

King's Colourful History

Governor Simcoe's expedition



Soon after Upper Canada's first lieutenant-governor, John Graves Simcoe, established a military outpost, Fort York, in Toronto harbour in the summer of 1793, he organized an expedition to scout a site for a naval base on Lake Huron to defend against a possible American attack.

On Sept. 25, 1793, Simcoe's expedition headed north from the mouth of the Toronto River – he renamed it Humber – along an ancient portage, the Toronto Carrying Place, familiar to his Mississauga guides. On Sept. 27, they crossed the Oak Ridges Moraine in present-day King Township. Sheriff Alexander Macdonell recorded in his diary:

“Proceeded on early in the morning. Shortly after leaving our fires went through a ridge of very fine pine, which appeared to be bounded by a deep ravine on the north.

After crossing in an oblique direction the pine ridge, went over excellent land, black rich mould; timber, maple, beech, black birch and bass. Crossed a ravine and ascended a small eminence of indifferent land. This height terminated in a point, then a gradual descent to the River Humber, which we crossed. We dined here, and remained two hours to refresh ourselves and horses ... After dinner went on. About six o'clock came to the end of the carrying place and encamped.”

The expedition had reached a vast marsh draining east into a lake, which Simcoe named for his father. Continuing by canoe to Lake Huron, he chose a site for a naval base in Penetanguishene harbour. On Simcoe's return to York in October, he took a different path to avoid “the terrible bog of liquid mud” on the Carrying Place. Simcoe ordered the path widened and named it Yonge Street.

By Heather Robertson

Submitted by the King Township Historical Society