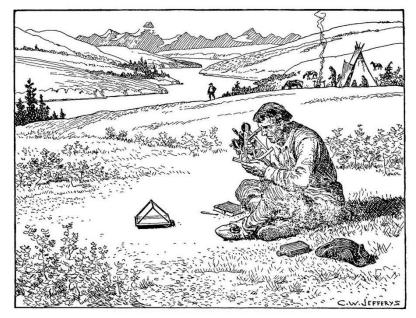# David Thompson

David Thompson's map of Western Canada is a remarkable feat.

A London charity schoolboy who was apprenticed to the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) because he had math and nautical skills, Thompson arrived at Fort Churchill in Rupert's Land in 1784 at the age of 14.

He was barely 18 when he camped with the Piikani west of present-day Calgary. That winter, Nehiyawan wise man Saukamappee recounted to Thompson stories that he would carry throughout his explorer's life.

David Thompson Taking an Observation
Courtesy Library and Archive Canada
Jeffery's. Charles W. 1945
The Picture Gallery of Canadian History Vol. II. P. 146

Although fur trading was his work, surveying was Thompson's passion. Mapping mattered so much to him that he requested instruments and nautical almanacs instead of clothing. The Salish called him Koo Koo Sint, the Man Who Looks at Stars. He even chose to leave the HBC and join the North West Company because they gave him more freedom to survey and pestered him less about the business of fur trading. When on a surveying expedition, David Thompson used a telescope to make observations, and an inkwell and lamp to record them.

Thompson's great map drew upon the 50,000 miles he had travelled, from Lake Superior to the Pacific. Its accuracy was astonishing given that he used little more than a sextant, a compass, and a telescope.

The Trade Room

At the Rocky Mountain House trading post, hides of beaver, bison, mink, and muskrat were traded for tobacco and traps.

Glenbow

The post stored its year's income in the trade room. First Nations people showed their furs, chose their trade goods and reached an agreement through the trade room window. The trade goods were then taken outside and the exchange was made.

The North West Company operated the Rocky Mountain House trading post. If the traders didn't like the goods or the price offered for their furs at this post, they went to Acton House nearby, operated by the Hudson's Bay Company.

David Thompson used the Rocky Mountain House trading post as a base for his explorations into the mountains - stocking his expeditions with supplies from the trade room.

Born: April 30, 1770 – Died: February 10, 1857

Additional Resources

- **Dictionary of Canadian Biography**
  http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/thompson_david_1770_1857_8E.html
- **Hudson's Bay Company History Foundation**
  https://www.hbcheritage.ca/people/explorers/david-thompson

Our Collections

Glenbow Museum
https://www.glenbow.org

Glenbow Western Research Centre | Glenbow Library and Archives
https://libguides.ucalgary.ca/glenbowlibraryandarchives

Glenbow Library and Archives | Digital Collection
https://digitalcollections.ucalgary.ca/asset-management/2R340826N9XM?WS=PackagePres&Flat=1