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Review of Surveying the Canadian Pacific: Memoir of a Railroad Pioneer and The Railway King of Canada: Sir William Mackenzie, 1849,1923

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Surveying the Canadian Pacific: Memoir of a Railroad Pioneer. By R. M. Rylatt. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1991. Foreword, preface, index xxvi + 246 pp. \$24.95.

The Railway King of Canada: Sir William Mackenzie, 1849-1923. By R. R. Fleming. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1991. Illustrations, introduction, notes, bibliography, index. xxi + 301 pp. \$29.95 cloth.

Both these books deal with themes related to railways and with events significant to the early economic development of western Canada. But there the similarity ends. Rylatt's memoir is a highly personal account of a stint with a survey crew in the Canadian cordillera a decade before the laying of the rails. Fleming, on the other hand, gives us a life of William Mackenzie, a railway builder who kept no diary and left very few personal papers to guide the biographer. Thus it is easier to contrast than compare the two volumes.

Rylatt was in the mountains from 1871 to 1873, when they were still truly wilderness, and his diary is gripping, action-packed, and in places highly romanticized despite the wretched conditions he had to endure. Mackenzie first came to the mountains as a contractor with the railway construction crews in 1884. In his own lifetime he saw three Canadian transcontinental railroads completed to the Pacific coast, including the Canadian Northern which he and Donald Mann put together. Much of the time he was able to

travel in style, often in his own private railway car. During this period much of the Canadian prairies were settled for farming, and the forests and minerals of British Columbia and the Alberta Rockies and foothills began to be exploited.

Mackenzie, however, was first and foremost an entrepreneur. Since Fleming's treatment is biographical, we learn about the whole range of Mackenzie's business ventures, including street railways and utilities, from Toronto and Winnipeg to Britain and Brazil. Mackenzie's rise to prominence was meteoric, as was his fall from grace. The completion of the Canadian Northern was possible only through government guarantees of bonds and loans that the company proved unable to repay. In the end the Canadian government was forced to take it over, and Mackenzie and Mann lost their railway empire. Many then saw Mackenzie as a railway rogue or robber baron, rather than the railway king of this book's title.

Fleming's history of Mackenzie is a sympathetic one. Though packed with footnotes and sources consulted, it moves along agilely and bears out the author's claim in the introduction that Mackenzie's life is a "good story" (p. xxi).

Rylatt's is even a better one. *Surveying the Canadian Pacific* is a shorter book written as a diary with numerous sketches by Rylatt himself. The title and the cover picture of a (presumably) Canadian Pacific train threading one of the spectacular mountain valleys are a little misleading: Rylatt's odyssey was mostly along routes not followed by the Canadian Pacific in the 1880s. In fact his return journey from Jasper to Kamloops, with a single companion, traces the route followed by Mackenzie and Mann's Canadian Northern forty years after Rylatt's stubborn trek.

How difficult it was to pass this way a century ago is what we experience reading Rylatt's diary. We are left to wonder how he and so many other surveyors survived it all. He also gives us a baseline from which to appreciate how much this environment has changed, particularly its wildlife. Encounters

with bears, wolves, panthers, rattlesnakes, and other wild animals heighten the appeal of this unforgettable memoir.

I do not have space to say more, except that Indians, families, politics, and other essentials are also covered in these books. You will have to find out for yourself when you read them. Both are well worth the investment.

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