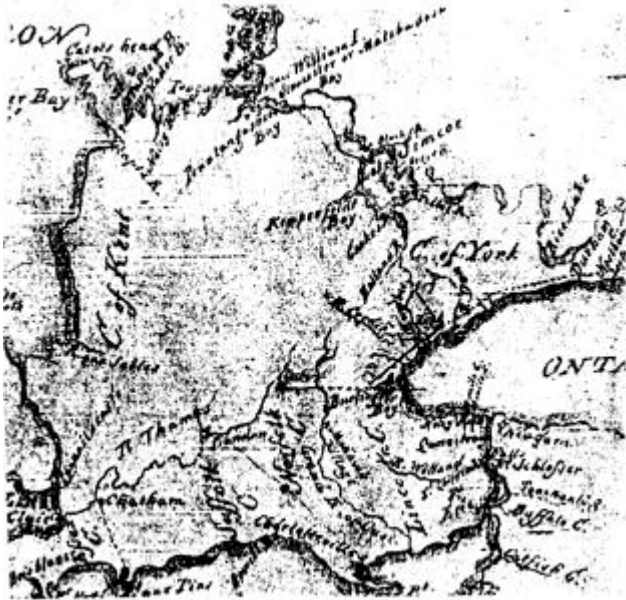


DESIGNATING DAVENPORT - PRESERVING ONTARIO'S OLDEST ROAD



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ORIGINS

It is unlikely that there was any person in the Toronto region as the Ice Ages came to an end, so the monumental changes that were then taking place were recorded only in the geological character of the area, and the land was formed over vast periods of time.

The post-Ice Age Lake Iroquois was formed by the melt waters of the receding glaciers, and the shoreline of that immense lake is now to be detected in the escarpment that crosses Toronto. Scarborough Bluffs is part of that Escarpment and is altered by weather and time, while other parts of the escarpment have been altered dramatically by human interventions, such as road-building. But in its pristine state, the escarpment was further shaped by melt waters which formed rivers, cutting their ravines and altering the shape of the ancient shoreline.

Above the escarpment was the slowly melting ice sheet, and below the escarpment, as Lake Iroquois shrank to form the Great Lakes, the receding waters left a streaming alluvial plain.

For a long time, the only "dry land" which was traversable was along the beach at the base of the escarpment. The first animals used this beach to reach water, and were followed by the

first humans hunting the animals for food. The same is true of the escarpment's extent outside of the Toronto region. The path first made by animals became a trail, used by all, and extended great distances over time.

FIRST PEOPLES

In the booklet by Roberta O'Brien, *The Archaeology and Early History of South Central Ontario*, the very first people to live in the region are described as to their place in time and their culture.

The first known are the Paleo-Indians, the Clovis people who lived in camps and were hunters and gatherers. Between 5000 and 700 BC were the Archaic peoples, who were using copper, and ground stone tools. After them came three periods of Woodland cultures, and the development of some agriculture and larger villages. At the end of the Late Woodland period, white men came to Ontario and the Historic period opened.

The most ancient people moved about on foot and, after the invention of the canoe, by water. Travel on foot was an essential part of hunting, the hunters followed the game, and all moved about seasonally, depending upon food sources of the land. Some methods of fishing were developed, and agriculture extended the supply of foods from the land.

For thousands of years, the first peoples used the animals they hunted for food, clothing, and shelter, and they evolved into distinctive groups, each with its own culture but linked linguistically. They shared the land in common and traded goods between groups. The ancient east-west trail was intersected by other north south trails, all connected one way or another into a kind of network enabling one group to communicate with the others over great distances. After the invention of the canoe, travel by water became faster but the canoe routes required portages as links.

HISTORIC PERIOD

In 1610, the great Samuel de Champlain opened Ontario's French Regime when he arrived in Lake Huron. Behind him came the fur traders, other explorers, missionaries and military men.

Traders found their businesses more lucrative if they kept their sources to themselves, but the missionaries and others recorded where they went, who they met, and gave accounts of the land. They were guided by the inhabitants of the land who knew it intimately. The maps produced during the French Regime became the basis for all mapmaking that followed.

To protect their fur trade, the French built forts - three in the Toronto region alone. Two in particular were at the Humber River to connect with traffic coming by water to the trading post of the Rousseau family who had the trading rights to the whole north shore of Lake Ontario. Alongside the Humber was the Toronto Carrying Place Trail, a north-south route which crossed its more ancient predecessor running east and west. Others involved in trade used the

Don which was crossed by the very ancient route along the base of the escarpment and which was met by other trails, some leading north while others led to the shoreline of Lake Ontario. All of the younger trails connected with the one at the base of the escarpment, and this arrangement was repeated across the rest of the province.

BRITISH REGIME

Many maps from the French Regime are in collections in Quebec City and in France, and have not yet been examined, needing an expert historian conversant with 17th and 18th century French. But British engineers and surveyors were familiar with the French maps and built their additional information upon the earlier basic maps.

The British Regime began technically in 1759 but administrators and military engineers and surveyors paid little attention to Upper Canada until the 1780s when they were forced to do so in order to settle the influx of United Empire Loyalists. In this period, mapmaking was mainly concerned with the allocation of land to the new settlers without reference to the aboriginal landowners, and the maps and surveys concentrated on water routes for ease in the transportation of goods.

One of the most important maps showing the entire route of the ancient trail was made on birch bark in 1796 by Elizabeth Simcoe. This map is in the British Museum and shows the route going from Montreal to Niagara.

Maps made slightly later in the early 19th century show the portion running through the centre of Toronto as: "The New Road to Niagara", or "The Plank Road", or in one case "Bull's Road" because of one family with property on the road. But the name "Davenport" was attached to the route at a very early date, because the first house ever built on top of the escarpment in 1797 was called "Davenport" and access to the house, and those that followed later, was always from Davenport Road.

DESIGNATING THE ROUTE

The ancient trail that converted gradually into a road is, without question, the oldest and longest route in Ontario. Within the City of Toronto the central portion is called Davenport, while its eastern extension has many names but most commonly is called Kingston Road. Westward from the Humber River, it also has many names, the most commonly used one is Dundas Street because it was joined by the built route from Fort York to the Humber crossing of Davenport. The aboriginal names have been lost, but an Ojibwa language expert states that one could be reconstructed since Indian names actually describe what is named.

Toronto City Council has passed a motion to set up a committee to conduct a study leading to designation (i.e. protection) of the original route. Between the Humber and Don Rivers, the route is still in its original course; while modifications have been made to the Kingston Road and Dundas Street portions.

Efforts are being made to contact heritage groups and municipal governments along the entire length of the route, so that research can be collected and local designations made of the actual route, and possibly also of sites along its sides.

There is nothing anywhere that can compare with this ancient road crossing all of southern Ontario, and it is a heritage resource of major importance with huge implications for tying the province together and for tourism. Your support for designation should be directed to governments at all levels.

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