

Our Area's Early First Nations Trails

Introduction:

This article aims to document, on a continuing basis, an important part of our area history that has been lost over time – the location of the early trails of the First Nations peoples. The information in it has been provided by our readers, following our request for information on our website's 'Mysteries' section in March 2018.

Documenting these trails must be an ongoing project because of the limited information remaining on them, provided mainly from references in area stories or in undocumented statements from early residents.

A brief Comment on the Use of the Trails

Researching and understanding the First Nations' trail systems requires a thorough knowledge of their lives and culture, because the trails used varied with the seasons. Subject to correction by those who know better, it is assumed that the summer trails were primarily between waterway routes, and often part of medium to long-distance routes crossing a large part of the area. The winter trails served for short-distance travel for hunting and provisioning parties, where the families lived in the upper areas of the watersheds.

Unquestionably, the first trails used by the settlers in the area followed those of the First Nations, and then became the early wagon roads, and, in some cases, the general routes of contemporary roads and highways. This was natural, since the trails presumably followed the same high ground needed for roads. Some examples of this are noted in the following material.

As an indication of how limited the first information for this article has been, some of the first references are to possible trails:

- Along Jebbs Creek (listed on an early map)
- In the area of Bolingbroke Roadⁱ
- Near Silver Lake, Con. 9, Lots 7-10 (north end)ⁱⁱ
- Sharbot Lake
- Between Mississippi Lake and the Rideau River, and on to the Ottawa River (mentioned in Champlain's travels), and
- From Sharbot Lake area south, near present-day Highway 38ⁱⁱⁱ.

Trails Between the Rideau River and the Mississippi

Subsequently, based on recent submissions from readers^{iv}, there is credible information on two possible trails linking the early Rideau and Mississippi Rivers. Both trails follow streams, connected by portages, between these two important canoe waterways.

1. The Rideau to Mississippi Lake Trail

This probable route, running between the Rideau River, near Rideau Ferry, and Mississippi Lake, is the subject of several early references. It is probably the trail said to have been followed by Champlain, with indigenous guides, from 'the east end of Mississippi Lake' to the Rideau River. From Mississippi Lake, it would have traced a part of what we know as Tennyson Road, and then went west to the Tay around present-day Perth, or, perhaps also, crossed south-west

hitting the Tay at Jebbs Creek, thence along the Tay to the Rideau. A side trail, and paddle, would have gone west along Jebbs Creek to Otty Lake.

An 1964 article by Clyde Bell in the Perth Courier ^v states: “If you look at a map of Lanark County, the Rideau system and Mississippi River system come more closely together at (Perth) than at any other place on the map. The Indians had an overland trail following the high ground from Otty Lake and the Tay River to Mississippi Lake. It passed right by the McPhail Schoolhouse, on what I believe is the (Drummond) fourth concession.”

The McPhail Schoolhouse (aka Code School, S.S. 9) was a log school on the Tennyson Road, at Drummond Con. 3, Lot 16.

Ron Shaw, local author, advises that “When I was a kid, I once asked my grandfather why the Tennyson Road was so crooked, and I was told that the twists and turns were because it followed an “old Indian portage trail” that always “stuck to the high ground”.

The Tay River would have been an important part of this larger route, between the Rideau and, perhaps, the present location of Perth. This trip could have started with a one-mile portage from (present day) Beveridge Bay to the Tay River, above the rapids. Not coincidentally, this also the portage route followed by the first settlers to the area, between the Rideau and Tay River. (There is a service road now on this high ground, from upper Beveridge Lock to the river and Beveridge Dam.)

There was presumably an offshoot trail (and paddle) from the Tay to Otty Lake, along Jebbs Creek – that has been seen on an early map running beside Jebbs Creek (source not documented).

(Note: Clyde Bell’s article above goes on to state that the Duke of Richmond, in August 1819, followed the Drummond Concession 4 road from Perth to Richmond. However, as the Duke’s party is said to have left Perth on Drummond Concession 2, and passed Franktown, this would not normally tie into Concession 4.)

2. A Perth to Mississippi River Trail

There was very possibly also a trail running from the Tay River near Perth, north-west to the Mississippi River. An excerpt from William Bell’s *Diary*^{vi}, August 4, 1817, states “*The Indians with their baggage passed our house [in Perth] on their way to the Mississippi River, ten miles distant. Each of the men carried a canoe on his head. The (women) were loaded with blankets, skins, kettles, tents, etc.* .

This could have referred to the trail described in #1 above, heading to Mississippi Lake, because the Perth area of the Tay was apparently a jumping off location for Mississippi lake. However, a route running north-west from Perth to the Mississippi River, along the general area of present Highway 511, is also very possible. It would be about the same distance for a portage as the Mississippi Lake trail (about 13 kms), and would seem a logical connection to the Fall River, for canoists from Sharbot Lake area.

For the present, it is listed as a candidate.

This article will be added to if additional trail information is received.

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ⁱ Brenda Kennett, Maberly

ⁱⁱ Keith Kerr, Tay Valley Township

ⁱⁱⁱ Eugene Kirkham, Sharbot Lake

^{iv} Brenda Kennett, Maberly; Linda Davies, Perth; and Ron Shaw, Drummond/North Elmsley Township.

^v From Linda Davies: article dated, Thursday, March 26, 1964, “Colourful History of the 2nd Concession (Drummond Township)”, by Clyde Bell

^{vi} Ron Shaw, Drummond/North Elmsley Township