Conceptions of the Rocky Mountains:

A Comparison of Peter Fidler and David Thompson and Their Mapping Strategies

by

Bethany McMillan

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

History

Department of History and Classics
University of Alberta

Abstract

This thesis explores the ways in which Europeans conceptualized the Rocky Mountains by comparing the views and mapping styles of David Thompson and Peter Fidler. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) needed to establish inland trade to effectively compete with their Montreal based Canadian competitors, the North West Company (NWC). The HBC decided to employ surveyors to provide detailed information of new and established inland trade routes. Peter Fidler and David Thompson were trained by the HBC's official surveyor, Philip Turnor, in the late eighteenth century. Fidler and Thompson developed different conceptions of the Rocky Mountains from their eastern slope, which is evident in their fur trade and exploration journals. Several factors influenced their conceptions of the mountains. Indigenous inhabitants of the Plains shared maps and navigational knowledge of the landscape with Fidler, who did not have the opportunity to survey the region himself, as trade was the top priority for the HBC. Thompson, surveyed for the NWC, and employed Indigenous people, as hunters and guides, to help him expand the reaches of the NWC into new territory as he surveyed the landscape along the way. Ultimately, Thompson demonstrated a tenaciously European and western view of the Rocky Mountains whereas Fidler's conception of the Rocky Mountains portrayed an early appreciation for Indigenous knowledge as well as a hybrid style of mapping that married Indigenous and European mapping styles.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to several important people who contributed to the success of my thesis. Thank you to my thesis supervisor, Dr. Gerhard Ens, who patiently supported my studies, as I managed my thesis and my family life. Dr. Tolly Bradford deserves a great amount of recognition for inspiring me to pursue my studies as an undergraduate student and beyond. I accompanied him as a research assistant to the Hudson's Bay Company Archives, twice. From my very first lecture as a university student, to my thesis defense, Dr. Bradford continually encouraged me to investigate topics at a deeper level through his inquiries and I have always appreciated the challenge. I would also like to thank Dr. Liza Piper who always provided an alternate perspective and approach to my research.

I would also like to acknowledge the Department of History and Classics at the University of Alberta for providing intellectual and financial support during my program. I am grateful to have been the recipient of several funding opportunities which enabled me to focus on my research. The QEII Graduate Scholarship, the Eleanor Luxton Scholarship, the Joseph-Armand Bombardier Canada Graduate Scholarship (SSHRC), and the Alberta Graduate Excellence Scholarship facilitated my graduate studies.

Finally, I would like to thank my husband Oliver, who believed in me before I believed in myself. Thank you for your endless support, edits, and conversations that allowed me to flesh out my ideas.

Table of Contents

Listed Illustrations

Chapter One

Introduction

Peter Fidler and David Thompson were contemporaries and surveyors, and among the earliest European fur traders to travel far enough west to see the Rocky Mountains in the late eighteenth century. As their fur-trade careers progressed, the two men had different opportunities and experienced the mountain range differently, thus influencing their conceptions of the Rockies and the way they portrayed them. These conceptions and their portrayals form the basic subject of this thesis. This thesis is an examination of the surviving written records of Peter Fidler and David Thompson to evaluate how they represent the European fur trader perceptions of the Rocky Mountains in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. An extension of this analysis is how they acquired their information, including the knowledge their Indigenous allies shared with them. Very briefly, the thesis argues that Thompson and Fidler were quite distinct in their mapping techniques and very different in what they included in their maps. Thompson was European and western to the core, while Fidler incorporated as much Indigenous knowledge as he could. This was reflected in their mapping, and it was reflected in how they understood and portrayed the Rocky Mountains.

BACKGROUND

It is important to review the state of the fur trade in the late eighteenth century to understand how the Rocky Mountains, more specifically the eastern slope of the range, came within the purview of the trade. In the late eighteenth century, the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) could no longer rely solely on Indigenous middlemen to bring furs to the posts on the Hudson Bay. To effectively compete with Montréal based traders, the HBC needed to match

their competitors by traveling inland to establish posts. Canadian traders had been traveling inland for decades, and the HBC was increasingly aware of how the inland presence of Canadian traders affected their profits. In the late 1770s, Montréal trading interests started to merge for increased efficiency and diminished losses, eventually forming the North West Company (NWC). By 1783-4, the NWC was a major force, and went on to dominate the fur trade up to the end of the eighteenth century.[1] The HBC understood that they needed to change their bay-based approach and move inland to effectively compete with the NWC.

In 1774, the HBC sent Samuel Hearne inland with a group of Indigenous traders and established Cumberland House on the Saskatchewan River. The Company, however, struggled to perfect this Inland Trade. Not only did the HBC lack the inland experience the NWC had, but the Hudson Bay lowlands did not provide birch bark for canoe construction, so the HBC had to purchase canoes from Indigenous traders.[2] It was not until the 1790s that the HBC began to construct wooden York boats to effectively transport labour and supplies inland.[3]

The smallpox pandemic of 1781-2 devastated Indigenous populations across the territory. The rapid and significant decrease in population had many long-lasting effects, one of which was considerable population movements. Previous trade networks collapsed which furthered the establishment of the HBC inland fur trade. The expansion followed the North Saskatchewan River, as its position between the Plains and Parkland served the trade.[4] The Plains offered a consistent supply of dried buffalo meat and pemmican while the Parkland provided furs.

---

[1] Michael Payne, ""A Mari Usque Ad Mare" – The Fur Trade, 1763-1800," in *The Fur Trade in Canada: An Illustrated History* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company Limited, 2004), 42-43.
[2] Ibid., 42
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid., 47.

Independent trader and eventual NWC partner Peter Pond crossed Portage La Loche (Methy Portage) into the Athabasca region in 1778 to trade directly with the local Indigenous population. The region was referred to as the Eldorado of furs.[5] Pond's success in the Athabasca region, among a growing number of Canadian trader posts north of Hudson House, threatened HBC profits. Pond's presence in the Athabasca region motivated other traders to enter the Athabasca territory, and the HBC was among these. To do this, the HBC had to better understand the territory.[6]

The HBC employed Philip Turnor as the first official surveyor, and he arrived at York Factory in August 1778.[7] The company tasked Turnor with the job of surveying and establishing the coordinates of their existing posts. By the end of his career (1794), Turnor had produced ten maps, including his most well-known map: "Hudson's Bay and the Rivers and Lakes Between the Atlantick and Pacifick Oceans."[8] Another significant contribution he made to the fur trade was to train both Peter Fidler and David Thompson as surveyors. Thompson had attended the Grey Coat School in London where he acquired some formal education in mathematics and navigation. There is no record of Fidler's education prior to his employment with the HBC, but there is sufficient evidence to suggest he was educated in navigational calculations.[9] Turnor trained both men at Cumberland House in 1789-90, and Fidler accompanied Turnor on the

---

[5] Barry M. Gough, "POND, PETER," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 5, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 1983, accessed November 20, 2022, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/pond_peter_5E.html.
[6] Richard I. Ruggles, *A Country So Interesting: the Hudson's Bay Company and Two Centuries of Mapping, 1670-1870* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991), 51.
[7] E. E. Rich, "TURNOR, PHILIP," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 4, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003–, accessed September 13, 2022, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/turnor_philip_4E.html.
[8] Richard I. Ruggles, *A Country So Interesting: the Hudson's Bay Company and Two Centuries of Mapping, 1670-1870* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991), 49.
[9] Barbara Belyea, introduction to *Peter Fidler: From York Factory to the Rocky Mountains*, ed. Barbara Belyea (Louisville: University of Colorado Press, 2020), 3.

subsequent survey trip to Lake Athabasca; Thompson was unable to travel, as he was recovering from injury and illness.

Fidler and Thompson internalized Turnor's training and both made a lifelong practice of recording their survey observations. Their journals and maps provide a glimpse into European fur trader perceptions of Rupert's Land and, for the purposes of this thesis, the Rocky Mountains. It is best to examine Fidler and Thompson together for several reasons. The two men were contemporaries, Turnor trained them concurrently, and they maintained and practiced surveying their whole lives. The more intriguing aspects of Fidler's and Thompson's careers were how they differed. Thompson chose to leave the HBC for the NWC which resulted in different opportunities. Furthermore, the two individuals employed their Indigenous sources differently which led to each man developing divergent styles of surveying and mapping. Both Fidler and Thompson first experienced the Rocky Mountains at their eastern slopes and recorded their observations from that position. When examined together, the journals of Fidler and Thompson provide a more complete portrayal of European fur trader's perceptions of the Rocky Mountains, from the eastern slope, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

HISTORIOGRAPHY

The questions I ask in this thesis have emerged largely from the historical literature related to the writing and work of David Thompson and Peter Fidler. Barbara Belyea has written about both surveyors and approaches the journals of Fidler and Thompson with a background in medieval literature and literary theory. Three of Belyea's publications are of interest to this thesis: David Thompson's travel journals across the Rockies into the Columbia River watershed, two of Fidler's journals that encapsulate his journey from York Factory to Buckingham House,

and on to his winter with a band of Piikani along the eastern slope of the Rocky Mountains, and *Dark Storm Moving West* which examines the westward expansion of fur trade exploration.

In *Dark Storm Moving West*, Belyea discusses Thompson's surveyor training and the subsequent trajectory of his career. In another chapter, she evaluates Fidler's appreciation for Indigenous mapping conventions and his decision to not reconstruct a European style map from the Indigenous maps, as she argues that he recognized the incompatibility of the two cultures' mapping conventions.[10] *Peter Fidler: From York Factory to the Rocky Mountains* includes a short bibliography in the introduction as Belyea establishes the state of the fur trade leading up to and throughout Fidler's time with the HBC.

Belyea studies Fidler as a fur trader, a surveyor, and as an individual through bibliographic and literary lenses. She explores Fidler's unique journaling style as his sketch maps, included amid his written journal entries, offer a "visual impression" of the landscape he traveled through.[11] The sketches often focused on sections of the waterways he traveled, and he included details such as course directions and distances as well as distinct physical features of the landscape. Fidler's sketch maps and their high level of detail may have been given to fur trade brigades to assist them in navigating the waterways on their annual trip to and from the Hudson Bay. Belyea recognizes Fidler's collection of Blackfoot maps and his collection of maps from other fur traders. Belyea sees Fidler as a historical figure who has been overshadowed by Thompson in the historical record, but who was careful and diligent in his record keeping for the HBC.

---

[10] Barbara Belyea, *Dark Storm Moving West* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2007), 55.
[11] Barbara Belyea, introduction to *Peter Fidler: From York Factory to the Rocky Mountains*, ed. Barbara Belyea (Louisville: University of Colorado Press, 2020), 18.

Belyea's introduction to *Columbia Journals* conveys her effort to reveal David Thompson independent of his published *Narrative* or *Travels*.[12] Thompson's journals reflect his HBC origins in the fur trade as they are similar in style.[13] Belyea argues that Thompson kept the daily record for himself as the NWC only required financial reports.[14] *Columbia Journals* encompasses a series of journals written over a 12-year span, with a significant amount omitted to allow her to focus on her theme of exploring the river.[15] The journal, without Thompson's *Narrative*, allows Belyea to focus on Thompson as an author separate from that of the narrative, which reads differently.

Belyea's strength lies in her ability to evaluate fur trade journals while acknowledging their initial purpose. The journals were part of a greater European business world's "manuscript culture."[16] Written accounts, such as lists, journals, and maps, were essential for the HBC to conduct business overseas from London. The written documents communicated fur trade events and scientific knowledge back to the Governor and Committee. The HBC issued specific instructions for the written accounts to include main events during travel and at the post, trade transactions, account books, gifts given to Indigenous people, and expenditures.[17] The HBC expressed no desire for writers to include private life, personal intentions, or retrospective analysis.

---

[12] David Thompson, *David Thompson's Narrative of His Explorations in Western America, 1784-1812*, ed. J.B. Tyrrell (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1916). Over the last century, several new edited versions of the manuscript were published. See: David Thompson, *David Thompson's Narrative, 1784-1812,* ed. Richard Glover (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1962). David Thompson, *The Writings of David Thompson*, Two Volumes, ed. William E. Moreau (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 2009). David Thompson, *The Travels of David Thompson*, Two Volumes, ed. Sean T. Peake (Bloomington: iUniverse, 2011).
[13] Barbara Belyea, preface to *Columbia Journals*, ed. Barbara Belyea (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), x.
[14] Ibid., ix.
[15] Ibid., xi.
[16] Barbara Belyea, introduction to *Peter Fidler: From York Factory to the Rocky Mountains*, ed. Barbara Belyea (Louisville: University of Colorado Press, 2020), 8.
[17] HBCA B.239/b/36: Marten to Tomison, 12 July 1776.

Belyea values the way Fidler and Thompson recorded their travels as surveyors throughout their careers. Though she studied both Thompson and Fidler in depth, Belyea has never employed their journals to examine how Fidler and Thompson acquired their knowledge or how they represented early European conceptions of the Rocky Mountains. Belyea's focus is less about cultural conceptions of landscape and more focused on fur trade expansion and those fur traders who participated in the growth of the fur trade. Her work examines Fidler's and Thompson's maps as part of their daily journal entries. Her research reflects her literary background as *Columbia Journals* and *Peter Fidler: From York Factory to the Rocky Mountains* are presented as the best way to publish their original journals rather than forwarding an argument.

Ian MacLaren has different interests. He examines David Thompson's writing for his "literary mappings of the great Northwest."[18] MacLaren sees Thompson as a forerunner of Canadian literature. For MacLaren, Thompson is distinctive from other fur trade writers as he recorded Indigenous mythology with his observations, which demonstrates the Indigenous influence on fur traders' conception of landscape.[19] Thompson conveyed the territory of the fur trade in a way that was comprehensible to a European audience. His *Narrative* manuscript goes even further to appeal to the European audience, as he wrote it late in life with an intention to publish the text. MacLaren argues that Thompson's manuscript, though written from a European perspective, exhibits Indigenous influence and that the inclusion of Indigenous mythology provides an intensity by creating a multi-level perception.[20]

---

[18] I. S. MacLaren, "David Thompson's Imaginative Mapping of the Canadian Northwest 1784-1812," *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature* 15.2 (Apr. 1984): 90.
[19] Ibid., 98.
[20] Ibid.

MacLaren focuses on Thompson's literary descriptions of the landscape in general. The Rocky Mountains were not a focus in MacLaren's study of Thompson, and his maps were not a part of MacLaren's evaluation of Thompson's perceptions of the environment. MacLaren maintains a focus on the ways in which Thompson was a progenitor to Canadian literature as his observations went beyond a succinct scientific survey and into a much deeper and more culturally bounded description of the region.

MacLaren's arguments are interesting as David Thompson has consistently overshadowed Peter Fidler in the historical record. Thompson's descriptions of the Western Canadian landscape were not only comprehensible to a European public, but his word-images appealed to European conceptions of landscape. Thompson's writing conformed to British literary conventions of landscape as either sublime or picturesque. MacLaren does argue that Thompson went beyond British literary conventions by including his scientific observations and Indigenous mythology, and that this made Thompson somewhat distinct from his contemporaries.[21] MacLaren's observations of Thompson's literary conventions help to differentiate him from Peter Fidler's writings.

Peter Fidler's journal of his 1792-3 winter journey with the Piikani band, include a great amount of knowledge his Indigenous hosts shared with him as well as his own firsthand observations of the Piikani and the territory. However, it is unlikely that Fidler's journals had any influence on early Canadian literature as they remained unpublished in the HBC archives, located in London until 1974.

Perhaps the most important analysis for this study is the work of Ted Binnema. In his book, *Enlightened Zeal*, he noted how the contrast between Fidler and Thompson as surveyors

---

[21] I. S. MacLaren, "David Thompson's Imaginative Mapping of the Canadian Northwest 1784-1812," *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature* 15.2 (Apr. 1984): 92.

was mainly due to the differences between the HBC, a chartered company, and NWC, a Montreal based enterprise. Given that both men were Europeans trained by Philip Turnor, and both experienced the Rocky Mountains at about the same time, a study of these two men offered an excellent basis for comparison starting with Binnema's assertions.

Was Binnema correct about the company context as the main point of difference or were there other reasons? The NWC was most successful when dominating a region without competition, so they supported exploration and expansion to reach new territory and establish new posts.[22] This approach gave Thompson opportunities to survey territory far beyond Fidler. It was in the NWC's best interests to keep their surveys private to maintain a monopoly over their new trade territory.[23] On the other hand, the HBC had lower operating costs, so there was no need for the company to support risky expeditions. The HBC employed surveyors to acquire detailed surveys of established trade routes and territory. They shared their findings as a chartered company with obligations to the British Empire. Although Thompson composed an impressive map of the north-west, his survey work had less impact on the British Empire's map of North America than Fidler's smaller regional maps.[24] Binnema demonstrates how Fidler's position within the HBC provided more opportunities to make greater contributions to the territorial knowledge of the colonial empire, though he had fewer opportunities to survey than Thompson.

Historian Ted Binnema's essay, "How Does a Map Mean? Old Swan's Map of 1801 and the Blackfoot World," focuses on Fidler's copy of Ak ko mokki's map, Fidler's redrawn version

[22] Ted Binnema, *Enlightened Zeal: the Hudson's Bay Company and scientific networks, 1670-1870* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), 119.
[23] Ibid., 119-120.
[24] Ibid., 123.

sent to the HBC's Governor and Committee, and the map's reception back in London.[25] Binnema begins by discussing how Ak ko mokki's map, and four other Blackfoot maps Fidler collected around the same time, conveys meaning. He goes on to compare Ak ko mokki's map to leading British cartographer Aaron Arrowsmith's interpretation of the map, as the Governor and Committee provided Arrowsmith with the map for him to incorporate the new territorial knowledge into his map of North America. Binnema aptly argues that Fidler would have interpreted the map more successfully than Arrowsmith had as Fidler had more context of the circumstances in which Ak ko mokki created the map.[26] Binnema provides an insightful explanation of the Ak ko mokki map and the information communicated within it.

The article evaluates how mapping conventions are culturally specific and that the purpose of a map needs to be understood before it can be properly interpreted. The five Blackfoot maps, that Fidler collected, view the Rocky Mountains from a Plains perspective, or from an eastern slope perspective. Binnema's evaluation of Ak ko mokki's map, Fidler's redrafted version, and Arrowsmith's representation of it within his map of North America provides insight into the Indigenous knowledge Fidler received and incorporated into his work. There is no evidence to suggest Fidler worked to translate the information Ak ko mokki's map conveyed, but he did recognize the value of it, and continued to make a lifelong practice of collecting maps from other traders and indigenous allies. Though Binnema investigates the culturally bounded nature of maps and mapping conventions in this paper, he does not get into how the Blackfoot maps and the value Fidler placed upon them influenced and helped shape Fidler's conceptions of the Rocky Mountains from the eastern slope.

---

[25] Theodore Binnema, "How Does a Map Mean? Old Swan's Map of 1801 and the Blackfoot World," in *From Rupert's Land to Canada*, ed. by Theodore Binnema, Gerhard J. Ens, and R.C. Macleod (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2001), 201-224.
[26] Ibid., 208.

Binnema published another essay on Peter Fidler in 2009. In it, Binnema recognizes Fidler as an intellectual who stayed informed of scientific trends back in Europe and acquired an impressive library over his thirty-year career.[27] Fidler also sought to learn from his Indigenous allies, and his practice of collecting and preserving Indigenous maps made him distinct from Thompson and his contemporaries. Binnema values Fidler's highly detailed and observant records for how Fidler worked carefully to describe his Indigenous allies. Fidler's journals reveal how Fidler's understanding of Indigenous people and their cultures shifted over time, challenging the established European perceptions of Indigenous people of North America.

This literature, while it is very informative, does not investigate European conceptions of the Rocky Mountains. It does however raise some very interesting questions for my investigation. How did Fidler's and Thompson's interactions with their Indigenous allies influence their mapping? In what ways did these interactions influence the way Fidler and Thompson conceptualize the Rocky Mountains? I examine how Fidler and Thompson, as surveyors, represent the Rocky Mountains in their writing and maps. Both men were trained to make observations based on direction, course distances, physical features of the landscape, and take measurements to calculate geographic coordinates. Fidler and Thompson were bound by the same occupation and their survey work gave them a common ground from which to perceive the landscape. Despite this common ground, however, Fidler and Thompson perceived and represented the Rocky Mountains differently in their journals and maps.

THEORY AND METHOD

[27] Theodore Binnema, "Theory and experience: Peter Fidler and the transatlantic Indian," in *Native Americans and Anglo-American Culture, 1750-1850: The Indian Atlantic*, ed. Tim Fulford and Kevin Hutchings (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 158.

Historians employ fur trade journals to develop distinct arguments. Binnema uses fur trade journals to study the behaviour of Indigenous bands and leaders across the Northwest Plains.[28] In contrast, Elizabeth Vibert argues that only fur trader perspectives are present in fur trade journals, as the author is influenced by their own culture. [29] Her theory is that any seemingly Indigenous perceptions are obscured by the European author. Given Vibert's qualification, a study of fur trade journals can only reveal the views of the document's author. Rather than using fur trade documents to write an Indigenous history, I will draw on Vibert's method of evaluating fur trade journals to study European perceptions of the Rocky Mountains and what influenced those perceptions.

The post and travel journals of Peter Fidler and David Thompson, their maps, and David Thompson's *Narrative* manuscript are all central primary sources to this study. As well, in the case of Peter Fidler, I have used the maps he collected and copied into his journals. These sources are employed to gain a greater understanding of how Fidler's and Thompson's writing, sketches, and maps represent the Rocky Mountains and any Indigenous knowledge that may have influenced their perceptions of the Rockies.

Fidler's "Journals of Exploration and Survey" from that time, however, offer more information, and it is where he drafted better copies of the Blackfoot maps.[30] An overview of all Fidler's journals and maps provides insight into how his surveying and mapping styles evolved over the course of his career.

---

[28] Theodore Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground: A Human and Environmental History of the Northwestern Plains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001).
[29] Elizabeth Vibert, *Traders' Tales: Narratives of Cultural Encounters in the Columbia Plateau, 1807-1846* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 13-14.
[30] HBCA E.3/2.

An impression of David Thompson's perception of the Rocky Mountains requires a careful reading of his journals and manuscript, as he crossed over the mountain range multiple times to explore and establish NWC trade further west. The written record of the NWC was not as systematized as that of the HBC and Thompson's journals are housed in multiple archives. Belyea's *Columbia Journals*, served to exhibit Thompson's immediate impressions as he traveled west toward the Rockies with an intention of crossing over the range to the other side. Thompson also produced one large map upon his retirement from the fur trade which showcases his representation of the mountains and cartographic conventions. Thompson also referred to his fur trade journals to help him compose his *Narrative* of his fur trade career.

CHAPTER SUMMARIES

Chapter Two is an overview of Peter Fidler as an individual, and the progression of his career with the HBC. His superiors recognized him as a hearty and intelligent man. He came to recognize the value of the information his Indigenous allies shared with him. His mapping style evolved through experience and careful firsthand observations over his thirty-year career. An analysis of his journals, maps, and sketches serves to demonstrate how Fidler incorporated Indigenous knowledge into his maps.

Chapter Three explores David Thompson's career and character as a surveyor in the fur trade. Thompson employed Indigenous people and the knowledge they shared with him to facilitate his survey work. His maps demonstrate his preference for western cartographic conventions and exhibit no obvious Indigenous influence beyond some place names. Upon reflection of his fur trade career decades later, Thompson's manuscript demonstrates how he represented the Indigenous knowledge his allies and companions shared with him.

Chapter Four examines the ways Fidler and Thompson represented the Rocky Mountains as seen from the eastern slope. This focus facilitates an understanding of how both men conceptualized the mountain range and what influenced these conceptions. I employ their journals, sketches, and maps as evidence to demonstrate how both men depict the mountain range as surveyors. With this study of Fidler and Thompson, we can glimpse European fur traders' interpretations of the Rocky Mountains in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Chapter Two

Peter Fidler: A Surveyor of Land and People

Peter Fidler is an individual whose writing and journals warrant a close examination when studying European conceptions of the Rocky Mountains of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Fidler's surveying career and map making is what makes him noteworthy. Fidler obtained Indigenous maps and included Indigenous elements in the maps he drafted and shared with his superiors. He valued close connections with his Indigenous informants and their mapping conventions. Fidler's journals contain maps drafted and drawn by several Indigenous people over the course of his surveyor career with the HBC.

One journey, over the winter of 1792-93, is of particular interest when Fidler and John Ward, another European fur trader, accompanied a Blackfoot band on their journey south, south-east to the foothills of the Rockies, not far from modern day Calgary, Alberta. Fidler's genuine curiosity and willingness to endure hardship created an ideal surveyor in Rupert's Land in the 18th and early 19th centuries. This skill in surveying would be demonstrated in the Athabasca region after a summer as Philip Turnor's assistant.

It was not unheard-of for a fur trader to winter away from the post with a group of Indigenous people. In fact, Fidler passed the two previous winters with Denesuline bands before his journey to the Rocky Mountains. They were north of Île-à-la-Crosse, Saskatchewan, in the early months of 1791, and up in the region of Great Slave Lake through the winter months of 1791-92.[31] Fidler was willing to pass the winter months away from the post, experiencing a way of life that was distinct from his upbringing back in England. Upon Fidler's return to Lake Athabasca in 1792, Philip Turnor wrote, "[Fidler] is a very fit hand for the Country as he stands

[31] Robert S. Allen, "FIDLER, PETER," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 1987, September 7, 2021, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/fidler_peter_6E.html.

hunger and the Weather well and can eat anything the Indians will."[32] Though Fidler was not the only HBC employee willing to winter away from the comforts a post offered, Turnor's words express how this made Fidler exceptional. Turnor wrote as if he himself could not eat the way Fidler and his Indigenous companions ate when he states that Fidler *can* eat anything the Indigenous people will. Turnor's words also impart that the availability of food was not necessarily predictable when he comments on Fidler's ability to withstand hunger.

Fidler's hardy disposition enabled him to travel beyond the post as he accompanied different Indigenous groups learning more from them than he could have, had he remained at the post. This characteristic enabled Fidler to travel with and learn from Indigenous people in the way that he did, and his observational skills served to document a great amount of what he witnessed and learnt.

Fidler's detailed journals provide an excellent source for investigation. His writing demonstrates that he was perceptive of the world and people around him. Many of Fidler's accounts express interest in the actions of his Indigenous companions. The journal from the winter of 1792-3 includes Fidler's observations on Piikani hunting practices, family, gender roles, and politics, among other notes on landscape, geography, flora, and fauna.

The most important aspects of Fidler's perceptions of the Rocky Mountains were the maps drawn by several Blackfoot men and reproduced by Peter Fidler: the most well-known being Ak ko mokki's map.[33] Ak ko mokki, or Old Swan, was a Siksika chief who visited Chesterfield House where Fidler was in charge from 1800-02. There are six hand drawn maps at the back of Fidler's 1792-3 journal with credit given to their authors, all of whom were Blackfoot and two of whom were chiefs. The maps are dated 1801 and 1802, apart from one map

[32] HBCA B.9/a/3, April 10 1792.
[33] HBCA E.3/2 fo. 107.

where no date is included. Fidler worked, mainly from Ak ko mokki's map, to create a copy of the map to send to the London Committee.

This map was given to the British cartographer, Aaron Arrowsmith. Arrowsmith's task was to interpret the map and integrate the new (to Europeans) geographical information into his 1802 map of North America.[34] Fidler included a letter with the map to help interpret the river systems and marked mountains along the line which delineated the Rocky Mountains.[35] The map and the letter were not enough to accurately depict and delineate the area Fidler was attempting to share with his audience. As Theodore Binnema has noted, Arrowsmith's interpretation and incorporation of Fidler's map into his own did not produce an accurate result.[36] The reason was that Arrowsmith's map had an entirely different purpose from that of the Blackfeet or Fidler.

British mapmakers of the late eighteenth century concerned themselves with accounting for all aspects of the physical landscape, as in every indentation along the shoreline, every turn or bend in a river, and all islands big and small. The scale was important, along with the inclusion of cardinal directions with the top of every map orienting north. In other words, the western maps that cartographers like Arrowsmith drew in the eighteenth century were the predecessors of today's standardized maps. While navigation remains a primary purpose of the modern map, the accuracy of the topography, distance, scale, and all physical features remains a priority on our maps.

---

[34] Theodore Binnema, "How Does a Map Mean? Old Swan's Map of 1801 and the Blackfoot World," in *From Rupert's Land to Canada*, ed. by Theodore Binnema, Gerhard J. Ens, and R.C. Macleod (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2001), 201-224.
[35] D.W. Moodie and Barry Kaye, "The Ac Ko Mok Ki Map," *The Beaver* 307, no. 4 (Spring 1977): 13-15. The article includes a typed copy of Fidler's letter.
[36] Theodore Binnema, "How Does a Map Mean? Old Swan's Map of 1801 and the Blackfoot World," in *From Rupert's Land to Canada*, ed. by Theodore Binnema, Gerhard J. Ens, and R.C. Macleod (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2001), 201-224.

Ak ko mokki's map, and, in turn, Peter Fidler's copied map, originally served a more straightforward form of wayfinding. The layout was simpler and would have taken less time and space to compose. The Rocky Mountains of Fidler's redrawn map are marked by the same set of parallel lines that run horizontally across Ak ko mokki's map, spanning two pages of the journal.[37] The Missouri River is marked as a straight line running down from and perpendicular to the Rockies in the center of the illustration. The other defining features of the map are mountains that are marked along the Rockies with their names included, as well as the Missouri River's tributaries.

The Missouri tributary rivers all begin along the Rockies, where they stem out perpendicular from the mountains, follow a slightly curved course until each connects to the Missouri River in turn. The rivers resemble the veins on a leaf all running in an organized and somewhat symmetrical fashion until they connect with the midrib, the Missouri River in this case.[38] The map does not follow the conventional layout of a western map, the top of the map is oriented west, not north, yet in some ways it is easier to comprehend.

If someone asked for directions and no existing map was available to delineate the journey, an individual would have to draw out some simple directions to guide the seeker. It is unlikely that the drawer would include details of everything the person would encounter along the way, but instead would focus on specific points. The illustration might note a distinctive feature where the person had to change direction, or a significant marker, such as a river crossing, to assure the person navigating the directions that they are on the right track. A map of

[37] HBCA E.3/2 fo. 107 and G.1/25.
[38] Theodore Binnema, "How Does a Map Mean? Old Swan's Map of 1801 and the Blackfoot World," in *From Rupert's Land to Canada*, ed. by Theodore Binnema, Gerhard J. Ens, and R.C. Macleod (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2001), 216. Binnema refers to "the leaf-vein pattern of river systems."

this kind serves a different purpose than that of Arrowsmith's map and is extremely valuable to its user.

In the book, *How to Lie with Maps*, Mark Monmonier takes an in depth look at how maps are unable to provide an exact depiction of the place they represent. Monmonier states, "to avoid hiding critical information in a fog of detail, the map must offer a selective, incomplete view of reality."[39] Monmonier goes on to introduce how folk cartography was usually drawn to give directions, "transferring routes, landmarks, and other relevant recollections from mind to map."[40] Monmonier's introduction reminds the reader that every map, like other written sources, has its biases. Fidler understood Ak ko mokki's map because he understood the context within which Old Swan created the map and the purpose it served. Arrowsmith, not privy to the context and having different goals, misunderstood the map even though Fidler provided a detailed letter of explanation.

In the letter which accompanied the map to London, Fidler identified the high value of Ak ko mokki's map, even though it was incompatible with a western map. Fidler wrote, "this Indian map conveys much information where European documents fail … tho' they are utterly unacquainted with any proportion in drawing them."[41] The letter goes on as Fidler worked to communicate the physical features of the land from what his Indigenous informants had told him. Fidler's knowledge of the territory was expressed within the context of the fur trade, as he refers to an absence of beavers further south, the shorter wool undercoat of the mountain sheep, and regional Indigenous politics. Conflicts between bands would have a significant effect on trade and access to posts. Fidler emphasized the effect of the fur trade's presence, access to guns

[39] Mark Monmonier, *How to Lie with Maps* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 1.
[40] Ibid., 2.
[41] D.W. Moodie and Barry Kaye, "The Ac Ko Mok Ki Map," *The Beaver* 307, no. 4 (Spring 1977): 13. This article includes a typed version of the letter Fidler included with his map dated July 10th, 1802.

and ammunition, and the relations between Indigenous bands reflecting the shifting balance of power.

The letter not only explained Fidler's redrawn map, but Fidler worked to include as much knowledge of the region depicted as possible. It reads as a general survey of the area's inhabitants, their access to food, fuel, and furs for trade, as well as the terrain and how they navigated the Rockies. In short, Fidler worked to communicate all aspects of the region's value to the Indigenous inhabitants who lived and traveled there. The letter exhibits Fidler's ability to recognize the value of information shared with him by his Indigenous contacts and his efforts to share such useful knowledge with the Governor and Committee of the HBC back in London.

To understand Fidler's journals, and the observations he noted throughout his travels, it is important to be familiar with his early career in the fur trade and the roles he undertook for the HBC. Little is known of Fidler before the HBC employed him in April 1788.[42] What is clear is that Fidler was trained in navigation and made a good impression on his superiors early on.[43] Soon after he arrived in Rupert's Land, the HBC promoted Fidler from labourer to post journal writer, which is further evidence of some schooling back in England.[44] Within two years, the company sent Fidler to Cumberland House to study with Turnor.

Fidler's career in the fur trade as a surveyor began as early as 1790 when he began training with Philip Turnor.[45] A letter from Turnor arrived at Manchester House at the end of May 1790, expressing Turnor's anticipation of Fidler's forthcoming arrival at Cumberland House. Turnor wrote, "I have to remind you of my former request that Peter Fidler be sent down,

---

[42] Robert S. Allen, "FIDLER, PETER," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 1987, September 7, 2021, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/fidler_peter_6E.html.
[43] Barbara Belyea, introduction to *Peter Fidler: From York Factory to the Rocky Mountains*, ed. Barbara Belyea (Louisville: University of Colorado Press, 2020), 3.
[44] Robert S. Allen, "FIDLER, PETER," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 1987, September 7, 2021, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/fidler_peter_6E.html.
[45] Ibid.

that he may not slip the opportunity of receiving all the information in my power, respecting finding the latitude and longitude of any place he may be sent to."[46] Turnor's other student, David Thompson, was recovering from both illness and injury and would not yet be able to accompany him as an assistant. Fidler arrived at Cumberland House at the beginning of June 1790 and began his training immediately. In Peter Fidler's journal, "Cumberland House Observations," he began recording his calculations to determine geographic coordinates as early as June 19th, 1790.[47] The figures are written neatly into tables at the back of Fidler's journal. He was a quick learner, and within a month, Fidler's was recording various calculations and resulting geographic coordinates.

As Turnor's assistant, Fidler accompanied the surveyor on an expedition north. The goal was to find a feasible route into Athabasca country, the region surrounding Lake Athabasca located in modern day northern Saskatchewan and Alberta. The colder northern climate of the Athabasca region produced a thicker and therefore higher quality beaver coat than that of beaver found further south. The Athabasca was, at this time, the preserve of the NWC, and had been since 1779, when Peter Pond, a future Nor'wester, accessed the area via the Methy Portage and began trading directly with the local Indigenous people.[48] The presence of Canadian traders in the Athabasca region affected the number of furs Indigenous middlemen would bring to the HBC on the Hudson Bay, and this convinced the HBC to abandon its "sleep by the frozen sea" by 1782.[49] The heightened competition for Athabasca's furs spurred the HBC to endeavour to access the Athabasca region, establishing posts inland to west and the north.

---

[46] HBCA B.121/a/4, 28 May 1790.
[47] HBCA E.3/6, 19 June 1790.
[48] Barry M. Gough, "POND, PETER," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 5, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 1983, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/pond_peter_5E.html.
[49] Michael Payne, ""A Mari Usque Ad Mare" – The Fur Trade, 1763-1800," in *The Fur Trade in Canada: An Illustrated History* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company Limited, 2004), 43.

Fidler embarked on his first survey trip with Philip Turnor on an expedition to Athabasca country in September of 1790. After a winter at Île-à-la-Crosse, they began their journey with few provisions and hopes of some success hunting big game. It was a rough start for Fidler, as he accidentally broke the glass of his compass the day they set off, May 30th, 1791.[50] This was an unfortunate accident for the new surveyor as the instrument was essential to his work. Within days of the accident, Fidler's June 2nd journal entry reports that he managed to make a new glass for his compass.[51] The journey was difficult as the group had little success in hunting until they reached the territory surrounding Lake Athabasca. At one point, Fidler was diverted on his way back to camp after trekking to evaluate how far a section of rapids, that the Indigenous guides had no desire to navigate, went on upriver. Fidler recorded buffalo tracks leading in all directions, saltwater and freshwater springs, and a dried-up lakebed with various of fossilized shells.[52] Unfortunately, the surveyor's unexpected ramble took him way off course. His long walk back wore out his shoes resulting in very sore, bruised feet that took weeks to heal.

Although his injuries are included in his journal entries, Fidler was not preoccupied by his misfortune. Most of his journal entries were related to identifying features of the landscape they traveled through and recording distance, cardinal directions, and any change of course. At one point, he had to be carried in and out of the canoe because of his injured feet.[53] These events exhibit Fidler's character. His fascination with the territory he was investigating overwhelmed any conscious awareness of where he was in relation to camp and not to stray too far afield. He was fortunate that his injuries did not lead to any sort of serious infection.

[50] HBCA E.3/1, 30 May 1791.
[51] Ibid., 4 June 1791.
[52] Ibid., 19 June 1791.
[53] Ibid., 29 June 1791.

Peter Fidler's exploration journals are central to an investigation of early European perceptions of the Rocky Mountains. His writing provides a detailed record of the territory he explored and some astute observations of the Indigenous people he accompanied. A typical post journal would comment on the coming and goings of indigenous traders, on the daily chores of the post inhabitants, along with a weather update. Fidler's journals are exceptional because of the level of detail Fidler recorded and his descriptions of the landscape.

The intended purpose of any post journal was to produce detailed records of fur trade operations which could then be sent back to the Governor and Committee, the group of shareholders that owned the HBC in London. The journals enabled the Governor and Committee to oversee fur trade operations and manage the company from their office in London. For Fidler, the daily journal entries helped keep track of the correct calendar date while documenting daily events, observations, and any other information he considered relevant to the company. Knowing the correct date remained important to Fidler even when he wintered away from the post.

Fidler visited a Canadian house in late October with the Denesuline band he wintered with. He remarked, "the Canadians were 2 days wrong in their account having this only Friday – this is the first time I ever knew them wrong 2 days – but they are one frequently."[54] Fidler's adherence to the Gregorian calendar, and his note of the Canadians lack of such timekeeping, demonstrates that he had ingrained Western values and that he was committed to them. He was willing to live with an inconsistent supply of food, an insufficient amount of clothing through the winter months, and, at times, a lack of shelter for days in rain or snow, but it was essential for Fidler to know the proper date. None of Fidler's journals explicitly express any interest in how his Indigenous companions marked the changing seasons though he was likely aware of the way

[54] HBCA E.3/1, 30 October 1791.

they tracked the seasons. He may not have seen the techniques they used or the markers they assigned to each season as something systematic. The absence of such information could be caused by several different factors, but ascribing Fidler's motivation would be totally speculative.

The journal from the winter of 1792-3 is of particular interest, as Fidler passed the winter with a band of Piikani people on their journey south along the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. At this point, Fidler had spent two years routinely making observations and recording geographic coordinates. This trip was the first opportunity Fidler had to see the Rockies. Fidler and one other HBC employee, John Ward, left Buckingham House with several Piikani people in early November 1792.[55] Fidler mentioned that they were not the first HBC servants to accompany the band, but that the Piikani band planned on "going farther to the South along the mountain this than any former winter of late when our people have been with them."[56] His introductory entry to the journal, recorded on November 8th, reveals that only Ward and himself were willing to accompany the band, for a number of reasons, and that neither of them "know a single word what the Indians say that we are going with – time can only enable us to Learn."[57] His statement is confident and clear. Fidler was certain that over the course of the winter he would acquire enough of the Piikani language to adequately communicate with them.

Fidler explained why others were unwilling to accompany them: "These Indians had little Trade in with them to the House & consequently could not purchase what necessaries they required, the greater part of them went away dissatisfied and as they are a warlike people, not a man would accompany me on that account as they was much afraid that they would take their

[55] HBCA E.3/2, 8 November 1792.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid.

Horses & property from them, besides ill use them."[58] Fidler recognized the apprehension his associates had of traveling with the Piikani band, and maintained a respectfully cautious approach to his interactions with his travel companions. A month into the journey, Fidler mentioned that "hitherto they (the Piikani) have been remarkably civil & kind to us."[59] Fidler's writing indicates how mindful he was of the Indigenous people he interacted with, especially when accompanying a band for the winter season. He interacted with people based on attentive observation and adjusted his behaviour accordingly.

A particular instance in the Athabasca region reveals Fidler's active efforts to manipulate his relationship with his Denesuline hosts and the way they regarded him. During the winter of 1791-2, Fidler assisted his hosts in bringing meat to the camp from the latest successful hunt. This was early January, and it was the first time Fidler helped them in this way. He disclosed, "the more an European does of work with them the less he is respected by them & gets generally the worst victuals & frequently but little of it when he complys to do everything they bid him whereas if he stiffly refuses from the first that he is with them they will be very kind to him & will give him a larger allowance of provisions."[60] He decided how to behave based on his experience and, likely, some advice from his European peers. Fidler conducted himself in a way that placed him in a favorable position ensuring him a decent allotment of meat.

Many journal entries of this trip note a longing for more substantial food, warmer clothing, and better shelter. In other instances, Fidler noted that he was lonely and longed for a compatriot and a book to read. Upon coming down with a head cold, Fidler lamented, "to be ailing alone with the Indians is a melancholy situation for any one that ever experienced it, being

[58] Ibid., 8 November 1792.
[59] Ibid., 7 December 1792.
[60] HBCA E.3/1, 1 January 1792.

absent from all friends & Countrymen."[61] Regardless of the hardships Fidler experienced through the winter, he recalled an overall positive experience. Fidler returned to a temporary HBC House, next to the NWC's Fort Chipewyan,[62] April 10th when he reflected that, "upon the whole this has been rather an agreeable winter."[63] Fidler's journal of his winter in 1791-2 demonstrates that he was willing to take on endeavors that many of his HBC colleagues were unwilling to take on.

With such an adaptable disposition, Fidler continued to volunteer to winter away from the various HBC posts. He perceived the risks as a chance for greater gain, and through his trip with the Piikani in 1792-93 he was able to see the Rocky Mountains for the first time: for a surveyor this was paramount. After all, he had experienced difficult winters away from other posts and had returned unscathed. He packed all his surveying equipment, "a Brass sextant of 5 or 6 inches radius made by Ramsden; parallel glasses with Quick silver horizon; a Brass Boats compass chard [card] 3 inches diameter; a Common watch but good without a second hand; & a pocket Farenheit Thermometer well graduated, made by Dollend, London."[64] The two European men brought a significant amount of trade articles to supply the Piikani for hosting them through the winter and to present as gifts. Fidler indicated that his lot was worth 39 MB.[65] Both men had two horses each, one to ride and one to carry their belongings. And, as mentioned earlier, the Piikani were gracious hosts to Fidler and Ward.

The group Fidler left Buckingham House with was eager to reunite with most of their band, who were several days journey from the House. The Piikani band Fidler wintered with was

---

[61] Ibid., 14 March 1792.
[62] E. E. Rich, "TURNOR, PHILIP," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 4, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003–, accessed September 13, 2022, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/turnor_philip_4E.html.
[63] HBCA E.3/1, 10 April 1792.
[64] HBCA E.3/2, 8 November 1792. Correction of "chard" to "card" Peter Broughton, "The Accuracy and Use of Sextants and Watches in Rupert's Land in the 1790s," *Annals of Science* 66, no. 2 (April 2009): 216.
[65] Ibid., 8 November 1792.

of considerable size. Over the course of several days, Fidler documented the number of tents they met and joined. On November 16th, they met 14 Piikani tents along with three Cree tents, and then, on November 22nd, they met 22 more Piikani tents.[66] The Piikani Chief hosted Fidler and Ward in his tent which was substantially larger than the others. Fidler recorded that the Chief's tent was made up of 30 Buffalo skins and always had two fires going.[67] The winter was already an improvement on his last, as he has sufficient shelter, clothing, and supplies.

The 23-year-old had demonstrated his willingness, seemingly an interest, to winter away from HBC posts with Indigenous bands in the winters previous. As they traveled toward the Rocky Mountains, Fidler was constantly making observations regarding his hosts and the landscape, working to comprehend the Piikani, their language and the country they inhabited. He noted important key factors, such as how the Piikani traveled with their tent poles, made of pine, as they would not be able to acquire more while traversing the Plains. While on the prairies, there was little firewood and so dried buffalo manure became the main fuel for fires. Buffalo fat would then be speared onto a stick which would stand vertically in the pile dry buffalo manure, thus augmenting the fire. Fidler's journal indicated the importance of the buffalo to the Piikani and other Indigenous inhabitants on the Plains by the frequency of his reference to the animal.

Fidler observed two main preoccupations throughout the trip: buffalo and fire. For the Piikani, the buffalo were the main source of food, shelter, clothing, and fuel. The daily journal entries almost always mention buffalo, and often buffalo hunting. From buffalo pounds to meat processing, the buffalo were central to Fidler's journal. As Fidler chronicled his observations, it appears he was careful to understand Piikani practices before he documented them.

---

[66] Ibid., 16 and 22 November 1792.
[67] Ibid., 16 November 1792.

Fidler's first account of a Buffalo Jump includes a great amount of detail. He did not clarify as to whether a Piikani informant shared the principal aspects of the jump, but the journal entry identified the use of dead men and the role they played in the success of a jump. Dead men were cairn type structures that stood in rows and were set closer together nearest the jump or pound.[68] The dead men helped funnel the buffalo toward the jump or into the pound.[69] In some cases, piles of rocks created a base, or buffalo chips.[70] Branches were sometimes propped up in the piles and the motion of the branches would spur on the buffalo to the jump or the pound.[71]

After two months of living with the Piikani, likely gaining some competence in their language and dialect, Fidler included a detailed overview of the buffalo jump's composition and the contributions different band members made. Fidler described the Buffalo Jump thusly: "Dry Buffalo dung is piled up about knee high & about the distance of 30 yards from each other & at the rock (nearest the buffalo jump) the 2 sides are not more than 20 yards asunder, but they spread gradually wider all the way from the rock that at the other end the piles of Dry Buffalo dung will be 1 or 2 miles wide."[72] The journal entry reveals Fidler's acknowledgement of the importance of the dead men, yet it isn't until three weeks later that Fidler was able to truly describe their role and how older men and boys would lay down behind the structure, ready to jump out and shout to spur the buffalo to continue on to the cliff.[73] Fidler was an intelligent observer and a keen student.

The winter with the Piikani band enabled Fidler to see the Rocky Mountains for the first time. Less than two weeks after leaving the post, the group crossed the Red Deer River and

---

[68] Jack Brink, *Imagining Head-Smashed-In: Aboriginal Buffalo Hunting on the Northern Plains* (Edmonton: Athabasca University Press, 2008), 97-101.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Ibid.
[72] HBCA E.3/2, 5 December 1792.
[73] Ibid., 27 December 1792.

ascended the steep bank to reveal the mountain range in the distance. Fidler's journal entry for November 20th states, "Here I first got sight of the Rocky Mountain, which appeared awfully grand, stretching from SSW to WbS by Compass, very much similar to dark like rain clouds rising above the Horizon in a fine summers evening. It does not appear of a regular height in all places but appears like 5 hills, being the highest parts – on account of the distance, the other parts that connects the whole are not visible here."[74] As the journey continued and the view of the Rockies improved, Fidler identified the mountains as "more rugged" and "very high."[75] His writing references the Rockies as being singular made it seem as though he imagined *a* mountain rather than a range of mountains. Fidler's perspective of the Rockies shifted as they approached the eastern slope.

With the mountains in view, Fidler began to see the Piikani band's use of the mountain range to facilitate navigation. He wrote, "A remarkable High Cliff of the Rocky Mountain called by our People the Devils head & by the Muddy river Indians (Piikani) O mock cow wat che mooks as sis or the Swan's bill … a very high place but appears more so as the other parts all round near it are much lower."[76] Fidler made sure to note, "There are several places higher than this in other parts of the mountain to be seen but on account of all adjacent parts being lower makes the Devils Head the more conspicuous & remarkable."[77] The peak is notable because of its distinct shape which made it a functional peak used as a landmark for Indigenous people on the prairie. Fidler tried to impart the significant height of Devil's Head from his location on the prairies, while maintaining that, in relation to the surrounding mountains, the Devil's Head was

[74] Ibid., 20 November 1792.
[75] Ibid., 26 and 27 November 1792.
[76] Ibid., 29 November 1792.
[77] Ibid.

not exceptionally tall. It seems Fidler understood that the Devil's Head was identified for its distinct shape, yet he did not go into detail concerning the shape of the Devil's Head peak.

The Devil's Head became a central element to Fidler's surveying and the geographical knowledge the Piikani shared with him. As they traveled, Fidler recorded the peak's bearing with his compass as he continued to use the mountain as a landmark to orient himself on the prairies. Indeed, Fidler would integrate this visually distinct peak into his survey work much in the way the Piikani and other Indigenous peoples used the landmark.

In an exceptionally long journal entry, spanning almost 9 pages, dated December 31st, 1792, Fidler included a great quantity of new information. The last third of the entry was recorded much later as Fidler wrote, "In the fall of 1800 …. 2 Canadians accompanied them (a Ktunaxa band) to their Country to examine it & learn whether or not any Beaver in any quantity was to be found there."[78] The two men were illiterate and Fidler obtained details of their journey verbally.[79] In the transcribed and published version of *Journal of a Journey over Land from Buckingham House to the Rocky Mountains in 1792 &3*, editor Bruce Haig contends that Fidler likely heard of the two men's trip from Duncan McGillivray of the NWC.[80] The transmission of information from the two men who made the journey, to McGillivray, and on to Fidler is significant because it demonstrates what information each participant included in the account of the trip. In the account Fidler received, the Devil's Head was, again, used as a marker. The Devil's Head, and its use by Fidler and other European traders, exemplifies how Indigenous knowledge of the landscape was absorbed and employed by fur traders thus improving their comprehension of the region.

---

[78] Ibid., 31 December 1792.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Bruce Haig, *A Look at Peter Fidler's Journal: Journal of a Journey over Land from Buckingham House to the Rocky Mountains in 1792 &3*, ed. Bruce Haig (Lethbridge: Historical Research Centre, 1991), 50.

A deeper knowledge of the landscape and an ability to navigate the territory was essential to any chance of success for fur traders by the end of the eighteenth century. Once the HBC could no longer rely on Cree middlemen to trade on the coast of the Hudson Bay, mapping and gaining understanding of the territory became a top priority for the company. Fidler's journey to the eastern slope of the Rocky Mountains as a surveyor with the Piikani was executed with the prospect of expanding the fur trade into the region. Yet, throughout the journey, Fidler was completely reliant on his Piikani hosts to properly navigate the area.

The Piikani skill impressed Fidler. The December 8th, 1792, entry reads, "These springs are of very great service on passing these extensive plains, where seldom any creek or river is to be seen, and it is very surprising how straight the Indians go to them although there is no woods to direct their way."[81] Fidler was grateful to the Piikani for plotting a course across the open Plains, and for finding water, both for themselves and their horses. Fidler understood, "Water being such a very necessary article we are obliged to encamp at particular places, some days journey are long & some short, entirely owing to the places where water is to be had, both for ourselves & the Horses."[82] Binnema discusses how the mountains identified on the Blackfoot maps Fidler acquired were not only visually distinct but marked the location of certain rivers where they enter the prairies.[83] Although Fidler did not convey an understanding of how the Piikani navigated the Plains without any visual markers for aid, that is, before the mountains are in sight, the passage imparts an awareness of the Piikani's use of waterways throughout the journey.

---

[81] HBCA E.3/2, 8 December 1792.
[82] Ibid., 4 December 1792.
[83] Theodore Binnema, "How Does a Map Mean? Old Swan's Map of 1801 and the Blackfoot World," in *From Rupert's Land to Canada*, ed. by Theodore Binnema, Gerhard J. Ens, and R.C. Macleod (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2001), 215.

Fidler seemed to gain an understanding of his Indigenous hosts' methods for navigating the Plains as time went on. As spring approached and the band was making its way back to Buckingham House, Fidler began indicating distance by recording the number of days it took to travel from one place to another. Fidler valued the measurement of time traveled to account for the distance between one place and another. There are multiple examples in the 1792-3 journal where Fidler made note of how many days a specific journey took, and how the Ktunaxa were confident in their time estimates.[84]

Fidler's journal also includes the narrative of a journey two young Ktunaxa men undertook. The two men, one of who was the Chief's son, left January 1st and Fidler noted, "they say that they will return back to us in 27 nights more."[85] The passage does not reveal much on its own, but Fidler's entry from January 19th raised the matter again as he recorded, "we remain here … waiting the return of the Cotton ahews (Ktunaxa) from beyond the Mountain with Horses. They was to return in 27 nights after the 1st Inst."[86] The journal entry on January 28th, the exact date of their expected arrival, reveals an anxiety and anticipation of the two men's return.

Fidler observed a Kainai medicine man as he performed a ceremony to determine the situation of the young men, as their families worried that something bad had happened. The medicine man prophesized that the men would return in two more days. Exactly two days later, the journal entry reads, "our Indians – hold the Chief in great contempt & tell him that at first he meant to deceive them."[87] The event demonstrates how confident the Ktunaxa had been in the accuracy of the timeframe established for the two men's trip and, as the days passed after their

[84] HBCA E.3/2, 1 January 1793, "They say that they will return back to us in 27 nights more," 2 March 1793 "They have come from their Tents at Spitcheyee & have slept 6 nights in coming here," 4 March 1793 "they say that we shall be 9 nights before we arrive there."
[85] Ibid., 1 January 1793.
[86] Ibid., 19 January 1793.
[87] Ibid., 30 January 1793.

expected return, an increasing tension as they awaited their safe return. The men arrived the very next day, one day later than the medicine man's prediction, and the previous unease disappeared.

For Fidler, this ability to measure distance through number of days traveled gave him an insight into their approach to navigation. He wrote a letter to William Tomison and sent it along ahead to inform Tomison that he and Ward were well, and they would arrive back at Buckingham House by March 20th.[88] The entry includes a message the Piikani Chief transmitted to his band members camping nearby. The message was "to acquaint them of his intention of going to the House in 20 Days more & if they mean to go there, they will join us."[89] The connection between Fidler's letter to Tomison and the Chief's message to his people suggests that Fidler trusted the Chief's assertion of how much time it would take for them to return to Buckingham House, although Fidler added a few days to his presumed arrival. Fidler, Ward, and the Piikani band did, in fact, arrive back at the House on March 20th, 1793, just as Fidler said they would. As the trip progressed communication improved, allowing Fidler to gain more insight and understanding into his Piikani hosts and the other Indigenous people they interacted with.

Fidler's writing usually expressed not only his own observations, but also those of his Indigenous hosts. In the lengthy entry from December 31st, Fidler wrote, "the Indians say … a great distance to the Southward, that [the mountain] inclines still more Easterly, becomes much lower, & that there it is divided into 4 or 5 parallel ridges, with fine plains betwixt them & a small river running thro each of these Vallies, where yew becomes plenty, & 2 or 3 other kinds of wood they describe which I have never seen."[90] Other statements allude to Fidler's Indigenous

[88] Ibid., 25 February 1793.
[89] Ibid., 25 February 1793.
[90] Ibid., 31 December 1792.

sources: "our Chief says," "one of our Indians says," "by their account," and "on my enquiring… the Indians gave me a surprising & ridiculous account."[91]

The first weeks of the journal are predominantly observational though he expressed an understanding of certain aspects of his Piikani hosts' actions and motivations. By the latter half of December, communication improved as Fidler included Piikani reasoning regarding certain aspects of hunting. Fidler noted how any bison that escaped a pound, or a jump were pursued and killed. The entry states, "The reason [the Piikani] assign for this is that should these that escape be at any future time be in the Band of Buffalo that they might be bringing to the Pound, by their once being caught in the Trap they would evade going into it again." [92] The evidence of increased communication expands as the journal continues. Fidler's late December entries cover a variety of topics as he worked to incorporate all the knowledge the Piikani provided him, the narratives of other European fur traders, and his own firsthand experiences. As Haig has pointed out, some of the journal was clearly written later, after his winter with the Piikani. It is difficult to say exactly what and how much Fidler wrote after the fact.

By 1802, when Fidler sent a copy of the Ak ko mokki map back to the Governor and Committee in London, the letter he included with his map stated, "The places marked the Devils head, Pyramid, King, Heart &c &c are parts of the mountain considerably overtop the rest."[93] This assertion diverged from Fidler's original account of the Devil's Head as a peak that appeared high because the surrounding terrain was low and that there were higher places "in other parts of the mountain to be seen but on account of all adjacent parts being lower makes the Devils Head the more conspicuous & remarkable."[94] In Fidler's efforts to better understand the

[91] Ibid., 11, 29 and 31 December 1792.
[92] Ibid., 18 December 1792.
[93] D.W. Moodie and Barry Kaye, "The Ac Ko Mok Ki Map," *The Beaver* 307, no. 4 (Spring 1977): 13.
[94] HBCA E.3/2, 29 November 1792.

territory along the eastern slope of the mountains, he seems to have dismissed his original observation 10 years later. It seems he was unable to reconcile the value of the visually distinct mountains as markers and their prominence on Blackfoot maps with the expectations the HBC's London Committee would have regarding a map and what features they would deem noteworthy.

Fidler internalized Indigenous knowledge he relied on and valued, but he also maintained his European values. He remained a God-fearing Christian and dismissed many aspects of Indigenous spiritual practices. He referenced "necromancy" when describing the Kainai medicine man who consulted with "demons," and thought Indigenous people to be excessively superstitious.[95] When the medicine man's prediction of the men's return was only off by one day Fidler felt the need to elaborate. He conjectured, "What opinion can one justly form of that affair. For my part I think it is more by chance than by any knowledge that he can pretend to."[96] It seems Fidler was confounded by the medicine man's prediction and its accuracy, so he dismissed any acclaim for the Kainai medicine man. His writing exhibits how he remained of the Christian faith as he dismissed and diminished Indigenous spirituality to superstition.

Fidler's adherence to the Gregorian calendar is another example of how he retained European values. He also amassed an impressive library of 500 books by the time he wrote his will.[97] His library confirms his ongoing interest in scientific developments back in Europe among other subjects such as literature and philosophy. Most of all, Fidler continued to consistently chart courses and calculate geographic coordinates throughout his life. He maintained his survey

[95] Ibid., 27 November 1792, 17, 28, and 30 January 1793.
[96] Ibid., 31 January 1793.
[97] Theodore Binnema, "Theory and experience: Peter Fidler and the transatlantic Indian," in *Native Americans and Anglo-American Culture, 1750-1850: The Indian Atlantic*, ed. Tim Fulford and Kevin Hutchings (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 158.

work alongside the information and maps his Indigenous informants provided. The two sources coexisted in Fidler's mind.

Fidler spent his whole life as a loyal HBC servant. His work as a surveyor and map maker were the most climactic years of his career, though he never left the employ of the HBC. He went on another expedition via the Seal River to find a water route into the Athabasca region in the summer of 1793.[98] In 1794 at York Factory, he married his wife Mary, a Maškēkowak woman, *à la façon du pays*, and she went on to be his lifelong companion.[99] Mary was known to accompany Fidler on most of his journeys. The two parented a total of 14 children, 11 of which were alive when Peter Fidler died at Dauphin Lake House in 1822 at 52 years of age.[100] A one-year furlough in England, in 1811-2, was the only time he spent away from Rupert's Land.

From 1812 to 1817, Fidler worked in multiple capacities. He surveyed river lots, to assist in establishing Lord Selkirk's Red River Settlement despite the NWC opposition to the settlement.[101] Shortly thereafter, Fidler returned to work at Brandon House and Dauphin Lake House for the last few years of his life. His health degraded to the point where George Simpson would comment, "[Fidler is a] faithful and interested old Servant, now superannuated, has had a recent paraletic affection and his resolution quite gone, unfit for any charge."[102] The surveyor sought no alternate life to that which the fur trade offered, and passed away before retiring, though he wintered at the post in his later years rather than accompanying a local Indigenous band beyond the comforts of the post. Several Red River District Reports contain maps Fidler

[98] Robert S. Allen, "FIDLER, PETER," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 1987, September 7, 2021, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/fidler_peter_6E.html.
[99] Ibid.
[100] Ibid.
[101] Ibid.
[102] HBCA B.239/f/12, fo. 5d-6. George Simpson's comments on European Clerks, 1821-22.

drafted late in his career.[103] The maps demonstrate Fidler's integration of certain Indigenous mapping conventions while maintaining other European conventions.

The 1819 Red River District map was drawn upon a grid indicating longitude and latitude while the 1820 Manitoba District map was not. Fidler oriented north at the top of the maps, yet the 1819 map labels topographical features in almost every orientation, which suggests the top of the map orienting north was an afterthought. Obvious Indigenous conventions are how the river tributaries connect to the main river at a perpendicular angle. The angle at which two waterways meet communicates that the intersection is more important than any topographical accuracy that a European map would prioritize. Fidler's rivers on the District Maps are simpler smoother lines than the way a European map would identify every twist and turn along the river's path. The Red River District maps serve to showcase Fidler's hybrid mapmaking style that integrated Indigenous mapping conventions with European ones. He made note of drafting "the Map a la Savage," which demonstrates his awareness of his mapping style and how he thought the style appropriate for the map's purpose.[104]

Peter Fidler was an excellent observer of both the land and its Indigenous inhabitants. He valued and recorded the knowledge his Indigenous companions shared with him. His maps, whether it be Ak ko mokki's redrawn map or the Red River District maps, reveal how he valued and internalized Indigenous knowledge resulting in a hybrid of both European and Indigenous mapping conventions. For Fidler, survey work went beyond his firsthand observations as he surveyed his Indigenous companions for their knowledge and navigational practices of the territory.

---

[103] HBCA B.22/e/1. HBCA B.51/e/1.
[104] HBCA B.51/a/2, 6 April 1820.

Chapter Three

David Thompson's Writing and Mapmaking

David Thompson merits close examination when evaluating European conceptions of the Rocky Mountains in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Thompson and Fidler were contemporaries and there are evident commonalities throughout their lives. However, some key distinctions make them both worthy of investigation. We know more about Thompson's formal education before he was apprenticed to the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC). In contrast to Fidler, who lived out his years as a loyal servant to the Company, Thompson decided to leave and join the HBC's rival, the NWC, after thirteen years of service to the HBC. Another distinction is that Thompson retired from the fur trade, in 1812. Unfortunately, his remaining years were filled with financial strife, and he died in 1857. This study of Thompson, alongside Fidler is an examination of two fur trade surveyors who were to map the eastern slope of the Rocky Mountains. A focus of this research is how Thompson was able to access the territory, the guides who brought him to the mountains, and, most of all, the knowledge his guides provided which Thompson retained or deemed valuable.

Thompson's conceptions of Indigenous knowledge differ from those of Fidler. Thompson understood the great value of Indigenous knowledge while he explored and surveyed the eastern slope of the Rockies and worked to travel west of the mountains. Little of this, however, made its way into his maps. Fidler worked to record the Indigenous knowledge he received and often credited his source. Fidler sent Ak ko mokki's map to London because he understood the value of the information in contained and he sent an accompanying letter along to explain the map. Fidler did not alter the map to make it more European in style. Thompson's conceptions of

Indigenous knowledge are less obvious. Thompson embraced western cartographic conventions in his mapmaking, and his use of Indigenous knowledge is undetectable on his maps.

Thompson's conceptions of Indigenous knowledge are discernable in the manuscript he composed late in life. The first edited version of the manuscript was published in 1916, by J.B. Tyrrell.[105] To write his manuscript, Thompson referenced his journals, and recalled events from memory.[106] A thorough examination of Thompson's manuscript reveals his conceptions of Indigenous knowledge.

The surveyor relied on Indigenous knowledge to guide him in territories unknown to him. Thompson was dependent on his Indigenous companions for survival, cultural insights, and navigation. He understood the value of strong relationships with his Indigenous hosts and fostered these connections. The knowledge Thompson received enabled him to survey the eastern slope of the Rockies and expand the fur trade west, beyond the Rocky Mountains. Although Thompson's conceptions of Indigenous knowledge are not apparent in his maps, they were foundational for his success as a surveyor in the fur trade.

To understand how Thompson came to recognize the value of maintaining respectful and sound relationships with his Indigenous informants, a review of his life before the fur trade and how he became a surveyor is required. For this purpose, I have relied on the most recently published version of Thompson's narrative manuscript. This is William E. Moreau's edited version of Thompson 1850 manuscript, his latest version. I have also used Moreau's version of

---

[105] David Thompson, *David Thompson's Narrative of His Explorations in Western America, 1784-1812*, ed. J.B. Tyrrell (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1916). As noted earlier, several other edited versions of the manuscript were published. See: David Thompson, *David Thompson's Narrative, 1784-1812,* ed. Richard Glover (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1962). David Thompson, *The Writings of David Thompson*, Two Volumes, ed. William E. Moreau (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 2009). David Thompson, *The Travels of David Thompson*, Two Volumes, ed. Sean T. Peake (Bloomington: iUniverse, 2011).

[106] William E. Moreau, introduction to *The Writings of David Thompson Volume I*, ed. William E. Moreau (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 2009), xxx.

the "1845 Opening" and the "1847 Conclusion," as well as additional writing, in Volume II.[107] Sean T. Peake published a 2-volume edition of Thompson's manuscript around the same time as Moreau, and I have used his introduction which includes extracts from journals written by Thompson's contemporaries to bolster Thompson's narrative and help define his character.[108]

Thompson was born in London. His parents relocated there from Wales, and his father passed away shortly thereafter.[109] His mother, Ann, was left to care for David and his younger brother, John.[110] At the age of seven, Thompson was admitted to the Grey Coat School, a charity school for impoverished children in Westminster.[111] While the Grey Coat School girls mostly went into domestic service, many of the boys, equipped with lessons in mathematics and navigation, were destined for a career with the Royal Navy or with one of Britain's trading companies.[112] Following the latter course, Thompson became an apprentice, indentured to the HBC for seven years at the age of fourteen in 1784.[113] On May 20th 1784, Thompson boarded the Prince Rupert, bound for Churchill on the Hudson Bay.[114] The ship arrived at its destination in September that same year. Within ten days, the ship was unloaded of all "supplies and provisions" intended for the company and stocked with the freight destined for England.[115] In one of the earlier drafts of his manuscript Thompson recalled how he "bid a long and sad

---

[107] William E. Moreau, introduction to *The Writings of David Thompson Volume I*, ed. William E. Moreau (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009), lix.
[108] David Thompson, *The Travels of David Thompson*, Two Volumes, ed. Sean T. Peake (Bloomington: iUniverse, 2011).
[109] John Nicks, "THOMPSON, DAVID (1770-1857)," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 8, University of Toronto/Université Laval, accessed January 6, 2022, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/thompson_david_1770_1857_8E.html.
[110] Ibid.
[111] Ibid.
[112] "History of the Grey Coat Hospital," United Westminster Schools & The Grey Coat Hospital Foundation, accessed February 6, 2022, http://westminstergreycoat.org/?page_id=174.
[113] Sean T. Peake, introduction to *The Travels of David Thompson Volume I*, ed. Sean T. Peake (Bloomington: iUniverse, 2011), xxi.
[114] Ibid.
[115] David Thompson, *The Writings of David Thompson Volume I*, ed. William E. Moreau (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009), 12.

farewell to [his] noble, [his] sacred country, an exile for ever," as he watched the *Prince Rupert* sail away.[116] Thompson's recollection captures the fears of a young man displaced from the life he knew with little knowledge of what his future held.

Given his formal education, Thompson showed promise for the HBC early on. The company gave strict instructions to Fort Churchill's chief, Samuel Hearne, that Thompson was not to be left to mix with the "common men" but was to be occupied with "the writing, accounts & warehouse duty, and occasionally making observations so that he may by degrees be made capable of business & become useful in our service."[117] The order expresses the great expectations the HBC's Governor and Committee had for Thompson's career in the fur trade. The statement also reveals how everyone at the fort lived in close quarters, regardless of their rank.

The reality of life at Fort Churchill is revealed in Thompson's manuscript. It reads, "my only business was to amuse myself, in winter growling at the cold; and in the open season shooting Gulls Ducks, Plover, and Curlews, and quarreling with Musketoes and Sand flies."[118] Thompson recalled his first year in Rupert's Land as one of leisure in a somewhat inhospitable environment. Thompson's memories of his time at Fort Churchill reflect on his observations, the activities of men at the fort, the austerity of the buildings, and wildlife. Thompson borrowed books from the three officers at Churchill, but there was no paper to spare. Hearne employed Thompson in copying his manuscript so Thompson could maintain his writing skills.[119] It seems that Thompson's first year, on the shores of the Hudson Bay, was a gentle introduction to fur

---

[116] William E. Moreau, introduction to *The Writings of David Thompson Volume I*, ed. William E. Moreau (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009), xxiii.
[117] Sean T. Peake, introduction to *The Travels of David Thompson Volume I*, ed. Sean T. Peake (Bloomington: iUniverse, 2011), xxii. HBCA A.6/13 Governor & Committee general outward correspondence.
[118] David Thompson, *The Writings of David Thompson Volume I*, ed. William E. Moreau (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009), 28.
[119] Ibid., 27-28.

trade culture and life at the fort. His recollection of his time at Churchill reads as idyllic and carefree.

Upon the arrival of the annual supply ship in August of 1785, the London Committee ordered Thompson to York Factory. A fellow Grey Coat School student, George Charles, was on board and was apprenticed to the HBC. Thompson spoke with Charles and learnt that the HBC came to the school in want of "a gentleman well-qualified to survey the interior country."[120] Sean Peake confirms Charles's claim quoting a letter from the London Committee explaining how Charles was to accompany Robert Longmore.[121] From this point, Thompson was aware of the HBC's desire to have a company servant undertake a survey of the HBC's inland operating territory. Thompson was sent to York Factory as a writer, but it's clear that his conversation with Charles made an impression on him. In his manuscript, he remembers Charles being unqualified and uninterested in surveying.[122] With the ability to reflect on his career, post-retirement, Thompson saw this early event as an indication of what he was to become.

Thompson accompanied two Indigenous men on a ten-day journey to York Factory. The men made the trip frequently as they delivered correspondence between the posts.[123] York Factory Chief, Humphrey Marten, was unenthused by Thompson's arrival as the post was already struggling with cramped quarters.[124] Marten resolved to send groups of men to stay in the woods upriver throughout the winter, but Thompson was brought back to the post mid-February "being much frost bitten in the Face," after a particularly cold stretch.[125] Thompson's inland

---

[120] Ibid., 28.
[121] Sean T. Peake, footnote #46 in *The Travels of David Thompson Volume I*, ed. Sean T. Peake (Bloomington: iUniverse, 2011), 355-6.
[122] David Thompson, *The Writings of David Thompson Volume I*, ed. William E. Moreau (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009), 28.
[123] Ibid., 29.
[124] HBCA B.239/a/86, September 14 1785.
[125] Sean T. Peake, introduction to *The Travels of David Thompson Volume I*, ed. Sean T. Peake (Bloomington: iUniverse, 2011), xxiii.

experience began in July of 1786, when he was sent to write for post master Mitchell Oman who was establishing South Branch House on the South Saskatchewan River. The post was finished December 21st, 1786, and Thompson spent the following year inland.[126]

Inland master, William Tomison, recognized Thompson's potential and worked to keep him inland. Tomison wrote, "he is a promising youth and very desirous to stay inland to learn to be serviceable, and as such persons will soon be wanted, I thought proper to leave him."[127] His formal education was key, but it seems Thompson expressed a keen intellect as well. The following winter Thompson had the opportunity to see the Rocky Mountains for the first time. To ease pressure at the post, Thompson was sent with James Gaddy and seven others to pass the winter with a band of Piikani. It was common practice to send company servants out to winter with a group of Indigenous people and the act served multiple purposes.

Fewer men at the post eased demand for provisions through the winter months. In addition, the company expected a trader living with a particular Indigenous band to learn some of the language, easing communication for trade. Fur traders were often sent to winter with an Indigenous band because the band accrued debt at the post in the form of trade goods. The traders with the band would ensure their return in the spring when they would repay their debts with furs.[128]

In *Travels*, Thompson made no mention of why he was spending the season with the Piikani. His recollections focus on how much the Piikani people valued certain trade goods. For example, how a steel awl eased women's leather sewing, or that a flint and steel made starting

[126] HBCA B.205/a/1, 21 December 1786.
[127] Sean T. Peake, introduction to *The Travels of David Thompson Volume I*, ed. Sean T. Peake (Bloomington: iUniverse, 2011), xxv.
[128] HBCA E.3/1, 4 September 1791.

fires effortless.[129] Although Thompson had yet to receive any training as a surveyor, his manuscript reveals his observational skills. Interestingly, Thompson's first sighting of the Rocky Mountains was expressed in a similar way to Fidler's, as distant clouds. Fidler identified the mountains as "very much similar to dark rain like clouds up above the Horizon in a fine summers evening," and Thompson recalled, "at length, the Rocky Mountains came in sight, like shining white clouds in the horizon."[130] Both recognized the stark contrast between the prairie landscape and the dramatic visual effect of the mountain range on the horizon.

At first glance, it was difficult for either man to fathom the extraordinary height of the Rocky Mountains in the distance. In *Travels*, Thompson's recalled their guide informed them that the weather would become milder as they approached the mountains.[131] Thompson was skeptical, but the guide's claim proved to be true as Thompson stated, "the month of November was full as mild as the month of October …. The cold of these countries decreases as much by going west as by going to the south."[132] The interaction demonstrates Thompson gaining confidence in his Indigenous guides and their knowledge of the territory.

Most of the trip details express a knowledge of the European men's reliance on the Piikani for food, almost entirely buffalo meat, wayfinding, and a knowledge of the significant places they passed during their travels. "One Pine" and its accompanying history offers a great example. During a smallpox outbreak, a man from a nearby group of Piikani made a speech and an offering to the lone pine. The man requested his family to be spared. He continued to provide offerings for several days, but their situation continued to worsen. Once his entire family died, he

---

[129] David Thompson, *The Writings of David Thompson Volume I*, ed. William E. Moreau (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009), 59.
[130] HBCA E.3/1, 20 November 1792. David Thompson, *The Writings of David Thompson Volume I*, ed. William E. Moreau (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009), 62.
[131] David Thompson, *The Writings of David Thompson Volume I*, ed. William E. Moreau (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009), 62.
[132] Ibid.

climbed the pine and, in his weakened state being sick himself, lopped off the top third of the tree to gain revenge.[133] The story, and tree, had a resonance with almost all traders in this area. Both Mitchell Oman and Peter Fidler referred to the tree.[134] Oman knew the story whereas Fidler referred to "Nee tuck kis," some distance from where he was traveling as "a single very large Pine."[135] The Piikani shared this account with those that accompanied them, educating fur traders on the significance of the place and the traumatic events associated with smallpox.

Thompson's memory of his winter with the Piikani illustrates the way that the European traders incorporated the information the Piikani shared with them to enhance their understanding of the territory. An increased comprehension of the region would improve the company's chances to successfully establish trade along the eastern slope of the Rocky Mountains. For Thompson, this trip was the first of many to the mountains and beyond. The account of his first winter along the slopes of the eastern Rockies includes Thompson's introduction to the Piikani band and life away from the post in the interior. The bulk of the knowledge Thompson acquired and retained from this trip came from one individual in particular, his host, Saukamappe.

Saukamappe was a Cree man who had lived amongst the Piikani for forty years.[136] He hosted Thompson in his tent over the course of the winter in 1787-1788. Saukamappe played a significant role in shaping Thompson's impressions of Indigenous people of the Plains and the tremendous effects the fur trade had on their existence. Thompson recalls Saukamappe fondly in *Travels*. For nearly four months, Thompson spent his evenings sitting and listening to Saukamappe and was captivated by the old man's stories "blended with the habits, customs and

---

[133] Ibid., 61.
[134] Sean T. Peake, footnote #141 in *The Travels of David Thompson Volume I*, ed. Sean T. Peake (Bloomington: iUniverse, 2011), 382.
[135] HBCA E.3/2, 30 November 1792.
[136] William E. Moreau, introduction to *The Writings of David Thompson Volume I*, ed. William E. Moreau (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009), xxix.

manners, politics and religion such as it was, Anecdotes of the Indian Chiefs and the means of their gaining influence in war and peace, that [Thompson] always found something to interest [him]."[137] Saukamappe told stories of war between Piikani and Shoshone bands, the introduction of horses and the powerful role they played, the devastating effects of smallpox and what changed in the wake of the disease decimated their people. Thompson held Saukamappe in high regard and valued the insight he provided him about Indigenous life.

In *Travels*, Saukamappe's accounts are published in the first person, as if Saukamappe is telling them to the reader directly. The exclusion of Thompson's voice throughout this section expresses Thompson's intentions to maintain the great impact Saukamappe's stories had on Thompson when he listened to them. Thompson included Saukamappe's narrative as it was told to him and felt no need to influence the reader's impression of the man. The section is interesting as it reveals the value Thompson placed on Saukamappe's words. The encounter and relationship contributed to Thompson's understanding of Indigenous people and served to protect him two and a half decades later with the help of Kootenae Appe, the principal war chief, who made a promise to Saukamappe that he would protect Thompson.[138] John Nick's entry on Thompson in the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* maintains that Thompson learnt the language of the Piikani people over the winter he spent with the band on the eastern slope of the Rockies.[139] There is no way to determine, however, the level of proficiency Thompson gained in the Piikani

[137] David Thompson, *The Writings of David Thompson Volume I*, ed. William E. Moreau (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009), 65.
[138] Ibid., 67.
[139] John Nicks, "THOMPSON, DAVID (1770-1857)," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 8, University of Toronto/Université Laval, accessed January 6, 2022, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/thompson_david_1770_1857_8E.html.

language. Saukamappe's lengthy account in *Travels* and the bond the two men made over their winter together suggests that Thompson did possess a certain proficiency in the Cree language.[140]

An accident in the winter of 1788 changed the course of David Thompson's career. On December 23rd, at Manchester House on the North Saskatchewan River, Thompson took a misstep and slipped down the riverbank while pulling a loaded sled; his leg got caught between the sled and what Tomison identified as "a stick," which resulted in a broken tibia.[141] Tomison's account of the event dates the accident to December though Thompson, in *Travels*, recalls the incident having occurred in March. The date discrepancy illustrates why Thompson's manuscript should be used as a source in collaboration with post journals to improve accuracy.

The accident was catastrophic and resulted in Thompson being bedridden for months. In May 1789, Thompson accompanied Tomison downriver. Turnor wrote, "David Thompson by his own desire I am taking down but god know what will come of him."[142] Thompson was left at Cumberland House to continue his recovery, "it being impossible to carry him down in the condition he [was] in."[143] Thompson regained enough strength through the summer and was well enough to take part in surveyor Philip Turnor's training by the fall.

It was the presence of Turnor at Cumberland House and the decision to instruct Thompson in mathematics and navigation that allowed Thompson to recall how his unfortunate and life-threatening accident, in fact, "turned to be the best thing that ever happened to [him]."[144]

---

[140] David Thompson, *The Writings of David Thompson Volume I*, ed. William E. Moreau (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009), 65.
[141] HBCA B.121/a/3, 23 December 1788. William E. Moreau, introduction to *The Writings of David Thompson Volume I*, ed. William E. Moreau (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009), xxx.
[142] HBCA B.121/a/3, 17 May 1789.
[143] HBCA B.121/a/3, 9 June 1789.
[144] David Thompson, *The Writings of David Thompson Volume I*, ed. William E. Moreau (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009), 72-73.

Moreau refers to the arrival of Turnor as "a happy coincidence for Thompson" as Turnor's "training bore the fruit in his life's vocation."[145] Thompson's broken leg redirected his entire career as he became a surveyor and continued this path even after he retired from the fur trade. That is not to say that he would never have been trained as a surveyor, but that the setback, in fact, launched his surveying career forward.

Turnor, the official surveyor of the Hudson's Bay Company at the time, instructed both David Thompson and Peter Fidler at Cumberland House for over a year. Following their training, Fidler accompanied Turnor on an Athabasca expedition.[146] The expedition was one of many attempts to find and survey a feasible route into Athabasca territory for the company, thus matching their Canadian competition.

Thompson was an excellent student but was not yet physically well enough to undertake the journey. A letter to the London Committee in the summer of 1791 confirms Thompson's poor condition. He wrote that he was recovering yet could only travel ten to twelve miles per day.[147] Philip Turnor educated both Thompson and Fidler in practical astronomy. In *Travels*, Thompson recalls being Turnor's "only assistant," though shortly after that, he writes of Fidler accompanying Turnor on his voyage to the Athabasca region in his place.[148] Thompson was Turnor's only apprentice until the HBC sent Fidler to Cumberland House in the spring of 1790.

The time Thompson had with Turnor one-on-one was highly beneficial for Thompson's education as a surveyor. He devoted a lot of time and energy to furthering his surveying skills.

---

[145] William E. Moreau, introduction to *The Writings of David Thompson Volume I*, ed. William E. Moreau (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009), xxx.
[146] David Thompson, *The Writings of David Thompson Volume I*, ed. William E. Moreau (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009), 74.
[147] Sean T. Peake, introduction to *The Travels of David Thompson Volume I,* ed. Sean T. Peake (Bloomington, IN: iUniverse, 2011), xxxi.
[148] David Thompson, *The Writings of David Thompson Volume I*, ed. William E. Moreau (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009), 73-74.

Much like Fidler, Thompson incorporated the practice of recording into his duties as a surveyor: keeping a journal of weather, observations, daily occurrences, and calculations.[149] Thompson possessed both an aptitude and an interest in surveying, and these permanently influenced Thompson's perspective. He observed and documented the landscape with a new scientific approach. As surveyor, Thompson's approach to the territory and its inhabitants shifted to prioritize his aim of mapping the region not yet surveyed by Europeans.

Thompson's superiors made note of his abilities. Turnor recognized Thompson's skill and adeptness in mathematical calculations as well as in the recording of scientific observations and weather conditions. In the introduction to *Travels*, Peake notes that Turnor recommended that the HBC's London Committee could depend on Thompson's surveying abilities should his health improve.[150] Turnor went on to advise that, should Thompson not recover, he would make an excellent educator training others in astronomical and navigational calculations to qualify future company surveyors.[151] Thompson's health did improve, but it took a long time. He recalled how the Indigenous women at Cumberland House played a major role as they generously brought him berries to eat.[152] He had found that fish were "too rich for [his] low state of health and [he] became emaciated until the berries were ripe."[153] This inclusion in *Travels* clearly states Thompson's awareness of his reliance on the local Indigenous population for survival.

These women were equipped with the knowledge of the territory as they knew which berries were edible and where to find them. They also recognized what they could do to help

---

[149] William E. Moreau, introduction to *The Writings of David Thompson Volume I*, ed. William E. Moreau (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009), xxx.
[150] HBCA A.11/117, fo. 45.
[151] Ibid.
[152] David Thompson, *The Writings of David Thompson Volume I*, ed. William E. Moreau (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009), 73.
[153] Ibid.

Thompson in his poor condition and acted on the idea. Thompson saw their actions as ones of generosity and remained grateful in his later years when he wrote, "This was pure charity for I had nothing to give them and I was much relieved."[154] Unfortunately, he suffered another bout of illness in May 1790, which resulted in the loss of the sight in his right eye.[155]

In the same month he lost the sight of his right eye, Thompson wrote to the London Committee requesting surveying equipment in place of his standard allotment of clothing.[156] In response to his request, the London Committee fulfilled his request, in addition to his regular clothing issuance.[157] Shortly after Thompson received his new instruments, he began his travels inland to survey the territory for the HBC, but company politics would impede his progress.

In August of 1792, Thompson received orders for his first surveying mission. Joseph Colen, Resident Chief at York Factory, instructed the newly qualified surveyor to pursue a route into the Athabasca region known as the "northern track."[158] The northern track was one of three known routes to access Athabasca. The presence of Canadian traders in the Athabasca region undercut trade at the Bay and the HBC was eager to keep pace with their competition.[159]

Inter-company politics, difficult conditions, and unreliable guides impeded Thompson and his companions' efforts.[160] Thompson spent years striving to complete his objective of accessing Athabasca by way of the northern track. In May 1797, Thompson left the HBC as he

---

[154] Ibid.
[155] Ibid., 74. HBCA B.49/a/21 10, 19, 22 and 26 May 1790.
[156] Sean T. Peake, introduction to *The Travels of David Thompson Volume I*, ed. Sean T. Peake (Bloomington, IN: iUniverse, 2011), xxxi. HBCA A.11/117, fo. 54-54d.
[157] John Nicks, "THOMPSON, DAVID (1770-1857)," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 8, University of Toronto/Université Laval, accessed January 6, 2022, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/thompson_david_1770_1857_8E.html.
[158] Barbara Belyea, *Dark Storm Moving West* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2007), 24.
[159] Ibid., 18.
[160] Ibid.

was "determined to seek that employment of the North West Company."[161] Moreau discusses the debate among researchers regarding Thompson's "pivotal act" as Thompson remained vague about events surrounding his defection to the NWC in *Travels*.[162] Moreau concludes that Thompson saw more opportunities for financial profit in partnership opportunities with the NWC. Thompson was made partner in July 1804.[163] His manuscript reveals how he respected the NWC partners, who actively participated in the fur trade together with hired hands.

The NWC partners and their direct engagement in the trade stood in stark contrast to the Governor and Committee who oversaw HBC operations, made decisions, and sent out orders from their office back in London. The appeal is understandable. The NWC partners and clerks met annually at Grand Portage making the decisions and necessary accommodations for that trading season, which, as Peake suggests, gave the NWC a serious advantage over the HBC, who had to wait a year for the supply ship to return with decisions and instructions from the London Committee.[164] The NWC initiated Thompson quickly as they implemented rigorous strategies to surpass the competition. The NWC ordered Thompson out on a surveying trip straight from his first meeting at Grand Portage.

The NWC required a survey west of Lake of the Woods. The goal of the Company was to understand the situation of the boundary line that divided British and American territory, and where NWC posts were in relation to the 49th parallel, the most likely boundary based on the

---

[161] David Thompson, *The Writings of David Thompson Volume I*, ed. William E. Moreau (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009), 169.
[162] William E. Moreau, introduction to *The Writings of David Thompson Volume I*, ed. William E. Moreau (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009), xxxi-xxxii.
[163] Ibid., xxxv.
[164] Sean T. Peake, introduction to *The Travels of David Thompson Volume I,* ed. Sean T. Peake (Bloomington, IN: iUniverse, 2011), xlvi.

terms outlined in Jay's Treaty in 1794.[165] The NWC finally gave Thompson the opportunity he was waiting for, and he undertook his surveying with vigor. Thompson and nine freemen embarked on their journey November 28, 1797.[166] The immense undertaking was completed in eleven months.

Thompson and his companions overcame extreme weather, nearly losing one of their members in a severe snowstorm.[167] Early spring melt and heavy wet snow exhausted Thompson's Indigenous guide, breaking trail for the others.[168] Thompson expressed his comprehension of Indigenous culture and beliefs when the group arrived at four Indigenous lodges. Thompson's writing recalled an uninviting group with no reception upon their arrival, that is, until he began to use his sextant to find the latitude of their location. Thompson wrote about Indigenous people's superstitions and their shift in attitude towards him. Upon their questioning, his guide told their hosts that Thompson had "supernatural Knowledge."[169] Though the high praise worked to his advantage, Thompson worked to communicate that he was unexceptional and no greater than anyone else. The interaction exemplifies how the surveyor knew better than to overstate his abilities. The narrative of his eleven months surveying over 6,000 kilometers is extensive. Thompson wrote of everything from the weather and the environment to difficulties along their journey and the people they encountered.

The group relied on NWC posts in the region as well as Indigenous encampments they came to along the way. Thompson desired a proficiency in the languages spoken by his

---

[165] John Nicks, "THOMPSON, DAVID (1770-1857)," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 8, University of Toronto/Université Laval, accessed January 6, 2022, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/thompson_david_1770_1857_8E.html.
[166] David Thompson, *The Writings of David Thompson Volume I*, ed. William E. Moreau (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009), 198-199.
[167] Ibid., 204.
[168] Ibid., 223.
[169] Ibid., 116.

Indigenous guides. In March, he met a Métis family at Cadotte's House. He wrote, "I had long wished to meet a well-educated native, from whom I could derive sound information for I was well aware that neither myself, nor any other person I had met with, who was not a Native, were sufficiently masters of the Indian Languages."[170] Thompson wanted a stronger connection between his own understanding and that of his Indigenous companions. He was conscious of how much information got lost in translation.

An excerpt from a letter by Thompson, who was west of the Rocky Mountains in March of 1808, epitomizes the language barriers when he wrote the following:

> We have not a single person who understands their language and I find a great difficulty in explaining to them my views and the necessity there is for their working beaver otherwise they will see us no more. What I say in French is to be spoken in Blackfoot, then in Kootanai, the in Flat Head &c &c so that the sense is fairly translated away before it arrives at the person spoken to, and these Indians having never had commerce with any white people have curious ideas, supposing that horses and berries are our favorite objects, as they are theirs. This is the formidable error I have to combat.[171]

Although this example is one of pronounced communication difficulty, the letter expresses the limitations Thompson often encountered when attempting to obtain Indigenous knowledge and communicate his intentions and those of his men.

Indigenous knowledge of the territory remained critical to the NWC's advancement inland and across the Rockies to trade directly with Indigenous bands residing west of the mountains. Through the years that Thompson attempted to traverse the Rockies and find a viable trade route to the western slope of the mountains, he travelled along routes that Indigenous people either knew of or had accessed themselves. Unlike Fidler, however, there is no surviving journal of Thompson's which includes maps drawn out by Indigenous allies. In other words, Thompson's writing does not attribute the knowledge he possessed to specific individuals or

---

[170] Ibid., 229.
[171] HBCA, A.67/1 fo. 8-11d.

instances. Thompson valued and utilized Indigenous knowledge to achieve his own goals. The Indigenous knowledge he received facilitated access to the territory he surveyed, but any Indigenous knowledge of the region Thompson retained was eclipsed by European cartographic conventions. The maps that Thompson made during his time with the NWC exhibit his preference for European cartographic approaches. The only evidence of Indigenous knowledge within his maps are place names. Thompson assigned Indigenous names to many of the rivers and lakes on his maps. Some are an English translation, such as "Buffalo Lake," where others are an anglicized spelling of an Indigenous name, for example the "Spitchee River."[172] Thompson's maps stand in contrast to Fidler's, who sent the London Committee a redrawn version of Ak ko mokki's map.

It appears Fidler was unable to synthesize the Indigenous knowledge Ak ko mokki provided him into a European style map. Instead of combining the information on Ak ko mokki's map with the observations he made firsthand, Fidler sent the Ak ko mokki map with an accompanying letter to explain the map.[173] If Thompson acquired similar maps from his Indigenous associates there are no records of these at present. Furthermore, Thompson would have most likely mentioned it in his manuscript as he composed it with the assistance of his old journals and observations from his time in the fur trade. Thompson's maps are genuinely western in their composition.[174] The difference between Thompson's cartography and Fidler's Ak ko mokki map and accompanying letter reveal how the two surveyors acquired and conceptualized Indigenous knowledge differently. In *Travels*, Thompson provided his perception of Piikani

---

[172] David Thompson, *David Thompson's Narrative of His Explorations in Western America, 1784-1812*, ed. J.B. Tyrrell (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1916), reproduction of Thompson's map in pocket at end of volume.
[173] D.W. Moodie and Barry Kaye, "The Ak Ko Mok Ki Map," *The Beaver* 307, no. 4 (spring 1977): 13-15. The article includes a typed copy of Fidler's letter.
[174] David Thompson, *David Thompson's Narrative of His Explorations in Western America, 1784-1812*, ed. J.B. Tyrrell (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1916), reproduction of Thompson's map in pocket at end of volume.

customs and beliefs. The section covers topics of spirituality, language, ceremony, and a system of numbers. In the segment covering numbers, he recalled the following:

> The Indians of the Plains count only to ten, often making use of the Fingers to denote the number; each hand is five, and both hands ten; after which they count by tens, generally having a small stick which they lay on the ground to prevent mistakes; and for every ten more another stick is laid down, and these sticks are counted to give an idea of the number of tens … the numbers in a large herd of Bisons are expressed by a great many, a great many; Indians have few abstract ideas, their minds are formed from what is visible, especially of what is tangible.[175]

The passage is noteworthy from the surveyor's perspective. Thompson had training in mathematics, navigation, and astronomy all of which could be seen as abstract or theoretical. He plotted his course through the application of math, astronomy, and navigation, marking locations through measuring latitude and longitude. The remark suggests that Thompson did not obtain any Indigenous territorial knowledge beyond what was "visible and tangible." That is, Thompson's acquisition of territorial knowledge from the Piikani was more direct. He used his Indigenous guides to navigate the territory, and to supply Thompson and his men with food. Both roles, guide and hunter, were essential to Thompson's survival and success in surveying the eastern slope of the Rocky Mountains.

An account of Thompson's attempt to traverse the Rockies in 1801 reveals how badly a trip can go when the guide is incompetent. The guide was known as "The Rook", and was a Cree man named Ah ah shu, whom Thompson had encountered in the Athabasca region.[176] Thompson did not have a high opinion of his guide, but the NWC was eager to expand their trade west of the Rockies and the window of opportunity, and season, was short. The trip was unsuccessful for several reasons. The Rook led them to an impassible lake, especially for the horses, and excess

---

[175] David Thompson, *The Writings of David Thompson Volume II*, ed. William E. Moreau (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015), 108.
[176] David Thompson, *The Travels of David Thompson Volume II*, ed. Sean T. Peake (Bloomington, IN: iUniverse, 2011), 51.

rain increased river water levels making the trail exceptionally difficult.[177] Thompson recalled how remarkable the year's rain was when he wrote, "so greatly indeed had the waters swelled that the oldest people do not remember ever to have seen the river so high … except one about twenty-three years ago."[178] Duncan McGillivray planned to accompany the group but was not physically well enough to make the attempt.[179] Thompson knew the value of hiring a proper guide, who possessed a knowledge of the territory and was up for the task. The Rook proved not to be that man.

Thompson chose his Indigenous sources with care and respected them as reputable informants. Saukamappe was one of Thompson's valued informants, as were those who Thompson became acquainted with through Saukamappe. Kootanae Appe promised Saukamappe that he would protect Thompson in 1788, on Thompson's first journey to the eastern slope of the Rockies. In 1810, Kootanae Appe developed a scheme and successfully diffused the war party's attack.[180] An ally like Kootanae Appe was invaluable at the time, when tensions were rising on the eastern side of the mountain range as fur traders worked to gain direct access to Indigenous bands on the west side.

Thompson's expedition in the Rocky Mountains and through the Athabasca pass in 1810, showcases two Indigenous individuals: Thomas, a Haudenosaunee, and a Cree man, Yellow Bird.[181] Thompson does not elaborate on either character, and any note of their presence seems relatively standard. November 1st, "Thomas the Guide" went on ahead with two men to ensure

---

[177] David Thompson, *The Travels of David Thompson Volume II*, ed. Sean T. Peake (Bloomington, IN: iUniverse, 2011), 58-61.
[178] Ibid., 62.
[179] Sylvia Van Kirk and Jennifer S. H. Brown, "McGILLIVRAY, DUNCAN," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 5, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003–, accessed April 1, 2022, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/mcgillivray_duncan_5E.html.
[180] David Thompson, *The Writings of David Thompson Volume II*, ed. William E. Moreau (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015), 140-141.
[181] Ibid., 183 and 239.

the path was acceptable and, in early January, Thompson confers with the four Indigenous people about a set of tracks from an exceptionally large animal.[182] The discussion with his Indigenous companions demonstrates Thompson's value of the Indigenous knowledge of the territory and the animals living there as well as how he incorporated their views into his understanding of the animals that resided in the Athabasca pass.

To examine the way Thompson acquired and conceptualized Indigenous knowledge, it is best to look at the relationships Thompson fostered and valued. In general, Thompson understood the advantage of maintaining friendly relations with Indigenous people. When west of the Rockies, Thompson made sure to establish contact with each community they came upon. Peake states, "in the typical fashion of an experienced trader, Thompson stopped at every village to build goodwill and to distribute tobacco and gifts in order to gain an understanding of the politics and hierarchy of the tribes."[183] In 1800, Thompson spent the latter part of the year trying to successfully meet a group of Ktunaxa to escort them to Rocky Mountain House safely. The NWC had established Rocky Mountain House with the hope of Ktunaxa bands crossing over the mountains to trade directly with the company. The long-term plan was for the post to become the staging point for the company to expand trade and set up posts west of the Rockies.[184] It is clear in *Travels* that Thompson was keen to obtain their knowledge of a feasible passage over the mountains.[185]

---

[182] Ibid., 184.
[183] Sean T. Peake, introduction to *The Travels of David Thompson Volume II*, ed. Sean T. Peake (Bloomington, IN: iUniverse, 2011), liii.
[184] William E. Moreau, introduction to *The Writings of David Thompson Volume II*, ed. William E. Moreau (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009), xv.
[185] David Thompson, *The Travels of David Thompson Volume II*, ed. Sean T. Peake (Bloomington, IN: iUniverse, 2011), 39.

A version of Thompson's most famous map hangs in the Archives of Ontario.[186] The map is tremendous. It measures 213 centimeters in height by 328 centimeters in width.[187] J.B. Tyrrell included a reproduction in the back of his publication of David Thompson's manuscript in 1915.[188] Tyrrell reduced the scale of the reproduction but the legend on the map is telling. Below the title of the map, Thompson incorporated and credited the survey work of Philip Turnor, Sir Alexander Mackenzie, and John Stewart.[189] Thompson composed the map upon his retirement from the fur trade, and the NWC paid Thompson, on top of his profits as a shareholder, to produce the map.[190] Thompson's ability to integrate the survey work of his peers is a testament to the surveyor's high level of skill as a mapmaker. Not only could he make observations in his fieldwork, but he was able to put his twenty years of survey work, along with that of others, into one cohesive work. With the support of the NWC, Thompson had the time, the opportunity, and the ability to produce an impressive result.

The map, however, does not credit those who facilitated Thompson's survey work. There is no suggestion of who guided him through the territory, or how a skilled hunter was necessary to feed Thompson and his companions. It comes as no surprise that Thompson only credited himself and his fellow surveyors. Thompson's conceptualizations of Indigenous knowledge are not laid out in his maps in the same way that Fidler's were with the Indigenous maps in his

---

[186] A copy of this map can be found in Archives of Ontario, I0012850, reference code: F 443-6, AO 1541, "Map of the North-West Territory of the Province of Canada by David Thompson, 1814," David Thompson fonds. Accessed February 15, 2022, http://www.archives.gov.on.ca/en/explore/online/thompson/big/big_44_thompson_map.aspx.
[187] "David Thompson North America's Greatest Geographer," Archives of Ontario, accessed February 15, 2022, http://www.archives.gov.on.ca/en/explore/online/thompson/geographer.aspx.
[188] David Thompson, *David Thompson's Narrative of His Explorations in Western America, 1784-1812*, ed. J.B. Tyrrell (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1916).
[189] Ibid.
[190] Sean T. Peake, introduction to *The Travels of David Thompson Volume II,* ed. Sean T. Peake (Bloomington, IN: iUniverse, 2011), lxiv.

journals. When reviewing *Travels* to examine Thompson's conceptualizations of Indigenous knowledge, only glimpses can be found.

In studying Thompson's *Travels*, several challenges arise. He wrote the manuscript in hopes of it being published for a public audience. He drafted *Travels* both from memory and from the journals he was still in possession of forty years later.[191] Throughout the text, he identifies specific dates and particular sections read more like a daily log of events than a flowing narrative.[192] The combination of wanting to tell a story and working from old journals to be accurate create two different styles. Certain sections are more of an overview of his experiences and observations while other sections are Thompson's ethnographic overview of Indigenous groups he interacted with.

In the day-to-day portions, there are more details regarding individuals, their interactions with Thompson, and, in some cases, how their presence affected the journey. Some characters are unobtrusive, like the presence of Thomas as the surveyor's guide into the Athabasca Pass.[193] Thomas's presence is uneventful compared to The Rook, likely because Thomas performed his duties as a guide proficiently. Thompson and Thomas exchanged opinions on where to camp and what they saw along the way, which suggests that the surveyor trusted Thomas and relied on his knowledge of the pass to inform Thompson's decisions as they progressed.

---

[191] William E. Moreau, introduction to *The Writings of David Thompson Volume I*, ed. William E. Moreau (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009), lvi. John Nicks, "THOMPSON, DAVID (1770-1857)," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 8, University of Toronto/Université Laval, accessed January 6, 2022, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/thompson_david_1770_1857_8E.html. The article states that Thompson began composing his manuscript in Longueil, while he and Charlotte lived with their daughter and son-in-law.

[192] William E. Moreau, introduction to *The Writings of David Thompson Volume I*, ed. William E. Moreau (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009), xiii. Peake caught and rectified inaccuracies in the manuscript by adding a footnote to explain when an event was more likely to occur. One example of Peake's corrections Sean T. Peake, footnote #27 in *The Travels of David Thompson Volume II*, ed. Sean T. Peake (Bloomington: iUniverse, 2011), 435. A good example of a section that demonstrates his use of an old journal and daily entries. David Thompson, *The Writings of David Thompson Volume II*, ed. William E. Moreau (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015), 273-74.

[193] David Thompson, *The Writings of David Thompson Volume II*, ed. William E. Moreau (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015), 183-190.

In the case of Saukamappe, Thompson held the man in such high regard that he decided to leave the man's teachings unadulterated. Saukamappe's section within *Travels* is the only part where Thompson removed himself from the position of narrator and let Saukamappe recount his history himself. It was as though Thompson wanted to enlighten his audience in the same way that he was enlightened so early in his fur trade career. In a separate section of *Travels*, where Thompson produced his overview of Piikani customs and beliefs he includes the following remark, "Persons who pass through the country often think the answers the Indians give is their real sentiments. The answers are given to please the querist."[194] This statement is interesting as it expresses Thompson's awareness of the role the audience plays in the transmission of knowledge and that the interaction is related to the relationship between those taking part in the conversation. Saukamappe's narrative is similar to Fidler's Blackfoot maps, as Thompson let Saukamappe's voice tell the story.

Thompson's survey work and map making skills are impressive. The maps and manuscript showcase his character. David Thompson was intelligent and ambitious. He understood the value of maintaining good relationships with his companions, both Indigenous and European, as they were his informants, allies, and team members who worked together for survival and success. Saukamappe had a significant impact on the surveyor early on his fur trade career and he held the man in high esteem for the rest of his life. Thompson was an excellent surveyor and he relied on others (guides, hunters, and voyageurs) to achieve his goals. This aspect of Thompson is important, as he achieved *his* goals whereas Fidler worked to convey Indigenous ideas. Thompson's goals were distinct from his Indigenous companions who enabled his achievements.

[194] Ibid., 313.

There is a main thread throughout Thompson's manuscript and maps which stands in contrast to Peter Fidler. Although Thompson fostered and valued relationships with his Indigenous allies, there is no evidence to suggest he internalized the knowledge they provided. His manuscript expresses his observations of the region, its inhabitants, and conversations he held with others regarding beliefs and values. In the case of Saukamappe, he provided a narrative directly from the source, the same way he received the narrative. He removed himself from his position as narrator and let the story come from Saukamappe himself. Saukamappe's story within Thompson's *Travels* exhibits how Thompson valued the man's knowledge yet did not internalize the information.

Thompson connected with and respected Rupert's Land, but the fur trade did not define him. He retired from the NWC in 1812 and continued to work as a surveyor, among other money-making enterprises. He relocated his wife and children east to Canada. Once there, his wife and children were baptized, and he and Charlotte were married in a Presbyterian church as they were previously married *à la façon du pays* in 1799.[195] Thompson worked to ensure his children received an education, even though the family struggled in Canada. They lost two of their young children in 1814, at the ages of five and seven, and the family struggled financially, due to a number of factors, for the rest of Thompson's life.[196] Late in life and continually facing hardship, Thompson decided to put his story into writing, and it is his reflection on his life and career.

---

[195] John Nicks, "THOMPSON, DAVID (1770-1857)," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 8, University of Toronto/Université Laval, accessed January 6, 2022, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/thompson_david_1770_1857_8E.html.
[196] William E. Moreau, introduction to *The Writings of David Thompson Volume I*, ed. William E. Moreau (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009), xxxvi-xxxix.

Thompson did not see himself as a part of the fur trade. He was a traveler, surveyor, and astronomer, doing what was required of him to make something of himself. Thompson's surveys are his own, as are his maps. They are European, with inclusions from other European surveyors. There is no Ak ko mokki map and no suggestion of what wayfinding and survival skills his Indigenous guides possessed, simply that a quality guide was essential to his surveying success. Thompson retained his European sense of mapping, geography, and topography. Unlike Fidler, Thompson never moved beyond his European conceptions.

Chapter Four

Conceptions of the Rocky Mountains: Peter Fidler and David Thompson

The most substantial similarity Thompson and Fidler shared was their positions as surveyors, within the fur trade. Their journals demonstrate their ways of thinking and what they valued most of their Indigenous associates. An examination of Fidler's and Thompson's conceptions of the Rocky Mountains and how they portrayed them in their writing demonstrates how distinct the two men's perspectives were from one another. It will also show how they internalized Indigenous knowledge of the Rocky Mountains. This chapter will examine the divergent aspects of Fidler and Thompson as surveyors in relation to their observations and interpretations of the Rocky Mountains from the range's eastern slope. Their careers and lives progressed in different ways and, as such, affected how each man is represented in the historical record. In the case of Fidler, written history scarcely acknowledges his role in the fur trade and western Canadian history, especially when examined alongside Thompson.

As mentioned earlier, Fidler and Thompson made similar observations upon seeing the Rocky Mountains on the horizon for the very first time. Both drew a comparison of the mountains in the distance to clouds on the horizon.[197] Beyond this preliminary observation, the mountains portrayed in their journals and maps are quite different. The two men interacted with the landscape and its inhabitants around them differently. Fidler trusted and relied on Indigenous associates to provide a reliable representation of the region. His collection of Indigenous maps, drafted and redrawn, found in the back of several journals, provide strong evidence to suggest that Fidler placed high value upon Indigenous territorial knowledge and their style of

[197] HBCA E.3/2, 20 November 1792. David Thompson, *The Writings of David Thompson Volume I*, ed. William E. Moreau (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009), 62.

cartography. Fidler employed the Indigenous maps he acquired to strengthen his understanding of the Plains and eastern slope of the Rockies.

While many sketches and maps covering small areas can be found throughout Fidler's journals, two of Fidler's journals contain a series of maps near the end of the notebooks that are of interest as they focus on, or include, the eastern slope of the mountains.[198] These maps are central to evaluating his conceptions of the Rocky Mountains as well as how he acquired knowledge relating to the mountains. Fidler relied on his Indigenous allies for their familiarity with the mountains. Fidler made sure to date and credit the individuals who drew the maps that he obtained, keeping track of his sources. The five maps that are included in the older of the two journals were drawn by Ak ko mokki, Ki oo cus, both Siksika chiefs, Ak ko wee ak, a Blackfoot man, and one which is nameless. Ted Binnema states that the nameless map was drawn by an unidentified Gros Ventre man.[199] One of Ak ko mokki's maps is dated 1801 while the other maps are dated 1802.

[198] HBCA E.3/2 and E.3/4.
[199] Theodore Binnema, "How Does a Map Mean? Old Swan's Map of 1801 and the Blackfoot World," in *From Rupert's Land to Canada*, ed. by Theodore Binnema, Gerhard J. Ens, and R.C. Macleod (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2001), 210.

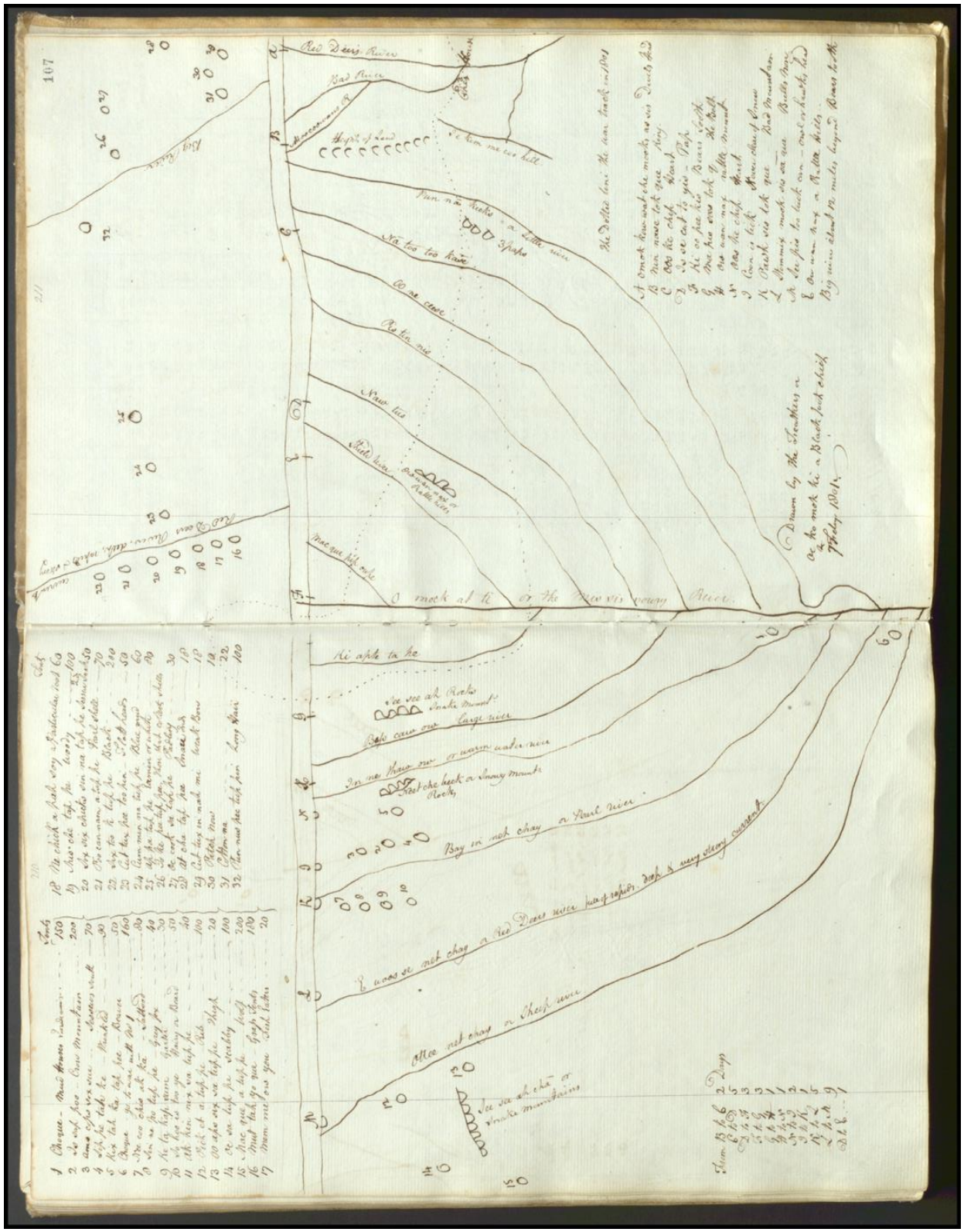

Figure 4-1, Ak ko mokki's 1801 map HBCA E.3/2 fos.106d-107

It seems that Ak ko mokki's 1801 map piqued Fidler's interest as he worked to secure additional maps, from Ak ko mokki and others, the following season, to further his understanding of Ak ko mokki's cartographic style. The acquisition of the 1801 map and the 1802 maps demonstrates Fidler's appreciation of Indigenous cartography and territorial knowledge. Rough copies of several of the maps are located near the end of the Nottingham House (Fort Chipewyan) post journal, dated 1801-1803, and Fidler's redrafted versions in his journals are evidence of the high value he placed upon them as well as the time he spent working to understand them. Fidler worked to include Indigenous elements when he drafted larger scale maps.

The map by the unidentified Gros Ventre individual communicates different information of the same territory, and as such it stands apart from the other Blackfoot maps, though the key landmarks are the same as the other maps. Ak ko mokki's 1801 map includes river names, significant topographical features, a legend listing the distinctive mountains used in wayfinding, and a separate legend naming numerous Indigenous group encampments and their size. The Gros Ventre map seemingly served a single purpose which was to identify all the different groups of people on the Plains, where they were located, and in what number. It could be that Fidler felt no need to crowd the map with the names of mountains and rivers, as that information was already known to him. The size of each encampment is identified by the number of tents.

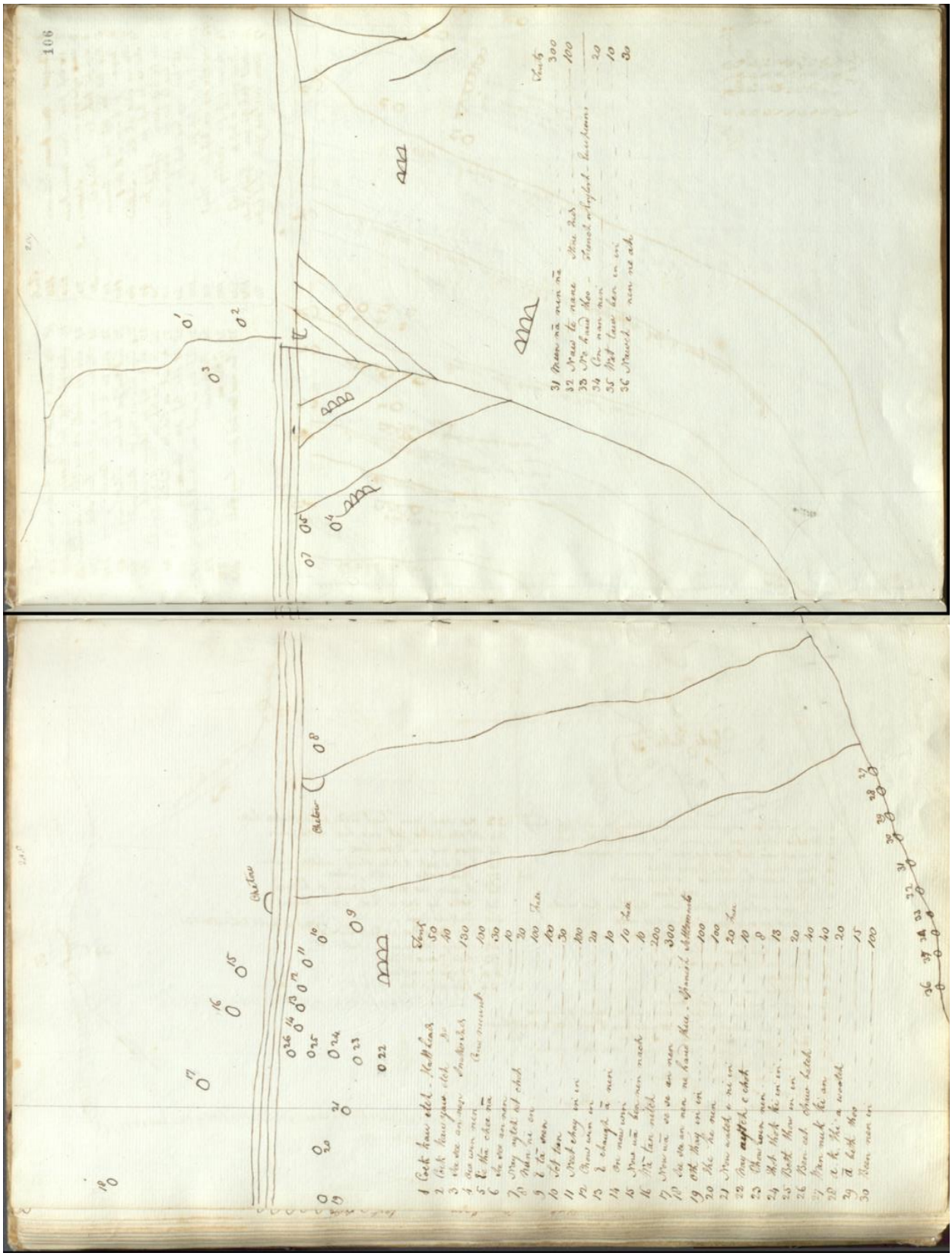

Figure 4-2, Unidentified Gros Ventre Man's Map HBCA E.3/2, fos. 105d-10

The number of tents was likely estimated as most are round numbers apart from a few smaller encampments where the total was less than 20 tents. The map even includes a "Spanish Settlement" in the top left-hand corner, the southwest corner, of the map. The Gros Ventre map seems to have functioned as a secondary or supplementary map with a focus on the location and population of assorted groups of people inhabiting the Plains. The Gros Ventre map, along with the others, demonstrates how Fidler sought to enhance his knowledge of the region by acquiring multiple maps of the same area in addition to the survey work he did himself, charting courses and taking astronomical observations to calculate geographical coordinates.

With its focus on encampments, the Gros Ventre map serves as a reminder of how difficult it is to include every element of a featured territory within one map, in this case a small map which spans two pages of journal, where a larger map may be able to include more details. The map hints at the topics Fidler and his Indigenous sources covered in conversations regarding their knowledge of the territory within the maps. Fidler sought to obtain and record all knowledge of the territory his Indigenous informants were offering. Knowing who was where was important to Indigenous inhabitants of the Plains as well as to Fidler, the HBC, and the fur trade overall.

Ak ko mokki's 1801 map, the first map acquired in this group, identifies topographical features of the region, but also features the encampments of different Indigenous bands and an estimate of the number of tents at each camp. Another inclusion in Ak ko mokki's 1801 map is a dotted line depicting "the war track."[200] In the Chesterfield House journal of 1801, Fidler made no mention of Ak ko mokki by name or the map the Siksika chief drew for him.[201] The map is dated February 7th and that day's journal entry is relatively uneventful as Fidler noted the

[200] HBCA E.3/2, fos. 106d-107.
[201] HBCA B.34/a/2, 7 February 1801.

weather and the tasks the men undertook at the post. Fidler did not routinely record names of Indigenous individuals at the post, but more commonly referred to a general group, of Blackfoot, for example. There is no mention of any Blackfoot people at the post that day.

The absence of Ak ko mokki, and Fidler's interaction with him, in the post journal suggests that Fidler understood his role as surveyor was distinct from his role in charge of Chesterfield House. However, the conflict between the Siksika and their Shoshoni enemies, who Fidler referred to as "the Snake Indians," is covered regularly throughout the journal starting as early as November 1800.[202] The inclusion of the conflict in the journal is to be expected as it would have impacted trade and threatened the safety of the traders. Post journals are notorious for a lack of detail, so it's not surprising that Fidler made no mention of his interaction with Ak ko mokki and the map he acquired. The event had no direct effect on trading and, though Fidler had acquired such an informative map, he knew he needed to understand more before he shared the map with his superiors. Consequently, the four maps that followed demonstrate Fidler's determination to gain a deeper understanding of the territory depicted by Ak ko Mokki's map. Through all of this, Fidler was headquartered at Chesterfield House, situated at the fork where the Red Deer River joins the South Saskatchewan River.

Chesterfield House was first established in the fall of 1800. It was the first fort established by the HBC so far upstream on the South Saskatchewan and out on the Plains.[203] The Blackfoot were attaining dominance over the Plains at this time due, in part, to their military strength.[204] The journal Fidler kept as they traveled up the South Saskatchewan to the forks

---

[202] Ibid., 20 November 1800.
[203] Ibid., 15 August 1800.
[204] Theodore Binnema, "How Does a Map Mean? Old Swan's Map of 1801 and the Blackfoot World," in *From Rupert's Land to Canada*, ed. by Theodore Binnema, Gerhard J. Ens, and R.C. Macleod (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2001), 209.

reveals how the threat of attack was a source of anxiety for him from the start. In the initial entry of the journal, Fidler noted that he "gave all hands ammunition & guns in case of an attack."[205] Fidler knew they were traveling into contested territory.

Daily journal entries are dominated by charted courses, distances, and distinct topographical features as the journey continued. The threat of attack continued to be a source of anxiety for Fidler and his men for he noted that everyone slept with their firearms by their sides.[206] A regular recording of astronomical observations began in November, once they arrived and were settled at the new post, yet geographical coordinate calculations appear every few days through the weeks they traveled up river. Regular updates referring to the Blackfoot conflict with their enemies are found throughout the house journal that first year. The 1801 Ak ko mokki map, which features "the war track," encompasses the most expansive territory and features the greatest amount of detail of the five maps from the 1801-1802 series.

Ak ko mokki's map presents the mountains as a straight line running horizontally across the map. The line representing Missouri River begins at the mountain range running perpendicular to the mountains vertically down the center of the map. The Missouri tributaries begin similarly, branching perpendicularly from the mountain line, eventually coming toward the center meeting the Missouri, as Binnema suggests, resembling the veins of a leaf.[207] The style and structure of the map stand in contrast to the European cartographic conventions Fidler was familiar with. The mountain line and the Missouri River line establish the region the map encompasses. The two lines were likely the first two lines drawn as Ak ko Mokki composed the

[205] HBCA B.34/a/2, 15 August 1800.
[206] Ibid., 21 August 1800.
[207] Theodore Binnema, "How Does a Map Mean? Old Swan's Map of 1801 and the Blackfoot World," in *From Rupert's Land to Canada*, ed. by Theodore Binnema, Gerhard J. Ens, and R.C. Macleod (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2001), 211.

map, after which he would have added all subsequent rivers running from the mountain line and eventually connecting to the Missouri. Ak ko mokki's map clearly intrigued Fidler.

The mountains indicated along the line served as visual landmarks to orient the user of their location on the Plains and in relation to nearby waterways. The legend in the bottom left corner of the map imparts further wayfinding information as it features the number of days travel from one identified mountain to the next. The mountains are marked alphabetically, right to left, starting with an 'A' and finishing with an 'M' on the left. The right to left identification suggests that Ak ko mokki began with territory known to Fidler, on the northern side, working southward, into increasingly unknown territory to Fidler.

An essential function of the map was to be able to navigate the territory by orienting oneself with the most distinct mountains along the eastern slope when viewed from the Plains. This function is dissimilar from the European cartographic convention of labelling the mountains which are greatest in height overall. But, marking the highest mountains, as opposed to the most visually distinct peaks, would not serve an individual attempting to situate themselves on the Plains, without a compass or course measurements. The priorities and conventions of Indigenous maps were unlike European cartographic conventions.

The number of days journey from one identified mountain to the next communicated the distance travelled. The rivers, in turn, served as additional landmarks the traveller had to cross and indicated the presence of much needed water. For Fidler, the map showcased the extensive territory the Siksika occupied and how they employed both mountains and rivers in navigation. Fidler understood that the local Indigenous people possessed a thorough knowledge of the territory and knew how best to navigate it. The inclusion of "the war track" shows two different places where the war party crossed the mountains.

The war track follows a small loop beyond the mountain line before coming back to the Plains. The route hits on two different parts of the mountain line which illustrates that the Blackfoot knew of at least two places they could pass through the mountains and access the territory beyond. The map does not indicate any sort of direction for the war track. The course of the dotted line that represents the war track is very intentional as it circumvents topographical features and intersects the rivers often at, or nearing, a right angle. The right angle between the war track and the rivers reinforces the importance of the intersection as a key component of navigation.

The war track intersects with the mountain line twice, once alongside the Missouri river and again next to "ma pis sees tok q," or "the Belt" mountain. The war track follows the "Ki apte ta he" river toward the mountains and then jogs slightly to the left, intersecting with the mountains right beside "The Belt." The "Ki apte ta he" is the first tributary on the left side, the southside, of the Missouri river on the map. The war track follows a straight line from Chesterfield House to where the "Ki apte ta he" tributary joins the Missouri, where the track changes direction and heads toward the mountain line. The only alteration in course is to pass between the Cypress Hills and what is marked on the map as the "Height of Land." The Cypress Hills, Sweet Grass hills, or any height of land, were important vantage points while travelling across the Plains as they allowed the traveler a more expansive view from the top. The war party made use of the Cypress Hills and Sweet Grass Hills on their way out and their way back.

Overall, Ak ko mokki's 1801 map contains a great amount of information: Indigenous group locations and population estimates, rivers, significant and useful mountains, travel distances, and the location of a recent war track. More importantly, the map introduced Fidler to a new set of cartographic conventions quite dissimilar from the European conventions Fidler

knew well. Regardless, Fidler knew the map and the information it contained was of great value to him as a surveyor, offering an additional source and perspective, and to the fur trade overall. What he did not know, was how to translate the map for European use.

Fidler acquired more maps, from Ak ko mokki and others, and the Indigenous cartographic style persists throughout the subsequent maps. It seems Fidler struggled to reconcile his European, scientific, surveyor methods with the Indigenous maps and wayfinding. In the summer of 1802, he sent a letter to the London Committee with a copy of Ak ko mokki's map and a lengthy explanation to help the committee decipher the layout of the map and its features.[208] The copy Fidler sent to London is crowded by legends titled "Explanation" as Fidler worked to translate as much of the map as he could for the committee. The map itself, however, is almost identical to Ak ko mokki's original illustration with a mountain line and a leaf vein pattern of tributary rivers coming off the line of mountains and eventually meeting the main stem river.[209] Fidler's mountain line is no longer perfectly horizontal across the page but slopes down on the left and curving gently downward on the far left, southeast.

[208] D.W. Moodie and Barry Kaye, "The Ak Ko Mok Ki Map," *The Beaver* 307, no. 4 (spring 1977): 13-15. The article includes a typed copy of Fidler's letter.
[209] Ibid., 6-7.

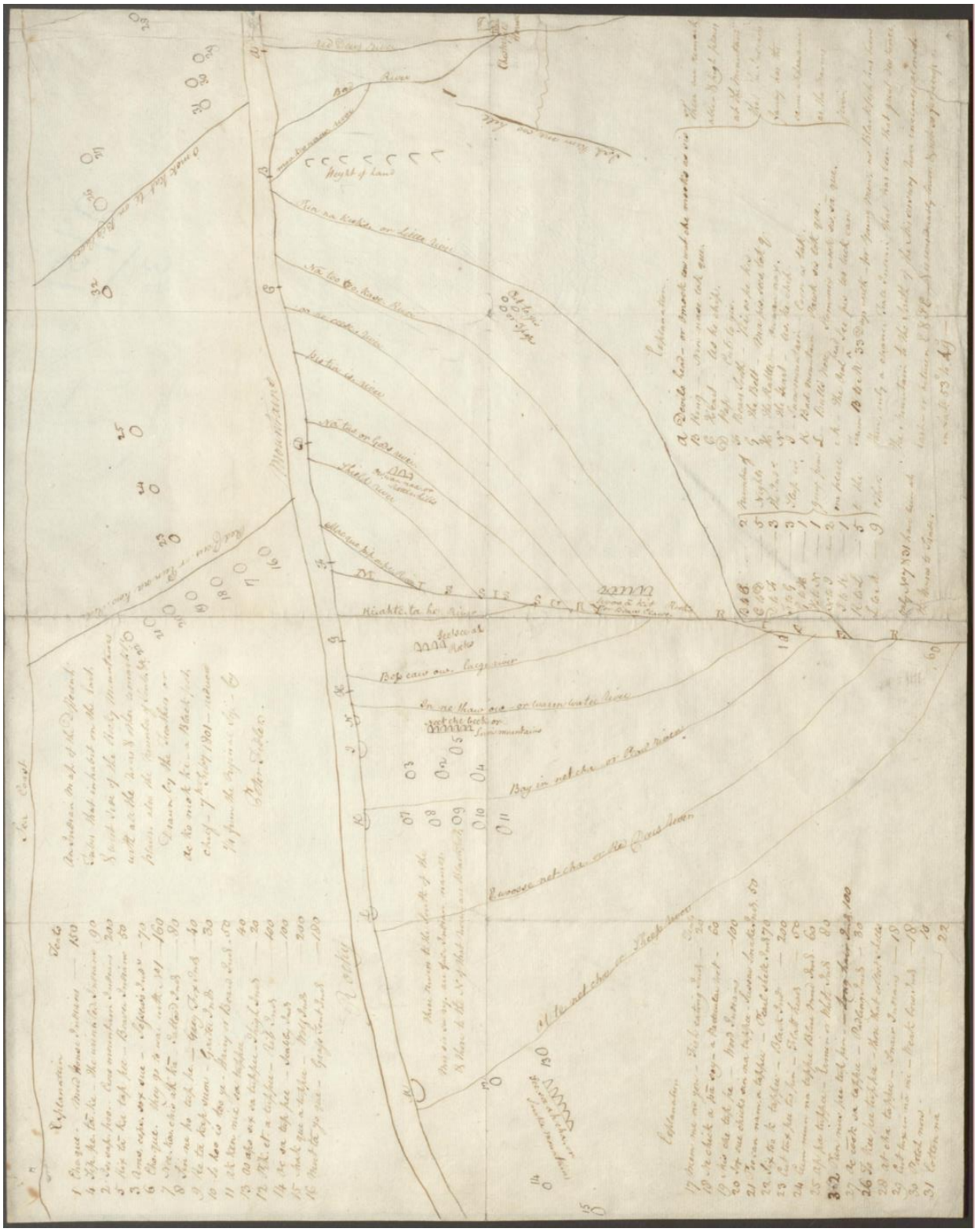

Figure 4-3, Fidler's Redrawn Ak ko mokki's Map (sent to London) HBCA G.1/25

Although, Fidler understood a significant amount of what the map communicated, he still titled the mountain line the "Rocky Mountains." The Blackfoot and Gros Ventre identified the mountains they could see from the prairies, not necessarily the Rocky Mountains, especially south of the Missouri river. In the letter Fidler included with the map, he stated, "I have put down the rivers & other remarkable places, solely from the Indian map."[210] He was careful to communicate his source and that his map was supplied by a secondary source. The letter also relayed Fidler's awareness of how the Blackfoot map conventions differed from European mapping.

He acknowledged how proportions were not a consideration in Ak ko mokki's map which is one of its greatest distinctions from a European map. He also wrote, "This Indian map conveys much information where European documents fail; and on some occasions are of much use."[211] The statement suggests that Fidler understood the value of Ak ko mokki's map once properly interpreted. Other statements in the letter, however, reveal his inability to abandon his European cartographic conventions when he named the mountain line the "Rocky Mountains" instead of the range of mountains visible from the Plains. The assumption that the mountains on the map refer to the Rocky Mountains and the continental divide demonstrates how difficult it would be to refrain from imposing European cartographic conventions on a different style of map. Even Fidler, who recognized the value of the map and all the information it encompassed, still clung to the European cartographic conventions.

Binnema believes Fidler would have done a better job of translating Ak ko mokki's map into a European style map than London cartographer Aaron Arrowsmith did, and Binnema is

[210] Ibid., 13.
[211] Ibid.

probably right.[212] It seems clear that Fidler had no confidence in his ability to convert the Indigenous style map into one of European cartographic style. Fidler was caught between two worlds, yet he understood the context within which Ak ko mokki's created his map. Fidler's misunderstandings of it demonstrate how he struggled to shift his European perspective to accommodate an alternate point of view, all the while recognizing the value that Indigenous mapmaking provided. His letter to London claimed that the mountains named along the range were "parts of the mountain considerably overtop the rest."[213]

Fidler may have better understood and explained the distinction of the marked mountains if he had traveled along the eastern slope of the mountains with Ak ko mokki. After over a decade of life in Rupert's Land, Fidler recognized the value in being able to navigate the landscape as Indigenous peoples did. After all, plotting courses, distances, and geographic coordinates across the Plains to create a European map of the territory required time and resources.

Fidler employed the regional knowledge of his Indigenous allies to further his understanding of the territory while maintaining the post. He had to balance his roles as surveyor and as the one in charge of Chesterfield House, as trade was paramount. Ak ko mokki's map was readymade for immediate use so long as the user understood the map's conventions. His interest in Indigenous mapping did not diminish his commitment to his survey work. Indigenous maps offered an additional source of territorial knowledge. Throughout his life, he continued to meticulously chart courses and distances when traveling in addition to a multitude of astronomical recordings carefully registered in the back of all his journals.

---

[212] Theodore Binnema, "How Does a Map Mean? Old Swan's Map of 1801 and the Blackfoot World," in *From Rupert's Land to Canada*, ed. by Theodore Binnema, Gerhard J. Ens, and R.C. Macleod (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2001), 208.
[213] D.W. Moodie and Barry Kaye, "The Ak Ko Mok Ki Map," *The Beaver* 307, no. 4 (spring 1977): 13.

In some ways, Thompson's approach was much simpler as he strictly made his own maps and consulted other European surveyors. Fidler added an additional and complicated layer by trying to interpret Indigenous maps, based on disparate cartographic values and conventions. Indeed, the maps were only part of Fidler's acquisition of knowledge. Fidler composed word lists in different Indigenous languages at the back of his journals.[214] He recognized the value of understanding as much as possible regarding his Indigenous partners, and their perception of the territory. But, as Barbara Belyea has stated, there was no common ground. "European and Amerindian conceptions of space are essentially different and remain incapable of merged combination."[215] Fidler knew that he could not redraw Ak ko mokki's map in a European style, but he did incorporate Indigenous conventions in his map making. J.B. Tyrell recognized Fidler's deviation from European cartographic conventions when he commented on a small map Tyrrell included in his publication. A map of Cumberland Lake drawn by Fidler has a footnote in which Tyrrell states, "Fidler's map of Cumberland lake gives a general idea of its shape, though it is neither on a definite scale, nor is it oriented in any definite direction."[216] Though Tyrrell drew no connection to Indigenous mapping, Tyrrell felt compelled to note the simplistic style of Fidler's map for his readers.

Fidler internalized some other Indigenous cartographic conventions. He seemed to be caught between the two styles of maps, recognizing the strengths and weaknesses of both. Two maps Fidler composed of the Red River District, dated 1819 and 1820, showcase the way Fidler blended European and Indigenous mapping conventions. The rivers in the Red River District

---

[214] HBCA B.34/a/1 fos. 17, 21, 26, 31, 36. HBCA B.39/a/2 fo. 86. These two journals offer great examples of the word lists Fidler compiled.
[215] Barbara Belyea, *Dark Storm Moving West* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2007), 73.
[216] J.B. Tyrrell, *Journals of Samuel Hearne and Philip Turnor Between the Years 1774 and 1792*, ed. J.B. Tyrrell (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1934), 485, see footnote.

maps are not straight but somewhat circuitous in a more European style, but when tributaries meet the main river, the intersection is nearly perpendicular. The perpendicular joint focuses more on the fact that the two waterways meet rather than prioritizing topographical accuracy as a European map would.

The smaller lakes identified on the maps are plain shapes, circle, bean, and teardrop shapes. Fidler's shorelines delineate larger coves and peninsulas in lakes Winnipeg, Winnipegosis, and Manitoba. He also marked portages, rapids, heights of land, forts, and the Manitoba district's boundaries. In this way, the Red River District map possess a visual likeness to the Blackfoot maps more than they do to a European map. Although the rivers wind across the map, their inclusion assists in defining the space within the map's borders. Furthermore, the tributaries would serve as helpful markers while traveling along the river. The 1819 map was drawn within a grid of longitudes and latitudes, while the 1820 map has no such grid. The Assiniboine River of the 1820 map is represented as a long sweeping curve on the bottom of the map, rejecting any European conventions of marking the twists and turns along the river's path; it appears Fidler favoured the Indigenous conventions of marking a river.

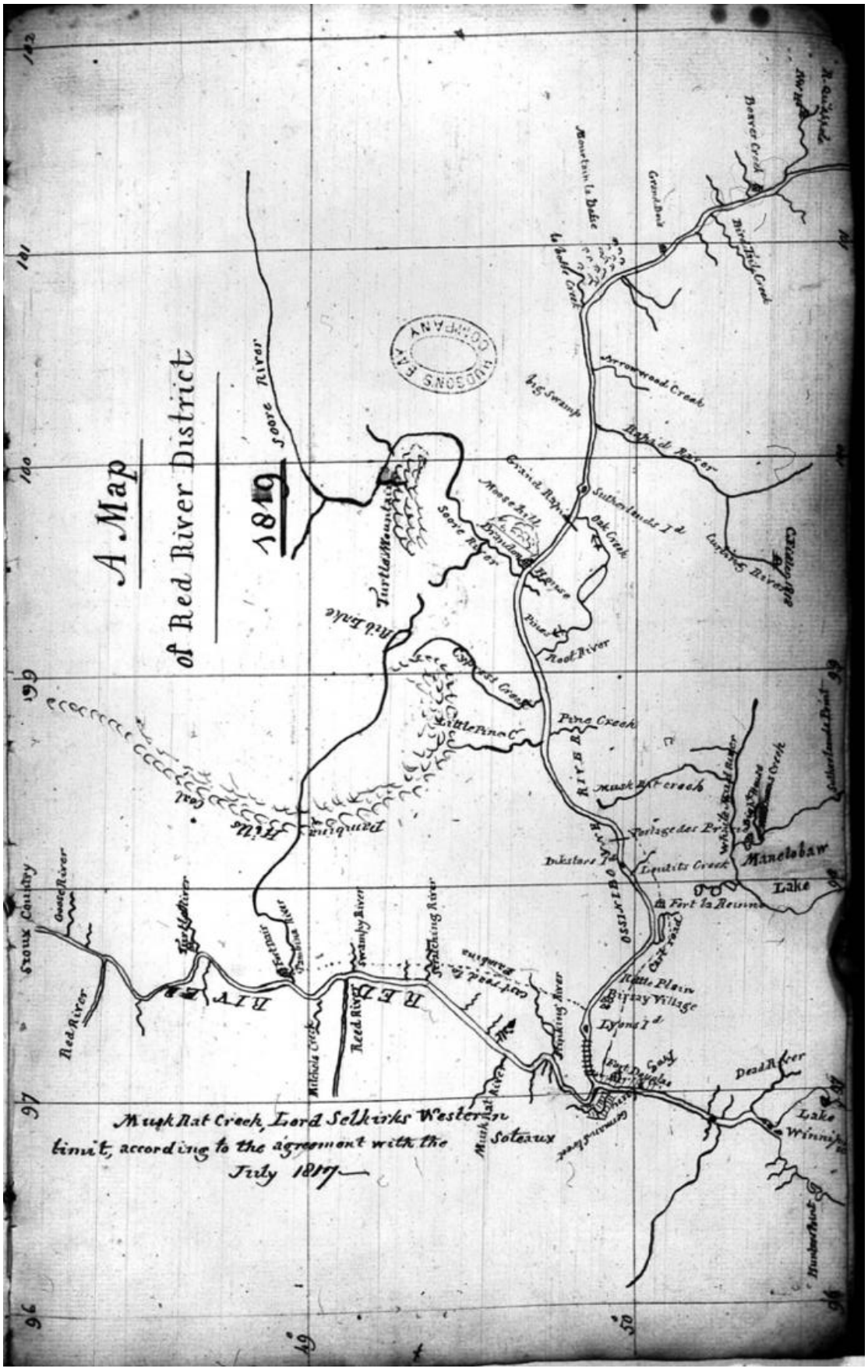

Figure 4-4, Fidler's 1819 Red River District Report Map HBCA B.22/e/1

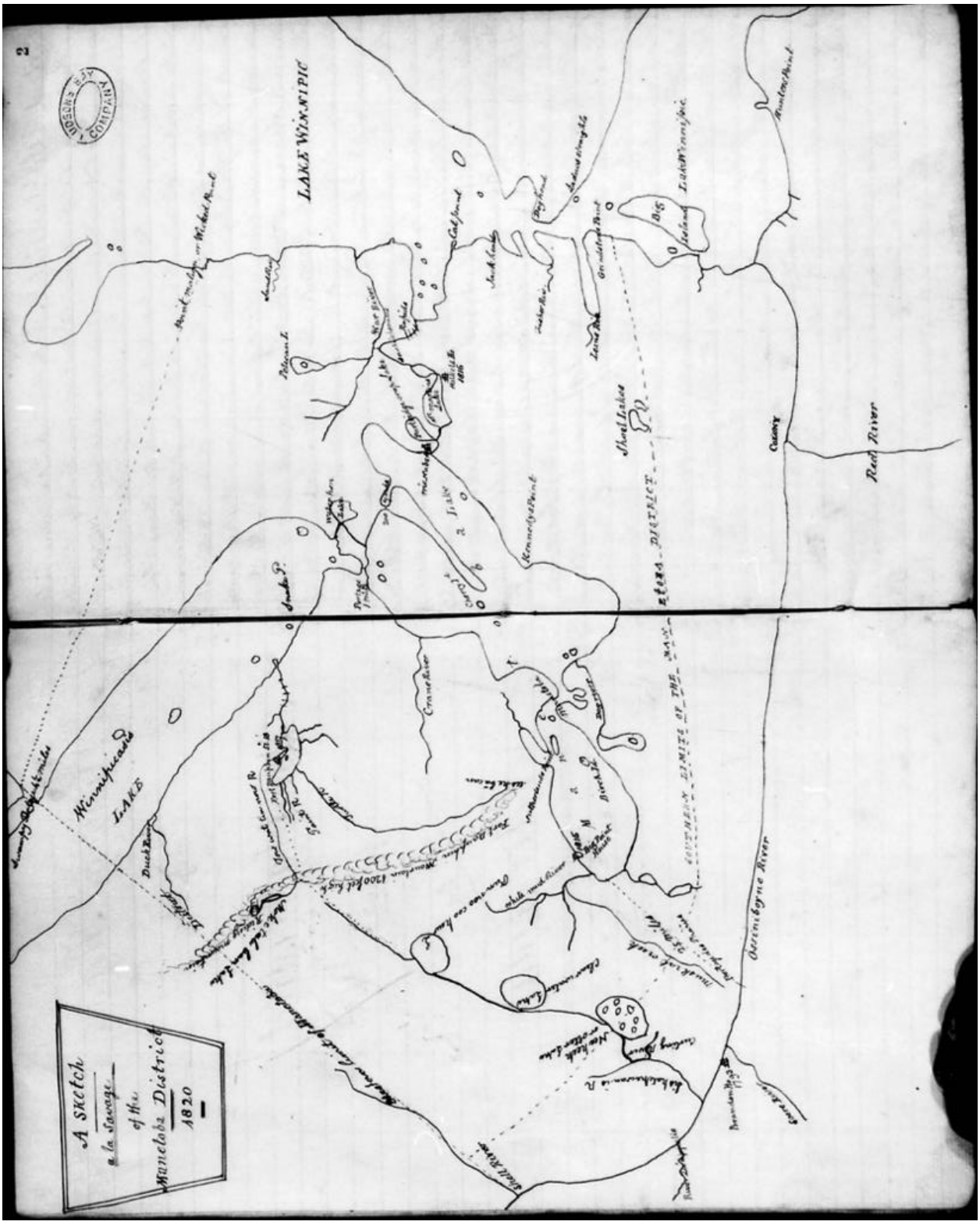

Figure 4-5, Fidler's 1820 Manitoba District Report Map HBCA B.51/e/1

Fidler's Manitoba District maps offer insight into the way Fidler favoured the functionality of Indigenous maps by employing a straightforward layout which acknowledged the region's topography without the precision of European cartography. Fidler employed the British convention of cardinal directions and positioning north at the top of his maps. His mapping style became a hybrid, incorporating what he favoured of both European and Indigenous mapping conventions. Unlike Thompson, Fidler never left the fur trade world. He spent the last decade of his fur trade career, and his life, within the Manitoba District. Though he composed few maps, Fidler continued to diligently record geographic co-ordinates, astronomical observations, temperatures, and weather until May of 1821. Fidler had recurring health problems beginning in late 1819 which continued to worsen until his death on November 17th, 1822.[217] The HBC relieved Fidler of his duties in the summer of 1822 due to poor health, with a continued salary to the end of the year. The HBC planned to move him and his family to a lot on the Red River Settlement in the spring of 1823.[218]

David Thompson, like Fidler, recorded his daily observations habitually for most of his life.[219] Thompson was also an eager and intelligent student of scientific methods. Thompson was interested in determining precise coordinates. He understood that his scientific contributions were of value. He wrote, "it is tedious to the reader to attend to these calculations, and yet to the enquiring mind they are necessary that he may know the ground on which they are based, for the age of guessing is passed away, and the traveller is expected to give his reasons for what he

[217] HBCA B.51/a/2, 4 November 1819. Almost all secondary sources record Fidler dying on 17 December 1822, but the Swan River Account book for 1822-23, records him dying at Fort Dauphin on 17 November 1822. B.213/d/11, fo. 53d.
[218] HBCA D.4/1, 27 July 1822, fo. 68.
[219] William E. Moreau, introduction to *The Writings of David Thompson Volume I*, ed. William E. Moreau (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009), xxx.

asserts."[220] It is clear that Thompson felt an obligation to record and provide the most accurate information he could as a surveyor. He expressed a deep appreciation for the sciences throughout his life and he respected those around him who pursued scientific reasoning of the world they observed.

In his manuscript, Thompson situates himself in a position of superiority to his travel companions. In one instance, he recognized camping sites along the river as they traveled where the brigade preceding their party down river had spent each night. Thompson employed his observations to calculate when they would come upon the brigade ahead of them. Thompson realized that a windy day, which didn't impede their progress on the river, sheltered from the wind by the surrounding woods, would significantly slow the brigade ahead of them, who had no wind shelter on Lake Winnipeg. He stated his prediction aloud, to his companions, asserting when they would come upon the brigade, and he was correct. He described the event in his manuscript as a simple application of observation but stated, "one party seemed delighted in being credulous, the other in exaggeration; such are ignorant men, who never give themselves a moments reflection."[221] The statement suggests that he valued individuals who were thoughtful and took the time to reflect upon their observations and employ reason to understand things as opposed to believing what they are told without question. In this recollection, Thompson presents himself as superior to the others in his brigade because of his awareness and ability to reflect. This air of superiority is a key element present throughout his manuscript.

In another instance, when Thompson and his men first saw the Pacific Ocean at Fort Astoria, Thompson was delighted. He recalled how his men were disappointed and found they

[220] David Thompson, *The Writings of David Thompson Volume I*, ed. William E. Moreau (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009), 256.
[221] Ibid., 117.

were unable to comprehend the vastness of the sea as it resembled the Great Lakes they knew well. He wrote, "from the Ocean they expected a more boundless view, a something beyond the power of their senses which they could not describe; and my informing them, that directly opposite to us, at the distance of five thousand miles was the Empire of Japan added nothing to their Ideas, but a Map would."[222] This comment communicates the great value he placed on maps and mapmaking. He took the opportunity to highlight the importance of his role as surveyor and cartographer and how maps offered greater perspective for people, helping them understand their position relative to a much larger geographical area, beyond what the eye can see.

Both accounts are of interest as his manuscript characterizes his role as surveyor and astronomer as something superior and even incomprehensible to his Canadian companions. He used his manuscript to promote himself and the importance of his role as surveyor in the fur trade. The tone is noteworthy as a reading of Thompson's daily journals, recorded throughout his career in the fur trade, does not convey the same air of superiority. A review of Thompson's journals is more revealing of his initial impressions of the mountains, his commitment to approaching everything with a scientific perspective, with only hints of his Indigenous informants, with an additional element that displays the influence of British literary conventions in portraying a picturesque landscape in writing.

Unlike Fidler's Indigenous maps, Thompson's conceptions of the mountains, more specifically the eastern slope of the Rocky Mountains, is understood best by evaluating the word-images found in his journals. The North West Company's journals and records were unlike those of the HBC, which required detailed accounts of the trade. The NWC servants were required to

[222] David Thompson, *The Writings of David Thompson Volume II*, ed. William E. Moreau (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015), 229.

keep financial accounts and what they chose to report beyond that varied.[223] Barbara Belyea published a collection of Thompson's journals with a particular focus on his travels west across the Rocky Mountains and the time he spent trading and exploring the Columbia watershed.[224] Thompson's daily journals during the years he spent in the vicinity of the mountains reflect his HBC roots by his highly detailed accounts. The journals showcase a more European conception of the Rocky Mountains.

Ian MacLaren examines how Thompson, among other fur traders, often described the landscape in ways that echoed contemporary British literary conventions. Thompson stands out to MacLaren as he often supplemented the scenic descriptions with objective scientific observations and Indigenous narratives.[225] Thompson tended to invalidate Indigenous stories with his scientific observations. The second half of this chapter will examine how Thompson conceptualized the mountains through a European cultural and scientific lens.

There are several accounts of his initial observations from the eastern slope of the Rockies as he and his party were approaching the mountains with the objective of crossing over the height of land to the Columbia region. On Monday, October 6th, 1800, Thompson, and his men followed the Red Deer River upstream, making their way to the mountains, loaded with supplies and trade goods. Thompson recorded, "Here we had a grand view of the Rocky Mountains, forming a concave segment of a Circle, and lying from one Point to another about SbE & NbW. All it's snowy cliffs to the Southward were bright with the Beams of the Sun, while the most northern were darkened by a Tempest."[226] Thompson took the time to examine

---

[223] Barbara Belyea, preface to *Columbia Journals*, ed. Barbara Belyea (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), x.
[224] David Thompson, *Columbia Journals*, ed. Barbara Belyea (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007).
[225] I. S. MacLaren, "David Thompson's Imaginative Mapping of the Canadian Northwest 1784-1812," *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature* 15.2 (Apr. 1984): 92.
[226] David Thompson, *Columbia Journals*, ed. Barbara Belyea (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), 4.

his surroundings and record his observations. He recorded the geographical features of the river valley he was traveling through and hypotheses on how the landscape had evolved.

He included as much detail as he thought relevant to his investigation and understanding of the area. He was a curious individual who sought to understand the world around him through a scientific lens, and added a more descriptive statement regarding beams of light illuminating one side while a storm darkened the other side. In contrast to Fidler's journals, Thompson's writing suggests little consultation with any of his Indigenous travel companions, or at the very least, less value placed upon his informants than his first-hand evaluation. Though he discussed his theories and observations with others and sought their knowledge, his records of those discussions and what his companions shared are minimal.[227] His journals primarily contain his first-hand observations.

In addition to the word-images found throughout his journals, several of Thompson's sketches of the Rocky Mountains still survive. J.B. Tyrell was the first to publish Thompson's manuscript and he included copies of the surviving sketches along with a large four-piece copy of the map of North America Thompson produced for the NWC in 1813 and 1814, at the end of his fur trade career.[228] The sketches are elaborate as they define the different features and variations on the rock faces of the mountain range, as well as snow, ice, possibly even glaciers, and vegetation. In a journal entry from Sunday October 12th, 1800, Thompson wrote, "I went up a high Knowl & took a rough Sketch of the Appearance of the Mountains."[229] Though the overall objective was to cross the Rockies and trade with Indigenous group west of the mountain range,

---

[227] Ibid., 12. October 21st, 1800, Thompson wrote, "Conversed much with them [the Ktunaxa] about the Mountain and the Rivers and the Lake on the other Side [west of the Rocky Mountains].
[228] David Thompson, *David Thompson's Narrative of His Explorations in Western America, 1784-1812*, ed. J.B. Tyrell (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1916), sketches can be found as flyleaves in the back of the book.
[229] David Thompson, *Columbia Journals*, ed. Barbara Belyea (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), 6.

Thompson continued to record as much as he could of the territory he traversed. Word-images were not sufficient as a record for him, so he supplemented his writing with illustrations of what he surveyed.

Figure 4-6, Sketches of Elevations or Mountains, [ca. 1809] David Thompson
Thompson (David) Papers, Ms. Coll. 21, item 5, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto

The tone of his word-images referencing the mountains varied. As they traveled southward along the eastern slope of the Rockies, with an intention to cross west over the mountains, Thompson perceived the range as an "impenetrable Bank," yet "The View is grand in a high Degree: on our right we have the Bow Hills, lofty in themselves and Brown with Woods, above them stately rises the Rocky Mountains vast and abrupt whose Tops pierce the clouds – on our left, before & behind us, a verdant Ocean."[230] Beyond his scientific lens, Thompson was enchanted by the grandeur of the mountain peaks in contrast to the flat and open landscape of the

[230] Ibid., 13-14.

Plains and his descriptions of the mountains can often convey an emotional element. Ten days later, their course upstream following the Bow River began to narrow. Thompson found an opportunity to ascend a nearby mountain for a better view.[231] Thompson described his view from the top of the mountain in the following entry:

> Our View from the Heights to the Eastward was vast & unbounded the Eye had not Strength to discriminate its Termination: to the Westward Hills & Rocks rose to our View covered with Snow, here rising, there subsiding, but their Tops nearly of an equal Height every where. Never did I behold so just, so perfect a Resemblance to the Waves of the Ocean in the wintry Storm. When looking upon them and attentively considering their wild Order and Appearance, the Imagination is apt to say, these must once have been Liquid, and in the State when swelled to its greatest Agitation, suddenly congealed and made Solid by Power Omnipotent.[232]

The entry is of interest as he described the Plains as ocean only days before this entry. Thompson's use of ocean as an analogy to describe both the Plains and then the Rocky Mountains is his way of describing the endlessness of both geographical features. These word-images depict Thompson's keen observational skills, but they are not necessarily through a scientific lens. His reference to the "Power Omnipotent" expressed his awe rather than a scientific hypothesis regarding the emergence of the geological formation. The passage conveys a sublime landscape, which demonstrates Thompson's European view of the scene. Both these entries were recorded at the beginning of arduous journeys. Thompson's description of the mountains, that he intended to physically overcome, reaching territory beyond the mountain range, likely influenced his perspective of "the Rocky Mountains vast and abrupt whose Tops pierce the clouds."[233] The voyage was an intimidating prospect and Thompson's descriptions reflect the sentiment.

---

[231] Ibid., 18-19.
[232] Ibid., 19.
[233] Ibid., 13.

In 1801, Thompson and a party of NWC men attempted to cross the mountains by following the Saskatchewan and Ram rivers into the Rockies. The attempt was unsuccessful, and the tone of the journal is gloomy from the start as Thompson spoke disparagingly of the guide chosen for the voyage. Unusually heavy rains that year made the road difficult for the men and their horses. The gloomy tone persisted when he described their surroundings. On June 8th, Thompson recorded, "The scene around us has nothing of the agreable in it: all Nature seems to frown, the Mountains are dreary, rude & wild beyond the power of the pencil."[234] The tone of this entry aligns with Thompson's frustrations and their unsuccessful attempt to find a feasible route over the Rockies and beyond.

There is evidence of Indigenous information in Thompson's journals. During a conversation in "the Foxe's Head's tent" in November 1800, Thompson learnt a great deal.[235] He recorded, "here we discoursed about the Country …. They told us, from where they are now Tenting to the Missisouri was 10 days Walk & no more, and a Horseman would only sleep 5 Nights to that Place."[236] The entry reveals a significant conversation where Thompson sought to obtain information about the region from its Indigenous inhabitants. He found that much of their conversation was "not worth inserting here [in the journal]," but that he also got "information of all the Brooks & Rivulets which fall into the Bow River from the Mountain southward of its Source."[237] The entry is evidence of Thompson surveying his Indigenous companions for geographic information of the region.

[234] Ibid., 24.
[235] Ibid., 15.
[236] Ibid., 15.
[237] Ibid., 16.

An entry from September 17th, 1807, offers a second example of a journal entry in which Thompson mentioned a conversation he had with a group he referred to as "the Lake Indians."[238] Belyea adds a note to the entry from a variant journal of the same day. Thompson stated, "They drew me out a Sketch of their Country, & to near the Sea, which they say I may go to from hence & be back in a month's hence [*sic*], were it Summer Time."[239] This interaction took place with Indigenous inhabitants west of the Rocky Mountains, but it is revealing. The entry proves that Thompson solicited Indigenous people regarding their knowledge of the landscape, the total area they inhabited, and how they were able to best communicate such information. The sketch of their country was likely something resembling Ak ko mokki's map, yet there is no evidence to suggest that Thompson copied the sketch into his journals as Fidler had done numerous times. Thompson incorporated the information into his understanding of the territory and continued to perceive the landscape from his position as a European and a surveyor.

Based on his diligent survey and recording of observations he assembled a map for the NWC upon his retirement in 1812. The map is representative of Thompson's ability to consolidate all his recorded observations, from the navigational courses he plotted while traveling, to the tables of astronomical observations he calculated when he stopped. The result is comprehensive and includes the survey work of other European fur trade surveyors, Philip Turnor, Sir Alexander Mackenzie, and John Stewart,[240] but there is no suggestion of any Indigenous knowledge included in the map.

The map is a great part of Thompson's legacy as a version of it remains on display in the Archives of Ontario. Thompson's manuscript, which he wrote at the end of his life, was possible

---

[238] Ibid., 67.
[239] Ibid., 227.
[240] David Thompson, *David Thompson's Narrative of His Explorations in Western America, 1784-1812*, ed. J.B. Tyrell (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1916), reproduction of Thompson's map in pocket at end of volume.

because of the detailed records he kept throughout his fur trade career. Thompson was able to make his *Map of the North-West Territory of the Province of Canada* because of his diligent record keeping and survey work throughout his travels in the fur trade. These two documents were recognized as valuable contributions that furthered European conceptions of a territory that was unreachable for most at the time. A glance at this map in detail (see next image), however, shows that it was entirely within the conventions of European mapmaking.

Figure 4-7, Map of the North-West Territory of the Province of Canada (1814) David Thompson fonds, Reference Code: F 443, R-C(U), AO 1541, Archives of Ontario, I0030317

Figure 4-8, Detail of Thompson 1814 Map showing the area from the Mountains to the Pacific

When Thompson retired, he moved back east. A letter he wrote to a friend in 1810 expressed his intentions to retire in the fall of 1812 and move his entire family east into the province of Canada to ensure his children had the opportunity to receive "an equal and good education."[241] The letter expressed how he was "getting tired of such constant hard journeys; for the last 20 months [he] spent only barely two months under the shelter of a hut, all the rest has been in my tent, and there is little likelihood the next 12 months will be much otherwise."[242] He looked forward to his life after the fur trade and wanted to live with his family in a British colony, away from life at the post.

Thompson is responsible, in part, for creating his legacy. Even his decision to leave the HBC and enter service with the NWC suggests Thompson's interest in self-promotion early on. If he hadn't consolidated his career of survey work in a large map, his maps would have remained in journals as Fidler's have. His manuscript is a self-promotion in which he emphasized the importance of his role as "Astronomer and Surveyor."[243] Tyrrell took up the cause and in the 1880s published the first account of Thompson's Journey.[244] It was Tyrrell who later claimed Thompson deserved "his rightful place as one of the greatest geographers of the world."[245] Although Tyrrell included one of Fidler's journals in a subsequent publication of Samuel Hearne's and Philip Turnor's journals, and mentions his surveying, he does not give Fidler the same praise that he awarded Thompson.[246] He was impressed by the accuracy of

---

[241] David Thompson, *Columbia Journals*, ed. Barbara Belyea (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), 254.
[242] Ibid.
[243] William E. Moreau, introduction to *The Writings of David Thompson Volume I*, ed. William E. Moreau (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009), xxxvii.
[244] J.B. Tyrrell, *A brief narrative of the journey of David Thompson in North-Western America* (Toronto: The Copp Clark Company, 1888).
[245] J.B. Tyrrell, preface to *David Thompson's Narrative of His Explorations in Western America, 1784-1812,* ed. J.B. Tyrrell (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1916), xix.
[246] J.B. Tyrrell, introduction to *Journals of Samuel Hearne and Philip Turnor Between the Years 1774 and 1792*, ed. J.B. Tyrrell (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1934), 89-93.

Thompson's maps and sought out the sources. He describes his experience as he retraced Thompson's footsteps as he traveled and surveyed western Canada for the Geological Survey of Canada. Tyrrell felt connected to Thompson and his scientific work and elevated him when he published Thompson's manuscript.

Fidler left no such legacy. He lived and died in the fur trade. His family stayed with him and though there is a record of his sons' employment with the HBC, only one was employed with the HBC after his father's death.[247] He never composed a large-scale map like Thompson did, nor did he pursue any survey work beyond the employ of the HBC.[248] Fidler's legacy is confined to the journals he recorded and compiled along with any correspondence he had during that time. There are no letters expressing his desire to move his family away from the fur trade for any greater education. Fidler was 53 years old when he died and had yet to retire from his service with the HBC.

Without the financial strife that troubled Thompson in his eighties, it is possible that Fidler could have written a manuscript of his life and career in the fur trade. There is evidence to suggest Fidler would retire to the Red River Settlement. A letter written to Fidler in July of 1822 from the HBC's Northern Department governor, George Simpson, noted that "I would recommend that yourself and your Family remove to Red River Colony where the Gentleman in charge of that District will see you settled in a Lot of Land."[249] Fidler died before this occurred.

Fidler's and Thompson's conceptions of the Rocky Mountains as viewed from the eastern slope are reflected in their lives. David Thompson was determined to be recognized and

---

[247] HBCA Biographical Sheet, "Fidler, George, (b. 1800) (fl. 1822-1826)," JHB/ek; July l988; Revised: Oct./88; June/99/mhd.
[248] There is record that Fidler composed a twelve-sheet map from 1807-8 and several regional maps from 1811-2 that no longer exist. Ted Binnema, *Enlightened Zeal: the Hudson's Bay Company and scientific networks, 1670-1870* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), 117.
[249] HBCA D.4/1, fos. 68-68d.

validated as an astronomer and surveyor in British society, beyond the fur trade. Thompson also sought to promote his family to succeed in British society, making his fur trade career a jumping-off point for him and his family. He observed and conceptualized the mountains first-hand, and, though he was informed and influenced by his Indigenous guides and companions, all his records align more with European conventions, both literary and scientific. The word-images found in his journals, along with sketches of the mountains, communicate a western style which was consolidated into the large-scale map he created for the NWC upon retirement.

Peter Fidler was determined to gain as much information as possible from the Indigenous inhabitants of the region and forwarded this information to the Governor and Committee. He valued the knowledge of the Siksika chief, Ak ko mokki, as he and his people dominated the territory. As he was often left to manage a post, he surveyed as he moved to and from various posts. He was never solely a surveyor as trading remained the top priority for the HBC. He never faced the mountains with the prospect of penetrating and overcoming them to reach the far side, which makes his perspective distinct from that of Thompson's. Like Thompson, Fidler rigorously recorded astronomical observations and kept precise courses and distances when traveling.

Fidler's Red River District maps reflect how much Fidler internalized Indigenous cartographic conventions as he mimicked a similar style in his district surveys later in life. Without any self-promotion, Fidler disappeared into the background of the historical record until the latter half of the twentieth century.[250] In comparison to Thompson, Fidler's role in Canadian history remains minimal. Belyea argues that Fidler had a "chameleon's talent for adapting to his

[250] J. G. MacGregor, *Peter Fidler: Canada's Forgotten Surveyor 1769-1822* (Toronto: The Canadian Publishers, 1966) was the first publication focused on Fidler.

hosts' culture."[251] Fidler worked hard to connect with and understand the knowledge of Indigenous cultures even while he seemed unable to translate what he learned into a European framework. He may have recognized how much knowledge would be lost or misconstrued if he attempted to translate what Ak ko mokki and others shared with him. Fidler knew he could not recreate Ak ko mokki's map in a European style that demanded courses, distances, and geographic coordinates, and yet he continued to keep thorough recordings. Fidler was aware that the information within Ak ko mokki's map offered a vast amount of valuable information that could serve the company in trade pursuits. Fidler's continued practice of collecting Indigenous maps, crediting his sources, and incorporating some Indigenous cartographic conventions suggests Fidler placed genuine value and respect in his Indigenous sources.

Thompson and Fidler stand in contrast to one another; as their surveyor careers advanced, their findings became more disparate. Thompson coupled a scientific presentation with British literary conventions of a sublime landscape. Fidler, though he continued to record daily scientific observations, focused on more ethnographic and lived experiences to better inform the HBC. Fidler's conception of the mountains was strongly influenced by his Indigenous informants. The maps he collected maintained a strong focus on the mountain range and the rivers as they played a central part in navigation for those residing along the eastern slope of the mountains. The Blackfoot maps and Fidler's position on the Plains shaped Fidler's conception of the Rocky Mountains. Fidler conceptualized the range from a more Indigenous perspective by perceiving the mountains as "Backbone-of-the-World."[252]

---

[251] Barbara Belyea, *Dark Storm Moving West* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2007), 126.
[252] Walter McClintock, *The Old North Trail, or, Life, Legends, and Religion of the Blackfeet Indians* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1910), 13.

As such, Thompson's and Fidler's conceptions of the Rocky Mountains are somewhat divergent perspectives. Thompson was able to deliver his conception and knowledge of the Rocky Mountains in the form of a European style map and narrative that was comprehensible to a colonial audience. Thompson also had the opportunity, plus a financial necessity, to promote his career and the important role surveyors played in the fur trade. Thompson's manuscript is more of a narrative for the public, than the chronicle layout of daily fur trade journals. The reflection on his life allowed him to compose a literary work for an audience beyond the fur trade which Tyrrell recognized and thus published. MacLaren's claim of Thompson's manuscript as an early Canadian literary work is plausible.[253] Fidler learnt and acquired an extensive amount of knowledge from his Indigenous companions through communication and keen observation, but he illustrated it only in his journals. He died before retirement, and it is unlikely he would have publicized himself better though he had a wealth of written material to work from.

[253] I. S. MacLaren, "David Thompson's Imaginative Mapping of the Canadian Northwest 1784-1812," *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature* 15.2 (Apr. 1984): 89-106.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

Peter Fidler and David Thompson's conceptions of the Rocky Mountains, Indigenous knowledge of the mountain range, and representations of the Rockies demonstrate the complexity of landscape and how people perceive it. The two surveyors kept a thorough record throughout their careers which facilitates a study of their perceptions of the Rocky Mountains and how they formed those conceptions. Their survey careers began at the same time as Turnor taught the two of them at Cumberland House in 1789-90. The two retained their surveyor education and remained committed to the work; their lifelong detailed journals of calculations and observations are a testament to their dedication to survey work. Their careers progressed in different directions, and they perceived their surroundings differently, but they had similar goals to map the territory. Trade was prioritized over mapping and surveying so that neither Fidler nor Thompson was able to fully commit their time to surveying. Thus, their conceptions of the Rocky Mountains were shaped by how they acquired knowledge and how they interpreted that knowledge.

Fidler only ever viewed the Rocky Mountains from the Plains. His view was heavily influenced by that of the Blackfoot, who resided primarily on the Plains. Fidler's maps echo the Blackfoot conception of the Rockies as the "Backbone-of-the-World."[254] Most of Fidler's surveys were conducted from his position at the post he oversaw. He relied on his Blackfoot sources to gain a greater understanding of the territory. Over time, he came to understand many aspects of Indigenous mapping conventions. Fidler respected that a Plains perspective was a central element to the composition of the Blackfoot maps, as they were used to navigate the

[254] Walter McClintock, *The Old North Trail, or, Life, Legends, and Religion of the Blackfeet Indians* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1910), 13.

region. He worked to transmit the information they contained in a redrawn map and an accompanying letter he sent to the HBC's Governor and Committee in London in 1802.

Fidler was a skilled surveyor who charted courses and distances as he traveled. After training with Philip Turnor, Fidler took daily observations, to determine geographic coordinates, and made it a lifelong practice. We can only glean Fidler's ideas of landscape from his daily journals and observations. His habitual practice of collecting sketches and maps from his companions, other traders, and Indigenous people suggest a continuous effort to understand the country he was trading in. The Blackfoot maps were a way for Fidler to survey the Plains, and, in turn, the eastern slope of the Rockies. He surveyed his Indigenous allies, he recorded the knowledge they shared with him, and he worked to synthesize his Blackfoot sources into one map. When redrafting a map to send to London, Fidler made few changes to Ak ko mokki's original map from 1801. The Rocky Mountains sweep eastward on the southside of the map and he omitted the 'war track.' He provided details about which Indigenous groups resided where and included the "remarkable & high places at the Mountains."[255] Overall, the map is a copy of Ak ko mokki's map as Fidler maintained the same composition and layout.

For the rest of his career, Fidler continued to survey people for their geographical knowledge. The sketches that he recorded while surveying his travels are drawn with attention to directional details, course distances, and any physically distinct geographical features.[256] He included the calculations he took to determine latitude among his sketches as they moved along the river. There are some tables referencing distance through the number of days required to travel from one place to another, either with a loaded or light canoe, and upriver or down.[257]

[255] HBCA G.1/25.
[256] HBCA, E.3/4 16 June 1809 offers a great example.
[257] Ibid., 20 June 1809 and 24 June 1809.

Additional inclusions were the smaller maps drawn by others, and Fidler credited different Métis, Indigenous, and European individuals for their illustrations. This practice reveals how Fidler employed his companions and their geographical knowledge as sources for his survey work. He was interested in collecting maps and information from any person familiar with the territory. Most of these maps portray a much smaller area than the Blackfoot maps.

The Red River District Reports he completed in 1819 and 1820, late in life, are revealing. The maps included in the reports illustrate Fidler's mapping style after decades in the fur trade. His maps are unique as they incorporate both European and Indigenous cartographic conventions. The rivers on the district maps are simple, not accounting for every twist and turn the waterways take, but instead traveling across the landscape in a sweeping line with smoother curves. The tributaries meet the main river close to a perpendicular angle, focusing on the importance of the intersection itself instead of an exact representation of the topography.

Fidler valued the input of his companions and worked to collect as much data as possible, from his observations and calculations to the perspective of others inhabiting the region. He practiced caution when interacting with new Indigenous groups and conducted himself carefully. Fidler was willing to endure difficult conditions and recorded his experiences thoroughly. He seemed to internalize aspects of the Blackfoot maps as he recognized the wealth of information they embodied. The internalization of Blackfoot mapping conventions is evident in what Fidler recorded in his journals through the rest of his life. He valued the maps of others for their insight even when the sketches often did not conform to European mapping guidelines; they still served a practical purpose of navigation. His perspective as a surveyor always played a role in his observations yet it stood alongside his practice of collecting maps and knowledge from others as well.

There is one other noteworthy Rocky Mountain map located at the back of Fidler's journal of exploration and survey, dated 1809. It spans a two-page spread of the journal and is attributed to Jean Findley in 1806. Jacques-Raphaël Finlay, or Jaco, was a Métis fur trader, interpreter, and guide.[258] He worked as a hunter and guide for Thompson and the NWC crossing over the mountains. Finlay was literate as he and Thompson corresponded by letter,[259] but like many NWC employees Finlay spoke French, not English.[260] What is important for this thesis is that the map exists nowhere except in Peter Fidler's journals, and, as such, probably represents Fidler's conception of the Rockies west of the eastern range.

Finlay's map features a first and second ridge of the Stony Mountains, the headwaters of the North Saskatchewan, Athabasca, Red Deer, and Bad Rivers, among others, and a large expanse of the territory west of the Rockies, all within the Columbia watershed.[261] The map's rivers resemble Fidler's rivers, a soft s-pattern following a relatively direct course. The two Stony Mountain ridges span the entire map as two horizontal lines mostly parallel to each other. The Columbia River is one line across the very top delineating the western boundary of the map. The map depicted a territory beyond what Fidler had recorded previously.

---

[258] Eric J. Holmgren, "FINLAY, JACQUES-RAPHAËL," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 6, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003–, accessed May 31, 2022, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/finlay_jacques_raphael_6E.html.
[259] David Thompson, *Columbia Journals*, ed. Barbara Belyea (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), 166 and 170.
[260] Eric J. Holmgren, "FINLAY, JACQUES-RAPHAËL," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 6, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003–, accessed May 31, 2022, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/finlay_jacques_raphael_6E.html.
[261] HBCA E.3/4 fo.17.

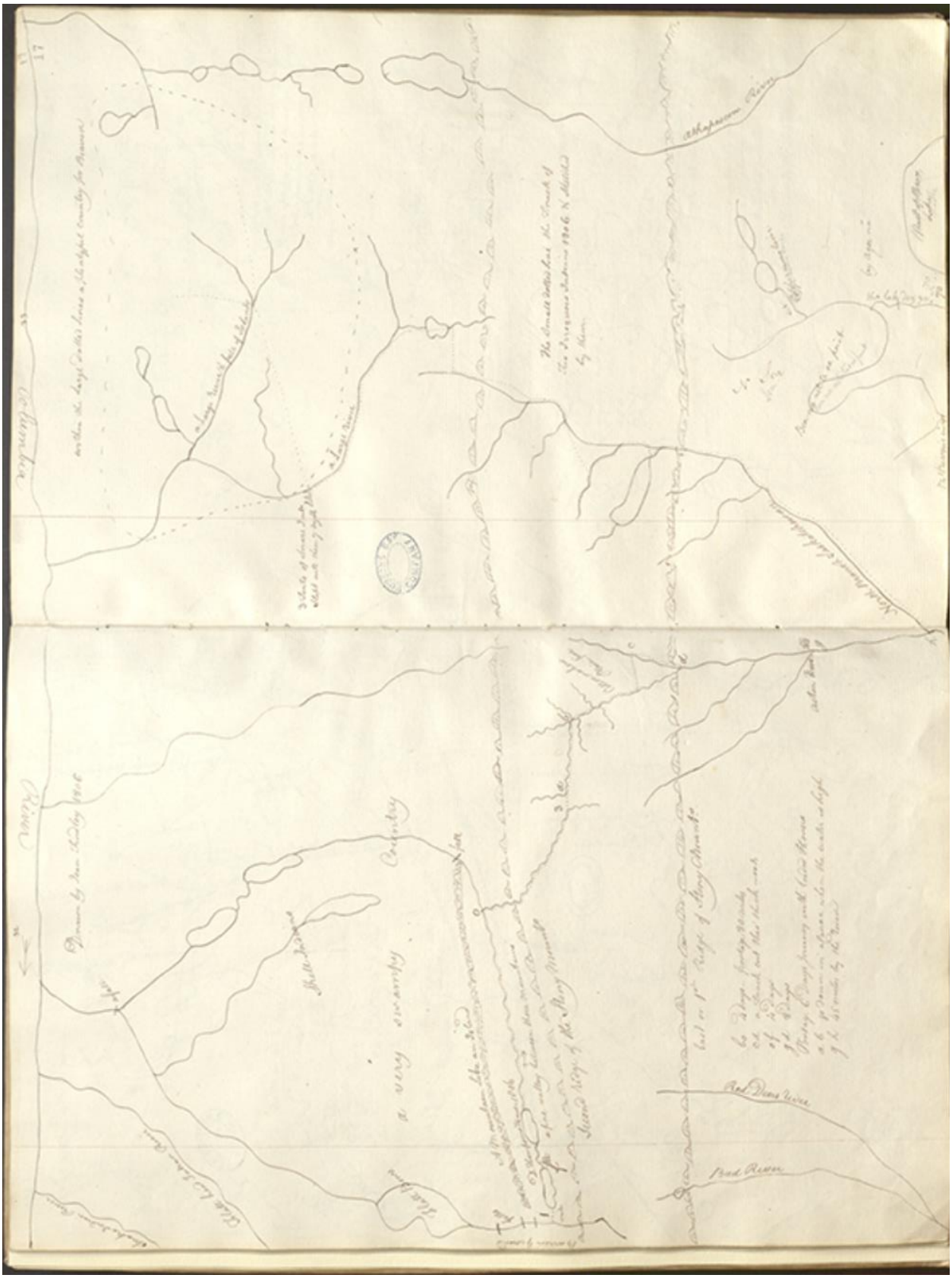

Figure 5-1, Jean Finlay's 1806 Map, HBCA E.3/4 fo. 17

The inclusion of the eastern slope of the mountains as the bottom third of the map allowed Fidler, well versed in that region, to ascertain the region known to him on the map in relation to the new unknown territory of the map beyond the Rocky Mountains. The style of the map is similar to Blackfoot mapping conventions. Finlay's map demonstrates how, though Fidler never traveled west beyond the Rocky Mountains, he might have seen the inter-mountain west. He grasped Finlay's conception of the Rockies, and the territory beyond, as Finlay's mapping style was similar to his. The inclusion of the map in Fidler's journal of exploration thus indicates, somewhat, how Fidler wanted the mountains represented.

From the age of 18 to 53, Fidler spent his adult life in the fur trade, in Rupert's Land. He internalized Indigenous mapping conventions and ideas, all the while retaining ideas and practices from his European origins and training. Fidler's conception of the Rocky Mountains is Blackfoot in nature due, in part, to his lack of opportunity to travel and survey the eastern slope of the Rockies himself. It was also due to the way he collected and valued the geographical knowledge of his Blackfoot allies. There is evidence that Fidler planned to retire to the Red River Colony. As early as 1814, Red River Colony's Miles Macdonell wrote of a need for a surveyor in the colony, that Fidler was a possible candidate for the position, and that Fidler had offered to build a house for his family in the settlement.[262] As his health degraded and the HBC removed him from service, George Simpson recommended Fidler and his family move to the colony in the spring of 1823 "where the Gentleman in charge of that District will see [Fidler] settled in a Lot of Land."[263] Fidler would never live to retirement. He died November 17th, 1822, at Fort Dauphin, his last post.[264]

[262] LAC Selkirk Papers, C-1, Vo.3, p. 1203. Miles Macdonell to Selkirk, 25 July 1814.
[263] HBCA, D.4/1, fos. 68-68d.
[264] HBCA B.213/d/11, fo. 53d.

David Thompson viewed the Rocky Mountains differently as he interacted with them more directly than Fidler. He had ample opportunity to view the Rockies from a Plains perspective, from the eastern slope, but he also considered them as someone who intended to penetrate and overcome the mountain range to travel beyond. Like Fidler, he was willing to endure harsh living conditions and endured many onerous journeys. Once trained as a surveyor and in good health, the HBC wished for Thompson to accompany Malchom Ross, as his assistant, to find the northern track connecting the Hudson Bay to the Athabasca region. Years of effort resulted in disappointment and Thompson decided to leave the service of the HBC and join the NWC in the spring of 1797, who he worked for until his retirement in 1812 at the age of 42.[265]

As with Fidler and the HBC, trade took precedence over surveying for Thompson and the NWC. The difference was that Thompson was expanding the reach of the NWC into territory not yet established by the fur trade. The expansion of trade into new territory enabled Thompson to travel, explore, and survey even while trade remained the primary objective.

Thompson engaged his Indigenous allies to facilitate his travels, but he drew his maps differently. He respected their territorial knowledge, wayfinding and observational skills, and their hunting abilities. He collected their observations and knowledge of the landscape while recording his own thoughts and observations of the region. He did not, however, record the knowledge of others as extensively as Fidler did. He valued his relationships with Indigenous and Métis inhabitants as they facilitated his work of surveying and expanding the trade of the NWC west beyond the Rocky Mountains, but the mapping was all his own.

---

[265] John Nicks, "THOMPSON, DAVID (1770-1857)," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 8, University of Toronto/Université Laval, accessed January 6, 2022, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/thompson_david_1770_1857_8E.html.

He mapped the land himself. There is no surviving evidence to suggest he collected maps the same way Fidler did. Upon his retirement, the NWC provided Thompson the opportunity to consolidate all his observations and calculations from years of travel and trade into one cohesive map of today's western Canada. Thompson incorporated the work of several other European fur trade surveyors within the map to fill out areas he himself had not surveyed. Thompson credited the European individuals by name for their contributions beneath the map's title.

Thompson's narrative manuscript provides an additional source to understand his fur trade career and map making. Thompson tailored his narrative to emphasize role of surveyor as superior to that of his peers. Like his map of the Canadian west, his manuscript offered Thompson a chance to tell his story, his way. The manuscript was written from the viewpoint of an old man, reflecting on his career and life in the fur trade. He had a lot of control over how he represented himself and others in the narrative. After J.B. Tyrrell acquired the manuscript in the late 1880s, it was published to establish Thompson as "one of the greatest geographers of the world."[266] Though a valuable document, the manuscript requires careful consideration and is most valuable when placed alongside the surviving journals he wrote throughout his travels in the fur trade.

A thorough examination of Thompson's writing reveals that he always conveyed the scenery around him in a British and picturesque landscape style. Even his unedited journals contain elaborate statements depicting the surrounding landscape with an emotional response to what he saw. Thompson also wrote detailed journal entries of his interactions with people and the environment. He valued and respected his Indigenous allies and the knowledge they shared

[266] J.B. Tyrrell, preface to *David Thompson's Narrative of His Explorations in Western America, 1784-1812,* ed. J.B. Tyrrell (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1916), xix.

with him as it facilitated his survey and trade pursuits. Despite this respect, however, he retained his European and scientific perspective as he internalized his roles as surveyor and astronomer.

Thompson did not embody or incorporate any Indigenous mapping conventions into his mapmaking. He worked to produce maps for a western audience and was successful. He wrote about the landscape he viewed in a British literary style. As such, Thompson maintained a western perspective throughout his time in the fur trade. His writing was accessible to a colonial audience, his manuscript and the large 1814 map especially, and they were published by Tyrrell to facilitate recognition for Thompson and his achievements.

The two surveyors experienced, surveyed, and recorded the Rocky Mountains in their journals. While Fidler integrated Blackfoot mapping conventions into his mapmaking and continued to collect maps from his companions as he found the practice to be worthwhile, Thompson constructed a western style perspective of the Rocky Mountains. The map and manuscript Thompson composed in retirement promoted his role to a western audience. Fidler never had the chance to review and consolidate his survey work or his career in Rupert's Land as he died at his last post. His maps, for the most part, were confined to two-page spreads in the back of his journals, many of which were incomprehensible to a wider western audience. Understanding Fidler's value, and the value of his maps, requires a thorough examination of his work and life.

An examination of Peter Fidler and David Thompson, their writing, and their survey work helps to understand their different conceptions of the Rocky Mountains and Indigenous knowledge. The two were contemporaries, both were trained by the HBC's official surveyor Philip Turnor, and both men recorded their survey work habitually throughout their careers. As well, both experienced the Rocky Mountains from an eastern slope or Plains perspective.

Thompson's perspective embodies European traditions of cartography and literature. The word-images recorded in his journals impart a preference for a more picturesque landscape of British literary tradition. Many of Thompson's word-images conveyed emotions connected to the imposing presence of the mountains, that were welcome at times and upsetting on other occasions. Thompson described sunbeams breaking through a dark looming cloud,[267] and the ocean served Thompson as an analogy to describe the Rocky Mountains; an analogy to convey the large and endless expanse of topographical features. In a similar way, Thompson compared the sound of avalanches to that of thunder.[268] He worked to transport the reader to his location through imagery; he connected his unfamiliar surroundings to something familiar.

Thompson was also committed to European mapping conventions and his 1814 map conveys this. North is oriented to the top of the map and a grid establishes the longitudes and latitudes. The waterways feature every twist and turn meandering across the landscape. Many heights of land are shaded in, displaying watersheds. Thompson presented all that he knew of the region's geography as he provided more detail in certain areas of the map than elsewhere. The 1814 map demonstrates Thompson's knowledge of the Rocky Mountains and the territory west of the range. The Plains, by contrast, appear bare, with the primary rivers marked and very little else. The map was constructed with an aerial view, standard to European cartography. Thompson's Rocky Mountains are almost strictly western in style. Whether examining his word-images or his maps, Thompson was steadfast in adhering to European convention.

Fidler's survey work and his penchant for collecting Indigenous maps provide a glimpse into Blackfoot mapping conventions and Fidler's evolving conceptions of mapping the northwest. Fidler's redrafted Ak ko mokki map also exhibits another perspective, that of a

---

[267] David Thompson, *Columbia Journals*, ed. Barbara Belyea (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), 4.
[268] Ibid., 211.

European surveyor trying to survey the people as well as the landscape. Fidler understood the value of navigation and prioritized it because of his inability to undertake a survey of the eastern slope of the mountains firsthand. He knew the Siksika dominated the Plains during his time at Chesterfield House which meant that they understood the landscape and how to maintain control of it. Fidler both incorporated Blackfoot mapping techniques in his own work, and he continued collecting maps from others throughout his life. He did this even while, like Thompson, he maintained a strong connection to his western roots.[269]

Although this thesis has encompassed significantly more territory than how the two surveyors viewed the Rocky Mountains, it has tried to drive home the point that Thompson and Fidler were quite distinct in their mapping techniques and very different in what they included in their maps. Thompson was tenaciously European and western, while Fidler incorporated as much Indigenous knowledge as he could. This was reflected in their mapping, and it was reflected in how they understood and portrayed the Rocky Mountains. At the end of his career, Fidler drew up a lengthy report of the Lake Manitoba District and drew a map of it. In his journal for that year, he noted that he had "finished the Report & the Map ***a la Savage*** [emphasis mine] of this District."[270] Not only was he cognizant of how his mapping style had changed, but he clearly believed that Indigenous mapping conventions better portrayed the fur-trade world.

---

[269] The Hudson's Bay Archives Library has a "Peter Fidler Collection." 63 books are catalogued in the collection, and they feature a variety of topics. Many of the books are second-hand, much of the collection is comprised of almanacs. The rest present a wide range of topics, from science and mathematics to midwifery and history. Thematically, Fidler's survey work and texts to assist that role took prominence in his collection of literature. The library is a testament to his commitment to surveying.

[270] HBCA B.51/a/2, fo. 34. Peter Fidler's Fort Dauphin Journal of 1819-20. Entry for 6 April 1820.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Archival Primary Sources

Archives of Ontario

F 443, R-C(U), AO 1541 Map of the North-West Territory of the Province of Canada (1814). David Thompson fonds. I0030317.

Sketches of elevations or mountains, [ca. 1809]. Thompson (David) Papers, Ms. Coll. 21, item 5. Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library. University of Toronto.

Hudson's Bay Company Archives (HBCA)

A.11/117 Correspondence from York Factory, 1787-1797.

A.67/1 Miscellaneous papers, [ca. 1744] - [ca. 1899].

B.22/e/1 Red River District Report, 1819, Peter Fidler.

B.34/a/2 Chesterfield House post journal and meteorological observations, 1800-1801. Peter Fidler.

B.39/a/2 Nottingham House (Fort Chipewyan) post journal, 1801-1803. Peter Fidler.

B.49/a/21 Cumberland House post journal, 1789-1790. Malcolm Ross.

B.51/a/2 Fort Dauphin post journal, 1819-1820. Peter Fidler.

B.51/e/1 Winnipeg District report (Fort Dauphin), 1820. Peter Fidler.

B.121/a/3 Manchester House post journal, 1788-1789.William Tomison.

B.121/a/4 Manchester House post journal, 1789-1790. William Walker.

B.205/a/1 South Branch House Journal, 1786-1787, David Thompson.

B.213/d/11 Swan River general account book, 1822-1823.

B.239/a/86 York Factory post journal, 1785-1786. Humphrey Marten.

B.239/b/36 York Factory correspondence book, 1775-1776.

B.9/a/3 Lake Athabasca post journal, 1790-1792. Philip Turnor.

D.4/1 Outward correspondence book, letters forwarded by Simpson to Governor and Committee, 1821-1822. Governor George Simpson.

E.3/1 Journals of Exploration and Survey, 1791-1792, and Astronomical Observations, 1790-1806. Peter Fidler.

E.3/2 Journals of Exploration and Survey, 1792-1800. Peter Fidler.

E.3/4 Journals of Exploration and Survey, 1809. Peter Fidler.

E.3/6 Astronomical journal for Cumberland House, Ile-a-la-Crosse, Slave Lake, Canadian House and Athapescow Lake, 1790-1792. Peter Fidler.

Fur Trade Library Peter Fidler Collection. HBCA Library.

G.1/25 "An Indian Map of the Different Tribes that inhabit on the East & West Side of the Rocky Mountains with all the rivers & other remarkbl. places, also the number of Tents etc. Drawn by the Feathers or Ac ko mok ki -- a Black foot chief -- 7th Feby. 1801 -- reduced 1/4 from the Original Size -- by Peter Fidler." Hudson's Bay manuscript maps collection.

HBCA Biographical Sheet. "Fidler, George, (b. 1800) (fl. 1822-1826)." JHB/ek; July l988; Revised: Oct./88; June/99/mhd.

Library and Archives Canada (LAC)

MG19-A8 vol. 8 Part III. David Thompson Journals, 1806-1808.

MG19-E1 Selkirk Papers, C-1, Vo.3, p. 1203. Miles Macdonell to Selkirk, 25 July 1814.

NMC R/701/1813-1814. Map of the North-West Territory of the Province of Canada from actual survey during the years 1792 to 1812...1813 and 1814... by David Thompson, Astronomical Surveyor.

Published Primary Sources

Thompson, David. *Columbia Journals*. Edited by Barbara Belyea. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007.

Thompson, David. *David Thompson's Narrative of His Explorations in Western America, 1784-1812*. Edited by J.B. Tyrrell. Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1916.

Thompson, David. *David Thompson's Narrative, 1784-1812*. Edited by Richard Glover. Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1962.

Thompson, David. *The Travels of David Thompson*, Two Volumes. Edited by Sean T. Peake. Bloomington: iUniverse, 2011.

Thompson, David. *The Writings of David Thompson*, Two Volumes. Edited by William E. Moreau. Toronto: The Champlain Society, 2009.

Secondary Sources

Allen, Robert S. "FIDLER, PETER." *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol.6. University of Toronto/Université Laval, 1987. September 7, 2021. http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/fidler_peter_6E.html.

Belyea, Barbara. *Dark Storm Moving West.* Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2007.

Belyea, Barbara. Introduction to *Columbia Journals, xv-xxx*. Edited by Barbara Belyea. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007.

Belyea, Barbara. Preface to *Columbia Journals*, *vii-xi*. Edited by Barbara Belyea. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007.

Belyea, Barbara. Introduction to *Peter Fidler: From York Factory to the Rocky Mountains, 1-42*. Edited by Barbara Belyea. Louisville: University of Colorado Press, 2020.

Binnema, Theodore. *Common and Contested Ground: A Human and Environmental History of the Northwestern Plains*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001.

Binnema, Theodore. *Enlightened Zeal: the Hudson's Bay Company and scientific networks, 1670-1870.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014.

Binnema, Theodore. "How Does a Map Mean? Old Swan's Map of 1801 and the Blackfoot World." In *From Rupert's Land to Canada*, edited by Theodore Binnema, Gerhard J. Ens, and R.C. Macleod, 201-224. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press.

Binnema, Theodore. "Theory and experience: Peter Fidler and the transatlantic Indian." In *Native Americans and Anglo-American Culture, 1750-1850: The Indian Atlantic*, edited by Tim Fulford and Kevin Hutchings, 155-170. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Brink, Jack. *Imagining Head-Smashed-In: Aboriginal Buffalo Hunting on the Northern Plains*. Edmonton: Athabasca University Press, 2008.

Broughton, Peter. “The Accuracy and Use of Sextants and Watches in Rupert’s Land in the 1790s,” *Annals of Science* 66, no. 2 (April 2009): 209-229.

“David Thompson North America’s Greatest Geographer.” Archives of Ontario. Accessed February 15, 2022. http://www.archives.gov.on.ca/en/explore/online/thompson/geographer.aspx.

Gough, Barry M., “POND, PETER.” *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 5. University of Toronto/Université Laval, 1983. Accessed November 20, 2022. http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/pond_peter_5E.html.

Haig, Bruce. *A Look at Peter Fidler’s Journal: Journal of a Journey over Land from Buckingham House to the Rocky Mountains in 1792 &3*, edited by Bruce Haig. Lethbridge: Historical Research Centre, 1991.

“History of the Grey Coat Hospital.” United Westminster Schools & The Grey Coat Hospital Foundation. Accessed February 6, 2022. http://westminstergreycoat.org/?page_id=174.

Holmgren, Eric J. “FINLAY, JACQUES-RAPHAËL.” *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 6. University of Toronto/Université Laval, 1987. Accessed May 31, 2022. http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/finlay_jacques_raphael_6E.html.

MacGregor, J. G. *Peter Fidler: Canada’s Forgotten Surveyor 1769-1822.* Toronto: The Canadian Publishers, 1966.

MacLaren, I. S. "David Thompson's Imaginative Mapping of the Canadian Northwest 1784-1812." *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature* 15.2 (Apr. 1984): 89-106.

MacLaren. I. S. “Literary Landscapes in the Writings of Fur Traders.” In *"Le Castor Fait Tout": Selected Papers of the Fifth North American Fur Trade Conference, 1985*. Edited by Bruce G. Trigger, Toby Morantz, and Louise Dechêne, 566-86. Montreal: Lake St. Louis Historical Society, 1987.

McClintock, Walter. *The Old North Trail, or, Life, Legends, and Religion of the Blackfeet Indians.* London: Macmillan and Co., 1910.

Monmonier, Mark. *How to Lie with Maps*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991.

Moodie, D.W. and Kaye, Barry. “The Ac Ko Mok Ki Map.” *The Beaver* 307, no. 4 (Spring 1977): 4-15.

Moreau, William E. Introduction to *The Writings of David Thompson Volume I, ix-liv*. Edited by William E. Moreau. Toronto: The Champlain Society, 2009.

Nicks, John. "THOMPSON, DAVID (1770-1857)." *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 8. University of Toronto/Université Laval, 1985. Accessed January 6, 2022. http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/thompson_david_1770_1857_8E.html.

Payne, Michael. ""A Mari Usque Ad Mare" – The Fur Trade, 1763-1800." In *The Fur Trade in Canada: An Illustrated History*, 37-48. Toronto: James Lorimer & Company Limited, 2004.

Peake, Sean T. Introduction to *The Travels of David Thompson Volume I, xxi-liv*. Edited by Sean T. Peake. Bloomington: iUniverse, 2011.

Rich, E. E. "TURNOR, PHILIP." *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 4. University of Toronto/Université Laval, 1979. Accessed September 13, 2022. http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/turnor_philip_4E.html.

Ruggles, Richard I. *A Country So Interesting: the Hudson's Bay Company and Two Centuries of Mapping, 1670-1870*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991.

Tyrrell, J.B. *A brief narrative of the journey of David Thompson in North-Western America*. Toronto: The Copp Clark Company, 1888.

Tyrrell, J.B. Introduction to *David Thompson's Narrative of His Explorations in Western America, 1784-1812, xxiii-lxiv*. Edited by J.B. Tyrrell. Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1916.

Tyrrell, J.B. Introduction to *Journals of Samuel Hearne and Philip Turnor Between the Years 1774 and 1792.* Edited by J.B. Tyrrell. Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1934.

Tyrrell, J.B. Preface to *David Thompson's Narrative of His Explorations in Western America, 1784-1812, xv-xxi.* Edited by J.B. Tyrrell (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1916

Van Kirk, Sylvia and Brown, Jennifer S. H. "McGILLIVRAY, DUNCAN." *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 5. University of Toronto/Université Laval, 1983. Accessed April 1, 2022. http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/mcgillivray_duncan_5E.html.

Vibert, Elizabeth. *Traders' Tales: Narratives of Cultural Encounters in the Columbia Plateau, 1807-1846*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997.