

Over the Shining Mountains

LINDA FAIRFIELD

Many species of wild roses (Rosa L.) grow across North America, establishing themselves at the margins of forests. Borne on prickly shrubs, the five-petaled flowers are showy and fragrant, blooming in early summer. The fruit or hips, which ripen in the summer, are fat and red and very high in Vitamin C. Several parts of the plant are edible; the petals can be used in salads and the fruit makes delicious jelly, syrup and tea. The hips were widely used by native North Americans.

Shining blue in the sunshine, right, the Fraser River at Quesnel gives little hint of the tumult it will soon become as it thunders south through the Fraser Canyon.

The Louisiana Purchase by the young American republic in 1803 had an immediate and obvious impact on the fur trade in the United States, but its repercussions were also felt much farther afield, in what is now Canada's northwest.

A year later, both the North West and Hudson's Bay Companies were aware of the Lewis and Clark expedition up the Missouri, even as the Corps of Discovery settled in for its first winter at the Knife River Villages (see page 238). The Americans, they realized, were aiming to lay claim to the territory west of the Rockies and north of California.

More than a decade before, Alexander Mackenzie had reached the Pacific on foot, becoming the first European to cross the continent north of Mexico, but despite his achievement even he realized this was not a practical commercial route. So the Nor'Westers responded to the American chal-

lenge of 1804 with a two-pronged assault on the mouth of the Columbia, beginning in 1805. David Thompson, backed by John McDonald of Garth at Rocky Mountain House, was assigned to find a way over the Rockies from the upper North Saskatchewan River and young Simon Fraser was charged with

finding a route west and south by way of the upper Peace River.

As it turned out, neither route proved to be the way to the Columbia; that wasn't sorted out until 1811 (see David Thompson on page 191), by which time the Americans had already built a post on the Pacific shore. But the Nor'Westers did establish Fort Dunvegan about midway up the wide, bountiful Peace River Valley, and by 1808 Fraser and his men laid claim to a large area of what is now the interior of British Columbia, where the furs were reckoned to be as good as or better than those of the Athabasca country.

Fraser called B.C.'s intermontane territory New Caledonia, recalling his mother's tales of Scotland, "a land of

brown heath and shaggy wood". He established a string of posts along the water routes between the Peace and Fraser Rivers; several grew into northern British Columbia's towns and cities. Though

the Hudson's Bay Company battled for decades to extend this territory south to the Columbia, using the fur trade as a weapon of politics, in the end Washington state went to the Americans (see The Columbia Department on page 226).

Today, the New Caledonia fur trade is recalled at picturesque Fort



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Dunvegan Provincial Park in north-western Alberta, Fort St. John, at Hudson's Hope and McLeod Lake in northeastern B.C. and at Fort St. James National Historic Site in the town of the same name. The "grease trail" that Alexander Mackenzie followed from the Fraser River to the sea has been marked and nationally recognized and draws hundreds of hikers every year. The route that Thompson mapped to the Columbia was, with some adjustments, used to convey

express brigades over the Rockies. Farther west, Thompson's River Post grew up at the forks of the North and South Thompson Rivers (today's Kamloops) and became an important staging post for HBC horse brigades.

The Rainbow Mountains soar above the Chilcotin Plateau, a wild and beautiful upland area that is home to a multitude of wildlife, including grizzly bears (Ursus arctos). Grizzly means "grayish" and "inspiring horror." Both meanings apply, for these bears often have a frosting of gray or blonde hair on their backs and shoulders and adult males can weigh up to 400 kilograms and are enormously strong. By contrast the tiny cubs, born in the winter, weigh about 400 grams (less than a pound) each.

