

AMERICAN JOURNEYS COLLECTION



Voyages from Montreal, on the River
St. Laurence, through the Continent
of North America, to the Frozen and
Pacific Oceans; in the Years
1789 and 1793 [excerpt]

by Alexander Mackenzie

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CHAPTER XI.

Renew our voyage. Circumstances of the river. Land at the house of a chief. Entertained by him. Carried down the river with great rapidity to another house. Received with kindness. Occupations of the inhabitants on its banks. Leave the canoe at a fall. Pass over land to another village. Some account of it. Obtain a view of an arm of the sea. Lose our dog. Procure another canoe. Arrive at the arm of the sea. Circumstances of it. One of our guides returns home. Coast along a bay. Some description of it. Meet with Indians. Our communication with them. Their suspicious conduct towards us. Pass onwards. Determine the latitude and longitude. Return to the river. Dangerous encounter with the Indians. Proceed on our journey.

AT one in the afternoon we renewed our voyage in a large canoe with four of the natives. We found the river almost one continued rapid, and in half an hour we came to an house, where, however, we did not land, though invited by the inhabitants. In about an hour we arrived at two houses, where we were, in some degree, obliged to go on shore, as we were informed that the owner of them was a person of consideration. He indeed received and regaled us in the same manner

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Saturday 18.

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as at the last village; and to increase his consequence, he produced many European articles, and amongst them were at least forty pounds weight of old copper stills. We made our stay as short as possible, and our host embarked with us. In a very short time we were carried by the rapidity of the current to another house of very large dimensions, which was partitioned into different apartments, and whose doors were on the side. The inhabitants received us with great kindness; but instead of fish, they placed a long, clean, and well made trough before us full of berries. In addition to those which we had already seen, there were some black, that were larger than the huckle berry, and of a richer flavour; and others white, which resembled the blackberry in every thing but colour. Here we saw a woman with two pieces of copper in her under lip, as described by Captain Cook. I continued my usual practice of making these people presents in return for their friendly reception and entertainment.

The navigation of the river now became more difficult, from the numerous channels into which it was divided, without any sensible diminution in the velocity of its current. We soon reached another house of the common size, where we were well received; but whether our guides had informed them that we were not in want of any thing, or that they were deficient in inclination, or perhaps the means, of being hospitable to us, they did not offer us any refreshment. They were in a state of busy preparation. Some of the women were employed in beating and preparing the inner rind of the cedar bark, to which they gave the appearance of flax. Others were spinning with a distaff and spindle. One of them was weaving a robe of it, intermixed with stripes of the sea-

otter skin, on a frame of adequate contrivance that was placed against the side of the house. The men were fishing on the river with drag-nets between two canoes. These nets are forced by poles to the bottom, the current driving them before it; by which means the salmon coming up the river are intercepted, and give notice of their being taken by the struggles they make in the bag or sleeve of the net. There are no weirs in this part of the river, as I suppose, from the numerous channels into which it is divided. The machines, therefore, are placed along the banks, and consequently these people are not so well supplied with fish as the village which has been already described, nor do they appear to possess the same industry. The inhabitants of the last house accompanied us in a large canoe. They recommended us to leave ours here, as the next village was but at a small distance from us, and the water more rapid than that which we had passed. They informed us also, that we were approaching a cascade. I directed them to shoot it, and proceeded myself to the foot thereof, where I re-imbarked, and we went on with great velocity, till we came to a fall, where we left our canoe, and carried our luggage along a road through a wood for some hundred yards, when we came to a village, consisting of six very large houses, erected on pallifades, rising twenty-five feet from the ground, which differed in no one circumstance from those already described, but the height of their elevation. They contained only four men and their families. The rest of the inhabitants were with us and in the small houses which we passed higher up the river.* These people do not seem to enjoy the abundance of their neighbours, as the men who returned

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* Mr. Johnstone came to these houses the first day of the preceding month.

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from fishing had no more than five salmon; they refused to sell one of them, but gave me one roasted of a very indifferent kind. In the houses there were several chests or boxes containing different articles that belonged to the people whom we had lately passed. If I were to judge by the heaps of filth beneath these buildings, they must have been erected at a more distant period than any which we had passed. From these houses I could perceive the termination of the river, and its discharge into a narrow arm of the sea.

As it was now half past six in the evening, and the weather cloudy, I determined to remain here for the night, and for that purpose we possessed ourselves of one of the unoccupied houses. The remains of our last meal, which we brought with us, served for our supper, as we could not procure a single fish from the natives. The course of the river is about West, and the distance from the great village upwards of thirty-six miles. There we had lost our dog, a circumstance of no small regret to me.

Saturday 20.

We rose at a very early hour this morning, when I proposed to the Indians to run down our canoe, or procure another at this place. To both these proposals they turned a deaf ear, as they imagined that I should be satisfied with having come in sight of the sea. Two of them peremptorily refused to proceed; but the other two having consented to continue with us, we obtained a larger canoe than our former one, and though it was in a leaky state we were glad to possess it.

At about eight we got out of the river, which discharges itself by

various channels into an arm of the sea. The tide was out, and had left a large space covered with sea-weed. The surrounding hills were involved in fog. The wind was at West, which was a-head of us, and very strong; the bay appearing to be from one to three miles in breadth. As we advanced along the land we saw a great number of sea-otters. We fired several shots at them, but without any success from the rapidity with which they plunge under the water. We also saw many small porpoises or divers. The white-headed eagle, which is common in the interior parts; some small gulls, a dark bird which is inferior in size to the gull, and a few small ducks, were all the birds which presented themselves to our view.

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At two in the afternoon the swell was so high, and the wind, which was against us, so boisterous, that we could not proceed with our leaky vessel, we therefore landed in a small cove on the right side of the bay. Opposite to us appeared another small bay, in the mouth of which is an island, and where, according to the information of the Indians, a river discharges itself that abounds in salmon.

Our young Indians now discovered a very evident disposition to leave us; and, in the evening, one of them made his escape. Mr. Mackay, however, with the other, pursued and brought him back; but as it was by no means necessary to detain him, particularly as provisions did not abound with us, I gave him a small portion, with a pair of shoes, which were necessary for his journey, and a silk handkerchief, telling him at the same time, that he might go and inform his friends, that we should also return.

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return in three nights. He accordingly left us, and his companion, the young chief, went with him.

When we landed, the tide was going out, and at a quarter past four it was ebb, the water having fallen in that short period eleven feet and an half. Since we left the river, not a quarter of an hour had passed in which we did not see porpoises and sea-otters. Soon after ten it was high water, which rendered it necessary that our baggage should be shifted several times, though not till some of the things had been wetted.

We were now reduced to the necessity of looking out for fresh water, with which we were plentifully supplied by the rills that ran down from the mountains.

When it was dark the young chief returned to us, bearing a large porcupine on his back. He first cut the animal open, and having disencumbered it of the entrails, threw them into the sea; he then singed its skin, and boiled it in separate pieces, as our kettle was not sufficiently capacious to contain the whole: nor did he go to rest, till, with the assistance of two of my people who happened to be awake, every morsel of it was devoured.

I had flattered myself with the hope of getting a distance of the moon and stars, but the cloudy weather continually disappointed me; and I began to fear that I should fail in this important object; particularly as our provisions were at a very low ebb, and we had, as yet, no reason to

expect any assistance from the natives. Our stock was, at this time, reduced to twenty pounds weight of pemmican, fifteen pounds of rice, and six pounds of flour, among ten half-starved men, in a leaky vessel, and on a barbarous coast. Our course from the river was about West-South-West, distance ten miles.

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At forty minutes past four this morning it was low water, which made fifteen feet perpendicular height below the high-water mark of last night. Mr. Mackay collected a quantity of small muscles which we boiled. Our people did not partake of this regale, as they are wholly unacquainted with sea shell-fish. Our young chief being missing, we imagined that he had taken his flight, but, as we were preparing to depart, he fortunately made his appearance from the woods, where he had been to take his rest after his feast of last night. At six we were upon the water, when we cleared the small bay, which we named Porcupine Cove, and steered West-South-West for seven miles, we then opened a channel about two miles and an half wide at South-South-West, and had a view of ten or twelve miles into it. As I could not ascertain the distance from the open sea, and being uncertain whether we were in a bay or among inlets and channels of islands, I confined my search to a proper place for taking an observation. We steered, therefore, along the land on the left, West-North-West a mile and an half; then North-West one fourth of a mile, and North three miles to an island; the land continuing to run North-North-West, then along the island, South-South-West half a mile, West a mile and an half, and from thence directly across to the land on the left, (where I had an altitude,) South-West three miles.*

Sunday 21.

* The Cape or Point Menzies of Vancouver.

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From this position a channel, of which the island we left appeared to make a cheek, bears North by East.

Under the land we met with three canoes, with fifteen men in them, and laden with their moveables, as if proceeding to a new situation, or returning to a former one. They manifested no kind of mistrust or fear of us, but entered into conversation with our young man, as I supposed, to obtain some information concerning us. It did not appear that they were the same people as those we had lately seen, as they spoke the language of our young chief, with a different accent. They then examined every thing we had in our canoe, with an air of indifference and disdain. One of them in particular made me understand, with an air of insolence, that a large canoe had lately been in this bay, with people in her like me, and that one of them, whom he called *Macubah*, had fired on him and his friends, and that *Benfens* had struck him on the back, with the flat part of his sword. He also mentioned another name, the articulation of which I could not determine. At the same time he illustrated these circumstances by the assistance of my gun and sword; and I do not doubt but he well deserved the treatment which he described. He also produced several European articles, which could not have been long in his possession. From his conduct and appearance, I wished very much to be rid of him, and flattered myself that he would prosecute his voyage, which appeared to be in an opposite direction to our course. However, when I prepared to part from them, they turned their canoes about, and persuaded my young man to leave me, which I could not prevent.

We

We coasted along the land* at about West-South-West for six miles, and met a canoe with two boys in it, who were dispatched to summon the people on that part of the coast to join them. The troublesome fellow now forced himself into my canoe, and pointed out a narrow channel on the opposite shore, that led to his village, and requested us to steer towards it, which I accordingly ordered. His importunities now became very irksome, and he wanted to see every thing we had, particularly my instruments, concerning which he must have received information from my young man. He asked for my hat, my handkerchief, and, in short, every thing that he saw about me. At the same time he frequently repeated the unpleasant intelligence that he had been shot at by people of my colour. At some distance from the land a channel opened to us, at South-West by West, and pointing that way, he made me understand that *Macubah* came there with his large canoe. When we were in mid-channel, I perceived some sheds, or the remains of old buildings, on the shore; and as, from that circumstance, I thought it probable that some Europeans might have been there, I directed my steersman to make for that spot. The traverse is upwards of three miles North-West.

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We landed, and found the ruins of a village, in a situation calculated for defence. The place itself was over grown with weeds, and in the centre of the houses there was a temple, of the same form and construction as that which I described at the large village. We were soon followed by ten canoes, each of which contained from three to six men. They

* Named by Vancouver King's Island.

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informed us that we were expected at the village, where we should see many of them. From their general deportment I was very apprehensive that some hostile design was meditated against us, and for the first time I acknowledged my apprehensions to my people. I accordingly desired them to be very much upon their guard, and to be prepared if any violence was offered to defend themselves to the last.

We had no sooner landed, than we took possession of a rock, where there was not space for more than twice our number, and which admitted of our defending ourselves with advantage, in case we should be attacked. The people in the three first canoes, were the most troublesome, but, after doing their utmost to irritate us, they went away. They were, however, no sooner gone, than an hat, an handkerchief, and several other articles, were missing. The rest of our visitors continued their pressing invitations to accompany them to their village, but finding our resolution to decline them was not to be shaken, they, about sun-set relieved us from all further importunities, by their departure.

Another canoe, however, soon arrived, with seven stout, well-looking men. They brought a box, which contained a very fine sea-otter skin, and a goat skin, that was beautifully white. For the former they demanded my hanger, which, as may well be supposed, could not be spared in our present situation, and they actually refused to take a yard and an half of common broad cloth, with some other articles, for the skin, which proves the unreflecting improvidence of our European traders. The goat-skin was so bulky that I did not offer to purchase it. These men also told me that *Macubah* had been there, and left his ship behind a point

point of land in the channel, South-West from us; from whence he had come to their village in boats, which these people represented by imitating our manner of rowing. When I offered them what they did not choose to accept for the otter-skin, they shook their heads, and very distinctly answered "No, no." And to mark their refusal of any thing we asked from them, they emphatically employed the same British monosyllable. In one of the canoes which had left us, there was a seal, that I wished to purchase, but could not persuade the natives to part with it. They had also a fish, which I now saw for the first time. It was about eighteen inches in length, of the shape and appearance of a trout, with strong, sharp teeth. We saw great numbers of the animals which we had taken for sea otters, but I was now disposed to think that a great part of them, at least, must have been seals.

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The natives having left us, we made a fire to warm ourselves, and as for supper, there was but little of that, for our whole daily allowance did not amount to what was sufficient for a single meal. The weather was clear throughout the day, which was succeeded by a fine moon-light night. I directed the people to keep watch by two in turn, and laid myself down in my cloak.

This morning the weather was clear and pleasant; nor had any thing occurred to disturb us throughout the night. One solitary Indian, indeed, came to us with about half a pound of boiled seal's flesh, and the head of a small salmon, for which he asked an handkerchief, but afterwards accepted a few beads. As this man came alone, I concluded that no general plan had been formed among the natives to annoy us, but this opinion did not altogether calm the apprehensions of my people.

Monday 22.

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Soon after eight in the morning, I took five altitudes for time, and the mean of them was $36^{\circ} 48'$ at six in the afternoon, 58. 34. time, by the watch, which makes the achrometer flow apparent time $1^{\text{h}} 21^{\text{m}} 44^{\text{s}}$.

Two canoes now arrived from the same quarter as the rest, with several men, and our young Indian along with them. They brought a very few small sea-otter skins, out of season, with some pieces of raw seal's flesh. The former were of no value, but hunger compelled some of my people to take the latter, at an extravagant price. Mr. Mackay lighted a bit of touch wood with a burning-glass, in the cover of his tobacco-box, which so surpris'd the natives, that they exchanged the best of their otter skins for it. The young man was now very anxious to persuade our people to depart, as the natives, he said, were as numerous as musquitoes, and of very malignant character. This information produced some very earnest remonstrances to me to hasten our departure, but as I was determin'd not to leave this place, except I was absolutely compelled to it, till I had ascertained its situation, these solicitations were not repeated.

While I was taking a meridian, two canoes, of a larger size, and well manned, appeared from the main South-West channel. They seem'd to be the fore-runners of others, who were coming to co-operate with the people of the village, in consequence of the message sent by the two boys, which has been already mentioned; and our young Indian, who understood them, renewed his entreaties for our departure, as they would soon come to shoot their arrows, and hurl their spears at us. In relating our danger, his agitation was so violent that he foamed at the mouth. Though I was not altogether free from apprehensions on the occasion, it

was

was necessary for me to disguise them, as my people were panic struck, and some of them asked if it was my determination to remain there to be sacrificed? My reply was the same as their former importunities had received, that I would not stir till I had accomplished my object; at the same time, to humour their fears, I consented that they should put every thing into the canoe, that we might be in a state of preparation to depart. The two canoes now approached the shore, and in a short time five men, with their families, landed very quietly from them. My instruments being exposed, they examined them with much apparent admiration and astonishment. My altitude, by an artificial horizon, gave $52^{\circ} 21' 33''$; that by the natural horizon was $52^{\circ} 20' 48''$ North latitude.*

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These Indians were of a different tribe from those which I had already seen, as our guide did not understand their language. I now mixed up some vermilion in melted grease, and inscribed, in large characters, on the South-East face of the rock on which we had slept last night, this brief memorial—"Alexander Mackenzie, from Canada, by land, the twenty-second of July, one thousand seven hundred and ninety-three."

As I thought that we were too near the village, I consented to leave this place, and accordingly proceeded North-East three miles, when we landed on a point, in a small cove, where we should not be readily seen, and could not be attacked except in our front.

Among other articles that had been stolen from us, at our last station,

* This I found to be the cheek of Vancouver's Cascade Canal.

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was a founding-line, which I intended to have employed in this bay, though I should not probably have found the bottom, at any distance from the shore, as the appearance both of the water and land indicated a great depth. The latter displayed a solid rock, rising, as it appeared to me, from three to seven hundred feet above high water mark. Where any soil was scattered about, there were cedars, spruce-firs, white birch, and other trees of large growth. From its precipices issued streams of fine water, as cold as ice.

The two canoes which we had left at our last station, followed us hither, and when they were preparing to depart, our young chief embarked with them. I was determined, however, to prevent his escape, and compelled him, by actual force, to come on shore, for I thought it much better to incur his displeasure, than to suffer him to expose himself to any untoward accident among strangers, or to return to his father before us. The men in the canoe made signs for him to go over the hill, and that they would take him on board at the other side of it. As I was necessarily engaged in other matters, I desired my people to take care that he should not run away; but they peremptorily refused to be employed in keeping him against his will. I was, therefore, reduced to the necessity of watching him myself.

I took five altitudes, and the mean of them was 29. 23. 48. at 3. 5. 53. in the afternoon, by the watch, which makes it flow apparent time

	1 ^m	22 ^h	38 ^s			
In the forenoon it was	1	21	44	2	44	22
			Mean of both	1	22	11
Difference nine hours going of the time-piece flow						8
				1	22	19

I observed

I observed an emerfion of Jupiter's third fatellite, which gave $8^{\circ} 32' 21''$ difference of longitude. I then observed an emerfion of Jupiter's firft fatellite, which gave 8. 31. 48. The mean of thefe obfervations is $8^{\circ} 32' 2''$ which is equal to 128. 2. Weft of Greenwich.

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I had now determined my fituation, which is the moft fortunate circumftance of my long, painful, and perilous journey, as a few cloudy days would have prevented me from afcertaining the final longitude of it.*

At twelve it was high water, but the tide did not come within a foot and an half of the high water mark of laft night. As foon as I had completed my obfervations, we left this place: it was then ten o'clock in the afternoon. We returned the fame way that we came, and though the tide was running out very ftrong, by keeping clofe in with the rocks, we proceeded at a confiderable rate, as my people were very anxious to get out of the reach of the inhabitants of this coaft.

During our courfe we faw feveral fires on the land to the Southward, and after the day dawned, their fmokes were vifible. At half paft four this morning we arrived at our encampment of the night of the 21ft, which had been named Porcupine Cove. The tide was out, and confiderably lower than we found it when we were here before; the high-

Tuefday 23.

* Mr. Meares was undoubtedly wrong in the idea, fo pofitively infifted on by him in his voyage, that there was a North-Weft paffage to the Southward of fixty-nine degrees and an half of latitude, as I flatter myfelf has been proved by my former voyage. Nor can I refrain from expreffing my furprife at his affertion, that there was an inland fea or archipelago of great extent between the iflands of Nootka and the main, about the latitude where I was at this time. Indeed I have been informed that Captain Grey, who commanded an American vefel, and on whofe authority he ventured this opinion, denies that he had given Mr. Meares any fuch information. Befides, the contrary is indubitably proved by Captain Vancouver's furvey, from which no appeal can be made.

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water mark being above the place where we had made our fire. This fluctuation must be occasioned by the action of the wind upon the water, in those narrow channels.

As we continued onwards, towards the river, we saw a canoe, well manned, which at first made from us with great expedition, but afterwards waited, as if to reconnoitre us; however, it kept out of our way, and allowed us to pass. The tide being much lower than when we were here before, we were under the necessity of landing a mile below the village. We observed that stakes were fixed in the ground along the bay, and in some places machines were fastened to them, as I afterwards learned, to intercept the seals and otters. These works are very extensive, and must have been erected with no common labour. The only bird we saw to-day was the white-headed eagle.*

Our guide directed us to draw the canoe out of the reach of the tide, and to leave it. He would not wait, however, till this operation was performed, and I did not wish to let him go alone. I therefore followed him through a bad road encumbered with underwood. When we had quitted the wood, and were in sight of the houses, the young man being about fifteen or twenty paces before me, I was surprised to see two men running down towards me from one of the houses, with daggers in their hands and fury in their aspect. From their hostile appearance, I could not doubt of their purpose. I therefore stopped short, threw down my cloak, and put myself in a posture of defence, with my gun presented

* This bay was now named Mackenzie's Outlet.

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towards them. Fortunately for me, they knew the effect of fire-arms, and instantly dropped their daggers, which were fastened by a string to their wrists, and had before been held in a menacing attitude. I let my gun also fall into my left hand, and drew my hanger. Several others soon joined them, who were armed in the same manner; and among them I recognised the man whom I have already mentioned as being so troublesome to us, and who now repeated the names of Macubah and Benzins, signifying at the same time by his action, as on a former occasion, that he had been shot at by them. Until I saw him my mind was undisturbed; but the moment he appeared, conceiving that he was the cause of my present perilous situation, my resentment predominated, and, if he had come within my reach, I verily believe, that I should have terminated his insolence for ever.

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The rest now approached so near, that one of them contrived to get behind me, and grasped me in his arms. I soon disengaged myself from him; and, that he did not avail himself of the opportunity which he had of plunging his dagger into me, I cannot conjecture. They certainly might have overpowered me, and though I should probably have killed one or two of them, I must have fallen at last.

One of my people now came out of the wood. On his appearance they instantly took to flight, and with the utmost speed sought shelter in the houses from whence they had issued. It was, however, upwards of ten minutes before all my people joined me; and as they came one after the other, these people might have successively dispatched every

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one of us. If they had killed me, in the first instance, this consequence would certainly have followed, and not one of us would have returned home to tell the horrid fate of his companions.

After having stated the danger I had encountered, I told my people that I was determined to make these natives feel the impropriety of their conduct toward us, and compel them to return my hat and cloak which they had taken in the scuffle, as well as the articles previously purloined from us; for most of the men who were in the three canoes that we first saw, were now in the village. I therefore told my men to prime their pieces afresh, and prepare themselves for an active use of them, if the occasion should require it.

We now drew up before the house, and made signs for some one to come down to us. At length our young chief appeared, and told us that the men belonging to the canoes had not only informed his friends, that we had treated him very ill, but that we had killed four of their companions whom we had met in the bay. When I had explained to them as well as it was in my power, the falsehood of such a story, I insisted on the restoration of every thing that had been taken from us, as well as a necessary supply of fish, as the conditions of my departure; accordingly the things were restored, and a few dried fish along with them. A reconciliation now took place, but our guide or young chief was so much terrified that he would remain no longer with us, and requested us to follow with his father's canoe, or mischief would follow. I determined, however, before my departure, to take an observation, and at noon got
a meridian

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a meridian altitude, making this place, which I named Rascal's Village,
52. 23. 43. North latitude.

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On my informing the natives that we wanted something more to eat, they brought us two salmon; and when we signified that we had no poles to set the canoe against the current, they were furnished with equal alacrity, so anxious were they for our departure. I paid, however, for every thing which we had received, and did not forget the loan of the canoe.

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