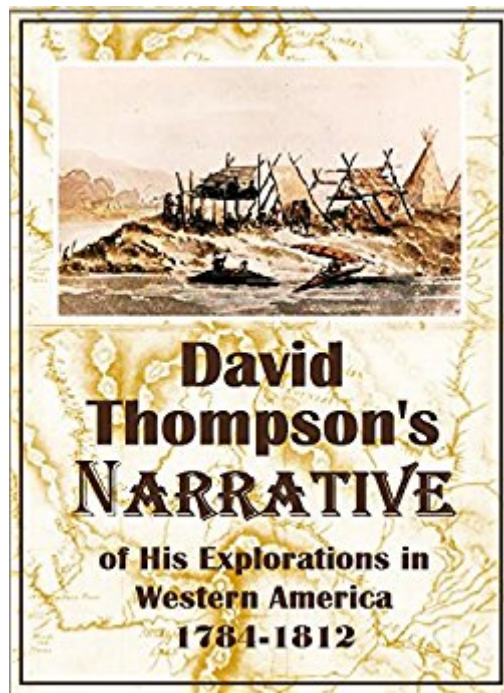




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David Thompson's Narrative Of His Explorations In Western America, 1784-1812 (1916)



Synopsis

David Thompson (1770 – 1857) was a North American fur trader, surveyor, and map-maker, known to some native peoples as "Koo-Koo-Sint" or "the Stargazer." Over his career he mapped over 3.9 million square kilometres of North America and for this has been described as the "greatest land geographer who ever lived." The account here published of the explorations of David Thompson in the western parts of Canada and the United States was written by Thompson himself when he was about seventy years old and still in the full possession of all his faculties, but after the active part of his life-work was completed and when he had retired to Montreal in the hope of enjoying his remaining years in quietude. While he was writing this history of the portion of his life in which he undoubtedly took the most interest, he kept his note-books before him, and with their assistance he retraced the scenes through which he had passed in the days of his youth and strength. He tells his story with an accuracy that has rarely been equalled in the case of an old man who is recounting the experiences of his younger days. I have carefully compared his narrative with his note-books, written by him from day to day as he travelled through the country, and in comparatively few instances were discrepancies found; where these occur they are indicated in the notes at the bottom of the pages. Part II of the Narrative covers in detail the years 1807 to 1812, which were spent as a partner in the North-West Company in the provinces of Alberta and British Columbia, and the states of Montana, Idaho, and Washington, while Part I is a more general account of his life while in the employ of the Hudson's Bay and North-West Companies between the years 1784 and 1807, in the country from Lake Superior and Hudson Bay westward to the Rocky Mountains. This well-appointed volume is designed to give to the public, in permanent and creditable form. David Thompson's narrative of his own travels and explorations in the Canadian Northwest and in the old Oregon Territory. It embraces the period of his active service with the Hudson's Bay and Northwest Fur companies, and terminates at about the year 1813, or almost exactly midway of Thompson's career. The value of the Narrative as historic authority is of course quite different from that of the Journals. The Journals are definite records, set down at the time of the events to which they relate, and thus constitute fixed and unalterable data. To such data must always be assigned the highest historic value. The Narrative, on the other hand, was written late in life (the author was between seventy and eighty) and deals with recollections of men and events of a period which closed more than thirty years before. Naturally such reminiscences are liable to inaccuracies of memory and to a new coloring as seen through the misty, and often painful, light of advanced age. But Thompson seems to have kept himself free, to a remarkable extent, of these dangers. His note-books were always at hand for the verification of facts, and there seems to have

been complete freedom of anything which might savor of complaint or prejudice in his review of the past. The Narrative is thus a most useful supplement to the Journals, for it fills in the bald record of daily events. Thompson's literary style has generally the quality of clearness. The chief value of the Narrative will doubtless be in its descriptions of the country, the native inhabitants, and the fauna and flora, the varied phenomena as witnessed in the hard life of the trader, and the accounts of incredible hardships of a type of existence which is now a thing of the past. It is a never-ceasing wonder, in reading these accounts, how human beings could have survived such experiences. Reformatted for Kindle from original published in 1916, may contain occasional imperfection from original publication or from reformatting.

Book Information

File Size: 3078 KB

Print Length: 402 pages

Simultaneous Device Usage: Unlimited

Publication Date: November 25, 2015

Sold by: Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B018JLN0NA

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Enabled

Screen Reader: Supported

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #458,562 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #34

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Customer Reviews

David Thompson is the ultimate explorer of the Northwest of Canada and into America. Starting as a 14 year old boy, he spent 28 years in the northwestern wilderness, eventually mapping most of western Canada and all of the Columbia River. He did all of this without specific academic training

and I am told never lost a man under his command. His own narrative written from his extensive field notes when he was in his 70's went through 4 drafts and was never finished to his satisfaction and the book here is edited and published years after his death. There are probably mistakes but I would guess minor ones. I have been an admirer of Thompson for a number of years and am happy to see that he is getting his somewhat overdue recognition. He took a half native woman for a wife and stayed with her for over 60 years and 13 children. He saw that all of his children got an education which is remarkable in that time and that age.

This copy of Thompson's Narrative is very useful for someone interested in early Canadian-American exploration. This volume is well bound and fairly well printed. A couple of pages were hard to read because of poor copying. My one complaint is that this is a travel book and the maps are not included. The table of contents lists maps and they are not in this edition. This was not an inexpensive book so I should not have had to go on line to print out a copy of Thompson's famous maps.

Interesting slant by an industrious, intelligent 18th century searcher. He knew that the taking of pelts by the Hudson Bay Company would threaten the existence of North American wildlife (eventually). He kept copious notes and they were published here. Read this and the Narrative of John Tanner and you will have a good idea of what it was like around the Great Lakes from the Churchill River to the northwest coast of USA/Canada after the Revolutionary War.

This is one of the better books about early exploration of the Hudson's Bay area, Northern Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Northwestern United States. It helps to be familiar with the geography of these areas since a map is not provided in the book. Unlike many early explorers, Thompson was not an Indian fighter and with some exceptions was able to maintain friendship and respect with the Natives. He does a great job of describing the appearance, dress, and cultures of the various tribes he encounters. There are a few mistakes in spelling and continuity in the book, but nothing that detracts from an interesting read.

Amazing narrative. Not real exciting but real.

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