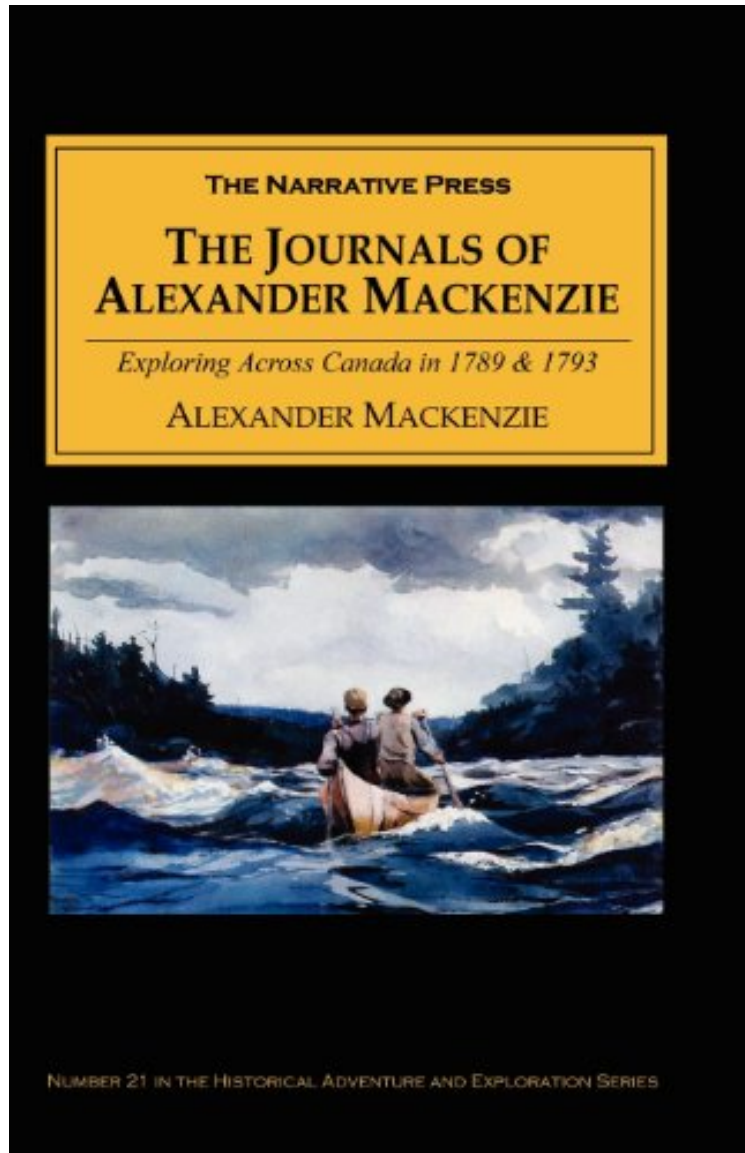


(Ebook pdf) The Journals of Alexander MacKenzie: Exploring Across Canada in 1789 1793

The Journals of Alexander MacKenzie: Exploring Across Canada in 1789 1793

Alexander Mackenzie

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The journal of possibly the first white man to cross continental North America. Published 12 years before Thomas Jefferson sent Louis and Clark on a similar journey.

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Alexander Mackenzie was the first man to cross continental North America, a trip he accomplished by canoe in 1793 - twelve years before Lewis and Clark. Mackenzie's journal of his explorations appeared in 1801. Both the Lewis and Clark and the Mackenzie expeditions were conceived as waterborne explorations and owed their strategy to the French explorers, who had proposed, sixty years earlier, that the North American continent could be crossed by going west on either the Saskatchewan or the Missouri, and then linking up with the unidentified "River of the West." Acting on this overly-simple thesis, Mackenzie took the fur traders' route along the Saskatchewan and found his way over to the Fraser, and thence by an Indian trail to the coast. Mackenzie had an amazingly naive attitude about the wilderness around him and the proper way one should interact with it. But somehow his Dudley Doright personality worked: "My tent was no sooner pitched, than I summoned the Indians together, and gave each of them about four inches of Brazil tobacco, a dram of spirits, and lighted the pipe...I informed them that I had heard of their misconduct, and was come among them to inquire into the truth of it. I added also that it would be an established rule with me to treat them with kindness, if their behavior should be such as to deserve it; but at the same time, that I should be equally severe if they failed in those returns which I had a right to expect from them. I then presented them with a quantity of rum, which I recommended to be used with discretion, and then added some tobacco, as a token of peace. They, in return, made me the fairest promises; and, having expressed the pride they felt on beholding me in their country, took their leave." It seemed as if his handful of men were often on the verge of mutiny. At least one of his guides deserted him. They found a new one: "About midnight a rustling noise was heard in the woods which created a general alarm, and I was awakened to be informed of the circumstance, but heard nothing...At two in the morning the sentinel informed me, that he saw something like a human figure creeping along on all-fours about fifty paces above us...it proved to be an old, grey-haired, blind man, who had been compelled to leave his hiding-place by extreme hunger, being too infirm to join in the flight of the natives to whom he belonged." Mackenzie fed the blind Indian, then drafted the old man as his guide. The party groped its way westward. Mackenzie's route to the Pacific Ocean proved too difficult for others to follow, but this does not diminish the value of this great expedition across wild America.