



McGillivray's Map

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Simon McGillivray, a trader for the Hudson's Bay Company, was the first outsider ever to visit "The Forks," the place where the Skeena and Bulkley rivers join, and the later site of the town of Hazelton. Based out of Fort St. James, he was shown the way west to The Forks in June of 1833 by local people out of Old Fort Babine. But how did his guides take him? Fortunately, he left us a hand-drawn map, located in this century by Alan Pickard in the HBC Archives in Winnipeg. It is possibly the oldest European-style map of the Bulkley Valley.

And what a fantastic map! Hand-drawn with little peaks and wavy rivers, it tells about an alternate geography, one in which the main route of travel connects Hazelton to the outlet of Babine Lake, two locales that today are a dusty, circuitous, three-hour drive apart. Until the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway came up the Bulkley, the primary way for people and goods to travel between the interior and the coast was through the Suskwa Pass and along the Suskwa River. It had a major pack trail built through it in the 1870s, and hundreds of gold-seekers headed to the Omineca this way.

We can match McGillivray's map up with many features we recognize today. French Peak (1) is probably where, "From this mountain the whole course of Babine River is in view except a little of the lower parts." "Rivulet" (2) is the upper part of the Suskwa River as it descends from Suskwa Pass. (McGillivray calls the Suskwa River "MacPherson's River" and identifies as its headwaters what we would call Harold Price Creek.) The meeting place (3) where he touches the Suskwa on both his outward and return journeys is perhaps the same place where the Suskwa Forest Road crosses the river at Km 15 today. The "Sans Culotte River" (4) is Fifteen Mile Creek near Hazelton. The Forks itself (5) stands out as the confluence of two major rivers. I have to admire how closely the shapes of McGillivray's hand-drawn rivers echo the actual geography measured today with GPS and satellite photos.

One thing McGillivray knew he was looking for was *Simpson's River*, a big river that met the ocean near an HBC post called Fort Simpson, at today's village of Lax Kw'alaams just north along the coast from Prince Rupert. British map-makers incorrectly showed Simpson's River flowing out of Babine Lake, and coming out at the mouth of the Nass. No one they knew had ever actually been down that river. When McGillivray saw the Bulkley, he thought he had found Simpson's River, and labelled it that way, in his beautiful handwriting, on his map. He also assumed the big river coming in from the north to join it at the Forks was the Babine. He never knew this was in fact the Skeena, a major river that collects the Babine among many

1 *Sans Culotte* was a term for the the working class folk fighting in the French revolution some fifty years before McGillivray drew his map.

others on its way to the sea.

McGillivray, whose mother was a métisse and father an HBC partner, had one foot in the world of European culture and the other in native culture. He travelled in Europe, but was also at home in the wilder lands of Western Canada. He formed a crucial link, because he could live with the local residents, who knew where everything was, and then pass on what he learned to HBC traders and map-makers. Sadly, the information on this map never made it out of the HBC offices. More than ten years after his journey, the Forks and the Skeena were still absent from both British and American maps.