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## **THE NINE - MILE PORTAGE**

The Nine Mile Portage was an overland route from the head, of Kempenfeldt Bay in Lake Simcoe, where the Town of Barrie now stands, to Willow Creek, a tributary of the Nottawasaga River which empties into Georgian Bay at Wasaga Beach.

This portage was in use before the coming of the white man and its presence was noted by a member of Governor Simcoe's famous exploratory expedition of 1793.

Starting at Dunlop Street east In the vicinity of the former Post Office at Barrie, the portage followed Ross Street to Wellington Street and thence to the corner of Anne and Letitia Streets. Continuing, the trail then led through Sandy Hollow to the height of land beyond. The route was almost due west through Vespra Township to the high ground overlooking the Minesing Swamp. The final mile lay through the swamp to a point at the head of navigation on the sluggish waters of Willow Creek known as "The Landing". Although narrow and winding this water was navigable to its junction at the Nottawasaga River whence bateaux could proceed to the mouth of the river at Wasaga Beach and the open waters of Georgian Bay.

During the War of 1812 passage of reinforcements and supplies between Upper Canada and the British military and fur trading posts at Lakes Huron and Superior was endangered by American control of Detroit and the St. Clair River.

In the winter of 1814 a small military and naval force under Lieut.-Colonel Robert McDouall left Kingston and proceeding via York, Holland Landing and Lake Simcoe landed on the site of Barrie. The members of the force cleared the Nine Mile Portage sufficiently for their own passage and for a considerable volume of supplies destined for the isolated garrison at Michilimackinac. Twenty-nine bateaux were built on the banks of the Nottawasaga River and in these the expedition set sail on Georgian Bay, April 25th, 1814, landing at Michilimackinac on the 18th of May. The arrival of these reinforcements and supplies prevented the loss of that post, and was instrumental in holding the allegiance of the western Indians to the British.

During the remainder of the war improvements were made on the portage and a large volume of supplies was transported to the west and some furs on the return trips. This traffic was impeded to some extent by the destruction of the [Nancy](#) by the Americans on August 14th, 1814. This schooner had been used to run supplies from the mouth of the Nottawasaga to Michilimackinac.

Following the war the portage continued in frequent use until at least 1830. A considerable proportion of the supplies from 1818 onward were destined for the military and naval establishment which had been set up at Penetanguishene. A road from the northern shore of Kempenfeldt Bay to Penetang had been constructed by the famous Dr.

"Tiger" Dunlop In 1814 but for several years it was almost impassible for heavy traffic during the summer months.

Supply depots including warehouses and living quarters were established at the eastern and western ends of the Nine Mile Portage. That at the eastern end formed the nucleus of Barrie. The western depot stood on high ground about one mile from the actual loading place and was known as Willow Fort. In the later period oxen were used to transport goods over the portage and an organized forwarding business grew up.

Over this busy route passed soldiers, sailors, administrators settlers, fur traders and explorers. Among the latter were David Thompson who followed its course in 1824 and Sir John Franklin who used it in 1825 on his second Arctic expedition.

However, with the improvement of highways and the development of better ports than that offered by the mouth of the Nottawasaga, the portage was abandoned before the middle of the nineteenth century.

During the past there has been an increasing interest in the Nine Mile Portage which resulted in the tracing of the route from high ground to the Willow Creek. In 1955 Dr. Wilfrid Jury, a distinguished archaeologist from the University of Western Ontario was asked by the Barrie Chamber of Commerce to make a complete survey of the Portage. Dr. Jury, a member of the Archaeological and Historic Sites Board carried out this project successfully in company with Messrs. Norman D. Clarke, J. A. Coutts, and Grant Mayor, representing the Huronia Committee of the Barrie Chamber of Commerce, and other interested persons. [Read Jury's Report](#)

Recently the Fort Willow Improvement Group under the Nottawasaga Valley Conservation Authority have been working to preserve the site and educate the public as to the significance of the fort itself and as well as the Nine Mile Portage. [Read An Historic Outline](#)