

Anthony Henday and Innisfail

Anthony Henday was the first white man to see the Rocky Mountains north of Mexico, to cross the Canadian Prairies, to meet the Blackfeet and to see them riding horses. It is likely that Henday first saw the Rocky Mountains from a hill east or northeast of Innisfail.

The Man – There is little concrete information about Henday either before or after his historic expedition. The only information available is from Andrew Graham who worked with Henday at York Factory (Fort Nelson). Graham said he was born on the Island of Wight, an island in the English Channel, between England and France. In 1748 he was outlawed^a for smuggling and in 1750 he was employed by the Hudson's Bay Company¹. The Company did not know he was an outlaw. For the first four years he was at York Factory Henday was a labourer and net mender, the lowest of the employees. Henday volunteered to go on the expedition inland to persuade the Blackfeet to bring their furs to York Factory on Hudson's Bay¹. He went on two expeditions inland to the Prairies for the Hudson's Bay Company and then returned to England in 1763². Nothing is known of him after that.

Anthony Henday in the Innisfail Area

Henday crossed the Red Deer River east of Delburne on October 11, 1754 and headed in a southwesterly direction. He arrived in the Pine Lake area on October 13, 1754 where he met an advance party of the Blood Tribe², part of the Blackfoot Confederacy. At this time Henday's party consisted of about 45 tents of Cree and 17 tents of Assiniboines, about 275 people². On October 14 he traveled from his camp on the east side of Pine Lake to the camp of the Great Leader of the Blackfeet that was located on a hillside 4 miles west of the south end of Pine Lake². The Blackfoot camp consisted of between 200 (Oct. 14) and 322 (Oct. 17) tents lined up in two rows, with the Leader's tent in the middle at one

^a To be banished or exiled. One put outside the law and deprived of its benefits and protection.

end of the rows. Henday and his group met with the Great Leader on two successive days. The Great Leader could not be talked into coming down to Hudson Bay to trade.

On October 17 the Blackfoot broke camp and Henday's group moved a short distance south and west where they spent several days. Henday never directly mentions when he first saw the Rocky Mountains. If he had not seen the Rocky Mountains before he would have seen them shortly after October 17 when he traveled from the area west of Pine Lake south west toward present day Innisfail². He does mention his last sight of them on December 24 from a hill near Eckville².

Henday's party broke up into smaller groups following the great meeting with the Blackfeet. The group traveling with Henday was likely reduced to about 11 tents². On October 23 his band moved again and may have camped near Napoleon Lake, on the west side of Innisfail². That day his group killed two moose, one buffalo and 10 beaver. Henday thought they could have killed 200 beaver

On Saturday, October 26, 1754 Henday's party crossed the Red Deer River (Waskesew River in his notes) west of present day Innisfail where the river flows due east. He reported the river was '2 feet deep & 10 poles wide. The current runs East. Large timber of sorts growing on its banks.' They likely crossed at the mouth of the Medicine River which was a traditional crossing site on the Red Deer River.

Two days later they left the plains (Muscuty Plains in his notes) and entered the woodlands. Henday's party worked their way up the Raven River and Stauffer Creek². By November 12 Henday's camp was in the Stauffer area. By December 4 his party had dwindled to 3 men, 5 women and 4 children². They turned north and crossed the Medicine River near Eckville around Christmas time. It was from Last Hill near Eckville that Henday looked out for his last view of the Arsinie Watchie, the Rocky Mountains, on December 24, 1754². Then they passed over the hills west of Sylvan Lake and into the valley of the Blindman River near Bentley². Henday slowly moved north and reached the Rimbey area near

the end of December², the headwaters of the Blindman in early February and the Kavanagh area in late February, 1755².

Henday's Journal^b Entries for the time he was in the Innisfail area, from October 17 through October 26, 1754

October 17. Thursday. 322 tents of Archithinue Natives unpitched and moved Westward, 17 tents of Asinepoet Natives moved Northwards; and we moved S.W.b.W. 9 miles. Level land with ledges of Poplar and willows. Passed two creeks, but little water in them; and none to be got anywhere else.

October 18. Friday. A gentle frost: Travelled none. The women employed dressing skins for cloathing &c.

October 19. Saturday. Snow at times; Travelled none. Women employed as Yesterday.

October 20. Sunday. Travelled none. Women employed making Beaver coats; Men hunting; killed 5 Buffalo & one black Bear.

October 21. Monday. Travelled none. I asked the men why they did not go to kill Beaver & Wolves: but they made me little answer.

October 22. Tuesday. Travelled 5 Miles W.S.W. Level land with poplars; a great many small Creeks & ponds, with plenty of Beaver houses. Indians killed a few, & I killed three. Fifteen tents pitched another way.

October 23. Wednesday. Travelled 7 Miles W.S.W. Land &c. as yesterday. Indians killed two Moose, one Buffalo & only ten Beaver; when I am certain they might have killed 200 if they had chused: but they only killed a few for cloathing, & for Beaver feasting; Buffalo being their chief food at present. The ponds here are surrounded with Beaver

^b From published version edited by L.J. Burpee

houses; & numbers along the Banks of creeks; the roofs are thin and easily broke into.

October 24. Thursday. It freezes in the nights & thaws in the days; Travelled 6 Miles W.S.W. Level land; plenty of Creeks, & Beaver houses. Indians killed 2 Moose & a few Beaver.

October 25. Friday. Travelled 5 miles W.S.W. Land &c. as yesterday. Indians killed one Buffalo.

October 26. Saturday. Hail at times. Travelled 9 miles W.S.W then crossed Waskesew River (Red Deer) 2 feet deep & 10 poles wide: The current runs East. Large timber of sorts growing on its banks. Indians killed a few Beaver

References

- 1 - Burpee, L.J. (ed). 1973. The Journal of Anthony Henday, 1754-55. York Factory to the Blackfeet Country. Canadiana House, Toronto. 48 pages
- 2 - MacGregor, J.G. 1954. Behold the Shining Mountains; Being an account of the travels of Anthony Henday, 1754-55. The first white man to enter Alberta. Applied Art Products Ltd. Edmonton. 276 pages.
- 3 - Williams, G. 1978. The Puzzle of Anthony Henday's Journal, 1754-55. The Beaver, Winter 1978. pages 41-56
4. Murray, J.S. 1989. The Map-Makers. Filling in the Blanks in Western America. The Beaver, February-March 1989. pages 14-27.