

Herbert J Ollett

Cheveley,

A Land Hunting Expedition to Qu'Appelle District,  
North West Territories, Canada.

On Sunday evening, 4th October, a party of 4 viz, - McCleary, a young Scotsman, hailing from Kirkintulloch, who wears the kilt and plays bagpipes, also has served through the South African campaign; Blackwell, McCleary's landlord in search of a homestead for his son; Ollett, my son-in-law, and myself, left the C.P.R. Station by the 6 p.m. train for Qu'Appelle. It being a fine clear moonlight night we were able to see what was going on in the adjacent country during the whole night. We saw that the grain was all cut, and nearly the one half either threshed or stacked, the remainder being in stock, and in nearly every case seemed a fair crop; but, in consequence of the exceptionally dry summer, was short in the straw. This, however, has been an advantage to the farmers the crop has been easier handled, and the increased price, at least 10 cents per bushel more than last year, has made up for any shortage there has been in the crop of 1903.

We reached Qu'Appelle, which is distant 324 miles from Peg, about 7 a.m. Monday, made our way to the Hotel and had a wash to freshen us up, then sat down to breakfast. We were not half done when the waiter came shouting "Mail for the Fort at the door", but we paid no attention till we were satisfied.

We then boarded the mail Gig, Mac and I on the back seat, 2 Americans in the centre seat, Blackwell, Ollett and driver on front seat, all nice and comfortable, but also before we left the town we stopped and picked up an R.C. Clergyman, whom the driver put between Mac and I, but he turned out to be a jolly good fellow, and ere long I was telling stories making him laugh, till he was like to burst, then we all sang a song with a good chorus, and so we bowled merrily along until we came to the Post Town on Strathcarron, which consists of one house and one family. As soon as we had exchanged mail bags, on our team sped across the old Touchwood Trail. The adjacent country is nearly all homesteaded, and is of a more rolling nature than around the Peg, but I was not greatly in love with any part of the country we had yet traversed.

"But everything comes to those who wait" at last we reached a large Poplar grove, extending east and west as far as one could see. The driver pulled up and asked us to walk the next mile, as we were starting to drive down a long steep hill. This we did cheerfully, as for my part, it was the first hill I had seen in the countryside. Down we sped. When near the foot we got the first glimpse of Fort Qu'Appelle, one of the old Hudson Bay strongholds, and the view, after the flat country we had passed along, was simply enchanting.

The Fort lies in the valley of the Qu'Appelle river. The valley is one series of lakes "teaming with wild duck" joined together by the river. The valley varies one to five or more miles in width, with hills on each side, three to four hundred feet high, clad with trees in the hollow parts, the higher portions clad with grass, forming good grazing for the Fort cows and horses.

After leaving our coats etc. at the hotel, we set off to find Mr. Newth, the homestead agent, which was soon managed. We handed him a letter from J.O. Smith Esq., Immigration Department, Winnipeg, introducing us, and he at once asked us what he could do for us. We replied we were on the hunt for 6 homesteads, 4 if possible in a block. He produced papers, and

marked those that were taken up on Townships 23, 24, 25, 26. "a township is 6 square miles, one half open for homesteads, the other half has been given over to the Railway companies; who sell it, and this pays, at least part of the cost of the Railways. Now we said "Mr. Newth, how are we to reach those lands?" He said he would try and get Tom Barns to drive there. He was sent for, but being from home his brother turned up for him. We held a consultation, and our driver agreed to start with us after dinner, provided his brother did not come home in time.

We then adjourned to the hotel and had a good dinner after which the two sports McCleary and Ollett, were casting longing eyes at the duck flying about the river. So off they bolted to have a shot, we agreeing to shout when we were ready to start.

Blackwell and I took a stroll through the village, getting all the information we could, prices of firewood, lumber, shingles, eggs, beef, bacon, horses, oxen, cows etc., and at last landed back beside the genial land agent Mr. Newth. While chatting with him Tom Barns, our guide, and before we left I can safely say friend, turned up. On making our bargain with him he reminded us that we were never thinking of grub for our journey. Our sports turned up at supper time with nine duck, having lost quite a lot that fell into the lake. They needed a dog to retrieve them. After supper we had a walk and a smoke, then off to bed about 9 p.m.

Tuesday 6 a.m. on looking out at our bedroom window we found every sign of a good day so at once dressed and out to the street. We soon saw the duck shooters coming home laden, having each 20 to 40 duck. They had gone out at 5 a.m. and were home to breakfast at 7.30 so to our porridge we marched, and had a jolly tuck in, the last course being pork chops and potatoes.

After breakfast we set off the Barns' stable and found the rig ready, but he was assisting a newly arrived emigrant whose baby had died that morning of diarrhoea. We saw his horses for teaming, also one entire Clydesdale and one polled Angus Bull. These are not so large as Old Country stock, neither are they kept so fat, but seem good, useful animals. McCleary then got his camera, and we went and took a view of the valley and bridge, the three of us standing on the bridge. He also took a view of one of the streets, an entire horse belonging to the hotel proprietor in the foreground, and Ollett behind. We again went to the stable and found him hitching a well bred Montana Mare which had been grazing for three months, and for the mate a four year old grey broncho, which had only been in harness three times. The grey decidedly did not like harness, but after a time this was managed, and the pair hitched to a heavy farm wagon to give them a pipe opener before hitching to a light buggy. We started to walk up the winding road on the north side of the valley, Ollett, as usual, gun in his oster, but as long as we could see our team was galloping wildly over the flat prairie, Barns holding on for all he was worth. We walked slowly up the hill, shot one partridge en route, and finally reached the top where we lay down to wait the arrival of the team, which finally landed about 12 noon, but minus the grey Broncho, which was N.G. that morning. So into the buggy we jumped, three behind, Barns and I in front, Ollett dismantled his gun, no shooting to be that day so as to allow us to make up some of our lost time, and away we bowled at a spanking rate along the Touchwood Trail. This trail was at one time the highway from New York & Chicago to Hudson Bay. The ruts in some places were pretty deep, but in dry weather is grand for teaming.

No need for shoes on horses here. Driving for about fifteen miles we saw in the distance the construction camp of the new Kirkella Branch of the C.P. Railway. We then crossed the new railway track, drove on for another fifteen miles, singing or telling stories all the time, and then came to the log hut of a half-breed settler, called Sangrett where we stabled and fed the team. Mrs. Sangrett and Co. hurrying up some meat for us. This we found out later to be stewed duck, chicken, partridge, and A.L. potatoes, washed down with a cup of good tea, and a feed of preserved fruit, to finish a dinner fit for the Gods.

After resting the team for two hours, we again hitched up, lighted our pipes, Ollett also to be allowed to shoot, and away we spanked over the rolling prairie in search of section 34, township 24, range 15 west of 2nd Meridian. This Barns said to be an A.L. section distant about ten miles from Sangrett's. We found it without any trouble, drive along the south end and up the east side of it. We were all pleased with the look of it, and thought it would take something dandy to beat it. We then drove in search of two homesteads for Mac. and Blackwell, found two good ones, adjacent to our own section 28, also two in township 25 section 12. The shades of eve were falling fast, so we turned the heads of our tired team for Sangrett, where we landed between 7 and 8 p.m. Ollett handed over his game bag to our landlady, who soon had our tea and tatties for us. Supper being barely finished a rig drove up at the door, on looking out we found it a stormy night, a twenty-five mile gale was blowing accompanied by sleet. The traveller was a young homesteader from the Touchwood hills whom we spoke to in the forenoon, driving two lady friends into the Fort. After supper here, and resting his team two hours, he started for his home, which he expected to reach about midnight. His team would travel over one hundred miles that day. Think of that you old Country post hirers.

Another team came to the door that night, a Scotch lad, Bain, and a young English friend. They had been into the Fort for a load of lumber, had got safe back to Sangrett, stayed a night and started two days ago for their homes ten miles away, but had lost themselves and were very glad to get back to the point from where they had started. We got their team stabled, they had supper, then we had a smoking concert until our Touchwood friend left about 10, then us men folks seven all told, made for the kitchen. Blackwell and I in a bed one side, Bain and his friend in a bed on the other side, the remaining three on a shake down on the floor, our blankets being our top coats, and our pillows logs of firewood, but all the same we enjoyed a jolly good night's sleep.

Wednesday morning on getting up we found wind and sleet, the ground white with snow. After breakfast a consultation was held, when it was agreed to start; but, as I did not feel very well, the young Englishman got my seat, Barns to drive by his section, where they had left a week ago a Scotch youth, Mackay by name, living in a tent, and they knew he would be short of grub, so off they set, Sangrett to pilot Bain with the load to his home later on. About 3 p.m. they landed back cold, wet and hungry, but their dinner was ready and soon on the table, chicken grouse, mud hens, tatties tea and fruit, to which each one did ample justice. Then McCleary was asked to report the days journey. The report was short and pithy, "no land any better if as good as we had seen the previous day". They had covered about thirty-five miles, but I guess the cold, wet day would

have a depressing influence on their spirits. About 4 p.m. Sangrett, Mackay, Bain and the English chap landed, and after dinner Mackay gave us his experience of solitary life on a homestead. He said "being the practical joiner of the three I was left to proceed with the building of the shack. Bain and his mate intending to return the following day with a load of lumber, also a gun to shoot game with. I had some meat the first two days when I worked away cheerily. The weather being fine we only had up the tent in a temporary fashion, and did not bother to fix up the stove. After the two days I began to weary, no meat, no game, only a bag of rolled oats, so the third day and night went past, also the fourth day and that night, when the wind threatened to blow away the tent. I did feel lonely during the night. I felt thirsty, but my pail was dry; so, as the prairie wolves were howling all around, I loaded my revolver and with it in one hand, pail in the other, I made tracks to the nearest slough. On returning safe I rolled up all the clothes about me, that I could get hold of, and so the night passed away. At last in the eastern horizon about 5 a.m. the first streaks of morning appeared, so I went to the door of the tent and fired off minute guns with my revolver, twenty-one in number, but no help came, so I made up some meal and water and sat down and sang hymns, and wiped the tears away. But all at once I sprang to my feet, and said Mac be a man. Do not die without a try. So I put on four coats, four vests, four pair of trousers, all my shirts and underclothing, and with my revolver in hand I started to Sangrett's. On my way a prairie chick crossed my path, I fired but I missed alas. After travelling as I thought miles, but indeed only 200 or 300 yards, I met Bain and his party, when I fell on their necks and wept."

After tea, or as it is called in Canada, supper, which was stewed rabbit chicken, bread, potatoes, fruit and tea, we had a general conversation, telling one another our experience in the country etc. I asked Sangrett provided we took up land in the vicinity, if he could cut and haul logs for us during the winter, and what size of shack he would advise us to put up. He said he had a lot in hand this winter, but would do it for me. He would advise me to put up a house 248 by 188. This would require 60 logs 26' long and squared to 6 inches at the small end. They would cost 75 cents each. He has to cut and haul them 25 miles from the Touchwood hills, and this was agreed to.

About 9 p.m. we made tracks for the kitchen, eight of us Mac being one added; and, as he was worst housed the previous night, he was ordered to sleep in a bed with Bain. So we all tumbled in. Mac however, took at least, an hour longer than the rest, but shades of the dead, talk about Tool in the artful dodger, he never was in it with Mac, as he peeled layer after layer of clothes off till at last we fancied he would peel himself away. He was the thickest man in the room when he started but when he stopped he could have slipt through a keyhole.

Thursday morning found us all up to welcome a nice bright, sunny day. Sangrett's larder, however, was beginning to get low, so Ollet was off with the gun, and in half an hour or so came back with a bunch of chicken, so some of them in addition to some duck, were soon simmering in the pan for breakfast and immediately after we had finished McCleary was ready to photo Sangett and his family at his shack door.

The visitors were then taken by Sangrett also four of us in the rig, and a man's arm on the wheel. Mac stood out of range of the camera.

Bain and McKay started for the Fort for another load of lumber. We bid farewell till next April to the Sangrett family, and hied us away to have another look at adjacent country; but, after driving until about 1 p.m. we came back to our first love, drove up the opposite side, and along the north end, and back to a high hill nearly in the middle of it, where we could see five or six miles all around us. We also saw the MacDonald hill tops ten miles away white with snow, so we unhitched the team, and allowed them to graze, hobbled of course, while we kindled a fire, plucked some chick, cut them open, spitted them on willow wands, and roasted them over the fire. That, along with some biscuits, we had made an enjoyable lunch. Ollett saw a badger about a mile away so off he set to get its skin to make a Sporan for McCleary's kilts. He fired and broke its leg, but it got into its hole before he could get a bother shot.

This section we agreed on and have taken for the Pringle family. We brought and long pole with two pieces of deal nailed on the top. This was duly erected, and an inscription written on the shafts follows. "This section is the property of the Pringle family. Trespassers will be prosecuted". Sangrett will lay down the logs at this spot.

We then hitched up and went to look for two quarters for McCleary. This did not take as long as we found the top quarters of 28 next to ours were A.1. and this we selected for them.

We then turned our horses heads south west along the side of Jumping Deer Creek, and crossed mile after mile of Prairie all strewn with Buffalo bones, bleached white as snow, in the direction of the Fort, which we expected to reach that night; but, alas, one of our horses got played out, so we had to walk the hills. This, however, enabled Ollett to have plenty of shots at chicks etc. He did not miss any, and when we got under cover at Neil's, he had quite a bag.

The land along the side of the creek is stony and rolling, with little bluffs on it, and would be easy to bring under cultivation, but is evidently of inferior quality to where we had homesteaded.

After crossing country for ten or twelve miles we at last came to the Touchwood Trail, five miles north of the new railway, and as our horses were well done up, Barns thought it advisable to make the nearest hospitable settler's home, and seek quarters for man and beast, so we made for a Mr. Niel's fifteen miles from the Fort. Mr. Niel and his wife were away at a dance, but we found the hired man and three little boys at home so we stabled our horses, and were soon devouring tea, tatties and bread.

Our inner man being satisfied Barns turned his attention to next day's breakfast, so out I went to Ollett's game, and brought one rabbit, one grouse, and two chicks skinned them, then peeled a pail of potatoes, some onionsetc. These were all put into a large stew pan, the stove stirred up, and kept burning all night, so in the morning that was our breakfast, backed by bread and tea. We were just finished our morning meal when Mr. Niel and party landed home, having driven twenty miles before 7.30 a.m. and were quite pleased we had made ourselves at home.

The Friday morning was pretty swell, ground quite hard. We hitched up our team, bade adieu to the hospitable Neil family, and our team trotted

cheerily along after their night's rest. We soon reached the new railway crossed it, and met outward bound the Peg Agents for the syndicate, who have bought up the railway lands around townships 23,24,25, and 26. We asked their price, cheapest \$6.50, was the reply. On crossing the new railway we noticed the contractor finishing up the surface ready to lay the ties. They were also putting the Ys or turntables, and the engineers were mapping out the site of the new town, which is to be called Lipton after Sir Thomas, the streets are to be named after his yachts, skippers etc. The only heavy piece of work to carry out between Neudorf, that is the name of the station where the line is open to, and Lipton is the lumber bridge across the Pheasant Creek. We are hoping this will be put through this fall, as it will make a difference of 60 miles to us in trekking to our new home. Lipton will be 8 or 10 miles. Qu'Appelle 70 miles away or so.

Setting our team going again, we drove into the Fort about 11 a.m. made straight for Mr. Newth's office, paid \$10.00 each, homestead dues, then squared up Barns, and once more off to the lake to shoot some ducks to take home with us to the Peg, got a few into the Fort, bid all our friends adieu, boarded the mail rig, landed at Qu'Appelle about 5 p.m. and had supper in the hotel, train at 8 p.m. back to Winnipeg about 9 a.m. Saturday morning, found everyone wondering what had come over us, and wearying to hear the news. But we would tell them nothing until we had breakfast - ham, eggs and coffee this time.

The country around our new home is nice rolling land, interspersed with bluffs of trees, our section, however, is pretty clear, as I do not think that there will be 60 of the 640 acres but what is ready for the plough, and as far as we saw entirely free of wet sloughs.

The top soil is 12" to 18" deep, a nice mellow black loam. How do we know that? Well 20 years ago this country was all laid out for settlers; and, as the marks were getting obliterated, surveyors have been over it this summer. At the corner of each quarter section a iron peg is driven into the ground with letters and figures stamped on it corresponding to the survey sheet, then four holes are dug, and the earth thrown up to form a mound around the iron peg; consequently, every half mile you can see the depth of the spit, but in the bluffs and hollow parts it will be deeper on account of the decayed vegetable matter accumulating over the centuries. Next to the top spit there is 15' to 20' of sandy white clay, then blue clay. On the low parts there are acres of hay standing 12" to 18" long, and not a stone to be seen among it. Anyone could have gone in with a mower and cut tons in a day. On the higher portions there are some stones strewn over it. These are mostly limestone of good quality, and lime could be got handy at any time, and a small kiln put up on the side of the hills to burn it. We also noticed where a badger had its burrow, gravel of good quality. The land will be easily broken up, the turf is not of the tough nature found at the Peg, but crumbles down so that you can plough and sow without backsetting, or twice ploughing. This disc plough run over it makes it ready to seed.

Water of good quality is found at from 20' to 50', and the authorities have put down wells every 12 miles with windlass, chain and bucket ready for travellers use at any time. I also fancy that in the large sloughs, which are free of vegetation, springs of water exist. In the smaller sloughs they are choked full of rank vegetation.

Trees consisting of poplar, ash, elm, cherry, plum, red dog wood, maple etc. are plentiful, but not of large size. This however, is accounted for I think

by recent prairie fires. The trees seem mostly of 10 to 15 years growth, but about 2 miles away, nearer the McDonald Hills poplars of a large size exist suitable either for stable buildings or firewood.

Fruits - The leaves being off the trees, the various sorts are not so readily observed, but wild plum choke cherry, raspberry, strawberry, gooseberry seemed plentiful.

Flora - Little can be seen of this at this season of the year, but roses are plentiful, and I noticed the dried stems of lillies, michaelmas asters, golden rod, and one or two other sorts.

Game - this is plentiful, Ducks, Mallard, Spoon Bill, Red Head, Teal etc. Grouse, partridge, mud-hens, jack rabbit or hare, rabbit, deer - saw seven in a bunch etc.

Wild Animals, Badger, beaver, musk rat, coyotte, or prairie wolf, etc. Timber Wolves exist in the hills, and many traverse the plains in a severe winter.

Fish - All sorts are plentiful in the Jumping Deer Creek and small lakes which exist in its winding course. The nearest lake is about 4 miles from our section.

Cost of Trip and Distance Traversed by T. Pringle and W. Ollett. - Son of John Clement

	<u>Miles</u>	<u>Railway Fare etc.</u>
Winnipeg to Qu'Appelle	324	Return 34.70
Qu'Appelle to Fort, Mail Buggy	19	2:00
Tom Barns hire of rig 3 days	150	12.00
Game Licence		1.00
Fort to Qu'Appelle	319	
Qu'Appelle to Peg	324	
Hotel Bills Qu'Appelle and Fort		4.40
Sangreitt's Hostelry		4.00
Homestead Dues		40.00
Sundry Expenses		1.40
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	836 miles	2 <span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">101.50</span>

Travelled at a cost to each of ....50.75

