

# TrailTracker

Alberta TrailNet Newsletter

Issue Five, December 2003

## The Iron Horse Trail



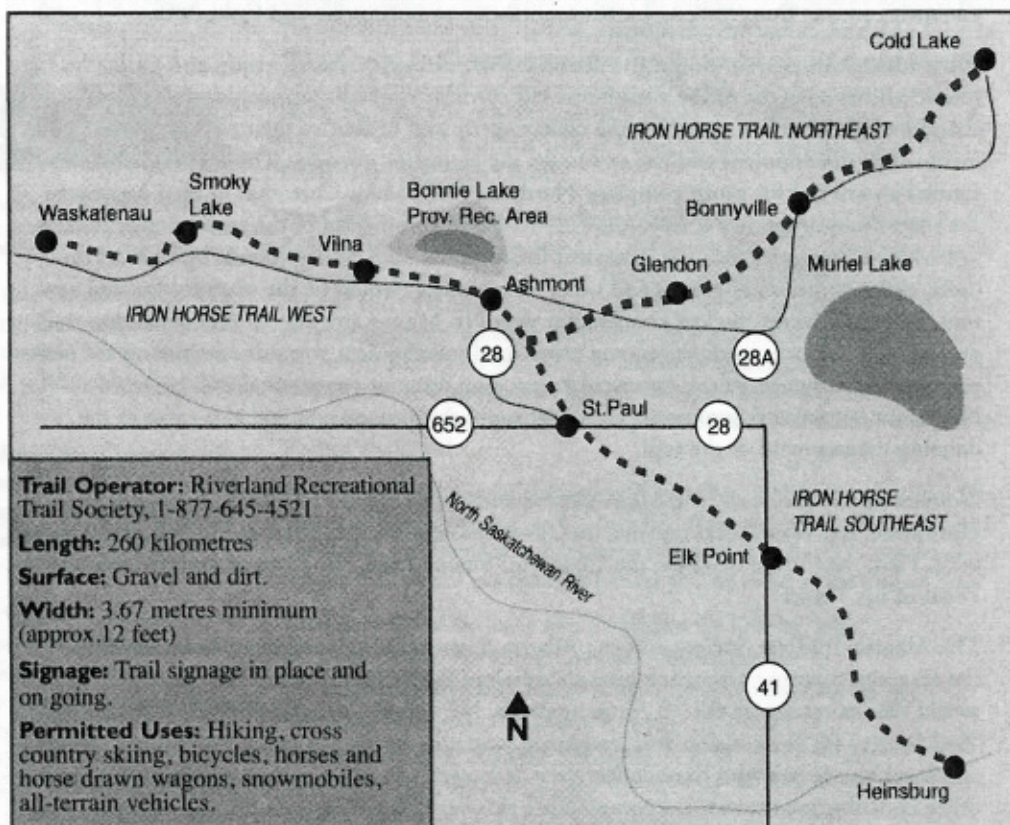
**Type of Trail:** Abandoned CN rail line.

**Location:** Waskatenau to Heinsburg (east central Alberta, east of Edmonton). Trail alignment generally follows that of the North Saskatchewan River.

**Historical Perspective:** In some sections the Iron Horse Trail follows the historic Carlton Trail, first documented in the 1790's as a fur trade route. The Carlton Trail linked eastern and western Canada and has been referred to as the original Hudson Bay Trail, the Victoria Trail, the Winnipeg Trail and the Edmonton Trail. Missionaries (Father Lacombe, George McDougall) followed it in the 1860's and then came the NWMP (1874) and the Northwest Rebellion (1885). Deep ruts left by the Red River carts are still visible in some areas.

**Terrain:** Aspen Parkland. Pleasant rural scenery with rolling hills, lakes, ponds, sloughs, pasture land, cultivated fields and woodlands interrupted by dense forest, deep gullies and views of the North Saskatchewan River.

**Access:** Broad trail with easy grade, however loose gravel and sand over significant stretches,



especially in newer sections between Waskatenau and Elk Point, making walking and especially bicycling difficult. There are a number of gates along the Trail which are closed during the summer season to allow cattle grazing along the Trail. There is an open 'cattle guarded' pass through beside each gate. See map for main trail access points.

**Facilities:** Parking available at main trail access points. Small campsite with toilet, benches and fire pit at Middle Creek. Good camping facilities are also available at Whitney Lake, Lindberg, Upper and Lower Mann Lakes, Garner Lake Provincial Park, Bonnie Lake (Vilna), Bellis Lake, Minnie Lake Recreation Area, Moose Lake Provincial Park, Cold Lake, and at the trail-head towns - Elk Point, Heinsburg, Smoky Lake, etc. Other rest/camping spots are being developed along the trail

**Points of Interest:** Fort George Buckingham House Interpretive Centre, Windsor Salt Works (Lindbergh), the Elk Point Pioneer Museum, historic Heinsburg, Whitney Lakes Provincial Park, Buffalo Alley (a long line of modern buffalo ranches), St. Paul Museum, UFO Landing Pad (St. Paul), Boyne Lake Recreation Area, Garner Lake Provincial Park, Vilna Lake Golf Course, oldest operating pool hall in Alberta and world's largest mushrooms (both at Vilna). The Waskatenau railroad trestle is a must see, along with the giant pyrogy at Glendon, Moose Lake Provincial Park, Bonnyville and District Museum and many other local points of interest.

For maps and more detailed information visit the Iron Horse Trail web site:

[www.ironhorsetrail.ca](http://www.ironhorsetrail.ca)

# DEDICATION AND OPENING OF ALBERTA'S IRON HORSE TRAIL

## A new 260 km Multiuse Recreation Corridor

June 8th, 2003, was 'a dream come true' for the community groups, trail users, businesses, municipalities and many other local stakeholders and individuals who support and have worked towards creating this new multiuse recreational trail corridor. With great fanfare and a 'cast of hundreds', the Iron Horse Trail was officially dedicated and opened.

The 260 km Iron Horse Trail is located to the east of Edmonton and runs generally parallel to and on the north side of the North Saskatchewan River from Waskatenau to Heinsburg, with a branch running from Abilene Junction northeast to Bonnyville and Cold Lake.

What makes this project unique in Alberta is that, through a shared vision and goals, the 10 municipalities adjacent to the abandoned rail corridor worked cooperatively to secure the abandoned CN rail line intact for the collective use and benefit of their municipalities. This included its development and use as a multi use recreation corridor. The 10 municipalities formed a joint not for profit company, Northeast (NE) Muni-Corr, that in turn negotiated the acquisition of the ROW from the C.N.R. Upon completion of the land transfer process, NE Muni-Corr agreed that the Riverland Recreational Trail Society (made up of local trail users, clubs, community groups and other stakeholders) would be the operator for this new trail. Riverland works in close cooperation with NE Muni-Corr, the 10 municipalities, trail user groups, adjacent landowners, and other local stakeholders, towards completing the planning and construction of this spectacular new long distance recreational trail corridor. Numerous community groups are participating in this process and will also assist in the ongoing management of the trail.

Member municipalities of NE Muni-Corr include: the City of Cold Lake, the M.D. of Bonnyville, the Town of Bonnyville, the Town of Glendon, the Town of St. Paul, the County of St. Paul, the Village of Vilna, the County of Smoky Lake, the Town of Smoky Lake and the Town of Elk Point.

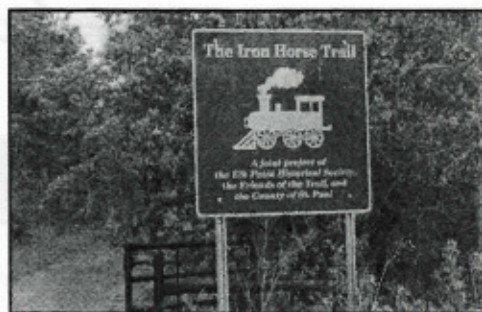
The Alberta TrailNet Society and the Alberta Snowmobile Association have provided funding and ongoing assistance towards developing the Iron Horse Trail. Alberta TrailNet would like to recognize the 10 Municipalities, NE Muni-Corr and Riverland Recreational Trail Society for their vision and leadership, and also thank the many individuals, groups, and local businesses who have collectively dedicated countless volunteer hours and made other contributions towards accomplishing this very significant addition to Alberta's trail network – the Wild Rose Trail System. We are all enriched through these efforts.

Please note that not all portions of the trail are complete. Trail surface may not be suitable for all uses.

For full information call 1-877-645-4521 or check out [www.ironhorsetrail.ca](http://www.ironhorsetrail.ca)

### In Memory

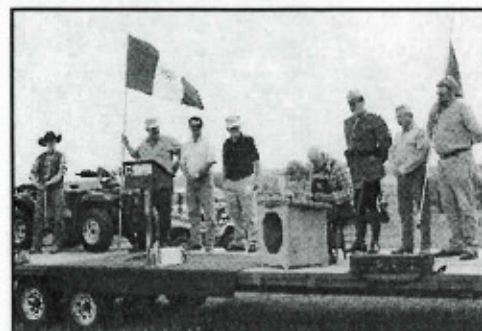
It is with sadness that we honour the passing of Murray Hughes, 49, of Smoky Lake on September 27, 2003. Murray was a steadfast advocate of the Iron Horse Trail and was involved from the earliest meetings in 1999. He was a Director of the organization representing Smoky Lake and the first president of the Trail Twisters Snowmobile Club (1998). Murray was a fine representative of volunteering and he will be sadly missed by the trail building community.



Trail Head



Ribbon Cutting



Local Entertainment

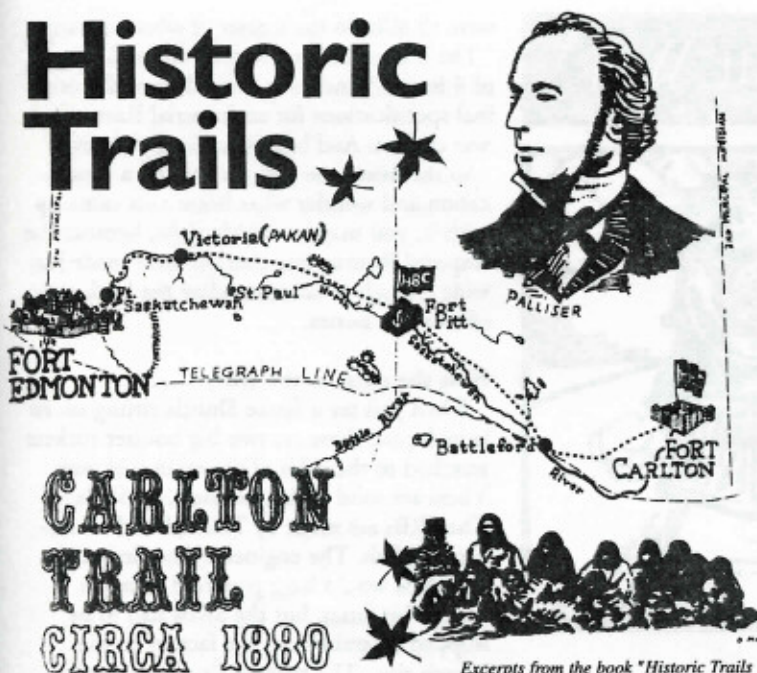


Starting Out!



Wagons Ho!

# Historic Trails



Excerpts from the book "Historic Trails in Alberta", written by Mark Anderako and published by Lone Pine Publishing

When people speak of the old Carlton Trail, they are referring to what is probably the oldest westward overland trail in Canada. It was the beaten path linking east and west, crossing the Red River in the heart of the continent, passing through virgin prairie and parkland in the future provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta.

The Carlton Trail was named after an important Hudson's Bay Company post located on the North Saskatchewan River, midway between North Battleford and Prince Albert. This trail is known through historic documentation as the Victoria Trail, Winnipeg Trail, or Fort Pitt and Saskatchewan Trail, depending on the location of its different segments.

The original route of the Carlton Trail came into being with the amalgamation of the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company in 1821 and the subsequent founding of Fort Pelly as headquarters in the Swan River district in what is today Saskatchewan. Even then, much of the trail's general path, though dimly marked in places, was familiar terrain to fur traders who roamed west from their posts on the Upper Assiniboine River as far and wide as the Touchwood Hills and Quill Lakes in central Saskatchewan. For generations, the annual buffalo hunt had carried the Red River Metis west into the plains along a network of well-beaten trails leading from Fort Garry to Portage la Prairie.

Between Fort Pelly and Carlton House, there were no connecting waterways to guide travelers to the Saskatchewan River. Moreover, it was treacherous going when treading the land between the territories of the friendly Cree and their enemies, the fierce Blackfoot and allies of the Blackfoot nation. Despite such adversities, Hudson's Bay Company Governor George Simpson, during his journey to the Columbia District in 1824, braved this passage when few men would dare. Accompanied by Chief Trader James McMillian and eight company employees, Simpson and party succeeded despite rumors of ambush, rampaging floods and the grave threat of becoming lost. In 1841, Simpson used the trail as we know it, demonstrating the feasibility of extensive overland travel. Within a decade of Simpson's trailblazing journey, the Carlton Trail developed into an important link of a tried-and-true transcontinental trails network.

For the next two decades, the Carlton Trail was the only well-trodden Canadian overland route between Fort Garry and Edmonton. Beginning from what is now Portage Avenue in modern Winnipeg, this historic trail stretched for 900 miles through Portage La Prairie, Minnedosa, Shoal Lake and Fort Ellice in Manitoba. In Saskatchewan it passed through Touchwood Hills, Humboldt, Batoche, Duck Lake, Fort Carlton and Fort Pitt. It terminated in what is now Alberta at the Methodist Mission founded by John McDougall in Victoria (now Pakan), on the north bank of the North Saskatchewan River, about eight miles south of Smoky

Lake.

Much of the Alberta segment of the Carlton Trail followed the North Saskatchewan River and was known as the "North Route", used by fur traders moving between posts along the river. Between Fort Edmonton and the eastern Alberta border, no less than twelve trading posts lined the north bank at one time, affording the only protection against attack by the Blackfoot tribes gathered to the south. After 1849, "free traders" were able to enter into competition to barter for furs without reprisal from the Hudson's Bay Company.

Later, when Rev. George McDougall and his son John established the Victoria Mission in 1863, the Carlton Trail entered into a new phase. Where once the trail only accommodated packhorses, it now was capable of handling carts and wagons. The Winnipeg Trail became a vital freight route. Father Lacombe deserves much of the credit for the trail's development as he claimed to have employed the first cart brigade to carry freight over the trail from Red River to Carlton House in 1862. Victoria, the first permanent settlement between Fort Pitt and Edmonton along the trail, administered the faith to the nearby Cree. In 1864, George McDougall opened the first Protestant schools west of Manitoba - one at Victoria and the other north at Whitefish. Father Lacombe established the St Paul des Cris Catholic Mission southeast of Victoria near present-day Brosseau. Victoria was later named Pakan, in honor of Cree Chief Pakan, a friend of the McDougall family.

The Carlton Trail was significant in the initial planning of the Canadian Pacific Railway, when it was proposed as the route across the northwest to the Yellowhead Pass in the Canadian Rockies. Sir Sanford Fleming, engineer-in-chief of the CPR, selected survey party leaders to investigate possible routes while he personally surveyed the Carlton Trail in 1872, traveling by buckboard on the well-established trail. Victoria became an important post from which the survey crews secured supplies. However, when the railway was built in the south, Calgary soon eclipsed its commercial potential and the Hudson's Bay post at Victoria was closed.

The first mail run over the trail was conducted along the lake route between Fort Garry and Fort Livingston in 1874 by John Matheson who traveled by dog sled. The service was extended to Edmonton two years later. By 1879, regular cross-country mail service was conducted along both segments of the Carlton Trail.

These are a few of the many who traveled on the Carlton Trail:

- 1815 John Rowan Northwest Company - Blazed the trail
- 1825 Governor Simpson - Hudson's Bay Company - Declared the trail
- 1840 Gabriel Dumont - Moved to Fort Pitt
- 1841 James Sinclair - Guided 200 settlers to BC
- 1846 Paul Kane - Wandering artist
- 1858 Captain Palliser - Mapping expedition
- 1859 Sisters Emerey, Lamy and Alphonse - First nuns west
- 1862 Overlanders - 97 carts to BC gold fields
- 1962 Reverends George and John McDougall - Methodist missionaries
- 1863 Lord Milton and Dr Cheadle - Traveled across Canada for adventure
- 1865 Chief Big Bear - Moved to Fort Pitt area
- 1867 Father Lacombe - By dog team to Fort Garry
- 1871 Captain Butler - By dog teams
- 1872 Sir Sanford Fleming - CPR survey
- 1874 Inspector Jarvis - With 23 Mounted Police
- 1876 Hon. Morris and Treaty Six commissioners
- 1892 Amirault Ranch - Cattle drive
- 1909 Poisson - First Paradise Hill merchant
- 1912 Minnesota Slovenian group - To Deer Creek
- 1929 Lillian Alling - Walking home to Russia

The new Iron Horse Trail cuts across and parallels portions of the Carlton Trail. In some places you can still see and place your feet in the original cart tracks of the Carlton Trail.

Illustration from Historic Trails Alberta, by Mark Anderako © 1965, Lone Pine Publishing, Edmonton, Ab. Reprinted by permission.



# "We've Always Done it That Way"

**Does the statement, "We've always done it that way" ring any bells...?**

The US standard railroad gauge (distance between the rails) is 4 feet, 8.5 inches. That's an exceedingly odd number.

**Why was that gauge used?**

Because that's the way they built them in England, and English expatriate built the US Railroads.

**Why did the English build them like that?**

Because the first rail lines were built by the same people who built the pre-railroad tramways, and that's the gauge they used.

**Why did "they" use that gauge then?**

Because the people who built the tramways used the same jigs and tools that they used for building wagons, which used that wheel spacing.

**Okay! Why did the wagons have that particular odd wheel spacing?**

Well, if they tried to use any other spacing,



the wagon wheels would break on some of the old, long distance roads in England, because that's the spacing of the wheel ruts.

**So who built those old rutted roads?**

Imperial Rome built the first long distance roads in Europe (and England) for their legions. The roads have been used ever since.

**And, the ruts in the roads?**

Roman war chariots formed the initial ruts, which everyone else had to match for fear of destroying their wagon wheels. Since the chariots were made for Imperial Rome, they

were all alike in the matter of wheel spacing.

The United States standard railroad gauge of 4 feet, 8.5 inches is derived from the original specifications for an Imperial Roman war chariot. And bureaucracies live forever.

So the next time you are handed a specification and wonder what horse's ass came up with it, you may be exactly right, because the Imperial Roman war chariots were made just wide enough to accommodate the back ends of two war horses.

**Now the twist to the story.....**

When you see a Space Shuttle sitting on its launch pad, there are two big booster rockets attached to the sides of the main fuel tank. These are solid rocket boosters, or SRBs. The SRBs are made by Thiokol at their factory at Utah. The engineers who designed the SRBs would have preferred to make them a bit fatter, but the SRBs had to be shipped by train from the factory to the launch site. The railroad line from the factory happens to run through a tunnel in the mountains. The SRBs had to fit through that tunnel. The tunnel is slightly wider than the railroad track, and the railroad track, as you now know, is about as wide as two horses' behinds.

So, a major Space Shuttle design feature of what is arguably the world's most advanced transportation system was determined over two thousand years ago by the width of a horse's ass.



## 2002 Legacy Park

### Benefits Alberta Trails

Keith Henderson, Legacy Park Family Festival organizer, presents a cheque to Linda Strong-Watson of Alberta TrailNet. These proceeds from the 2002 Festival 5K Fun Run/Walk are designated for trail construction in the Edmonton-Fort Saskatchewan area.



## International Trails Day is June 5th, 2004

In September, 2001, delegates from Nova Scotia attended the Rails to Trails Conservancy meeting in St. Louis Missouri and came home with the idea of forming an international event that would highlight trails worldwide. What started as a little idea is now growing and taking shape. A website has now been established to promote International Trails Day ([www.internationaltrailsday.com](http://www.internationaltrailsday.com)). Trail builders, operators, groups, and users, including schools and communities, are encouraged to hold trail events on or in the week of June 5, 2004 (International Trails Day, 2004) and register these events as soon as dates are known on the new International Trails Day (ITD) website.

The committee team is now engaged in gathering data and photos from last year's June 7, 2003 International Trails Day events. If you would like to post your trail's past or upcoming events on this website please contact **Dave Carter** at [dave@trailtc.ns.ca](mailto:dave@trailtc.ns.ca) or phone: 902-463-8913, Fax: 902-463-3305.

This is a great opportunity to further the goal of promoting trails not only in Canada, but worldwide. We have the opportunity to show the rest of the world our spectacular trails, that Canada has a strong trails movement, and that we are willing to share our resources and experience with others. Registrations of events for 2004 are now being accepted! Post your trail event today.

**Mark your calendars. International Trails Day in 2004 is June 5th**