Great Mountains east side of and near the Kootanae Lake (sketch by David Thompson)

'The age of guessing is passed away'

AN EXHIBITION TO MARK THE DAVID THOMPSON BICENTENNIAL

by Sandra Alston and William Moreau

THOMAS FISHER RARE BOOK LIBRARY UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

22 May – 31 August 2007

INTRODUCTION

This celebration of the remarkable achievements of Canadian explorer, trader, and cartographer David Thompson (1770-1857) forms part of the North American David Thompson Bicentennials initiative. As the institution that holds one of the primary source documents of the life of Thompson, the narrative of his 'Travels', the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library has undertaken this exhibition to commemorate not only his life, writings, and works, but also the long and rich tradition from which he came – the explorers and fur traders who mapped Canada.

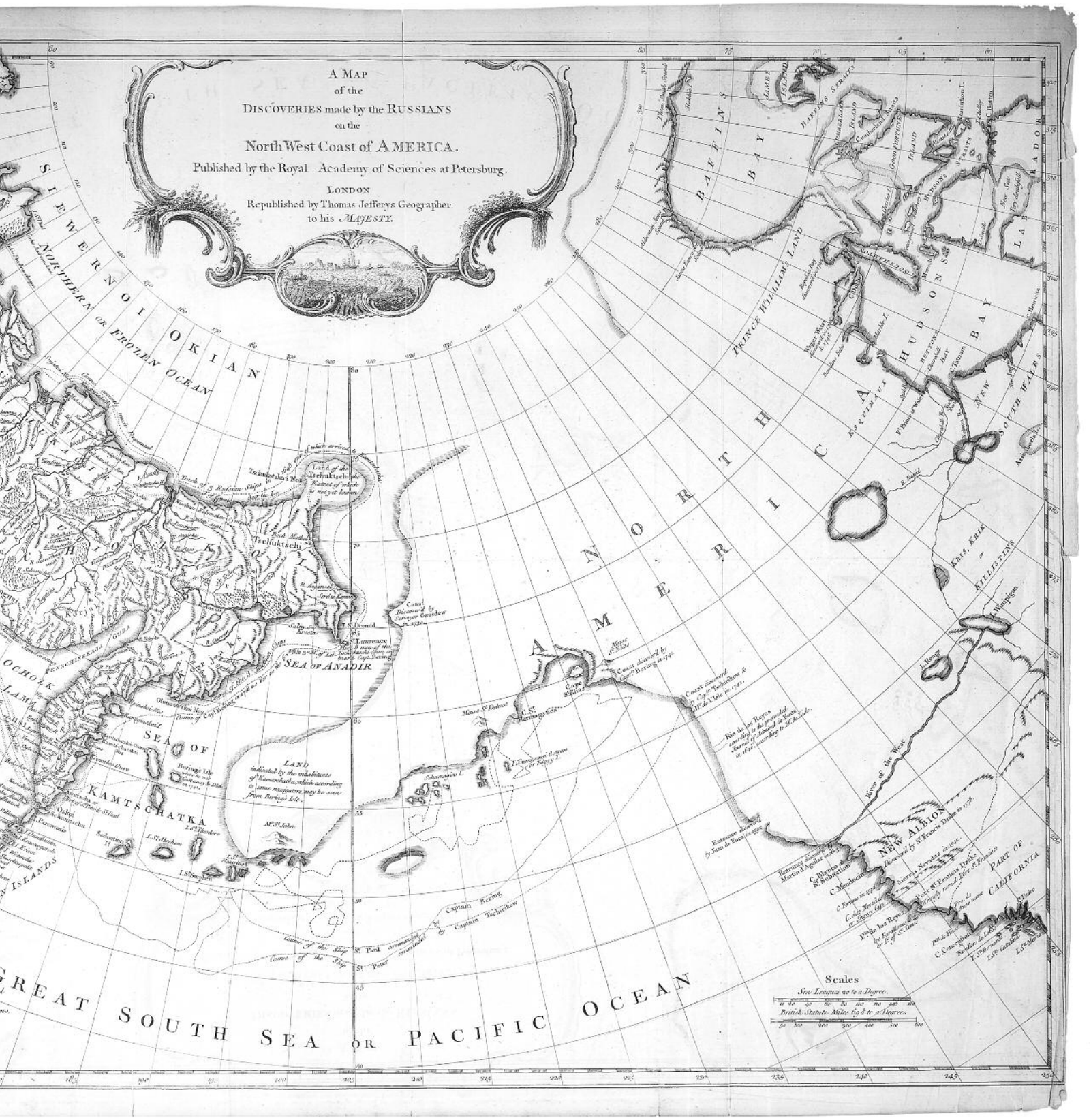
David Thompson was born in poor circumstances in London in 1770. At the age of seven he entered the Grey Coat Hospital, a charity school, and from there went to the Grey Coat mathematical school where he received some training in navigation. Apprenticed at fourteen to the Hudson's Bay Company, he left for Fort Churchill, and never returned to England. Thompson spent his early years with the Company traveling throughout the north, assisting in establishing trading posts and learning Cree and Peigan. What could have been a disastrous leg fracture led to the discovery of his future life's work when he received a short apprenticeship in surveying over the winter of 1789-1790 under the guidance of Philip Turnor, the Company's inland surveyor, while confined to quarters recuperating. Exploration and surveying became his greatest interests and it was the possibility of a promotion, with its stationary position in one of the trading forts that led Thompson to approach the North West Company, the Hudson's Bay Company's chief rival, as he felt his wish to survey would be more welcome there. Thompson remained with the company for fifteen years, until his retirement in 1812. He spent the next few years preparing one of his great legacies, the large map of the Northwest which hung for many years in the Company's headquarters at Fort William. At the age of forty-seven, Thompson became a surveyor, sometimes the sole surveyor, of the boundary commission created under the sixth and seventh articles of the Treaty of Ghent (1814) which was to fix the boundary between Canada and the United States, and remained with the commission for some years, trusted and respected by both sides. Financial reverses in later life led to unsuccessful attempts to sell his maps, and to publish the narrative of his travels. He died in poverty in 1857 and was buried in an unmarked grave in Montreal.

During his lifetime David Thompson explored and mapped 3.9 million square kilometres of the Northwest, from Montreal in the east, to Astoria on the Pacific Ocean and from the Great Lakes to Fort Churchill. His legacy comes to us in his many maps, in the work he undertook for the boundary commission, and in his writings. Thompson was a prolific writer; examples of his letters, surveying notes, essays, notebooks, and journals are housed in archives across North America. Most important are the 101 notebooks and journals, as well as the great map, now at the Archives of Ontario, and the 'Travels', based on those journals, held here at the Thomas Fisher Library.

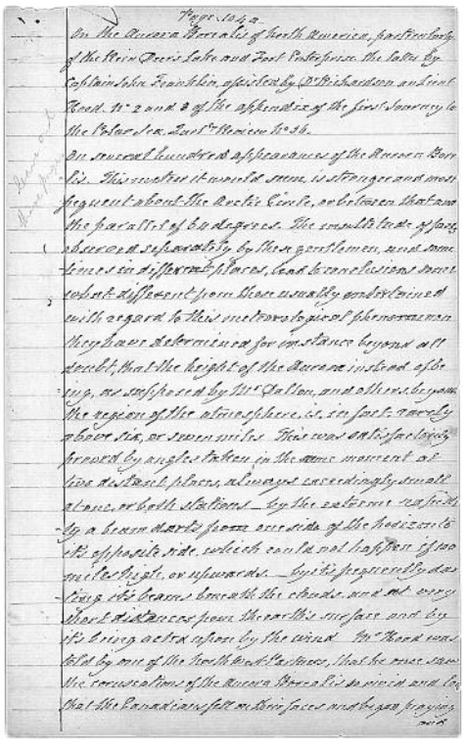
This exhibition examines the role of the fur trade in the exploration and mapping of this country. Early exploration of Canada, by the French along the eastern coastline and into the interior by way of the St. Lawrence River, and by the English from the north through Hudson's Bay was undertaken with a view to trade. The search westward for a trade route to China was promoted and financed by European powers looking for an easier and more certain route to the riches of the east. The land mass in the way offered possibilities both in its abundant fisheries and the potential of rich mineral deposits, but the economic staple which was to influence European exploration of this new territory for almost three hundred years was the beaver.

Sandra Alston

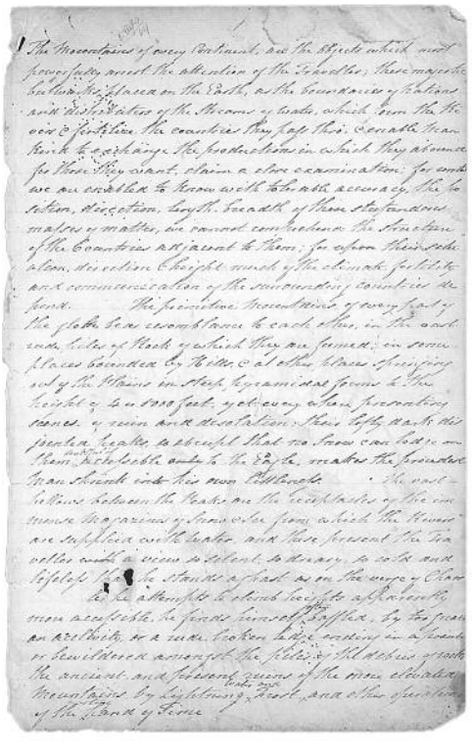
Map from Gerard Fridrikh Miller (1705-1783). *Voyag*



ges from Asia to America, for Completing the Discoveries of the North West Coast of America. (1761).



'Essay on the Aurora Borealis'.
David Thompson Papers,
MS 21, box 1, folder 41, p. 104



'Essay on mountains'.
David Thompson Papers,
MS 21, box 6, folder 3, first page

In later life, David Thompson habitually signed himself "Astronomer and Surveyor Under the 6th and 7th Articles of the Treaty of Ghent." It is telling that Thompson identified more closely with this role, which he held from 1817 to 1827, than with the work on which his fame rests today: his fur trade career with the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company, lasting from 1784 to 1812. In one respect, Thompson's use of the title was self-interested, as it emphasizes work performed on behalf of his country (service meaningful to the political and commercial figures with whom he corresponded, and whose patronage he often sought), and elides the ambiguous legacy of his departure from the HBC, and the demise of the NWC, in which he had been a partner. But the term also reflects Thompson's conception of himself as one who engaged in the scientific pursuits of observing the heavens, measuring the land, and using the data he obtained to create maps.

Thompson is, simply, the finest North American cartographer of the nineteenth century. His surveys took him from the hills of Quebec's Eastern Townships to Cape Disappointment on the Pacific, from the shores of Lake Athabasca to the banks of the Missouri. In addition to the hundreds of maps that he created, from draft sketches to the great map of the Northwest, Thompson's data was used by cartographic firms to fill in the gaps in their own general maps of the continent. It is apt that, on Thompson's 15 July 1811 arrival at Astoria, the Pacific Fur Company post at the mouth of the Columbia, the PFC clerk Gabriel Franchère (1786-1842) commented that Thompson travelled 'more like a geographer than a fur-trader'[Franchère 121].

'They had no scientific object in view.' ('Travels', iii.232)

But the empty spaces on the map of North America were not the only blanks which Thompson sought to fill, for he was an enthusiastic participant in the great eighteenth and nineteenth-century project of the collection and ordering of all knowledge about the known world. While explorers, surveyors, and mapmakers sought to chart the entire globe, cartography was only one aspect of this grand project. As science came of age, a number of concerns, particularly teleological questions, were dominant: the origins and nature of the earth itself, myriad natural phenomena, from meteor showers to magnetic variation, the classification of plant and animal species, the origins of peoples, particularly North American Natives, and the relationship between physical and geographical circumstances and human societies.

Evidence of Thompson's conscious engagement in this project is scattered throughout his daily journals, notebooks, letters, contributions to newspapers, and 'Travels' narrative. He was anxious to participate in the learned discourse of his time, and to integrate his own insights into the systematization of all human knowledge. The draft prose sketches found in the back pages of Thompson's notebooks, held at the Archives of Ontario, indicate the breadth of his interests. Within the two dozen pages of a single notebook we find notes on the lynx, Columbia River swans, grizzly bear, moose, red deer, bison, mountain goat, eagle, parsnips, mineral springs, the depth of the South Atlantic Ocean, magnetic variation of the compass, brushfires, cannibalism, Native belief in the afterlife, horse gelding, wormwood, the census of Upper Canada, the Aurora Borealis, and tables of temperature data ['Notebooks' 28.1-24].

In the 'Travels', after having carefully calculated the elevation of the Mississippi's source, Thompson writes what could be the motto of his time: 'the age of guessing is passed away, and the traveller is expected to give his reasons for what he asserts' ('Travels' iv.226). Thompson amasses his reasons from four sources: personal observation, oral testimony, the published record, and Christian revelation, and as he brings these sources into dialogue with one another, he attempts to reach a dynamic synthesis.

Thompson's powers of observation are acute, and he subjects the data he gathers to the rigors of the scientific method. Having tamed a horned owl (*Bubo virginianus*), he conducts an experiment in order to gauge when the bird would consume its prey:

> Perched on it's [sic] stand, and a live mouse presented to it, with it's formidable talons, it seized the mouse by the loins, and instantly carried it to it's mouth, and crushed the head of the mouse; still holding it in one of it's claws, it watched till all motion ceased and then, head foremost, swallowed the mouse. ('Travels", iv.33a-b)

Thompson then attempts to confirm the pattern of cause and effect that his observation suggests:

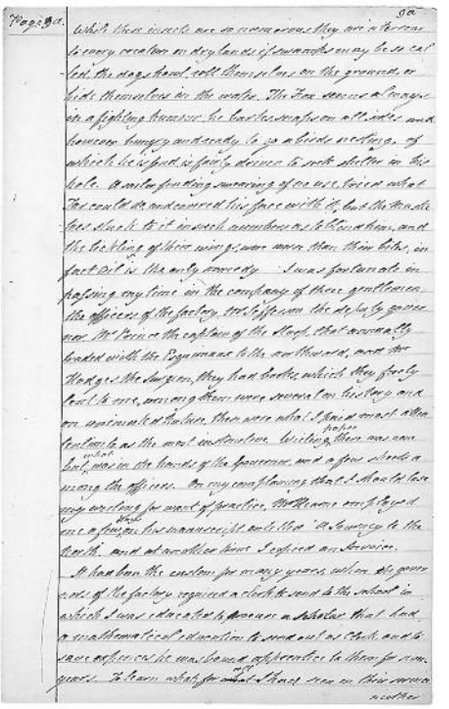
> Often while the Owl was watching the cessation of motion, with the end of a small willow, I have touched the head of the Mouse, which instantly received another crush in it's beak, and thus continued, 'till it was weary, when loosening it's claws, it seized the Mouse by the head; by giving motion to the body, it crushed it, and have thus vexed it until the body was in a pulp, yet the skin whole; by leaving the Mouse quiet for about half a minute, it was swallowed; from seve[ral] experiments, I concluded, that to carnivorous birds, the death of it's prey is only known by the cessation of motion ('Travels', iv.33a-b).

Thompson was a careful and attentive collector of oral tradition. In describing what we would today term his ethnographic method, he stresses the need for long and intimate contact with Native people. 'My knowledge', he writes, 'I collected from being present at their various ceremonies, living and travelling with them...it was only in danger and distress that I heard much of their belief' ('Travels', iii.34a). He is also cautious about the contamination of Native tradition by contact with Europeans, for he assures his reader that 'my knowledge was collected from old men, whom with my own age extend backwards to upwards of one hundred years ago' ('Travels', iii.34a).

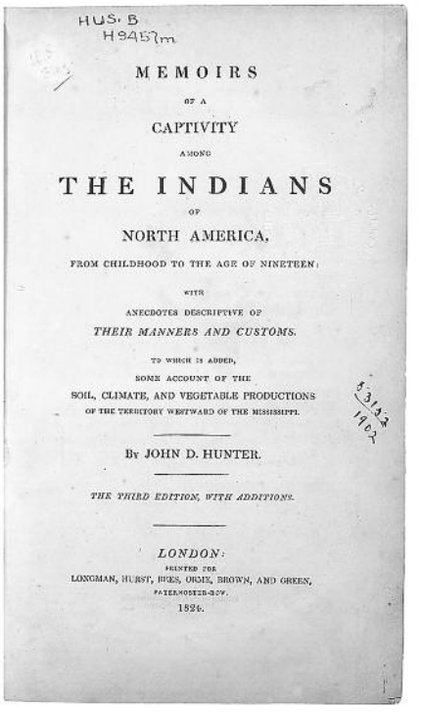
He uses people of mixed heritage as his bridge into Native culture, and credits two in particular. One is the Nor'wester Jean-Baptiste Cadotte *fils*, son of a French Canadian trader and his Ojibway wife. Of him Thompson writes, 'I had long wished to meet a well educated Native, from whom I could derive sound information' ('Travels', iv.189). The second, and undoubtedly more significant intermediary is Thompson's wife, Charlotte Small, daughter of the North West Company trader Patrick Small and his Cree wife. Of Charlotte, whom he married in 1799, Thompson writes 'my lovely Wife is of the blood of these people [the Cree]...which gives me a great advantage' ('Travels', iii.34a).

Of the greatest significance for the current exhibition is Thompson's reliance on the published record. Thompson's daily journals and the 'Travels' are punctuated by references to reading, revealing his intellectual engagement with other thinkers. Many were contemporaries of Thompson, and wrote, like him, of North America. The journals reveal that Thompson enjoyed John Dunn Hunter's *Memoirs of Captivity Among the Indians of North America* (1824) and John Charles Frémont's *Narrative of the Exploring Expedition to the Rocky Mountains in the Year 1842* (1845), while the 'Travels' contains references to William Parry's *Journal of a Voyage for the Discovery of a Northwest Passage...in 1819-20* (1821), John Franklin's *Narrative of a Journey to the Shores of the Polar Sea* (1823), and R.M. Ballantyne's *Hudson's Bay* (1848). Other works of travel led Thompson the reader farther afield: John Lloyd Stephens' *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatan* (1841), Sir George Simpson's *An Overland Journey Round the World During the Years 1841 and 1842* (1847), and William Francis Lynch's *Narrative of the United States Expedition to the River Jordan and the Dead Sea* (1849).

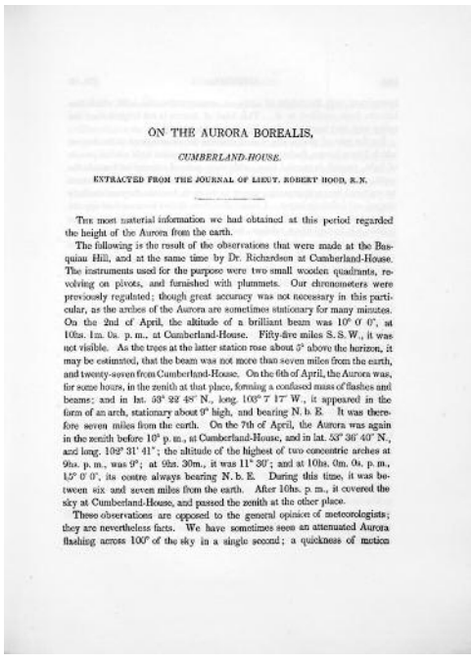
But topics much broader than travel engaged Thompson's interest: he consulted



'Travels'. David Thompson Papers, MS 21, box 1, folder 31, p. 9a



Title page from John Dunn Hunter (1798-1827). *Memoirs of a Captivity Among the Indians of North America, From Childhood to the Age of Nineteen.* (1824)



ON THE AURORA BOREALIS,

CUMBERLAND-HOUSE.

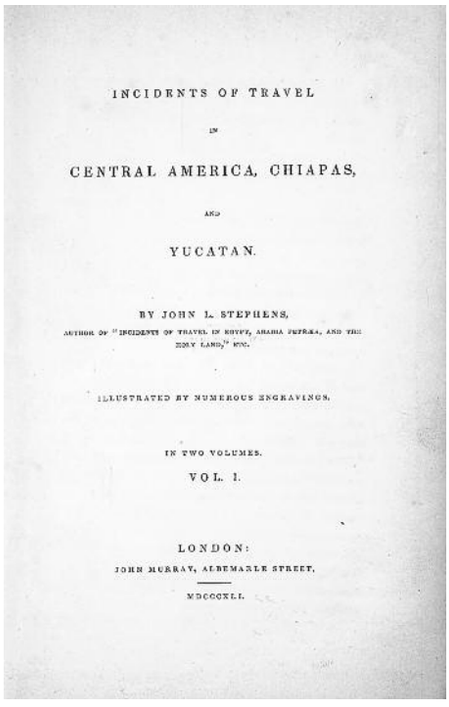
EXTRACTED FROM THE JOURNAL OF LIEUT. ROBERT HOOD, R.N.

THE most material information we had obtained at this period regarded the height of the Aurora from the earth.

The following is the result of the observations that were made at the Basquian Hill, and at the same time by Dr. Richardson at Cumberland-House. The instruments used for the purpose were two small wooden quadrants, revolving on pivots, and furnished with plummets. Our chronometers were previously regulated; though great accuracy was not necessary in this particular, as the arches of the Aurora are sometimes stationary for many minutes. On the 2nd of April, the altitude of a brilliant beam was 10° 0′ 0″, at 10hs. 1m. 0s. p. m., at Cumberland-House. Fifty-five miles S. S. W., it was not visible. As the trees at the latter station rose about 5° above the horizon, it may be estimated, that the beam was not more than seven miles from the earth, and twenty-seven from Cumberland-House. On the 6th of April, the Aurora was, for some hours, in the zenith at that place, forming a confused mass of flashes and beams; and in lat. 53° 32′ 48″ N., long. 103° 7′ 17″ W., it appeared in the form of an arch, stationary about 9° high, and bearing N. b. E. It was therefore seven miles from the earth. On the 7th of April, the Aurora was again in the zenith before 10ʰ p. m., at Cumberland-House, and in lat. 53° 36′ 40″ N., and long. 102° 31′ 41″; the altitude of the highest of two concentric arches at 9hs. p. m., was 9°; at 9hs. 30m., it was 11° 30′; and at 10hs. 0m. 0s. p. m., 15° 0′ 0″, its centre always bearing N. b. E. During this time, it was between six and seven miles from the earth. After 10hs. p. m., it covered the sky at Cumberland-House, and passed the zenith at the other place.

These observations are opposed to the general opinion of meteorologists; they are nevertheless facts. We have sometimes seen an attenuated Aurora flashing across 100° of the sky in a single second; a quickness of motion

Appendix on the Aurora Borealis from Sir John Franklin (1786-1847). *Narrative of a Journey to the Shores of the Polar Sea in the years 1819, 20, 21 and 22.* (1823)



INCIDENTS OF TRAVEL

IN

CENTRAL AMERICA, CHIAPAS,

AND

YUCATAN.

BY JOHN L. STEPHENS,

AUTHOR OF "INCIDENTS OF TRAVEL IN EGYPT, ARABIA PETRÆA, AND THE HOLY LAND," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY NUMEROUS ENGRAVINGS.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET.

MDCCCXLI.

Title page from John Lloyd Stephens (1805-1852). *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan.* (1842)

Moravian missionary John Gottlieb Heckewelder (1743-1823) on the Native peoples of Pennsylvania, John McIntosh's *The Origin of the North American Indians* (1843), and the Swiss geologist Horace-Bénédict Saussure (1740-1799) on the geology of the Auvergne region; his citations reach back into history, to Herodotus on the wars between the Persians and the Egyptians, and to Roman historians on Gaul.

Two other sources are of particular importance. The first is the *Quarterly Review*, the most important review journal of the early nineteenth century, of which Thompson held a considerable run. In its pages he could read the ideas of the foremost thinkers of his time. The second is the Bible, the importance of which is highlighted by a journal entry for Sunday, 7 July, 1850 which reads, 'the day, as usual, passed in reading the Prayers and Scripture' ('Notebooks', 61b.11).

This last source highlights an aspect of Thompson that is easily overlooked today. As much as he employed personal observation, experimental method, and rational analysis of evidence, he did so within the context of a deep belief in Christian revelation. The fourteen-year-old Thompson was scandalized by Samuel Hearne's (1745-1792) profession of belief in Enlightenment rationalism, encapsulated in Voltaire's *Dictionnaire*, and retained throughout his life a personal providential faith akin to that expressed by Robinson Crusoe, in one of his favourite childhood books. Thompson is of the generation of Canadian men of science for whom, as Carl Berger puts it, 'nature was the handiwork of God and its patterns and operations disclosed His wisdom, power and goodness' (Berger xiii).

I now turn to consider some particular cases in which Thompson brought personal observation, oral testimony, the published scholarly record, and Christian revelation into dialogue. These are the scanty fossil record of the Canadian Plains, the existence of an enormous creature in the Athabasca region, animal intelligence, and the origin of North American Natives.

'Who can tell what has passed in ancient times' ('Travels', iv.11)

The 'Travels' contains several regional geographies, and it is not suprising that one who had such facility in making things should be especially fascinated with the way that the Earth itself is formed. In his work, Thompson employs the methodology of the foremost geologist of his day, Charles Lyell (1797-1875), who posits his mission in his 1833 work *Principles of Geology* to be 'to reconcile the former indications of change with the evidence of gradual mutations now in progress' (Lyell 3:3).

Thompson's description of the shores of Hudson Bay reveals how much the spirit of Lyell animates him:

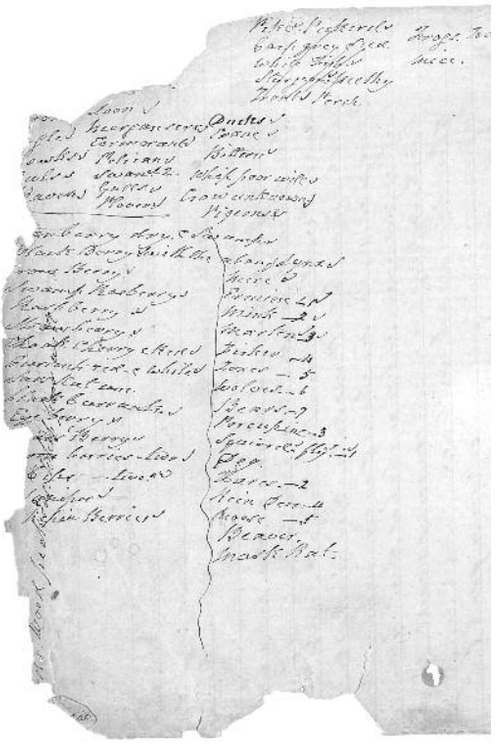
> it's formation seems to have been the work of ages past, as well as of the time present, caused by the flux, and reflux of the tides...within the memory of old men, in many places the land has gained from ¼ to ½ a mile on the sea; for more than two miles inland of the present shore, drift wood is found in tolerable preservation, showing the line of shore was once there ('Travels', i.2).

One piece of geological evidence of enduring interest to Thompson was the fossil record; indeed, he claims that when he joined the NWC he was asked to 'enquire for fossil bones of large animals' ('Travels', iv.115). Thompson's 'Travels' essay on the Plains contains three pieces of evidence drawn from the published record, relating to fossils found east of the Mississippi: the Big Bone Lick site in Kentucky, where several discoveries were made during the eighteenth century, the Osage fossil deposits, found in 1838-1840 by the German-American amateur palaeontologist Albrecht Koch, and a 'fable' of the Ohio River, based on a passage in Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1785), where it is attributed to a delegation of Lenape warriors (Jefferson, 107-108). Thompson then provides negative evidence relating to the lands west of the Mississippi, stating that Sir John Franklin (1786-1847) had found no fossils, and that in his own travels 'not a vestige that these great

Animals once existed in those parts could be found' ('Travels', iv.133). Thompson thus concludes:

> The great animals of North America were limited to the east and west sides of the Allegany Hills, and the east side of the valley of the Mississippe, and no farther to the northward and westward on this Continent: and that these were all destroyed by the Deluge, which also put an end to other races of animals, and thus the great Creator made the Earth more habitable for his favourite creature Man ('Travels', iv.133).

This integration of the Genesis account of the Flood with evidence from archaeology and Native oral tradition highlights the place of revelation in Thompson's discourse. Creation and the Flood are seen as historically recent events (in one of his later notebooks Thompson records the time elapsed between the Creation and the birth of Christ as between 4004 and 5872 years) and this leads to a consequent difficulty in reconciling an emerging geological timeline with the chronology revealed in Scripture. Thompson expresses the dilemma well, and asserts the power of the human intellect, when he states that 'the Great Architect said "Let them be, and they were" but he has given to his creatures the power to examine his works on our globe; and perhaps learn the order in which he has placed them' ('Travels', iv.231). In his inclusion of God in the geological equation, Thompson differs from Lyell, and aligns his work with the natural theology of William Buckland (1784-1856), as expressed in the works *Reliquiae Diluvianae* (1823), the Bridgewater Treatise *Geology and Mineralogy with Reference to Natural Theology* (1836), and Robert Chambers' *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (1844).



'Travels'. David Thompson Papers, MS 21, box 1, folder 33, p. 22 verso

'All the Animals of this Region are known to the civilized world, I shall therefore only give those traits of them, which naturalists do not, or have not noticed in their descriptions' ('Travels', iv.33f).

Plant and animal species were among the works of the Great Architect that Thompson examined most intently, and he was a faithful disciple of the Swedish botanist and zoologist Carolus Linnaeus (1707-1778), who in his *Systema naturae* (1735-1758) introduced the system of classification still currently in use. The preoccupation with the classification of organic diversity is expressed throughout the 'Travels', particularly in its carefully structured catalogues of fish, trees, mammals, and birds. Thompson was especially concerned with providing accounts of species which had not yet been fully described in the published record, and which he felt could be of use to society.

For example, in his catalogue of twenty-one species of North American berries, Thompson pays special attention to the Saskatoon Service Berry (*Amelanchier alnifolia*):

> The Mis ars kut um berry, perhaps peculiar to north america; the berry grows abundantly on willow like shrubs, is of the color of deep blue, or black; the size, of a full grown green pea, very sweet and nourishing, the favorite food of small birds, and the Bears. They are very wholesome, and may safely be eaten as long as the appetite continues; this berry is much sought after by the Natives, they collect and dry them in quantities for future use; and mixed with Pim me can, becomes a rich and agreeable food. The wood is of a fine size for arrows, and where this can be got, no other is employed; it is weighty, pliant and non elastic; as this berry is preceded by a beautiful flower, and the berry is as rich as any currant from Smyrna, and keeps as well it ought to be cultivated in Canada, and in England ('Travels', iv.30-31).

This description reflects not only a desire to contribute to the global catalogue of species, but the goal of diffusing knowledge of its helpful properties and promoting its wider use.

Organic diversity posed no challenge to revelation in pre-Darwinian times, but was regarded as testimony to the bounty of providence. After the publication of *On the Origin of Species* in 1859, two years after Thompson's death, the equation would change. However, Thompson did encounter several organisms, such as a caribou-moose hybrid the Cree called Mathee Moosewak, that proved difficult to place in the Linnaean system. The most extreme of these is a creature Thompson calls the Athabasca Beast. When the animal is first mentioned, it is January 1811, and Thompson and his French-Canadian voyageurs are ascending the Athabasca River, on their journey across the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific. Thompson's first reaction to the firm belief of his men in the existence of a creature of enormous proportions is denial. 'All I could say did not shake their belief in his existence' he writes ('Travels', iii.230), and the men can provide no evidence besides local Native legend. But the following day Thompson sees something which confounds him:

> ...continuing our journey in the afternoon we came on the track of a large animal, the snow about six inches deep on the ice; I measured it; four large toes each of four inches in length to each a short claw: the ball of the foot sunk three inches lower than the toes, the hinder part of the foot did not mark well, the length fourteen inches, by eight inches in breadth...('Travels', iii.231)

Still, Thompson will not work outside established categories:

> I held it to be the track of a large old grizled Bear; yet the shortness of the nails, the ball of the foot, and it's great size was not that of a Bear, otherwise that of a very large old Bear, his claws work away; this the Indians would not allow ('Travels', iii.231)

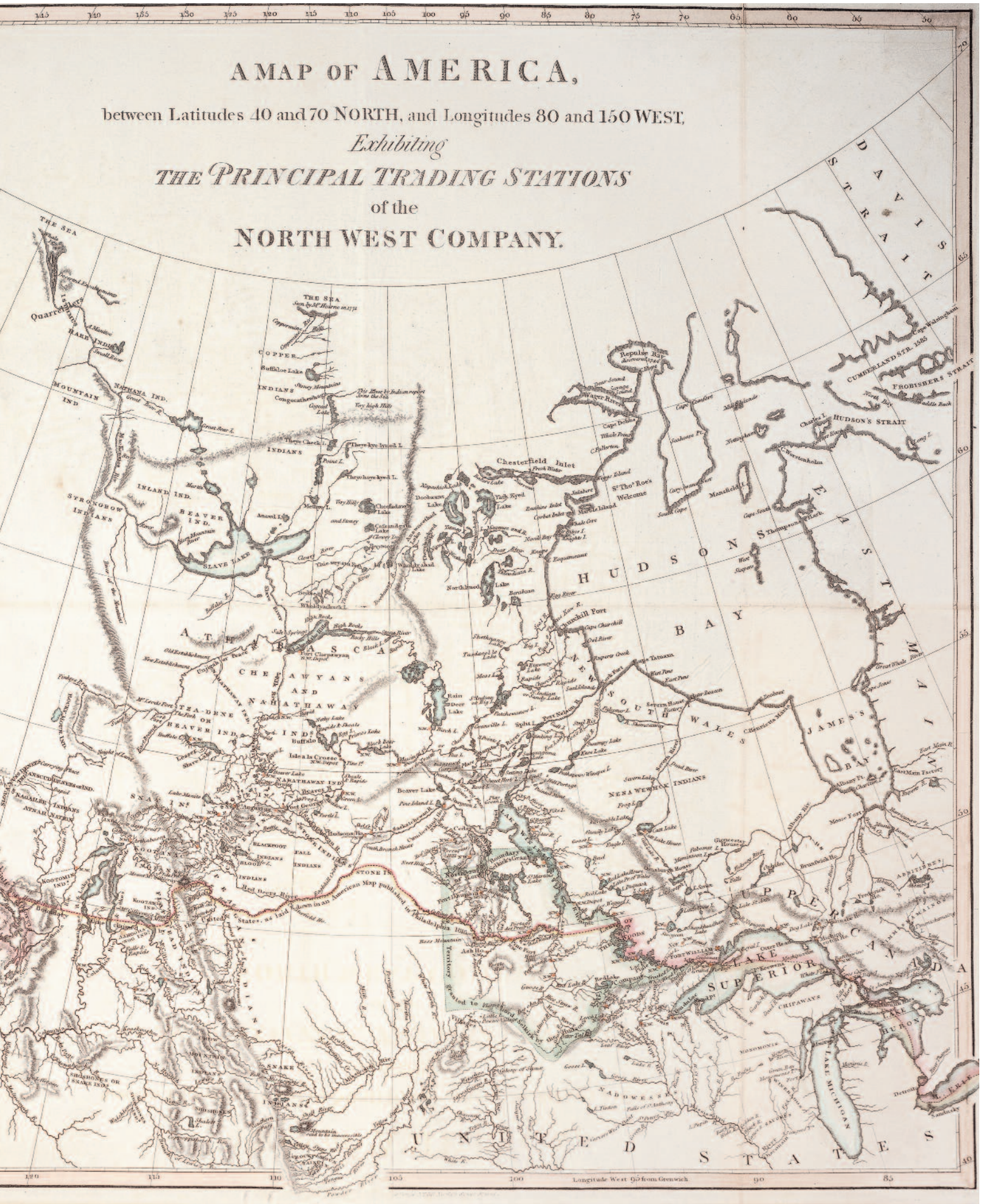
Thompson returns to the subject a third time during the narration of his activities of October 1811, on his return journey east. His men point out a certain mountain, and claim that a lake on its summit is the abode of the beast. Thompson is plunged again into his state of perplexity: 'I had known these men for years, and could always depend on their word, they had no interest to deceive themselves, or other persons' ('Travels', iii.307). After having heard the oral testimony, and considered the evidence of his own eyes, Thompson can only conclude that 'if put on my oath, I could neither assert, nor deny, it's existence' ('Travels', iii.307).

'You white people, you look like wise men and talk like fools' ('Travels', iv.56).

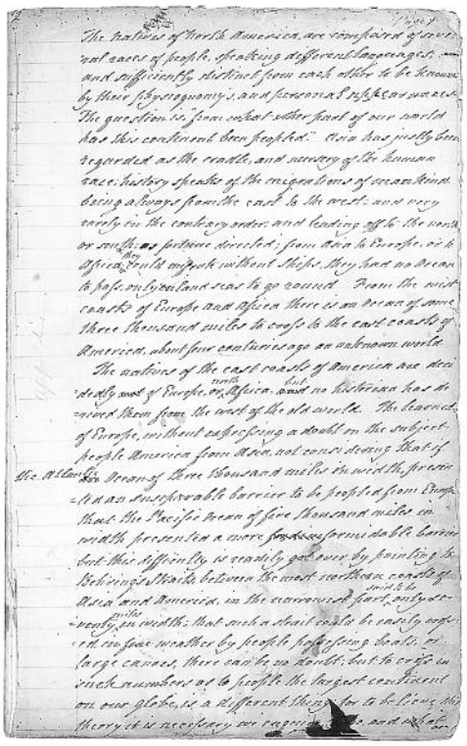
Thompson also sought to understand why animals behave the way that they do. Here Thompson attempts to reconcile what he observes with both received European scientific perspectives and Native belief systems. A question of particular interest for him was that of animal instinct, which he contrasts with the Native belief that animals receive spiritual guidance from a manitou. This theme first appears in the 'Travels' in relation to the topic of goose migration. Considering the accuracy with which the birds reach their destination, Thompson concludes 'the wise, and learned, civilized Man answers [that this is accomplished], by Instinct, but what is Instinct, a property of Mind that has never been defined; The Indian says the Geese are directed by the Manito, who has the care of them. Which of the two is right' ('Travels', iv.15). The question reappears, with greater insistence, when Thompson observes a herd of migrating caribou in May 1792, about twenty miles up the Nelson River from York Factory. The herd takes two full days to pass, and Thompson estimates the number of animals at over three-and-a-half million. Upon his return to the Factory, Thompson recounts his experience, and attributes the migration to instinct. His Cree audience replies with derision:

> Oh Oh. then you think this herd of Deer rushed forward over deep swamps, in which some perished...down steep banks to break their necks; swam across large Rivers, where the strong drowned the weak; went a long way through

Map from Samuel Wilcocke. *Notice respecting the bound*



ary between His Majesty's Possessions in North America and the United States … (1817).



'The Natives of North America'.
David Thompson Papers,
MS 21, box 6, folder 2, first page

> woods where they had nothing to eat, merely to take care of themselves. You white people, you look like wise men and talk like fools. The Deer feeds quietly and lays down when left to itself. Do you not perceive this great herd was under the direct orders of their Manito and that he was with them, he had gathered them together...and drove them on to where they are to go ('Travels', iv.56-57).

Here, then, the apparent rationality of the European scientific perspective is revealed to be little more than empty verbiage, whereas the Native spiritual concept actually explains the phenomenon in a more satisfactory way.

A similar kind of tension animates Thompson's treatment of animal intelligence. Thompson notes that Cree hunters precede the killing of bears whom they have roused from hibernation, with a speech of reproach. After asking a Cree hunter whether he thought the bear understood him, the man replies, 'How can you doubt it, did you not see how ashamed I made him, and how he held down his head?' to which Thompson retorts, 'He might well hold down his head when you was flourishing a heavy axe over it, with which you killed him' ('Travels', iv.68).

But Thompson cannot sustain his rationalist position. At another point in the narrative Thompson relates that, one evening during a time of privation, the NWC hunter François Amelle spoke thus to his Newfoundland dog. 'Do you know what we intend to do, the morrow morning we are to kill you, and eat you, for we are hungry.' Thompson continues that 'the Dog remained quiet until they were asleep, when he set off direct for the trading Fort about twenty miles, and next morning when the gates were opened, he was there, and rushed into the yard' ('Travels', iii.186).

Thompson comes to admit that there is indeed a trace of reason in the belief he had at first derided. He does not agree that animals comprehend the words addressed to them, but concedes that there is some intelligence at work in the animal mind. 'My own opinion,' he writes, 'is, that whatever kind of intelligence an animal collects for his safety is from the eye of Man, which is powerful on all animals, and which in such cases, must have a peculiar expression' ('Travels', iii.186).

"The question is, "from what other part of our world has this continent been peopled"" ('The Natives of North America', 1).

Thompson's interest in the origin of North American Natives is reflected in his 1848 essay on the topic, intended for inclusion in the 'Travels', and now held at the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library. Thompson employs all of his usual sources in tackling this question, in this case in order to contradict the learned consensus which had emerged in his time.

Again, Scriptural chronology yields a severely compressed timeline. Thompson believed that the Flood was a literal event, meaning that all human beings were sons of Noah. As Thompson writes in his essay:

> I do not believe the inhabitants of any part of the world to be indigenous they are all the descendants of the Patriarch Noah, however widely dispersed, and diversified in appearance ('Natives' 2).

Thompson dates the dispersion of humanity to the fall of Tower of Babel, which he places at 2233 BC; thus, he would have considered the human diversity he observed to be the process little more than 4000 years.

But Thompson does not appeal to revelation for hard evidence about *how* this process occurred. Beginning during his years in the West, Thompson sought to learn about Native cultural traits, religious beliefs, and language families, and applied this information to the process of human diffusion. Historically verifiable

patterns of migration provided, for him, the most decisive evidence.

Thompson describes movements of the Inuit, Dene, and Cree peoples, information gathered not only from his own experience in the West between 1784 and 1812, when there were significant migrations of Native groups, but also from the oral testimony of fur traders and of Natives themselves. The evidence provided by these sources all suggest a consistent movement of peoples west and south, which suggested to Thompson that the origins of North American Natives must lie to the east and north, in Greenland, Iceland, and northern Europe.

He was thus particularly interested in traits which might reveal affinity between groups. In the 'Travels' he writes:

> All the Natives of North America, except the 'Dinnae' in drawing the Arrow, hold the Bow in a vertical, or upright position which gives to the arms their full action and force; but the Dinnae, or Chepawyans, hold the Bow in a contrary, or horizontal position ... Do any of the people of Greenland, Iceland, or the northern nations of Europe, or Siberia, handle the Bow in this manner if so, some inference may be drawn from it ('Travels', iv.113-114).

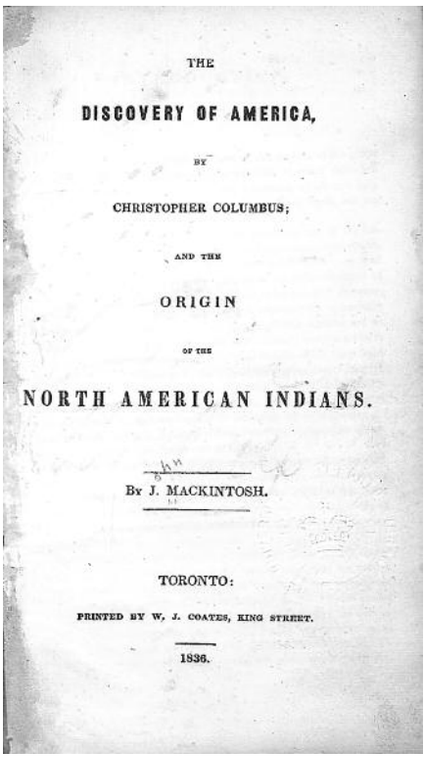
In the same way, Thompson tried to draw a cultural connection between Native North Americans and northern Europeans based on a shared belief in the immortality of the soul.

Based on his information, Thompson challenges the dominant hypothesis of his (and our) time, and in particular Sir James McIntosh's *The Origin of the North American Indians* (1843). In the 'Travels', Thompson asserts:

> European authors have sadly failed; the learned Sir James McIntosh more so than any other. (his book is before me) the whole of his work is to show the American Indians came from Asia by Behring's Straits ('Travels', iii.179).

The essay on Native origins culminates in a bold desire:

> [May] the learned of Europe ... no longer continue in the errour they have adopted, of the peopling of America from the north of Asia by Behring's Straits. ... To me it appears evident that northern america has been peopled from the north of Europe; and the rest from the south of Europe the Mediteranean and the north of Africa ('Natives' 9-10).


THE

DISCOVERY OF AMERICA,

BY

CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS;

AND THE

ORIGIN

OF THE

NORTH AMERICAN INDIANS.

By J. MACKINTOSH.

TORONTO:

PRINTED BY W. J. COATES, KING STREET.

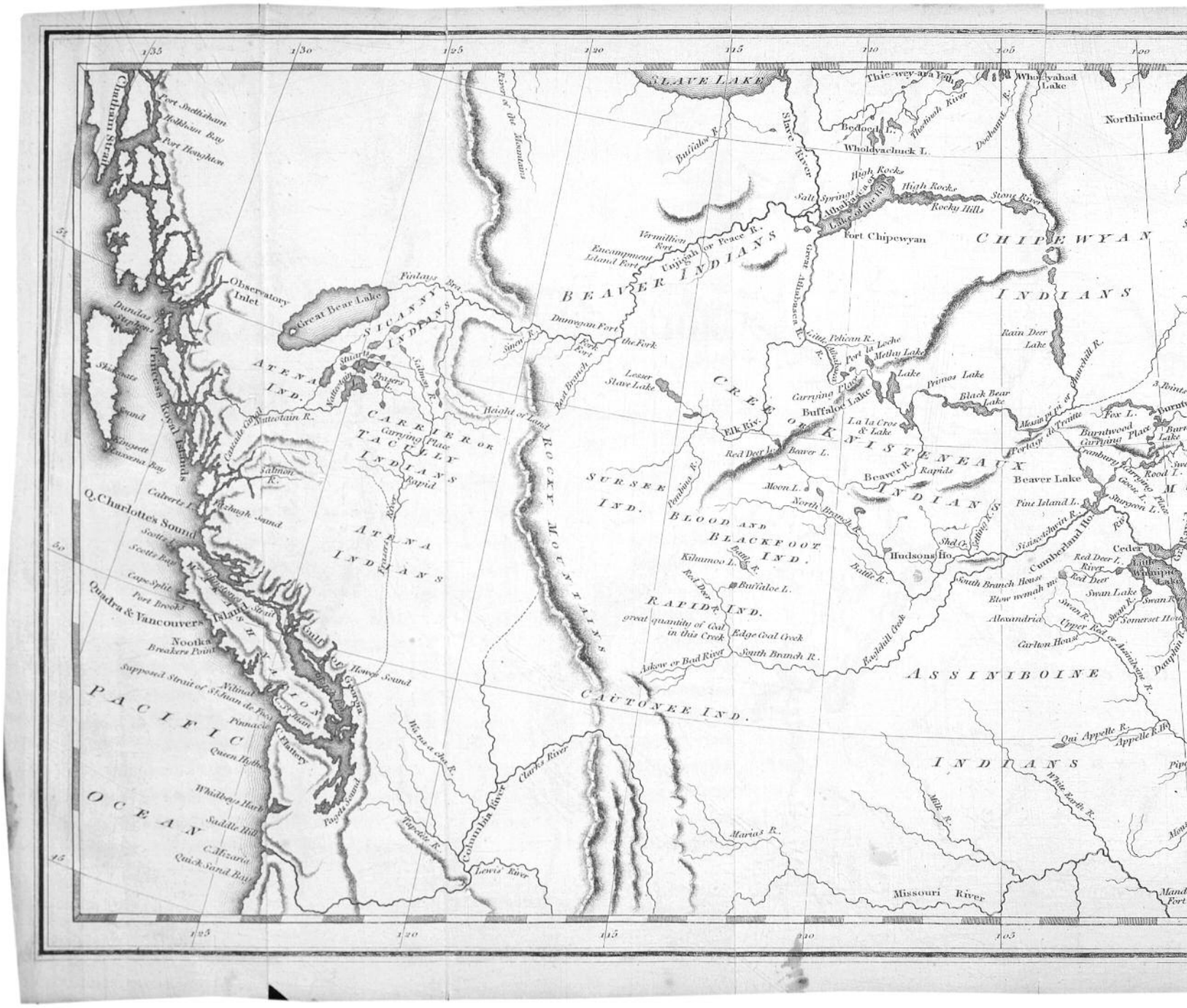
1836.

Title page from John McIntosh. *The Discovery of America by Christopher Columbus, and The Origin of the North American Indians*. (1836)

'There is yet a dark chapter to be written on this aberration of the human mind' ('Travels', iv.198).

In approaching these several topics – geological origins, organic diversity, animal behaviour, and Native origins – Thompson brings several sources into conversation with one another. None is strictly dominant, but they are verified in the light of one another. Although revelation is never contradicted, neither does it act as sole source of meaning; had Thompson lived a generation later, the challenges in this area would perhaps have been insuperable. Personal observation, oral testimony, and the scholarly record are kept in a creative tension, which appeals to the rational and yet is open to its limitations, respecting the work of the learned while challenging its deficiencies. As we conclude, it is well to recall that Thompson also cast his mind to the supernatural, and that the same man who strove to convince his Native and French Canadian companions that his astronomy involved no occult powers was at a loss to explain the Ojibwa rite of the shaking tent, and that he who described the mosquito so minutely also related the story of a waking encounter with the Devil. For Thompson the scholar, the final dark chapter on the metaphysical would remain unwritten.

William Moreau



Map from Daniel Williams Harmon. *A Journal of Voyages and Travels in the Interiour of North America…* (1820)


Map
of the
INTERIOR
of
NORTH AMERICA.
Engraved for Harmon's Journal.
HUDSONS BAY
JAMES'S BAY
NEW SOUTH WALES
Churchill Fort
Cape Churchill
York Fort
Severn House Factory
C. Henrietta Maria
East Main Factory
Moose Fort
Albany Ft.
Brunswick Ho.
Gloucester House
Osnaburgh House
Frederick Ho.
ABBITIBBES
NENAWEWHOK INDIANS
UPPER CANADA
LOWER CANADA
MISTISSINNYS
TIMMISKAMAINGS
LAKE SUPERIOR
Outer Head
Michipicoton Ho.
Nipigon
Lake of the Woods
SAUTEUX
CHIPPEWAY INDIANS
LAKE HURON
LAKE ONTARIO
Kingston
Montreal
Quebec
Lake Champlain
Lake Simcoe
Red River
River St. Louis
Fond du Lac
Rainy Lake
Lake Winnipic
Split L.
Fort Nelson R.
Cat Lake
Cat Lake House
Red Lake House
Ox Strait
Lake Nippissing
French R.
Ottawa
East Main or Slude R.
Great Whale R.
Cape Jones
Ruperts R.
Harricanaw R.
Kingston
Thousand Is.
Oswego
L. St. John
Middle L.
Mistissinny

THE EXHIBITION CASES

The exhibition has been divided into eight cases; some maps, and sketches by David Thompson are hung on the walls of the Maclean-Hunter Reading Room.

CASE ONE
French Discovery and Exploration of the Continent

Beginning with Cartier, who in 1534 traded French-made goods for furs, to the travels of Charlevoix searching for the purported western sea between the New World and Asia, this case documents the explorations of the French from the eastern coast of the New World down the St. Lawrence and into the Great Lakes region. Maps range from the first printed map largely devoted to Canada, initially printed in Ptolemy's *Cosmographica*, to Sanson's attempt to document 'Le Canada', Du Creux's mapping of the canoe routes used by the voyageurs, and Lahontan's imaginary westward-flowing 'La Rivière Longue'.

CASE TWO
British Exploration of the North

French domination of the eastern coastline and British attempts to find the Northwest Passage led to British control of the northern regions through Hudson's Bay. The case illustrates the early voyages of John Davis, and Thomas James, among others, to find the Northwest Passage, and the controversy between Christopher Middleton and Arthur Dobbs as to whether such a passage existed.

CASE THREE
Hudson's Bay Company

The early British practice of stationary forts to which furs were brought is illustrated in the account by trader Joseph Robson who began working for the company as a stonemason, helping to build Prince of Wales Fort on the shore of Hudson's Bay. Later exploration into the interior is exemplified in Samuel Hearne's *A Journey from Prince of Wales's Fort in Hudson's Bay to the Northern Ocean*; one of David Thompson's earliest tasks as a new employee of the Company was to write out part of this text. The great map of Hearne's journey is featured. Life in the service of the company after it joined with the North West Company is detailed in John McLean's *Notes of a Twenty-Five Years' Service in the Hudson's Bay Territory*. Just like Robson, and David Thompson, McLean was highly critical of the Company's practices.

CASE FOUR
North West Company

The French practice of sending out voyageurs in canoes deep into the interior of the continent was carried on by the North West Company, formed principally of Scottish traders, after the conquest. A number of notarial voyageur contracts and a manuscript letter about the sale of beaver skins to the firm of Sir Alexander Mackenzie & Co, one of the co-partners of the North West Company are featured in this case. Also displayed is the large folded map published in Alexander Mackenzie's *Voyages from Montreal on the River St. Laurence, Through the Continent of North America.*

CASE FIVE & SIX
David Thompson

The Thompson papers held by the Fisher Library consist of several drafts of the manuscript of the 'Travels', and essays on subjects of natural history that greatly interested the cartographer and which are described in this catalogue. Examples are shown in these cases.

CASE SEVEN
Influences on David Thompson

Mentioned in both the journals and notebooks and the 'Travels' are the titles of many books read by Thompson, not only in preparing his text for publication, but to answer his curiosity about the natural world around him. A number of these titles are displayed.

CASE EIGHT
David Thompson's Legacy

The 'Travels' has fascinated readers since it was first edited by Joseph Burr Tyrrell for the Champlain Society in 1916 'with the hope that it may assist in confirming David Thompson in his rightful place as one of the greatest geographers of the world.' Later editions by Richard Glover and Victor Hopwood are joined by type-script pages of the latest edition, currently in preparation by Bill Moreau, one of the authors of this catalogue.

Great Mountains near the Kootenae Lake, east side

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