

A Description of Natardin or Catardin Mountain being an extract from a letter written by Charles Turner Jun. Esq. in the summer of 1804 which was one of the several seasons in which he has been employed in the interior and north of the District of Maine, as a Surveyor.

On Monday August 13<sup>th</sup> 1804. at 8 o'clk A. M. we left our Canoes, at the head of boat-waters in a small, clear stream of spring water, which came in different frivulets [from the mountain, the principal of which (as we afterwards found) issued from a large gully near the top of the mountain. At South Bell we reached the summit of the mountain. Catardin is <sup>the</sup> southernmost and highest of a collection of 8 or 10 mountains, extending from it North east & North west. Round this Mountain on the west, south and east sides is a table land extending about 4 miles, ~~rising gradually to the foot of the mountain.~~ This Table Land is much elevated and overlooks all the country except the mountains – when viewed from the mountain however it appears like a plane. Leaving the Table Land, and following a ridge we endeavoured to gain the summit, at the west end which appeared most easy of access. From the head of

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(Coll. S-6451, Misc. Box 199/1)  
Date: 1804  
Description: Charles Turner account of climbing Katahdin

The table land, which we considered as the base of the mountain, we ascended, on an elevation, making an angle with the horizon of from 35° to 46° degrees, about two miles. This Mountain is composed of Rocks which appear to have been broken or split. The rocks except at and near the top are of a coarse grain, of light gray colour, and most of them are crumbling, and of these crumbles Mandak, of such it may be called, is composed. The Rocks near the top are of finer texture and of a bluish colour. The table land was formerly covered with wood of various kinds, with hard woods near the streams where the soil was good but with spruce in other parts, the trees lessening in height as we approached the mountain, until they became dwarfs of only 2 feet in height, and finally came to nothing at about a half mile from the summit. The rocks and soil in the ascent were covered with a deep green moss. The table land and mountain on the South and East have been burnt over and are entirely bare, except near the springs and streams. The ridge between the streams on the west seemed to have escaped the fire, and this circumstance enabled us to ascend with greater facility. The South and East sides were from their steepness inaccessible. Having reached the top, we found ourselves on a plane of rocks with coarse gravel in the interstices, and the whole covered with a dead bluish moss. This plane

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The westerly part of which was very smooth, and descending a little to the northward, contained about 8 hundred acres. The elevation was so great as sensibly to affect respiration. The day was very calm and sultry, and our toil so great, that when we had found several springs of very clear cold water, our company were inclined to drink of them too freely. Some felt the ill effects immediately, and others were taken with vomiting in the course of the night following; indeed our whole company which consisted of eleven, found on the following morning, our throats sore and inflamed. Whether this arose wholly from some ill quality in the water, or partly from eating a variety of fruits, such as Raspberries, blue whortleberries, black currants, boxberries & bog cran-berries, which we found in abundance from the place where we left our boats to near the top, we could not determine. Though to us in our thirsty and fatigued condition, the pure spring brought to our minds the fabled Nectar of the Poets, yet we found that it <sup>had</sup> a very perceptible astringent quality, and appeared to be impregnated with minerals. Having arrived at the highest point, which is toward the east end, we found ourselves above all the mountains within our horizon. We could not determine our <sup>actual elevation</sup> right ascension, not having instruments, nor being otherwise prepared to measure the height of the Mountain. From this point our view

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was so enchanting; The air however had during the day become a little smoky, which prevented our distinguishing distant objects with that clearness which we would have wished. The plane on the top of the Mountain, being nearly a mile and an half in length, would have afforded a base or leg, by which, with correct Instruments, we might have determined with a great degree of exactness, the situation and distances of all the principal highlands and mountains in the District of Maine. The situation and extent of the principal lakes. <sup>due north from us</sup> Here we could see the lake or cross pond, which is the main reservoir of the Aroostook branch of St. John's River, and several smaller lakes. Here we could see, bearing N.W. the lake at the head of St. John's River (The lake that is sketched on our maps of the District of Maine, N.W. from Moose-head lake). West from us we could see the south end of Moose-head lake - and N.N.W. its north end, a chain of small mountains lying N. of Piscataquis mountains, preventing our seeing its centre. Near the westerly part of the mountain which is connected with the Catardin, we could see Cheesauncook lake, extending N.N.E. and S.S.W. about twenty miles long and five miles broad, which empties into the Penobscot; and south of it, a large lake N. of the E. end of the Piscataquis Mountains, which empties into the Piscataquis River. We counted sixty three lakes of different dimensions which discharge their waters by the Penobscot. S.W. from us

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from the Penobscot to the Kennebec: and N. of the lands  
surveyed, lay a small ridge of mountains, about 20 miles  
North of the Piscataquis mountains. Amongst the collection  
of mountains near the Catardin, is one lying N. N. W.  
called by the English Fort Mountain, from its shape; its base  
being an oblong square or parallelogram, extending N. E. &  
S. W. and ascending at the sides and ends in an angle of  
about 45 degrees to a sharp ridge; which ridge is about  
one mile in length, and is covered with verdure. North  
of Fort Mountain appears an irregular mountain, on  
the S. side of which and near the top, appears an extensive  
ledge of smooth white rock which glittered like  
Ising glass. We could clearly discern the High lands from  
the Bay of Chaleur westerly, which divide the District of  
Maine from the Province of Quebec. E. N. E. from us  
lay Peaked Mountain over which Bingham's easterly  
line runs. Mount Desert was also distinctly in view.  
We could discern the range of high fertile lands extending  
N. & S. between the Penobscot and Schoodic waters, and  
those between the Penobscot and Aroostook waters,  
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Call, William Rice, Richard Winslow, Charles Turner, Jr.)  
and the date, cut upon sheet lead, and a bottle of Rum  
corked and leaded, on the highest part. We descended the  
mountain with cautious steps, untill we came among  
the low spruces, and the next day at noon we reached  
our Canoes.

It is difficult by any orthography, precisely to express  
the name of this mountain, and convey the nasal sound  
which the Natives give. Ne-tar-dn - or Ca-ta-din is as  
near perhaps as the powers of the letters will admit.

The Indians have a superstition respecting this Moun-  
tain, that an Evil Spirit, whom they call Pamola, inh-  
abits it, at least in the Winter, and flies off in the Spring  
with tremendous rumbling noises. They have a tradition  
that no person i.e. native, who has attempted to ascend it,  
has lived to return. They alledge that many moons  
ago, seven Indians resolutely ascended the mountain,  
and that they were never heard of afterwards, having been  
undoubtedly killed by Pamola in the mountain.

The two Indians whom we hired to pilot and assist  
us in ascending the mountain, cautioned us not to proceed  
if we should hear any uncommon noise; and when we  
came to the cold part of the mountain, they refused to  
proceed ahead - however when they found that we were

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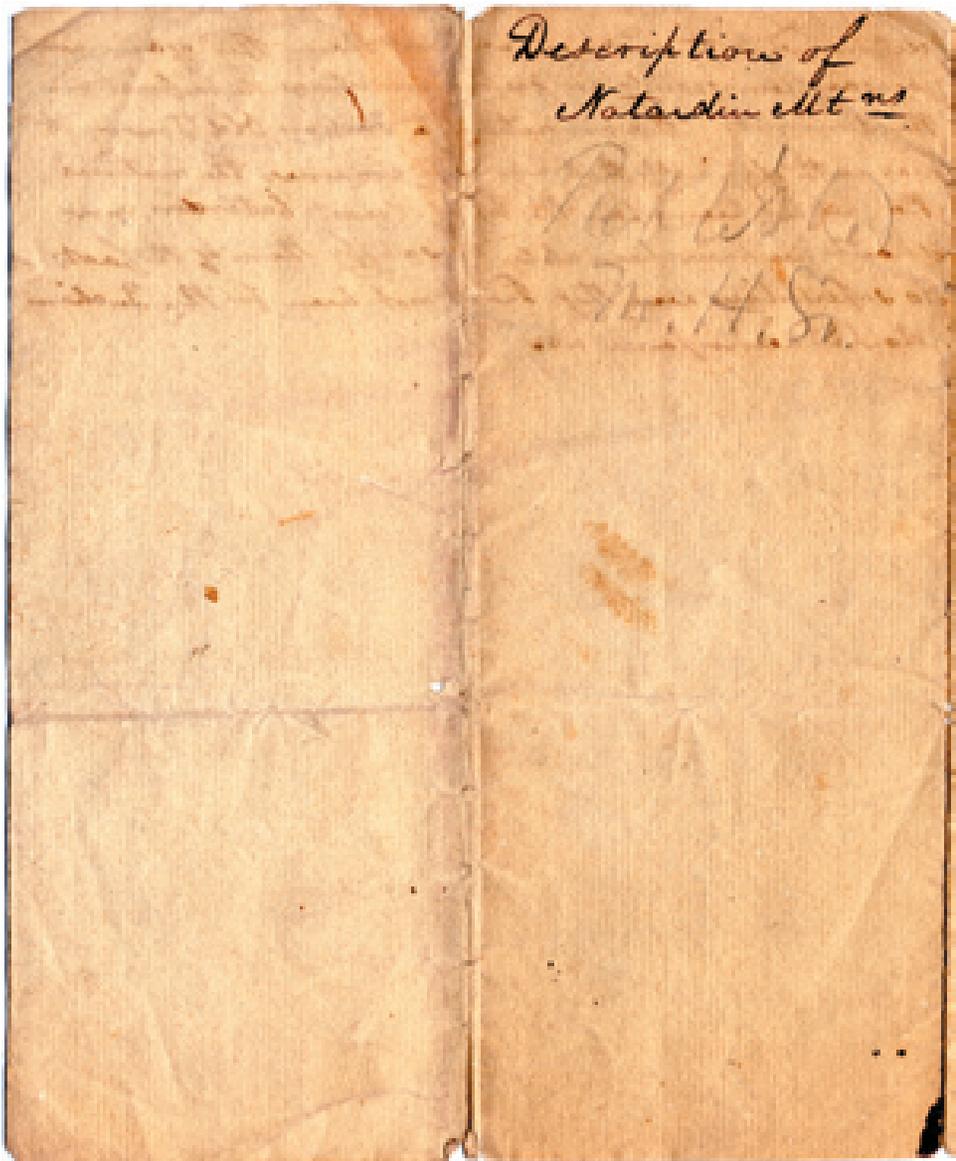
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determined to proceed even without them, they again went forward courageously, and seemed ambitious to be first on the summit. On our return to Indian Old Town, it was with difficulty that we could convince the natives that we had been upon the top of Mount Catardin, nor should we have been able to satisfy them of the fact, so superstitious were they, had it not been for the Indians who had accompanied us.

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Description of  
Natardin Mt<sup>ns</sup>

1840  
W. H. S.

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