a pan of this moss and got a good prospect, after our gastric wants were satisfied we all prospected the bar and found it a rich bar in gold. With our crude mode of working with rockers we made on an average fifty dollars per day to the man. We named this bar in honor to the man that washed the first pan of moss, Hill’s Bar.

Willie Gray

Hundreds of men were at work along the Similkameen River, whipsawing rough planks, constructing flumes, sluicing out the gold from the bars. It was a hard life in a world in which boys quickly became men. Thus we have the story of young Willie Gray:

When I was 13 years old we moved to British Columbia. This was in 1858. I began working with canoes and bateaux on the Fraser River. A good many people got drowned on the Fraser river, as it is a dangerous stream, but father used to say that danger was all in a day's work, and one must take what comes...

In the summer of 1860 we crossed the mountains to the Similkameen river to prospect for gold. We found gold on the south fork. Father built two rockers, and for the next two months we kept busy. At the end of that time our supplies were running very short. I was 13 [15?] years old, and father decided I was old enough to assume responsibility, so he sent me to Fort Hope to secure supplies. There was only an Indian trail, but I knew the general direction. I had to ford streams and cross rivers, but I had learned to swim when I was 8 years old, so that didn't bother me. As we were short of provisions, I only took two sandwiches, thinking I could make the 140 miles within two days. I had a good riding horse, and I was going to ride from daylight to dark. I had not gone over 20 miles when a rather hard character in that country called "Big Jim" met me in the trail. He stopped me and said, "Have you got anything to eat?" I told him I only had two sandwiches. He said, "I haven't had anything to eat for two days. Hand me those sandwiches." I looked at him and concluded it was safest to give him the sandwiches. He bolted them down, and grumbled because I had no more. He was on his way to Fort Hope, but his horse was almost worn out. I wanted to go by, but he wouldn't let me. He said, "Oh no you don't – we will stay together for company. Your horse is a good deal fresher than mine, and I may need him."

As we made our way across a high cliff, his horse lost its balance and fell, striking the rocks more than 200 feet below. He made me get off my horse and mounted mine. We rode and tied* from there on in to Fort Hope. It took us four and a half days, and all we had to eat during that time was a foolhen that he knocked down. My clothes were almost torn to shreds.

When I got home, I went in the back door. My mother saw me. She raised her hands above her head and said, "Oh, Willie, what has happened to your father?" I told her my father was all right, but I was nearly starved. I secured two horses and loaded them with bacon and beans, rice and other supplies, and started back for our camp. When some prospectors in town learned that we were making \$10 a day to the man, they followed me to our camp.**

* "Ride and tie" was procedure used when there were two men with only one horse. One man started riding down the trail, the other following behind on foot. When the first man had travelled a certain distance he dismounted, tied the horse to a tree, and continued on foot. When the second man reached the tethered horse he mounted it and rode on until he overtook the first man, when again the first man got the horse for the next stretch, and so the procedure continued for the duration of the journey.

** Fred Lockley, "Reminiscences of Capt. W.P. Gray", Quarterly of Oregon Historical Society 14 (1913) 324-26.

Struggle for Gold

Confronted with poverty, and with a wife, children and his old father dependent upon him, James Thomson remembered how once he had prospered in California. Now there were new gold discoveries in the West, in a place called British Columbia. Perhaps, with his experience, he could gloriously revive his fortunes in Cariboo. In April of this year, with his brother-in-law Anson and half a dozen other men from his district, Thomson left for New York and the long journey by way of Panama to the new El Dorado.

On July 27th James Thomson wrote to his wife Mary from Williams Lake. Things had not gone well since he had written to her last from Victoria. Their troubles had begun once they got off the steamboat which had brought them from New Westminster to Yale:

We had 600 lbs of provisions on board the Boat, expecting to get it packed from Yale but when we got there the mules were all engaged. So we each took what we could carry, sold the balance and started on foot for a journey of 380 miles. We travelled 13 miles that afternoon and 22 miles the next day which brought us to Boston Bar. Here they had commenced work making a waggon road which is intended to run from Yale to the mines. As it was still early in the season to go to the mines the roads bad and provisions scarce and dear, we concluded it was better for some of us to remain. Accordingly Anson, Jame McIlmoyl, Irvine Raney and Smith from Mountain hired with the contractor for one month while Picken, Thos Harbottle and myself should go on to Cariboo and prospect.

I find that I have not paper enough to give an account of my journey. Three weeks travel brought us to Forks of Quesnell (322 miles from Yale). We went 60 miles beyond the *Forks* to Antler and Williams Creek where some of the richest diggings are but did not succeed in finding any gold. We dug several holes, but like hundreds of others were unsuccessful. The ground is nearly all taken up and holes being dug but only a few claims paying and they are very rich, which has given rise to the excitement about Cariboo. Every one seems to be convinced that this country has been greatly misrepresented both as an agricultural and a mining country. No doubt new discoveries will be made and much gold found but this season provisions will be so dear that very few will be able to stay long enough to prospect thoroughly. When we were at Antler Creek, Flour, Beans, sugar, Salt & Rice were each one dollar per lb. Fresh Beef 50 cents & Bacon \$1.25 6/3 and at Williams Creek a quarter of a dollar was added to the price of each. Just think of Two hundred & fifty dollars for a Barrel of Flour and everything else in proportion. We could not stand it long.

Finding the Gold

The yield of Gold on this creek [Williams] is something almost incredible, and rich claims have risen to three times their market value of last winter.... Cunningham & Company have been working their claims for the past six weeks, and for the last thirty days have been taking out Gold at the rate of three thousand dollars every twenty four hours....Mess [rs.] Steel & C^o have been engaged for the last ten days in making a flume but during the previous three weeks their claims yielded two hundred ounces a day. These figures are so startling that I should be afraid to put them on paper, in a report for His Excellency's information were I not on the spot and *know* them to be the exact truth.

Information from other sources bears out the Elwyn report. Steele & Company, freed from work on their flume, made \$2500 (something like \$60,000 today) in a half a day. The famous Diller Claim paid \$20,000 in a single day. And this year an adjacent mine yielded the richest pan of gold ever washed in the Cariboo. J.C. Bryant, the finder, tells the story:

One day when I was cleaning up the bedrock in the mine where I was superintendent, I got to a place where I dug off a piece of the bedrock. It was soft and came off like cheese with the shovel. Right under this place, in a little hole, not much bigger than a gold pan, I saw what I took to be solid gold. I obtained a gold pan, cleaned it out, and then washed what I took out. Then I went to the shaft and washed out a bucket, and shouted up to the windlass man on top: "Run over to the cabin and see if Kelly is there. If he is tell him I want to speak to him." Kelly came to the top of the shaft and I called up to him, "I'm going to send you up a prospect." I dumped what I had into the bucket and sent it up.

Men at that time were very plentiful in Cariboo, and were always wandering round looking for work, and watching everything in the washing line. There were quite a number in the shaft house when my prospect went up. I called up to Kelly to dump it into a gold pan and I would come up and weigh it. Well, I went up and weighed it. There was 96 ounces [worth \$16 per ounce] and seven dollars in it, or a total of \$1,543. This was about the biggest pan of dirt that was ever taken out in the Cariboo.