

“Commentary on the Navigation of the St. Lawrence River and its Tributaries, upriver from Montreal and Oswego: vessels used, distances, etc.”

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- (1) The Navigation of the river S^l. Lawrence from Montreal to Oswegatchie distant about fifty Leagues, & from thence up the same river thirty leagues to lake Ontario, then over the East end of that lake twenty five leagues to Oswego, is so well known, & attended with so little difficulty, that a description of it may be unnecessary.

At Oswego or Fort Ontario you enter the Onondagoe river, which is very narrow & a strong Current when the water is high, but at this time of Year that is seldom the case, for this river taking its source put of the Oneida Lake, is not so readily swelled with rain, as other rivers which come from a greater distance. There is not above 7 & ½ feet water & the bottom a solid rock just before you enter the river, altho’ when you get in there is a good harbour, however neither the Snow Haldimand not the other King’s Ship now building can got into it, & it is a very unsafe roadstead as being in a kind of Bay or corner of the Lake exposed to the Northerly & Westerly Winds. There we lost two or three of the King’s Ships in the Fall 1764, which were built, that, or the preceding Year, on account of the Indian War.

Fort Ontario stands on very high ground on the bank of the Lake about a ¼ of a mile to the Eastward of the mouth of the river; the Fortification being originally logg work, is almost all fallen down but the Barracks & other works are still standing, tho’ in no kind of repair. The French Fort of Oswego was situated on the bank of the river other side, of which no vestage now remains.

The next Post that the English had, was at the Onondaga Falls, twelve miles up the river, & all the way, except about a league exceeding rapid & shoal. About

- (2) About a mile above the entrance¹ you meet with the Oswego rift or rapid, in which there is a small fall. For 7 miles further you have a strong current & many shoals ‘till come to Broadstreet’s rift, which for want of water is the most difficult of any. After it you have a league of still water before mentioned. Then a small rapid where the Indians have Eelwyers; to avoid which go close along the West shore & cross the river above when you will arrive at an Indian Field at the foot of the rapids occasioned by the Onondago falls. There is a road from hence about ¾ of a mile to the falls, where it may be necessary to carry over Land, Provisions &ca. The boats are with difficulty got up this rapid to the foot of the fall, which is between 9 & 12 feet high, where they are taken over land upon rowlers about fifty yards, then launched & reloaded. There is no remains of the Post we had here.

You then proceed up the three rivers, where the Seneca river being much the same size; as the Onondago falls into the latter, the distance is about 12 miles, a good many rapids, particularly the three river rift in which there is a fall of about 2 feet, here the Indians have also Eelwires & the Channel varies as they happen to be placed. About a mile & a half above this you come to the three rivers, at this place many have gone up the wrong way, please keep the left hand: From hence it is about 24 miles to Fort Brewerton at the Oneida Lake, which is also destroyed; there is very little Current in this part of the river, except at

¹ The entrance of the river into Lake Ontario.

the Oak Orchard² about half way. At Cocketinoy³ about 7 miles from that, & in the mouth of the river, ~~where~~ you enter the lake which is an exceeding bad
(3) bad Shoal. There is no difficulty in crossing the lake on the North shore; your course about E': & the distance about 25 miles. Steer about mid way between the Islands & the shore, 'till you come to the 9 or 6 mile point then cross the Bay which is 4 or 5 miles deep, & about the middle of the East end of the lake, near some very tall pines you ~~will~~ will find the mouth of Wood creek.: there is a barr⁴ just before you go into it upon which you may Ship some water if there is any sea running, but when you get in there is plenty of water. Here we had another post, the Royal Blockhouse which is also demolished. From hence you proceed two miles up Canada Creek (as all such coming from the Northward are called in that Country). it is larger than Wood Creek, & many have mistaken their way here also, but you are to keep to the right hand. A little above this you come to were there was ferry kept when there was a Garrison in the aforementioned Posts, & from that you will find a path which formerly was a good road to Fort Stanwix It stretches along the bank of Canada Creek except where there are windings in the Creek over a flat low land about 5 miles, then you leave the Creek & assend a Pine Ridge over which it goes 7 miles, when you come to another Canada Creek, distant 8 miles from Fort Stanwix, from whence there is a good road for all the Merchandize (except very early in the Spring when the water is high) must be transported this far over the Land, for it is with difficulty that the empty boats can be brought up.

We have before mentioned that the Distance from the Ferry to the second Canada Creek is only 12 miles by Land, & the road can be easily made in the Summer season, particularly over the ridge, now the distance by water is 24 miles, the Creek so very shoal that it is almost impossible to carry Loaded or
(4) or even half-loaded Boats up it, & when once you leave the Ferry there is no gaining the Pine ridge, because impassable Ceder swamps are in the way; it may be thought proper to make this road, which can be done in a day or two, as it will be found a more certain way of transporting Stores, & quite as easy as by water. The Bridge at the last Canada Creek is broken down, but you will find a good ford just below it. The water of Wood Creek, & the first Wood Creek is very bad, but there is good water about the middle of the Pine ridge, also that of the last Canada Creek. A moderate allowance of Rum preserves the health of Men who navigate these rivers. Horses & Carts can be carried very easily from Canada, & there being good pasturage where the old Forts were; no other provender will be necessary other than Oats.

From this last Canada Creek where we also had a Post, you proceed along the road 2 miles to Fort Bull, of which nothing remains but part of the ditch, hence 4 miles further to where the boats arrive at is Fort New Port, no part of ir remains, and now being at the source of Wood Creek, which has not water enough to turn a Mill in the Summer time, there is a carrying place about a mile to the Mohawk River, the road goes past Fort Stanwix & its direction can not easily be altered on account of Swampy low land.

It is further to be observed, that no other than small Batteaux or Barges, & they of the lightest kind, can be carried up the river Onondago in the Summer Season, neither

² A community named Oak Orchard still occupies that spot.

³ Caughdenoy, New York.

⁴ Fish Creek Reef.

- are Burch Cannoes proper to carry any burthen, because of the many rapids which are full of Rocks & Stones. Such small
- (5) small Battoes might carry Eight Men & Six Barrels of Provisions, or that weight; Each boat should be furnish'd with four Oars, Five setting poles pointed with iron; four Paddles about 18 inches longer than those used in this country, & to have crutches. Oil Cloths will be absolutely necessary to cover the Buscuit & ca. There are some good Battoemen with Major Gray, who could be proper Pilots, & if a number of Boats goes together, they will be about three weeks from La Chine to the Wood Creek.

The Passage from La Chine to Portage at the Cedars is about Six Leagues: Here all the Merchants goods are put on shore & carried in Carts to the Portage above the Mill, distant one League & a half, for which they pay 5 Shillings Halifax for each Cart load. The Boats pass up close to the shore. The King's Battoes do not unload here, they pass the first rapid at this place called Le trou' & a little higher another called Roche Fendu, but are obliged to land four Cart Loads at the third rapid near the Mill, & about 4 miles from the first Portage which is carried in Carts about ½ mile; where the Battoes pass round to receive it again. For the Cartage the King pays 30 Sous for each Load (of five Barrels of Provisions each), there are 25 Barrels in each Battoe About a league & a half further up there is another rapid called le Cotteau de lac where they are obliged to take out all the Provisions again & roll them over a narrow part of Land about 20 yds across, the empty boat with difficulty gets round. From hence to the point of the Lake

- (6) Lake is about half a league. From the first Portage, to this place the Current is exceeding rapid. The Lake is extended 7 Leagues in length & from the upper end to S^t. Regis is reckoned 3 Leagues. From St. Regise to the Millé Roche is 3 Leagues, there is here a narrow shallow Channel by which the Battoes mount & a league further you come to le long Sau't; this is a great rapid, the water dashing over the rocks with great fury, the Battoe is drawn along here by the Cable. From hence to the Rapid Plat is 6 Leagues, it is very strong but runs smooth, from this it is half a league to Point Iroquois & from hence to Le Gallo is one League & a half; this is a small rapid & the last you meet with untill you get to Oswegatchie. There is a strong current every where except in Lake Francois: I went up with difficulty in four days & returned easily in two to S^t. Regise, it took two days hard work & two more to Oswegatchie.

The Provision Boats in going up always keep close to the North shore, the banks are high & dry, covered with fine Oak, Hickory, Beech, some Ash & Pine (except for about a league on Lake Francois called Point Mou'le & half a league between the long Saut & rapid Plat). There are nothing but small brooks, which fall from the Land upon this shore, I suppose the reason is ~~that~~ the vicinity of the grand river. On the South shore there is greater quantities of Pine & the Woods much thicker.

Montreal April 9. 1777
B. Slack, 2^d L^t. Engineers⁵
(Copy)

⁵ Benjamin Slack was commissioned Practitioner-Engineer, in the Corps of Engineers, 4 March 1776. His rank title was changed to 2nd Lieutenant in 1782. Slack was lost at sea, 4 April. 1783.